

# BREATHE

Living with Chronic  
Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Kenneth Flowers

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To give the reader more of a sample, the front matter appears at the end.

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## Living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder

### Introduction

My handwritten journals were much more extensive than these excerpts indicate, and much more detailed. I wrote in them every day, and as I read back through them I saw that even after the onset of the disease, I actually had many more good or better days than not.

On my best days I generally expressed a greater variety of more positive thoughts, read many more books, and was much more constructively active during the spaces in between, but for this book I have only used entries in which I specifically referred to the disease or its effects. It is noticeable that during the first few years I rarely wrote about it even in the privacy of a journal. One reason is that I didn't want anyone else to know I had emphysema, or was so weakened by it, and another is that I just didn't want to poke the monster.

This is compiled primarily from the last nine years of those handwritten journals, beginning in April of 2006 when I was diagnosed with emphysema, through December of 2014.

In late 2014 I started transitioning over to using my Facebook page as my primary journal, and had completely made that change by January 1, 2015. I still keep handwritten books, but they are daily records of vital sign readings, exercise types and times, atmospheric conditions, and weather readings.

I took the cover photo from my favorite spot for watching sunsets on a friend's ranch north of town.

Kenneth Flowers

### Chapter 1: Summary

When I was a child I contracted tuberculosis from my father, (who died at age fifty after a ten year struggle with emphysema), and I was placed in a tuberculosis sanitarium in Arkansas where they were able to contain the disease after a year of therapy with Isoniazid—an antibacterial drug first used in 1952. I don't remember anything about that period and I never knew that I had actually had active tuberculosis until I applied for a teaching license in New Mexico and the state health department showed me the original record.

I was never very athletic during childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood, but I don't remember having specific lung issues until I was in my late 20s. From age 28 to age 35 I experienced some degree of spontaneous lung collapse nearly every year, and always during the period between the end of winter and

the beginning of spring. After the first few occurred I did start becoming concerned as that time of year approached, but when a doctor explained that they were just something that sometimes happens to tall thin men of my age, I didn't really think they were especially unusual, and I did seem to eventually grow out of them as he had predicted.

In the late 1990s I started experiencing increasingly severe flulike respiratory infections during the late winter or early spring, which were generally diagnosed and treated as bronchitis and which lasted longer each time I got them. I came to expect them.

The local doctor who treated me for those episodes also warned me that I was exhibiting signs of the early stages of emphysema and should stop smoking. I never smoked a lot anyway, but quit completely by 2001. And again, although I might have become a little more cautious, I wasn't overly concerned.

In late 2004 or early 2005, while being treated for a mild heart attack, my younger sister (and next door neighbor), was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and emphysema. She was started on standard breathing therapy protocol, and needed it only part-time at first, but by the end of 2005 she was using the supplemental oxygen, rescue inhaler, and nebulizer, almost full-time, every day. She had worked at physical labor jobs for all of her adult life, and had always been very active and constantly moving in that sense, but she was not active outside of her job beyond basic house work, and when she could no longer work her activity diminished to almost nothing except for the minimum necessary movements inside her house.

She and her husband and daughter all smoked heavily, and although she cut down when she started the oxygen therapy, she didn't stop. They all continued to smoke in the house, but she spent much of her time isolated in a bedroom where no smoking was allowed.

She was very frightened by the effects of the disease and the bleak diagnosis and prognosis (and probably from watching our father die from it), and seemed to immediately succumb to hopelessness. Except for utilizing the prescribed palliative measures, and struggling to survive through its worst effects, I don't know that she ever tried to be proactive in any way. I always got the impression that she attempted to remain quietly passive and unnoticed, as though a dangerous living thing was stalking her.

In 2006, during treatment for what was at first thought to be a recurring respiratory infection, I was diagnosed with late stage emphysema. I refused to believe the diagnosis and refused all treatments, including the standard rescue inhalers, until I was finally almost immobile and bedridden. I began to occasionally use rescue inhalers and albuterol by nebulizer in late 2007, but continued to refuse supplemental oxygen or cooperate with any of the other standard treatments for emphysema. Instead, I continued to struggle to move and breathe, and endured the breathing crises as they became more frequent and more intense, and ultimately caused even more damage to my lungs and tissues. I maintained that attitude for several more years, and during those times when I was somewhat stable and comfortable, I searched for either a better alternative therapy or a complete (and completely unorthodox)

cure.

My sister died at the end of 2012 from the combined effects of emphysema and an aggressive form of cancer that had appeared a couple of months earlier, but until then, although she would never join me in my active battle against the disease or try any of the various treatments or 'cures' that I located, we did keep each other informed about our symptoms and their progress on a daily basis. That interaction was actually very helpful to both of us. If we were both having a difficult day and experiencing the same symptoms, then there was likely an external cause (weather or air quality). If only one of us was experiencing something out of the ordinary, then it was likely internal. Of course that wasn't always correct since we both could have picked up a germ or virus at the same time, but it was a very good gauge.

So while she waited for the inevitable, I searched for the improbable. At first I wanted (and was certain I could find) nothing less than a complete cure. That eventually devolved into searching for a partial cure, and finally, I was ready to settle for a better type of relief from what was apparently never going away.

And as I searched, almost without noticing and certainly without properly appreciating them, I began to acquire a number of seemingly simple thoughts, behaviors, and techniques that relieved or greatly reduced negative effects of COPD symptoms in the immediate instant, but which I tended to regard as insignificant in contrast to a 'cure'.

- 1) I exercised my mind and body in various ways because I found that it made me feel better immediately, and I developed daily exercise routines because maintaining them seemed to keep me feeling better.
- 2) I tried different ways of breathing because some of them made me feel better immediately, and I maintained the ones that seemed to work best and have even longer term effects.
- 3) I observed my physical movements and began controlling them and making adjustments which assisted and made those easier because that made me feel better immediately, and I continued because it just seemed to be helpful.
- 4) I started paying attention to food and nutrition because I found that eating better food, at more appropriate times, would make me feel better immediately.

All of those things were seemingly insignificant to my primary concerns, daily quest, and long term goal ('I don't feel well right now, but this simple thing or action remedies that.'), but I persisted in practicing them and as I developed and incorporated them into my daily life they became more intimately important.

I slowly plodded through the years, still deteriorating physically, but improving in other ways. When my sister died I became somewhat despondent and lost quite a lot of ground both physically and mentally, and by the end of 2013 I reached such a low point that in an odd twist it was in my best interests. I became so uncomfortable and unable to function that I started paying attention to my doctor and cooperating. I accepted supplemental oxygen and began paying closer attention to suggestions and following

instructions. I also ended my isolation by creating a public book club through the local library. That required a lot of physical effort, forced me to begin interacting socially, and is still a personal motivator and going well.

In 2014, almost inadvertently, I took two somewhat casual steps and initiated two separate events, each of which was individually very beneficial. Combined with each other and all of those previously acquired and developed 'insignificant techniques and behaviors', they instigated a cathartic event that significantly changed my life, keeps developing, and sustains me to this day. I feel better, function better, and am better able to maintain both of those desired conditions.

At this moment I am still illuminated, elated, and somewhat confused. I am doing very well but not due to what I imagined would cause it, or in the way that I expected it to happen.

The mysterious thing I was searching for was right in front of me all along, and not much of a mystery. I was disregarding it because it seemed too simple and was too convenient. (Shouldn't great treasures always be difficult to locate and attain?).

## Chapter 2: 2006

I don't recall anything unusual about April 5, 2006, but on the morning of April 6, I woke up gasping for air and at the beginning of a drastic change in my life. Through the rest of the year, even though the doctor suspected a catastrophic lung condition, I was firmly convinced that it was a cold, or the flu, or bronchitis, and that in a few weeks, or maybe even months, I would wake up and be back to normal. But it never happened.

I had walked every day for almost 25 years, and it was becoming more and more difficult to continue that with each passing day. I had the hope that a return to that exercise would initiate physical improvement, but just the opposite occurred. My ability to breathe was deteriorating more each day, and when I tried to walk very far or for very long I ended up weak, gasping for air, and feeling damaged.

I reached the point where moving five paces was overexertion, and there were days when I couldn't find enough air to get out of bed when I woke up. I became slower and less mobile, and isolated myself to the point that I slipped into a sort of oxygen deprived madness where I stayed in bed and just waited for wellness to happen.

I started shutting my life down. I shut off the phone, the internet, cable television, and contact with my friends. I stopped answering the door. Conversation was just too exhausting. It was easier to disappear than to explain myself. Several members of my immediate family lived right beside me, and although we saw each other frequently, they never knew what I was experiencing until I couldn't get out of bed to go to the store or post office.

I knew that my mind was also deteriorating. The endless flow of thoughts and ideas, which I've always experienced, became an obsessive repetition of an often pointless single thought—the last sentence of a conversation, the punch line to a joke, one line from a song—over and over and over. Since I had no interest in company or conversation, the only remedy I could think of was reading, and I began checking out as many books as I could, as often as I could make it to the library.

As I became physically weaker and less active I connected to a state books by mail program and began to read voraciously. Sometimes one a day, I read hundreds of books, and then thousands. I would follow specific authors and then every author they referenced, or concentrate on geographical regions, or follow the development of a scientific concept or philosophical construct through time.

April 14, 2006—I called my part-time job today and told my boss that I won't be coming back. I just finished the antibiotics, and don't feel any better. In fact, I feel worse. I don't have any energy, and the slightest exertion leaves me gasping and with the strange sensation that I am about to lose consciousness. I don't know if my business is quite stable enough to stand on its own yet, but I have to risk it. I can't even speculate as to when I will have enough energy to engage with the clients I already have, but fortunately I do most of the work from here.

I doubt that I have the flu, because I haven't had an elevated temperature, but still feel that I have some type of extreme bronchitis. This is very much like the episodes of bronchitis I have had in the spring for the past several years, but more intense.

For the past two days I have been sort of mulling over my current condition and realize that it might have been inevitable. I have been in reckless pursuit of a life changing event for years and haven't really cared what form it took. Apparently it is here in the form of an extended illness.

Reading *Desert Solitaire; A Season in the Wilderness*, by Edward Abbey. Love it.

May 12, 2006—Am quickly losing mobility. I try to go outside at least for a little while every day. Actually, I try to walk to the dumpster every day, whether or not I have trash to throw away, and I sit in the sun and read otherwise. It's becoming more and more difficult to navigate the 300 feet to the dumpster and back, and today I barely made it. When I finally got to the dumpster I had to lean on it and rest for a long time, and on the way back I just collapsed, gasping for air, blackness invading my awareness. I saw images of a fish out of water, flopping around on the ground. That was very disturbing.

Reading *Land of Little Rain*, by Mary Austin. Interesting.

July 23, 2006—For four months I have been waiting to wake up on any next day, back to the way I used to feel. It has always worked that way before. I've had bronchitis several times and although it sometimes takes a while, I've always woke up back at normal. Well, I must have somehow squandered the ability to recover because it isn't happening now. As the months pass I seem to be rapidly moving in the other direction and I almost never lose the feeling of breathlessness.

Although I've used them through the years of my life, I absolutely hate submitting myself to medical practitioners, and rarely do. When the antibiotics didn't work, the doctor said he suspected emphysema and wanted to do more testing, but I haven't gone back. In the meantime, I've read probably every relevant thing ever written regarding the etiology, pathology, and possible treatments of the disease, and if it somehow should turn out to be that (which I doubt), I will repair myself. My first objective right now is a better method of exercising. The amount of walking I am able to do these days doesn't seem to have any positive benefits, and sometimes it even makes me feel much worse. This has made me realize that I'm going to have to rethink physical maintenance, so I've been looking for alternatives.

I recently read a medical article published in the 1950s about a British study of COPD subjects involved in a variety of exercise types. According to the findings, riding a stationary bicycle was not only associated with a halt in the progression of the disease for a high percentage of those observed, but in some cases it was associated with improved respiratory function. At the same time this particular exercise seemed to create less stress on a heart that has already been damaged by overwork.

This is the first study I've found that makes such claims and I now have an exercise bicycle to try out.

Another thing I've noticed is that I have always lived as though my mind and body are separate. Am I ever my body? Maybe occasionally. When I relax they sometimes seem to connect. And when I have engaged in some physically challenging activity that required thinking I have almost felt like one complete unit. But otherwise, not so much.

Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire. What an intelligent person. I read this book many years ago and loved the range and depth of his thoughts.

July 26, 2006—I spent the last of the evening mesmerized by the array of textures in one corner of my yard. The contrast between the Pinon needles and the Mondale pine needles against the changing colors in the western sky, captured and held me until it was too dark to see. I mostly love this place. Especially in times like these. The stationary bicycle is the perfect exercise for me now. I've used it for three days and can already feel a difference.

Reading *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, by Betty Smith. I love this book. Comfort food for the mind.

August 22, 2006—I am so reclusive that it has been a long time since I've gone anywhere, and starting this trip today was very uncomfortable at first. I instantly started wondering if the gasoline in the car was still any good. How many months does it take it to spoil? And then the tires. Do they break down from just sitting in the same place, month after month? I drove the first 20 miles with the windows down, listening to the engine and wondering about the tires. When I decided that everything seemed to be working, the rest of the drive was nice. The prairie is incredibly green and the humidity is almost visible. I saw an albino antelope among a herd grazing near the roadway but it isn't very distinct in the pictures I took. The other pictures show the western edge of the Llano Estacado. It isn't as spectacular as the north escarpment near where my sister lives, but it was enough to keep us entertained as children. I wonder if

people still camp in the caves on the weekends? Probably not.

August 24, 2006—After six months of growing weaker and more confused, I finally went back for more testing and/or treatment, and I still vividly remember the diagnosis. After six months of antibiotics, and trips to the doctor’s office, and blood tests, and breathing tests, and x-rays (none of which affected my deteriorating condition,) a doctor finally said, “You have rapid onset, advanced stage emphysema. It is incurable, irreversible, and generally untreatable, but we can keep you fairly comfortable as it progresses. And if you will allow us to do another series of tests, we should be able to discover what caused it to do so much damage so quickly.” He followed that with, “You need to immediately quit smoking if you do smoke (I didn’t), avoid contaminated or polluted air, and avoid stress.”

Incurable, irreversible, and untreatable. From his perspective he was just being politely factual, and he said it in a very nice way because he was a very nice man. But as I drove home, and through the next few days, the impact of those kindly spoken words has been terrible. Why couldn’t he have said that differently? Would some sort of positive statement of even a possibility of hope have been out of line? I don’t think so, and he could have, because as I understand it from the reading I’ve done, the disease likely isn’t any more incurable, irreversible, and untreatable than any other disease. It’s just poorly understood at the moment and no one has figured out how to intervene. Standard for a second class disease not yet important to medical research or lucrative as a business venture (but according to the escalating rate of diagnosis, it soon will be.)

As for the second part of his statement, ‘avoid stress.’—the irony of that right after confronting me with one of the greatest possible stressors—that the medical profession considers my condition to be hopeless.

I refused further testing, the bronchodilators, and the supplemental oxygen, and came home to try and find a way to correct the problem myself. I actually still didn’t believe that they can know it is emphysema without looking inside my lungs, if even then.

Reading *East of Eden*, by John Steinbeck. One of my favorite books and I’ve read it over and over since high school.

October 13, 2006—Beautiful afternoon. It has been so perfect that I have felt “beyond alive.” Almost immortal. The light is hypnotic, and I can both see and feel the changing colors. Green is mainly a thing of the past now and everything tends to be shades of yellows and oranges throughout the entire landscape.

The prairie is bright yellow from the mature grasses, with orange along the roadways where invader plants have taken hold, and this is incredibly beautiful when the mornings are wet. My yard is full of large, almost luminous yellow butterflies, and when they swoop by, suddenly a bright orange one will appear among them. I feel those things also. Although the attraction will diminish as the weather gets colder, right now it’s like being an aspect of the new season rather than watching it occur independently of myself.

Reading 1547-1577, *A History of Ancient Mexico*, by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun. Outstanding book. Sometimes difficult to understand because it is a translation of a translation, and difficult to handle because this copy is so old and fragile, but wonderful to read.

October 17, 2006—It's becoming more difficult to make it to the library when I run out of books, and although the librarian lets me cheat, I can't check out as many as I would like to have in order to make it through the times in between. I need to look for an alternative.

Odd how everyone else struggles with things that would be easy for us to fix, but our own struggles are so complex and frustrating that we finally just have to quit thinking about them. It's either that or make a decision and be responsible for it.

December 21, 2006—The sun is just setting. A layer of orange, a layer of gold, and a layer of pale yellow. The bowl of the sky almost to the eastern horizon is like looking at frosted glass. In this environment, the dawn almost erupts, but darkness seems to invade, making its edges more discernible than the front edge of morning light. I love sunrises here also, and wake up more than early enough to catch them but rarely do. Gasping for air as I watch.

December 26, 2006—So far today nothing has impressed me except the thought, "item in the rabble mill", and that was only impressively depressing. And it seems that I have been afflicted with a 'too much light' syndrome because it's overcast now and I feel much better. Not less congested, or even less bothered by that, just better. It's not cold enough to light the stove yet, but almost and I'm cheered up just looking forward to it.

Almost Sunset, and the darker and colder it gets the better I feel.

I am listening to the Dixie Chicks and reading *The Story of Corn*, by Betty Fussell. A very interesting book about what is probably the most significant item in our chain of cultivated foods. The view through my window of the bare trees, whipped by a cold wind, beneath a dark sky, is both eerie and comforting, and I feel at ease again. It is getting "colder by the minute" (does that actually happen?), and now I'm listening to Blue Oyster Cult, because they are loud and abrasive. Life flows.

December 28, 2006—30 degrees and raining. All of life is worth experiencing, but how much of one's life is worth describing? To complete strangers? Well, certainly not the majority of random mental noises that mainly serve to distract us from the immediate instant. Fantasies not worth sharing.

Beauty and brilliance are everywhere, all the time, just generally not emanating from one person or one place for very long. If anything those are highly transitory events in any arena. For example, the plains, which are nearly always beautiful in the late afternoons, are often ugly at noon. And even people can quickly transition from beautiful to ugly in a lot of different ways.

### Chapter 3: 2007

I didn't write very much about the illness during this entire year, but seemed to finally quit hoping that I had an extended cold, or the flu, and started believing that it was really emphysema. It was becoming very difficult to get around, but as long as I kept reading I seemed to be okay—or at least not as bad as I might have been otherwise. Left on its own my mind was a swamp and I obsessed over the strangest things. I didn't have the energy to work very much. Interpreting technical information was exhausting and it took me sometimes a week to complete work that I was doing in a day at the beginning of the previous year. I was alert enough to be embarrassed about that and worried that I would soon have to stop taking on work.

I still tried to move as much as possible, but there were issues about that. I had a fear of accidentally destroying whatever capacity I had left. Although it's likely, even probable, that emphysema had been developing for years, the doctor described it as 'rapid onset for no discernible reason'. That made me wonder what obscure thing I might have done to cause it, and worry that I might do it again.

I spent most of my time reading, and sitting outside in the swing as much as possible. As long as I was out of the wind, the cold air seemed easier to breathe. I also used the exercise bike daily. I still had difficulty lasting for more than a minute before I was depleted of oxygen and exhausted, but I refused to give up. I ordered a large amount of mullein and drank the tea constantly, and other than that I repeated over and over in my head, "I won't give up. I will get well." But I continued to deteriorate.

I am only using a few journal excerpts from that year, but the effects of the illness are still evident. It is obvious that I rarely left the house, and I never went anywhere, but apparently I allowed at least one person to visit, and I'm sure it was because he wouldn't accept "Go Away!" as an answer to his knocking on my door.

During the middle of summer I went to the clinic when I could hardly move and the doctor gave me a nebulizer and some albuterol to use. I did accept it, but only used it as a very last resort.

January 6, 2007—Still cold with sustained high winds and extreme gusts. To experience 40-50 mph winds anywhere is something to remember, but on the high plains, where there are absolutely no obstacles in its path, walking into such winds is an almost overwhelming experience. I've always been able to walk in them and did try today, but I didn't get very far. It terminated badly and left me feeling dismal and that all of life is changing drastically and will never return to what it was. As I struggled back home I was remembering when we were young and would truck our bicycles to the next town upwind and almost fly the 20 miles back home.

March 8, 2007—A strange paradox, but I have found myself trying to run away from these increasing feelings of breathlessness. Physical activity initiates them and they are becoming more frequent, even though I am much less physically active. Just now I ended up sitting by the pond because I had the feeling I might be able 'catch my breath' there. And what an interesting phrase that is.

Nice wind patterns today. I had the thought that the clouds are stretched out like semi-transparent, open scrolls, but what does that mean? Have I ever seen an open scroll? I think so, but as I keep looking, maybe they look more like the serif flourishes in a really big, but not bold, font. Beautiful, far away, and somehow related to finishing touches.

Anyway, I am now feeling less cultural and more organic, and after spending a few weeks reading about southern Utah, I am consumed with the urge to visit the desert. I won't for several reasons, that I can hardly breathe being one, but I like the sense of adjusting in that direction.

And as a sort of high point to the day, one of my oldest remaining acquaintances and longest enduring friends came by today and I found the energy to let him come in and visit for a couple of hours. (Forty-seven years since I first saw him in elementary school.) I don't see him very often, but when I do—it is an absolute pleasure. To be able to communicate so well with another human is one of the great accomplishments of my life. I can still leap through light-years after a conversation with him, and spent the afternoon doing just that.

July 20, 2007—I've spent the summer mostly inside my house, but sometimes in my yard, and avoiding contact with everyone. It's too difficult to interact and I don't want anyone to know how weak I am. I seem to drift in the past when I'm not reading.

Reading Abbey's *Road and Appalachian Wilderness*, by Edward Abbey, and they are wonderful. Mr. Abbey can blend with the interplay of the weather, rocks, plants, and animals of a wilderness ecosystem, but he regards the masses of his fellow humans with "fear and loathing." This man is (or was) brilliant, but he feels that the human race is incapable of appreciating, protecting, or preserving this wonderful life capsule that we inhabit, and that we are doomed. I believe that he was wrong, and that the answer to taking care of anything is as simple as—a feeling of investment.

From the late 1980s through the mid-1990s I taught GED preparation classes part-time at a local jail, and the jail administrator was a friend who let me experiment so I added art classes to make the basic work more appealing. One of the students brought up the idea of painting murals on some of the walls to make the prison seem a little more user-friendly and that sounded like a good idea to me because the place was sincerely ugly.

I was new to the general prison system and really didn't realize that "visually stimulating" wasn't a standard goal, but I convinced the administrator to let us try it and within a couple of months we had over 30 murals scattered throughout the facility. Most of them were very large, with life-sized figures doing life-sized things (an Indian shaman performing on one wall with storms invading from the ceiling), and most of them were beautiful.

And here the interesting part starts. Most of the people who are in jail are obviously hoods and thugs with no respect for anyone or anything, but they are also just attracted to vandalism in general. They were constantly destroying every part of the building. In the years that I was there (and in all of the other

facilities that I saw) the inmates scratched, scraped, poked, bent, twisted, broke and rubbed the finish off of anything that they came in contact with.

Some of it was conscious malice but most of it seemed to be wiring—that they just had no clue about protect, preserve and maintain. Not a single person who worked in that jail believed that the murals would last for more than a week, and by the time the last one was finished I was wondering myself. Maintenance already had more of the original wall paint to cover them when they were defaced, and actually, the guards were expecting trouble. What better way to get back at someone than to deface something that they are proud of—and all of the artists were extremely proud. (All of their families even came to see the paintings when they were completed.)

And the paint is still waiting. The jail remained open for the next 20 years and not a single mural was ever defaced by any prisoner. The whole prison population invested in those paintings when we did them. They were proud to have things of such beauty in that ugly environment, and their attitudes created an ongoing tradition that even the stupidest, meanest punk would not dare violate for as long as the jail was open.

August 24, 2007—For the first time that I can recall, I'm relieved that summer is winding down. I haven't felt well at all and seem to be getting progressively weaker. I constantly struggle and gasp for air.

Anxiety is not something I have ever had much problem with, because I always do only what I want so there is little to nothing to ever be bothered about. Still, even now I do random “do I care” checks on myself, and so far, never. I always feel secure, and am void of apprehension. But since I only control my own life, not the universe, things are bound to happen.

For the past couple of days there has been a lot of mysterious knocking in, on, and around the back of my house—sometimes at the back door, sometimes on the roof, and sometimes it even seemed to be in the attic. It was beginning to bother me, so apparently I did care. Earlier today while I was cooking, something started knocking again, and this time it was coming through the wood burning stove (which hasn't been burned in several days). I looked outside and a woodpecker was hammering away on the pipe. That was relatively easy.

Reading *Spirit of Place; Letters and Essays on Travel*, by Lawrence Durrell.

December 11, 2007—Having difficulty getting around and breathing has become quite a struggle through the year. This is beginning to alarm me.

I've spent the past two days reading *The Witches of Abiquiu; The Governor, The Priest, The Genizaro Indians, and the Devil*, by Ebrigh Malcolm. Excellent book, and the illustrations by Glen Strock are exceptional.

I've been there several times and remember an area of white clouds, blue sky, pink rocks, and occasional splashes of pale green vegetation, but it was just background for whatever I happened to be doing at the time. I had no interest in the indigenous people or their histories until many years later. And I don't want

to get carried away about it now, but most history books I have read either elevate aboriginal cultures to absurd levels, or apologize for being a member of the culture that displaced them. This is a history book that does neither.

## Chapter 4: 2008

Sort of a strange year.

My sister's husband died of some type of cancer that appeared suddenly and killed him quickly. She was already very ill and struggling with the effects of emphysema and congestive heart failure, and then woke up one day facing the death of her spouse and the first time she had ever really been alone. Solitude was so new, and so unwelcome, that it affected her quickly, and her precarious health began to deteriorate rapidly. Within a short time she became completely dependent on the oxygen generator, and never went without supplemental oxygen again.

When our youngest sister saw this start she moved back to take care of her. I was actually feeling better at the time, and I gave her the house I had been living in and moved her RV to a larger town nearby. I lasted for just over three months before my health deteriorated to the point that I felt it was better to move back to a more familiar place. I continued to live in the RV, but placed it on property that we owned in the town where I grew up.

The other interesting thing is that I acquired some strange obsessive behaviors.

I counted constantly and did many things in sequences of three and five. One for inhalation—exhalation was a four count. I always had either five or ten sips of whatever liquid I was drinking. My most comfortable walking pace was to a three count—which became complicated when I was also breathing to a five count.

I also had a difficult time throwing anything away, and when I did throw something away it had to be in the correct place. Even though all household trash eventually went into the large bag in the kitchen for removal to the dumpster, I was compelled to put trash in a certain waste can prior to that.

For example, I had dental floss all over the house, and waste cans all over the house, but I could only put used floss in the bathroom waste can. If I put it in any other one I would become very agitated and be uncomfortable until I took it out and put it where it belonged.

Likewise, I couldn't put what I regarded as kitchen trash of any kind in a bathroom or bedroom waste can. That might make sense with a banana peel, but I would sometimes have to struggle just to get a candy bar wrapper put in the appropriate waste can.

February 12, 2008—More perfect weather. It's a visual pleasure, but I'm too physically diminished to feel

it.

Read an outstanding New Mexico autobiography today, *Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch*, by Gretchen Heitzler. It is by a woman who married the manager of the 60,000 acre Three Rivers Ranch in 1942, and spent the next several years camping out in the ruins of the old Coghlan-Fall mansion while the ranch was being made operable and houses were built. I actually laughed out loud during parts of the book, and smiled through most of the rest of it. Excellent story.

I sometimes hear the strangest things—like parts of eerie conversations between unknown people.

We are in for several days of freezing rain and my stove has started fighting back tonight. I still love wood heat but it's hard to see in here and the smoke seems to be doing more harm than the warmth is worth.

Wendell Berry, in his collection of essays titled *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, says that as a nation we are industrial eaters, unable to imagine the connections between eating and the land; passive, uncritical—victims. Now that's harsh.

The Hopi language was officially outlawed in 1910. Sometimes really mean people are driving the bus.

March 1, 2008—I completely give up on trying to go outside, which isn't getting me anywhere anyway considering the intense winds, but by admitting it, I feel that I might win the war by losing this battle.

April 26, 2008—I'm just barely not comatose. I didn't read anything new today but reread a couple of the essays from Freya Stark's book, *Space, Time, and Movement in Landscape*. I follow her discussion (from her correct assumption that Space and Time are nonexistent beyond our physical boundary), as she explores what about ourselves is dependent on those human contrived perimeters and what is not, and I love the images that she creates no matter what the subject.

But at the end of the book I still have no concern about the mystery of either birth or death, and no interest in speculating as to what might have been happening before I was born or what might happen after I die. It just never enters my mind.

July 2, 2008—I've been drifting and only reading snack items (recent issues of *National Geographic* and *Sunset* magazines that my sister brought). The humidity is annoying, but the clouds are nice and the colors in my yard have been stunning today.

July 6, 2008—I love my yard this year. Not that it's anything compared to other yards, but it's nicer than it has ever been. I went out earlier to read and instead was drawn into the changing view—the colors, light intensities, and shadow patterns, changing with the movement of the sun.

Recently I have also become mesmerized by the movement of leaves, especially those on the little cottonwood that my sister planted and the morning glory vines growing on the patio trellis. They flutter like quaking aspen leaves and instigate an interesting nostalgia. For a few moments I am lost in the memories of a particular fresh, clean smell, and a feeling of freedom, both of which I have experienced

before. Maybe on a mountain somewhere.

July 12, 2008—I just walked to town and back for the first time in several years (and those years have flown by). I started the trip because I was irritated, but that was quickly shoved aside by the variety of surprises I suddenly had to negotiate, and I ended up continuing because I wanted to. I wouldn't have accepted a ride. I started out at 11:00 am, almost the hottest part of the day, and didn't even bother to go back in for sunscreen and a better hat.

For a long time I've been inactive except for a short daily exercise routine and periodic ambling around the house and yard, so I did get tired, and my breathing was fairly labored for the whole trip, but it wasn't too much. Luckily I had a credit card in my pocket so I could buy water in town, but it all worked out well.

Even the agoraphobia was almost neutralized by carrying a camera. And most interesting of all, I didn't fall on the bed and sleep for hours when I got back. I'm completely stunned by this. The thing I've missed the most, and have thought was gone forever, has been the walk that I took every day for 25 years.

Several weeks ago, noticeable changes started occurring in the content of my thoughts and how they were processing. I even described it to someone as feeling like I was emerging from suspended animation, but I thought of it only as a fortunate mental event.

Now that I look back, along with that, even with the lingering humidity and high pollen count and what they will probably always cause, my exercises haven't seemed as difficult. I've also noted to myself several times how clear and quick my thoughts seem to be. (I haven't put the milk in the microwave or thrown the loaf of bread in the trash can for nearly a month.)

Then today, in almost the worst possible conditions, I did what I've been convinced that I couldn't do. It must be just another remarkable aspect of whatever caused the other.

July 16, 2008—I just got back from the 2 mile hike that I used to take every morning when I got off work. It took longer, and it made me tired, but I just stopped and took pictures when I needed to rest. My breathing was labored, and occasionally became more so, but by adjusting pace and arm movement I could control that.

This is very odd. For the past few years I have had to struggle to make it the few hundred feet to my dumpster every day, and then I had to lie down and rest as soon as I got back. How has that changed in a day? All this time I've hated the physical and breathing exercises, but made myself keep at them.

Recently I have even been almost hostile toward medical science, thinking that the old article I based my exercise bicycle program on was probably made up just so someone could publish. And now this, almost exactly what the article said happened to the most fortunate of the study subjects. I'm coughing, I'm wheezing, I'm tired and my muscles are sore, but I'm elated.

I've always been incredibly lucky—exactly what I needed, right when I needed it.

September 9, 2008—I've been almost consumed by a desire to go away from here, and start over—maybe in the hope that this current surge of feeling better will continue to build. I convinced my sister to purchase an 8' x 32' RV, and have placed it on a friend's property outside of a town south of here.

I have decided to live there for the winter, learn how to most effectively live in an RV, and then move it to northern New Mexico in the spring or summer. It's sort of exciting to live near a small city. After living in a town with only a small convenience store for so many years, being so near grocery stores is wonderful. I've gotten a library card, scouted out walking paths, and have enjoyed being anonymous while surrounded by activity.

I slept very well my first night with only one strange experience when I woke up hearing science-fiction type noises coming from my roof. I went outside to check, and my friend's flock of guinea hens were roosting on the RV roof and in the tree beside it. I have never imagined they could make such sounds.

October 18, 2008—My favorite walking path has turned out to be the very extensive one that runs along the highway and by the hospital and college. It was raining as I walked this morning which is something I've never cared for before, but I enjoyed it this time. One of the more noticeable differences between a real walking path and a dirt road is—no mud when it rains.

October 21, 2008—My daily five mile commute to the walking path is well worth the effort. Only maintenance workers are there during the weekday early mornings but there were quite a few joggers today. If this had been my first time I wouldn't have stopped, or if I had stopped I would have been uncomfortable, but the past week of privacy has given me a sense of ownership. (I walk in poorly-fitted regular clothes and carry a camera, while everyone I saw there today looked like the cover of Jogger Magazine, exercise attire and an iPod.)

Aside from the fashion irregularities, what a remarkable place. Other than the public libraries, it is the only local tax funded facility I have ever genuinely appreciated.

November 19, 2008—I walked 1 1/2 miles today and love the changing plant life at the walking area, which is a very well-tended place. Park-like, with a variety of plants. I have been walking at least 1 mile each day for a couple of months (have missed a few days) but am building up to increasing to 2 miles by January. I also do breathing and isometric exercises for 20 minutes each night.

Logically I understand that it is a tremendous improvement from barely being able to walk to the dumpster each day, or the year of barely one minute per day on an exercise bicycle, but sometimes I am baffled by all of it. Even with the greatly improved ambulation ability, I can still be instantly shut down by loss of oxygen if my autonomic nervous system is activated. (For example, just seeing a snake anywhere near me will drain all of the oxygen out of my body and leave me helpless.)

How is it that I can perform better and continue to improve without actually affecting the condition of my respiratory system? Also, why does missing one day of exercise or walking cause such a noticeable setback

(my ability to breathe changes drastically if I don't walk for even one day), or why does missing several days throw me almost back to square one? Oh well. As long as I persevere this is working and I'm glad.

November 21, 2008—Walked 1 1/2 miles again today. I almost went for 2 but my hands didn't thaw until I had gone a mile and I didn't want to face the cold breeze any longer. I love the changing colors of the grasses.

November 24, 2008—I walked over three miles today. Not four, but I came close. It really wasn't all that difficult, but of course there are no snakes. There actually doesn't appear to be anything very frightening or dangerous around a well-tended public golf course except traffic and flying golf balls. Some people I met on the walking path pointed out a hawk and said it is a red-tail and although I pretended to agree, I can barely tell a hawk from a duck.

Reading *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, by Hutchins Hapgood (1902).

December 18, 2008—And in the blink of an eye, I crashed again. Maybe it's the cold weather and wind—I'm not sure and don't have the energy to track it down, but my health is failing. I'm so weak I can hardly function, and am actually not alert enough to be driving in this traffic. I've asked my sister to move the RV back to a place on our property. A failed experiment.

## Chapter 5: 2009

Not so much an uneventful year as one of rapidly changing ups and downs. I still spent most of my time reading books that I ordered from the state library, but I spent a lot of the rest scrolling through the internet and looking at everything related to COPD, emphysema, or breathing disorders, and then I tracked those back to their origins. I also spent a lot of time experimenting with different herbs after reading stories about how they 'cured' a breathing disorder. I couldn't tell that even massive quantities of any of them made any difference.

And I spent a lot of time obsessing about, and creating breathing crises for myself over the traffic on our road. There were four pickups that came by several times a day going what I thought was over 100 miles per hour (but who knows) in our 25 mile per hour neighborhood. All were driven by high school kids, and in a very short period of time I absolutely hated them. The sound of one of those vehicles coming from several blocks away would send me spinning, and made my breathing issues even more of an issue.

I had one visitor that year. A policeman I had worked with several years earlier came by and I let him in. He was the first person (besides a couple of family members), who had ever seen the inside of my house.

January 31, 2009—Really nice weather today but I spent much of the day worrying about a neighbor's dog and missed most of the good part.

For the first 45 years of my life I felt nothing for dogs. I didn't dislike them, but I didn't see much difference between having pets and having pests (dogs, cats, mice, cockroaches, flies). Then a friend started leaving his dog with me when he was on the road and everything changed. She (the dog) died over a year ago and in a sense freed me to return to my original perspective, but rather than stick with my plan to not become attached to another dog, something went very wrong and I woke up chained to something else. I now notice all dogs and worry incessantly about the abandoned and/or abused ones. The only thing that saves me is that I haven't brought any of them home. Probably mainly because I don't have a real home, but I prefer to think that it's because I have stuck to at least one part of the resolution.

March 25, 2009—The Healing Power of Flowers. I should repeat that until it becomes a reflexive assumption. Earlier I watched a documentary that has multiple themes, but I guess just the one main point—that plants have a conscious awareness that can be accessed and utilized to manage certain aspects of our lives.

One of the most impressive people in the documentary was a doctor who was using meditation in emotional therapy sessions for cancer patients, and has now incorporated sound or tone, rhythm, and aroma into those practices. Another interesting person was the lady from Findhorn. I can't remember her name, but she is still involved with people who are very invested in communing with plants. And, throughout the show was the oddly compelling aromatherapist who was sort of the main focus of the documentary. I say 'oddly compelling' because she is almost too well groomed for the things she says.

Anyway, I'm starting to drift away even as I type this, but during the show I was remembering the feeling I get when I smell essences of lavender or rosemary or patcholi or lemon balm. And as I was understanding how rhythm, tone, and scent can create, or assist with the creation of, a position of profound focus from which I can live better, more effectively, and more comfortably, I felt myself wanting to continue with those ideas, possibly by finding out more about those people.

I did look them up when the show was over, but by then I wasn't interested in direct contact. I got the message and really have no more need of the messenger. A good and stimulating documentary.

March 31, 2009—The winds were much stronger yesterday and it wasn't as warm, but the air was saturated with dust and pollen today. It looked nice through my bedroom window, but I could hardly breathe when I went outside.

May 10, 2009—I love those few minutes in the evening when I can first sense the coming of the cool breeze. Then it abruptly spills over the heated up landscape like cool water. That and the hugeness of the sky and the absence of big vegetation are my favorite reasons for living here. I notice the phenomenon more during the summer, but can still appreciate it during the hotter days of spring. A potent soothing elixir for my ravaged lungs.

May 30, 2009—One of my goals for the past couple of years has been to reach 30 non-stop minutes with my exercise routine. I have been stuck at 20 minutes for several months, but four nights ago I extended

the routine to 30 minutes. Completing the first one on Wednesday evening wasn't all that difficult, but then I could barely move on Thursday.

The second time was a little harder to finish, and I made it even worse by trying to convince myself that it was too hard and I should give up and go back to what I had been doing. I still finished, but felt run over on Friday. Which was such a step up from the day before that I even went outside.

Last night wasn't so bad, and I didn't think about quitting, but I have been in slow motion for most of today. Aside from that, the worst next day side effects seem to be fading. Tonight went well enough that I think I have it now—a 30 minute exercise routine. I'm not sure at what point I will feel it, or even if I will recognize such a feeling when it happens, but I seem to have accomplished a goal.

June 12, 2009—Even though an early morning shower followed by great coffee is probably one of my favorite parts of life, I have a phobia regarding humidity in general and I actively avoid it. I seal myself in the house with the dehumidifier running full blast when humidity gets anywhere near me, and I never willingly go outside in the rain. Today I was sitting at the pond when it started to sprinkle and although I got up to follow my usual routine and go inside, I could only make it to the patio swing. The rain felt so good and the air smelled so nice that I just sat down and let it happen to me. What a refreshing few minutes.

June 16, 2009—For a few weeks now I've felt as if I've been walking through deep mud. In slow motion. It takes so much effort that I haven't even had the energy to read, and I blame it on too much exercise. The ten minutes added to my daily routine is too much.

By now I should be recovering during the 23 1/2 hours between exercising but I can't. I just get slower, sleep more, and am exhausted through each day. I can't remember why I was in such a hurry, (and I guess now they'll take my name out of the record book and make me send the medals back), but I am changing back to twenty-one minutes of daily exercise, and will work toward the thirty minute goal by the slow route.

June 19, 2009—The change to twenty-one minutes of exercise is turning out well and I'm coming back to life after just a couple of days. Nine minutes seems like so little time to have an issue about, but it was wiping me out. And after all, it did take almost two years to reach twenty minutes. In fact, the whole program is taking so long that if I ever lose confidence, or gain laziness (and there are times when both loom), I might decide that there aren't enough years left to reach any sort of worthwhile level of exercise.

June 29, 2009—The humidity today was formidable. It wore me out, but I still feel refreshed by the intensity of the struggle. I constantly experiment with how far I can go through whatever is available (strong wind, cold, heat, humidity, etc.).

June 30, 2009—I had a hard time breathing outside today, but the landscape was incredibly beautiful, and the smells from the plants were amazing. I especially love the aromas that our pine trees exude after a

rain—like (my memories of) the heart of a pine forest. At 7:43 pm a cool breeze suddenly appeared. Great surprise.

July 6, 2009—I woke up sometime after midnight and listened to the rain for a while. Part of me loves the sound of rain on a tin roof and I drift in sensations that it evokes from the past—refreshing, clean, cool.

At the same time another part remembers how humidity now makes me feel and I dread the next day. Another one of life's pleasurable pains. A full moon is rising and it appears ready to rain some more.

The breathing crisis events will not end, and will become more frequent as the disease progresses. The key to living with them, or surviving in spite of them, is to remain vigilantly observant and be prepared. And still no guarantees.

Each new second, each new day, is some version of the same thing. I observe, make the best possible choices for the day's condition, and am prepared to make corrections as quickly as possible. Like driving a car, heavy traffic, a series of continual corrections; light traffic usually more casual.

July 9, 2009—I went somewhere for the first time in—I don't know how long. I notice changes through time, but don't really pay attention to the specifics of chronology (making last month, last week, and sometimes even yesterday, sort of interchangeable). Once this immediate instant has passed it flows into a big pool of "not right now" in which everything mills around together, so it might have been months or weeks since I last left the yard.

Anyway, the plains are beautiful. Those few days of rain initiated an explosion of growth and color, and the town appears to be surrounded by an enormous manicured lawn.

August 7, 2009—Today was nice. The sun was hot but there was a cool breeze for most of the day. I was talking to my sister earlier and we both feel that this summer has been especially arduous. It's been like a long, physically taxing journey, and as we get close to the end, we are exhausted, sunburned, and our lips are chapped.

Actually I hardly ever get in the sun so the sunburn is only in my mind, and my lips are chapped because I keep the humidity so low in my house, but everything else is true.

August 11, 2009—At some point I have to retreat from the elements, and today was that day. I couldn't sit still to read because of the hundreds of things I suddenly wanted and needed to do outside, and I couldn't stay outside long enough to do any of them. I believe the inability to maintain even the appearance of focus is one of my better skills because in the blink of an eye I completely lost interest in any of that.

I noticed movement through the window and suddenly realized that there are hundreds of young birds in and under our pine trees. There are also adults of several species present, monitoring and instructing their young. It was a great and complete surprise. We have fed the parents every day since spring but it never entered my mind that they were going to reproduce, and so many times. They seem to not only have

flourished, but also have maybe even evolved enough to consciously create a daycare center in our yard.

August 20, 2009—Meteorological conditions right now are such that I can't acquire much usable oxygen and can hardly move. Distance is out of the question. I can read especially well while physically inert, and usually do, but today I chose to indulge in feeling trapped.

Clever strategy. To say, "I'm upset because things are not the way I want them to be," and really mean it. I'm thinking the sincerity alone should clear the dust and pollen, probably by tomorrow.

August 25, 2009—Clouds built all afternoon and right before sunset a cool breeze hit and it started sprinkling very lightly. The coolness felt incredible and although I still have that pesky homichlophobia, I love the smell of rain. Each new time brings on flashes of images and sensations from all of the other rains I have experienced.

September 4, 2009—The cool breeze appeared even before the sun set today. I love this time of year. Beginnings are the most exciting part of anything, but especially the beginnings of shifts in weather extremes. It feels like stepping in and out of wildness.

September 14, 2009—I am so private that I rarely talk to anyone, but earlier today I had an interesting conversation with an old friend. In the first place, I am once again grateful that I've never needed company; and in the second, I am astonished at the array of unpleasant things that normal people appear to be experiencing and/or dishing out on a daily basis. What has happened? I've always remembered walking away from a much nicer world. It's as if a very strange energy has inundated the biosphere and it seems to cultivate a similar sort of frenzy in every social creature.

For example, here there are great numbers of large, yellow and black bumble bees, and yellow-jacket wasps around this year, and they are much more aggressive, and seem more dangerous than usual. They are definitely something to watch out for, and a real test of peripheral vision and reflexes. The human behavior my friend described is almost identical. Even speech is a droning noise signifying danger.

September 23, 2009—The very cool nights have started. I thought I was looking forward to them but couldn't even handle coffee on the patio with my sister just now. I finally had to tell her, "Sorry, but it's so cold that I can't understand what you are saying," and came inside. And I had just finished reading the Popular Science article about The Return of Swine Flu when she invited me so I knew better than to take unnecessary risks.

October 23, 2009—Perfect weather. Maybe it's because this is the first time we've ever had them, but I've never noticed fall flowers before. They're beautiful.

It's taken a couple of weeks but my flu shot has finally worked. I feel really rotten and I deserve to. I won't even take an aspirin without thinking about it for a while, then I stay awake to see if it does anything weird to me.

As soon as the nurse stuck the flu vaccine needle in my arm I thought, “Why am I doing this?” Peer pressure? Probably not. I hardly ever talk to other people. I’ll bet television caused it.

October 29, 2009—Morning glory vines put out new flowers each day, and they only last for a day. These have very few leaves left intact, but are still producing blooms.

I’m still reading and started another really good book, but don’t have the energy to write about it. I love this change in the weather but it is formidable and every movement requires considerable effort. I didn’t even go outside today except to take some pictures. What energy I can find is dedicated to my next breath, and to staving off paranoia that the H1N1 virus will sneak past my barricades.

Not really. I probably should think more about it specifically, but don’t. I mainly just hide from germs in general. Nearly every day a friend calls to update me on the latest H1N1 death toll and I always think, “All right, and now what did they die from? Oh, that.”

November 21, 2009—Not moving around very well, but it is so beautiful here. Especially in the winter, but starting even now, the land colors are so muted and the horizon circumference is so unobtrusive, that the plains become a sky environment. Celestial bodies, clouds, and the line drawing figures of dormant trees are about all I can see.

I planned a trip to the store at noon because I thought that stores would be empty, but they weren’t. I hate going in public places and germs are a major reason. I’m not a germaphobe because I dislike germs more than fear them, but the consequences are the same—I no longer function well in public. I won’t eat food if I can’t see who cooked it. I dislike crowds and will halt everything and leave if one occurs (and depending on my attitude, one other person can be an enormous crowd).

When I can make myself go into a store I do see the things that I need or want, and often almost start gathering them, but I instantly lose interest if other people touch them, or even walk by them. Germs and bacteria are highly mobile. And on top of that I hold my breath when I enter a store anyway because they all look just like big petri dishes to me.

I often wish that entering Walmart didn’t feel like entering the site of a cholera epidemic. They have some really great things I’d like to buy but I can’t hold my breath long enough to get to that part of the store.

I do like trips though, and small convenience stores and coffee huts.

November 28, 2009—As my ability to breathe diminishes so does my tolerance, for just about everything. I found out fairly quickly in the beginning that I can’t read books or watch shows or news clips about people exploring, or worst of all, trapped in, caves. In fact, any thought about or view of entrapment or entombment stimulates my autonomic nervous system, and I am instantly drained of oxygen and left gasping for breath.

So I carefully avoid all of that, but am still not in control of my phobias since new ones pop up daily.

Last night I watched a film on the Documentary Channel titled Manhattan, Kansas, and found one more thing that I need to stay away from—stories about growing older and sliding toward crazy. The lady almost made sense, and the feeling was of watching a descent into madness.

Some good questions at this point would be, is my personal discomfort about that due to a fear of losing the wits that I am currently working with? And if so, Why?

December 17, 2009—Today was incredibly beautiful. The high was 67 degrees and there was just enough breeze to clean the air.

I haven't taken pictures for several days, or even read my regular books. This new book, Plant Spirit Medicine, by Eliot Cowan, sent me off on a tangent of reading.

I don't order many fiction books, but my sister and I do enjoy Tony Hillerman and Larry McMurtry. We just finished the four volumes of Mr. McMurtry's Berrybender Narratives, and what a wonderful series. The Wandering Hill, Sin Killer, By Sorrow's River, and Folly and Glory. Not that I usually do much anyway, but I couldn't put them down and got nothing else done. My sister has grandchildren who require her attention, but she felt the same way about them. Outstanding!

A childhood friend showed up at my door not long ago wanting to borrow money or a credit card (I still laugh). He said, "You've got to help me. Look at all that my mother did for you and your family, and now I'm sleeping under a bridge." That instantly annoyed me and I told him, "Of course you are sleeping under a bridge. If you slept anywhere else you wouldn't be a proper derelict and all of your life's efforts would amount to nothing." Then I felt so bad that I gave him money and he left.

My point is, as strange as his choice might seem to me, that is the tool kit and those are the hunting techniques he chose to use in his assault on life, and they took him under a bridge. In the same way, I also chose certain tools and honed certain skills, and they led me to the life I am now experiencing.

The truth is that every day of my life has been better than the previous day, and that's still true in spite of this illness. I have never envied anyone or wanted much of anything. I don't know that I could have even done otherwise, and I don't care. I love living and find something to interest or excite me in every day.

A friend recently confessed that he thinks about death every day. I assured him that we all do. It's when those thoughts become saturated with fear that things go awry. Personal immediate awareness of reality (or as real as the few data we acquire will assist us in conceptualizing) is a terrifying thing for most humans, and some type of discomfort is a normal reaction.

We and everything we build are as seasonal as all that we observe. We are biochemical phenomena, flowing according to the patterns and rhythms of the larger physical world fabric. But some things we humans, individually and as a collective, can intellectually choose and interject into that flow.

The panic that threatens to overwhelm me when I run out of oxygen is indescribable, and what I once

would have considered unbearable. My autonomic nervous system has almost killed me several times this week—the snake I stumbled across, the frog that I thought was a snake and chopped to pieces in the dark, and just now, trying to escape from beneath limbs falling from a disintegrating tree. Something startles me and triggers the system, my body reflexively leaps into action, and within seconds I'm immobile, gasping, and confused.

December 24, 2009—It was still raining when I went to sleep. I only went outside once today, to feed the birds, and then only because I feel so guilty about them when I don't that I can't open the blinds. One of the drawbacks of purposefully placing the feeder right in the center of the window view is that a wider range of bird life becomes apparent. They are completely entertaining and sing all day when times are good, but not so much when the weather is bad and there isn't even any food.

I just moved up to 24 minutes of exercise. At this rate I'll be back to 30 minutes in about a year, but maybe sooner. The key seems to be in sticking with moderate increases.

The interplay between (within?) the sunlight and winter's pastel colors was beautiful today—but then we are more than twenty-four hours into the return of the sun. Even the spaces between objects, and between nearby objects and vistas, were vibrant with changing color and light.

The last time I was at the doctor he told me to eliminate stress from my life. I didn't comment, but that wouldn't be wise. Stress is perhaps our greatest (maybe only) disruptor of cognitive equilibrium—the result of which is the urge to solve, explore, act, move, question, think, search. Most people don't have the ability to initiate this drive internally, and without the stimulation of external stress they would just waste away from inactivity. Manage stress (and avoid ridiculous and unnecessary stressors) might be a better way to phrase it.

## Chapter 6: 2010

Interesting year. I continued to deteriorate, but began to write prolifically.

Toward the end of the year I babbled endlessly about my previous social anxieties, which is odd considering how completely antisocial I had become. The only place I ever went was to the doctor a couple of times and to the dentist to have my teeth cleaned twice a year. My books were from a books-by-mail program, and my sister picked those up for me. I didn't watch the news, or even think about it, and not a single person visited my house that year.

Looking back, I realize that I was experiencing serious oxygen depletion, and although I was using the nebulizer and rescue medication occasionally, I was still refusing supplemental oxygen.

January 6, 2010—The front of the cold front just hit. I'm always so amazed by such occurrences—fairly

warm with no wind all day, then, an instant high-velocity chilled wind—which appeared just a few minutes ago. It's supposed to bring enough cold to keep the plains below freezing (wind chill temperature below zero at times) for the next 60 to 72 hours.

I love the intensity of storm fronts and went outside when the wind started. The air smelled great and felt incredible in my lungs. Such breaths often send me reeling through images of similar experiences in the past.

The cold, crisp days of winter are little different from the hypnotically hot days of summer. Day after day, week after week, of cloudless electric blue sky, and pale, hardly visible foliage.

January 10, 2010—Maybe too much introspection. The atmosphere offered resistance today. The air was dense and extra heavy.

Very cold and quickly getting colder. Contrary to my earlier stated relief at finding it much easier to breathe in the winter, and the air to be much better, the colder it has gotten the less those seem to matter. I've changed what spells relief to any temperature below boiling but above freezing.

Spent the day inside, except for feeding the birds. And speaking of that, yesterday I became aware that in setting up a wild bird feeder, I have created an even wilder bird feeder. A ferocious little kestrel has been feeding on the birds who are feeding on the seeds in the bird feeder. The birds generally are safe since cats won't come in the yard and the dogs don't have any interest in birds, so these air attacks are shaking them up. And thinning them out. I'm not going to bother him, but still feel badly for the semi-domesticated, fat and slow mourning doves.

He's beautiful little predator, and even strangely exciting to watch at work (strange for someone who can't handle the guilt of killing a spider), but I'll bet that hurts. Flying sledge hammer to the forehead type pain. And so much force that there really is an explosion of feathers.

After watching him at work, I suddenly started thinking about the frailty of any existence—one of the larger hawks in the area is likely stalking the kestrel even as he is eating, but it doesn't concern him until it appears. That seems to be a personal lesson.

Each breath that I take is already a miracle, no matter what the condition of my health. Sometimes it almost seems like I have needed this struggle to breathe in order to appreciate that miracle.

I finally realized that my body and mind have been out of balance, but only my lungs were actually damaged. By adjusting certain habits and behaviors, I should be able to create an environment filled with more positive than negative, where I would no longer fear the physical damage or the effects of environmental agents.

January 15, 2010—The pond always looks kind of sad in the winter, but really, is still a thriving oasis for local wildlife.

Spent the day inside, drifting in a stupor. I got up early to read, then fed the birds early, but although the day seemed very nice through my windows I didn't go outside again. I've been too tired lately. A few days ago I upped the exercise to 25 minutes, and realized that I breezed right through those months at 21, 22, 23 and 24 minutes, because I really was never above 20 minutes.

The timer appears to be letting me increase the time by one minute, but actually always defaults back to 20 minutes as the maximum it will time. It really doesn't matter except that I'm going to buy another timer and stay with 25 minutes until I get it down.

January 18, 2010—Complete exhaustion. I didn't read anything yesterday, not even a sign, and don't remember having a single thought, but I did watch the sky and it was mostly interesting.

February 4, 2010—Last night I finally understood why the meth dealers in our community (and my neighborhood) function openly, and with no apparent concern about arrest and criminal prosecution and punishment, and that reason makes the situation even more sad.

The meth dealers roam freely because all of the local meth users have mothers who are determined to protect and make life easy for their deranged children. And not that those mothers don't complain about what they themselves suffer from the little maggots. All of them complain, constantly, but they are oblivious as to how their children's behaviors affect anyone else. They only complain because they want sympathy for their burdens, not because they want their children and relatives punished or even confronted about the crimes/sins.

Consequently, looming protectively over every meth user is a sick old woman (most fathers are somewhat immune to this self-destructive sentimentality) spending all of her energy and the family resources as she drags herself along the path of destruction left by her scabrous offspring—flirting with personal and community catastrophe but never saving a single junkie.

February 5, 2010—I order from 12 to 15 books every three to four weeks, always random choices, and I usually don't know anything about them other than they are from the Southwest Collection (although I have sometimes read other books by an author). The odd thing is that many times a high percentage of the books in each lot are on the same specific subject. For example, suddenly I am reading books about the dust bowl days and the Great Depression—I just started a new one this morning.

Finished Fredrick Manfred's book, *The Golden Bowl*.

February 7, 2010—I sometimes miss the adversity of my childhood and youth, because I absolutely appreciated everything that wasn't trying to eat or destroy me. I miss that time when the slightest or smallest resource could hold the universe at bay, for even a few seconds. I remember always being hungry when I was young, and always being cold in the winter, and hardly having enough water, but in the end, all of those things were incidental and I only realized that they signified extreme poverty when I was older.

Finished the Frederick Manfred book last night, and really liked it. In a sense it was like listening to my mom talk about her impressions of the 1930s in western Arkansas and Oklahoma. (My dad also lived through the same times in the same places, but I don't remember him ever mentioning anything about it.)

I would rather have all of that uncertainty than some of the sterile, discontented numbness that seems so prevalent now. I appreciate the technology of these times, but I regret the price that we have paid for it—a population that views frenzy and milling about aimlessly as productive, and misinterprets personal laziness and ignorance as boredom.

Even more than I regret those things, I regret what the political/ religious/intellectual paradigms of today are attempting to mold us into being. Whether by design (but I really don't think people are smart enough to implement such nefarious plans) or accident, they handicap rather than empower and leave the conditioned masses intellectually diminished and in need of being led. This makes us vulnerable to the whims and schemes of every sort of opportunistic social predator and is just generally an unfortunate thing.

Reading Lord Grizzly, by Frederick Manfred.

February 13, 2010—I've just been released by the most extraordinary experience. An all-encompassing feeling just spread through me that I perceived as an adjustment or rearrangement of both mind and body, and when it faded I felt balanced and at ease.

Interesting? Definitely. Exciting? As an aspect of a greater excitement. Worthwhile? Only to me at this time. Typically esoteric.

I can't say what it was because the essence was wordless; and I won't try to describe it because—?—maybe because I'm greedy. Which is sometimes appropriate.

I do know that I suddenly feel like I have changed significantly. That a catalytic something has shocked me out of what I was and into something else, but I have no clue as to what, how, or why; or even if what, how, and why are relevant.

I also know that I only received a taste, or a speck of a taste, of the total experience.

Even now, these words appear confused and rambling on the page, but feel loaded with a sense of promise as I take them back in. That's very different. Most of the major changes in myself have been stimulated by what are often viewed as obscure elements, a wildflower, a cloud, a sunset, a single word, a glance, the whiff of a fragrance, or even a taste. I read voraciously, hunt wildflowers, watch clouds, seek interesting people, etc. in a willful quest for those stimuli.

And I've always known that every book I've read, including the ridiculous ones, has loosened one of those mysterious bonds, which I never knew were present until they were loosened. (A few books have even broken entire sequences of those bonds.)

And maybe I have always hoped that if I read enough, one day, one of them, or some combination of many of them, would release me completely (from existing timidly and apologetically? I really still don't know what the feeling of release is about or where it comes from). That may have just happened. At the organic level I'm the same creature (and my lungs are still broken—so no physical miracles along with this other), but I seem to have lost a feeling of confinement.

February 15, 2010—I slept fitfully last night through more strange dreams. At 5:00 am I was certain that something I'm reading has instigated them. With some books, reading is like physical labor. And many of those books have affected me greatly: my deepest fears and my most far reaching dreams; what has attracted me most strongly and repelled me most forcefully; the lottery and hell, all in a single novel.

Maybe I should read about this, but I'm pretty sure that winds are responsible for cloud patterns. It takes some strange winds to create an acute angle in the sky. I have been watching them form above me, so I know they are not jet exhaust.

A black lie, a white lie, or no lie at all. I took an "ability to trust" test yesterday and failed it miserably. There are questions I just won't answer, or won't answer truthfully, not even to myself in the privacy of my mind. (And why assume there is privacy there?) I hide truths behind so many layers of distractions, diversions, and deceptions that I've confused myself. I'm not even sure about what I've always thought I was behind what I knew I was pretending to be.

February 18, 2010—It's almost 9:30 pm and I've been delaying exercising in hopes of putting it off tonight. I'm too tired (and when am I not?), it's too late in the evening (what could that possibly mean coming from someone who doesn't know what day it is?), it won't hurt to skip a day occasionally (like that attitude has ever worked in my best interests). Maintaining a regular exercise routine is amazingly like not smoking cigarettes, and I have found myself to be a clever and often successful opponent in both struggles.

The high today was 65 degrees and the winds were light breezes again. The calm before the storm since within a few weeks the winds will become extreme. And probably not a bad thing if they weren't pushing dust, sand, household litter, and dislodged building materials.

February 19, 2010—Probably something I should keep to myself, but over the winter I have come to really enjoy a cup of hot tea with sugar and a tablespoon of butter mixed in. A few months ago I made hot tea one cold afternoon, then found I was out of cream to put in it.

Before drinking it the hard way I thought about something I had read in a book by some British people who were exploring a glacier. It may have even been the porters, but someone in that party had used butter in their tea. I had plenty of butter so I tried it and the tea was delicious. I have had a cup nearly every afternoon since then. (And I prefer unsalted fresh butter and Lipton tea, or whatever kind of tea it is beneath that brand. To me, the herbal teas are fine as medicine, but ridiculous as a refreshing beverage—like chewing on weeds and twigs rather than eating good food.)

March 8, 2010—I love the extremes of March (my environment/my self). During this season I want the most and am capable of the least.

Late start today. I read until after midnight, and then woke up off and on throughout the rest of the night to the sound of rain. Then I spent much of the day sitting on the sidewalk with the little dogs and reading.

The other day I asked my sister to pick up more wild bird food, and then, since I am using one large bag each week, I mentioned that it sure must be expensive to feed wild birds. She said that it didn't matter as long as I enjoyed feeding them.

I just agreed with her and went on, but what a big liar I am. I might have enjoyed feeding the birds at one time, but that thrill is long gone, and probably didn't last through the first bag of food. Now I feed them so I won't feel terrible about not feeding them. And I feed them exactly on time so I won't feel terrible about that.

March 12, 2010—Just completed my 30th day of 30 minutes of exercise. I failed within a week the last time I attempted this, but feel that I have it now. And it could be my greatest accomplishment.

From the beginning I've noticed that the ability to make and maintain noticeable increases in an exercise program did not translate so well into the spontaneous movements of daily life. In fact, almost not at all, but I always thought it was just some sort of oxygen requirement difference between the rhythmic, expected movement of an exercise routine, and the nonrhythmic manner in which we make the unexpected movements usually necessary in walking the earth.

Maybe so. But now I'm also thinking that the amount of oxygen used in muscle/tendon/limb movement is also learned at a young and healthy age, and fixed in our neural pathways. When a certain pathway is activated, a corresponding certain amount of oxygen is, and has always been, drained from the available reserves.

If that is so, then my regular, lifelong movement patterns exhaust me because they still operate according to the amount of oxygen that used to be available. This exercise program is new to me, and my body and mind are learning how to accommodate it, and so remove only the fair portion of available oxygen.

Anyway, I accomplished it, and can't wait to see what I do next.

March 17, 2010—I didn't sleep last night, or today, and am seriously delirious. I did something yesterday that I felt uneasy about afterward, which was mostly what I was thinking about last night. I inflicted a painful truth on someone because I care for them. I decided that reality, no matter how disturbing, was better than the bewilderment they were living in.

In doing so I disregarded a number of potential consequences—which would have, and did, prevent others from doing the same thing, and as I was saying to my brother afterward, it's somewhat uncomfortable to be perceived as heartless. He said to not worry, that he just saw it as quickly getting to a necessary point,

although it wasn't something that he would have been the first to do.

That might have made me feel better.

As I get older I find myself taking more and more short-cuts. I am less willing to argue about, or endure—basically anything that I object to.

I won't endure a second of gibberish, or con, or any sort of attempted malicious engagement. Not only am I absolutely intolerant of those things, I am absolutely unforgiving of those involved.

March 22, 2010—The dumpsters on this block weren't emptied last week, and they didn't get picked up today either. The electricity went out for a while when it was snowing a few nights ago and that in conjunction with garbage piling up set off a tiny alarm in my head. Then on Friday evening we lost access to the internet.

We just got it back (3 days later), and it wasn't really that much of an inconvenience, but my tiny head alarm grew when no one would answer the provider's after hours and weekend emergency numbers. The ringing alarm is that it could happen here. The luxuries I expect everyday could disappear without leaving any trace that I would be able to follow.

If I hadn't still had internet access via my phone, I probably would have suspected treachery. I expect it at any time anyway. Considering what humans really are, and which ones have now assumed mantles of superiority, I can hardly believe that the masses haven't already been sent back to the dark ages; where we will be traveling only when we must, and walking when we must travel; bickering over hot coals to make fire; living in caves or shacks and eating weeds, rodents, and maybe gruel on a holiday; and conversing in grunts and signs. I don't look forward to that.

In the 70s today and somewhere in the 80s is predicted for tomorrow. I sat outside and read on my next book. A novel, but biographical, and I like it.

March 25, 2010—I sat in the sun and read this afternoon. And what a nice little book. It took two glasses of water, which I had to share with the dogs, and an apple, which I didn't share.

But is dog slobber dangerous? I generally won't eat food cooked or directly handled by other people because I am suspicious as to how clean and conscientious about food preparation most other people really are, but I am not bothered at all about our dogs touching my food. That is sort of strange because although they do get frequent baths, and regular teeth cleaning, they are still dogs they eat suspicious things, roll in dirt, shed hair everywhere, and chew and lick on some fairly obnoxious parts of their bodies. I just don't seem to mind. They still eat out of my plate, drink out of my glass, and help eat every ice cream cone, and when I find one of their hairs in my food I just move it (or not) and go on.

March 27, 2010—All of the willows have leaves and the Siberian elms just bloomed (There weren't flowers involved so is it still called that when leaves come out of the little buds?). There are broken limbs

everywhere and more to come I'm sure. I didn't even open a book last night. We are fixing a house for our sister to live in and that actually takes quite a lot of time. I really don't do a lot beyond plan, mark the wood for my brother to cut, and small punch-out chores, but those do wear me out.

Reading *The Mountain Lion*, by Jean Stafford (1947.)

Our sister already has a house but keeping it up is wearing her out, so we are fixing one that will accommodate her needs a lot better and will require less effort to maintain.

She and I are at about the same stage of emphysema—the one where every exertion has to count because all movement is a challenge, but unnecessary or pointless movement is depressing as well. We both are completely independent, and both live alone, but her heart is much weaker so she can't get out and get the exercise that I do.

The main point is that she needs a house that is user-friendly, and her current one isn't, so our youngest sister initiated a project to completely refurbish a different house for her. When we are finished she won't have to worry about what's going to fall apart next, and most important of all, she will have better control over interior air quality, and better access to exterior air on the days when it is perfect (as it often is here.)

I'm excited about getting it ready for her.

The sky was mostly beige; and roofing materials were flying off of all of the houses and limbs were falling from all of the trees. Although I will hardly open my door from now until sometime in May when the winds start letting up, this type of weather is sort of exciting.

Didn't get to sit outside, but started an interesting new book, *La Conquistadora; The Autobiography of an Ancient Statue*, by Fray Angelico Chavez. I've also read *My Penitente Land*.

April 16, 2010—We made the deadline. My sister is now in her newly refurbished house. This will be her first night there and I hope she completely enjoys it. My brother and I were still putting things together as her basic necessities were being moved in, and still have quite a lot to get done even with her living there, but the bulk of the work is finished. A nice mixture of feeling relieved (her life will improve as my own did with the same type of transition), and capable (I can still function), and my end results in nearly every area seem to be much better than they were when I moved fast and had endless energy.

I actually cut and finished a room of trim that appears almost seamless. Something I have never accomplished before.

At this moment she is more alone than she has ever really been—she went from high school and home, to communal living with friends, to marriage and a child, to grandchildren everywhere all the time, to suddenly living by herself. Sounds almost ominous, but not really.

I can see into her living room and kitchen from my bedroom window, and right now she and her dog and

cats are on the couch watching television. My brother can see into her kitchen and has an unobstructed view of both of her doors from his house. And our youngest (and most observant) sister can see all of that and more from her house. So really, the poor woman probably gets very little real alone time now, and might even feel stalked.

The wildflowers should be emerging tomorrow if the sky clears. The grass became green in a single day from the inch of rain we received two nights ago.

May 14, 2010—Sometimes quietly living is more interesting than talking or reading. I'm always stunned by springtime here. A grand promise of life and growth after the equally grand exhibition of death and decay of the plains winter. What a difference one day, a few degrees, and a little moisture make.

It started sprinkling about 3:00 am, and has been overcast, wet, and cold for most of the day. I rarely leave the house when the weather is wild, but the colors were so nice at sunset that I had to go outside and watch them unfolding.

June 15, 2010—It is less amazing that human cultural/social constructs parallel ecological/environmental realities than that although we claim to believe the condition to be true, we refuse to acknowledge the effects, looking instead into the metaphysical for reasons or excuses.

The entire human species is actually a single organism. I've been thinking a lot about it awakening (epiphanies, coming to awareness, enlightenment.)

It's so interesting how all human tools—from the simplest hand trowel, through lawn mowers and cars, on to computers and space ships, mimic a part or parts of the human body. I used to love operating one of the older model backhoes because I could feel it as an extension, amplifying my fingers and hands.

Fads of thought or concept occur within the mass subconscious in patterns and cycles similar to fads of food or clothing. We make group decisions, not through analysis, reason, and logic, but through momentum. And whatever conceptual fad happens to accompany the momentum becomes the decision.

We are able to escape the ruts of detrimental patterns and bad habits by determining the point of deviation (and there is one), and focusing on creating new pathways, patterns, and habits. It's difficult, but not impossible on an individual level (alcohol and drug addiction can be escaped), and should be roughly the same at the mass subconscious level. Create a new rut if necessary, but block the damaged one as an option.

Reading Konza Prairie, by O.J. Reichman.

June 24, 2010—The only place I ever really go now is our yard, but it's a nice summer there. We've really had less than an inch of actual rain during the past three days but it is so humid that going outside feels like plunging into water. Not especially bad, and I prefer chaos and turbulence to lingering static conditions (in all things including weather.)

Reading *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, by Edward Abbey.

July 23, 2010—Going outside was again like being underwater today, and I mostly avoided it.

The elm trees are constantly attacked by beetles so they start losing leaves by mid-summer. Two of my friends dropped by for no reason yesterday, but really to see why I didn't attend their 80th birthday party last week. The truth, that my agoraphobia and germaphobia won't allow me to join a crowd of people who are shaking hands and snacking from a buffet, would have hurt their feelings, so I just said I was sick that day.

While we were sitting in their car in the driveway, the wind rose and brown leaves started falling off of the elm trees. They watched it closely, then one asked the other, "Is it Fall already?" They completely crack me up.

Reading *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*, by Terry Tempest Williams. A wonderful book.

August 8, 2010—I've always felt that the species is much, much older than any of the scientific guesses I've heard. I'm sure that we have been up and down the cultural/technological ladder many times, maybe hundreds, or even thousands, and feel that we shouldn't be so casual about infinity. I wouldn't doubt that humans have achieved this same level, or something similar, many times in the past. The evidence has just been broken down into molecules and recycled. This planet is ancient, we are ancient, and our desires and behaviors are ancient.

Once I was breaking up a gang fight among junior high students and while sorting them out realized that there were three gangs involved—The North Side Browns, the South Side Browns, and the Middle Side Browns. That just sounded strange because I was used to gang names that were more location specific, and when I asked about it was told, "Those guys are from the north side of the neighborhood, those guys are from the south side of the neighborhood, and we are from the middle side of the neighborhood." I didn't laugh out loud, but was cracking up inside, and it still causes me to smile. At least they knew north and south and middle (maybe.)

August 10, 2010—I've always confused concentration with meditation. I possibly have never meditated. It has always been an exercise of the will.

Can I really have any impact on what is happening to my body? I'm changing rapidly and it does scare me at times. My surface self has always been sensibly wild and I have plunged into many things that scared me plenty on first contact, but I either adapted or chose to discontinue if the experience was too weird. The difference is that those were 'in addition to' and this is 'absolute.' From that perspective I almost fear taking any action that might speed up the process and am inclined to cling to the weights of what are now becoming familiar chains. I am understanding the illness as it unfolds. Resisting might have unexpected consequences.

The volume of worthless baggage I'm dragging almost crushes me, and the frailty of what few embers of skill or ability I have been able to accumulate is frightening. Then again, that might be just a part of me wanting something I shouldn't have. I seem to always choose even the promise of something over a huge pile of nothing.

Reading *Pieces of White Shell*, and *Leap*, by Terry Tempest Williams. What a remarkable woman. Interesting that she was friends with both Edward Abbey, who wrote so many great books, and Joseph Wood Krutch, who wrote the wonderful book, *The Desert Year* (who was also a friend of Ann Woodin who wrote *Home is the Desert*, an equally wonderful book.)

August 12, 2010—My dreams are intense. Not sexual, or even frightening, but filled with the unknown. Spell-binding and draining. The first thing one notices after losing one's perception of physical stability is how new and confusing everything is.

August 15, 2010—I talk much larger than I am. I can barely make it outside, and when I do, I can hardly move. As soon as I open my door and the heat and thick air hit me I feel as though I weigh a thousand pounds. Every movement leaves me gasping for air, so I formulate a goal (walk to the gate, or, move the sprinkler), follow it through, and then come back into the house and recover.

Sometimes when I'm feeling especially good about having accomplished that, the part of me that is angry will blurt out, "Get over yourself. You only walked to the gate and back."

Inside my house where I tightly control the environment for optimum ease and comfort, and where I have adopted oxygen conserving patterns of movement (rhythmic—no sudden or surprising movements), I can usually feel almost normal, but any wobble and that dissolves into gasping discomfort and confusion.

Given those things it would seem like good sense to avoid going outside at all costs, but I can't stop myself. I challenge the outdoors as many times a day as I can and the house is just a place to recuperate. I told my sister that getting to her house every day (less than 50 feet away) is usually like a book I read about early explorers struggling to reach the north pole—except very hot instead of very cold. Otherwise the same. She said that if I would read books by early Death Valley explorers I might find my exact story.

Reading *Cow People*, by J. Frank Dobie.

August 26, 2010—My thoughts are very chaotic and I feel a need to do something. Unsure what.

Cultural and social noises have become islands of comfort and stability. I realized a long time ago that very few people can tolerate solitude and silence, and very few of those actually seek and enjoy or prefer them.

I keep having daytime visions of chains of corpse-like humans, and I experience the feeling that it is somehow important to me. I have noticed it because it's unusual, but I resist investigation because I see little real value in that type of mysticism.

I have no regrets about the life I've lived. It has been full of good fortune, which led me to the best of people, places, and things. Broken lungs aside I've loved and still love my life and don't feel that any of it needs fixing. Successfully contending with the breathing issue would just be more dessert.

I wonder if addiction (to anything—from drugs and alcohol, to food, to relationships) has become a psychological necessity. Rituals with a comfortably familiar end result. A mediocre consciousness isn't worse than none at all, but it isn't the best first choice.

August 29, 2010—I almost have a bird farm, and the doves are large. In a couple of biographies I read that took place during the settling of Nebraska and western Kansas, the people mentioned utilizing mourning doves like little chickens. They ate the birds and their eggs.

I've felt like a bad person for a couple of days. I noticed one of my sister's cats was fighting with a snake near the pond and when I checked, it was a hog-nosed snake, which is somewhat poisonous. I tried to break them up but the cat was determined to catch it and take it home with him, and the snake was fighting back. I couldn't breathe and was feeling overwhelmed, so rather than allow the situation to become more complicated, I killed the snake and threw him in the pond where he was promptly eaten by turtles.

I've only killed a few things on purpose—a bird that I actually expected to just fall out of the tree and then come back to life; a dog that was trying to kill me first; and a goat that I don't ever want to think about again. I felt awful about all of those and feel terrible when I accidentally kill anything else. (And there's a sort of lie in here somewhere, but justifiable. I've killed several snakes over the past four years, but in self-defense. They were in my yard and behaving in a threatening manner.)

What about common pests? Still a dilemma. I've never casually killed spiders or ants or wasps or bees or even considered them pests, and we've never had cockroaches and rarely have mice, or even flies, so I'm just hoping that I could eliminate those if they ever invade.

Reading *Holy Grail: Ancient Pagan Apocrypha*, by George Keryx. Interesting book, but I can't locate the author.

August 30, 2010—Nice day. Still the underwater thing, but shallower. More like choking in a swamp than drowning in deep water. So that's an improvement.

I found the strangest wasp today. Beautifully colored a very dark brown with vivid yellow markings, and not aggressive. It was doing something at the base of the plum tree that involved digging, standing on its head, and cleaning its legs over and over. Almost like watching a dance and a perfect video, but it was gone by the time I retrieved my camera, and of course. An hour is probably 50 years in the life of a wasp.

September 8, 2010—The sky was completely overcast this morning, but as the day went on it took on the appearance of a mud flat as it dries out cracks and crevices between pieces of cloud. The clouds were dense, and fairly thick, but not a lot of altitude. Visually this was so nice, but the best parts of the day were

the smells. Cool and fresh and like freedom. Like the last hour of the last day of school before summer vacation when I was a child. Maybe I love all of the seasons and their transitions.

I've never experienced the pond at night during this time of year before, and it is busy. Almost overnight it has changed from lazy days of summer to savage place. What I would imagine an ecotone (a place where ecologies are in tension—area of intense predation) to be.

Last night near midnight I heard the screams of something being killed and as I was sneaking over to see what was going on, one of the large owls was leaving the south bank. The screams sounded cat-like and maybe that's what the bird had, but I once saw a snake swallowing a frog and it made that sound.

September 12, 2010—Occasionally the evenings here are infused with an odd coppery light that always reminds me of some sunglasses that I tried on one time. A familiar landscape made alien by hue and clarity. I always take my glasses off to see if something is wrong with them when this happens. Today I just watched it through my window. I didn't have the energy to go outside and take pictures of the effect.

When I went out earlier, the sky was filled with turkey vultures. Neat. Before I was born they were the predominant scavenger on this part of the plains, but as car traffic invaded they didn't adapt quickly enough and were replaced by crows. I don't remember seeing any when I was a child, but during my high school years I remember seeing a small flock of less than fifty at different places around the countryside where there were a few large trees, (when we got our driver's licenses we started roaming the thousands of miles of dirt roads through the wilderness that surrounds us, and we camped nearly everywhere).

There are almost no trees outside the towns or away from homesteads on this part of the Llano Estacado, and during the past ten years as the flock has been growing they have been coming to the town fairly often in the evening to roost in trees along the edge of the community.

This evening was outstanding. It was the largest group I have ever seen, and since we have lots of trees they always fly really low over our place. We also have lots of dogs, so they never land on any of the trees in our yards. In the past I've gotten a few really good close-ups of their wings and was pretty much mesmerized by them.

September 14, 2010—Patterns (ripples through time is a barely adequate metaphor, if even that, but maybe a hint in the right direction), common to our race and awakened in all of us by the same stimuli. These patterns connect us and sometimes exhibit as impeccable movements, like when flocks of birds or schools of fish wheel and turn and drop in perfect synchronicity.

Reading Crazy Horse, by Mari Sandoz. It is excellent. I read her biography about her father, Old Jules, a few months ago, and although I didn't care for her father, he was ultimately one of the great pioneers, and almost single-handedly responsible for the settling of western Nebraska. I loved the book.

September 20, 2010—I take care of my sister's dogs while she is at work, which means I go in her house for their morning medications, noon snacks, and evening meals, and in doing so have noticed something

odd about her. She has a large fruit bowl always full of bananas, oranges, and apples, and every ten days or so the old fruit is thrown away and the bowl is refilled with fresh fruit.

About a year ago I noticed the pattern and started eating some of the fruit myself, but I'm sure I'm the only one who ever has. Why would someone buy food they will never eat—two or three times a month? She did make banana bread one time, but can that make up for the hundreds of bananas she has thrown away after leaving them to go bad. I guess my point is, why not buy wax fruit? A one-time investment, and just dust them every ten days or so.

September 21, 2010—I am practically a weather forecaster. I feel something coming.

Finished reading *Old Magdalena Cow Town*, by Langford Ryan Johnston, and *Brothers of Light; The Penitentes of the Southwest*, by Alice Corbin Henderson. Hers is the fourth book I have read about the Penitentes, and all are very good.

September 22, 2010—Purple flowers and rain. The purple flowers are comforting, but rain almost paralyzes me, and on top of that I didn't want to spend one more day without a coffee pot. Mine broke a week ago and I've been improvising, but poorly. It would have worked if microwaved water would stay hot for more than a couple of seconds.

Every morning I give treats to my brother's dogs when I'm cleaning that side of the yard. The female collie mix (Foxy) is sweet and gracious about everything, but the male Boston terrier (Lamont), who has always tried to bite me, will walk up to the fence, snarl menacingly, and then delicately take the treat from my hand. I can get away with handing the treat in an opened hand with fingers tightly together because he is kind of like a coral snake. His mouth won't open wide enough to enable him to damage a large flat surface. He could chew a single finger off, but can't do much with a whole hand.

Reading *Wilderness at Dawn; The Settling of the North American Continent*, by Ted Morgan.

September 26, 2010—Right at sunset I heard a quail making a lot of noise in the pasture. I went to check and stumbled across a red fox in the tall grass on the edge of the pond. I immediately went back to my yard and left it alone, but was wondering, "What isn't he hunting somewhere else?" It's taken hours for me to comprehend a concept I use correctly all the time—the pond creates an ecotone, or boundary between two ecological niches, and it becomes a zone of intense predation. Animals living in water and animals coming for water, all eating each other.

Everyone on the block has been watching the 'Hoarders and Hoarding' shows this summer, and we are now divided into two distinct groups—a group that says, "I hardly have anything and I need all of it. And besides, everything I collect has value," and a group that says, "You're crazy! It's all trash and junk. Get rid of that worthless crap."

I recently told my brother that if he was as careful with his money as he is with his license plate and old bottle collections, he would have a big collection of money.

I also told him to take everything he has learned from hoarding junked cars, assorted nuts and bolts, and piles of tin and scrap metal, and apply it to cash.

I'll bet it would work. You should see how hard it is to get an old car bumper away from him. If only he could hold on to cash that tightly.

My current and semi-primitive technique for making coffee is to boil a cup full of water in the microwave, put coffee in a paper filter and clamp it closed with a clothes pin, and that will sit neatly on the cup rim while holding the filter and coffee submerged in the rapidly cooling water. It just almost works, but after a few days I would rather eat the coffee than drink another warm cup.

I do have a stove, but using it is out of the question. It's still new, and although I've removed the plastic it was wrapped in, I've never cooked anything on it. I have turned the burners on a few times to see if they work, but just realized that I've never opened the oven door. I don't even own pots or pans so I won't be tempted to use it.

Why? Because I don't want to have to clean it. This way I just have to dust it occasionally. I couldn't stand the suspense any longer and opened the oven door. It's just a regular oven, but really clean.

September 27, 2010—Cool to borderline cold last night. I got to turn off some fans and get out another blanket. The end of summer—beginning of fall, oscillates back and forth between feeling like I'm being attacked by lingering pollen, heat and humidity, and rejuvenation. Right now it's in the attack phase, but between midnight and sunrise, rejuvenation will set in. Sometimes I wonder how many of my thoughts and impressions about life have been stolen from books that I've read.

Reading My Pardner, by Max Evans.

October 1, 2010—According to my pictures, I never go anywhere but the pond and the flower beds, and only interact with dogs, cats, wild birds, fish and insects, but that's not entirely true. I also take the trash to the dumpster every morning. These flowers are mesmerizing in the early morning.

October 2, 2010—Beautiful day, but so difficult to breathe that I can hardly function.

I've decided to transition to holistic methods of contending with this. It's not like eliminating the medical doctor really matters since the only suggestion I have accepted from him is the albuterol therapy, and I use it more to combat the panic that sets in than for very much real relief. My doctor is a really nice guy, but I know more about the disease than he does, and although I try to only go there once a year, I get the feeling that he is merely keeping a log on a patient who is slowly expiring by suffocation.

And not that there is any fault in his practicing what he knows. There are many drugs and therapies he could prescribe if I would willingly participate, but I won't. So it's probably time to stop wasting his time and move on to something that I can trust and will accommodate. For whatever reason I do trust hippies and herbs, and have never rejected either.

As I sat in the yard having coffee this morning I realized I was experiencing something I have read about many times—a cacophony of natural sounds. The birds and insects were so loud that I couldn't hear anything else.

I'm actually not going to the holistic side of medicine completely. What I am embarking on is more of a 'shotgun' method (John Steinbeck's description of his mother's approach to illness—not a real gun).

Modern medicine and medical doctors do have merit, but not the amazing amount attributed to and often by them. I have always felt that graduates of medical schools are invaluable when it comes to setting broken bones, stopping blood flow, and closing wounds, but everything else they do is fairly arbitrary. The medical 'professional' fringe of Homeopathic, Holistic, Herbal, Nutritional, and even Spiritual practitioners, also have some degree of merit, and might even potentially be a little more effective due to their approaching health and wellness as balance, and disease or illness as an imbalance.

So I'm taking what I want from all of them. I've found some mullein growing near my house, and since smoke and humidity are my enemies, I am harvesting it on a slightly smoky and humid day (homeopathic), and after consuming a meal of raw vegetables and grain (holistic), I intend to drink some mullein tea (herbal), while I meditate (spiritual), with my finger on speed-dial 911 (modern medicine). How could this fail?

October 5, 2010—Less than two weeks into the season, and I'm beginning to think this is the perfect one. I'm always happy when it gets cool enough to use the blanket that my Aunt Opal made for me many years ago. Sleeping under it makes me feel like being in her Ozark home.

And it's not the mountains I'm remembering, since being surrounded by trees would make me very uncomfortable, but her and the atmosphere she maintained in her home.

This morning I read *New Mexico Courthouses*, by Donald W. Whisenhunt. A Southwestern Studies Monograph, and more a booklet than a book, but interesting.

October 14, 2010—Reading *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver* by J. Frank Dobie.

I think I'm managing it better now, but for several years I have been unable to think about, read about, hear about, or watch anything even remotely related to suffocation or entombment. Anything to do with caves, or cave-ins, closed places, underwater, open water, even having my finger caught in something, instantly activates my autonomic nervous system to its maximum level, which instantly drains my body of oxygen, disturbs my breathing patterns, causes my brain to react in a disturbed manner and initiate all kinds worthless or even damaging biochemical responses, and throws me into a panicked, gasping loop.

I was already having trouble breathing yesterday and then mistakenly stepped into a conversation that my brother was having with a friend of his, who was telling him one more 'sure' way to get rid of skunks. It was like listening to a horror story and within a few minutes I was gasping for air and had to leave. It affected me so much that at three this morning I woke up panicked and gasping for air from a dream that

I was enduring what I had heard him talking about.

Earlier I was telling my brother about my response to the conversation (mistake) and he proceeded to tell me that a few years prior, the same guy told him about how he had gotten rid of some unwanted kittens, and I immediately began gasping uncontrollably. When I could finally breathe again I asked him, “Are you trying to kill me?”

The point is that the stress that will trigger a breathing crisis can come from anywhere, at any time. And nearly anything that can cause a crisis will have lingering effects. It pays to be constantly vigilant.

(I haven’t included all of what was in my journal regarding this event, but reading and then copying it from the journal plunged me into a breathing crisis that lasted the rest of the day and through the night, showing two important things—the lingering potency of breathing-crisis triggers, and that they are manageable.)

I’ve known many people who fall through life with reckless abandon. After a while I learned to stay away from them just so their bad luck wouldn’t rub off on me, but really, they could live twice as long with half the broken bones and disasters if they would just stop and look both ways once in awhile.

October 17, 2010—The first truly fall-like day. Nice. Not going outside. I don’t have the energy and it’s probably an environmental trick anyway, but it’s so pleasant to watch through my windows.

Reading *The Arab Mind*, by Raphael Patai. Interesting.

October 18, 2010—I can’t get up, so I was scrolling through the channel guide early this morning and passed by a movie described as ‘Deranged Cannibals,’ doing whatever it was they were doing. I didn’t watch it, but later I wondered if that movie was an alternative to the less interesting lives of mentally stable cannibals—who probably already have difficult lives anyway and don’t need the negative publicity of a few cannibals gone bad.

Reading *Tierra Amarilla; Stories of New Mexico*, by Sabine R. Ulibarri.

October 22, 2010—I sat outside and read off and on, but mainly just felt the day occur. Nice, cool to almost cold winds hit us from all directions like a huge, oscillating, outdoor fan—and they stirred up very little dust or dirt due to the recent rain. Forceful circulation always seems to make breathing easier, like finding the eye in turbidity.

Actually aside from feeling like I’m trying to breathe under water it was an interesting day.

Reading *A Very Small Remnant*, by Michael Straight. A historical novel about the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864.

October 23, 2010—We act nonchalant about it, but interpersonal communication is a delicate time full of potential danger. Words can be benign, beneficial, or deadly, and I think we either consciously or

unconsciously follow and respond to instinctive safety guidelines when approaching any conversation. Several years ago I was interviewing a client and when the lady walked into the room she was smoking a cigarette. As she sat down she said, “Do I need to turn this off?” She didn’t, but for a few seconds I just blankly stared at her. The words she had said were familiar, but I (suspiciously I think) couldn’t participate with the way they were used. I recovered quickly, but have always remembered the effect of that moment. We can instigate incredibly complex thought processes within each other in very simple ways, but sometimes, the slightest discrepancy will cause us to shut down. It makes me wonder about my reaction to the emphysema diagnosis. I suspect that I knew I was very ill, but when the doctor spoke, I shut down and just blankly stared at him.

Reading *Tales of the Chuck Wagon*, by N.H. (Jack) Thorp. October 25, 2010—For the past few days I’ve been thinking about the trip to my friend’s vegetable garden.

The embarrassing parts are how out of my way it felt to go, and worst of all, how generous I felt for having gone. The man gave me enough organically grown, meticulously tended vegetables to last for months, and I didn’t get more because I’m too lazy. I kept remembering that there is a perfectly good store just a 50 mile trip away and they have more vegetables than I could ever want.

It has made me consider that my current physical state might be related to my attitude about food. As children, we were often seriously malnourished for long periods of time, but as I became older, even when I started making enough money to feed myself well, I just never considered food to be very important. I have always eaten whatever was available (quality and flavor weren’t important), and only when I absolutely had to (right before I passed out). In fact, for much of my adult life I have even kept myself slightly hungry on purpose because it seemed to help me excel at whatever I was doing.

And even now I can’t summon even a hint of an urge to change. I have no interest in anything but flower gardens, and would probably eat insects before I would consider raising chickens and pigs and goats.

A tree should fall on me.

Reading *New Mexico 100 Years Ago*, compiled by Skip Watson.

I love the smells of California, the feeling of Texas, and the exotic beauty of the Hawaiian Islands, but for me, Santa Fe has combined all three of those elements without copying any of those places. I realize that it isn’t what it used to be, but so what. The landscape is the living gem, not the human artifacts that are scattered about.

I’ve often thought it strange that people will preserve a structure as an important focal point, when it was originally actually intended as a shelter or place from which to view a magnificent landscape, which is then ultimately spoiled by the presence of view-obstructing structures preserved by a historical society. How much nostalgia do we need? There should be a society to balance the preservation society. A ‘Tear Down That Ridiculous Eyesore’ society.

October 26, 2010—It seems so much easier to breathe when the weather is cool that I sometimes forget that breathing is not really my issue. I can breathe fine. My malfunctioning immune system and inadequate processing of oxygen are the main issues. Still, on days like this when I'm not exerting any energy, I feel so close to how I used to feel that sometimes I plunge into things I really can't do and end up trapping myself in perilous ways.

Reading *The Brave Cowboy*, by Edward Abbey.

Earlier I was ambling around feeling almost normal, saw that a big branch had fallen in the pond, and without thinking started trying to get it out. Within seconds I had desaturated myself, lost all conscious control of the situation, and ended up gasping, disoriented, and almost being dragged into the water by the branch (so weird how they can turn on you like that). It was enough of a reminder of when I did fall into the pond this time last year that after I recovered I looked for other things to do.

Last year during the first week of November I woke up feeling great and put the boat in the water to gather up excess plants. I tired fairly quickly just by rowing, but it wasn't bad until I tried to lift a large clump of reeds into the boat and they somehow outwitted me and pulled me overboard into the water. I had on heavy clothes, heavy shoes, and a heavy coat and was already almost in a coma when I hit the water. If I hadn't had such a tight grip on the reeds, the clothes would have dragged me to the bottom, but even with that bit of good luck, getting out was like escaping a black hole. I never told anyone about it, but it sort of traumatized me for a while. Enough to not want it to happen again.

When we were kids we didn't have access to the same types of food that our classmates ate, but we knew about them. I remember being very intrigued with the idea of a bologna sandwich, especially the bread. I had seen a man eating one, and the smell of fried bologna was so good it made me start planning to get a job so I could buy all of the bologna sandwiches I wanted. People here always referred to bread from the store as 'light bread', but my sister and I misunderstood them and thought they were saying 'like bread.' She decided it was called that because if you ever ate it, you would like it and want more, and we wanted some. Our mom made the best biscuits, but after we found out about 'like bread' she practically had to beat us to get us to eat them. We would sit around the table, eating biscuits, crying, and asking, "Why can't we have 'like bread' like everyone else?"

The most profoundly enlightening statement I ever heard a high school teacher make was when my Driver's Education teacher defined the act of driving well and responsibly as a sequence of corrections. Due to the dynamics of the highway—twists, turns, changing road surface conditions, other traffic—one second's perfect aim is often the next second's worst possible choice. I immediately understood something about driving, and even more about living in general. That life itself, when lived well, is a sequence of corrections.

October 29, 2010—The fall is very nice and I should be more comfortable. I have everything I need, and a lot of what I want, but I don't feel enthusiastic about either. It isn't especially difficult to breathe, so I

should feel grateful, but it just seems unimportant. Melancholy for no reason.

I sometimes think about going somewhere, or inviting someone over, because I still function fairly well in public, but at other times that seems like stirring up something that won't go away.

I spend much of my time delightfully mesmerized, or laughing, but at the same time trembling with anticipation as to what might happen next.

It bothers me when the human species is excluded from the effects of universal causes. Like we are clever enough to duck an invisible pulse? Anything that will assist a bird, or a whale, in navigation, will also affect us in some way.

We are three separate things: The biological organism—a thing not so much driven by the phases of the moon as responding to the same universal laws as the moon—or a bear—or a leaf. The social organism—a thing that observes, dreams of, and yearns for a moon. The psyche—a thing that is in many ways, a part of the moon.

Finished reading *Cheyenne Autumn*, by Mari Sandoz. Very interesting.

October 31, 2010—Spent the day avoiding germs. Sometimes that's a good idea. Have gone outside a few times, but the barometric pressure is changing and the winds are full of pollen and dust. I'd rather not read in it.

Reading *Sky Determines*, by Ross Calvin. What an excellent book.

November 1, 2010—Didn't stay outside a lot, but it was nice when I did. Much colder at night and distinctly colder during the day, so the plants are shedding quickly now. I found only one morning glory in all the yards today, cultivated or wild. My pictures don't show it so well, but the color is so rich and saturated it seems more brilliantly colored than the individuals do in a large group.

November 3, 2010—Reading *Frontier Army Sketches*, by James W. Steele This afternoon I started walking outside again for the winter. I've been sort of dreading it, but it actually feels great. Two miles. I had to stop and rest several times, but my average distance last winter was only 1 1/2 miles. Outdoor walking seems to be more effective because changing terrain challenges balance and attention. I mainly prefer indoor exercise because I'm lazy and wait until late in the evening to get started. I still do indoor exercises all year round, just less when I walk outside. And I have to do this when it is light because it's just too dangerous to walk in the pastures after dark—holes, snakes, feral cats or dogs, rabid skunks, and then the guy down the road raises and trains killer fighting chickens. Imagine the carnage if they ever chewed through their chains and found me out walking around in the dark. No thanks.

November 7, 2010—Haven't been able to walk two miles again since the other day. It's really pretty hard and I have to slowly build into that type of marathon. But I do prefer colder weather and will rejuvenate when it finally sets in. Stayed outside for a while, but everyone in the neighborhood has the flu and I'm

not taking chances. I have a pile of rocks ready in case anyone tries to come in my yard, and my house is mined with germ killers, antiseptics, and disinfectants. In the meantime, I can perfect my obsessions.

I analyze everything I touch, or that might touch me, but it's not something completely out of control. I just won't go near my sister's grandchildren during the winter (all I see are germ factories, not children), and I would rather sleep in the open in a mud-pit during a snowstorm wearing only a t-shirt and tennis shoes, than go anywhere near a doctor's office this time of year. I couldn't carry enough germ killer solution to feel okay about walking through a crowded waiting room full of sick people.

An explanation came to me in the night. The conscious self, though noisy, has at most only tangential influence on our existence. (I don't know that physical laws and genetic imperatives even notice it.) Our most complex appearing actions are only exhibitions of sequences of habits formed according to patterns created by paralyzed social paradigms or cultural structures (which themselves are just more current manifestations of imprinted herd behaviors). There is very little, if any, individual complex thought or free-will involved. Even the dominant among us are motivated and controlled by forces beyond individual intellect and will—plagiarized thoughts and conditioned motions, driven by external forces.

November 8, 2010—I probably won't even read today. I don't feel well, and right now it seems pointless—hauling sand to a beach, water to a lake.

“Self-awareness is no cure for some basic instinct that keeps us going in a certain direction.”

The first time I heard, or read that, I ignored it, at least as something that might apply to me. The second time it appeared, the concept grabbed me by the mind and threw me into an abyss. It's true. For twenty-five years I stayed enrolled in various colleges in order to have access to their libraries. I usually took interesting classes as an excuse for always being there, and for something to do between books, but they weren't my focus. I read thousands and thousands of books and spent hundreds of thousands of hours thinking about them and reveling in the feelings of what I thought represented enlightenment and transcendence, and although I did develop the discipline to study and understand complex concepts and systems on my own, none of it has affected me much at all. It barely amounts to more than rote memorization of irrelevant data to keep my same self company on the same old journey.

I did go long enough to earn some degrees, and I even used one of those to get a license to teach high school for a while, but in the end I was nonchalant about the formal education process. I threw the certificates away and use the information more for personal satisfaction and entertainment than anything else. It is correct that I was slightly modified, but it replaced nothing. An accessory carelessly draping the original.

Reading *Canoeing with the Cree*, by Eric Sevareid, and what an excellent book.

November 9, 2010—When I worked in the juvenile jail I quickly saw that no matter what a child had been incarcerated for, and no matter how they behaved when they first came in, within a few days all of

gangster posturing went away and they became children. One day I would be frowning at and edging uneasily around a 15 year old murderer, and the next day when I came to work I would find someone making up ridiculous excuses for why he didn't do his homework, and more concerned with whether or not he was going to be kicked off of the baseball team than with doing math, or the starkness of murder. Even the trauma of slaughtering someone could barely affect the boy inside.

Reading Good-bye, My Land of Enchantment, by Alfonso Griego.

November 10, 2010—The winds are intense and overpowering and the dust is so thick I can sense it though the walls of my impenetrable, sterilized fortress, which my mind has been roaming through like a caged beast for the past two days. I knew exactly what was going to happen, but couldn't stand it anymore and dragged myself outside to take pictures. Almost immediately I went into oxygen crisis, lost nearly all awareness of where I was and what I was doing, and barely made it back. Existence becomes darkness and doom at that stage and my first inclination is to give up and let it have me. It takes a while—I suppose. Time becomes irrelevant—to reorganize and function again, but the strange thing is that a challenge always surfaces during that process. I've now accepted this one and will go outside again as soon as I have recovered sufficiently. I spend days like this attacking the wind and dust until I'm too exhausted to move.

It's so difficult to breathe right now that anything requiring movement or expending energy is out of the question, so it's either this or television since I'm out of books. Although I guess I could just stare out the window.

A part of me has been disgruntled from farther back than I have been able to trace yet. About something specific, "This is not what I was led to believe it would be and these are not the people and behaviors I was expecting to find," and to the point that my few ventures into mainstream society have been selective, and more guerrilla forays than attempts at integration.

It isn't the whole of my mentality but I now see that it has always been present. I have felt most comfortable while living among the least formally civilized people (speech, dress, etiquette), and except for the college environment, suspicious of anyone who too obviously projected the appearance of formalized civility. (There is a very good reason why certain types of people live in this state. There are no guardrails.)

In everything I've ever written about my childhood I've always stated that the past doesn't concern or bother me. In truth, it has been what mattered most in terms of building my social personality and character. Everything I've experienced has led to here, and any one thing changed, no matter how small, would have led to somewhere else.

So there it is. I've located the worm, and I guess the first thing to do is congratulate myself on my smashing successes. I am so well fortified and armed that I would have as much difficulty getting out as others do getting in.

And the second would be to see if I can turn it.

Reading Ramblin Through the 1880s—and Beyond, by George Richard Montague Stevens. Interesting. The etiquette conscious writing style gets close to being too much, but not enough to destroy the book.

November 12, 2010—Today I was wondering, “Why all the metaphors, aphorisms, and analogies? Why all the stories. It’s like I can’t carry on a normal conversation.” Everything immediately reminds me of something, and before I know it I’ve blurted it out.

I’ve thought about it for hours and a few minutes ago realized that it’s an adaptation to physical deterioration. Metaphors, aphorisms, analogies, and stories are language shortcuts to points which we think nothing of taking weeks, months, or even years to reach when we are in our prime. Ways of getting from here to some desired place or position at a reduced energy expenditure rate and with the least amount of wear and tear.

I remember working with people when I was younger and thinking, “Even if I have to show this to them every day for the next year they are going to learn how to do it.” A tired and deteriorating person quickly learns to just smack them with a brief, blunt, point.

Very cold, but not really so terrible. I went out to walk around before the sun set and just got back.

I also went next door to finally admit to my brother that I don’t really want to go in his yard to feed his dogs when he is out of town next week. One dog is good and friendly, but he doesn’t seem to understand that the other one is not. He tries to eat me every chance he gets and he treats my sister the same way. We don’t go in that yard, but we share a fence with them and if either of us gets near his side, he tries to chew through the chain link to kill us. We’ve both told our brother and he almost acts insulted. Like we’re telling lies about his little boy.

Well, we understated anything we said because the rotten little monster needs to go to reform school. As soon as our brother leaves his house in the morning it’s like the Tasmanian Devil cartoon character shows up next door.

At the end of my speech he told me that all I needed was a newspaper. And that I didn’t need to hit him with it, just shake it so it makes noise.

I don’t even want to go in the yard with him, and I sure am not going in there making noises with a newspaper. I told him I thought it was nice that even serial killers can have parents who love them.

My sister just brought burritos. She often makes tortillas and sopapillas from scratch and they are great.

She is one of those women who are equally skilled with a tractor, a skill saw, a computer, and a rolling pin.

Around 10:00 pm I saw a flashlight moving around the yard and heard someone talking near the back of my place. When I opened the door my brother was pointing the flashlight to a spot in front of him that

was blocked from my view and talking. I heard him say, “No. I’m not going to hurt you. But you have to leave this yard.” I asked him what was going on and he said that there was a little skunk under my swing and that it was using everything in its little skunk arsenal to make him go away, stomping its front feet and charging, and then running back under the swing. Then he said that he had just read about them on the internet and hurting one would be like hurting one of the Chihuahuas, so he wasn’t going to do it anymore.

Reading A Peak in Darien, by Freya Stark.

November 13, 2010—Even good ideas can have bad timing or application, and we understand and use this effectively on more personal levels. For example, in traffic flow terms, it is a good idea to use blinkers and obey traffic signs, but no one does it while being chased by a carload of armed thugs.

The same with everything else, stick with what works, no matter what the expert opinion to the contrary. If the medicine makes you sick, don’t take it. If it makes you feel better, do it. If it hurts when you do that, don’t do that. If it gives the vehicle better performance and the driver more control, install it. If the vehicle starts spinning out of control toward the edge of a steep cliff when you push that button, don’t push that button. And if you can chew through the bars before the monsters get you, start chewing.

“He changed his mind,” is currently used in the pejorative, when actually it indicates the potential presence of a necessary skill. The opposite of “He never changed his mind right up to the point where he drove over the cliff at the unexpected curve on the icy road.” Why would that be viewed as admirable?

No one zips through life with pinpoint accuracy, never correcting or adjusting an initial position or action even as conditions change or new information surfaces, and no one ever has or ever will. Or they don’t if they ultimately live responsibly and well. We are all surrounded by those whose lives are a continuous series of crashes and other catastrophes.

Once we establish any goal and engage in pursuing it, everything we do toward that end is always in the process of becoming a mistake. Reaching any goal involves estimating, judging, tentative moves, and corrections, or the effort likely will wreck.

We are facing a wild and unknown dynamic universe, not strolling through a manicured and well managed safe zone, free from the physics and chemistry of real life. Our will and expectations do not pull any strings but our own.

November 14, 2010—A few days ago my thoughts launched into hyper-drive for no apparent reason. It has been like a tsunami in my head and all I can do is observe while everything I have ever retained, rearranges, blends, and connects into webs of awareness within me.

Since then, everything I encounter or think about appears as a link in a chain of causes and effects reaching across space in the immediate instant, back through time and sequences of causes to its source, and forward through time to its possible conclusions. Almost an oracular position. Of course all I see are

layers of ripples like tossing rocks into a pond, but the meanings are clear.

As I wander around outside I can follow the floating movement of a seed all the way up through its connection to the winds in the clouds above, a blowing grain of sand from a mountainside granitic extrusion to an ocean trench, or the behavior of a beetle from its movements in front of me forward through its biological concerns to a position in the food chain.

I can hardly move, but my mind has never been as alert or active.

My feelings of self have always been located only in my head, and except for reacting if I burned my hand on a hot stove, that is where I have always existed. I've never felt a connection to my body other than as something that carried my mind around, and was annoyed when it required some sort of tending and maintenance, neither of which I put much effort into. I did let it sleep or lounge quite a lot, and would occasionally hose it off and cover it according to the weather, but little more other than those and keeping an eye on it in traffic. If it weakened or faltered I would shove more coffee and snack food in it (as I said before, my main vegetable for 20 years was a snickers bar), and then use force to make it go where I wanted to go.

And to think, I get mad at people who abuse their animals. If I keep this up I'll be laughing at the irony again.

Reading Prospero's Cell, by Lawrence Durrell.

November 15, 2010—Woke up in a horror movie today. There are times when I feel so much better that I forget what's really occurring, which never turns out well.

The wind is so intense right now that I couldn't inhale when I went outside. I was part way across the yard with bird food before I tried to take a breath, and couldn't, which is at first only mildly upsetting but quickly turns into mindless fear when I try to reverse the mistake.

Then I made it back inside and the guilt set in, exacerbating the inability to breathe. I probably won't recover for a while. I did get the birds fed, but the dogs need attention and so does the pond and I can't move to do either of those.

Called my sister to see how she was and she said she always feels pretty successful to find herself waking up and still alive, and if I would just stay inside and stop moving around I would also be more comfortable. I've never been able to find much comfort in boredom.

Several weeks ago I joined an online group forum for people with COPD, but have decided to bail out. They all seem nice, but the conversations are a collection of stories of despair. I don't mind what others know about me, or observe from a distance, but suffocation is too personal to encourage familiarity or invite comments.

November 16, 2010—Still difficult to get around, but not impossible, and the late afternoon is really nice. I

walked around the yard for a while to take pictures, but nothing really came up. And not that I'm normally discriminating, but the camera is heavy today and even slight other movement takes effort. It's strange that rhythmic movement such as walking steadily takes longer to tire me than erratic movement.

On the way to feed the dogs I stopped at my brother's and watched him work for a while. That's always interesting.

Today's Medicine: the wisdom of a petite, shy woman, who possessed the sensibilities of an apex predator. Freya Stark, in her book about her work as an agent for British Intelligence in the Middle East during World War II, stated that one thing she had realized during those times was that courage can be learned, and is largely a matter of practice. As with most things she said I found it to be insightful, and filed it under interesting things pertaining to other people.

At the time I was reading that book I was a wreck. I could only sleep for short periods and would wake desaturated of oxygen, and in physical frenzy and mental panic. My solution to the worst conditions was basically just to freak out, making whatever was going on worse until I was finally too exhausted to contribute further to the disaster. At that point I would more or less pass out and then my body would take over and establish balance.

I was terrified of those occurrences and could hardly make myself go to bed, but one night in the middle of such a frenzy, a form of her statement popped into my mind, "I learned to do this and have been practicing it for my entire life. I am indulging in a bad habit and making things much worse than they have to be."

The more I thought about it, succumbing to fear was only part of the bad habit. Another part was trying to escape what was frightening me, which was ridiculous since my own body was what I was trying to escape from.

I reviewed the biochemical mechanics of the physical event and realized that even in the worst of those times, I was responding to something that was logical and manageable, if I would just face it and quit trying to run away.

Nighttime desaturation was just the level I was at physically. I woke confused because I didn't have enough oxygen to think well, and gasping because my body chemistry was out of balance. My brain was demanding action from my lungs, but my flight habit was so deeply instilled that even asleep, as soon as I felt stress I engaged it and started trying to flee.

The next time I woke in that condition, I forced myself to start the breathing routine I had been practicing in the daytime. It was difficult, but I persisted and it worked.

Within a week of that type of conscious intervention the night time desaturation changed. I probably still experienced it, but I started to sleep through the night and the corrections happened without my being aware.

In those few days I came to intimately understand that fear responses are learned and are largely a matter of practice, but as that remarkable woman once determined, we also can learn the courage to face what we fear in more personally beneficial ways, and then make that habitual through practice.

What I am discovering now is that this late in life I can't replace any of the lifetime of bad habits I have accumulated so I must always consciously interfere and choose to face what frightens or confronts me rather than rely on reflex.

Very little physical difference from the past few days, but through conscious intervention I feel much better.

November 17, 2010—Hoping that if I just sit here quietly and passively it will go away. Decided to feel better today and went walking. Not bad at all but just barely made 1/2 mile. Not a lot of wind, but cool and kind of energetic. I love the way the grasses display.

I've been so intense for the past few days that I've been wondering if it's not anger. And what do you know, it is, but it isn't warranted.

I often encounter people who have this same disease and what is most striking about them is how passive they are. Like they're not at war. Like they're not being pillaged and plundered. Like they've given everything up and are resting because they want to.

The last time I was in the doctor's office there were several COPD patients who were even younger than me and it was like observing monks in a very strict order—infrequent, spare movements, and no unnecessary gestures or expressions (even frowning burns oxygen). So stoic they appeared resolved and courageous when compared to my own unsettled behavior.

I don't understand their choice (at what point does expressing nothing become having nothing to express?) but I do understand why they chose it. When every effort is a battle eventually lost it's hard to find the will to keep making an effort. Also on that side of the coin is the fact that if one exerts minimal or no resistance, the demons only hover nearby, choking you but rarely beating you. Allowing a somewhat extended existence but in a very small and constantly diminishing space.

In the end, I'll slowly suffocate the same as they will, and what I've experienced of that so far has been absolutely terrifying, the same thing they experience. I probably should back off and let trained professional minds guide me through the minefield to the bottomless pit, but I won't.

And even as the disease engulfs me and my energy and will begin to fade away, I am still aware that if I would just give up and curl up into the smallest and most docile possible form it would back off and let me exist a while longer, but I can't. The thought of giving in to a ruthless superior force so enrages me that I don't just resist, I attack and keep doing so until it beats me senseless. Am I overreacting?

November 20, 2010—Perfect day. Seventy degrees and no wind. A day of discovery.

Reading *The Desert and the Sown* (1907), by Gertrude Bell. A book about her Syrian adventures. I got it mainly to compare her to Freya Stark, and they are nothing alike beyond the fact that they were women explorers who dared to wander through the Middle East long before it was acceptable to either the Western or the Arab cultures. I do like the book, but not her so much. She roars through the countryside inflicting herself on it. Ms. Stark blended into the landscape with the culture, observed everyone and everything, and was hardly noticed.

I didn't feel up to exercising last night, but maybe I just needed a vacation because I was able to walk a mile today. Actually just under, but I made the goal I had in mind, and along the way learned something really interesting. Some people describe their walks as 'ground pounding'. For some reason that has stuck with me and today I realized that is how I have been approaching the exercise. Since I exercise in a pasture filled with clumps of grass and no discernible trail, I trip and fall toward the goal rather than walk. I stumble over every little obstacle, and the cumulative result is pounding the ground rather than moving over it with any sort of skill.

It's kind of hard to alter a course of action in the middle, and when I'm tired, but right at the halfway point, and without changing stride or speed, I focused on paying attention to where I was walking. It changed everything. I finished the walk less tired than I was half-way through it, and I didn't sprain either of my ankles.

It's strange how distance almost seems irrelevant here. This afternoon I drove probably 140 miles to get dog food and an inhaler, and it's really a common thing with everyone. And most people here keep driving until they can't figure out how to start a vehicle. Maybe this is a questionable choice, but I intend to do the same. And no I won't feel bad. (The cashier at the gas station had no reason to ask if I needed her to call an ambulance, I was practically fine.) There are drivers here with 50+ previous DWI arrests, more heroin addicts per capita than probably any place on earth, and everyone has seen what happens when a Mexican fiesta dance shuts down. No guilt even if I was blind. It's a roll of the dice for everyone, all the time.

But I am extra alert and cautious—one of those "white knuckled drivers going exactly the speed limit and refusing to pull onto the shoulder," is probably a very good description—and I don't pull over to the shoulder because the odds are I would just keep going and end up in the fence.

Which indicates that I am so alert and conscious of my driving that I am probably even a better than average driver for this state.

November 21, 2010—I was entranced by the shapes and colors as I walked. The grasses are beautiful in this state.

Beginning to understand that I read voraciously not as a hobby, and not even for the reassurance of similar or compatible thoughts, but for clues.

Couldn't spend much time outdoors, and when I did go out it was uncomfortable, so I spent part of the

day looking for more respiratory system information.

Very little to nothing has ever been studied about the effects of daily environmental changes or conditions. In fact, every query seems to lead to 'see cigarettes and smoking' because almost the whole of modern medicine seems to be dedicating its preventative efforts toward the elimination of cigarettes. I would disagree.

I don't smoke cigarettes or cigars, but don't mind if other people do, because there are other, much worse, and more invasive things. I was talking to my sister about it this morning and we quickly named off several things that we prefer cigarette or cigar smoke to:

Rapid temperature changes—our internal thermostats are very slow to make adjustments.

High wind—and I would have thought it would be easier to inhale in high winds, like it would force air right into me, but it isn't. Air circulation and cooler air temperature are preferable, but freezing, cyclonic air isn't the ultimate.

Rapidly changing and prolonged low barometric pressures.

Rapidly changing and prolonged high humidity levels.

Cooking odors—especially anything frying. She and I both almost lock down in the presence of spattering grease. I love the smell of cooked bacon, but can't stay in a house where it is cooking.

I told my sister that and she said she just gave her daughter a bunch of bacon and sausage because she can't cook it in the winter when she can't open all the windows.

Any kind of spray, no matter what the propellant—both of us can sense them from a long way off, and it's like an invasion.

Chemical smells—I don't know that I can really define those, but it's the smell of WD-40, brake pads, burning rubber, any hot plastic and most new plastics, most fragrances (we both use unscented everything, nearly all perfumes and colognes remind me of wasp & hornet spray.)

All of those are everywhere and can just suck the oxygen right out of us, but I hardly notice tobacco smoke. I would go so far as to say that second hand tobacco smoke has often saved me from having to put up with more obnoxious fumes and particles.

Reading *The Alexandria Quartet*, by Lawrence Durrell.

December 15, 2010—The sunsets have been spectacular lately and I've had the urge to drive to the edge of town and take pictures of them but can hardly move.

## Chapter 7: 2011

A couple of life-altering events this year. The first, and maybe most important, is that I joined Facebook. What an experience! After several years of self-imposed isolation, I was finally interacting with other people again. At first I was too shy and self-conscious to do more than watch, but as the months went by, and I acquired more friends and reconnected with old friends, I became more outgoing and confident. When I finally started posting my photographs they were so well received that photography became a high point and key motivator of each day. I started driving again, to favorite places around or near town, and taking pictures of my favorite scenes. I specialized in sunset landscapes and shared them as accents to reviews of, and excerpts from, the books I was reading.

I also moved to another house. I reached a point where I was very uncomfortable in the RV. It was nice, and even larger than I actually needed, but I began to hate sleeping there and ended up spending the night on my sister's couch most of the time. During one of the winter blizzards a huge limb broke out of the large tree beside where I was parked, and although it missed the RV, it took out all of the power lines near it. That made me nervous. Then the noise was an issue. I could hear all of the wind, every dog in the neighborhood, and sand pelting the sides during the spring windstorms. I convinced my sister to sell the RV and let me move into an older, large mobile home that she has on a lot next to her house. I started doing aroma therapy and created a meditation technique to use in conjunction with the essential oils and tonics. The essential oils are not cures in themselves. They are catalysts—facilitators of cure. I don't put them on and lie down waiting for them to work. I put them on and go to work.

I purchased a device called a lung flute as soon as it was approved by the FDA in February of that year. It is advertised as producing a vibration of a specific frequency that will thin and dislodge mucus in the bronchial tree, and has been used in Europe for years as an aid in clearing congestion.

And maybe best of all these things, a friend arranged and delivered an incredible Christmas experience that lasted the entire month of December and through much of the next year. It required a lot of effort on her part, I am very thankful for our friendship and grateful for her generous spirit, and when I get the opportunity I intend to do the same thing for someone else.

January 1, 2011—Perfect, clear day, and perfectly cold. It didn't get above 37 degrees.

Just finished the nicest New Year's dinner that my sisters cooked. As I walked back home my main thoughts were that none of us ever celebrated holidays until the past few years. When we were young we didn't know about them, even Christmas, although our parents were very religious. They kept the concept of holiday celebration from us because they couldn't afford to participate. And when we were young adults we didn't have the holiday habit.

I am finding that I like holidays, not for the specifics of what they are about, but for the interaction with my family. Although my brothers and sisters and I have always lived near each other, and have always

been the best of friends, we've all had completely separate lives and really don't know the up to 40 years of personal experiences unique to each other. We do however communicate very well, and it's nice to discover them at this time, under these conditions, while eating great meals.

January 12, 2011—The high today was 33 degrees. Not a lot of wind, so it wasn't miserable, but I still didn't go outside any more than I absolutely had to.

I finished reading *Goodbye to a River* by John Graves sometime during the night, and instead of the usual post-journey intellectual depression, I was somewhat surprised by the feeling of being intellectually satisfied. Something I constantly consciously seek, and am actually skilled at finding, and that sometimes (as with this book) hits me when and from where I least expect it. Surprise.

January 13, 2011—Reading *Searching for Fifth Mesa*, by Juana Foust.

January 16, 2011—One good thing about becoming physically decrepit—paint starts drying. It's like an unnecessary miracle but worth noting. I've painted lots of things throughout my life, buildings, houses, rooms, furniture, even one car, and so on, and the one thing all of those projects had in common was the excruciatingly long period of time spent waiting for the paint to dry. Sometimes I've even become suspicious that paint could dry.

Over the past few days I've noticed that that is no longer an issue. As soon as I finish something, it's dry enough for a second coat.

January 17, 2011—A perfectly terrible day. One of the worst I've experienced in a long time. But still, strangely perfect.

Everything was in the 70s today—temperature, wind gust speeds, and percentage of local atmospheric dust. Not all of that is completely true. It was 75 degrees today but the wind gusts hardly reached 50mph. The amount of dust in the air was so great that I started searching for measurement standards and instruments.

The atmosphere is a fascinating subject in general, and apparently hugely political. A search for measurements of minute silica particles (dust) suspended in the air, leads to an explanation of radiative forcing—which is interesting, followed by information about the interest the United Nations has in those things. I still don't know how levels of dust in the air are measured, or where to find records of recent levels, yet. But I am noticing that I don't consider 'United Nations' to be a good reference. In fact, I find it suspicious and possibly alarming that they could be engaged in anything regarding earth's atmosphere.

Anyway, along with the dust, the crew was at our house today to begin installing the fiber optic cable. All last week and this morning they have been marking noticeable buried lines, and asking me to locate ones I know about.

I've gone along, but have been a wreck because this place is covered with water, sewer, and gas lines, at a

variety of depths. At night all I can think about is that I don't have the energy to quickly fix whatever they are about to destroy. Even when they finally parked in front today and aimed all of their machines this direction I was on the verge of telling them 'no thanks.' I stopped two of the people and said that I didn't think they could keep from breaking some of the lines, still expecting that at any second some guy who didn't speak English would start charging toward the house on a ditch digging machine, breaking every line, marked or not, and taking out part of the fence just because my screaming was giving him a headache. I didn't say that out loud and they didn't tell me what was going to happen, but did say they would repair anything they broke, which was good enough to let them start at 1:00 pm. I waited and waited for the line rupturing monster to show up, and although I could see a couple of people in the yard with shovels, no ditch digging machine ever appeared. They left at 5:00 pm and when I let the dogs out I went to check what they had done, expecting not much.

What I found, and found out, was amazing. They are almost completely finished, and without a ditch digger. I had noticed that they parked a small machine about the size of a forklift at the roadway ditch (we don't have curbed roadways), and it ran intensely for several hours, but that didn't mean anything.

It was, however, the key tool. That machine somehow sent (bored?) a conduit into which the fiber optic cable will be threaded across the 300 foot distance from the roadway to the house, at a depth several inches below the deepest buried utility pipe.

I wouldn't have worried at all if I had known they were using that kind of technology. I knew it existed, but few of the many technological wonders that exist actually stop here, especially at the height of their wonder.

January 20, 2011—Beautiful and clear yesterday but all of that changed during the night. Still clear, but it was 71 degrees at this time yesterday, and 30 degrees right now. I guess 'winter time' probably explains it.

The last three days have been like night of the living dead for me, especially at night. Moderate to high pollen levels and so much suspended dust that breathing in it is barely possible, so I've been trying to stay inside and not move. Never really an option.

Last night I experienced 'fear of going to sleep' for the first time in a while. The past four days I have had a very difficult time breathing, and for some reason, even though I move less and burn less oxygen, the problem is amplified at night. Gasping for air, losing sensibility, and experiencing feelings of unavoidable and imminent doom (if I can't somehow manage to get some oxygen into my body) is terrible enough in the daytime, but to wake up in the grip of that at night is fairly terrifying.

And what is the terror about? Not the closed spigot, but the almost torturous process of its closing. The slow grinding thing is what I fear, and I feel like a prisoner when I fall into waiting for its random appearance.

I feel better physically today, but am still psychologically shaky, which will linger for days. I tried to take a

nap earlier, but soon woke panicked and desaturated from a dream that I had seen a puppy fall into a well hole and could hear him but didn't know how to save him.

Oh well, but it sometimes freaks me out. I suppose I shouldn't mention that since doing so reeks of a lack of composure and confidence, but I have faked those two things for most of my adult life anyway. The only reason I don't talk about it more often is shame. My sister has a more advanced form of the same disease and she never complains, making my own discussions seem like whining.

I hardly went out today but watched the pond through my bedroom window.

January 21, 2011—I always regret mentioning being afflicted and deteriorating rapidly, but as I was thinking about the dilemma while I exercised, I experienced an epiphany (and is it still a credible illuminating realization when one has 20 or 30 of them a day, or is it just another bad habit?).

For the past year I have often thought about how strange it is that I can maintain a program of 20 to 25 minutes of moderately strenuous aerobic exercise—usually only once a day but every day without fail—but I can rarely make it from my door to the gate without stopping to 'catch my breath'. Even today, I walked to the pond to take pictures and it was like one of those expeditions to discover the North Pole, except 55 degrees and no blizzard. On the way back I had to stop every few steps and lean on something while I struggled to breathe, then I came inside and a short time later went through a 25 minute exercise routine with little difficulty and fairly normal breathing.

When I first noticed this strange discrepancy I realized, just because the contrast was obviously between old and new movement, that it had something to do with muscle memory, but it has taken a while to understand more about that.

Tonight's realization is that the body's systems have more potential than I was giving them credit for. Both a far greater range of remembered and habitual movements and their complex processes, and far more ability to learn new movements and processes.

Each physical motion is comprised of the automatic activity of flexing and relaxing muscle fibers, working in conjunction with sequences of other systems and organs, and all need oxygen. As soon as I want or need to go outside and to my gate, automatic routines engage, and muscles and other tissues and organs start working and consuming the amounts of oxygen that they are conditioned to having had available according to a 55 year relationship with my previous lung capacity. I collapse primarily because my lungs are now broken and the remembered amounts of oxygen are not present.

Now, I can remain trapped in that dead end, or, I retrain those muscles to act with what is available, or, I learn new movements and condition them to act according to the amount of oxygen that is available. I intend to keep learning new movements, but I also want to retrain the old ones, and the key seems to be related to being more consciously deliberate in my general movements.

I'm becoming tedious even to myself, but am excited about this just the same. I started practicing more

deliberate movement as soon as I finished exercising and could see a difference right away, but learned something else as well. I am constantly doing multiple, sometimes unrelated things, and there are automatic systems at play in each (even thinking consumes oxygen and my brain is always engaged in multiple activities, all at different levels of intensity). Even as I concentrated on walking deliberately from one part of the house to another, other parts of my body were engaged in other, oxygen greedy activities.

January 22, 2011—I loved the clouds that were waiting when I got up this morning. I practiced deliberate, controlled movements (which are slower by nature) last night and today, and it does make a significant difference, but maintaining them for even a second is as difficult as keeping one's mind empty of thoughts. I could consciously imagine an action and deliberately engage in movement, but then an onslaught of a multitude of automatic muscle systems quickly overwhelmed whatever control I might have felt at the beginning. That will be a tangled web to navigate.

Just finished exercising and although when I tried a couple of hours ago I didn't have the strength or oxygen to last for even a minute, I listened to music for a while before trying again, and lasted for 22 minutes with no problems. Odd how that works out.

And I noticed another important element. My physical center of gravity has always been near my navel (slightly behind and slightly lower). Tonight I experimented with changing that and find if I move it back toward the coccyx and slump my shoulders slightly (the poor posture example of Thoracic Kyphosis), it is much easier to inhale and exhale. I now have three positive clues—rhythmic movement, deliberate/controlled movement, and slight backward shift in center of physical mass.

January 23, 2011—Among the multiple epiphanies I experienced today was this particularly amazing one—Good Posture works.

As I was doing my walking exercise tonight I was experimenting with different postures, and for no particular reason tried the one described in the center of body mass articles as the good one. It actually works. It was better than good, it was great.

For the past several years, when walking or even just standing still, I have been experiencing what seems like a tight belt or band around my torso that restricted depth of inhalation and ease of exhalation. I could only get the sense of breathing deeply and then efficiently expelling carbon dioxide when reclining. That restriction is much less intense in the good posture position.

I also noticed that when walking becomes strenuous I tend to lean forward and hunch my shoulders, both of which are obviously restricting my diaphragm (important because I am a stomach breather.)

January 24, 2011—I just finished my medium exercise routine (22 minutes) and once again was reminded that the difference between how I feel and the struggle it takes to move through the general course of a day, and how I feel and the relative ease of movement while engaged in the exercise program that I have been building for the past few years, is extreme. I occasionally even find it unbelievable.

Logically I understand the difference (movement conditioned to former lung function versus movement developed according to current lung function), but realistically I haven't been able to assimilate that information into my conscious awareness. It just seems bizarre, unreal, or maybe mystical.

I almost skipped exercising tonight because just an hour ago walking to the kitchen for a glass of water took so much effort I wanted to give up for the night. Fortunately I ran out of dental floss and since I had to walk to the pantry to get more anyway, I stopped at the exercise spot and turned on the music. First movements were awkward and slow, but within the first minute I was a completely different creature.

I know there is a freedom for me somewhere in this, but also realize that it is intimately tied to its opposite—freedom/ captivity, elation/despair, life/death—one means nothing without an awareness of the other.

The weather was terrible. The temperature reached the 60s, but so did the wind speed, and airborne dust gave everything a reddish tint and gritty texture. There has been so little moisture this fall and winter that the dust never really settles down between wind storms.

I spent most of the day huddled in front of my air cleaner and that probably was a good thing, but I could still hardly find the energy to go next door and feed the dogs. On the bright side, they are always so appreciative of my attention and company that they cheered me up even if I was suffocating.

Sunsets are usually spectacular on days like this but I couldn't stay outside and wait for this one to finish. Not bad though.

January 25, 2011—Not a great day for science. Some days the universal principles apply, and some days the universe is an enigma with no discernible patterns.

I made it through half of my exercise program and had to stop and take a breathing treatment. I hate having to do that, but what started out difficult soon became impossible. And as I was recovering during the treatment, my initial reactions were those of a newly caged beast—fear and fury. Fear of for some reason not having this method of rescue available, and infuriated that I am chained to it.

I easily finished exercising after the treatment, but spent the entire time thinking about how to rid myself of this dependence without losing the relief it brings. I thought about acupuncture, aromatherapy, herbal therapy, and so on, but in the end, any substitute would just be trading heroin for methadone, so to speak. So I guess if this really is important to me, the only rational thing to pursue would be finding out why my biological bronchodilators aren't functioning (or why my bronchoconstrictors are working overtime). Either that or shut up.

One of my favorite authors, Freya Stark, lived to be 100 years old, and to the very end explored the world with an enthusiasm that few humans have dared to feel, and a grace that even fewer have dared to exhibit. In her autobiography she said that the greatest danger we face is giving in to despair. She was right.

I'm now obsessed with meteorological conditions—wind speeds, barometric pressure, humidity level, dew point, and pollen concentration.

January 26, 2011—I'm thinking that it is far better to go through life with a sense of question than with a sense of already having all of the answers. I wake up desperate to see what the weather is doing and maybe determine how it will affect me.

January 27, 2011—Usually when I complain it's because at that instant I feel what I can only describe as helplessly immobile. Frozen. And thoughts at that moment must be similar to those of someone buried alive or hopelessly trapped. If I succumb to that feeling, images of falling into bottomless wells or pits, of being trapped in any enclosed space but especially caves or mines that have caved in, or, of being trapped under the ice of a frozen unknown body of water (all of which sometimes also appear as dreams) will flash through my awareness and my breathing will instantly deteriorate.

I was thinking about this earlier and am beginning to suspect that I'm both creating and indulging in this, and it isn't necessary. All of it boils down to 'feeling completely contained and having no options', and not only should I not feel that right now, I don't know that I really ever should have.

I've mentioned several times the difference between what I can do now and what I used to be able to do, and have actually been measuring it as extreme. Such a change that there are days, and even weeks, when it seems that the current struggle is way out of proportion to the almost imperceptible gains, and especially compared to 'how I used to feel and what I used to be able to do.'

There is a difference, but the one I have been preferring to remember is now highly suspicious. I'm not going to dwell on this, but for example, although I entertain images of myself running and jumping with ease in my past, the reality was that I couldn't even run all the way around the 440 yard track field in high school. Forty years later I still probably can't, so what exactly have I lost?

Am I really dissatisfied with now because I have been entertaining false memories? There might have even been a gain since then because I'm sure I could at least walk around the track now.

What a strange and exciting mixture this time is. I've never felt more physically challenged, or more intellectually adept. At the same time, worse than I can remember and better than I ever imagined I could be.

I spent most of last night trying to finally understand weather. What a subject.

The other day my sister and I were talking about the weather and she said, "I'm embarrassed to not know this, but what is a low pressure system? The weatherman said there is one coming through." With almost any other person I would have faked my way through that, but I told her, "Even though I've been aware of their moving around me for as long as I've been watching the weather news, I have no idea."

Now I know, and Good grief! How did I not already understand weather just through the random

mingling of normal thoughts? Science information, principles, and theories swirl through my mind like winds, and in all of these years of observation and deduction, none of it spontaneously clicked into the simple realization that the gas molecules around and above me have weight and are influenced by gravity? Now it's obvious that although I've talked a good 'dynamic universe', I haven't really accepted one.

Reading Adobe Doorways, by Dorothy L. Pillsbury

February 1, 2011—I did spend most of the night awake, but all that accomplished was a night of continuously freaking out rather than the more startling experience of periodic episodes. The good news is, it is much easier to breathe cold air than hot. The bad news, temperatures around the zero mark are enormously personally uncomfortable and all water freezes too.

Not the coldest day in the town's history, but right now it is -4 with a wind chill of -15. And considering that last Saturday had a high of 69 and this Saturday is predicted to be back in the upper 60s again, it's quite a shock to my system. Actually to all systems since hardly anyone has running water. I think I've lived in places where air temperature was colder, but there were barriers to the wind. Here there are none and even a light breeze hits everyone and everything.

February 5, 2011—54 degrees today, but another storm has moved in and the temperature is dropping as the cold winds increase.

Last night was weird, and it has been difficult to breathe all day but the warmth was nice. I considered freaking out when the storm started moving in, but my sister has worked on our houses all day and being an obvious wimp would have been seriously rude.

Such an interesting past few hours that I have to write it down or risk having it become another lost idea.

I understand more of, I guess it would be my current state of being, and almost the same second that became evident I lost what feels like a thousand pounds of fear and anger. Right in the middle of an episode of gasping and feeling my heart pound while bladder control started slipping away (the first really important thing to go in any oxygen crisis), punctuated by the fearful thought of, "Why am I suddenly losing ground so rapidly?", I realized that part of my distress was because I was becoming wrapped up in some kind of weird psychological tantrum.

An effect of that realization was a feeling of standing up and walking after a long period spent crawling. I do experience frequent oxygen desaturation crises, sometimes several a day. But that is a million times better than the couple of years I spent when I never achieved oxygen saturation. I was always gasping, always barely able to move. Five years of this struggle in April, so it's taken three years to crawl this far, but through exercise and strict control of my barricaded environment (manage the autonomic nervous system, manage the disease), I now have many more good days than not. So many more that the bad days or times take me by surprise and my mind overreacts, making the event even worse. And I logically know that the reaction isn't warranted, because I'm never careless. I avoid germs, bad weather, bad air, shocks,

annoying people places or things, tiring myself, deadlines, and so on, but still, when the disease kicks in I go into overdrive, not only looking for the cause, but obsessing about what I've missed.

The truth is that the complaining (exhibition of feelings of anger and fear) I've indulged in lately was largely from a part of me that always exhibits behaviors similar to the tantrums of a spoiled child who wants to feel good all the time and retaliates by feeling as miserable as possible when given the opportunity. I recognize it because almost the same thing would emerge a few years ago when I would think about the fact that in order to quit smoking, I could never smoke another cigarette again. That never led to anything rational.

I'm hoping I experience these episodes because my intellect/ body is responding to some sort of universal cycle and not because I really am a jerk.

Reading *Shadows of the Past (Sombras del Pasado)*, by Cleofas M. Jaramillo.

February 8, 2011—It was 55 degrees with a brisk, cool wind at noon; 25 degrees and a wind chill of 16 at 2:30 pm; 16 degrees and a wind chill of -4 at 4:30 pm; and 12 degrees with a wind chill bouncing between -9 and -12 at 6:00 pm. I'm stunned. And even more so after looking up the record low temperature for today. -32 in 1933. So this is still good. Right?

The wind is howling and I think I can hear branches cracking.

A friend had an office meeting in Odessa today and just called as he was passing by Midland on the way back. He said the sky was so full of red dirt he could hardly make out the building outlines, and the clouds to the north of him were ominously dark. I told him they are also fairly ominous when they are on top of you.

My shades are closed and Led Zeppelin is blasting louder than the wind, so now I'm going to make some coffee and start a new book. And if thoughts of weather pop into my head, I'm going to ignore them and go back to reading.

Often I wonder what I'm standing back politely waiting for. Permission? An invitation? Just maintaining my place in line? And then sometimes I shade my eyes against the sun and scan the horizon expectantly. Normal people are focused on living, and generally accommodate ideas and counsel according to their practical application regarding specific needs. The rest is just noise.

February 24, 2011—Reading *Xavier's Folly and Other Stories*, by Max Evans. Very good

I've enjoyed writing this journal for the past several years, and in one sense it truly saved me and kept me from choosing to be defeated and giving up. I began perceiving, reacting to, and acting on my world very differently quite a while ago and chose to keep it invisible, but the manic conditions within which we live, plus the realization that my body really is going to die, make me want to stop wasting time. An enigmatic journal is pointless. Rather than just casually mention the deep, dark hole I'm going to describe it and my

search for a way out.

March 1, 2011—I avoided going outside as much as possible. So much dirt still lingers in the air that breathing outside is like eating a handful of sand.

Reading Oku Pin; The Sandia Mountains of New Mexico, by James A. Morris.

March 2, 2011—Gusts of stray wind off and on, but the most spring-like day so far.

I don't know how much longer I can tolerate the RV. It's actually very nice, and a good size, but I am starting to feel trapped. I wake in the night, desaturated of oxygen and panicked, and it takes hours to get back to sleep. I sometimes have to go next door and sleep on my sister's couch just to feel comfortable.

March 3, 2011—I had to go to the doctor to get prescriptions renewed today, and that turned out to be a fortunate thing. I don't think of myself as sick, only that I have an injury. And I haven't believed I would ever get sick unless I happened to catch one of the germs other people harbor and pass around.

Consequently, I am so paranoid of other peoples' germs that I can hardly make myself go into any type of crowd, but especially a doctor's office full of sick people. When I don't feel well I think, "Oh. I wonder what this is about." Not, "I need to go to the doctor." I've only used doctors for prescriptions, not for aftercare or monitoring.

I've had a rough time for the past week, having to stop and rest every couple of steps, and unable to sleep because I can't lie down without starting to suffocate. But it's just what life has become, and although I've been more uncomfortable than usual it hasn't really concerned me. As she was checking my lungs this morning (something they always insist on doing, when all I want is the prescription, quickly, and out of the germatorium), she said, "You're having difficulty moving air," and I thought, "True, but why are you talking about it?" Then she said, "You have an infection, and if we don't stop it you'll likely end up with bronchitis or pneumonia," and a moment of personal clarity occurred. "It's what they do. The doctor can actually minimize, or even eliminate, some of what I've been enduring."

My behavior suddenly reminded me of something I've seen on television—where thugs terrorize an area because the non-thug people are intimidated into letting it happen and choose to live in fear rather than risk calling the police to complain, or willingly participating in an investigation when the police intervene on their own. I then told her everything I knew and gladly accepted the prescription for antibiotics.

I'm amazed at how much better I felt at that moment, and still feel. For a short time the doctor's office was more my friend than my enemy, but I still don't want to spend time in crowds of sick people.

March 10, 2011—Strange sunset. Very little color.

I guess that one good excuse for flip-flopping is because I want to and I can, but there are others as well. I had a difficult cold-weather season, and after an extensive checkup, a lot of expense, and very little relief, I decided that doctors and their medical treatments were a racket and pretty much stopped going to my

doctor and following his advice. I also spent the fall and winter trying to wean myself off of the bronchodilators and find a less drug-like way to combat constriction.

In the end all I did was weaken myself to the edge of pneumonia (almost cleared up now) and fall back a few steps in my own exercise program for physical therapy. As I snuggled deeper into that black hole my blood-oxygen levels fell and my thought processes quickly followed. It isn't really that my perspective changes when that happens, but my perception does, and as I plunged into darkness so did my thoughts regarding what I appeared to be perceiving.

And not that I was completely miserable (although the thought of dying doesn't appeal to me at all), but I became suspicious that potential misery was everywhere, and I didn't have the energy to contend with it if it chose to confront me. I shut out and off everything that I could. I guess I've grown. Some more. Again.

I've reconnected with the doctor, I'm using the medication, addiction or not and most helpful, and attempting to redirect my thoughts from the life I lost to the progress I'm making. I no longer feel like I'll probably die in the next few minutes. Maybe this change of mind matters and maybe it doesn't, but it feels better.

March 11, 2011—Reading *The Great Wedding*, by Max Evans (very nice), and *New Mexico Triptych*, by Fray Angelico Chavez.

Very congested and can hardly get any oxygen. Taking a round of prednisone but my throat is so constricted that I can hardly swallow even tiny pills.

March 14, 2011—Very cold. Don't feel much better, if any, and I just aspirated an antibiotic capsule. I immediately called the clinic and their only response was that I needed to try and cough it out or I would be in serious trouble. So that was reassuring.

Reading *Coronado's Children; Tales of Lost Mines and Buried Treasures of the Southwest*, by J. Frank Dobie.

March 15, 2011—Slept better last night but still freaked out. The good news is that I think I got most of the aspirated capsule out of my lungs. The bad—I'm still in danger of getting pneumonia. The good—there is a hospital twenty miles away. The bad—I don't like hospitals.

Feel like the life of a kite—at the whim of whatever winds come along. I'm actually feeling better this week and even breathing better today, but still on the verge of panic. It's just weird. Control my thoughts, manage my life. (If only I could.)

March 23, 2011—After 35 minutes of mild exercise my blood oxygen level is 95 and my pulse rate is 85. Incredibly good. Last month my pulse rate was staying in the mid to high 120s, and my blood oxygen level never rose above 94.

Reading *The Old Ones of New Mexico*, by Robert Coles.

April 1, 2011—Unable to exercise, or even move very much.

April 2, 2011—Managed 20 minutes of exercise and after feeling awful all day I end up feeling better. Or at least not as bad. The wheezing seems to be diminishing.

The Fourteeners; Colorado's Great Mountains, by Perry Eberhart and Philip Schmuck

April 3, 2011—A tremendously terrible day. Constant, intense wind, hyper-saturated with dust and sand.

I'm shocked at how strong the sense of being attacked was. I actually spend time fearing this kind of day, but today the outcome was different. I did feel fear when I woke up to a cloud of dirt and pollen, and remnants have occasionally come to life throughout the day, but mostly I have felt stronger and more alive. Maybe it's the visible enemy thing—despite my pride in my cerebral abilities, I don't trust them so much. I've never chosen a philosophy, or had very high regard for source theories, or black holes, or pre-histories, or predictions of the future. I function much better regarding what I can actually see. Like dirt in the air.

My sister called earlier and said that she had to take a side street home because the meth lab house down the road was on fire and the volunteer fire department had it surrounded. She was wondering why they didn't just let it burn (maybe because sustained winds were 30-35 mph with gusts up to 60 and the entire town could go up in flames). I've been thinking about all the things in that place that could have possibly ignited, including one of the derelicts who have been camped there during the past few years. Just another of the surprises in a wilderness.

Still reading the book about mountains in Colorado. The black and white pictures are very nice and the 'social' histories of the peaks are interesting. Especially interesting is the desire to have the highest mountain, when height differences are sometimes only a few feet. Since the 1800s, special interest groups, and even entire communities, have thought about raising their personal mountain's height to a higher national or worldwide ranking by stacking rocks to form a new and higher peak. Probably the main reason I can find no evidence that anyone ever really did that is because, through time, scientific height estimates have changed so often, and often so drastically, that there was never enough time to get started on such a project.

April 4, 2011—Intense wind this morning, but perfectly calm all afternoon. I have been feeling better lately. Not because I'm any healthier, spring winds and what they bring are instigating extreme physical reactions—but because I've somehow acquired a previously missing degree of composure. It seems to be directly tied to a newly realized sense of appreciation for the health I do have.

During the past couple of years I've gained significant ground in mobility and strength, but have often felt only disappointment in what has really been a sequence of successes. And during the past year I've hit a level of exercise that I can't get beyond. That has begun to disappoint me almost daily, and in my worst moments, the entire effort has seemed pointless.

I fear that I've behaved in a self-destructive manner. "Fear does that."

Reading *When Legends Die*, by Hal Borland.

April 5, 2011—Just the fact that I had divided the story of my life into 'the way I used to be', 'the way I am now', and 'the way I hope to someday be again', ought to have raised questions long ago, and maybe it did, but I ignored them. Today I started to wander through the ridiculous impossibilities of 'the way I used to be' (running, jumping, climbing), and suddenly realized that it was a bunch of boring lies and I wasn't fooling myself anyway. It probably started innocently enough because sometimes when I'm struggling to get through a moment, or a day, I do feel better when I think about breathing requiring less effort and movement being easier. It lowers the intensity of the event and becomes an incentive to endure and improve. But I was using them as an excuse for regret, or for failure to try, and that's a waste of time I can't afford.

Living is a single story with no chapters, varying degrees of struggle, and everyone pays. That's just the cost. Learning is the only activity that has always been very easy for me. I might have run fast once or twice, and I did sometimes get up early, but all of it has always taken effort, and I've been tired as often as I've been energized. The point is, I've been gauging my current self against a contrived past, and reacting to a disparity that doesn't really exist. I have carefully created a pre-illness self, and of course I made it more perfect than it could have been, and myself more able than I was.

Which isn't bad for just casual lying, but I've been believing it. I'm always amazed at how far off course I can get even when I only closed my eyes for a few minutes.

April 15, 2011—After two weeks of whatever exercise I can manage each day, I finally received the lung flute and used it for the first time. I always panic with any new thing (don't disturb the monster) and am not sure how much good it did, but I did cough afterward.

Reading *The Bronc People*, by William Eastlake.

April 16, 2011—Rough day. Panic, anxiety and discomfort. But, we are surrounded by grass fires and smoke, which delicately augment the winds and dust. Having a very hard time relaxing, which exacerbates, or maybe even creates, the physical discomfort. It's still very cold. Napped for an hour and woke feeling better, but for some reason I have no control over my right foot.

April 17, 2011—This spring I haven't been able to get outside in the morning until after most of the blossoms have withered and fallen off of the wildflowers (I guess in response to sunlight), but today I got out earlier than usual and took a couple of nice pictures.

Prairie fires surround us and intense winds have swirled the dust and smoke around for a couple of weeks now. It is physically difficult to contend with such elements, but I'm more psychologically immobilized than physically—going outside and breathing smoke and tasting grit is a frightening thing.

Reading *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, by Eric Newby.

April 18, 2011—Slept very well last night and actually sort of overslept—almost ten hours. Have felt good today aside from being sleepy, but I've been ungratefully suspicious.

Searching the internet for new meditation techniques.

April 19, 2011—The wind quit at sunset and it might be calmer outside now.

Feel a little better today. Starting to understand that everyone has to 'warm up and get started' in the mornings. This has been maybe an unnecessary source of panic for me. I would never have imagined it happening to me, but after talking to my sister last night, it appears that I might have fallen into depression. She recognized the symptoms as adding up to that. It's almost embarrassing.

Went outside with the dogs and there is little wind, but the air is brown/gray from all of the lingering dust and wildfire smoke.

There must be a way to face days or seasons such as this without plunging into despair and allowing the combination of those two elements (weather and attitude) to diminish my health. I have recently started meditating again, and things do seem better even though I can't quite follow the rules. For example, so far I have not been able to successfully imagine a bright light entering my body until I am filled with light which I then consciously radiate outwardly from myself. Not all techniques are that, but all are something somewhat similar and I just don't hit the marks that seem to be necessary.

But I'm continuing for the same reason I continue exercising. Maybe I can still find a better life beyond complaining about bad weather and poor health.

Today I was asked if I would be interested in editing a book and at first only thought about how I don't have the energy to contend with frenzy or schedules, but then I realized that having a goal or mission might just free me from the madness I've been flirting with recently. I even have a business geared toward proofreading and editing, and worked at it before the illness overwhelmed me, so I said I would be interested.

After I hung up the phone I experienced a few minutes of fear, but the interesting thing was that for the first time in a while I was afraid of something other than suffocation—I was afraid that I might not still be able to produce a quality product. Just how much of this struggle to breathe is psychological, and could a work/project focus be similar to meditative focus and direct my energies more productively?

Reading *Thirty Pound Rails; The Denver & Rio Grande Narrow Gauge (1956)*, by Kelly Choda. I never would have imagined it, but what an interesting book.

April 21, 2011—Very interesting day. The morning was overcast and fairly calm, but high winds moved in by noon and didn't leave until sunset. I've felt so much better over the past four days that I hardly noticed the wind. I also mostly stayed inside.

Felt better last night and this morning, and have enough energy and enthusiasm to call the professional aromatherapist and arrange a consultation. I then spent time writing down the questions I will ask.

Afterward I went outside to read for a couple of hours—the first time I have been outside in a while. Along with reading I did some mild stretching exercises and elementary meditation, and talked with my brother while he worked on his trees. I wheezed for most of the time and gasped for air occasionally, but it was still good.

Had the most remarkable conversation with an extraordinary woman this morning. I've watched the show about her on the documentary channel twice during the past year, and was drawn to not only her therapeutic theories and methods, but also to her personality. Her relationship with the flowers in her yard reminds me of my own relationship with our pond. At the end of the conversation I felt even better than I was already feeling and that has continued to this moment. Something like an “incredible lightness of being.”

Fragrances and scents are possibly the most profound instigators of nostalgia available to our species, and as I told her, the smell of freshly baked bread brings up memories and images of my mother that I can't summon on my own in any other way. I think she has a doctorate in chemistry, and works in conjunction with medical doctors, and hospitals, and never even mentioned their methods or medicines, but after talking to her I now know that my intuition was correct—they don't deliver what I'm wanting—but it is available and closer than I have ever acknowledged out loud.

April 22, 2011—The most perfect day of spring so far, and it started at sunrise. No wind, and the animals were very busy. My brother and sister were outside in the yards, digging, and weeding, and raking like gophers, or maybe gardeners.

Consultation with aromatherapist: Told her my story, asked questions, she asked questions, and then she offered some suggestions and said that she would create a eucalyptus based formula for me to use. Actually two that will specifically work the lungs—a special blend and a decongest blend. A fragrant one that stays on and one that will lift.

She advised that my diet is very poor (I have almost stopped eating) and that I need iron—lungs function on that—and that I also need animal based protein, but not large amounts. Even a little will give me stamina.

She advised that I use the nebulizer if needed because it is very important that the tissue not starve, and to always wear a mask when I go outside, a charcoal filter mask if I can get one.

She said that it would be helpful to make oil application a meditative event so I asked for her interpretation of meditation since there are so many. She advised to look a picture of healthy lungs and think about the healthy respiration process.

April 23, 2011—A difficult night and morning. I over-exerted on the exercise last night and over-ate this

morning, but it will balance out. My diet has always been very poor in that I lived on coffee and rice for years. What could those things possibly support?

Even now I eat garbage. Cheese, nuts, crackers, meat maybe once a week, while I binge on sugar coated dry cereal for weeks at a time.

An exercise in mind over matter: I've found a small 4" x 4" diagram of the interior of healthy lungs and have memorized the basics of respiration and how the parts of the respiratory system are involved:

Nares—openings to the nose

Nasal Cavity—contains cilia, which filters the air; mucus membranes, which moisten the air; and capillaries, which warm the air

Pharynx—the throat above the larynx

Epiglottis—the flap that shuts off the larynx when swallowing

Larynx—connects pharynx to trachea—(windpipe) connects larynx to bronchial tree

Bronchus—right and left bronchi

Bronchioles—smaller branches radiating from the main bronchi

Alveolar sacs—at the end of each bronchiole, surrounded by capillaries and contain millions of single layer alveolar cells

Air passes through the alveolar sacs to the alveoli where gas exchange occurs between the alveoli and capillary epithelia. There the red blood cells give off carbon dioxide, take on oxygen, and the oxygenated cells move through the body.

I spent the afternoon contemplating the sketch of the lungs and thinking about the process of respiration and each of the above components. Then I tried to relax, and with those things still in mind, encourage my lungs to perform properly. I intend to work on this every day, and when the essential oils arrive I will incorporate this procedure with use of the oils and create a ritual.

Except for the stationary exercise bicycle, all of the enormous number of, and generally expensive, procedures, pills, herbs, tonics, meditation and exercise CDs, and books that I have tried so far have two things in common: 1) all are advertised as cures; and, 2) none have worked.

I found most of these 'cures' on the internet, but I have also searched through dozens of libraries and collections for books on folk cures, natural remedies, and native remedies. So many that I am not only exhausted, I am also bored with both the premise and promise of 'cure.'

Still, I refuse to give up the idea that with the correct incentive, my body can cure or heal itself, whether that be a pill, an herb, a thought, or a tool (such as the lung flute—and I'm still wondering about that and

even if I'm using it correctly.)

With that in mind I am working on the mantra I will use when I start applying the oils. Something on the order of: 'My alveoli are regenerating, My cilia are recovering, My lungs are rejuvenating, My body is healing.'

April 24, 2011—Sometimes good health is just a walk through the Herxheimer effect. That near, and that far away.

The winds were intense today. I went outside long enough to take the dogs for a walk and feed the birds, then came inside and watched wind batter the trees through my bedroom windows.

Changes are actually occurring rapidly, but my reaction is still tentative and there is still the danger that I could give up and refuse to participate.

First I had to realize that not believing in anything is a belief system. And that my will is strong enough that I am capable of being utterly immovable. I have so completely believed that there is no point, and that for the most part I float along as the universe unfolds regardless of myself or anything I might choose to desire, that I created an inflexible and unchangeable life for myself.

All of the above probably ultimately matters, but it's really only adjacent to the current point. April 6 was five years since I woke up unable to breathe, and I actually gave up on that day. All through my endless monologue (internally and in this journal), although for some reason I've pretended otherwise (maybe related to good plot development), I've never really believed I could do anything to change the inevitable. A necessary byproduct of not believing anything.

A couple of weeks ago I was remembering my last letter from a friend who was describing the meditation process that he has developed and maintained over the past 20 years, and the power he feels that it gives him to sustain stability and productive focus within the very oppressive conditions of his life.

For whatever reason, I had a flash of insight to the connection between that process, and the quality of his very impressive mind, and out of respect for him (because I certainly didn't believe that it would really have any value for me), I spent the rest of the evening focused on a personally relevant and potentially life-sustaining thought. Probably not meditation in the professionally taught sense, but meditative, and to my surprise, I had a better night and woke to a better day.

My habitual skepticism still interferes, but I have managed to keep it at bay and maintain the thought. At first, only in the evening and as I was falling asleep, but yesterday I noticed that during the past ten days or so I have more and more managed to incorporate that thought into my daily living.

Useful tool?

This morning, for the first time in several years, my blood oxygen level reached 96. I only maintained it for a few seconds before I freaked out and shocked it back to 94, but that's almost irrelevant. I reached a

place that just two weeks ago I didn't believe I would ever reach again.

Whatever I do with this knowledge, and wherever I go from here, I am now certain that there are other possibilities, and I am also now certain that part of what fuels my decision to not believe is a fear of the part of becoming well that resembles exacerbation of the disease (Even though it will make me feel better afterward, it hurts when I do that. So I won't do that.)

I feel strangely clean tonight.

April 26, 2011—Winds today expected to start about 9:00 am, and be in the 65 to 70 mph range until about 9:00 pm. I got up early to get everything done outside (take pictures, feed the birds, clean up the yards after the dogs and take them walking), and probably won't go out again.

Several differences, and one is that I used a mask when I had to go out yesterday. I'm not sure exactly why I resist doing that even when I logically know it will prevent further lung damage, but the thought of wearing one has always made the word 'stupid' pop into my head. Interesting that the real 'stupid' is not wearing one.

Another is that I've needed fewer rescue breathing treatments over the past few days, and best of all, even without bronchodilation beforehand, this morning my blood oxygen level was 95 with a pulse rate of 81.

Meditation? I don't know, but I've been able to maintain meditative focus for a few days now and it certainly hasn't hurt.

April 27, 2011—Received the oils and began using them. As with anything new in my entire life, I am suspicious and somewhat hesitant. On maximum alert for effects. But I enjoy the smells of the oils, and immediately incorporate them into the meditative process that I have been practicing. They seem to make that easier in some way.

Reading *The Happy Man*, by Robert Easton.

April 28, 2011—Except for my regular outside chores, I missed most of the day. I helped my sister work on her house, and after telling her, "I can do that easily and it won't take hardly any time," it took me the entire day to add two pieces of trim around her bathtub and re-tape three small corner areas. I become so frustrated about how difficult such tasks now are that I slow down even more. So odd how the mind doesn't really degenerate or age along with the body. I still feel young—maybe not eighteen, but much younger than this—until I look in a mirror. And I know I can do anything, right up until I actually attempt something.

April 30, 2011—The wind speed indicator keeps changing, but 34 to 44 mph sustained, with a maximum of 49 mph this hour. The dust in the air reminds me of the dust storms that blew through here when I was a child.

I'm realizing, and should have known all along, that confronting a disease or illness is not a gentle or easy

thing. Sort of embarrassing, but all this time I have been expecting to one day or moment, pleasantly drift into wellness—no matter what the source.

By their essential natures, battles are not gentle, kind, or nice. They are draining, wearisome, often frightening things, of generally unknown outcome. My initial response was to entrench, move less, breathe in more shallow gasps, and practice tolerance toward a disease that became very aggressive over the unusually cold, dry, and dusty winter, and then was amplified by an unusually dry and dusty spring. Life wasn't exactly stretching out ahead of me.

Then just over three weeks ago, for no apparent reason, I began a multi-pronged attack.

First, after a year of waiting for the FDA to approve its use in the U.S., which they did on February 4 of this year, I ordered a lung flute in March. I've been so congested that I've hardly been able to move around or breathe for several months, and since I couldn't get rid of the congestion, by March it was turning into pneumonia. I received the device on a Friday toward the end of March, and immediately used it.

To begin with, it looks like a poorly constructed toy. That didn't give me a lot of confidence, but I read the instructions and followed them—20 repetitions of two exhalations—and nothing. I thought, “rip-off!” but did 20 more repetitions anyway. Then I put it aside and sat for a few minutes wondering if I could get my money back. I mulled that over for maybe 15 minutes, then suddenly started coughing, gagging, and expelling large quantities of mucus. This started about 7:00 pm, and continued all night long, to the degree that I was never able to go to sleep. I coughed up so much mucus that about 2:30 am I was seriously concerned by the amount and wondering how that much stuff could have possibly been lodged in my respiratory system.

I'm used to contending with anxiety attacks and fear of suffocation so I worked through that particular crisis, but was still shocked by the entire situation. The flood abated sometime the next morning (congestion seems to be more of a problem at night), but I continued to cough up stuff, quite violently, throughout that day and for most of the next day. My throat hurt (felt like I had ruptured something in that area), my chest hurt, and my stomach hurt (I have been a diaphragm breather for several years and that area got a serious workout), but by the third day I was able to lie down and sleep without wheezing and gurgling for the first time in several months. And, I was actually able to sleep for most of a night for the first time in at least that long and probably longer.

So in case anyone has been wondering, the lung flute appears to work. The other side of that story is that even though it worked and I started feeling better, I would rather have picked up a live, angry rattlesnake than pick up the lung flute again. For two weeks I left it untouched on the table where I had placed it after completing the first session, because in my distorted perception the cure was freakier and more painful than the congestion caused by the disease (which I had become used to.)

Then I started a primitive form of meditation, or, a more conscious and thoughtful engagement of the disease. The first week was very simple and the only thing I really accomplished besides calming myself

down and acquiring a stronger sense of self was another look at the lung flute. After a few days and a from a more rational attitude, I was able to view it as a tool, and, like any other tool, understood that there is no point in using it except when I need it (ex. no reason to change tires every day just because I have a jack and a spare). I have used it again since the first time, but not to the same extreme, and once again, it worked. My lungs and bronchial tree cleared.

In the few days since then my meditation has evolved considerably. I can now visualize respiration from inhalation into the nasal cavity through gas exchange between the alveoli and red blood cells (and of course expiration of carbon dioxide), and I can comprehend my respiratory system down to the cellular level. I can work through all of these things as I control my breathing and focus on what should be the next act of a healthy system.

I do this every night until I fall asleep, every morning as soon as I wake up, and throughout the day whenever I'm not pressed to think about other things.

This is my third day of using the essential oils. Are they working? Something is. I have awakened to two very good mornings and have had to resort to rescue breathing 1/4 the amount that I was having to at the first of the week, and, weather conditions definitely aren't any better.

I still haven't determined exactly what is occurring, and for sure don't know exactly what is doing what, but since Monday of this week my blood oxygen level has reached 96 several times for short periods, and has maintained 95, often for longer than I kept the measurement going (with a pulse rate of 90 or lower each time). On Wednesday, every time I checked, the reading was 95 for blood oxygen and my pulse was in the low 80s. In all the time I have been keeping tabs, a 94 blood oxygen level was the highest reading I ever got and my pulse has generally been above 90 and up to the high 120s.

As a final note to this lengthy confession, the only things I will say for sure are that a lung flute assists in clearing congestion, and meditation can assist in lowering one's pulse rate. The rest will just have to play out, but for now I do feel more logically optimistic.

May 1, 2011—Day five of aromatherapy. Not bad. The day is overcast and windy and I haven't exercised in several days.

May 2, 2011—The clouds were beautiful today. Billowing and wet looking to give the impression of moisture.

Intense morning. I slept very soundly, much longer than usual, and woke up feeling like I had a hangover, which I've never actually had since I don't drink alcohol. My perceptual acuity—well, it isn't.

Very cold last night and most of the morning, then a beautiful, cool, afternoon and evening. Magical in many ways.

Night before last was my third day of the plant/flower essence therapy, and it was—unusual.

I have been applying the oils early in the morning right after I get up, and later in the evening, a couple of hours before I go to bed. The first two days, although I could smell them on my hands after massaging them into my skin, I didn't notice them beyond or after that.

Then on the third evening, about 30 minutes after I put them on, I was suddenly aware of the oils and within a few minutes felt like I was very stoned. Not a terrible sensation, but so odd, and for no apparent reason, that I freaked out somewhat which made the experience disconcerting. I then spent several hours in a state of turmoil—which I immediately attributed to low blood oxygen level, but when I checked it, the reading was 96 for a few seconds and then 95. I also seemed to have too little energy to exert energy and was unable to exercise.

And finally, I was experiencing odd tingling on my skin and the little finger on both hands began cramping and curling into an odd inward position that I could only change by physically moving them with the opposite hand. I've never experienced that before (or any other type of tingling or cramp that I can recall). For the rest of the night I slept very little but meditated on my respiratory system when I could calm the wordless chaos in my head.

The next morning (yesterday) I decided that the experience was so strange I should contact the aromatherapist. She wasn't immediately available so I left a voicemail and then applied 1/2 the amount of oil that I had been using. The rest of the morning was a slightly different version of the night, less anxiety, but some things were more noticeable in the light of day. My perception was definitely altered. I walked around looking at everything, and all of it was the same, but still so different that my yard felt like an alien landscape. And my reaction to it reminded me of the tunnel vision I have experienced when exposed to a completely unfamiliar environment.

The aromatherapist called back within an hour and when I explained what was occurring she made a statement that instantly cleared my anxiety—that I have become accustomed to being ill and am now comfortable with the processes of the disease and my habits for recognizing and contending with them. That becoming well and feeling better would include a perceptual shift that will appear as very unusual and possibly quite unnerving at first.

How astute. She also reminded me again that all people and whatever ails us, including the diseases we have in common, are actually very unique and that I need to experiment with different amounts of the oils and different places of application. She said that my lack of energy in spite of my elevated blood oxygen level could be because my body was using the extra oxygen to heal itself and there was none available for work. She was also very interested in the cramping of my fingers and instructed me to massage my fingers daily to facilitate circulation.

Once again, what a wonderful person she is. No medical professional has ever offered any measure of hope—nothing more than medicines to minimize discomfort as the disease progresses.

I still don't understand what is occurring, but something definitely. Today was day five, and after sleeping

heavily last night through a series of very odd dreams that I still remember vividly, I woke feeling like I was very high—to the point of being slow and groggy for much of the day. That feeling seemed to diminish slightly after I massaged the oils in, but I wasn't up to moving a lot and spent most of the day reading in the back yard while the dogs ran around.

Whenever I looked up for a break from reading, I would focus on imagining the processes taking place in my respiratory system (and again, I think of it as meditation, whether it is or not). As the day progressed I finally felt energetic enough to go in my house at 5:30 pm and ride my exercise bicycle for the first time in 3 days. At the end of 15 minutes I stopped and rested for about 10 minutes. Then I checked my blood oxygen level and pulse. My blood oxygen was 97 and my pulse was 82!

I'm so excited I can hardly contain myself. For the past week I have occasionally reached 95 with a couple of spikes to 96. Now I have reached 97, and I could feel it throughout my entire body. Something else also happened. I didn't freak out and lose the moment. The meter still read 97 when I disconnected and although I haven't used the meter since then, I've tried to maintain the sensation that accompanied the reading.

Even in the middle of feeling so strange, my blood oxygen level was 95, and my pulse rate was very high at 120, but that was probably because I was freaking out.

Several times since I have started using the oils, I have had an almost overwhelming feeling that something is very wrong. The accompanying physical sensations are very similar to those of excitement, but not in a good way. I always immediately check my blood oxygen level and it is always extraordinarily high.

Reading *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer of 1860; A Woman's Life on the Mormon Frontier*, by Mary Ann Hafen.

May 3, 2011—Very vivid dreams, but I slept well.

Reading *Sunshine Preferred*, by Anne Ellis.

May 4, 2011—Woke very early after a night of very strange dreams involving two menacing characters and a gloomy college. I have been wheezing since I got up, but just had a shower, a nebulizer treatment, and applied the oils, and seem to be feeling better.

My sister said she is also wheezing so it is likely a weather thing.

Today I seem to oxygenate better, or at least feel better, when I chest breathe rather than diaphragm breathe.

Had a fairly rough night, but spoke with my sister this morning and she did also. I always check with her and when we are experiencing similar conditions, we know that the problems are weather related. What we experienced last night generally only happens during times of high humidity or when a high pressure

system starts moving through, which wasn't the case, but something similar was happening.

Even given the rough night (had a difficult time meditating, and experienced very weird dreams), and that I woke up this morning wheezing and my blood oxygen level was fluctuating between 90 and 92, by 11:00 am I had started to clear up and my blood oxygen was a sustained 96.

Didn't stay out a lot, but I took the dogs on several walks around the yard.

Reading *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land*, by John Lloyd Stephens.

May 5, 2011—Wonderful day, but my oxygen level is down and my pulse rate is up. The aromatherapist told me to massage my fingers, then described how. Have been working on that.

Emphysema is an inflammatory disease (along with asthma and rheumatoid arthritis), characterized by over reaction of the immune system to the point that it damages the body (tissue and organs), and incidences of inflammatory diseases are occurring at alarming rates even though the air is cleaner than it was ten years ago.

May 7, 2011—More perfect weather, but a weird day. Once again I have spent the entire day feeling totally stoned.

I tried to go for a walk to shake the feeling, but the pastures are so burned out looking that it just got stronger. The only wildflowers were just like the ones in the yard, but the vultures were kind of interesting.

The good news is that even though I feel this way, and just ate a huge meal, my blood oxygen level is 95 and my pulse is 96. Sometimes it's hard to say which way I'm really going.

May 8, 2011—Calm early morning, but strong winds from mid-morning until sunset. And those are just a prelude for the tremendous winds expected tomorrow. The dust didn't seem to bother me today, but actually I wore my new mask when I went outside and it made quite a difference. I've tried to wear the construction worker masks before and found them to be more suffocating and damaging than helpful, so I gave up on the mask idea until I purchased this one last week. It's a honeycombed washable fabric, easy to wear, easy to breathe through, and it wicks the moisture so my glasses don't fog up. I'm still laughing about the instruction that came with it—"Please don't wear this mask inside a bank or other business."

I finally understand that in order for my lungs to heal, they have to have a period of freedom from irritants, just like any wound. With that in mind, wearing a mask doesn't feel so 'stupid'.

May 10, 2011—More wind, more dirt, and surrounded by smoke from wildfires, but the pollen count is lower. Not up to risking the exterior weather, but am up to checking the weather inside me.

I've looked into all possible treatments, read the newest literature regarding research, and follow (but don't participate in) several online forums maintained by COPD treatment professionals and peopled by

COPD sufferers, but the final word on the subject is always this—"The world's fourth leading cause of death, COPD is characterized by limited airflow, which is progressive and irreversible, caused by an abnormal inflammatory response in the lungs, and which at advanced stages can lead to the patient's death. All current treatments are merely symptomatic and palliative."

On my worst days, the prognosis stimulates fear, and in the beginning, the fear exhibited as anxiety and despair which would feed each other, and then build until I collapsed. Critical events were nightmares which I folded in the face of, and I nearly always allowed the disease to have its way with me. As time has gone by, although fear still surfaces, despair has faded away and I experience an anxiety that I am better able to at least manage, and more and more often able to completely, and quickly, neutralize. And is this because I am starting to trust that modern research and medical practices will someday find an effective treatment? Not really—although I don't deny that that could happen. It's mainly because I am refocusing on something I've known all along. That although modern medicines and (some) surgeries appear miraculous, the best theorists and practitioners within the medical profession actually know very little about the human body, the human mind, and the processes and organisms working to destroy or debilitate either. Not only that, but for the most part medical practitioners have tunnel vision as far as treatment goes (sometimes a byproduct of time constraints—too many patients and not enough time; sometimes a byproduct of intellectual constraints—too many possible therapies and not enough time), and a thousand other deterrents as well.

This is day 15 of my combined exercise (ongoing for several years), meditation (approximately 3 weeks), massage, consciously avoiding dirty air (I wear a mask when I have to go outside in the wind), and aromatherapy. And this is two weeks of reaching a blood oxygen saturation level of 95-96 at least twice a day with a pulse rate from the low 80s to low 90s, after five years of never once testing above 94 (and only reaching that when I felt very good and didn't move around at all), with a pulse rate staying between 90 and the high 120s. As I've acknowledged before, blood oxygen saturation level measurements aren't measuring metabolism rate, but I can feel an improvement in that. I even am often surprised by periods of breathing without conscious struggle. Something is occurring, it's more positive than not, and I feel a reasonable optimism.

When I relax and settle into—maybe it's the pulse of the universe around me—I seem to find a type of pathway not formerly obvious. I start randomly choosing books which seem to motivate and/or guide me, and I encounter people who affect me in the same ways. Even the wildlife, plants, and weather are guiding forces (wind and dust are only bad things if I throw myself into them without protection.)

May 11, 2011—Another windy day and I wheezed through most of it, but not so bad.

At 9:30 pm last night, just as I was finishing exercising, I noticed that it was sprinkling. That continued off and on very lightly until I fell asleep, and then at 12:30 am when I woke up for a few minutes, I could hear it still sprinkling, lightly. There was considerable lightning, but not enough moisture fell to even register in the rain gauge. Still, just the gesture was nice.

I found two new wildflowers this morning but it was too windy to get really clear pictures.

Reading *Prairie Earth*, by William Least Heat Moon. What an excellent book. The title and his name almost threw me off.

May 13, 2011—Maybe the most perfect day of all time. That happens. And it could happen here. In fact, I'm certain it did. No wind, 80 degrees was the highest temperature, and everything was colorful and alive.

I've basically turned the wind into my enemy and choose to be bummed out when it's blowing and dirt is swirling. Not really such a good decision in a place where wind is so prevalent. Anyway I was spared that (really I spared my journal another of those experiences) and today was impeccable as a reward.

Took a fairly good walk and looked for more wildflowers this morning. I found a few. The little brown cone flowers looked healthier today, but seem mutated. The pastures haven't changed from winter. Only shade trees, hardy ornamental shrubs and bushes, mesquites, and a few lawns are green.

Reading *The Book of the Navajo*, by Raymond Friday Locke.

May 14, 2011—Something I noticed while exercising earlier. The psychology of an illness can be more destructive than the physiology—or can destroy everything before the body has actually broken down. After five years of viewing health as an unreachable goal, and indulging in fantasies of a past of almost impeccable health and vitality (HA! None of them were even close to being true.), I realize that I am having a very hard time believing that my life can be anything other than an increasingly miserable, gradual decline.

I'm using almost childishly simple things to combat this, and wonder how much good that will do, but they are the only tools I have. I tell myself a hundred times a day (more or less) that 'balance is the key'. And why? Because obviously a hyperactive immune system, always overreacting and for far too long, lacks balance. I try to find other ways to approach this but so far nothing comes to mind. It's a struggle with no end in sight.

For almost three weeks, without a single bad day, my blood oxygen saturation level has been in the 'almost normal' range, and during the past week my ability to breathe has improved noticeably. Yet I am constantly experiencing anything from random bursts to an all-out spasms of fear.

Fear of success exhibiting as clinging to the comfort and security of a now familiar disease?

Just checked my blood oxygen saturation level and it's a sustained 96 and my pulse rate is 71. This is exactly 20 minutes after I completed 15 minutes on the exercise bicycle, and is almost miraculous.

Whatever is occurring, and for whatever reason, the real results (I can breathe better and haven't been chained to a bronchodilator), keep me engaged even as a part of my mind (and I'm pretty sure it's the same part that has always resisted when I tried to break a bad habit. It sounds the same and the tactics are

similar.), tries to make me give up and accept disappointment and/or relapse.

So far I'm not losing, but I do wish I had more formidable appearing, confidence instigating tools. Oh well. 'Balance is the key' is actually a pretty big stick.

Reading *Soul of the White Ant* (1937), by Eugene Marais. Astonishing. Wonderful. How have I missed this before?

May 15, 2011—It was overcast and cold when I woke up and the humidity was probably high, but not even a hint of moisture for the landscape. The other day my sister called and said that the humidity reading was in negative numbers and we wondered about that for a while. It was more interesting to think that the atmosphere was sucking moisture out of the plants and animals than to look it up and find out what it meant.

This morning I woke feeling great. My blood oxygen reading was 96, my pulse rate was 89, and I haven't had to use the nebulizer all day. Spent most of the day out in the yard, reading and watching the dogs. I also walked 1/4 of a mile and intend to work on that each day.

May 18, 2011—The prairie grass appears dead, but it's just waiting. Exercise bicycle thoughts: Being a normal human, no matter what situation I have ever found myself in, I've always managed to convince myself that I could succeed. That I would be able to manage or cope. That I am a person capable of, and likely to, make trustworthy, appropriate, and most of all, correct decisions. If I was winning, I managed to understand it was because I was in control. If I was treading water, I understood it as because that's what I was choosing to do. And if I was losing (although I don't remember ever losing), it was a part of my own bigger plan within my own bigger picture.

I've even thought I was able to do that with this disease, monitoring and chronicling its progress, waiting patiently for the next obvious marker, and almost enforcing a steady state adherence. But in the past three weeks, unexplained, and what I've been choosing to view as unexplainable anomalies, have seen sneaking upon me, and not only am I not on top of them, I have to admit that they throw me for very big loops.

It has made me realize that the truth is probably that even though the words of progress, and wellness, and miracle, and cure have been in my mind and language, I've never really felt much more than a superficial connection to them. Instead, I might have adapted to being chronic and irreversible, and am now mentally attuned to their demands and perimeters. Consequently, I am completely unprepared for feeling better and even suspicious that it would appear.

"Am I just seeing things? What kind of trick could this be?" Very little has changed.

I've been rubbing oils on my body, concentrating on simple, positive thoughts, or at least refusing to allow the most obvious negative thoughts, and trying to imagine how my lungs function, (from the more general concept of 'air in and CO2 out', to the different functions of known cells), and encouraging them to regain balance and do better.

Minor adjustments. Nothing to explain why I should feel good. At least nothing even remotely resembling the miraculous pills, magical plants, or mystical healers I have been waiting for and prepared to believe.

I've never really believed that it was the simple things (although I've always said I did), but the only changes have been simple ones, and suddenly I actually feel better.

Not what I have imagined, but noticeable and better.

A part of me is on the verge of freaking out, losing balance, and falling off of whatever I happen to be perched on (traversing? riding?—I can't tell) but another, and increasingly stronger part, smotheres the urge. Even that is simple.

It was such a strange day. The dust was so pervasive that I didn't go outside without a mask. I felt very strange walking to the dumpster while wearing a big floppy hat and a black mask covering all but my eyes (fortunately no one drove by), but physically I've felt great all day, and mentally I've barely been crazy. Wind and dirt storms generally don't allow that, or haven't in awhile. I don't understand it and almost don't believe it.

The winds died down right before sunset and there was so much dirt floating around that the colors and reflecting lights were beautiful.

May 19, 2011—Exercise bicycle. I maintained a constant breathing rhythm for the entire session. This is huge. I don't remember ever being able to do this since I started the program 5 years ago. I even worked more strenuously tonight than usual and went all the way through without having to slow down and open my mouth to gasp for air. (The other night I started exercising to Smooth Electronic music, which is a little more exuberant than Classic Vinyl.)

My body still seems to be rejecting the diaphragm breathing that I've been forcing on it, but whatever is has chosen instead seems to be an improvement. I can feel the lower lobes filling, but each lung seems to be filling without emphasis on either chest or diaphragm. The sensation was of 'balanced organic flow' rather than of 'awkwardly controlled force.'

This almost seems too superstitious to admit, but as my lungs feel better, other things are popping up and other weaknesses are appearing. It's as if there is something alien and inherently negative to my body (my self) within me that intends to stay in one form or another, and keep doing what it does in one way or another.

Distressing on first view, but maybe a resident alien isn't such a bad thing if it can be convinced to stop the parasitic behavior (as in destroying the host), and aimed toward something more symbiotic.

And how would one convince an alien entity to refrain from something?

The only thing I can think of is the same way one convinces children or criminals to stop an action. Shut down the pathways and make certain places and things off limits. I'm saying "No" a lot, and childproofing

with metaphorical doors, barricades, bars, and locks.

Thirty minutes after exercising, and my readings are: blood oxygen 96/pulse 90—sustained for the entire time I kept the meter on, and I can feel the difference.

Reading *Traders to the Navajos; The Wetherills of Kayenta*, by Frances Gillmor and Louisa Wade Wetherill.

May 20, 2011—Exercise bicycle thoughts. For at least the past 20 years, I have frequently awakened (sometimes during the day, sometimes at night—I worked a midnight shift for at least 10 years) in the middle of a compulsion to flee. Not leave. That would be rational. This was an overwhelming compulsion to evacuate immediately.

Sometimes if I just went outside and breathed fresh air the urge would disappear, but usually I would get in my car and take off down the highway. And sometimes just a few miles would be enough, but sometimes it would take hundreds before I would feel sated (odd word to use but it's the one that fits.)

Tonight, not two minutes into exercising, that same compulsion hit me and it was a battle to not stop and go outside. I got rid of my car so no more flights down the highway, but out in the open air was where I suddenly felt I had to be.

The newly forming 'balance' portion of my self won and I finished exercising, hardly missing a beat, but it was a tremendous struggle in my head. Oddly enough, as soon as the struggle ended I experienced a strange perceptual or conceptual boost. All this time my visualizations of respiration have been limited to a very sketchy bronchial tree, and I could only manage one alveolar sac containing just a few alveoli, and finally the gas exchange between one alveolus and one cell.

This time, when I started my respiratory system meditation, I was able to visualize a much more complex scene. I could follow a single breath through the entire process. The upper part of my respiratory system filled out into a more complex, but easier to understand system. It was like riding a molecule from my nares to my bronchi. I could see multiple bronchioles all terminating in alveolar sacs, and watched the gases exchanging between all of them and their capillary beds. I even had a more clear picture of the movement of vast numbers of oxygenated cells. Interesting.

Also interesting is that change, even for the better, startles me and I have been interpreting my physical reaction as fear rather than surprise, which then leads to immediate erroneous speculation.

The other side of that is that maybe I have been needing the challenge. I feel incredibly good now. Like I've accomplished something.

May 21, 2011—Riding my exercise bicycle. Exercising tonight was very nice. More invigorating or rejuvenating than draining. Almost the opposite of what I expect from exercise. And I love the electronic music I'm using. I really can't understand most of the words (maybe they're foreign) but that doesn't

matter because I love the feelings the music instigates. I also now love ice water, and for most of my adult life it has been the last thing I would ever drink. I keep a thermos of it with me constantly. What an unexpected pleasure.

One of my favorite songs is “Little Things That Kill” by Bush, and lately I’ve been realizing that it’s also the little things that sustain life. The aromatherapist has taught me quite a lot in one short month, and one thing is that positive effect isn’t necessarily directly proportional to stress and strain. That health, or absence of illness, can happen as a result of relaxing into positive expectations. Of course this has to be augmented with good sense (in my case, avoid dirty air and eat the right foods so my lungs can heal—then maintain that state), but the entire process is less complicated, less demanding, less expensive, and in my own experience, much more productive than anything that I’ve found so far.

And I’m not trying to be offensive toward the medical profession, but in their own words, “All current treatments are merely symptomatic and palliative.”

On the other hand, no matter where she draws her confidence from, during my initial consultation the aromatherapist said I can be cured, and in just under one month of using her essential oils, following her dietary advice, enhancing my meditations per her suggestions, and massaging my fingers and hands, my physical condition has improved almost miraculously.

I just checked my blood oxygen saturation level and it is a sustained 96 with a pulse rate of 90. I’ve been getting these readings, breathing better, and feeling better from almost the first day I started working with her. And really, I don’t care if I ever understand what is causing it, but I am certain of where it is coming from.

Almost every molecule in me is vibrating right now and I’m suddenly amazed at how happy I am.

May 22, 2011—I went for a short walk in the road today and found some beautiful wildflowers. Didn’t get very far before I ran into a neighbor and spent quite a while talking to him. It’s the first time I’ve spoken to anyone except my brothers and sisters in a long time and it was actually quite nice. He mentioned that he hadn’t seen me in several years and thought I had moved.

May 24, 2011—Woke up at 3:00 am wheezing. By 5:00 am there were tremendous winds and lots of dirt. I had to go outside twice today, but wore a mask both times. Very stressful day breathing wise, but better than the past few stressful days. I’m maintaining the exercise, aromatherapy, and meditation regimen, but sometimes feel too congested to do more than rudimentary movement from one end of the house to the other.

May 25, 2011—The last couple of days have shocked me back into a sort of realism (and not that something wouldn’t have anyway, but the important thing is the particular realism I happen to find myself waking in). Exercise is a key, but enthusiastically maintaining a consistent program is the key to that key.

I mentioned the other day that my body seemed to be rejecting diaphragm breathing. Well it was doing

something, but not exactly that. It was responding to increasing activity on only the exercise bicycle. I have been using another set of muscles on the bicycle at the expense of the ones I used with the mat based aerobics—which was where I had also developed and strenuously practiced the diaphragm breathing.

Last night I had such difficulty breathing (although I did register a 95 blood oxygen saturation level at 10:00 pm and a 97 at 2:30 am) that I settled for yoga breathing and flexing movements while lying down, and then did the yoga based external upward and downward body scans until I fell asleep (I can only do partial internal body scans). Right before I fell asleep I realized that although I force myself to exercise and rarely miss a session, I go through long periods of time with no enthusiasm. It becomes something like a prisoner engaged in forced labor, which never has good results.

In order to avoid doing work, or expending energy, without productivity, I need to use all of the exercises on a more regular basis. The yoga, which I know very little about other than what I've learned from reading and watching videos, is a daily thing, but the exercise bicycle and mat aerobics are movements I can easily alternate, and will from now on.

Beautiful evening!—after 2 1/2 days of extreme winds and dirt. The afternoon turned out very nice and I spent time outside with the dogs.

I woke up at 2:00 am Monday morning feeling stressed and suffocating, and that has lingered until the wind quit this afternoon. I've felt so good for the past few weeks that I've been shocked by the experience, but probably shouldn't be. I think I remember up and down as being normal.

This morning there was a large gray fox on the pond berm eating the duck's bread. They didn't seem very concerned but I'm pretty sure that a fox will eat a duck. I also wonder if one might try to eat a Chihuahua.

May 26, 2011—Went to the doctor today and had a nice experience. The nurse was checking my vitals before the exam and said, "Your blood oxygen level is really good today. It's 95." Every time I've been in before it's been so low they have asked if I wanted them to bring oxygen to the room.

But there also was a down side. I've lost seven more pounds since my last visit. I now weigh 140. That's ten pounds since the first of March and kind of freaks me out. I've been taking the time lately to eat more, and more often, so maybe I can recover the weight. 140 is just too thin for my height.

Have felt good today. No problems with breathing. I did the mat exercises again, mainly to let my stomach muscles have a rest for a while from riding the bicycle.

May 27, 2011—"Relax, Calm, Balance." What effective commands to be so simple. All this time I've been expecting something with at least a calculus equation, a couple of complex chemical formulas, and a sequence of words I couldn't understand or pronounce correctly. Something on the order of: Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo—The Buddhist people at the school in northern New Mexico chanted it all the time, and taught it to me.

They even offered me the use of their very elaborate altars. Although I can only mimic their passion and pronunciation, it frequently drifts through my mind. Tonight I actually chanted it during part of my exercise. I used it to stretch “Relax, Calm, Balance” into a more effective rhythm.

I even spent part of the time comparing myself to a mountain. Rivulets, streams, rivers—capillaries, veins, arteries; air and moisture circulation; symbiotic inhabitants—destructive invaders; birth, maturity, erosion and decay.

Nothing is off limits. I’m using everything I can find or imagine because I’ve decided that good health is still within reach. The real issue is that at a certain point, and that is usually a function of age, the scales tip and good health requires effort, or more effort, to maintain.

Tonight I did 20 minutes on the exercise bicycle, and it was really nice. I am having to learn to balance differently so my stomach muscles aren’t worked so intensely, but that didn’t seem so difficult. I’ll know for sure in the morning.

May 28, 2011—Lots of wind, heat, and wheezing today, but not so much dirt.

Felt worn out for much of the day, and kind of congested, but I try to resist that with other thoughts and it seems to work as well as the bronchodilators—sometimes.

Tonight I did 20 minutes of mat exercises. (These sort of resemble walking convulsions. I continually work most of the movable parts of my body—neck, shoulders, arms, fingers, and waist—while walking.) The exercise does drain oxygen and raise my pulse rate, but I actually recover fairly quickly. Last night I did those and a series of deep breathing exercises until I fell asleep. Today my ribs were somewhat sore so I didn’t go out a lot, but other than the heat the weather wasn’t so much a factor. I was just burned out.

May 29, 2011—The amount of new information coming out about COPD would make me lose my breath if I tried to absorb all of it, but I don’t. I just read it and think, “Well. That’s pretty amazing.”

The most obvious thing to me is that, like any other profession, the new information in the medical profession is left for the new recruits. Apparently when people have read enough books to pass their exams, they stop reading. And not that it matters because in the end no one can save us but ourselves, but the medical people I go to are still stuck on smoke, and almost only that.

I read somewhere that people with rheumatoid arthritis are two times more likely to have concurrent chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, even when otherwise critical factors such as age, gender, weight, and smoking history are disregarded. Maybe I’m being too simplistic about it but why hasn’t there been more focus on researching the immune system and less of the incessant interest in accessory irritants.

I was wheezy in my mind and body today, but I think it was more an attitude than anything since my blood oxygen saturation level stayed fairly high.

As I admitted several days ago, I am sometimes dismayed that improvement isn’t quicker and more

complete, but that is just whining about a ridiculous fantasy (to wake up well and with no scars). The real situation, that I am gradually improving at all, is still astonishing, and more than I would have ever hoped for.

May 30, 2011—We have 30% chance of rain from now until Wednesday or Thursday, and I can feel the weather changing. We've only had just less than an inch of effective precipitation for the year, and the parts of the plains that haven't burned off are looking like deep winter. Maybe this time. I went out with the dogs when it was calm, early this morning, and then occasionally to move the water (soaking the trees) throughout the day, but not otherwise. And I wore a mask.

Changing weather would generally freak me out, but this time it is just something to notice because it doesn't seem to be affecting me adversely.

Thirty-five days of aromatherapy and forty days of the new meditation, and every day I am amazed. Two weeks ago I couldn't believe that I was reaching a 95 blood oxygen level and maintaining it for much of each day. Now that's old news and I'm reaching 96 and maintaining that. 98 isn't so far away.

May 31, 2011—Some of my lung tissue cells are senescent and have lost their ability to divide, which has left my lungs trying to function with broken or worn out components and unable to get new ones. The subsequent behavior of the cells is similar to humans who try to navigate through a busy city when their senses and reflexes are impaired—stumbling blindly into traffic, or turning left instead of right and getting lost. No wonder I gasp and wheeze.

I spent the exercise period chanting and searching for senescent endothelial cells in my lungs. At this point I can't do much more than hurl insults at them, but that will change when I know I have finally located one. Lunacy? No. Microscopic. And the pattern of a being outliving its usefulness and then becoming a menace is similar and equally recognizable at all levels.

I wheezed and gasped and felt that today was a rough day, but only when compared to my recent days. It was actually as good as some of my better days in the past. Odd how I only see the now and too much is never enough.

Up to 20 minutes on the exercise bicycle. My pulse soars, but my blood oxygen level also rises—at least for a while. It just flooded the town south of us, and I heard maybe ten raindrops on my roof. I probably should be grateful for that, but the humidity has almost immobilized me, and I'm not even considering celebrating until we get substantial rain. Interestingly enough, I just checked my blood oxygen level and it's 97 with a pulse of 86. Maybe a little gratitude, for something, is in order.

Reading *The Man to Send Rain Clouds; Contemporary Stories by American Indians*, edited by Kenneth Rosen.

June 1, 2011—Only a couple of months ago, days like today could crush me, but this has only been mildly uncomfortable. I am noticing the weather change and high humidity, but haven't felt defeated by it.

Tonight I did 20 minutes of mat exercises, and it seemed a little longer, maybe because I added some strenuous elements, but I felt great through the entire program, and I feel even better now. Time seems to have slowed down significantly over the past couple of hours. That must mean something.

I'm anxiously waiting on the next leap. My body is constantly changing, but am I causing it? Can I actually change myself at a cellular level? And can I do it with just the tools I have at hand? And what will I become when I choose that path? I've decided to believe I can. To the very end.

June 2, 2011—Humid and quite a few clouds this afternoon—rain clouds. I felt congested and rested a lot.

I have such difficulty with moderation. I remind myself of a lab experiment I read about in some college class. Scientists put a group of mice in a box with two levers (they didn't describe the rest of the decor). One of the levers dispensed mouse food and water when pressed, and the other stimulated the pleasure centers of their little mouse brains. Some (or maybe most or all) of the mice would lie down on the pleasure center stimulating lever until they starved to death. I have more resolve than that, but still tend to unbalance myself more often than I am knocked off balance by other forces. Maybe it's because balance requires constant focus and extremism allows suspension of thought.

I found a globe mallow or *Sphaeralcea coccinea* in our yard earlier this evening. Very small and beautiful.

To begin with, it rained for a few minutes starting at 9:15 pm. It smelled so nice. No real revelations, but while I was exercising I noticed how slowly the time was going and realized that time has not slowed down, I am perceiving it differently. It's the difference between concentrating on the journey and concentrating on the destination.

Focus on the minutiae of a moment and focus on an ultimate future goal. Both have value, but living resides in the minutiae of the moments that make up a journey. Sometimes I can feel those to the point that time has almost stopped, and sometimes I wake up and a year has flown by.

I keep checking my blood oxygen level because I'm on the edge of my seat waiting for my first 98. I still remember my first 95, 96, and 97. Those were great days.

June 5, 2011—Humid day. And humidity is a very relative term. This is an arid region, so a spilled glass of water will raise the humidity quite a lot.

Yesterday morning I got my first 98 blood oxygen saturation reading. It was at 11:30 am and lasted for less than a second before dropping to 97, and then 96—but it happened and it was the first one ever. I didn't mention it last night, maybe because I'm superstitious, or maybe because less than a second seems like pushing an issue, but then this morning I got another 98 reading. It was at 4:30 am and lasted for more than a second (maybe a couple), and once again the reading dropped to 96.

The 95, 96, and 97 measurements all started out in the same tentative way before becoming frequent, so hopefully this will also become more common. I still have lower readings, frequently, but more and more

often I see 95 and 96. And I still get exhausted easily, but less easily than I have been.

June 6, 2011—The smoke from the fires west of here has invaded and I've wheezed and coughed all day. I've been checking my blood oxygen saturation level since early this morning and the results are not good.

June 7, 2011—After six weeks of what appeared to be steadily improving respiratory health, last night and today hit me like a disaster. (Are all disasters unexpected?) I knew that the smoke from the Arizona fires would be coming, and might be as aggressive as the smoke from the northern New Mexico fires was if the jet stream made the projected changes, but knowing it and feeling it are not really related. The smoke has probably been building in this area for a while, but hasn't really affected me noticeably. My progress has felt so positive that any accumulating negatives have not attracted my attention.

By early evening yesterday my blood oxygen level started dropping and by 9:00 pm I didn't have enough energy to exercise, and could hardly breathe. Spent a very uncomfortable night (weird dreams and waking frequently), but still got up at 6:00 am, forced myself to do minor chores, went outside and forced myself to stay there until almost noon, and then begin to rapidly crash.

I've spent the afternoon almost immobile and struggling for each breath. Since all I can do is think, as I reflect on the past couple of weeks it appears that my daily conscious resolve and dedication to routine has been deteriorating in favor of mindless habits—floating aimlessly because it feels easier to follow a habit than to take a new path. Even the meditation has been perfunctory, and, like a history lesson, over-confidence and negligence has led to collapse. Pointless to regret. Rebuild the ladder and start climbing again.

Have been focused on meditation for the past hour. I know it won't cover the deficit, but it's better than despair.

The 8:30 pm blood oxygen level reading was disappointing, but I was worn out. The thing to remember is that my respiratory system has been doing something positive. The other side of that is I am noticing that a part of my mind is not completely healthy. I sink into darkness at the slightest opportunity.

And although the price of the day and this activity is a pounding headache, I intend to remain on task until I reverse the inflammation and airway constriction without using medication. It could work.

June 10, 2011—The extreme heat seems to be neutralizing the smoke from the wildfires. My sister had to go to Hobbs for today, and wanted to let the little dogs go along for the ride so I went with her to watch them while she was in the store. They were so good and had a great time. The only weird part was the view. I haven't been out of our yard for many months (maybe even a year) and although I know it hasn't rained and this is the driest year ever on record, I was shocked by the real effects of that. What grass is present is so withered and not-green it's almost transparent (right to the edge of our pond and yard), and the parts of the plains that burned recently are just drifting sand with no visible plants of any color. To further drive the point home, there are Caution, Blowing Sand, and Low Visibility signs posted every few

miles along the highway.

Our yard is so comfortable and green that leaving it is like entering a colorless and hostile alien world. We do have an oasis here and I was really glad to get back. I might never leave again, at least until after it rains.

My lows are lower, but my highs are higher than they were. Recovery? I'm afraid to speculate. Arrogance isn't always beneficial.

Reading *People of the Blue Water*, by Flora Gregg Iliff.

June 17, 2011—The atmosphere is thick with wildfire smoke. It kept me uncomfortable and awake for most of the night.

I feel so strange today and felt very strange all of last night. Mostly mental, but also in my body. My arms and legs feel like they are burning. Gasping for breath and that scares me.

June 18, 2011—Exercise. I've been diligently exercising, alternating between the stationary bicycle and mat exercises—20 minutes of one every night, but as with anything else I do, enthusiasm fluctuates. Today I bought a treadmill, and after a week of fantasizing about what I was going to be able to do, ended up with a good dose of reality instead. I anticipated being able to go at least a mile, and hoped for more, but was only able to do less than 1/10th of a mile, and at the slowest possible speed. If I wasn't so tired I would be disappointed. I didn't think about anything except taking my next breath while on the treadmill, but I had some exercise related thoughts during the day.

Human intelligence? Why would I use it and what does it even mean. As a dependent clause it's sarcasm. As an independent clause it's a scream of rage.

The illness has become my normal state, and worse, the habit of being ill is now more debilitating than the disease. Why? I've already proven to myself that I can improve my respiratory functions, but parts of me resist the improvement and try to drag my body back to what has become the norm. In that sense, I'm addicted to being ill.

The addiction phenomenon generally applies to substance abuse, but the aromatherapist alerted me to the fact that probably within the first few months I adapted to the disease and was no longer able to correctly remember not being ill. Then as the years have drifted by the adaptation became an addiction complete with its own set of supporting habits. What would I be and how would I behave if I didn't have this? What would I do if I didn't spend my time anticipating and fearing the next catastrophic event.

There is a mental safety in my relationship with the illness and I am so strangely comforted by the daily struggle that I panic when it isn't present. When I feel better.

Over the past few months I've done something—what?—that has elevated my blood oxygen saturation to levels I probably didn't even experience when I was young (due to the effects of childhood tuberculosis). I

believe I do know the reasons, but whatever they are, a change for the better and against the worst has been initiated, and even as I understand the oddity of the reaction, more often than not I have been terrified by that change and resist it. My physiology should be changing to reflect the oxygen increase, but I still amble about tentatively and look for reasons to gasp and wheeze. Do I watch the weather, test the air, and refuse to function normally because I am addicted to maintaining the habits of a disease that I have become so close to?

My mind is better than this, but I'm behaving like a cornered animal when there is no corner.

Would this be easier if the medical professionals didn't call it incurable and irreversible? Does that even matter? It might if I hadn't always believed only what I choose to believe, so in this case it doesn't.

Yesterday I could barely function, but in reality my respiratory system was working almost impeccably. I checked my oxygen level nearly every hour and it was always 96—mid to high normal range and something I haven't experienced before the past two months, but that gave me no comfort. I spent the day stumbling from place to place as anxiety battered me. Late last night when I checked after exercising it was 90 and almost instantly my anxiety dissipated. What weirdness. Apparently I had been longing for evidence of my functioning illness and felt relieved only when I found myself diminishing back into the familiarity of chronic illness.

So I'm addicted, and not even to something tangible. And as an addict I find that the road out is almost too hard. At the same time, although there isn't enough time left in my deteriorating body for me to even begin to make a plan for sorting through the variables that keep piling up, I incessantly plod along as if I have some sort of confidence in being able to break away.

Another ridiculous habit? Addiction to plodding, piled on addiction to illness, piled on addiction to . . . I almost respect my friends who were merely addicted to alcohol, or heroin. (I was never nice to them about it.)

All of this really interferes with my new work, but back to the treadmill. I intend to achieve a mile even if it is at 1 mile per hour.

June 19, 2011—Wind, dust, smoke, and 102 degrees. I was wheezing and coughing and stumbling around aimlessly, but it was real, not habituated addiction behavior. So I feel good about that.

Reading *Yellow Sun, Bright Sky; The Indian Country Stories of Oliver La Farge*, edited by David L. Caffey.

June 21, 2011—I have tried the treadmill several times, but really used it for the first time today. It took me 21 minutes and 32 seconds to make 4/10 of a mile and I had to stop and rest five times. It's a challenge that I look forward to.

Not so hot as yesterday, but also not even a breeze. I'm still having difficulty getting over the day before yesterday and rested more than anything else.

I don't regret making the Facebook connection with my high school friends, but don't care to explain why I won't be attending the reunion this weekend. Usually I just lie, but that's harder to do with people I know so well. In the past I've just avoided them, but that would defeat the purpose of being on Facebook. Dilemma.

July 2, 2011—The days are not as hot. Haven't had the energy to do much lately, but the past couple of days have had news. Day before yesterday, as she was going to work my sister noticed two black dogs running along the highway. When she got off of work that night, the dogs were still in approximately the same place and were obviously in distress. She was unable to catch the dogs by herself, but our niece happened to drive by and stopped and helped. When she got them home they were covered with fleas, dehydrated, starving, and very frightened.

They are now medicated (for fleas and facial injuries), well fed and watered, and much less frightened young female dogs of unknown breed. She intends to have the vet spay them and give them their shots next week, and then try to find a home for them. As usual, I would bet they end up living here.

Reading *Big Falling Snow; A Tewa-Hopi Indian's Life and Times and the History and Traditions of His People*, by Albert Yava.

July 11, 2011—After a month of improvement I now have bronchitis and am barely able to move. I'm mostly confined to bed so I can't go outside, my lungs are so congested I feel like I'm drowning unless I sit in a certain position, and I'm also out of books. Fortunately I can use my computer while in bed, but it doesn't interest me all that much. I want to be up and outside and anything else pales in comparison. My blood oxygen saturation level has been so low for the past few days that old obsessions are rearing their ugly heads. I just spent 20 minutes panicked over losing something on my bed. Something important? Not at all. It was a plastic tip from a vial of albuterol that I was holding until I could make it to the kitchen to throw it in the trash. Why the panic? I suppose because I'm not quite sane when I don't have enough oxygen. When I realized it wasn't in my hand I was overwhelmed by thoughts that it was gone forever and in a few minutes I was gasping for air and trying to take my bed apart. I have to be mean to myself to stop these events once I've let them begin. It would be embarrassing if anyone was watching.

The storm is back and it's starting to sprinkle.

July 14, 2011—Plenty of humidity today, but no rain. We ended up with a total of .6" of rain yesterday and last night. The first rain we have had in well over a year. I'm sure there must be a forest of wildflowers blooming now, but I can't go outside without collapsing from the humidity and alien pollens. I actually tried several times today but could only make it a few feet before I had to crawl back and plug into my machine. It just infuriates me, which makes the situation worse but at that point I don't care.

I've noticed a very strange phenomenon since I started this recent deterioration. When the bronchitis first hit me and my blood oxygen saturation level started dropping, I retained the capacity to panic when it was in the low 90s and high 80s, but that disappeared at lower levels.

I'm only able to sleep a couple of hours at a time before I start drowning, and for the past few nights, when I wake up my level is in the very low 80s, and although I'm lucid enough to know that is dangerous, I don't even care and don't panic. I can't go back to sleep, but that's just because my body has taken over and is struggling for air. My mind is disconnected and mostly uninterested.

The good news is I'm feeling better this evening and was able to exercise for 15 minutes for the first time in a couple of weeks. I'll have to think about this when I can think better, but my blood oxygen level is fluctuating wildly right now.

July 16, 2011—The morning was so nice that I was able to take the dogs out for a couple of hours, until it got hot. It smelled even better than I was remembering. Interesting that I remember myself as being healthier than I really was, and summer mornings smell better than I remember them as being.

Reading *The Sundering Flood*, by William Morris.

September 21, 2011—I've been congested and have been growing progressively weaker since the rains. Haven't felt like exercising, but force myself. Can't decide whether to attempt to work through this, or stop work until I start feeling better. Actually I guess I have decided since I continue to exercise. Tonight when I finished, my blood oxygen level was 81 but my pulse was only 106. Theoretically, I should hardly be conscious at that point, but didn't feel endangered, or even particularly dull.

October 10, 2011—I recently added very light weights to the nightly aerobic exercises, but my blood oxygen level has been all over the place for weeks. Feeling freaked out and breathless. Going from illness to wellness is a journey filled with obstacles and battles, and few who accomplish it leave maps, recipes, or even phrases of encouragement. But I have felt a type of hope or optimism lately.

October 12, 2011—Maintaining exercises and meditation, but the results are chaotic.

I have to remind myself over and over that I initiate only a fraction of the life I'm experiencing. For the most part, I exist within a flow of unfolding social and environmental events that were initiated hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries, and maybe even millennia ago, and I react or respond, reflexively or consciously, as well as I can. Sometimes I'm enthusiastic, sometimes lethargic, and sometimes I just hope to maintain balance.

Reading *The Valleys of the Assassins*, by Freya Stark.

October 13, 2011—I have hardly been able to move all afternoon. Didn't have the energy to swallow my food and almost needed assistance getting back into my house. Then, after resting for a while, I forced my way through exercise and came back to life. How does it turn out like that?

I have suspected for a while that it has something to do with precondition and post-condition muscle memory. Through over fifty years of movement, my muscles, organs, and body tissues developed a set procedure in which a certain amount of movement (energy expended) required a set amount of oxygen.

My brain and body have not accommodated the rapid onset of the disease and still try to stick to that same procedure, ignoring the fact that I no longer have those amounts available. Not only do I have to relearn how to move in less aggressive and oxygen demanding ways, but I need to train my brain to not automatically deplete available stores—to give up a percentage of what is available rather than the entire amount.

November 3, 2011—It froze last night and although I am still wheezing and congested, I am not as uncomfortable as I have been.

Reading *A Peak in Darien*, by Freya Stark.

November 26, 2011—Feel fine as long as I remain perfectly still. Did fifteen repetitions on the lung flute. It does seem to loosen congestion, but I wonder if the resistance isn't more effective than the sound. Also still wonder if I'm doing it correctly. The literature doesn't seem to indicate that it takes this much effort.

Reading *The Coast of Incense*, by Freya Stark.

November 30, 2011—Drastic weather changes are about to happen. The low pressure system is still 12 to 16 hours away but already has crushed me. By noon I felt like I weighed 1000 pounds and every move was a struggle. It's strange how 'broken' is actually a state of hypersensitivity. My sister and I both feel even the slightest environmental change—pollen, temperature, humidity, pressure—and usually begin to adjust just as the next one occurs.

Got the neatest surprise today. An enormous box was delivered, and when I got it inside and opened, a friend from high school had sent Christmas to me. The box contained 29, individual, beautifully wrapped Christmas gifts, a card, and a letter. Two specific boxes were to be opened immediately, then one each day from December 1 through December 24, and finally, three specifically for Christmas day. I will follow her suggestion, and although I didn't feel so great physically, it is probably the nicest Christmas surprise I have ever received. The first two packages are teas, cookies, and candy. What a wonderful friend.

December 1, 2011—Freezing wind and sleet and I don't feel so great, but it is partly psychological. This type of storm brings out a sense of environmental despair. I expect germs behind every gust of wind (and the cat is drinking out of my water glass).

Reading *The Real Thomas Jefferson; The True Story of America's Philosopher of Freedom*, by Allison, Maxfield, Cook and Skousen. Interesting.

December 2, 2011—A thin coating of ice on everything outside and cold, but no wind. It is actually kind of nice. Breathing is becoming easier as it gets colder.

December 10, 2011—Overcast, cold, and very humid. I didn't actually go outside except for a few minutes at sunset to take pictures, but left my curtains open all day and the weather was nice to watch. Even now, it's dark, but when I look outside it reminds me of Sherlock Holmes stories—foggy London night, street

lamps masked to a barely perceptible flicker of unknown origin. Maybe not exactly that, but similar.

December 21, 2011—Winter solstice. A return to wellness is not something that can be accomplished easily, nor can any progress made be held casually. From birth, our bodies are constantly contending with attacks from outside forces, so in a sense, rather than experiencing long periods of wellness, we are constantly recovering or moving away from a state of illness.

I only fell for a short period of time, but making up what I lost will require my most astute attention, my sharpest focus, my most logical decisions, and all of the energy I can find, for the rest of my life. Really, no different than what everyone else experiences.

Reading *Go in Beauty*, by William Eastlake.

December 23, 2011—Second snow, or maybe third. It was really cold, overcast, and there was a small amount of snow on the ground this morning. It has remained overcast and flakes fell through the day, but just barely enough to be noticeable until late this afternoon. Just before 5:00 pm, large amounts of large, heavy flakes started falling.

I've been reading intermittently on *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, by G. LeStrange, and pleasantly drifting.

I also spent most of the day trying to capture an image of a snowflake. Which I actually accomplished, but not as I imagined. This snow is more like tiny drops (conglomerates of crystals) than discernible flakes. Even if (out of almost 250 pictures) I had gotten a clear close-up of one, it wouldn't have been the "six fold radial symmetry" I was looking for. The ones taken with a flash are the most interesting.

## Chapter 8: 2012

Still up and down, but my list of positive actions grew some more this year.

After several years of not driving, I got a license and started again. At first I was unsure that I had retained sufficient driving skills, but I had, and I sharpened those fairly quickly. I am almost a white-knuckle driver, but I always have been. I drive exactly the speed limit, I come to a complete stop at stop signs, I always yield at yield signs, and I am always watching the other vehicles. And I have always done those things.

I was also almost too paranoid about going back out into the public. It was very nice to do my own shopping, but strenuous, and every time I went into a store, someone tried to call 911 for me—I must have looked terrible but I didn't feel badly enough to want an ambulance. The last time I went into Walmart to pick up a prescription, I could only make it to the bench inside the door, and while I was resting to try and recover, at least ten different people came up, freaked out, and started calling for assistance. I was

struggling to breathe and it was very difficult for me to explain to them that I didn't need assistance, that I just needed to rest and recover. Then they freaked out some more when they saw me get in the truck to drive away.

I do appreciate how nice they were. It actually says a lot about the caliber of people who shop there, but I've never gone back in the store again. It was disconcerting to almost be rescued when I didn't feel that I needed to be.

The next big change was that I bought a very nice semiprofessional camera and plunged into local landscape and skyscape photography. I didn't travel very far—within a five mile radius of my house, and I had limited subjects—two windmills, three trees, and the flat, empty horizon, but I began saving my energy to go out every day about thirty minutes before the sunset and take pictures of at least one of those subjects.

It was originally a type of therapy—moving around, and holding a camera as a good reason for moving around in the places where I went, but I have grown to love the art and have taken several hundred thousand digital pictures. I've posted the best ones on Facebook, but I've also spread prints among my friends and family, and entered some in photography contests. Therapy to hobby, and I feel successful with both.

And the down almost destroyed all of those. My younger sister died on December 26.

January 1, 2012—Exercising as much as I can, but barely able to move. My lungs are in terrible shape and I am gurgling my way into the new year.

Reading *Westward the Women; An Anthology of Western Stories by Women*, edited by Vickie Piekarski.

January 23, 2012—I could hardly move to experience it, but the day was beautiful.

February 1, 2012—It was warm, there are insects moving around, several varieties of plants with very small, yellow blossoms are out, and the elm trees are trying to flower.

My sister and I are getting close to having read all of the books in the New Mexico State Library Southwest Collection. There are still a few left, but we're almost through the body of books I focused on at the beginning so I'm starting the next new subject: books about the Southwest that aren't in the state library. I've logged most of the ones I want to read and have started ordering them through the inter-library loan program.

February 2, 2012—I conserve my energy all day so I can go outside around sunset. I am most attracted to big, loud, skies, but a subtle sky can be just as interesting. A narrower range of colors in this sunset, but that was balanced by depth. It was a beautiful evening.

February 8, 2012—Very beautiful day. I felt cold until I found out that on this date in 1933 it was minus 32 degrees here, the lowest temperature ever recorded in this area.

Reading *Another Juanita and Other Stories*, by Josephine Clifford. This book was printed in 1893.

February 28, 2012—Incredible dirt storm today. Winds were in the 50s and 60s for most of the day, and they brought in a tremendous wall of dust. But it was warm.

My life is now fairly normal if I maintain certain conditions and behaviors, the main one being, don't breathe dirty air in any of its forms. I try to wear a mask when I go outside on days like this, but it's such a weird feeling to think about being seen wearing a black surgical mask (I should order a different color), that it's a battle with myself every time. And even though the alternative is to breathe dust, have an immune system overreaction, and become so congested I can hardly move, I will still rip the mask off if I see other people.

What I've learned is that all this time I've been a total liar when I said, "I don't care what anyone else thinks." I care deeply about even insignificant things.

Reading *Judgment On Janus*, by Andre Norton.

March 7, 2012—Wind, dust, and heat. A lot of dust and I've been congested for days, but not so bad. A strong wind from the southwest brought enormous amounts of dust from Mexico. Actually the day here was mostly clear, with a flow of light clouds from that direction, but by late afternoon the first 20 degrees above the horizon were obscured by dust and when I went out of town for the sunset I could see the flow patterns from the southwest and a thicker dust front not far away.

Reading Witter Bynner's book, *Journey With Genius*, and love it. What an intelligent man. I even like his poetry.

March 12, 2012—I'm almost too old to be learning this, but good and evil dance and swirl around us all the time. What changes is our ability to perceive, choose or desire, and engage one of them—or not, and just watch them perform.

March 15, 2012—Very nice day.

Started reading *Shadows and Light*, the autobiography of the painter, and ex-husband of Mabel Dodge Luhan, Maurice Sterne. Interesting.

March 19, 2013—Cold and wet all day.

Reading *Wheels Within Wheels*, by Dervla Murphy. Excellent book by a remarkable explorer/adventurer. Born to a rural librarian and his interesting wife in Linsmore, Ireland in 1931, this book is about her childhood, and I can see how it will lead to her books on travel.

Her personality takes me to a place similar to where I go through Freya Stark's books, and there are interesting similarities in their early lives, but they are definitely not comparable. Freya Stark was a phenomenon, unique in the history of humanity, who had my avid attention with her first book. Although

I am finding this woman to be very interesting, I've been able to put her book down to eat, watch a television show, and do other things.

March 23, 2012—Reading *On a Shoestring to Coorg; An Experience of South India* by Dervla Murphy.

March 27, 2012—Beautiful day. My brother just told me that the weather is supposed to turn bad. I asked “What?”, thinking, ‘blizzard, windstorm’, and he said, “Possible rain.” It cracked me up. Where else would rain be seen as bad weather?

March 31, 2012—I sat outside and read again, and again the smells were incredibly nice. So strange how certain breezes contain smells that instigate memories of childhood. Fresh, clean, and green.

Reading *Eight Feet in the Andes*, by Dervla Murphy.

April 1, 2012—Incredible, excellent day. The smells were intoxicating. Couldn't really get beyond the yard today, but found some nice wildflowers.

Changed to the book *Full Tilt*, by Dervla Murphy. It is next in the chronology of the books that I have.

April 18, 2012—I finally made it outside again. Not so bad and so far no repercussions.

Reading *Old Calabria*, by Norman Douglas (1915). A book about his travels through the Calabria region of Italy probably during 1911. Very good. I'm not sure if that was the style of the times, or his class, or if he is just an amusing person, but I laugh frequently.

April 24, 2012—Incredible day. I might as well be in a smoky bar. Or the middle of the smoke filled portion of a forest fire. I feel like I weigh a thousand pounds. My camera is almost too heavy to carry. Even my phone is almost too heavy to carry. I've gurgled and wheezed for most of the day, metabolizing so little oxygen that the simplest movements completely drain me, but the clouds looked promising and I had to go take pictures.

When I was a garbage collector, on the worst, windy, hot or cold days, I would sometimes pretend I was on a science expedition to the South Pole. I didn't go deeply into the play, mostly the contending with the great physical discomfort part, and going out to take pictures was sort of along those lines.

I almost had to trick myself to make the journey, and it was even more exhausting than I imagined it would be. But it was also more rewarding than I imagined it could be. I actually feel great right now. Breathing with no difficulty and the weakness is gone.

I can't state too often how much I like this book. It's incredible. His wit and perceptual/conceptual acuity are brilliantly stimulating.

April 25, 2012—Much easier to breathe today, and very nice weather-wise. I'm kind of stunned, and wishing I could read 17th century Italian, if I could even locate the books. Just found out that it's possible that the British poet Milton probably based *Paradise Lost* (printed in 1656), on the slightly earlier sacred

tragedy *Adamo Caduto* (printed in 1647), written by Serafino de la Salandra. Although Salandra wrote for people who were barely not peasants, the styles, characters, points, perspectives, and even many of the verses, are very much alike.

One man, although probably fairly well known in his region of Italy during that time, died obscurely and disappeared into the past, only a few copies of his work were printed and it's unknown if any still exist. The other became almost culturally immortal. Dissonant.

April 29, 2012—Nice, humid day. Very nice sky. This book is wonderful almost beyond belief. Casual perfection. I'm so impressed, and so entertained.

Every year, every month, every week, every day, every moment, up—down, in—out, two steps forward, and hopefully less than two steps back. I know that I'm doing better than I was for the first three years because I have physically good days, but they are such a struggle to reach and I can't sustain them for very long. Just the slightest change in nearly anything, from weather to social situations to my own thoughts, and I crash. Other than degree of congestion and the blood oxygen levels I am now sometimes reaching, my respiratory system is just as damaged as it was the first year, and probably has deteriorated, but my ability to synchronize what I require of my body to what it can realistically produce has improved considerably. Still, standing back up is so much more difficult than falling down was.

May 1, 2012—Windy, but nice today. Finished the wonderful Norman Douglas book, and it was amazing to the very last sentence. I'm ordering five more of his books. Started reading *A Victorian in the Modern World*, by Hutchins Hapgood, and like it. I've read two other books by him, but I ordered this autobiography because of his associates. He was contemporary with a group of people who all seemed to know each other, and spent the late 1800s—early 1900s exploring the world, enjoying it, and writing about it. Amazing humans. Their kind seemed to disappear after the 1930s and no one has even gotten close to their abilities since.

May 4, 2012—Another beautiful day. Sometimes I feel like I should probably be alarmed about a number of rapidly accumulating things (age, decomposition, and other things of similar nature), but about the best I can manage are occasional tinges of regret about being unable to feel alarmed.

I started the autobiography of Leo Stein, *Journey Into The Self*, being the letters, papers and journals of Leo Stein. Interesting. Sometimes narcissism amuses me, and sometimes it annoys me. His book is no surprise except that I'm often amused and annoyed within the same sentence.

What a self-absorbed person Mr. Stein was. I have a great deal of respect for the ability to maintain the social selectivity and isolation necessary for the pursuit of self-interests and/or self-exploration. It's similar to how I have lived. But I am appalled at how smug he and most of his famous friends could be. And nothing they ever accomplished would have kept them alive under different circumstances. If you are fortunate enough to have the time and money to live anywhere you want, and do only what interests you, then good for you, but don't be a cad.

May 18, 2012—Nice day. The first day I've been out in a while. I'm already paying, but think it was worth it.

Finished *Not I, But the Wind*, by Frieda Lawrence; *A Poet and Two Painters*; *A Memoir of D. H. Lawrence*, by Knud Merrild (I really like some of his paintings, and am amazed at when he painted them); and am almost finished with *Looking Back*, by Norman Douglas, all very good books.

May 23, 2012—Very strange day. Extremely hot, and by 10:00 am we were covered by the smoke plume from the Gila fire in western New Mexico. By noon it was so thick that when I looked outside the trees seemed to be smoldering. The wind has shifted slightly, and the smoke is not so thick, but still suffocating. If wind shifts proceed as expected, we should start clearing by tomorrow night.

May 27, 2012—Nice morning. Fairly windy and the smoke is slowly clearing. I am moving around some inside my house, and will have to accept that as exercise. Only going outside when I absolutely must, and I need to buy a mask with a charcoal filter for the next wildfire season, but I have plenty to read.

Finished *Alone*, by Norman Douglas (wonderful book), and started *Purity and Danger; An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, by Mary Douglas.

May 30, 2012—The Gila Wilderness fire in western New Mexico was the largest fire in New Mexico's history by this morning, and was zero percent contained. We are inundated with smoke that originates 400 miles away.

June 1, 2012—Difficult to get around, but the day was beautiful. The smoke is so thick that it has permeated my house. My air purifier seems to take care of a lot of it, but not all. I can't escape the smell or the feelings of suffocation it instigates.

Still reading *South Wind*, by Norman Douglas. Different. I love his travel books, but this is a novel of fiction built on places he wrote about traveling to. Mainly I don't get the period sarcasm until pages later. I don't know enough about late 19th Century European society to understand many of his frequent and brilliantly caustic comments. Still interesting.

June 6, 2012—Very difficult to go outside, but I drove north of town to take pictures of the transit of Venus across the sun.

June 14, 2012—Very difficult to breathe, but a nice day otherwise.

Started reading *Life In Mexico*, a selection of the private letters written by Frances Calderon de la Barca (born Frances Erskine Inglis in Edinburgh on December 23, 1804) to her friends and family while living in Mexico when her husband served as a Spanish diplomat to Mexico during the years 1839-1842. So far I love it.

June 28, 2012—Am I adapting to the heat somewhat? I could breathe much better when I woke up this morning.

July 21, 2012—A beautiful day, and I can hardly get around. Not complaining, but I can walk about 20 feet before I'm completely desaturated of oxygen and have to stop and recover. I try to not drive when it's this difficult to remain conscious (sort of a joke.)

July 28, 2012—A day like water, but no rain. I'm starting to gurgle when I go outside, and after being outside for a while it becomes extreme. Not so much in the early morning and late afternoon, but during the day it's like a sauna. Okay, not a real sauna, but in that direction.

August 2, 2012—Hot, humid days, but beautiful. I start wheezing and gurgling as soon as I step outside, but I can't stand staying inside all the time.

Finished reading *The Vicar of Wakefield*, by Oliver Goldsmith. What an excellent little book. I loved it. Just started *Memoirs of a Polyglot*, by William Gerhardt.

August 12, 2012—Nice day but very difficult to breathe. Even I get bored with my constant complaining about gurgling and wheezing because of the humidity, but it hasn't left so I haven't stopped. I think probably it's just normal for the ending of summer. A big blast of heat before it cools down.

Reading *Viva Mexico!*, by Charles Macomb Flandrau (1908). What a nice book.

August 15, 2012—Rain. I can't really function very well outside when it's humid, so I avoid going out to conserve energy and maybe prevent accidents.

August 17, 2012—Mostly overcast, high humidity, occasional sprinkles, and obvious rain all around us, but nothing here so far. I'm stuck in between about to pass out from the effects of high humidity on my respiratory system, and really not feeling all that bad. I can still exercise.

August 18, 2012—More rain. Felt like a day underwater.

Started reading *Indians of the Andes; Aymaras and Quechuas*, by Harold Osborne (1952). Interesting.

August 22, 2012—Finishing *Spanish Rattle-Taggle*, by Walter Starkie. A book about his walk through Northern Spain in the early 1930s.

September 1, 2012—When the pollen flares up, I think, "When this is over. . ." then the dust starts and I think the same thing. Now it's the seeds. And I could probably do without whatever those little things are that I can see floating in shafts of sunlight.

I do like Dervla Murphy as a very entertaining writer and interesting person. But if she hadn't published this book and gone on to write others I would have suspected she was killed by just about anyone involved in the process of changing South Africa over to Black rule. In her 60s and tottering around on a bicycle through robberies, murders, and riots.

September 5, 2012—Incredibly difficult to breathe, but the landscape view through my windows was beautiful.

September 9, 2012—Mostly inert today, but the rain and humidity seem to have cleared the air of whatever was suffocating me.

Read *Perilous Sanctuary*, by D. J. Hall (1937) today. Interesting historical novel involving the New Mexico penitentes in the 1930s. Actually a very good book, and surprisingly accurate. I've read quite a few books about los Hermanos, from a variety of perspectives (from the 20th century artists and bohemians who spied on them and wrote about it, to the musings of Fray Angelico Chavez and Alice Corbin), and the plot incorporates nearly everything they pointed out or discussed.

September 12, 2012—Nice day, but I seem to rest a lot.

I love this book, and I love this man's mind. He is possibly my favorite living writer. Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen; *Reflections at Sixty and Beyond*, by Larry McMurtry.

September 25, 2012—Nice sunset.

Turned due books into the library and received two new ones. *The Dance of Life*, by Havelock Ellis (1923), and one of the few books by Larry McMurtry that I haven't read, *Telegraph Days*. I read the wonderful book by Mr. McMurtry and watched my brother and sister trim trees with chainsaws. Encounters with an overabundance of talent.

October 1, 2012—More moisture and it is very difficult to breathe, but the winds are cool and the landscape is beautiful.

October 8, 2012—I began perceiving time differently several years ago, but immediately resisted the change. Now, I'm beginning to appreciate it. The seasons are flying by, but the seconds have much greater depth. And it isn't one or the other, it's one and then the other. Perceptual or conceptual evolution.

October 12, 2012—Raining. I feel perfectly normal if I sit up and don't move, but if I move, or worse, try to lie down, I'm instantly drained of oxygen. Another night of sitting up.

October 16, 2012—Very nice day, but the incoming cold front makes it very difficult to breathe.

Reading *The Arab of the Desert*; a glimpse into Badawin life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, by Harold Richard Patrick Dickson. Compiled from his personal experiences between 1929 and 1936 and published in 1949. Interesting.

October 21, 2012—I've received so many wonderful books during the past two months and I get lost in them for long periods of time. But I do occasionally gaze out my windows. So there's that.

Reading *Tibetan Foothold*, by Dervla Murphy.

October 28, 2012—Nice day after the first freeze. I am always jittery with anticipation, hoping that it cleans the air for a while.

Reading *Where the Indus is Young; A Winter in Baltistan*, by Dervla Murphy. Another excellent travel book.

October 30, 2012—Fine day. Not breathing so well, but I can be fine with that.

Reading *In Ethiopia With a Mule*, by Dervla Murphy. Very good.

November 2, 2012—In the 80s with a nice breeze. Everything is changing color. The plants, the landscape, and the sky, and responding intensely to the changing amount of available light. Hard to breathe and I wheeze all through the night, but on the other hand, beautiful and interesting.

Reading *Travels in Mexico*, by Frederick A. Ober (1883)

November 3, 2012—Still unable to move very much. It's a struggle to even stand. Our existence is always some form of plunder—life devours life. And is it less ignoble to kill a plant than an animal?

November 10, 2012—Intense winds and dust today. I'm at a slow crawl.

November 15, 2012—Cool but not cold, and the clouds are increasing. Difficult to breathe this morning—so it's interesting that I generally feel fine.

Reading *A Place Apart*, by Dervla Murphy

November 17, 2012—Trapped inside by clouds and humidity. Started having difficulty breathing during the night, and that peaked early this morning. I've mainly lounged and read. The sunrise was spectacular. It woke me and I was entranced. I mostly slept through the day, between bouts of reading, and finally came to life with the sunset.

November 22, 2012—I think it might have been a nice day outside. I had a difficult time getting around, but it looked pleasant through my windows.

Started reading the John Lloyd Stephens book, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan; Volume I* (1854). Wonderful book.

November 25, 2012—Nice day. The weather has stabilized somewhat—my headache is gone and it's easier to get around. Read some out of three different books today. My dreams should be interesting.

December 4, 2012—Really nice day, but very hard to breathe. That almost doesn't seem to work out logically, but it's true. I'm actually not even that uncomfortable. I just have to remember to move slowly.

December 8, 2012—The cold is coming and I hope to feel better when it gets here.

Finished reading *A Place Apart*, by Dervla Murphy, and it is an outstanding book. I feel like I've been to school. Am almost finished with her book *Transylvania and Beyond*, about her 1990 trek through the Romanian territory of Transylvania. The trip was the realization of a 50 year dream, but couldn't be made until after the 'reign of terror' of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu was ended and foreigners were allowed

access to the country. Another outstanding book.

December 13, 2012—Nice day, and warm. Still wheezy and gasping for air.

Finished *Transylvania and Beyond*, and started *Muddling Through in Madagascar*, both by Dervla Murphy. Great books.

December 14, 2012—Nicely chaotic weather today. When I woke this morning it was fairly clear with high winds. Through the middle of the day a bank of dark clouds appeared in the west, and moved over eastward, raining briefly in the process. This evening is clear and cool. I wish I could have gone out to take pictures, but have to conserve energy.

I absolutely loved the last two Dervla Murphy books. I knew nothing about Ireland, or Romania. I didn't even know that Transylvania was one of the three territories, or areas, comprising Romania. I don't even mind her occasional comments about politics anymore. Just an amazing woman.

I am almost overwhelmed by sadness. I attempt to keep my demeanor stable in the presence of others, but I have little control over the storm of chaos inside me. My younger sister has been struggling with both emphysema and congestive heart failure since 2005, and began having debilitating headaches a couple of months ago. Thanksgiving week our youngest sister finally convinced her to go to the doctor and after a few days of testing she was found to have very aggressive forms of cancer in her kidneys, lungs, and brain. She refused further testing or treatment other than pain control, and only wanted to come back home, where she began visibly deteriorating almost immediately. Each day she has disappeared a little more and required more direct attention and care.

Our youngest sister and one of our nieces are doing most of the work (and there is a lot involved—her mind is very different now and she is like a destructive toddler), and our oldest sister comes from Lubbock on her days off to help. I assist as much as I can, but am unable to carry her or support her weight for very long, so the more helpless she becomes the less help I can really be. Mainly I watch her while they catch naps and alert them when she needs something that I can't take care of. I also spend a lot of time talking to her about what is happening.

She says she doesn't mind dying (and I don't believe that at all), but she is terrified of death. To the point that she spends much of her time either staring into space and ignoring us, or fidgeting in an increasingly frenzied manner. When I asked her what bothers her the most, she said that she is losing her mind and can feel her brain being destroyed. I pointed out that by definition if she lost her mind she wouldn't know it, and that what she was experiencing was anxiety and the chaos of runaway thoughts brought on by giving in to despair.

I don't want her to embrace death, but we are keeping her pain free, and she should be able to relax and be more comfortable, or at least less wretched.

I asked her why she thought she was feeding the anxiety rather than controlling it and she said what

difference does it make when the next step is eternal blackness. Not even a hell to look forward to, just death and nothingness. I told her she doesn't know that and she said there is no evidence that there is anything else. To which I replied that there might be more evidence for something else than she is paying attention to.

I then took a long time to point out that we are not our social identities, not our language, and not even the thoughts our language attempts to express. Those are only tools and we are the undefinable spark behind those tools. That it is very likely that an essential 'self' is merely using the human body as a container in which to exist in this environment, much like an astronaut inhabits a space suit, or a spaceship. When she understood what I meant by that I told her that even if she couldn't embrace one of the standard religions right now, she could still be prepared for an eternity of self-awareness in another form.

And finally I told her that I am sure that our mother is still with us and has been since her body took its last breath. I told her to look back over her memories of mom and remember how devoted she was to us, and she should see that, if at all possible (and it could be), our mom is waiting for us, wherever and however that might happen. She said, "I hope so."

No great steps, but her hope gives me an opening. I now know how to calm her down in each immediate crisis, and neutralize some of the fear and anxiety as the process of dying progresses.

It's not all sad and/or disturbing, but sadly enough, that is mainly due to the amounts of morphine we give her. I doubt that anyone really ever embraces death, or is ever very brave about it, but it could be better. There could be less fear. I hope I have the courage and physical strength to keep this up as long as she needs me.

December 16, 2012—Nice day of very strange weather. Yesterday was totally exhausting. Our sister has become hyperalert in the strangest ways. Her mind isn't tracking very well, at least all the time, but she is more clever (actually devious) than she has ever been. She knows we don't want her trying to move around on her own because she will fall and likely break something, so she has decided that she must move around on her own, and will be up and moving if we don't pay attention all the time. She also dismantles everything within reach.

Our oldest sister is here today and will take care of everything through tomorrow. What a relief. Two observations. 1) While atheism might work out well for those whose deaths are sudden and unexpected, it isn't a comfort at all for at least some of those experiencing a prolonged dying process. And, 2) It's done now, and whether good or bad, through conversation I led her to the conclusion that she still has the option to seek religious redemption, and to make the decision to take it. I could tell that a part of her wanted to, but she felt guilty for having rejected religion for so long, so I convinced her that there are no time constraints, and that the worst of her very few sins were fairly innocent anyway. I'm really not sure how Christian redemption works, but told her that any sincere personal appeal will do. She believes me.

The sunset was nice.

December 18, 2012—Wild and windy morning, but a beautifully calm evening. Incredible sunset accompanied by a brisk cool breeze.

This could be sister's last day and I feel drained and conflicted. Heartbroken that she is leaving us, but somewhat relieved that her physical misery will end. The morphine blocks the pain, but that isn't enough. Something worse keeps torturing her. Regrets.

I wasn't a very good caregiver yesterday and that guilt will haunt me for a while. I don't have the strength to lift her and had to be stern to keep her from getting up and falling. I probably should have just let her do what she felt compelled to do, but ran out of air and could only speak enough to give her orders ("Don't move until someone else gets here.") I guess it's fortunate that that's not the only guilt I have, or will accumulate for that matter.

I also wish that I could see death as I think about it—a transition rather than an affliction. I do believe that she isn't ending, merely changing, but can find no comfort in that at this point.

Last night I started the book *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan; Volume II, (1843)* by John Lloyd Stephens. Very interesting.

December 21, 2012—Nice day. High, drifting, wispy clouds, and very little wind. The center of the sky was especially blue. I really didn't go out until I went to take pictures, but could see it through my living room windows. I may have read some but don't remember.

Linda came out of the coma-like sleep, and although noticeably diminished physically and mentally, she seems somewhat more calm and is alert and talking. I stopped to visit when I came back into town and we talked a little. I get the strangest feeling of waves breaking against rocky cliffs. Not in a bad way, but the feel of relentless.

December 26, 2012—Goodbye Linda. Too sad to function much beyond this.

December 27, 2012—Beautiful day outside, but very sad. I was sort of numb all day. My younger sister died at sunset yesterday. I'm happy that she never had to leave her home, her pets, her grandchildren, and her comfortable things, and that she has spent every minute with the people who love her, but I feel empty and that I have failed her in some way. I should have been able to repair our damaged selves.

Although her death has been expected at any moment for a couple of days, it was still a big surprise. Life seems endless until it ends. Even up to the very last second—"Maybe the rope will break; the electricity will fail; the bullet didn't hit anything vital; this disease will just go away."

Everyone who lives here or has lived here for the past 50 years knows us and knew her, and some of their questions are difficult to answer. When she found out she was dying from rapidly metastasizing cancer as well as the emphysema, she decided no further testing and no treatment. And then she emphatically

stated that afterward, a cremation, no obituary, and no memorial (or any kind of) service. I don't know how to answer the questions people are asking about those things and make it sound normal and not angry. Maybe she was angry. I hope not, but we didn't question her motives.

December 31, 2012—Very cold, but nice. Still sad, but no grief. Much like the way my mother's death affected me, I still sense my sister nearby. Like all of the previous years when she was alive in her house next door, I couldn't always see her, but I was always aware of her presence. Probably a psychological safeguard against despair, but maybe not.

Freya Stark described her understanding of the transition from life to death as a process of submerging into the depths of the same stream within which we are all flowing toward the same unknown destination. I like that thought. It's comforting.

## Chapter 9: 2013

I began deteriorating soon after my sister's death. I could tell long before she died that she was just exhausted by the struggle to breathe and was losing the will to continue what had become a daily grind. Nothing we said or did seemed to change her decision to give up.

Within the first few months of the year I had started to give up myself. I almost stopped eating and quickly lost 30 pounds. Exercise became more gesture than real, my breathing deteriorated, and my blood oxygen dropped to the mid to low 80s and stayed there. Then it would really plummet at night.

Nights became nightmares and I couldn't lie down to sleep any longer. I added pillows until I had ten stacked at the head of my bed and was basically sitting up all through the night (which is how she slept for the last four years of her life.)

I became more and more ill, and when I finally went to the clinic in July, the medical provider came in the examining room reading my chart, looked at me sternly and said, "You're committing suicide by starvation aren't you."

I was shocked and vehemently denied it, but she wasn't convinced (she was my sister's caregiver also), and after submitting to her examination and listening to her lecture I realized that she was probably correct. I hadn't consciously chosen anything, but I had very little will to go on left in me. I was also just tired of the struggle. My blood oxygen level was so low that I could hardly move, and it had been that way for a while, so she prescribed supplemental oxygen (which I accepted—I think gladly), and my anxiety was so extreme that I wasn't sleeping for days at a time, so she prescribed a medication for anxiety (which I was dubious about but willing to try). The oxygen was very helpful, and I could at least fall asleep when I used the other medication.

By the end of September, even with supplemental oxygen, breathing became a terrific struggle and my blood-oxygen level dropped to and stayed in the 80s. All movement required serious effort and I was no longer able to lie down without experiencing the feeling of drowning due to the fluid in my lungs. My chest rattled with every breath and I could actually hear myself gurgling loudly. I stopped using the anxiety medication and nights again became nightmarish as I was sleeping less and less. Not so much that I was still bothered by things outside of myself (traffic, the state of the world, etc.) as that it was just so difficult to sleep while sitting up, and when I did fall asleep I would wake, desaturated, panicked, and gasping.

In October, in an attempt to at least slow the rate of decline, after a conversation with the librarian, she and I created a book club and invited eight members of the community to join us. And it worked. Although getting there, dragging an oxygen tank around, and then having to talk so much (I also did all of the reading out loud) was occasionally overwhelming, and even though the rest of the year was characterized by continued weight loss and physical decline, some part of me began to flourish again. January 3, 2013—Overcast and cold all day. I can't remember what I did other than go to the library, but looking back it doesn't seem to have been very productive.

New travel book, *Mani*, by Patrick Leigh Fermor (1958). I loved Lawrence Durrell's books about his travels in Greece, and hope this one is interesting.

January 16, 2013—Overcast morning and I gurgled and wheezed through it, but a beautifully clear afternoon and evening. Cold for two days and nights, and I've been occasionally slightly worried about how low the temperatures can unexpectedly drop here. The record lows for January and February during the past century are almost frightening. When it happens again, there will be no unfrozen water.

Reading *The White Nile*, by Alan Moorehead. Interesting, but especially for its wealth of bibliographical resources. Richard Francis Burton—19th century British explorer. I have to read everything he wrote.

January 23, 2013—Very nice day. I might feel some better. Some wind, but warm and nice. I missed the best part of the sunset. As soon as I got home the sky exploded in color, and it was too late to head out again.

Reading *The Blue Nile*, by Alan Moorehead. Great book.

February 10, 2013—Finished the travel book about Greece, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, by Henry Miller, and it was outstanding. I really don't know anything more about the particulars of the landscape than I already knew, because he doesn't elaborate on those things, but thanks to him I experienced wonderful feelings about the place.

The book is so provoking that I've experienced complex, vivid dreams related to it for the past week. Night before last I seemed to dream all night about trying to describe into a word processor the qualities of different types and degrees of light as they occurred (no typing, just thinking—and I know it was a word

processor because of the way I could delete and edit). Blinding light, shafts of light, rays of light—with and without motes, and clusters of twinkling lights.

February 22, 2013—We've had three days of high humidity, ½ inch of rain, and some hail. Very cold and I can barely move.

Reading *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. There are five volumes covering the period from 1915 to four days before she drowned herself in 1941. Interesting woman. I've been thinking about her suicide, and it must take some tenacity to hold yourself under water until you die. I wish she had been less unhappy about life because otherwise she had a very fine mind.

February 28, 2013—Just received Volume 3 of Virginia Woolf's diaries. Volume 1 is good and I've been reading it slowly while waiting for the others to show up. I now have volumes 1, 3, and 5, and am waiting for 4 to show up. I've been advised that the library won't be able to obtain Volume 2.

March 3, 2013—Nice day but I think the pollen level is increasing. Very difficult to breathe.

March 14, 2013—I sense my entire past as all there, all of the time, just over my shoulder. I do still (or can if necessary) maintain an awareness of chronology, but the data swim in a big pool, and sometimes vast amounts of it burst through and flood me, and sometimes I have to fish for a long period of time in order to find anything that I am wanting or needing.

My social/cultural self has undergone extreme transformation through the years. From relatively bland at birth, to assertive and curious as perception developed, to my current bundle of poses and masks that sometimes feels smooth and normal, but is mostly just lurching about on stilts, while blindfolded, in traffic. I don't sense that my psyche (which is definitely distinct from and seemingly independent of my social/cultural identity) has aged at all. I used to wonder why the police didn't wear sneakers. Something that would allow them to run faster and jump higher. It just seemed ridiculous to wear the boots they were wearing and try to do those things well. Later on I realized they wore boots because it's the costume that counts. Appearance is the most important element. No one really wants to run, and no one really wants to have to chase someone who is running. It's all scripted.

If we didn't still eat meat and reflexively smash insects and rodents and snakes we might have already lost our dominant position in the food chain.

My bed is right by the east windows in my living room, and since I can hardly get around now and spend most of my time in it and reading, my main contact with outdoors is through those windows. And that has become a nightmare.

The view I have is of emaciated horses in the pasture next door. The people have three wild horses they adopted, but not enough sense to feed and water them every day. In fact, the people sometimes stay away for as much as a week, and the water barrels are turned over by the end of the first day.

The horses have eaten every blade of grass, weed, and stick in the pasture and I am churning with anger. This has been going on for months and the police are sick of my calling to complain. Maybe I'm over reacting, but I think they are under reacting. Just like when they ignore littering.

Our bodies are surrounded by morphic fields, extensions of ourselves, and all tied to the mass subconscious—which explains that strange feeling we get when someone stares at us.

March 19, 2013—Overcast for most of the day and cooler, but not so cold. I was lethargic and floated.

April 4, 2013—A beautiful, warm day, but I'm afraid to attempt to move much.

I am reading and loving the book *Zanzibar*, by Richard Burton. He was such an explorer, and so thorough in his observations. A great man among an entire century of great men.

April 7, 2013—Nice day. High pollen and dust levels, and still very difficult to breathe, but I don't really need to hurry for any reason.

April 11, 2013—I read off and on all day, but was mostly a vegetable. I struggled for air whenever I moved and felt numb when I thought about that. I think the day outside might have been nice and the sunset was great.

Reading *The Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia and the Sword Hunters of the Hamran Arabs*, by Sir Samuel W. Baker (London; 1867). Excellent book. Excellent man and a very brave and loyal wife.

April 13, 2013—Not at the 'gasping for breath' point yet, but almost. There are lots of particles in the air. Beautiful day otherwise.

May 1, 2013—Very strange days. A record high of 95 degrees yesterday, but a predicted low of 24 degrees tonight with a 50 percent chance of snow. I keep trying to be more active and at least get out of bed.

May 5, 2013—Beautiful day. I'm almost immobile from something in the air.

May 6, 2013—Cool, overcast, and sprinkling this morning. Still gasping for air. I need a better relationship with humidity and pollen. Have to work on that.

May 7, 2013—I'm still in some sort of weird physical state, not quite sure whether I feel terrible, or just different. When I'm honest with myself, the truth is that no matter what it feels like, it's definitely better. I probably haven't gained capacity, but I've learned some new behaviors that seem to have initiated improvement. Anyway, I sort of drift during the day, unable to move a lot, but I don't feel so uncomfortable with it.

June 6, 2013—Beautiful day, but so humid that I can hardly move. A chance of more storms tonight.

July 10, 2013—A beautiful, hot day. The humidity is diminishing, and the plains are beautiful from the rain. Pollen is a bit of a deterrent, but I'm starting to get outside again.

July 12, 2013—The days are beautiful. Am on the verge of gurgling when I breathe but am managing to hold it at bay.

July 15, 2013—Another storm moved in yesterday evening. First a wall of dirt, then rain. It was overcast for most of the day, but this morning was one of the best I've had in awhile. I didn't become congested until the temperature went up this afternoon. Very nice day.

July 18, 2013—Clearing, but still humid and fairly cool. When I woke up it was raining, and has stayed muggy all day. I feel sort of worn out from battling the moisture, but better than last time.

July 20, 2013—It's very nice outside but I can hardly move. Glad I have windows.

Had to finally go to the doctor. I haven't slept in a while from fear of the panic and gasping that I wake up to when I do go to sleep. I can't lay down without feeling like I'm drowning, so I lean back against a huge pile of pillows and doze off and on. I'm using more than the prescribed maximum of four vials of duoneb per day. Maybe even six or eight.

I'm so weak that I can hardly get around so we have moved my bed nearer the bathroom, which at least got me away from the view of the starving horses. It takes me nearly all day to get through a shower, and I don't have the energy to eat. Still trying to struggle through books in order to keep from dwelling on the other. Sometimes it works.

The trip out to take pictures was a mistake. It's taken me almost an hour to recover and get my oxygen level back up. I'm suddenly so hoarse that I suspect pollen is the irritating agent.

August 2, 2013—It freaks me out to go outside, but I lose ground staying in all the time. I actually can only thrive if I contend with the elements. Otherwise I'll be trapped in sterility.

August 5, 2013—Can't remember when I went to the doctor, but I sat through an intense lecture, and then came home with antibiotics, anxiety medication, and an oxygen generator. The anxiety medication did put me to sleep and I slept all night, but I hated the way I felt the next day. I do feel better with the supplemental oxygen, but nothing has really changed. I just feel more at ease with my current state of deterioration. Ambivalent.

August 12, 2013—Lots of clouds and a muggy feel. Worst day I have had in a while. I think I went to sleep sometime after midnight. Woke abruptly at 3:30 am aware that I was about to experience a breathing crisis. The episode lasted until after 4:00 am and I have felt groggy and uncomfortable all day. I think I've napped some, but can't be sure. Haven't eaten very much and have used oxygen all day plus a greater than usual amount of duoneb. My pulse is high but my blood oxygen level isn't bad as long as I don't move at all. I desaturate quickly when I do move.

Reading *The Maharajahs*, by John Lord.

Feel the need to exercise, but first I would have to be able to get out of bed. I would like to sleep, but hate

the thought of using a prescription medication. Called the aromatherapist and she said that I am likely responding to the excess mold and mildew that this moisture is causing.

Just received the book Coryatt's *Crudities*, by Thomas Coryatt. Possibly the first travel guide ever published. Very old, very primitive, very interesting. I'll read it later.

August 13, 2013—3:30 am. Respiratory crisis. Sweating, gasping for air, and panic. Was finally able to use the lung flute and it seemed to help. It is much easier on me physically (and mentally) to expel small amounts of the congestion mucus at a time. Large amounts restrict my already compromised breathing and lead to more panic.

I slept for maybe a couple of hours and felt some better. It's been very humid all day and again I'm on the verge of extreme congestion. Not enough to be completely uncomfortable, but too much to relax. Have started drinking the vitamin infused, high protein drink that invalids use. Also trying to eat more often, and including meat and vegetables.

August 15, 2013—Everyone else is gone today, and I am very nervous about being alone, which got me to thinking about how I handled it in the past.

Simple answer—isolation.

For the first two years of this disease I shut myself up in the house and had no contact with anyone. I didn't worry about dogs and cats (I didn't have any), or even care who came on the property. I didn't look beyond my yard and rarely left the house.

Since then I have gradually accumulated more responsibility. First, the two kittens when I moved out of the RV and into this house. Almost at the same time I took on responsibility for my youngest sister's dogs when she is gone to work. Those two obligations actually took up most of the extra hours in my day for quite a while, and any extra time I had I tried to spend with my younger sister who was also struggling with emphysema, and help take care of her dogs and cats. Even though she didn't come outside at all and was more immobile than I am, I didn't realize how much her presence kept me from worrying about the safety and security of her animals (which my youngest sister incorporated into her family when our sister died in December.)

I also have to remember that just caring for the two kittens was almost too much for me. I would sometimes struggle to get them fed and their litter boxes emptied twice a day. At that time I was still going next door to stay with the dogs nearly every day. I would mostly read and sleep and just be present.

Then when our sister died it felt like I inherited a burden that she seems to have been carrying—primary concern for her animals. Even though our niece now lives in her house, and the animals love and depend on her, she lacks the capacity to hold and maintain total responsibility for them and their environment.

In fact, she attracts disaster, and this is a very real phenomenon. I suspect that her life-force is so

scattered and unfocused that it is essentially without a guardian perimeter. Most people who have fenced yards can naturally assimilate the construct into their functioning conscious, but she is unable. There are no lines or barriers behind which she feels generally safe and beyond which she perceives insecurity and chaos. It's all chaos to her.

When they called this morning and said they would be gone I had a moment of panic and my blood oxygen level dropped. I thought, 'What will I do if—the dogs escape; someone invades the property; anything goes wrong at one of the houses?' One part of my mind was thinking about my brother, but I looked toward his house and his front door was closed, causing me to remember that he doesn't feel well and is having trouble sleeping at night. He won't be available for an emergency.

Call the police is my only choice—and not a bad one. I could go outside if I absolutely have to, but my condition right now is such a delicate balance between maintaining and a complete crash, and I don't want to tip it toward more extreme congestion. I have to find a way to not feel so overwhelmed and desaturate over things like this. Just these thoughts have activated my autonomic nervous system, initiated an adrenaline dump, and eaten up what oxygen I have managed to accumulate.

I am surrounded by neighbors who pay no attention to their animals and whose properties are constantly invaded by strangers, yet they never exhibit the slightest concern (until something happens—and then they fall apart.)

I constantly walk a tightrope of anxious anticipation and consequently don't experience drastic surges when something happens (because it's all a drastic surge for me). I need a better method. A passive, non-emotional awareness that is able to act or react when necessary. I know that this will require a retraction of some parts of sensory scanning and the hyper-productive thoughts that accompany it. (If \_\_\_\_ happens, then I'll \_\_\_\_.) Maybe I can track back to my emergency services training. At my best I was able to wait with complete detachment, yet instantly and productively respond at the first sign of a critical event (a 911 call). I didn't hover over the phone playing and replaying possible disaster scenarios. I ignored the phone until it rang, and the radio until someone called in, and then let reflexes and training take over. And I was always remarkable. The operators who stayed worried were the ones who had problems.

August 16, 2013—Very uncomfortable night. Used the lung flute, did huff breathing, and used the nebulizer every hour or so. Also supplemental oxygen.

August 17, 2013—Rough night. A tremendous storm started just before midnight, and although the humidity level in my house remained low because of the dehumidifier, breathing was stressful (something to do with barometric pressure?). Up every two hours all night clearing my lungs. In between I remember having very strange dreams, but still felt fairly rested when I got up for the day. It has taken work to remain stable, and vestiges of anxiety are ready to surface and take over.

Went outside at noon to help my sister build a cat habitat, in spite of the humidity. I actually can't do much more than watch her and offer suggestions (it took three hours for me to put ten screws in the

structure), but I seem to feel better. My blood oxygen level registered 96 when I came back inside. How is that possible? Something weird is going on with my body.

August 18, 2013—Woke at midnight and had taken the nasal cannula off in my sleep. I didn't feel congested, but was still disturbed by how randomly my body behaves. I always have to work at not being suspicious about feeling better.

August 20, 2013—3:00 am Nearly messed up. Winning at sports has completely distorted our concept regarding winning at living. We lose sight of the fact that in life there are no set distances, no periods, and no quarters. That the race only ends at death. It doesn't matter if I am passed on the course; it doesn't matter if someone else gains control of the ball. It isn't the cumulative scores, or even the cumulative wins. It's only right now.

I woke at 1:00 am, and although I was uncomfortable, thought, "I'm fine. No need to try and clear my lungs. I'm doing well." But I'll never be casually fine again and there will always be a need to clear my lungs. By 3:00 am I was almost too congested to find the energy to try. And at that point it's almost too scary to even try. There is something nerve wracking about trying to expel thick, sticky mucus through a constricted air passage.

August 21, 2013—Went outside to watch progress on the cat habitat but could barely remain conscious. Constantly gasping for air. All of the meters I am watching say very low humidity, but the air feels thick. Possibly dust, pollen, or smoke. Or all three. When I got back inside I checked and pollen, dust, and dander are at peak highs today.

The lung flute seems to be my go to tool for relief. I finally watched a YouTube video and saw that I was doing it entirely wrong. Once I made the adjustment, it is sort of remarkable. Placebo effect or not, when I use it I am able to clear up a lot of the immediate congestion.

August 22, 2013—It's been months since I was able to sleep, undisturbed, all night. I wake every two hours at least, and sometimes every hour, and have to find a way to make myself comfortable enough to go back to sleep. Usually I use the lung flute and nebulizer and concentrate on calming down.

August 25, 2013—High humidity and very congested. Slept very little and was very uncomfortable, but stable as long as I sat up. I leaned against pillows stacked against the wall at the head of my bed and was able to doze some.

August 27, 2013—The days are blending in a frenzy of discomfort. Humidity is up and down. Pollen and dust are fluctuating but mostly up. Very difficult to breathe if I try to move, and when I do I am so concentrated on that that everything around me becomes flashes of images and colors. So, other than going to the bathroom, what's the point.

I did finish the complete Penrod series by Booth Tarkington: Penrod; Penrod and Sam; and, Penrod Jashber. Difficult to laugh (which leads to uncontrollable coughing, which leads to gasping and panic), but

so amusing.

I rarely write about it, but for years now I have kept the laptop on my bed and periodically throughout the day and night I search the internet with multiple engines for everything about emphysema. And then I pursue anything that seems even remotely likely. Some things are obviously scams, some are obviously harmful, most are just more questions (the chat places and forums for people with emphysema are just sad—wails of despair and no relief in sight). Occasionally I order pills, or tonics, or books, or, the lung flute, but except for the essential oils (which mostly seem to assist with meditation and calming me down), some herbal teas (elderflower, bear root, mullein), and, the lung flute (which, for whatever reason, does something that seems helpful. But I don't know that I really believe it emits a note of the exact pitch necessary to dislodge mucus.), nothing else has been worthwhile.

And occasionally I come across gems such as this: “Can the mind really heal the body? The biggest predictor of longevity is psychological resiliency—being able to roll with the punches that life throws at us.” I don't know where I found it, but I jotted it down because it gave me hope.

August 28, 2013—My journal is just page after page of humidity, pollen, and dust level measurements, barometric pressures, temperatures, blood oxygen levels, pulse rates, and descriptions of how my lungs feel—taken over and over throughout the day, the week, the month. Another obsession, but not as weird as some I have weathered during the past seven years.

The only down side is that I am beginning to suspect that rather than using them to predict a possible breathing crisis onset, I might be using the information to trigger breathing crises. I sometimes wonder if not knowing about and being so aware of meteorological changes might result in fewer breathing problems. Then I promptly forget that and check the gauges.

I have difficulty remaining in the moment—what I have and what I can manage (to a degree). The entire time I was meditating I had to counter the impulse to spring up, startled and anxious about some vague ‘What if?’

In view of all of this I need to consider—that although humidity levels are still very high, my blood oxygen level is higher than it has been in a while. Maybe this is related to my eating more, and more nutritious food, and deliberately choosing to relax when I feel myself spiraling toward anxiety.

Just finished the remaining three of the four volumes of Freya Stark's autobiography again; Traveller's Prelude, Beyond Euphrates, and, Dust in the Lion's Paw. Before that I read The Journey's Echo, which is a compilation of her work, and the journal her elderly mother, Flora Stark, kept while imprisoned by the fascists—Italian Diary. They arrested her and her equally elderly male friend from their home in Asolo, Italy, in reaction to Freya's work in the Middle East for British Secret Service. A beautiful book.

August 31, 2013—The humidity is lower, but I'm still out of sorts. Maybe I just complain too much. I've been a wreck all afternoon. On the verge of panic.

September 1, 2013—Another physically intense day but I am feeling better as the evening unfolds.

‘We are shaped by our thoughts, We become what we think. When the mind is pure, Joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.’ The Buddha

Thoughts like this, though simple, are very comforting when I feel the worst.

Can hardly go outside, but continue exercising by walking in place. It’s something. I actually drag myself out every evening to take sunset pictures. Sometimes my level of consciousness is debatable, but I take back roads outside of town and am rarely near any traffic.

September 7, 2013—My exercise is in terms of steps rather than time and distance. And those steps are taken in place, so I wonder how beneficial it really is in terms of musculature, but I know that it is very beneficial psychologically.

Feel groggy and sleepy today. This has become common and builds through the afternoon. It seems to be related to the heat. The grogginess sort of bums me out. I feel a sadness lingering at the edge of my awareness, and if I give in to it, random, potentially sad things pop up (abandoned and neglected animals, my sister’s death). This makes me suspect that the initiating mechanism is something biochemical and that it opportunistically feeds on whatever is available.

The air seems as dense as water. Almost feel unable to extract oxygen from it. Eating much better than I ever have. More conscious about the nutritional value and amounts, but at times the effort seems pointless. I just get tired of struggle.

Read Fort Phil Kearny; An American Saga, by Dee Brown. Enjoyed it.

So why am I freaking out? Why the anxiety? Fear of suffocation.

But in some ways I’m doing better than I was when I could sleep soundly. Actually I haven’t slept soundly or through the night for a long time. And sometimes when I feel the worst I sleep the best. I’m only able to lie down for a few minutes before bolting upright in panic. Nearly anything out of the ordinary can send me spinning in panic. Being left on the place alone, feeling responsible for all of the animals, starts a building panic.

And all of those things have one thing in common. Fear. I fear what might happen, and I fear that I will be unable to react appropriately. When I perceive anything as wrong, bad, or out of the ordinary, my physiological response immediately drains me of oxygen reserves, leaving my cells starving, my respiratory system over reacting, and my mind in panic. I fear that I can’t function in an emergency, so I wait in terror for an emergency to occur so I can fail.

Every strange sound, every strange car, every unknown or unrecognized person, anything outside of my insulated routine, opens the adrenaline valves and makes me ready to run. But the reality is that I can only shake in place until I defeat myself.

And especially at night, when I can't see catastrophe coming from a distance—or far enough away so that I can fall apart before I even identify the new and strange thing, I sleep, or wait, with my metaphorical hand on the metaphorical valve. The slightest disturbing thought will cause me to open it full force.

My existence is becoming a sequence of panicked, fearful reactions, whether warranted or not. I've created a surveillance zone that extends as far as I can see and hear, and respond suspiciously to every sound or movement.

How do I change this?

For one thing, I am hyper-attentive—constantly scanning my horizons for disturbance or danger. Prepared to panic and amplify anything I notice, but not prepared to react appropriately—and this is where the sense of impending doom comes from. That I am constantly expecting a threat or emergency and feel completely incapable of responding appropriately or well.

Reel those senses in, maybe by increments. Stop worrying about the roadway, and concentrate only on my yard for a while. I am not healthy enough to police the town, or even the neighborhood. Truthfully, not even my yard. The interior of my house is a strain on my limited abilities, so forget about the planet for now!

Strange noises, low, almost inaudible intermittent sounds coming from my kitchen, bothered me all night. This morning I figured out that it was the air conditioner, which instigated another type of discomfort, when really, neither of those things warrant much attention, and certainly not full-blown panic. (As I was writing that down, the television show froze on an image, some sort of channel problem, and I instantly became anxious.)

This appears to be getting out of hand, and all I can do is watch as it flings me about.

Am I over reacting because for so much of my life I under reacted? I never paid attention to the state of my health until I developed this condition, then I began monitoring everything outside of myself, and now I am trying to scan to the ends of the universe. The outside is not looking in at me but I have allowed and even encouraged my conscious awareness to run amuck outside of myself as if it is doing something necessary, and effective.

The most obvious clue is how I just stopped eating and moving, but amplified my scanning of the world external to myself. Another clue is that although I do love the animals, I have been paying them only lip service in my madness.

That strange popping sound again and I want to freak out. Why? Am I in danger? Is something else in danger? Am I a bad or inept person if I just relax until whatever might happen happens? Is it mechanical, is it animal, is it metaphysical? It doesn't matter—until it matters.

Did it frighten me so when my body broke for no apparent reason that since that day I've been struggling

more with fear than with my deteriorating health? (Actually there were probably very good reasons. I was never very healthy to begin with, and then I never took very good care of myself.)

Lack of health is the issue, but I seem to have made it incidental. Rather than really engage and respond to the components of my unhealthiness, I've cast my conscious awareness into oblivion. (Dump a baby into a wilderness and it will just cry and run from scary thing to scary thing.)

All of this is deadly overkill. Think about it. What is the impending danger? Why the fear and fight or flight response? I have created some bad habits.

Took a few minutes to center myself and establish calm. This is going to take effort, because I am so ready to flee. My body is damaged, but it isn't yet completely destroyed and with work it should be able to function sufficiently well for some time. Because in reality, although I've done it no real good through the years, I've also done it no real damage. (I have never used alcohol, or hard drugs, and I smoked very little.)

I need to just start here, by anchoring my awareness firmly into my body. Somehow, from the beginning some part of me has had enough sense to exercise. Now that I have started eating again, I can fortify some of the not so damaged parts, which should in turn support the more damaged ones.

September 16, 2013—Eat, exercise, struggle, and I am uncomfortable. An elevated blood oxygen level is so strange that my mind reacts negatively to it and suspects that something is wrong. My first impulse is to panic, when actually, I should be elated. I don't know how to respond to something so unique, so I fall apart.

Read an article regarding de novo growth of new alveoli in adults. It has apparently been observed in one person—an athletic woman who vigorously exercises and is a yoga expert. But then I also read about a Buddhist monk who lives a very active life even though he is missing all of one lung and part of the other.

Swirling in the same pattern. Exhausted but unable to fall asleep. Part of this could be that I stopped using the prescription (and refuse to ever use it again—what a horrible experience), but the other parts are equally disturbing.

What is keeping me awake right now?

Worry—about the animals. I feel responsible for them when everyone is gone. But they are here now, so what prevents me from falling asleep? Adrenaline overdose? The pent up energy of staying awake until they got back?

Guilt—again, about the animals. I feel guilty about how little I actually interact with them.

Weather—I watch humidity level, barometric pressure, weather channel, internet weather sites, clouds, wind, etc., so intently that I am almost chained to the information.

Maybe I should reconsider the anxiety medication. No.

September 18, 2013—Exercised to tiredness, if not to exhaustion. Have a different feeling about tonight. Maybe the mania is disrupted, at least for now. I feel more relaxed than I have in a while even though the elements I previously thought were causing my discomfort are still in place. Maybe I'm starting to believe that they are not the real issues.

Also, I've been reviewing previous manic episodes, all as weird as this one. Maybe I went through them easier because I was so isolated, or maybe they really weren't easily navigated at all.

September 20, 2013—Woke several times in the night, very uncomfortable, and finally got up and fell asleep on the sofa. Struggling to get around and make breakfast (high humidity), but don't feel especially terrible.

Why can't I fall asleep at night? I do have a degree of anxiety related to falling asleep at the 'appropriate' time, but don't think it is deep seated. I'm not helplessly floundering in the throes of some terrible mental issue. Even the physical weakness I first ascribed it to is a stretch. I know that I am physically weak, but struggle should be against the physical condition itself, not against thoughts (although perhaps I have been trying to ram square intellectual pegs into round philosophical holes.)

Something else is going on. And maybe I need to be awake for it. I do feel guilty about sleeping late, or during the day, but that is because I feel responsible for the place when everyone else is gone or busy. And all in all, I put way too much into that.

Right now, at rest, and without supplemental oxygen, my blood oxygen level is 94 and my pulse is 84. If I work with it, I can raise the blood oxygen level to 95 and lower my pulse to 82, and this is very significant.

Something seems to be occurring within my body at night when I am asleep, and my brain seems to be trying to keep me away from whatever that is. My conscious awareness resists and struggles, which leads to daytime struggles and so on to catastrophe.

Right now I am tired from being awake all day, and actually struggled through the day, barely able to breathe well enough to move around the house. I also feel an odd sort of guilt about still being awake.

Some of the older articles I have read about inflammatory diseases assume that stress mediators, including adrenaline, are potential regulators of the inflammatory process and inhibit inflammation, but some of the newer information suggests that the opposite might be true, that adrenaline might either influence or contribute to inflammation. I suspected that long ago, and it still trapped me. My primary movement now is based on adrenaline dumps (which I can instigate at will). I determine an objective, build tension, and in a coordinated burst, fling myself forward on a boost of adrenaline. My arms and legs are covered with scabs and bruises from running into walls, doors, and furniture in the process.

Reading *The Plains of the Great West* (1877), by Richard Irving Dodge, and *The Prairie and the Sea*

(1905), by William A. Quayle. Both very interesting books.

September 23, 2013—Our sister Linda's birthday. We didn't have any kind of service for her because she was adamant that we not. It was so important to her that we had her cremated, fended off questions from the public (mostly avoided them), and immediately resumed our regular routines. But that has been sort of haunting to all of us. We all feel that we need to do something to honor that she lived, and mark that she no longer does.

This morning I went to the cemetery with my youngest brother and sister and watched them refurbish our mother's grave. Then we came home and had a kind of celebratory lunch in honor of Linda's birthday. We chatted casually with each other, but not about her. Maybe it wasn't necessary. In the afternoon we went back to the cemetery with the thought of having some sort of ceremony for her at our mother's grave. The wind was intense, so we didn't sprinkle any of her ashes. Our youngest sister made a nice statement, hoping that Linda is in a good place, then played a beautiful song.

I am so tired right now that I don't know how I feel. Maybe relieved that we did something. My strongest sense is that we are all deeply connected, and always will be. And relief that we did remember her, with love.

September 24, 2013—Ate three good meals today. Slept well last night. Woke several times in the night but went right back to sleep. Thinking about moving my bed into the bedroom again. Closer to the bathroom, which I sometimes have difficulty getting to, and also fewer windows and darker. The living room floods with light as soon as the sun starts coming up.

September 26, 2013—The quality of my life has been diminishing so rapidly that of course I've felt strange—out of sorts, and anxious. Actually I'm becoming more restricted and more restrictive. Getting out is not the biggest issue—or maybe it is.

Progress is an opening and expanding thing, and just moving through space is not that. I need activity, not just movement. And it would be a shock to my system, but so is the other. So is everything.

My youngest sister is my best example. She is relentlessly active. Working, building, creating, transforming.

I'm eating much better. The past two days are questionable, but the past two months are quite a change. And actually, the questionable part about the past two days is that I haven't logged the meals. Maybe I'm established in the habit enough that I don't need to describe the meals and count the calories and protein. I have established a pattern, and just like now, I woke up feeling hungry. I need to immediately get up and eat when that happens. More important, I need to stay close to the 2,000 calorie with 60 grams of protein per day instruction.

And this thing of logging all of my pictures each day and then never looking at the logs again. Part of the reason is so I can post them more easily, but maniacally saving the messy logs does not feel healthy. It

feels like hoarding.

It's okay to sleep when I'm sleepy and be awake when I'm not, no matter what the hour. Why am I having such issues with that?

I have always been comfortable with each minute, and maintained a sense of pleasant expectation about the coming moments, but sometimes I feel the looming presence of a monotonous complacency. A state of moving because I fear not moving rather than because I love movement. That attitude affects me and whatever else the ripples from it contact—like spreading a disease. And although it might not dominate an environment, it still infects enough to diminish local quality.

There have always been down times, but I have loved my life much more, and more deeply, than not. That shouldn't change even with catastrophic organ damage. I have been breathing better lately, and have been rebuilding after the summer meltdown, but I seem to be using the extra oxygen to become more fearful rather than to expand my joy in living. Every day I throw away valuable seconds indulging in dread. Negative speculation amplifying a vague sense of impending disaster or doom. That isn't me. Well, apparently it is, but it isn't what I want to be.

I still love this place. And so what about the influx of strange new people. In many ways they are much easier to live with than the strange old people were. Meth-heads and idiots just happen to be among them, but that's every place now. They don't rule the world, and don't really ever last anywhere for very long.

Reading *Agents of Vega and Other Stories*, by James H Schmitz. What a great science fiction writer.

October 3, 2013—The past few days have been difficult.

The weather is changing significantly. The heat of summer is slowly fading and fall is moving in. I am often thoroughly congested, but able to clear it. My thoughts are a little out of balance, but maybe not so much as they were. I seem to be able to more easily discard the negative, but am still bothered that it so frequently appears—like unexpected gusts of wind.

October 9, 2013—Our first book club meeting. I know all of the people who have been invited to participate, but am still nervous. I haven't been out in public in many years and am not sure how they will react to me. The first book I have chosen is one of my favorites, *The Valleys of the Assassins*, by the wonderful British explorer Freya Stark. She was brilliant, an excellent observer and writer, and this book about her journey on foot and by donkey into Persia to find the old stronghold of the cult of the Assassins is a remarkable story of courage and determination. I hope they enjoy it.

I need this very much. I've become so reclusive that I go for long periods of time without speaking, and haven't invited anyone into my house in years. (My sister and brother come over nearly every day—but I don't invite them. I just don't lock my doors and they come right in.) I know that if I socialize I will perk up in general. Too many people freak me out, but this will be six other people, and it seems like a comfortable number.

October 20, 2013—Reading *Unknown Mexico*, by Carl Lumholtz (1902)

Haven't felt well for several days. Fifth day of antibiotics. My ear infection seems to be clearing but the chest congestion isn't (well, maybe today was some better). My blood oxygen level has been in the low 80s for the past few days, when it usually only drops to that level at night.

Did ten minutes of aerobic walking in place tonight. It's been a few days since I attempted any exercise but can't remember how many and haven't noted it in my journal.

October 24, 2013—No exercise last night. Could hardly move.

Reading *The Suppressed Memoir of Mabel Dodge Luhan; Sex, Syphilis, and Psychoanalysis in the Making of Modern American Culture*, by Lois Palken Rudnick. More matter-of-fact than as slimy as the title sounds. I still think Mrs. Luhan was a very interesting woman. Very intelligent, she wrote well, and I admire her spirit. And of course she omitted lurid details from her autobiography.

November 14, 2013—Woke up feeling better today. That was nice. And I slept very well last night. Also nice. Was able to complete a partial exercise routine before I went to bed. I still woke up desaturated after a few hours of sleep, but it wasn't as intense as it has been, and none of the recent experiences are as bad as the ones before I started using supplemental oxygen. Those were near death experiences.

November 17, 2013—Feel better today, but everything seems slightly off.

Reading *Death Valley in '49; The Autobiography of a Pioneer*, by William Lewis Manly (1894).

November 18, 2013—And a little better today. The slightly off feeling is gone and I could have slept a little longer. The day feels exciting and new. The turning leaves are beautiful and there is no wind.

December 30, 2013—*The Law of Attraction* You can only attract more of what you already have. So if you want something, think about how having it would make you feel. Then learn to nurture those very same feelings now.

How would it feel to be healthy—if my lungs worked properly and well? Happy, alert, active, energetic, clear, clean.

Reading *A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold (1949)

Even the most brilliant humans who have ever existed were barely, precariously, clinging by their fingernails to some sort of ability and stability, and they knew it. The rest of us ride through life on the intellectual and technological innovations those few have been able to envision and create or produce.

We are estranged from our actual reality of being by a social/ intellectual construct that is dubious at best, and completely wrong at worst. Rather than realize and appreciate that, 'Yes. A human did discover ways to make fire at will, but it wasn't me.' or, 'Yes. A human did discover how to harness electricity, but it wasn't me.', all of us assume the mantle of 'Those who discovered how to make fire and harness

electricity!

Everyone knows about biology, but few people really believe it. The same with physics, geology, chemistry, history, art, and so on. We memorize, but we don't assimilate. The numbers, and observations, and theories are vaguely interesting to us, but we continue to behave as if we have no clue that they are actually about us.

December 31, 2013—Last day of 2013. Odd that I feel it more this year, and not in a bad way. Rather, an uplifting thing. I even spontaneously thought about New Year's resolutions this morning. Something I have never thought about before. I always found them to be ridiculous, but now I think they might be comforting.

Looking for something positive about my breathing, and I have decided to be happy that it isn't very much worse than usual today.

Reading *The Dollmaker*, by Harriette Arnow.

## Chapter 10: 2014

2014 was both my worst and my best year ever. The first three months were a continuation of the previous eight years and I sank to the lowest point of this experience. I physically struggled through the first two months and part of the third, hardly leaving my bed, and only leaving my house to drag myself out in the evening to take pictures. I was weak, malnourished in mind and body, tethered to an oxygen concentrator, and inhaling rescue medications day and night. I felt hopelessness taking over, and was paralyzed by the thought that my only choice was deciding what to lose next.

Then in March, while blindly clutching at straws, I found at part of what I had been searching for—a simple and easy technique to help me maximize utilization of whatever capacity my lungs still possessed, and disrupt the anxiety, fear, and panic, and neutralize the issues those things created or exacerbated. In essence, I found a program that helped me learn (or maybe remember) the correct way to breathe.

One day during an internet search about breathing disorders I found information about a Russian doctor who developed a method of breathing normalization during the middle part of the last century. Through videos about its use I learned 1) that the part of the mind that regulates physiology is plastic and malleable, and I could influence it and change the way I breathe; and 2) I would then be able to more effectively utilize the breathing capacity my lungs still have in order to maintain the best possible quality of life.

I was highly skeptical at first and would not generally have followed up on it, but through a series of fortunate events, within a week of finding out about the program I located one in this country and had

registered for and paid to take one of the classes. It turned out to be possibly the best investment of my life.

During the lessons, in spite of the tremendous effort required, including the suspension of disbelief, I focused entirely on the process and followed all suggestions and instructions.

But although with the help of the breathing therapist I located the breathing pattern, and after two months of practicing the exercises could reach it almost at will, I would quickly shift back into the damaged breathing patterns and behaviors at the slightest disruption or irregularity, so I needed something else that would enable me to reach that newly discovered state and stay there, and then either take it with me when I moved, or quickly return to it when I got off track.

That something else turned out to be something I already had, the combined exercises, quick fix techniques, obscure therapies, and behaviors I had acquired and been diligently practicing for the previous eight years. I've always been fortunate that way.

Almost in conjunction with the breathing normalization therapy, another positive event occurred. I finally started seeing a lung specialist. I was so incapacitated by the end of 2013 that right after the holiday season was over in 2014 I asked my local care provider to make an appointment with a (or any) nearby Pulmonologist, and in March she had one set for July.

That was soon canceled by the doctor, and when the lady was talking to me about a reschedule date she asked if I was open to seeing a different doctor in the same group since he had an opening in September. I didn't know either doctor and had never heard anything about either one, so I took the September opening, and what a good choice. I connected with the most knowledgeable doctor I have seen since the disease was diagnosed.

January 4, 2014—Cool and cloudy. A semi-rough night. Congested, but I slept fairly well. Today my chest is tight but I am not totally uncomfortable. I've been sitting outside on the swing and reading. Windy, but really sort of nice. I keep getting fragments of positive energy—like I used to feel when I was young and beginning something new or going someplace new. Excited. Expectant. But just fragments.

Reading *Black Tents of Arabia*, by Carl Raswan.

I use essential oils and drink a lung tonic every day, and I log it in a journal, but it has become like drinking water—just something I do.

January 5, 2014—A sort of difficult night, then slow, and gurgling and wheezing all day. Not so bad when I don't move at all.

January 11, 2014—A fairly okay night. One critical breathing event (which happens several times a week now), and a few rough spots early this morning. Sat outside for a while but the wind was too much. Don't feel too congested, but some.

My house is clean (thanks to my sister), and I have great books to read (thanks to the New Mexico State Library books by mail program). Nice day.

Reading *Ice Bound Heights of the Mustagh* (1908), by Fanny Bullock Workman and William Hunter Workman for the second time. An incredible book but so old that it is falling apart as I turn the pages. No way I can read it outside. They are such interesting people, and she is so obnoxiously aristocratic that she is hilarious. I laugh at nearly every page—although the porters and local people she is torturing would hate me for doing so.

Freaking out as it gets toward night. I dread trying to sleep because I dread the breathing crises that wake me in the night.

I have a recurring nightmarish theme of forms of suffocation, and the most prevalent of those dreams is of being trapped under ice (maybe a frozen lake—I never find out). Don't know how I get there, but I am in an air pocket in ice water, and the surface above me is frozen and impenetrable. I breath until the air starts running out and then take off swimming, looking for another pocket of air. I am always in a dilemma of whether to just stay there and accept what happens when the air runs out, or keep searching for more air pockets.

When I finally wake it is sudden and startling. I am always drenched with sweat and gasping for air. And always I have ripped the nasal cannula out and can't find it. This happens several times a week and is terrifying.

January 13, 2014—Very strange day. I mostly felt awful all morning, a little better in the afternoon and evening, and then not so good as the night deepens. My oxygen level has been erratic all day even with supplemental oxygen. In a mental stupor, but still able to enjoy a book. Reading *Helen of Burma*, by Helen Rodriguez. A good book that I found in the free books section when I went to the library for the book club meeting.

January 16, 2014—Rough day after a very rough night. Not every day is a struggle, but a lot of them are. And the nights are mostly horrible. Trying to sleep wears me out. Still, when I look back on previous winters, this one is easier, because of the supplemental oxygen. I remember weeks of gurgling and wheezing every day, and hardly able to move. I still gurgle and wheeze, but movement is easier.

February 2, 2014—Snow last night and this morning. Stuffy and lethargic all day but feel some better. I've been exercising faithfully again after two or three weeks of random attempts. An endless bad loop—I don't feel well so I don't exercise, so I feel worse and still don't exercise, and so on. Difficult to begin again, but doing it anyway.

Reading *My Antonia*, by Willa Cather. I absolutely love all of her books.

March 1, 2014—After exercising every day for most of February, I suddenly crashed. Today is my first exercise in several days and right now is the first time I've taken off the supplemental oxygen in over a

week.

Not sleeping well at night. When I do fall asleep I wake in a panic after only a short period of time, so I never feel rested. I seem to have a panic fueled breathing crisis almost every night.

March 2, 2014—Managed to walk 500 steps in place and lift the weights a few times (only five pounds, but very difficult). I actually felt a little better afterward.

Reading Franny and Zooey, and Raise High the Roof-beam, Carpenters, by J.D. Salinger. I read them when I was young. Still interesting.

March 3, 2014—Very rough night. One nice thing about the supplemental oxygen—what were once episodes of blackness and extreme fear are now only periods of dark gray and mildly frightening. And I recover easier. They were much worse in past years.

March 13, 2014—Summary of Physical Condition:

Can only sleep while sitting up. I almost drown if I try to lie down. I lean against multiple pillows stacked against a sponge wedge that has replaced a headboard on my bed.

Falling asleep is a very difficult process and I wake up four to five times during the night urgently needing to urinate. For that reason my bed has been placed only a few steps from the bathroom, and it's still a major ordeal to make it.

I don't want any company and hate speaking on the phone. Both are too exhausting—and too revealing. I don't want anyone to know how much I have deteriorated. Except for daily visits by my brother and sister, and the book club, my only other social contact is Facebook.

I rarely remove the supplemental oxygen cannula and often worry about the electricity going out.

I generally don't feel completely terrible when I wake for the day, but getting out of bed is a struggle and I have to do it in stages. First I have to build enough strength to sit up. There is a sense of being pressed down by extraordinary gravity and I feel like I weigh a thousand pounds. After sitting up in bed I have to recuperate and gather enough energy to swing my legs onto the floor—then more rest and recovery. Again I have to build the energy for the next move, usually to the bathroom, where I can get a number of things accomplished before I attempt the journey into the living room.

It usually takes me over an hour to finally make it to a chair in the living room, and sometimes that was a poor choice because I immediately have to find enough energy to go back to the bathroom, but usually I fall into a chair and freeze into almost immobility.

I don't have the energy to cook, and sometimes I don't have the energy to eat, but it is available when I do. I keep jars of peanut butter, boxes of crackers, and cases of ensure, and my sister cooks something for me nearly every day.

On good days I alternate between reading and searching the internet for COPD information. I hardly move other than turning the pages of a book or moving a mouse, and those movements are minimal and very stilted—almost controlled spasms rather than something resembling fluid movement.

The only time I really leave the house it to go out at sunset and take pictures. Quite an ordeal actually and I spend a lot of time preparing and conserving energy to be able to make it.

My most ambitious project each day is a shower, and it generally takes most of the day to get through one. The shower itself takes about an hour, but I have to plan, get there, go through it, get dressed, rest and plan some more, and make it to the next place. And all of that together takes most of a morning or most of an afternoon, depending on when I start.

I'm covered with bumps, bruises, and cuts from running into furniture, walls, knobs, etc. My sister bought a shower stool and installed a hand-held sprayer, so I now sit while using the shower, but I can't remember when I've completed a shower without ramming my head into the shower head holder.

I live in the moment, but it's mostly peering up from the bottom of a deep hole. And although supplemental oxygen helps, I see that I'm only rapidly sinking while needing more and more of it as time goes on.

March 15, 2014—Thoughts just prior to the initial consultation with breathing therapist:

Slept fairly comfortably last night, but almost created a fear crisis for myself this morning—'Don't upset what little balance there is.' 'Don't risk anything new.' And most of all, 'Don't poke the monster.'

Other than those, no specific negative thoughts, but a general feeling of impending doom/failure/poor choice.

During the phone call where we set up the consultation, the therapist told me to start practicing breathing through my nose only and I have worked on it since that moment. This morning there were urges to mouth breathe and I had to struggle against them. On the positive side, no congestion. That is very different.

Almost time for the initial consultation. It will take place via Skype. Then I drag myself to the computer with thoughts of 'Is this real? Even if it is, can I do it? Do I have the Energy? The Will?

Before I accept his call I remove the nasal cannula but keep it beside me. Gravity is crushing me and I can't work the muscles of my face. I have a choice. I can either try to talk, or watch him and listen. I can't do both. I don't have the energy. I choose to watch and listen. When he requires an answer, I nod.

The breathing therapist talks nearly the entire time but I'm sold within the first few minutes. He obviously knows what it feels like to have difficulty breathing. He accurately describes many of the things that I "endure," something that none of the medical professionals I have gone to so far have been able to do. I realize that you don't have to be intimately familiar with everything you treat, but they are always very far

off the mark with this disease.

He made a few suggestions to work with before the first formal class: Keep breathing through my nose. Try to not cough, but don't fight the cough, and do a nose pinch after. Relieve chest tension by yawning and stretching. A yawn is not only allowed, they are worth extra credit. Remember that adrenaline is a subtle venom.

The first formal class was set for March 18 at 11:00 am, and he assigned Homework to work on before then; Find a comfortable place with a view and sit and watch the day go by while observing my breathing for at least ½ hour.

Practice gentle walking and movement.

He keeps repeating the words—gentle, smooth, easy, flowing, kindness, gratitude, loving. I'm so impressed.

After the consultation ends I sat in a chair in the living room and observed my breathing while watching the trees blow in the wind and the cumulus clouds build and dissipate. I put the nasal cannula back on not long afterward and kept it on. I might have used less than four vials of albuterol. Sometimes I don't count.

Random things floating through my awareness after the consultation:

I have been in bed for most of almost eight years.

Even outside of that, I am now limited to where I can drag a portable oxygen tank, or the length of the hose connected to the oxygen concentrator.

My life is inundated with a Palpable but Nameless Fear.

I live with constant Tension/Stress. My body is rigid. My physical movements are stiff and jerky.

I seem to exist outside of my body—no synchronized connection; like a very bad video game, constantly making mistakes of over reacting and under reacting.

I have been breathing through my mouth almost constantly.

I have been breathing as deeply as I can.

I hyperventilate almost constantly.

I have to force myself to relax with every breath.

I am always on the verge of Panic.

I fear taking initiative and risking further damage.

I have difficulty bending over.

I have difficulty lifting or carrying almost anything—from a gallon of milk to a book.

Every breath is such an effort that my shoulders hunch and my throat bulges as I inhale.

I can't watch the news. I can't watch anything with open ocean, caves, or anyone or anything trapped or being buried without instantly starting to feel like I'm suffocating. I can't even read books about those things.

It seems that most of my previous attempts at managing my breathing have thrown it completely out of balance.

March 16, 2014—6:00 am Lying in bed observing my breathing for 45 minutes. Very interesting experience.

Realizing that adrenaline saturation sustains an illusion of living. Really, it's just explosions. Movement forced on unwilling and unable limbs, followed by hard crashes. Over and over. Need to rein my awareness into a more manageable perimeter. Trying to learn to relax my diaphragm in multiple positions. This is so comfortable that I hesitate to get up and leave it.

“Not the thing itself, but the sense of other and contrary things, makes reality.” Freya Stark, *The Valleys of the Assassins*, published in 1934 in England.

Shut off oxygen before I got up. 1:15 pm Observed breathing while relaxing for 20 minutes. Went without oxygen for much of the day, but put it on again at night.

March 17, 2014—6:00 am Awake with a slight feeling of chest congestion. I don't feel able to remove the oxygen cannula just yet. Not as startling as yesterday. The wind wasn't blowing and it was difficult to not pay attention to obscure random thoughts. 7:00 am Shut off oxygen concentrator and move to the living room to do the observation exercise. Relax, and watch out the window.

March 18, 2014—Beginning of Classes—First session with therapist:

This was the first of eight, approximately two hour sessions with the therapist, and it was excellent. The preliminary things he showed me during the consultation have turned out to be very helpful, and were actually necessary building blocks for what we did today.

Breathe through my nose. What a novel concept, and I always assumed that I was, at all times. When I began observing myself it turned out that I was breathing through my mouth more than fifty percent of the time, even with the nasal cannula in.

The 'relax and observe my breathing' exercise has been very helpful and informative.

The first thing he did in the session was motivate me with stories, metaphors, analogies, and aphorisms (and I know how those work). Then he had me get what I regard as a very uncomfortable kitchen chair (hard surface and edges making it difficult to slouch), and sit in what I regard as an uncomfortable

manner (good posture and no slouching).

When I was sitting in the correct position he instructed me on how to perform the breathing exercises. They are simple, and involve taking slow, rhythmic, shallow breaths using the diaphragm, maintaining that until it is a steady pattern, and then pausing at the end of an exhalation. The first breath pause for two seconds was almost beyond me. At the end of two seconds I collapsed, gasping and struggling to recover.

He was neither surprised nor concerned and guided me to the understanding that perfecting the posture, and then maintaining slow, rhythmic, shallow breathing, and pausing the breath for steadily increasing lengths of time, is the way I will retrain my brain to normalize my breathing. (Discard my current chaotic and ineffective breathing pattern—which is the main source of much of my discomfort.) I actually understand what he means, and about using relaxed observation periods for making adjustments and fine tuning.

The rest of the session was again supportive and motivational: Suggestions about eating, suggestions for relaxation, suggestions for creating the best atmosphere for this process to work.

He then gave me an assignment for the next week, which will fill each entire day so I will require solitude. Three sessions of breathing exercises of ten repetitions with two and four second breath holds each day. Then play around with six second holds if I feel like it. The rest of the time, relax and observe my breathing, start eliminating bad habits, and control my environment.

I feel enthusiastic and confident at the end. Stop doing violence to my lungs. Already I am deciding to stop using the lung flute for now.

When I begin a movement and sense an issue starting, don't push forward into a crisis. Just to what? Pick something up, or cross a room? Look out a window?—those aren't that important.

I can easily find too little and too much, but just right is difficult to come by. I understand now (this immediate instant), and speak of it often, but I have avoided it for a while. Aware of it but constantly maneuvering to stay away from it. I flee into chaos if it comes near me on its own.

“My depression, My emphysema, My heart condition”, etc. Catering to the affliction? Giving it attention and credibility. Our thoughts create our reality? Why not “My stable state, My productive breathing, My strong vital heart”?

March 19, 2014—Unable to sleep all night without oxygen. Had an odd event at about 12:00 am, and put it on. Took it off at 5:00 am, and dozed until 7:00. Sat up, and went through the exercises immediately afterward.

Did three sets of breathing exercises today. The two and four second ones were okay, but the six second ones were very difficult. I dreaded them and almost violently forced my way through them. Not a good

thing I realized afterward.

March 20, 2014—I'm understanding that there is no reason for regrets. Other than the fear (which I'm learning to be grateful for). I've been able to read thousands of books and become a fairly good photographer during this time.

The premise of the therapy is that for whatever reason, I have developed abnormal and actually destructive breathing patterns, which my physical brain now views as 'normal' and it tries to alter body chemistry to make them work. Through these exercises, and just contemplating and understanding the situation, I will find my more normal and correct pattern of breathing, and gradually replace the other with it. The astonishing thing is that in only a few short days I can already see remarkable changes—starting with recognizing how much time I was spending breathing through my mouth, even when I had the nasal cannula in, and consciously changing to and maintaining nose breathing. I feel better and am so impressed.

And the therapist himself—combination of Dervish, Monk, Snake handler, and Television Evangelist. In a very few days he has helped me initiate a positive change by using some very simple exercises, and he encourages me to make better choices through the use of personally relevant aphorisms, analogies, and monologue therapy. I could never have done this on my own.

Reading *The Painted Bird*, by Jerzy Kosinski. Probably not a good choice. It is a good book, maybe a great one, but action packed, slightly dark and tense.

March 21, 2014—Woke at 6 am, and immediately went into a hyperventilation fueled panic attack. Very intense and it took a while to subdue. Stayed connected to oxygen until 7 am. First set of exercises went well.

I have been on the verge of slipping into panic all morning. Upper chest breathing. Actually rapid fluctuations between feeling fine and doing okay, then instantly the other. Comparing it to school—the first few days—“Is this too hard? Will it really benefit me? Do I want to be here?” From school experience, if I stuck it out past the rocky beginning and didn't run away, it turned out to be never too hard, I did want to be there, and it always changed my life for the better.

Two more sets of exercises. I've felt hot and a little stuffy all day, but apparently my breathing is okay. Still wrestling with demons.

'Breathe deep and cough.' The worst advice ever given by a medical professional. It probably caused the ruin of more of my alveoli than a thousand cigarettes.

March 22, 2014—Three sets of exercises and everything is easier. In such a short time. While sitting quietly, relaxing, and observing my breathing, I've been able to analyze and understand several things about my reaction to or relationship with this disease.

I'm not sure about the nature of breathing crises in general—if there are typical ones, or if they are unique to the individual. I've never discussed my own with anyone because it would have been similar to reliving a nightmare, and—well, because I didn't want to. Although there are two distinct levels or maybe degrees of intensity and involvement, my breathing crises are all very much the same and have been from the beginning.

They start as what I sense to be a wave—I notice the presence of a force that seems to come from outside of me, although I now know it is all internal. It advances and recedes, and with each advance it gains amplitude and pressure. Now, since I know what is about to happen, as soon as I feel it coming my first impulse is to get to the bathroom, because at some point the 'biggest wave' will crash on top of me, then seem to enter my body and become an internalized pulse that will immobilize me.

When that happens, hyperventilation begins immediately—rapid upper chest breathing, erupt in sweat, heart pounding, unable to move, and almost immediate loss of bladder control. Generally, when that state is active I just gasp and shake and concentrate on controlling my bladder until the situation ends, which I have always sensed as being whenever the thing grows tired of assaulting me and leaves on its own. But during the most severe episodes, which I know as different from the others when they start, I almost always also have the thought that I am dying, at that moment. For example, last winter I woke as one was starting and tried to get to the bathroom. I made it to the front door and knew I couldn't make it any farther so I opened the door and stepped out on the porch. It was sometime in the early morning hours, below freezing, and there was a strong wind. I leaned against the house holding on to the door as the episode intensified. When it internalized, the pulse created a state of increasing darkness so that even with my eyes open I quickly saw less and less of what was around me.

Usually I experience a lot of fear during the event, but that time, my awareness seemed to leave my body before fear set in. I remember suddenly being slightly away from and above my body, watching it shake, and thinking, "So this is dying." Before it was finished I found that I could go back into my body, or leave again, at will. When I was in it, I felt everything that was occurring, but from the outside perspective I felt nothing and had absolutely no emotional connection to what I was watching. Then it ended and I found myself battered, weak, confused, and shaking on my porch on a cold winter night.

I came to dread those to the point that I stopped sleeping for a while, which itself became so disturbing that I started taking prescription anxiety medication. I hated the effects of the medication so I only took them for a month (and after the first few I broke every pill into eight pieces, so I didn't actually take a lot), and for whatever reason I have been mostly sleeping through the night again since then.

This morning I woke at 2:30 am, and knew that one of the severe ones was about to happen, and I barely had time to have that thought when the waves crashed on me. I gasped twice very deeply from my chest and was about to succumb to the regular routine when something else inside me took over.

I am always lucid during these events, just powerless, but something in me wasn't powerless and it

seemed to take over my respiratory system and forcefully slow the breathing to regular shallow breaths from the diaphragm. At that instant there seemed to be several distinct ‘personalities’ clamoring around in my head; the monster, pulsing and threatening; the victim, whining “I need air. Breathe deeply and rapidly!”; and the other with a tight grip on my lungs, forcing slow, shallow, even breathing. My primary conscious awareness at first just watched in stunned amazement and offered no resistance or assistance.

Then I remembered what someone said when he was teaching the method—“Breathe less. The body is smart.” I kept repeating that over and over and began to participate in the situation. This is the first time I have ever resisted, and despite the counterintuitive method being applied, and the screams of the victim, I knew that I was not starving for oxygen.

It was like a battle and it continued until the instigating negative force seemed to be backing off. The lungs were allowed to return to normal function and I decided to lie back down, but the negative thing instantly returned, as did the whining thing, and fortunately, so did whatever intelligence was controlling my breathing.

The situation became an incredible, strange, learning experience. Although the victim never really gave up insisting, “I need more air!”, and the monster didn’t stop attacking and fully leave until almost 5:00 am, I spent the time participating with the part of me that was controlling my respiratory system in what I now think might have been the beginnings of ‘Breathing Normalization’ (and what a wonderful concept).

When it was really over and I saw that it was after 5:00 am, I went ahead and got up for the day, but out of habit still waited until after 7:30 am to do the exercises. Although I had only slept for three hours, and my ribs were so sore that for several hours after that I felt like I had been in a tremendous fight, I felt really good. Almost refreshed. And still do.

I learned several interesting things during the experience.

First, the monster is me, or at least a part of me.

Second, the victim is the part of me that quickly adapted to being frail, weak, breathless and ill, and has accommodated the illness and difficulty in breathing to the point that it now becomes very disturbed about any change not compatible with respiratory system deterioration. It would throw a fit if I were suddenly completely well because it has built an expression of existence around “being sick.”

And finally, there is another part of me that knows how to neutralize both of those, and by choosing to participate with it against those two forces I was able to return to the place where my breathing is correct, easy, and appropriate for the efficient operation of my entire system. It was interesting. But next time I hope I am far enough along that I can just get up and move gently about, then take a hot shower.

I wrote this down to try and understand it better myself. I’ve been hesitant to try and sleep today, and will be looking over my shoulder when I go to bed tonight (hot stove syndrome), but this has just been a part of my life for several years. The exercises didn’t initiate this morning’s episode, but something I have

learned from them made it easier to get through this time.

March 23, 2014—Three sets of breathing exercises. My chair is not as comfortable as I had thought at first and my posture is poor, possibly because I have been in bed for so long and only rarely sat up.

My right side/chest is sore or uncomfortable. For a long time (years) I have noticed that air doesn't seem to be entering my right lung, although I could feel air going into the left one. I thought this was odd and sometimes worried about it, and today, along with the soreness, I definitely do feel air entering the right lung.

March 24, 2014—Three sets of breathing exercises. Each new instant is an opportunity to practice maintaining, or returning to, normal breathing.

Gratitude—Miracle—There are challenges, but my days are no longer struggles with despair and darkness.

Reading *A Distant Mirror*, by Barbara Tuchman.

March 25, 2014—Session with therapist: Motivational conversation and then he had me perform some breathing exercises so he could make any necessary corrections to my technique and posture.

It has been so long since I sat in a chair that it is difficult to do. My back begins to hurt and it is very difficult to sit up straight, or in the correct posture. Just something I will need to work at. He also had me attempt increased breath pause/hold times by what feels like tremendous amounts (four, six, and eight seconds) while he guided me. I could do them, but they were very difficult and I was a wreck at the end of each one—gasping through my mouth and trembling. He advised me to not worry. To just allow my body and lungs to do what they need to do, but to persist at the practice as soon as I recover.

He requested that I search for a chair that is comfortable but will encourage and support correct posture. None of the ones that I have fit that description. He also said that except for our class work, I don't necessarily have to sit in a chair.

March 26, 2014—The first exercise session was difficult. There was a tremendous rain storm in the night and humidity was high. I didn't become congested (absence of dairy?) but noticed. Went to Book Club and had a nice time. Not difficult, but not easy. The day was still overcast and windy. Took the oxygen tank but didn't use it. Didn't talk a lot but listened and tried to retain breath composure. Leaving was a little rougher but not as rough as it has been. Noticed that I key to everything, including my friend's driving. Had to ask him to slow down so I could compose myself—and I was just a passenger.

Second exercise session was tough and I fell asleep afterward for three hours. Spent the evening dreading the third session. Waited until late before starting. Wanted to give up several times. It's like I became stuck in that restless stage that always occurs right before hyperventilation and panic set in.

I kept both somewhat at bay, but they were factors for the evening and most of the rest of the night. The air seemed thick, so I just froze (counterproductive) and tried to slow my breathing. Several times I

almost broke into the tell-tale sweat that accompanies panic—beads of moisture on my forehead. The nebulizer didn't help. I used it several times and couldn't tell a difference.

No position in or on the bed was comfortable. At 2:30 am I put oxygen on, which didn't really help either but it was psychologically comforting. At 3:00 am I came into the living room and spent the rest of the night in a chair.

Napped occasionally and had very strange dreams. That I was in a strange mechanic shop. Dreaded starting the exercises and emailed the therapist to ask if I could alter them without hindering my progress. Then emailed again and tried to describe my night and current state of agitation.

March 27, 2014—Decided to do the exercises with only 5 repetitions for each breath hold and it went perfectly. I felt great afterward. Emailed the therapist advising what I had done. He answered back that of course I could alter the exercises to fit how I felt—that this is a process for life, something I will do from now on in order to maintain normal breathing.

Did the same with the second session and had the same results. I felt better afterward.

March 28, 2014—Woke at 3:30 am. Tried to go back to sleep but wasn't sleepy. Still felt inclined to force the issue, then remembered the note from the therapist—"Sleep when you are sleepy." Just because it is night, or dark outside, doesn't mean I need to be asleep. I only need to be asleep if I am sleepy. What a novel concept.

So I got up for the day, came into the living room, opened the east window and turned my big chair around so I could look out it. There was a sliver of moon, but it made more than half the circumference of the moon, at about 15 degrees above the horizon. At about 45 degrees and just to the right of the moon was a planet. They were both slightly obscured by clouds, but between them was a wedge of clear sky. It was beautiful in the dark and I sat and watched and thought.

For the past several years I have desperately wanted the circumstances of my life to change, but never imagined that I would have to change the way I live. The way I live is my life and it has resulted in my being broken, and unless I change, it will lead to my dying in a frightening manner (slow suffocation.)

March 29, 2014—Felt like I had a cold when I went to bed last night. Slept well but used oxygen all night. Restless before I finally went to sleep. Odd dreams. I often dream about people who have died, and college, or some kind of school. Not the classes, but the buildings and the comings and goings.

This morning I realized how tense I can be about relaxing (HURRY UP AND RELAX!) It made me laugh.

I didn't fight with the morning exercise and it was very nice. And where am I always hurrying to? Nothing is closing in and no one is expecting me. My ribs don't hurt so much and my skin seems to be changing for the better.

The first step is to find balance. The second is to create an internal and external environment where I can

reach balance more and more often and sustain it for longer and longer periods of time (food change, quiet comfortable place, and good posture).

But we are creatures of action, and the slightest move out of that space spins me back into mental and physical chaos; so the next stage is to accumulate techniques and habits for either taking the essence of that state with me as I move, or somehow returning to it after I have moved.

Venture out slowly—slight movements with no or limited startling encounters, and learn to maintain or quickly return to balance through these. Then keep building.

Both the most difficult and the easiest thing I have ever done. Difficult because habits are hard to break. Easy because it is a return to a natural state for the body—where it is designed to be functioning from. And both the longest and the shortest change I have experienced. The seconds of time seem to slow down, but the sequence of changes are clicking along rapidly.

I'm not sure exactly what day of these past few this happened, but I now go to sleep looking forward to the next time I wake up for the next neat thing I will experience, rather than dreading the next ordeal I will face.

So am I cured now? No. Just writing this I had to correct myself many times. But I'm infinitely better. Moving toward life and deciding what I want next rather than choosing what to eliminate or discard next as my abilities deteriorate and my will diminishes. It took eight years for me to reach the deplorable state I was in—bedridden, weak, malnourished in mind and body, connected to an oxygen concentrator and inhaling bronchodilators day and night. It will take a while to reverse all of that—but I'm moving forward.

I laughed out loud at myself while resting and relaxing after the first exercise session. It isn't about breath holds at all, or numbers, except as methods for disrupting the mind/body connection. I am trapped in a pattern of bad habits and need to be startled out of that rut. Then, while the mind is distracted, the body is free to return to its preferred state of balance. This must occur over and over again until the mind accepts, adapts, and adjusts. Then I paused my breathing for 16 seconds with no effort.

March 30, 2014—Easier night. Slept well when I was asleep but was awake and ready to be up at 5:30 am. Wide awake and breathing freely. Just lounged on the bed until 7:00 am. My movement had slowed by then and by the time I started the exercises I was very slow, breathing less freely, and less exuberant.

Session 2 was a little more difficult. Feel like I have some cold symptoms, but not all of them. Can't tell if I am stuffy or the air is really thicker. It has been hazy and overcast for most of the day. I yawned over 20 times when I woke this morning. I don't remember yawning very much—or ever—in the past.

Reading *An Unspoken Hunger*, by Terry Tempest Williams.

March 31, 2014—What a great night's sleep. How nice to greet the morning in a happy, rested, frame of mind.

The exercises were a little difficult to engage. Maybe I do have a cold. Maybe I've hit a wall (and the thought made me laugh during exercises—had the image of the little old man from Laugh In running into a wall.)

Exercise over, breakfast finished, and I just realized how good I feel. I no longer feel like I weigh a thousand pounds. Movement is amazing.

I've been worried about numbers, about not doing 10 repetitions. It doesn't matter. I've been working at this for two weeks and the transition is phenomenal. With time I will succeed.

Strange comparison, but my current perspective is similar to what criminals experience in jail—'From here there is clarity.' As soon as they leave jail they go right back into their familiar environments and start doing the familiar things in the old familiar ways, but while in jail they can see how those don't work, as well as what would work. They just have no idea how to, on their own, get to a place from which to make that happen.

It is so difficult to accurately remember some details about the past, even a few hours ago, but each time I do the breathing exercises I think, "This is the hardest they have been." True or not I don't know. This time was certainly difficult. My nostrils seem to be more closed or constricted and have been for three days. The difficulty makes me wonder if I can get beyond these numbers. Will I ever reach a pause of 20?

Everything I have been told about responding to emphysema is suspect. Even my sleep posture, while possibly good as far as contending with the building congestion (which itself is a result of other typical coping suggestions), actually only exacerbates my poor breathing in the long run. I can see that eventually I will be back on a horizontal mattress and comfortable again. Last night I lowered the pillow pile by 50% and slept 50% better.

Until the past few days every breath I took was visible in my neck and throat. Bulging arteries and trachea, tense muscles, uplifted shoulders—showed the strain required to fill my lungs with air. Now (or today) there is hardly a twitch in any of those.

I experience a hundred aspects of my changed and changing self each day, all of which tell me that this method works. I also experience a hundred fears each day, all of which tell me how addicted I am to madness. Not that I like being sick, but I am accustomed to it. It has become normal and my life revolves around it.

My limited actions and my considerable array of inactions depend on its presence. But these things I know: I have had two almost congestion free weeks. Breathing is much less labored, and the volume is smaller but sufficient. Sleep is more comfortable. My indulgence in frenzy is greatly reduced. My random flow of thoughts is more positive in general. My skin color is changing from gray to pink. My skin texture is better—from paper thin with the appearance of alligator hide, to smooth and thicker. My attitude has moved from despair to belief that I am much better and will soon be better still.

Oh My Gosh! How little breath it takes to function at peak efficiency.

April 1, 2014—"Gentle Breaths." I didn't know what that phrase meant until the past few days. Thinking I was being kind, relaxed, and gentle, I have subjected my lungs to some terrible violence.

April 2, 2014—Waiting to reschedule the session. Beautiful morning, but need to coax myself back into that zone of balance.

Not a bad day. Windy and kind of dusty. I woke from a nap on the decline a little while ago. Brought myself out of it, but it was 'shades of a crisis.' My breathing was shallow, rapid, and from the top of my lungs.

I don't think that any part of me actually wants to die, but there seems to be a 'dying self' persona that likes itself and its existence—which a breathing crisis is a part of. Why else the urge to give up and let things be the way they have been, working as poorly as they have worked. To be healthier and mobile frightens the contented 'dying self' persona with threat of annihilation.

Albuterol addiction will be my greatest challenge. I'm cutting down, but slowly. I desperately want it on days like this.

April 3, 2014—(Session with therapist begins in a while.) What are yawns? What do they signify physiologically? I seem to yawn constantly—after a lifetime of hardly ever.

Not behind—progressing as I should. I guess I need a reference point. So far I do the breath hold exercises and mosey. My upright movement is improving. I can't walk very far, but am better able to breathe as I walk. I always get kind of excitable as class time approaches.

Session with therapist: Corrections, guidance, and more motivational conversation. In a way it is like being blindfolded and allowing someone to guide me through a highly technical activity. It requires a great deal of concentration, focus on both my actions and the instructions, and trust in the instructor. He taught me a new, more passive exercise, to augment the other, more involved breathing exercises. He suggested that I spend at least twenty minutes at a time on that.

He also wants me to start walking. The walking he wants me to do is without purpose and more like mosey or amble, something I should master in no time.

And finally, he wants me to try a new exercise that is usually only for students in the advanced program. It will require 48 hours. I am to completely clear my schedule. No visits, no phone calls, no excursions. If I do it correctly, I will be amazed at what I learn about how I think, move, and most of all, keep the Fight or Flight situation engaged. My breathing is a pattern from a pattern. This new exercise amounts to—for 48 hours I will do everything, including breathing exercises, at 50% speed.

I tell him that I will begin the exercise when I wake up on Sunday morning, which will give me time to get ready (and also to make a Do Not Disturb sign for my door.)

April 4, 2014—A little less comfortable night, but not bad. More albuterol than usual but no oxygen. It was a colder night and I ran the heaters. The fan seemed to make me a little stuffy. The morning exercise session was excellent.

My sister is doing some carpentry work on my bedroom today and I'm wanting to help her, so the therapist wants a quick Skype session to give me pointers. He said since we haven't done the breath in motion segment, to keep certain things in mind: No talking, Keep breath in motion, Remain fluid and loose. Always be aware of my states of breathing, thought, and emotion, and be ready to adjust. Beware of slipping into hyperventilation.

The last few minutes of my morning exercises were transcendent.

Had a series of dreams about new exercises the therapist was assigning. In the first one, he mailed a dog to me with instructions that the dog was specially trained to behave exactly like a fox being pursued by hunters. I was to take it outside, turn it loose, and chase it as if I was a fox-hound, while holding my breath for thirty-five minutes. I woke up thinking, "This is too hard. I'll never be able to do it." Then I realized it was a dream.

In the next dream I received instructions to go to a river in West Virginia. I was to find a sluice funneling water from the side of a mountain into the river, and hold my breath when the sluice wasn't flowing and breathe when it was. This also seemed very difficult.

April 5, 2014—Dreaming more and more about my breathing. At first it was exercise dreams, but last night it was correction dreams. I found myself in situations where my breathing was out of, or getting out of control, and I corrected it.

The neat thing was the fluidity of the correction—organic rather than emotional. Up to now, my daytime corrections have been like a hungry beast grabbing for food. In the dream I noticed where I was, then instantly, and calmly, adjusted to where I needed to be. No grabbing, no emotion, and no feeling of fear when I was away or relief when I returned. Just a corrective action like calibrating a machine.

Only occasional vestiges of the fear of failure left in me. Of course I magnify them out of proportion when possible, but they no longer rule the neighborhood. Old ragged barbarians carrying ancient and increasingly ineffective weapons.

My psyche is a pool of elements related to this organism—thoughts composed of socially acquired and conditioned tags, definitions of observations, images of experiences, and so on, all more or less drifting within the container. My general conscious personality is my social identity, which is somewhat malleable, depending on who and/or what I am around and what situation I am facing (I am different dependent on expectation and requirement), but I also have sub-personalities. Some are fleeting, forming or coalescing only once, or even a few times, and then evaporating. Others are stronger and appear periodically, and some are more personal, and they all have varying degrees of presence or strength, depending on the

situation.

With that in mind, it appears that my 'victim of the chronic, irreversible, and untreatable disease of emphysema' sub-personality has become so strong that it was actually becoming my dominant personality. So constantly present, not only privately but publicly, that it, rather than my general social identity, began to direct my life. It has a simple agenda: Plans—struggle through this day with minimum damage. Goals—not suffer so much and die of something less horrifying than suffocation. Expectations—sequential deterioration. Achievements—Making it from the bed to the chair and not urinating on myself.

This disturbed personality is not only fueled by the malfunctioning autonomic nervous system, but uses it masterfully to maintain its preferred state of being chronically ill. I don't think it has any long range goals in that I don't think it has planned for or really wants me (the host) to die. I don't think it even has that capacity. But I do think that it wants to exist and has chosen to do so—by keeping the illness active and the deterioration and misery in play.

Therefore it resents and resists anything that undermines its presence and control. Any time I have felt better, I am almost immediately flooded with waves of suspicion and doubt ('What's wrong? What is broken now?'), and thoughts of getting back to the 'safety' of the illness with which I am familiar. The good news is, it is a sub-personality, and I will cause it to evaporate.

April 6, 2014—48 hours of Life at 50% speed: Why did I think that this would be easy? Right away there is a struggle inside of me. An urge to 'speed up' And almost a punishment when I don't—flashes of anxiousness; changes in breathing for no apparent reason. My slowest movements are followed by (not accompanied by) feelings of breathlessness. Something is demanding that I 'prime the pump and engage the engine.'

So far I have learned that I itch a lot—especially my chin and forehead. Putting on my glasses was an interesting experience. I had never noticed the magnitude of the transition before. Tea at half speed results in greater depth of flavor. Writing at half speed is the same.

50% slower is difficult to maintain. Sometimes I find myself in super-slow-motion, and sometimes at only about 25% slower than my usual pace, but everything so far is much slower.

I have learned that frenzy isn't productive behavior. Physically vibrating. Writing is a good example. Slowed down I can convey complete, coherent thoughts, and they are legible.

Eating—chewing with the speed and force of a wood chipper is mainly a big waste of time and energy. And, I bite my cheeks and tongue a lot. Chewing slowly works best in so many ways. The food is actually appropriately broken down. Flavor and texture are enhanced. The meal becomes a thing in itself.

Shaving—slowing down resulted in a closer and cleaner shave. The only negative is that the heads on the electric shaver get fairly hot after a while.

Brushing my teeth—I use an electric toothbrush so the time didn't change, but quality and comfort did. I see now that I have been assaulting the inside of my mouth with a battering ram. Frenzied, rapid jerking motions and I constantly hit my teeth with everything but the brush bristles. I might as well have used a jack-hammer. After this morning my teeth feel cleaner and less battered.

Exercise session #1 Going slowly is tiring—or maybe I'm just wanting an adrenaline fix. Exercise #2—Chose to mosey, and moseying at 50% speed didn't get me very far. Just around the yard a few times, and it was very difficult at first—then merely difficult. I also used a cane, mostly for balance, but I had to lean on it occasionally. Again, I could see that adrenaline has fueled my movements.

Washing dishes at 50%—They've probably never been cleaner.

Where have I been hurrying to? Rushing on to poorly perform the next task. Life without adrenaline is like starting over. Back to baby steps.

End of the first day and I'm exhausted. I was able to stay at or near 50%, although there was fluctuation.

The therapist quizzed me about sudden startling revelations about my past. He said that those commonly appear to people engaged in this exercise. I've experienced nothing like that. Interesting that I don't have much if any emotional debris. Our father ignored us but was rarely around so he wasn't really a factor. Our mother adored us, was always there, and always made us feel loved and safe. She never taught us any bad habits (not envy, greed, jealousy, or even anger), and she never wanted or expected anything from us except that we be good (kind, generous, compassionate) and happy.

The lack of social skills, appropriate to where and when we were raised, caused us some problems, but they were minor in the long run. And the almost complete absence of social ambition created or led to a few problems as we have grown older, but still, minor.

April 7, 2014—Second 24 hours at 50% speed: Felt odd when I went to bed last night. Sort of jittery and expectant before I fell asleep. Had to urinate more than usual—more often and more volume.

During one of those (didn't notice the time) I felt a hyperventilation/panic crisis trying to build. Rather than wait for it to hit me and react, I got in front of it. It was almost like my 'Selecting normal breathing from a shelf' dream. I experienced a few parts of an event, but successfully thwarted it. Then I put on oxygen for several hours. Took it off at 5:00 am and slept until 7:00 am. As I started to get up I realized that I was completely drained of energy and suddenly understood the role that adrenaline has been playing in my life. It has been the fuel for my every movement.

I resisted the urge to speed up all day. The struggle to be normal threw my exercise sessions off, but nothing unmanageable. I took off the oxygen by noon and my breathing has been good since then.

Spent the rest of the evening and night at 50%, and see that I will maintain some parts from now on.

April 8, 2014—Session with therapist: We discussed the amazing 48 hour exercise and I learned that it did

exactly what it was designed to do—it interfered with my highly destructive habit of using the fight/flight system to power my basic movements. And the time period allowed my body to flush residual adrenaline and clean out, like what an alcoholic or a junkie goes through.

I learned that I have to continually watch myself. I've turned nearly everything into a stimulus for an adrenaline boost—writing, putting on my shoes, even putting on my clothes, and so on. All I need to do is think before I act and just slow down. And the other frustrations? Just refuse to be frustrated. If breathing feels funny—get up and do something. When I can see chest movement, that is not breathing, that is misuse of muscles.

The session was intense. He turned the choice of exercise techniques over to me—I choose which ones to use and at what level. He recommended several books for me to read, and several procedures for me to initiate. The rest of the session was supportive—Suggestions for effective breath monitoring and management.

Hints on what to think about breathing, or, how to think about it. How to avoid inflicting violence on my lungs (or any part of my body).

Every time something happens to make me think, “I’ve got this!” something else happens to let me know that I’ve just barely found the direction in which the path lies. It’s still hidden somewhere out in front of me, but fortunately, I am now stumbling along in the right direction.

The part of me that interferes and resists becoming healthy is fascinating in a macabre way. Tonight I did 20 minutes of the passive breathing observation exercise and it eventually worked. My breathing slowed and became less ‘greedy’ on its own, but it was a struggle. Part of me wanted to just give up and gasp for air. I kept thinking, “Breathe less. Your body is smart.” The negativity came in noticeable waves and looked for excuses to support its cause. Even thinking about it now brings it to life, but I must understand how to defeat it.

The reckless driver in the loud pick up came by about 10:00 pm, and I had to slightly intervene to keep from hyperventilating. Then I thanked him for the lesson. This was the essence of what I learned from today’s philosophical lesson—no more memorizing and regurgitating platitudes. I must create the soil from which platitudes spring.

Nuance, adaptation, energy portals, Spirit of Place. Alien sounds, thoughts, perspectives as catalysts to adaptive synchronicity—but not as ways of life. We must find the rhythms and spirit of our own place and adapt to them in order to heal and/or refurbish the organism.

We take an essential self with us when we move, a structure, like the framework of a house; but the parts that cover the frame, even those that fill the interior, are reflective of and attuned to the ecology, meteorology, and pulse of the location/destination.

April 11, 2014—Not a bad night. Woke several times, always slightly stuffy. Stuffy when I got up for the

day. Not noticeable if I took it easy, but when I tried to move more and breathe more I would get stuffy again. I believe that my body is shifting to less volume, and is refusing to allow more volume when it isn't necessary. Had a hard time getting into the breath hold exercise—when I would breathe harder and faster my nose would start closing. But I made adjustments and did them. I ultimately feel a little better every day.

The therapist had advised me to stop trying to control. To let my body make the adjustments and merely lovingly influence. Good advice.

Walked for 55 minutes and made  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. I did it the hard way (lots of resting), but I did it. I am to continue this slow walk every day for the next 21 days.

April 12, 2014—Sleep—Nature's gentle nurse. Just did 20 minutes, without pause, of energetic walking in place. It was beautiful. My breathing was the best so far. I was alert for flaws, but focused on the movement and let my body do the breathing. No stress, very comfortable, and I felt grateful. My breathing was a little labored toward the end, but barely. I felt free.

April 13, 2014—Difficult day in many ways. Not so much in others. I have been coughing since early this morning, and my nose has been running a lot. I also feel more tired than usual. The coughs are from the lungs rather than the throat, but not violent like they have been for years. Kind of noisy, and occasionally productive, but this doesn't feel like an illness. It does feel like a change. Like my body is making some kind of adjustment.

April 14, 2014—Slept very little last night and had strange dreams about seemingly impossible breathing techniques. The rest of the time I coughed.

Got up at 5:00 am and felt physically weak, but strangely enough, my breathing seemed fine. Even better than usual—slower and steady. Very little coughing. I think the weak feeling is due to the absence of the adrenaline.

April 15, 2014—Session with therapist: Sometimes the body appears to make you ill so that it can make you healthy. What medical science considers to be diseases may actually be complex survival and healing attempts by the body.

The key for opening the body is gravity.

The major event now is walking—everything is wrapped around it. Eat, sleep, rest, walk.

April 16, 2014—First day of new exercise schedule. All of them were difficult.

Reading the four volumes of Mabel Dodge Luhan's autobiography, *Beginnings*, *The European Years*, *Movers and Shakers*, and, *The Edge of Taos Desert*. Excellent.

April 17, 2014—Odd day. All of the exercises were difficult, but especially the walk. Ten paces at a time and

then a long rest. I felt burned out for much of the day.

April 18, 2014—Overcast and muggy day. Wide awake at 3:00 am, but that was okay.

The exercise ball workout was the best one so far. Then—and a big surprise—the slow walk was absolutely the best one ever. I walked the farthest I have gone with the least effort. Little achievements (victories) every day. I just have to persevere.

April 22, 2014—Session with therapist: More about the flow of breath. I am not watching my breathing closely enough. Getting caught up in the technique and forgetting the point. To relax the lungs—fill them a little more.

I am aware of my normal 3300 RPM breathing, but not doing anything productive about it. Conscious control doesn't really work and I will plunge right back into the manic pattern as soon as I let up.

So, use other techniques: Passive following of the breath. Visualization (fluttering leaf, butterfly, or whatever). If I exhale to pause, but feel the desperate need to inhale right away, I am headed for hyperventilation.

Following my breath—Imagine a roller coaster. At the top of the big hill it goes down, but it doesn't just keep going down and gathering speed. It goes into a series of smaller and smaller hills and levels out.

I didn't do well answering his spirituality question. I do respect the spiritual, but I don't know how to reach it. My posture is terrible. I need to find a chair that is truly comfortable.

April 20, 2014—I suspect that I've been wanting a universe geared to my personal needs and expectations. How could that not be frustrating? At some point I froze and refused to adapt any longer to even the simplest things.

I smelled the morning air today. During the past few years, an occasional breath would give me a hint of something I used to know. Most often it felt like a perfect day from my childhood—fresh invigorating air, excitement, unlimited expectations. The feeling didn't linger much beyond the single breath, but long enough, and frequent enough to entice me. The air this morning carries that. In a diluted sense, but there.

I had no psychological revelations following the 48-hour slowdown, but they are appearing now. Just not what the therapist expected. Mostly regrets about things I haven't tried and opportunities I failed to take.

I'm generally using one vial of albuterol each day. Not what the therapist wants but better than the four I was using. And I have hardly used supplemental oxygen for the past two weeks.

The humidity seems oppressive today. Not reduced to gasping and panic, but breathing is definitely more difficult. The air just seems thick and heavy. Have to keep remembering, that really, I'm getting plenty of air. My lungs are huge, and no matter if parts of them are damaged, enough of them function correctly to oxygenate me adequately; and, my reaction is basically psychological. The humidity and feeling of thicker

air has triggered my previous conditioned response which is trying to activate the hyperventilation syndrome.

April 22, 2014—Session with therapist: Outward view—Play with length of Breath Holds. Go to two walks per day. Take formal breath hold exercises to one hour. Experiment with the sensations of holding breath and adjusting. (Look at the analogy of a manual transmission.) Every moment is now in the method—if my breathing is messed up, deal with it. View walks as field trips. Concentrate on consistency and fine-tuning until next time.

Changed the exercises after the session, and either that, or something in the air, but the day was challenging.

April 24, 2014—Could COPD be ‘the fear disease?’ Does diagnosis exacerbate the deterioration?

Breathing is tight. I actually feel very good until I move. It seems to be related to my incessant counting and the way my breathing conforms to that. I dragged myself through the noon walk, and then just barely got into the evening breath holds before I stopped. Too gaspy and forced.

April 25, 2014—Session with therapist: He said he was elated when I told him that I was very tired. He said that tells him a change is beginning—healing. I am in a neutral space. I must sleep, eat, rest, and maintain my breathing diligently. Always watch and be aware, and always immediately make corrections.

April 26, 2014—Session with therapist: I was advised to move randomly through the day, slowly exhale, pause, and observe. See what I feel when I want another breath. Sense breathing. Feel pressure and pattern.

As we get busy we tend back toward the other pattern. Disassociate and fix with awareness. Follow breath. Take it back to where it needs to be. Not by following a ritual. The body will enjoy this bliss state.

Graduation!

June 17, 2014—In my journals I have written about, or from the influence of, the effects of emphysema for the past eight years. Then I discovered Facebook a couple of years ago and greatly reduced the amount of handwriting that I was doing and started transitioning to Facebook as my primary journal. I have posted some about my experiences with the disease, but actually very little of what I write in my notebooks because I didn’t want anyone to know the extent to which it has negatively affected me, but recently I have been deciding on a different approach. I’m going to post more openly about living with emphysema, but focused on information about how I am learning to solve the problems and resolve the issues it presents, without spending too much time describing the appearances and natures of those problems and issues themselves.

Yesterday was three months since I began a breathing normalization therapy, and I’m astonished at how well the method works.

June 21, 2014—The humidity has been very high for over a week (actually since the end of May), and although it is affecting me and I experience some discomfort, it is manageable and much better than what I have experienced in previous years.

I've settled into three sets of breath hold exercises each day (morning, noon, and night), and three periods of slow walking. I also intend to include the exercise ball and a few other simple exercises as soon as the weather slides back into arid.

The situations that do affect me adversely still have the same initial impact (humidity, dust, pollen, heat, stress), and my days are filled with monitoring my breathing and adjusting (either my thoughts or physiology), but at the same time I am still seeing continuing progress in that my anticipation or recognition of problems is more timely, my responses are quicker, and the negative consequences are decreasing.

The unexpected still throws me. I lost the medical practitioners who have worked with me since the onset of the worst of the emphysema symptoms, both at the same time last month, and have to find someone else. I also received word last week that I have to recertify for the oxygen concentrator—which means that during a regular office visit I have to show 88% or less blood oxygen level while on room air. I already know that isn't going to happen and the stress of losing the comfort of the machine sent me into a nighttime hyperventilation situation. Although I controlled that incident before real panic set in I have still been somewhat anxious.

The good news is, even though when I started this program I was tethered to the concentrator every night and more often than not every day, by learning and maintaining the breathing techniques I have elevated my blood-oxygen level significantly and have only rarely needed supplemental oxygen during the past three months. The bad news is, the thought of not having it available when I do need it is frightening.

Luckily a lot of what I have been learning is now almost reflexive and I go to them rather than panic and hyperventilate, but 'my breathing follows my thoughts', and my thoughts can unexpectedly and quickly turn dark. Even if I don't specifically think about the loss of the machine, I have been having dreams and waking flash visions of entrapment (in caves or confined spaces) and suffocation. I really have to work to avoid those and their consequences. Anyway, it's a challenge, but I'm up for it.

Haven't been outside today because confronting the weather would take too much out of me, but have had a very nice day otherwise. I've been on a three week break from therapist directed sessions, and have only two more to go for breathing in motion training (unless he wants to meet with me beyond those), but will include a few notes that I have taken at the bottom of this post.

One final thought for today, during the first month of sessions when I was told that my brain would start making internal adjustments when I reached a regular or fairly regular 20 second Control Pause, I about gave up in despair. I was barely able to hold my breath for five seconds at that time and recovering from the effort would take several minutes. Holding my breath for 20 seconds seemed so impossibly far away

that I was thinking I might reach that point in a few years. The eighteenth of this month was the three month mark from my first session, and for the past three weeks I have reached a 20 second Control Pause at least every day, sometimes three times a day. The distance that I have come constantly astonishes me.

June 22, 2014—Don't feel so great today, but not terrible either. Doctor appointment tomorrow and I dread starting over. A 25 Control Pause during the evening exercise. I should feel better after that, but I felt kind of sickly afterward and still do. Either that or the fish was bad. Nice day weather-wise, but very hot, so maybe that is why I feel this way.

June 28, 2014—What a strange process. When my mind decides that I have peaked, I find my body rising.

For the past week my breathing has been changing dramatically—from still fighting for volume, to very shallow, but very satisfying, breaths. I have been interfering with that somewhat because something in me feels that I need the large exchange in order to get sufficient oxygen (after all, I am chronically ill), and I also have the feeling that I need to stretch my lungs to keep them elastic, but in spite of my other efforts, the change keeps coming and is more and more apparent. This morning as I was observing that change I suddenly realized that my standing posture is also changing, and along with that, my standing movement. So much that I realized how rigid I have still been up to today. My standing posture, while much more relaxed than it was three months ago, has been almost combative, as has my movement. I will have to process this for a while, but I'm starting to feel successful. My breathing follows my thoughts!

July 7, 2014—Summer, and especially July and August, are my most challenging months. Along with the heat, the lingering humidity from the monsoonal flow (although it rarely actually rains), keeps me in a constant battle to feel like I'm getting enough oxygen. And that is part of the key. Even though I might be getting enough, I hardly ever feel like I am. This year is already different in that I don't yet feel completely overwhelmed. I am having difficulty, and have had to slow down on the exercise, but I am still moving around and I am effectively contending with the recurring feeling of breathlessness.

The main thing I have had to remember and reinforce with myself is—First, do no harm. Be gentle with and considerate of my lungs. It is not a good thing to exercise until it hurts or until I feel terrible from exhaustion. That is counterproductive and damaging to my already fragile lungs. I had to make myself sick over the weekend (in the sense of weak and damaged—not viral or bacterial illness) in order to remember that lesson, but when I backed off of the exercises on Saturday I rebounded to feeling better. Today I almost tried to push myself too far again, but didn't. I am still exercising, but just not pushing. I stop as soon as I feel struggle, or anything negative.

I also have to be careful about my mindset during this time. Just in the past week I have started having entrapment and suffocation dreams, and have had flashes of those thoughts during the past few days while awake. I have to deflect those or I will sink into despair. And there's no reason for it. I am improving and that's the thing to concentrate on.

The sound of flowing water (the waterfall at the pond), or wind blowing through the tall grasses, seems to

free my mind from random negative thoughts, and from listening to the real thing, I am now learning to summon those sounds almost instantly when I need them. I guess the real issue is that there is almost too much to remember—like remembering the list of corrections to make when you see a car wreck beginning to unfold. (Steer into the skid?) Reflex is what will work and that will come into play after conscious repetition through an unspecified period of time.

Through reading, I've learned that optimal breathing is 3 to 4 liters of air per minute, although most people, including myself, are breathing in three times more than is optimal. Medical professionals have rigid standards for blood pressure, pulse, and body temperature, and become very concerned if a patient goes outside of those standard limits. But none of them express concern over volume of air breathed in.

I am beginning to understand breathing in an entirely new way. Among other things, I now realize that carbon dioxide is not a waste gas. Its presence at specific levels is very necessary for maintaining optimal healthy respiration.

One of the main causes of bronchospasm is low level of carbon dioxide in alveolar air. This causes excessive tension in the smooth muscles of the bronchi, leading to constriction of the bronchi and a feeling of breathlessness. Deep breathing starves the body of carbon dioxide, and the deeper we breathe, the more destruction we cause.

July 21, 2014—First visit to a Pulmonologist. I'm exhausted and confused just from the strain of the trip, and from waiting for the appointment, the results of which were both scary and freeing.

First were the respiratory function tests and x-rays of my lungs, then the doctor came in to talk with me about those and my medical history. He said that my lungs are so enlarged that they had to take two x-rays just to show both of them; and about the breathing tests, he said that regarding one of them (involving exhaling), if a person drops below 40% it is a bad thing, below 30% is very debilitating, and anyone going below 20% is usually bedridden and unable to move. I am at 11%. He said that although there are exceptions to nearly everything, he was astonished that I was moving around. I almost lost the ability to move or breathe right then.

He also said that there is nothing in my history, including the tuberculosis, to warrant the amount of damage that he sees in my lungs, and that he suspects that I might have a genetic protein deficiency and is testing for that.

And finally, he prescribed a beta agonist maintenance inhaler to use twice a day, and said he wants me to consider a lung transplant. I told him that just the inhaler was scary enough and that the thought of a transplant was almost unfathomable. He told me to read everything I could find on the procedure and we will discuss it at the next appointment.

Very interesting, and what a nice person. The first medical professional I've been to who knows more about the disease than I do. I wanted to tell him that if he was astonished that I was moving around he

should have seen me seven months earlier (before the breathing therapy). I felt much worse and was far less able to function.

I will use the inhaler and I will do more reading, but I've already read a lot about lung transplants. A friend has been trying to get me to consider one for several years, and so far I have found nothing about them that appeals to me.

## Chapter 11: 2015

On January 1, 2015, as a sort of graduation ceremony, I changed the way that I journal. I started keeping my thoughts, impressions, and observations on my Facebook page along with my pictures.

This was a therapeutic decision, and I made the change in order to positively affect my own attitude and clarify what, toward the end of 2014, I had learned to be true or correct about both myself and the disease:

That I no longer felt like a helpless, confused, victim;

That the disease and its effects hadn't really diminished the potential range or quality of my life;

That although the disease might eventually kill me, that will be only if it gets to me first, because there are plenty of other equally viable ways to die lurking about.

One hot summer day in 2007, I was wandering around my yard, confused and anxious from the lack of oxygen, and I happened to bend over at the water faucet located on the outside of our bathroom. When I stood back up I realized that I had seen an unrecognized pattern filled in with strange colors, and when I looked back down, there was a very large snake partially wrapped around the faucet and stretched along the concrete footing at the bottom of the wall. I instantly used up what little oxygen I had available by panicking, and froze into immobility but managed to fall backward away from the snake. I then watched in absolute horror as it crawled through a hole and under the sub-floor of the bathroom. I can't begin to describe what that did to me, or the thoughts that were swirling through my mind (mostly clustered around that it would find a way into the bathroom and my house), but it instigated a strange obsession that lasted for most of the rest of the year.

When I could finally move I managed to make it to a store where I purchased more than thirty mouse traps and set them up all around my bathroom floor. I also sprinkled flour all over the floor and around the hole outside to show tracks if the snake moved through either area. Doing those things was ridiculous, but they made me feel much better.

Then I purchased several tubes of concrete infused silicone and filled the hole that the snake had gone through, plus all of the other holes I found at the base of the bathroom walls. After a short time I realized that I might have trapped the snake under the house and reopened the first hole so it could get out, but

the big mission was started.

I spent weeks finding holes on the outside walls of my house and filling them with silicone. And at night I would search the interior walls for holes and fill them. I had to purchase spackling and joint compound because even a tiny nail or thumbtack hole bothered me so much that I had to fill it.

When there were no more holes left in or on the outside of my house, I noticed that some of the trees had holes in them, and I started filling those with concrete.

And as I was filling holes in the trees I noticed that there were holes all over the yard so I started carrying a bucket of sand or dirt, and a small gardening trowel, and filling those.

And the obsession was also complicated. I sometimes went back and cleared some of the filled holes because I would start worrying that I might have trapped some small creature in there to suffocate. And some of those I emptied and filled over and over.

One morning I walked into the back yard and saw a new hole. It was about the size of a gopher hole, but irregular so I knew it wasn't one, and I was so confused and upset that I started circling it and wondering what it was and what to do about it.

I happened to look up and saw that my brother was standing in his yard watching me. At that point none of my family knew about my illness, and wouldn't for some time. He asked what I was looking at, and I could hardly speak, but I pointed and said, "Hole."

He said, "Aren't those strange? I wondered about them for a long time and then dug one up and realized that they form when old tree roots rot and the dirt that was around them collapses. We have them all over the property."

That statement suddenly transported me to another level of awareness. As one part of me was understanding that I had been obsessed with something weird for a very long time, another part said to him, "That is strange," and then I completely walked away from all of it. I have never been unusually concerned with holes again.

The breathing therapy had a similar effect on me. Over a longer period of time and through a lot more conversation, it disrupted my limited and limiting thoughts, altered my awareness, and allowed me to see the ineffectiveness of how I was reacting to the disease. I was then able walk away from that mindset and find a different, more proactive and effective perspective.

I have always been a happy person, and was never really unhappy even then. But I was confused and uncomfortable. I felt as if I was lost in and struggling through an alien place where I didn't understand the rules.

But in a stroke of good fortune, I engaged in the breathing therapy, and at some point it seemed to coalesce with all of the other positive techniques, exercises, and remedies I had managed to accumulate,

and they combined to form a set of tools and strategies almost uniquely designed for my condition.

As a result, on January 1, 2015 (or close to it—the number is symbolic), I was no longer caged by ignorance, fear, and panic, and I began wielding an effective weapon from a place of comfort and confidence.

March 18, 2015—Today is one year since I began the breathing normalization therapy. The breathing therapy itself is so saturated with the trappings of Eastern Religions, (most of which I ignored but I never let them know that), that at times it almost seemed ridiculous, but the breathing exercises were so effective, so quickly, that I never backed off or let up. I simply created my own mantras, prayers, and routines, and found more Western types of music to be soothed by while I meditated or relaxed.

I also didn't adopt the Vegan diet that they are so keen about. I stopped drinking coffee only as long as I was involved in the formal sessions with their therapist, and only because I don't like to lie. I also stopped all dairy products during the sessions, for the same reason. As soon as I was on my own I started drinking coffee and eating cheese again.

I do formal breathing and movement exercises for two to three hours each day.

My breathing pattern is more relaxed and easier to maintain, and when I overexert, I compose myself and recover.

I use supplemental oxygen as needed, but no longer need it full time.

I started using a maintenance inhaler once a day, but only occasionally need to use the rescue inhaler.

I am rarely anxious about anything, because I refuse to be. I avoid anxiety triggers. I can't avoid anxiety inducing personal thoughts, but I've learned to reach for other thoughts and allow the negative ones to mostly harmlessly pass through.

I have cut down significantly on meat consumption, but mainly because I can't stand the smell of it cooking. It also disturbs me to kill other living things. From bugs to cows to fish, to even plants (I watch where I walk), it makes me anxious to contribute to a death, and anxiety disrupts my newly attained breathing pattern.

I sip herbal teas and use pleasant scents not because I think they have inherent healing qualities, but because they have other qualities that create a situation from which my body/mind can maintain balance and repair itself.

I sleep well through the night and wake refreshed and looking forward to the day.

I move casually and easily through my house without thinking about it.

I am much more mobile outside.

I no longer experience hyperventilation or panic episodes caused by desaturation during sleep.

My basic movement is no longer adrenaline based.

Balance is the key by which I now live. I've discovered that balance isn't something that is found and then kept from then on—it is something that I must relocate at every instant, for every continuing and new situation. There are days when I fail miserably at this, but I always catch myself and adjust back to where my breathing is best, my thoughts are harmonious, and I feel most alive. Living means constant change, and even what we regard as routine never really is from one second to the next.

And finally, although I hoped for all of these things, I never expected any of them to happen. I just persisted in searching for more, and better, until they appeared in my life.

May 2015—My second visit to the Pulmonologist. The first maintenance inhaler eventually caused problems for me and the doctor prescribed a new type which, in my opinion, is perfect. He is still encouraging me to consider a lung transplant, and seems slightly perturbed by my hesitation, but is invariably nice. He just said that I can't wait too much longer to make the decision and recommended that I continue reading the literature and make a decision soon.

His first test for the Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency showed negative and he will now have a DNA test done. Very good visit and he makes me feel a lot better about the state of my health.

## Chapter 12: 2016

It's almost the end of 2016, and as I look back over the past ten years I get the impression that for much of nearly the first eight years I was swimming in a pool of madness, and that that pool was especially crowded during the first three years.

My lungs are still extremely damaged and deteriorating, but in a sense, my most detrimental thoughts and behaviors have been cured, so I am much better. I've learned (and am still learning) to manage both my exposure to damaging elements and situations, and my responses to their debilitating effects, so more and more often I contribute less and less to the progress of the disease.

As I write this I realize that the weather is changing and my breathing is slightly labored. At the edge of my awareness I can feel my body and mind trying to respond to those and indulge in frantic vibration, but I am not allowing it. I control my breathing and don't entertain negative thoughts.

I still have good moments and not so good moments. There are times when the air is so thick with particles that my lungs are very congested and breathing is difficult. Times when extreme temperatures drain my energy. Times when I become anxious. Times when I begin to feel overwhelmed by struggle. Times when I just get tired. But I don't give up. I remain alert for what I have identified as negative or

potentially negative elements and I focus my efforts into getting through those. And I also recognize and enjoy those days when the air is perfect, breathing is easier, and nothing blemishes my pleasure in living

In the past three months I have only hardly left the house, but I never feel trapped or diminished. I go outside at least three times a day to feed and water the cats and give them treats, and while I am out there, depending on conditions, I might walk around the yard and look at plants, or new blooms, or any other interesting item. Also, when conditions are right, I occasionally go outside just to walk, but I rarely leave my yard. Every Wednesday morning I go to the library for our book club meeting, and spend three hours talking to the other members and reading at least one chapter of the current book out loud to them.

I finally understand that my lungs, although the primary issue, were secondary to what I was struggling with. Even at a diminished capacity, my respiratory system still functions well enough to adequately oxygenate my tissues and cells, if I understand and live within the perimeters of that capacity.

During the first eight years, even though I spent a lot of time immobile, I exacerbated and accelerated immune system malfunction and caused tremendous tissue damage as I flailed about wildly and ineffectively due to ignorance and fear. That started to change two and a half years ago after I developed a better attitude and began using more appropriate tools. Since then, I have not experienced even an instant of fear of the disease, and have not felt helpless or defeated at any time.

Environmental stressors such as humidity, pollen, dust, smoke, and any combination of those still trigger physical responses that make it difficult for me to breathe and move around. As do extreme heat, extreme cold, and abrupt changes in the barometric pressure. But I know to either limit my direct exposure when that is possible, or limit my activities and expectations when a condition is pervasive and unavoidable.

The other important trigger, social stress, is also manageable. From world events, to community events, to even the ups and downs of my friends and extended family members, I don't allow myself to obsess about or dwell on things that are beyond my control. If I didn't create it, and it is anxiety inducing but beyond any repair I could perform, I walk away and focus on other, more positive and life-affirming thoughts and activities.

When I find myself feeling physically diminished and mentally awkward, I immediately start overloading the moment with positive—I close my eyes and let the warm sun shine on my face, I step outside for a breath of cool, fresh air, I think about the next thing I want to do, the next book I want to read, or the next conversation I want to have.

The result so far is that every day, no matter what the conditions in the environment or the immediate state of my respiratory system, I am primarily happy, interested, searching, moving, thinking, watching, assessing, assimilating, and accommodating—all while viewing the best sunsets, eating food that I enjoy, drinking my favorite coffee, and waiting on new books and new days, because I know that the negative components are either avoidable or manageable, and that I can ultimately, positively affect the quality of my breathing.

March 18, 2016—Two years since I began the breathing normalization therapy, and I've maintained it faithfully. The therapist told me that it was for life, and now I understand. I've missed very few days, but when I have, it has been very noticeable. My breathing comfort and capacity are both diminished until I exercise again. I am still so appreciative of the chain of events and whatever else led me to the program.

September 21, 2016—I look forward to the appointments with the Pulmonologist, and even though some of my vital signs might be alarming by the time I get into the office, I actually feel very good when I go. It is like an exciting mini-vacation to drive one hundred miles to the nearest small city, have a stimulating and informative conversation with an intelligent person, and then have a really good meal at a nice restaurant.

My second appointment for this year, and according to him, I am remarkably healthy and active considering the state of my lungs and my breathing capacity measurements. He also asked what my decision was about having a lung transplant and when I said I have decided to not have one, he said that he agrees with me. That there is no reason to interfere with the way I have been able to adapt. That visit was both encouraging, and, in a sense, something of the rejuvenation I started searching for ten years ago.

My Strategies for Living Well: Every person who has any form of COPD becomes familiar with the elements of the onset and development of a critical breathing event, but generally in the early stages, the reflex reactions are fear followed by unhealthy or not helpful responses. The quicker the pattern is recognized and altered or halted, the more comfortable I am.

I breathe through my nose now. The first and likely the most effective thing I have learned, and the most encouragingly beneficial. To the point that when I am in a position where I might fall asleep on my back I will tape my mouth shut by applying a vertical strip of bandaging tape from just under my nostrils, down over my mouth, and under my chin. This keeps my mouth closed when I sleep and I did it at night for several months when I was first trying to move away from mouth breathing.

I keep moving and thinking, and although the tendency is to slow down or stop either or both of those, I resist that. I want to maintain or build muscle strength, I also want to keep muscles active and joints flexible for as long as possible, and I want to remain cognitively interested and interesting, so when I am awake I stay engaged and continuously exercise my lungs, my body and my mind.

Depending on how I feel, I follow a semi-formal exercise regimen, generally twice a day. Sometimes more and sometimes less. And I have found that the early morning exercises are the most beneficial overall and will give clues as to how my body is functioning and help me plan what I will do for the day.

As soon as I wake up I perform a type of morning mind exercise in which I prepare for the day by observing how I am breathing as I think about what I need to do and what I would like to do. When I get out of bed I almost immediately drink a liquid to hydrate my body. I prefer coffee, but water would probably be a better choice. Then, after relaxing a while and waiting for hydration to occur, I do 35 minutes of breathing exercises.

Breathing exercises—I continue to do the exercises I was taught in the breathing normalization program. I do at least one set of them each day, and up to three when I am able. I also do breath holds or pauses throughout the day, especially if I begin to feel out of sorts, because they seem to move me away from a poor and damaging breathing pattern and back toward a positive and beneficial one (where each breath is most effective and perfusion is optimal).

Body exercises—I want to stretch and work my lungs, but not stress them, so I don't do anything that will cause me to break my pattern of nose breathing. Anytime I feel the urge to open my mouth and gasp for air I halt whatever I am doing. With those in mind I then engage any of a variety of either physical only, or machine based (treadmill or exercise bicycle) aerobic exercises.

Mind exercises—Meditation combined with aromatherapy. I finally understand that I have very little control over the mass of information and thoughts swirling around in my mind. External stimuli evoke something, and that drags strings of related bits forward into my conscious awareness. The control I do have is that I don't necessarily have to focus on and give credibility and duration to any of it.

I can instead block the impulse to engage whatever is flowing toward my consciousness, choose to interject something else, and effectively change my mental scenario. I've found that the essential oils are perfect catalysts to relaxation, which is essential to that kind of management of thoughts.

And before, after, and in between: I avoid or minimize the effects of certain types of stress, both social/cultural, and environmental.

I keep busy with activities or hobbies that interest me. I read and do photography when I have any spare time.

I don't dwell on the worst effects of the disease, but I actively resist it. I don't just passively let the disease assault me.

I find ways to relax at any time and in any place.

I turn my head, move my arms and legs, sit down and stand up as often as possible.

I try to take the minimum necessary breath, but at the same time, I allow my lungs to take what they need.

I am always aware of breathing rate, and prepared to slow it down when necessary.

I don't try to cough, but I don't try to prevent it when it does happen.

When I feel congestion building, I drink hot liquids—coffee in the morning, then tea throughout the day and at night. I have the head of my bed elevated about three inches so that I sleep in a slightly inclined position. This greatly reduces nighttime buildup of congestion. I also make my bed as soon as I get up every day.

I eat four to six small, nutritious meals each day. because smaller meals, more often, prevent pressure on my diaphragm. And I wash the dishes as soon as I finish eating because that prevents pressure on my thoughts.

And finally, I have become more accepting of and cooperative with the medical profession.

Conclusion: I spent years waiting to live again—to regain my old life—and every squandered second of those years was life, but almost everyone has a time when a challenge pushes them to greatly exceed their ordinary abilities, and I think that this was mine.

Through every second of this detour I have had to find a will to endure that was stronger than the choice to just give up and accept what was happening, and by inaction, participate in my own deterioration.

I occasionally feel foolish about some of the things I do, but it doesn't last. For example, I just caught myself bouncing around in my chair to a song I like, and was briefly self-conscious. What if someone sees me? Why should I care?

I feel normal again, because although I understand that I have serious lung damage, and that my body's diminished ability to oxygenate my cells and tissues has created a serious physical imbalance that I have to be acutely aware of and constantly prepared to make adjustments and corrections for, I know that it isn't the essence of my life. It is just a handicap, like any other, that I must consider as I engage in healthy, happy, interesting, and productive living.

The universe is an endless flow of changes (the world, the weather, myself). My body still responds to the same environmental, social, and mental stressors and triggers in the same ways, but now I identify or predict them, avoid those I am able to, and manage my engagement with those I can't avoid.

I have a breathing crisis of some degree nearly every day, sometimes several times a day, and during the first eight years I emerged from those feeling like I had been beaten by a monster. I eventually felt defeated and was losing my sense of identity and becoming an aspect of the disease—host to a parasitic illness.

Now I treat breathing crises as obstacles in my path, rough places or stretches in the road, and I get through them, or around them, or over them, or under them, rest after the effort, and then keep moving.

Every day I wake up refreshed, and get up and engage the day with enthusiasm and optimism. I read, I write, and I do work that is interesting and challenging. It is a limited amount, but it gives me a sense of participation and it stimulates my mind.

I go out and take pictures when conditions are good. I take care of and interact with my animals, I cook, I eat well, I take care of my house, I interact with wildlife, I interact with my friends, I rest when I am tired, sleep when I am sleepy, and I get up when I am awake, or not—however it strikes me.

I sit at my east window and drink coffee and watch the sunrise every morning, and I sit at my west

window and sip tea and watch the sunset every night—and I find that there aren't enough hours in the day to do all of the things I plan for and am interested in and able to do.

Each new day is my Best Day Ever. So are my lungs cured? Of course not. But I am. The medical profession is correct—at this time, emphysema is chronic, irreversible, and untreatable beyond certain palliative measures.

But I am no longer facilitating the illness. I have been able to disengage from the frantic and often confusing search for a miracle cure, and redirect that energy and effort toward productive behaviors. (Although I'm certainly open to it if someone else stumbles across one. This is a mysterious and surprising universe after all.)

And in the end I discovered that there was another sort of miracle available and I believe that I have experienced it.

Through years of searching, reading, thinking, experimenting, exercising, and meditating, I have come to the realization that every breath I take is living, and that my choices and subsequent actions and reactions determine whether I will perceive each accompanying moment as good or bad.

For a long time I was emotionally focused on the malfunctioning organ, making it the center of my existence, the creator of my attitude, and the source of my happiness or unhappiness.

I can now, through conscious intervention with a wide range of tools—bronchodilators, oxygen therapy, mind and body exercise, breathing exercise, relaxation, skills for recognizing and avoiding or minimizing the effects of environmental and social stressors—regard my lungs as merely damaged components that require attention and assistance while I continue to live comfortably and well.

The more I observe or learn, the less I seem to know—the universe is just too large, and too much is occurring.

If I do understand anything, it is that I am a briefly tangible aspect of a molecular continuum, a flicker of self-aware energy within an infinite and unpredictable flow.

If I do believe anything, it is that, depending on how I choose to act or react, it can be a remarkable and exciting experience, and can conclude with a sense of something done well.

And although I've always been happy, I've never been happier. I sip, taste, observe, and enjoy. I laugh often. I am grateful. And I Breathe.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth Flowers was born in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, and has lived in same small town on the Llano Estacado of southeastern New Mexico for the past 57 years. During that time he has held a variety of jobs, from maintenance worker to teacher. But his favorite, longest maintained, and most rewarding job, was as an emergency services dispatcher for local law enforcement agencies.

Kenneth spent twenty-five years taking classes in everything that interested him at nearby colleges, and has an undergraduate degree in Geology/Anthropology, and a graduate degree in secondary education. Currently, he still lives in the same town where he grew up, on the same property, and has many of the same friends and acquaintances. He is an avid reader of science and travel books, a landscape photographer, and this is his first book.

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### BREATHE

LIVING WITH CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

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