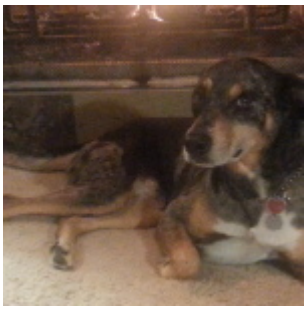
My Favorite World #5



My Favorite World comes at a good time this week. Sometimes the whole MFW ethos can find itself smothered by *stuff*. But then you just open your eyes, and there it is. MFW.

I just spent a long weekend with extended family, an even dozen of us. A generally good time sprinkled with the occasional fraughtiness, not unlike most family gatherings. Yesterday, a long day of travel that began at 9 am and was capped by weather-socked airports and a short train ride from the airport to friendly local bed space. Good job Delta, you almost got us all the way home.

This morning, up early, back on the train to the airport. J and the kids stayed with the plane option. For reasons too tedious to recount,<fn>”Gadzooks,” cries the reader. “Too tedious for *this* blog? Unpossible!”</fn> I ended up driving home from ATL. Finally arrived here cold, smelly, and tired a mere 32 hours after departure.

Shorter: travel during the holiday season is not in any way part of My Favorite World. Humbug!

Ah, but then I arrive safely at home and hearth, and there reposes Maggie, the Wonder Dog of Wonderment, holding court at fireside. This fine beast, who chose us by wandering into our driveway 8 years ago while we lived in the uncharted swamps on the other side of Ponchartrain, discharges all hint of negativity with the slightest nuzzle and yawn.

Maggie is a Catahoula Leopard Cur, the state dog of Louisiana,

and a breed that remains unrecognized by the poncey toffs at the American Kennel Club<fn>Those blackballing bastards, too busy sitting on their loathesome, spotty behinds squeezing blackheads, not caring a tinkers cuss &c.</fn>. This breed is known for its acuity as a herding and hunting dog, and is often trained in packs of three to chase down and subdue wild boar. That’s one of these bad mammas:



This creature will fuck. you. up.

That’s some serious anti-beast right there. I sometimes ponder Maggie, the WDoW, and try to extrapolate her enthusiasm for chasing squirrels into something akin to the fervor it must take to undo a boar. To no avail. Because let’s be honest and ruthlessly so: Maggie the WDoW is more of an area rug than hard charging anti-beast killer, the gentlest of curs who wants nothing more than to get under blankets or snuggle with her favorite boy.



These creatures will not.

And then, too, also, too…I am back home with my fabulous wife and kids, our extra daughter, and my mom. It is pouring rain, the fire is crackling, and there is a cold IPA waiting for me to s(l)ink into the holiday season. With all that, what else could this be except My. Favorite. World.

And also, too, as well…thanks to everyone who stops by to read these rambles. The traffic has been much busier than I dreamed, and I appreciate the comments and likes and shares more than I should – but given my inherent shallowness, less than you might expect.

Merry Whatever It Is That Makes You Happy With What You Have To Be Happy With, and a Most Favorite Worldish New Year.

My Favorite World #4



The news of the world lately has been pretty dispiriting, making it difficult to remember that this really is My Favorite World. Two tried and true things you can do in the face of apparent hopelessness…cooking and listening to great new music.

Field Tested Fool Proof Granola

Looking for an activity that'll cure what ails you? Cook something.

Alas, my kitchen chops are just enough to keep me from starving, and to get myself in trouble once in a while, but there are a few go-to recipes that keep me from being a cliched, *Leave It To Beaver* era patriarchal putz.<fn>There are plenty of other areas where I qualify, but I'm nearly redeemable on this score.</fn> If you are generally kitchen savvy, this post is likely beneath your notice, save as an opportunity to point and laugh as I wobble on toddler legs through the world of food.

This one is an amalgam of lots of different granola recipes I've made/bungled/burned over the years. I've finally learned the guiding principles, though, and now I can whip this out at a moment's notice, as long as I have all the ingredients:



Oatmeal – 4 cups

Sunflower seeds – 1 cup

Flax seeds – ½ cup

Coconut flakes – 1 cup

Tupelo Honey – ¾ cup (any other sweetener will do, but this is my fave?

Vegetable Oil – ½ cup

Salt – A couple two three pinches

Vanilla extract – A scoche

Then, if you're like me, you'll realize you forgot something, so off to the market to get:



Pecans – 1 cup chopped

Dried fruit – A fistful (cranberries today). DO NOT put the dried fruit in the oven or they will turn to stone.



Mix all the dry ingredients (except the dried fruit!!) in a big pan. You can substitute or add any kinds of seeds or nuts, but if you add much more than I use, you might want to add another cup of oats to keep the granola from becoming too seedy. Add the salt, oil, honey, and vanilla. Then stir like crazy. I use a pan with high side walls because I’m clumsy and spill a lot otherwise.

Put the mix in a 300* oven for 30 minutes. Make another pot of coffee after SOMEONE drank the rest of the first pot.<fn>I’m not naming names.</fn>

At the 30 minute mark, pull the pan out and stir well. Put it back in for another 15 minutes or so. Keep your eyes and nose peeled for any hint of burning.



After 15 minutes, or around the time your kitchen begins to smell like heaven's garden, take it out and stir again. Let cool for a while, stirring occasionally. Once it cools, add a fistful of dried fruit <fn>Exactly, no more or less. Be precise.</fn> and stir it in.

That's it. If I can do it, any prat can make it work. Half a cup of this mixed with a half cup of yogurt makes this My Favorite World.

Today's Music

This morning, Bitter Southerner posted their 25+1 favorite CDs to come out of the South in 2014.<fn>I wrote this last week, so the date's off.</fn> With just a couple of exceptions, I had not heard of the musicians on the list. So I pulled one up

to provide the soundtrack for granola wrangling: Curtis Harding's *Soul Power.*

An ATL-based guitarist/singer, Harding serves an updated take on one of my favorite styles – late 60s/early 70s soul and R&B. Isley, Curtis Mayfield, Issac Hayes, Al Green…not that he *sounds just like* any of these folks, but that you can feel the through-line from the pioneers up to more recent R&B authenticos like Prince and Cee Lo. (Harding was in Cee Lo's band for a while.) He also reflects the great blues vibe of Muddy Waters and the like. And then comes "Cruel World" to wrap things up and I'm reminded of Los Lobos and the great guitar of David Hidalgo. All in all, I really love it. Just one more surprise puzzle piece that fits right into MFW. I'm sure it made the granola more better.

And now we're into Amy Ray's *Goodnight Tender*. I've met Amy in passing a few times<fn>Not that she'd have any reason to remember.</fn> and she's truly one of the world's good people. Loving this album, a heaping helping of pure country. And all respect for the incred harmonies that pal Kelly Hogan is dropping here. M. F. W.

I'm looking forward to checking out the whole list, especially the latest Lucinda Williams, whom I adore, yes I do. And if you don't know the Bitter Southerner, get to know them. They provided more than a little bit of inspiration for establishing this here little bloggy vineyard.

My Favorite World #3



Welcome back to MFW, a weekly feature that highlights the things that make this My. Favorite. World.

The Music Supreme

On Tuesday, December 9, 1964, the John Coltrane Quartet set up in Rudy Van Gelder's recording studio in Englewood Cliffs, NJ. The music of that night stands with the greatest achievements of human creativity. A safe bet: if someone tells you they only own one or a couple or a few jazz recordings, *A Love Supreme* will be on her shelf. The album is emblematic of a transitional period in jazz from the be-bop/post-bop phase to the eruption of free jazz. It is an utterly radical departure from most of what came before and is also, incredibly, completely accessible to anyone willing to listen.<fn>Challenging, yes, but not forbiddingly so.</fn>

You probably know all this already. Writing about *A Love Supreme* is akin to writing about Bach, *The Great Gatsby*, Shakespeare. It's so famous, and so much has been said/written about it…I doubt that I have much to add. Ashley Kahn's 2002 book, *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album*, provides deep detail about the sessions, the preparation, and Trane's personal philosophy that drove the conception and composition. Go there for the history. Stay here for reflection of how this album, perhaps more than any other, made me realize that this is My. Favorite. World.

I grew up on rock and roll, especially the blues based stuff. My early ambition as a hustling neighborhood lawn mower man was completely spurred by my desire to buy every album ever made. Clapton. Hendrix. Duane. One day, I bought an album by Carlos Santana with some guy named John McLaughlin. “Hey, Carlos is cool, maybe a little weirdly exotic<fn>What with all that Latin rhythm stuff.</fn>, but basically a blues cat,” thought my 14 year old self. The opening track was this, a “cover version” of *Acknowledgement*, the first section of *A Love Supreme*.

Jesus H. Christ staring down Satan in the desert!

This was the first time I had heard of Coltrane, and I had no fking idea what to make of it. I had no frame of reference, nothing that helped me understand if it was good, bad, or utterly ridiculous.<fn>I felt all three ways about it on any given day.</fn> But I couldn’t stop listening to it, whatever it was.

Still, even with the occasional jazz-ish oddity like Mahavishnu Orchestra or Al Dimeola or Jeff Beck’s *Blow by Blow* in my collection, I was a rocking dude. Jazz remained not-too-vaguely-otherish, if not downright musty.<fn>Props paid here to my old man, who dragged me off to such like as Count Basie at Carnegie Hall and made me listen to Benny Goodman and Lionel Hampton and such, thereby laying a foundation. But still…jazz was geezer fart music. Shit, the guitars weren’t even distorted. Lame.</fn>

A few years post-Watergate, I went off to college at the University of Georgia, where I fell in with a notably disreputable crowd: the volunteers at the campus radio station. WUOG-FM’s programming then was a polyglot, a defiant holdover from the earlier days of alternative/pirate/underground radio. You could hear Hendrix into Flatt &Scruggs into Velvet Underground into John Cage

into Cecil Taylor into Scott Joplin. There were a few fellow students there who really knew their jazz, and I fell into their fiendish grip.<fn>Visualize a segment from *Reefer Madness* here.</fn> Pretty soon, I had stopped listening to rock and pop almost completely.<fn>This was the peak of the punk/new wave era, which I basically missed in a cloud of jazz and world music. So much for your Narrator as a eagle-eyed surveyor of prevailing *zeitgeist.*</fn>

One night, in a haze of some sort of uber-substantially-altered-mindfulnesslessness<fn>And we can just leave it at that, thank you.</fn>, I was draped across a filthy sofa in a candlelit room when a pal dropped the needle on *A Love Supreme*. From the opening stroke of the gong to the end of the opening saxophone phrase<fn>All of fifteen seconds.</fn>, my world changed. And then shit really got real.

I was unprepared, still without a useful frame of reference for what was going on, but here's the great thing: it didn't matter. This was music so pure, so honest, so skilled, that I think a herd of donkeys or a field of sunflowers would understand. Mind, this was about 35 years ago, and I remember it as clearly as if it were yesterday.

The album consists of 4 parts, totaling about 33 minutes. During this half hour, I alternated between disbelief, fear, tears, terror, and laughter. But the predominant lingering feeling was overwhelming joy that I lived in a world where something like *A Love Supreme* could exist.

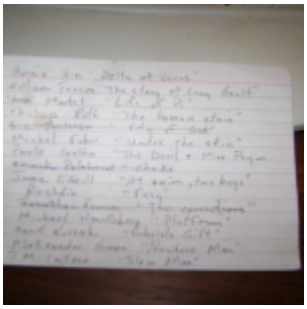
Over the years, I've probably listened to this album more than any other. Times come where I put it aside<fn>Been there, done that….</fn>, only to have it pop up on the radio and hit me across the side of the head one more time. Just this evening, I've listened through the entire piece twice, and then played specific segments another half-dozen times. There are elements that send a jolt up my spine every time. The gong and opening

sax statement. The four note bass theme, as instantly recognizable as the opening to Grumpy Ludwig's 5th. Jimmy Garrison's bass solo between the first and second parts (and again ¾ of the way through part 3 to bring in the elegiac and somewhat terrifying final movement). The explosion of Trane's sax as the second part, *Resolution*, begins. Elvin Jones' drum solo that opens *Pursuance*. McCoy Tyner's relentless block chord comping and butterfly runs. The chanting. Oh, the chanting. But mostly, the overwhelming power and beauty of John Coltrane's tenor sax, and his uncompromising pursuit of that *something* that neither he nor we could quite get at directly, but that we knew/know is there. If only….and still.

I learned more in that half hour twenty-some years ago than I had in the 18 years prior. This is music that contains multitudes: the blues, hymns, religious chants, ancient polyrhythms designed to entrance. The lessons learned from *A Love Supreme* resonate every day I'm in this world: our human potential, the possibilities, the payoff for relentless striving. But more than anything, this…

Music has the power to change the world. And that's the main reason that this world is my favorite. Any world that can produce a Coltrane is a world worth living in.

My Favorite World #2



Welcome back to My Favorite World, a weekly feature that highlights some things that make this my favorite world. These are the things that make me do the happy dance, only that's just inside my head because my dancing is surely terrifying.

The List

The things that make this My Favorite World can pop up anywhere. Last week I was walking Maggie, The Wonder Dog of Wonderment (who herself makes this MFW), and came across this note card crumpled in the middle of the street. It's a list of 26 authors/books, with five of them struck through in different colored ink or pencil. An aspirational list with dispatched works struck? I love to think that one of my neighbors has such ambition on the literary front.

One of my favorite games is to sneak a peek at the bookshelves when I visit a new friend's home or office to pull back the curtains on the friend's tastes and psyche.<fn>Fully aware of the possibility that you may have carefully arranged your books and cds for maximum effect on the nosy nellie who believes himself to be a cagey spy. Of course, the surveillor may anticipate your caginess and add or subtract style points accordingly. The whole thing is fraught, but it is still one of my favorite games. I once walked into a work mate's home and saw a shelf with the collected works of O'Reilly and Hannity (all hardback!!) displayed with great pride, and not a single other book in sight. I figured he was either fucking with me or a chowderhead. Ensuing conversation confirmed the latter.</fn> This is something like that, except i) I have no idea who the person might be, and ii) this list is not a

carefully arranged bookshelf designed to project an image of erudition and good taste. This is naked, unmediated, belle-lettristic ambition.<fn>Unless the list maker fabricated the list and left it in the street “accidentally” so as to disarm the culture spy and make him (me) believe that this represents the unguarded Truth about someone (but who?) when in fact it is a fabrication on par with the carefully arranged bookshelf that displays Foucault and Joyce and Schopenhauer while the dogeared copy of *50 Shades of Grey* lies hidden away under the bed pillow. But only a hopeless paranoid or manipulator would even entertain the possibility of such subterfuge, so let’s just move ahead as though nothing happened.</fn>

It’s quite a list, every bit as intriguing as any of those “you must have read these books or you are a Philistine” listicles on Buzzfeed. How many have you read? I’ve read eight. Strikethroughs are from the original list; my reads are marked by *. Spelling and capitalization as it appears on the card.

- Anaïs Nin, *Delta of Venus*
- William Trevor, *The story of Lucy Gault*
- Vann Martel, *Life of Pi* *
- Philip Roth, *The human stain* *
- ~~EL Doctorow, *City of God*~~
- Michel Faber, *Under the skin*
- Paulo Coelho, *The Devil + Miss Prym*
- ~~Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke*~~ *
- Jamie O’Neill, *At swim, two boys*
- Rushdie, *Fury* *
- ~~Jonathan Franzen, *The corrections*~~ *
- Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*
- Hanif Kureishi, *Gabriel’s Gift*
- Aleksander Hemon, *Nowhere Man*
- JM Coetzee, *Slow Man*
- Padget Powell, *Typical*
- ~~Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*~~

- Esther Freud, *Hideous Kinky*
- Joyce Carol Oates, *Black Water*
- JM Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg ——> Disgrace*
- Rushdie*, The Moors last sigh* *
- ~~Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*~~
- JG Ballard, *Crash* *
- Pauline Reage, *Story of O*
- Georges Bataille, *Story of the eye*

A couple of things caught my eye.<fn>Clues to our friend's personality?</fn> Capitalization is haphazard.<fn>Or perhaps this seeming inattention to detail is in fact a cleverly constructed detail of the aforementioned fabrication, a subtle ruse of informality that is itself a misdirection, and possibly proof of the list maker's devious nature. But that's crazy talk.</fn> Rushdie is the only author listed without a first name. Our friend misspelled Padgett with only one 't', but faithfully included the umlat for Anaïs Nin. I like that Rushdie and Coetzee appear twice in the list, the result of one of those "AHA" moments. Also, the second Coetzee item bears an arrow up and to the right to add *Disgrace* to the list; an aha atop an aha. These are the only authors listed more than once. And the almost after-thoughtish inclusion of both *The Story of O* and *Story of the Eye* indicates someone who either has a taste for the salacious or is in for a very big surprise.<fn>Or this is just another part of the subterfuge, an elaborate forgery to make me think that our friend goes in for the belle-lettristic strain of smut, not the 50 shades nonsense that sparked a brunch conversation between my mother and mother-in-law as to what the word 'fisting' could possibly mean, but never mind that, who would you like to see as Mr Grey, I thought of that nice George Clooney right away, &c., and really, I'm not sure my son has recovered from that episode and may never.</fn>

I hate to think of my unknown friend pining for this carefully curated catalog. If anyone in the neighborhood has any idea

who belongs to this list, let them know that I am keeping it safe for return (and adding most of it to my own list) and that I'd love to meet her/him. Even if it's all a big put-on.

The Invisible Bridge

Before I get into the list, Rick Perlstein's *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and The Rise of Reagan* sits at the top of my reading pile. Along with his first two books, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* and *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* – Perlstein chronicles the history of the conservative movement in the post-WWII era as a means of examining the polar split that has come to characterize political thinking.

> *There were two tribes of Americans now…One comprised the suspicious circles, which had once been small, but now were exceptionally broad, who considered the self-evident lesson of the 1960s and the low, dishonest war that defined the decade to be the imperative to question authority, unsettle ossified norms, and expose dissembling leaders—a new, higher patriotism for the 1970s.*

In his introduction, Perlstein writes of asking one of his colleagues, a member if the 'suspicious circle', to review the manuscript.

> *She told me I'd best not send it; she couldn't think straight about Reagan for her rage. Her beef, and that of millions others, was simple: that all that turbulence in the 1960s and '70s had given the nation a chance to finally reflect critically on its power, to shed its arrogance, to become a more humble and better citizen of the world – to grow up – but Reagan's rise nipped that imperative in the bud. Immanuel Kant defined the Enlightenment, the sweeping eighteenth-century intellectual-cum-political movement that saw all*

> *settled conceptions of society thrown up in the air, which introduced radical new notions of liberty and dignity, dethroned God, and made human reason the new measure of moral worth – a little like the 1960s and '70s – as "man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity." For these citizens, what Reagan achieved foreclosed that imperative: that Americans might learn to question leaders ruthlessly, throw aside the silly notion that American power was always innocent, and think like grown-ups. They had been proposing a new definition of patriotism, one built upon questioning authority and unsettling ossified norms. Then along came Ronald Reagan, encouraging citizens to think like children, waiting for a man on horseback to rescue them: a tragedy.*

All three books are long reads at around 800 pages each, but well worth the effort. If spending 800 pages with Reagan's happy, sunny, optimistic bullshit seems too much to bear, here's a more concise history.<fn>Ain't really a life; ain't nothing but a movie. Yet it remains My. Favorite. World.</fn>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLtRHN7fsgY