Field Tested Fool Proof Granola



Posted this almost exactly a year ago. I've been making at least a batch of granola a week since then, and today finds me making a couple of batches for holiday gifting. Seemed a good time to share this one again. BTW, the Bitter Southerner has a new Best Of list up for 2015. Check it out.

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.

Food Porn



One of the best movies I watched in the past year is *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, a 2011 documentary about Jiro Ono, the 85-year-old proprietor/chef of Sukiyabashi Jiro. This 10-seat, sushi-only restaurant in Tokyo – in a subway station, no less – is allegedly the greatest sushi restaurant in the known universe, and Jiro-san is sushi's greatest artist.



Take a look at these hands.

The movie delves into the single-minded pursuit of perfection that drives the Master, and by extension, his two sons, both of whom live under his shadow and dominance. One son has opened his own successful restaurant; the eldest remains chained to the old man as apprentice-for-life (or so it must seem to 50-year old Yoshikazu), or at least until the old man kicks and Yoshi can take over the subway sushi empire.

The movie is gorgeously shot, and slow, and lyrical. The depiction of the Lear-esque intergenerational dynamic is

subtle and clear. The director (David Gelb) manages to let the story unfold at a leisurely pace that matches the pace of the diners who savor every bite of the $250 prix fixe menu.

More than anything, the movie is about dedication to craft over a lifetime, the single-minded pursuit of excellence in a single-task. The results emerge in the food. It really looks glorious, and the meticulous care the chefs take in selecting ingredients and preparing and presenting the end product is captivating. It is truly worth the couple of bucks you'll pay to watch on iTunes or Amazon.

So we were pretty excited to see that Gelb was putting together a six-part series for Netflix called *Chef's Table*. Each hour-long episode profiles a chef from a different part of the world, with each one notable for his or her innovation and brilliance in the culinary arts. Most of them have developed creative interpretations of their own culture's food legacy. They are all faithfully honoring their heritage through innovation. They are all critical and financial successes after the obligatory years of struggle and failures, veritable icons of forward thinking foodery.



Crouton garnished with organic yard sprigs on a bed of hair with guitar pick.

And as we watch the full series, something about it just stinks.

It could be that top tier chefery remains such a boy's club, with LA-based Niki Nakayama the only woman in the series. It could be the generalized arrogance of the chefs themselves; Jiro may be imperious, but he's never arrogant. But mostly, it could be that the food lives in a world apart from 99% of us; this really is food for the one percent. And the food experts delivering incisive analysis of why this chef or that is *so critically important* are the masticant version of fashion mavens who sniff at *pret a porter* and congratulate themselves for acknowledging the existence of so-called "regular-sized women". It's like *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. You can never be too rich, or too thin, or have your foie gras or veal raised in such a humane manner, fed lovingly on grass that was pre-masticated and glazed with a balsamic-and-baby-tears reduction! Gaze upon our privilege, peons, and imagine yourselves so fortunate.



A more realistic dream…

Funny thing, though. None of the food in *Chef's Table* makes me wish I was there to eat it. And to be honest, none of the chefs makes me wish we could hang out. And as such, it fails as food porn at the fundamental level – it does not engorge my

desire to be in the action.

Food porn, like regular porn, is a substitute for the real experience. Food porn makes you hungry. Regular porn makes you horny.<fn>YMMV.</fn> Food porn makes you think, “hey, I could enjoy that, too”. Regular porn? Same sort of thing. In the end, one wonders what it might have been like to actually participate in the antics on-screen.



We like to watch.

But not all food porn is created equal. *Chef’s Table* falls short because it is so fussy and privileged. It’s a soft porn *Downton Abbey*. You are probably sort of sure there is something happening, but the attitude is so detached and stuffy that you can’t be sure. Having contemplated *noblesse oblige* for the better part of an hour, Lady Mary’s hand accidentally grazes the sleeve of Mr Bates’ jacket leading to sexual tension, guilt, and, alas, no resolution. Some Maggie Smith commentary would help, but only just. That’s the food experience at the *Chef’s Table*.



The High Priestess

I really enjoy cooking shows, have loved them since I was a kid watching Julia Child and *The Galloping Gourmet* on public television.<fn>Your Narrator has always been something of a dweebnerd.</fn> Even their snobbishness – that hint of the genteel in accent and demeanor – somehow added to their charm, and we had the idea that we were with someone who truly wished us all to become great cooks. And their food always looked kind of amazing and tantalizing.<fn>Plus sport! Watching the greats chop vegetables was like watching Baryshnikov or Federer. Jacques Pepin is bone fide Mack Heath with a blade. Watch Jiro-san slice sushi. Behold Julia poised before a duck, cleaver raised for the *coup de fowl*. Can we run that again on instant replay super slo-mo 360* telestrator?</fn>



The Galloping Punster

(My most enduring memory of Graham Kerr involved one of his intro stories. He was a shameless punster {“with fronds like these, who needs anemones?”}, and one day he told a nearly endless shaggy dog story that ended with him sticking a hypodermic into the top of a coconut, coinciding with the line “a furry with a syringe on top”. Well.)

Not for nothing, both of these icons were pretty liberal with the wine during filming.

The food shows of my youth were primarily instructional. We were intended to go forth and re-create what we had witnessed. In this sense, the oldie food shows were less porn-like and more akin to a Human Sexuality instructional video. The mechanics were depicted, but one was expected to put one’s learning into action.

Eventually, purveyors of foodie shows realized that most people can’t be bothered to actually, you know, cook food. Like exercise videos, most viewers take the food shows as passive entertainment. Sure, some of the current crop of celeb chefs offer recipes and such, but most programming on the food

networks are given over to spectacle, to travelogue and *Survivor*-style competitions where wannabe chow jockeys frantically yell at one another and sweat into the food they are handling in hopes of capturing the holy grail – a chance at their own food program.

But more than anything, modern food shows revolve around the Celebrity. Some actually cook, some just eat. Almost all of them paste their names on cookbooks and pots and pans and knife sharpeners and citrus zesters &c. Like Marylin Chambers and Jenna Jameson, our celebrity foodies have become franchises, interchangeable with brands like Trojan or Cuisinart, their photo on the cover a guarantee of a certain….something.

Latter day celebrity chefs run the gamut from sniff-sniff high society to here's how to make weenies in a blanket for a last-minute dinner party. Who do we love?



How does she not have a headache from stretching her face like that?

Giada De Laurentiis is the chef with a 2000 watt smile. On camera, Giada has the miraculous ability to come off as your girl-next-door bestie, which is exactly who she is if you happened to grow up in the most exclusive neighborhood in Beverly Hills. Her food is every bit as utterly divine as

Giada’s smile and wardrobe. You can almost smell the garlic coming through the electric picture radio box. One could almost forget that she lives behind high walls and guarded gates. Almost.



Alcohol is a very important part of a balanced teevee diet.

My favorite high-tone food flinger is Hamptons-based Ina Garten — the Barefoot Contessa. She has the most soothing teevee voice since Bob Ross. Really, watch her some afternoon when it is raining and you need to relax. Have a glass of wine or three — or maybe one of those pinkytinis pictured above — and let Ina’s dulcet descriptions of produce and process float you away on clouds of imagined gustatory delight. Better than Xanax, guaranteed. You might even pick up a recipe or two that you have no intention of ever actually making.

Both of them make you feel like you’d be welcome to dine at their tables, though in fact you’d probably meet a couple of very serious security guys if you actually tried. Their food

looks yummy, too. Let’s consider them the purveyors of art house food porn. Very plummy, very luxe. Out of reach, but certainly delicious. An impossible fantasy. Let’s watch another episode and pretend we’re Jeffrey.

Others in our constellation of culinary heroes are more, um, proletariat. Rachel Ray brings the perky energy of an ex-cheerleader to her single-minded mission to dominate the food of the masses. She is just goddamned adorably cute, and did I mention that she is perky? Perky, perky, perky!!



Fresh fruit is an important part of a balanced diet.

Her food is basic, easy to replicate, and frankly, perfectly revolting. This combination is even less appealing than you might think. But nobody works harder than Rachel. Her routine of filming up to a dozen half-hour episodes per day can lead to some pretty bizarre performances. It often seems as though she’s suffered a blow to the head with a board. Her perkiness never lags, even when she is slurring her words from exhaustion, and it’s always a suspense-filled mystery to find out if the unlikely ingredients she’s mangling will turn into something magical.<fn>That’s a lie. It never turns magical. But somehow, still, it’s hard to turn away.</fn> This is more mass-appeal fare, something more like *Debbie Does Meatloaf* than *Story of O.*<fn>Credit where due. Rachel had the Galloping

Gourmet as a guest on her talk show (yep) where she asked him to tell the furry with a syringe on top joke. Respect.</fn>

Then there are our travel guides, intrepid globetrotters in search of, well, something.

Andrew Zimmern (*Bizarre Eats*) seems a nice enough fella, but jesus hitler, that guy would eat sauteed dingleberries with poo garnish if someone served it out of a filthy kitchen with a camera watching, and then his face would contort into the foodie equivalent of oh-baby-you-have-such-big-thing that makes regular porn so, um, convincing. He even moans a little bit when the food is especially disgusting. Let's not even get into the episodes where he eats actual testicles; the parallel is getting uncomfortable even for me, and I'm behind this increasingly horrific metaphor-cum<fn>See what I did there?</fn>-critique.



That is, in fact, exactly what you think it is.

Bizarre Eats is sort of like watching the kid in middle-school who would eat a live cockroach on a dare. You're not gonna look away, and you're gonna get grossed out, but there's no chance you'd pass your bottle of Jack to that guy. Put this in with the X-rated *Frankenstein* that Warhol produced mid-70s, or maybe one of those *Faces of Death* shitshows. A very little bit goes a long, long way.

Guy Fieri? Probably the less said the better. This lands

squarely in the amateur, homemade porn realm, kind of gross, a matter of some curiosity at best. Watching this peroxided hipster wannabe chow his way through a three-pound burger with some inexplicable sauce is to watch a pimply couple with mullets slapping flab in the grainy light of a double-wide trailer. To be fair, though, Fieri brings superior production values, so you can really see the disgusting thing you want no part of.



The food is even less attractive than Guy himself.

Fieri is an actual restaurateur, ~~just like~~ not at all like our favorites from *Chef's Table*. Where the *CT* foodies might offer a thin slice of radish on a bed of peat with sea salt reduction for $60, our pal Guy is all about huge quantities of alleged food at allegedly low, low prices. One of his joints offers something called "Gringo Sushi", which is apparently just like sushi without the fish, rice and seaweed, subbing in french fries, crispy fried onions, and iceberg lettuce for that nasty foreign stuff. Iceberg lettuce in your sushi. No. Shit.

He is, as you may well imagine, a huge financial success, with his own Times Square “bistro”<fn>If by bistro one means a sub-Applebees botulism experiment with $18 dollar frozen burgers.</fn> that was the subject of one of the greatest restaurant reviews in the history of forever. Much like snuff films and Olive Garden, the mere existence of Guy Fieri is enough to convince one of the existence of a dark and malevolent force in the Universe, a sure sign of the decline of Western civilization.

Anthony Bourdain’s another story. Man, I’d love to travel and hang with that guy, though I’d probably suffer irreversible liver damage within a week. His tastes run from high to low, from bizarre to pedestrian. He’s as much at home in front of the most high-faluting avant-gastro as he is eating his way through the menu at *Waffle House*. Even better: Bourdain keeps his eye on the fact that food is an essential ingredient of human interaction, a basic glue that binds cultural identity.



Drunk as a skunk at the Waffle House. As it should be.

Bourdain is food porn a la Henry Miller and JP Sartre and Terry Southern. It’s raw, it’s dirty, it has that certain *je ne sais quoi*. And then you have to think about it a bunch and

spill a lot of words agonizing over what it all means in the larger scheme of things. And drinking. Lots of drinking! With normal people! My kinda food porn!

Bourdain was at one time an actual chef, but he has, like most of our heroes here, transcended actual kitchen work in lieu of a more profitable career in celebrity. More than anyone else mentioned here, Bourdain's heart and soul is about a good story, well told. Even though food (and drink) is still the common thread, Bourdain's interest is in the mechanics of food and drink as social and cultural signifiers. He'll take you 80 miles out into Gullah-land to find the best barbecue around, but he's going to be sure you understand why the people behind that Q do what they do, and how they do it, and how it fits into a larger narrative about economics and politics and social stratification. Unlike the knobs of the *Chef's Table*, Bourdain invites us to enjoy the food while we also take account of the classist balance sheet of the whole endeavor. On *CT*, they're too busy congratulating themselves on their commitment to holistic-eco-fetishism to bother noticing their inherent privilege and material excess.

Bourdain's focus on character development would be enough to disqualify his show as porn if it weren't for the fact that the food and drink and landscapes he brings us are exactly where you want to be at that very moment. No matter if he is in Charleston or Cambodia or Coney Island, you want to be there in his place, eating and drinking and smelling exactly what he is smelling. And talking about what it means over that fifth or sixth glass of bourbon.

Porn. It's what's for dinner.

The Monsters Are Due On Maple Street



UPDATED 11/23: Correcting one grammar error that allows me to add a gratuitous Trump insult; correcting one misplaced footnote that made Gwen Graham look worse than she is; and adding one detail that makes Trump look worse, but not quite all the way as bad as he is.

There be dragons, and they're coming to get you. Hide! Be afraid!

Many nights I wake up, between 2.30 and 3.30, and endure an hour or so of free floating terror. I'll never again write a good sentence or play the guitar well. Maybe I'm completely out of ideas. I'll never get hired again. Or if I am working, they'll hate what I'm doing and they'll never hire me again. My children will starve, my wife and I will live in a refrigerator box under a bridge. My dog will die. My dog will get sick, and because I don't have enough work, I won't have the money for treatment, and she will die. My kids will….

So you get the idea. After an hour or so, I'm so exhausted with worry and fear that I fall asleep for a couple more hours. Then I wake up, pull on my pants, and set out to find work, do good work, attempt creativity, strive. It's not that I forget the various terrors that plague me, but I still try.

It ain’t over til you quit.

And so, Paris.

People are terrified that it will happen here. A reasonable fear, but one that has been ginned up by various actors who stand to profit from our fears.

Be afraid. And CNN/Fox/MSNBC will be here around the clock to be sure you stay that way.

Be afraid. Only the stalwart leadership of {insert name here} can keep you safe. That other guy is going to let the evil-doers kill you in your sleep. Stalwart leader will keep them out! If only he can figure out how to tell the difference between a good guy and a bad guy.

Be afraid. Buy guns, more guns, and carry them everywhere, because you never know when you need to be a good guy with a gun who needs to stop a bad guy with a gun. As long as everyone can figure out how to tell the difference between a good guy and a bad guy.

Be afraid. Go ahead and assume that everyone is a bad guy until proven otherwise. Stand your ground! Ban everyone who looks/thinks/comes-from-somewhere different. Open fire if you feel threatened by someone who fits your idea of what a threat looks like. Sort out the bodies later. You can’t make an omelet…

And so, Paris. They could come here next! They might be here already! You know that they hate us for our freedoms, so how about you give up a bunch of those freedoms so we can keep you safe.

Lock the doors! Pull up the ladder. You can’t give a 100% guarantee that you can screen out evil-doers? Don’t let anyone in. That’ll fix everything.

Some of the pandering is not so extreme. Some of it is

“moderate”. Maybe let in only the refugees who can prove they are Christian. That way we’ll be safe, because Christians never use violence to achieve a goal. Or maybe, as one pundit suggested, only let in the women and children. That’s the compassionate approach, to break up families.

But then we hear from Uber Panders who not only think letting women in would be unsafe (they blow themselves up, too!), but that letting in “orphans under the age of five” is also too risky. You can’t be too careful.

Round ’em up and ship ’em back. Build fences. Bomb the whole dang shebang.<fn>”Trump: “I would bomb the shit out of them.”</fn> All under the guise of “keeping us safe”.

Lots of terrible ideas are floating around, and the goatfuckers of ISIS are laughing their asses off.

Paris. Now we are supposed to be afraid of going to a great city, or to Europe overall. Cafes and concerts? Jesus, a guy could get killed there. Swarthy immigrants who may or may not believe in the god of our fathers? Round em up and ship em back. You can’t be too careful, amirite?

Now we are supposed to refuse basic humanitarian considerations, to abandon our purported national ideals and values. We are asked, in the name of fear, to do exactly what the terrorists hope for: overreaction, cruelty, inchoate violence.

We keep hearing about ISIS being an “existential threat”. It’s a stupid phrase, but people who speak it seem to believe it affords gravitas, a seriousness of purpose. But it’s bullshit. There is no threat to our existence from a ragtag army of lunatics. Sure, they can disrupt, sow fear. And then they rely on us to lose our collective shit. If history is any guide, they will not be disappointed.

ISIS cannot destroy our civilization, our “way of life”, much

as they might wish otherwise. But we certainly have the means to do it. They need us to do the dirty work of abandoning the very elements of our society that make it worth protecting. On Saturday, "[a]bout a dozen protesters – most carrying long guns, some masked and one with his mother" marched outside a mosque in Irving, TX. Calling themselves the Bureau of American Islamic Relations, these brave protectors of the Fatherland insisted their guns were not to threaten, but merely a means of protecting themselves from the evil musselman within.

Also on Saturday, at a rally in Birmingham for the increasingly inexcusable Donald Trump, Tribble Top declared, "I want surveillance of certain mosques if that's OK. We've had it before." A week earlier he had called for shutting down mosques, so perhaps this is Trump being 'moderate'.

We won't shut ya down, but we've got our eyes on you. And maybe a few yahoos with hunting rifles patrolling the perimeter.

(Also at that rally, a Black Lives Matter protester was beaten, knocked down, and kicked as their Fearless Leader shouted, "get him the hell out of here", followed by Trump mocking the man as "a loser." Just another conveniently identifiable *other*.) *UPDATE: In a interview the following day, Trump said the guy deserved to "get roughed up". Very mid-century retro, nein?*

The news is full of stories like these. They all have one, or both, of the key ingredients: ill-informed (and perhaps sincere) people engaging in dangerous and counter-productive behaviors and/or the demagogues using the fear to enhance their own personae and power.

As Winston Churchill said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste."

As usual, the things we end up freaking out about (ebola, immigrants from wherever, terrorism, bacon fat) are typically not that big a threat in the scheme of things. We are all more likely to experience injury or death in these United States due to reckless driving (our own or someone else's) or falls in the bathtub (around 50,000 deaths or hospital-level injuries per year). Texting while driving claims 6000 lives per year. Shit, 450 people die each year from falling out of bed. Even sleeping in you own bed is more likely to do you in than a terrorist attack.

But there's no political upside in making you afraid to take a shower or a nap.

Last week, the GOP house – the same group of bedwetters who passed a cruel and useless bill to make it harder for refugees to come to America – attached two riders to the new budget bill that would cut the CDC's anti-smoking budget in half. Nobody<fn>I think even the tobacco companies have quit fighting this.</fn> disputes the carnage caused by tobacco. Tobacco deaths in the US each year outnumber terrorist related deaths worldwide by a factor of about fifteen. In 2014, almost a half-million people died in the US – more than 40,000 from secondhand smoke. Terror-related deaths in 2014 totaled around 33,000, up from around 18,000 in 2013. That's a lot of death, and the rising toll is something to be concerned about. But.

Most of those terror deaths occurred in places like Kenya and Mali and other places that most Americans don't care about. No demagogue worth his salt is going to try to gin up the rubes over a place like that.

But Paris is different. Western. White. So it's easy to conflate fear of terrorists with generalized fear of dark skin. It also makes them easy to target, to separate them from the core. It's why we imprisoned Japanese-Americans during WWII, and not German-Americans and other overt Nazi sympathizers like Charles Lindbergh.<fn>Or Prescott Bush.</fn>

It’s an easy fissure point for a clever communicator like Trump. In the mouths of less-skilled demagogues, maybe not so much; the execrable David Vitter tried to salvage his gubernatorial campaign over the past weeks with blatant fear mongering and lies<fn>He even threw Catholic Charities under the bus; his wife is their General Counsel. Nice guy.</fn>, but got thumped anyway. But here’s the thing: his loss was because of his other “qualities”, not because he played the racist/terror card. I’m frankly surprised it didn’t work out for him. After all, what are a few tawdry prostitute scandals compared to the good old boogity boogity?

Some of our political figures are keeping their heads on straight in all this. Obama is demonstrating an admirable resolve to not let the hysteria drive his policy over the refugees. (The decision to send more troops back into the desert shitshow is more troublesome, as is the flow of arms we keep pumping into the Middle East.) As far as the vote in the House last week to punish refugees – because reasons – I guess I should be happy that only 47 Dems<fn>Just a few dozen quisling Democrats like our local congresscritter, Gwen Graham.</fn> joined the wannabe revanchists, especially compared to the cowardice on display post-9/11.

Locally, our Governor has predictably pandered to his bible banger base of rubes. In response, our Mayor was asked his thoughts on the refugees, and he admirably said that we should welcome them with open arms. This naturally led the comments section of our local fishwrapper to explode in a veritable orgy of fantasy hypotheticals and nativist bigotry more-or-less openly expressed. It is to weep.

This is not going to get better any time soon. Recall post-9/11, how every rumor led to panic led to changes in the color-coded oh-my-god-we’re-fucking-doomed Official Terror Alert system. It’s back. Last time, it led us into a war that has still not ended. And with a dozen-plus power hungry nitwits trying to win the Republican nomination (not to

mention all the House/Senate numbnuts up for re-election), the calls for extremist reaction are not going to slow down. Because, as always, they're only selling what they know people will buy.

I might crawl under the bed myself. It's not the terrorists that scare me. It's us.



Validation is Not Just a River in Egypt



Validation. Some people crave it. Some could care less. Most of us probably fall in the muddy middle, swinging willy nilly between craving and caring less.

Sometimes, Your Narrator is reasonably content – yea, even fully satisfied – to do something well and enjoy the doing for its own sake. A well-written post. A nicely turned phrase. A lyrical, melodic line on the guitar. Mastering a new tune. That sort of thing.

Sometimes, YN is r/c – yea, even f/s – with a household chore done well. A clean toilet. A well trimmed hedge. Freshly cut grass. And so on.

Doing something well truly offers its own rewards. Really. No, really.

Usually.

Other times, invisibility seems to have taken over. The good post, the nicely turned melody, the simple chore…if a positive act falls alone in the forest, has it really happened? And even if it has….so the fuck what? Somebody pay attention!

So knowing well that the doing should be sufficient, what swings me to the opposite pole of neediness, of craving the validation? Is this a fundamental weakness? Or is a core need to be *seen* – and dog forbid, maybe even appreciated – a natural part of the human condition, something as inevitable as hunger or thirst or lust or a desire to lay on the sofa and watch old movies with bags of chips and such?

Whichever is true, the need for validation combined with an ongoing absence of validation is one of my triggers, that set of conditions that puts you off your game, in a funk, down

the hole, around the bend, {your preposition here} the {wherever}. And then it gets dark.



It's been a rough year. The remnants of that damned tick have at last receded into the memory mist, but employment remains elusive. (The news stories we've heard about how tough it is for someone over 50 to get work are not fairy tales. It just plain sucks out there.) Some plans and hoped-for outcomes fell to the ground. Other plans and h/f/o hang like undropped shoes. Hope began to feel banal and futile; at best, hopelessly naive. Pessimism became its own reinforcement.

The prescribed remedy – go ahead and do the work anyway – is easier said than done. Some people always seem to be able to muster the energy to persevere. (Or perhaps it only seems that way?) I'm not one of them. Sometimes, despair wraps its bony fingers around my neck and stops me in my tracks.

But.

Things are looking up, it's always darkest just before the dawn, I can see clearly now, &c. The feelings of dread pass, and of course they always have, so no big surprise there. It's not as though I've been lying on the floor counting ceiling tiles. Life has been pretty busy. There is an article commission – a musicological exposition that has never been made in such detail or with such care – that has occupied most of my writing time. It's going to be pretty great. I know this because I've had two good readers give me the reality

check. Validation! I knew (or thought) it was good, but the doubt crept in. The Greek Chorus knew just which tune to call to undermine confidence.

I really sweat blood on this article. A true labor of love, very important to me in so many ways. And now that it's turned the corner, I've got my belief back. I can't wait for everybody to see it.



Along with that, a couple of other h/f/o have turned my way. And even though none of it amounts to a nickel of income – yet, anyway – there are glimmers of light down the tunnel that might not be an oncoming train. Not gonna get too far out on the optimist limb just yet, but there might be, dare we even whisper it….hope.

Maybe even for the i2b blog. Or maybe not.

My first post at this little bloggy vineyard went up around a year ago. My last post went up about two months ago. Up until that last one, Your Narrator had been doing pretty well, keeping the entertainments rolling and the rants roiling. And then….

And then, the well just seemed to run dry. The Writer could not. Or did not. It's unclear.

One of a thousand cuts: it seemed that there was no real

interest in the blog. A handful of visitors here and there, the gears wouldn't catch. Attention must be paid!

Mostly, the blog has been a great experience. My writing improved week to week, and at its (my) best, the knowledge that I had to generate something more or less reasonably kind of readable and interesting triggered me to be more engaged with the world, always on the eagle-eye to spot another cool story.

But dammit, now I needs me some validation.



Who? Lil ol me?

I had to turn off the Comments function on the blog because I was getting 50-60 spam comments on every post. Actual reader comments averaged well below one per post. Not validating!

But strangely enough, the most validating of all comments ever posted here actually came from a spam bot. To wit:

> *What i don't understood is in reality how you are not actually a lot more neatly-appreciated than you may be right now. You are so intelligent. You know therefore significantly in terms of this subject, made me in my view consider it from a lot of various angles. Its like men and women are not fascinated except it is something to accomplish with Girl gaga! Your individual stuffs excellent. At all times care for it up!*

That was from Tanya3756dc from Uzbekistan. God, how I miss her unwavering support.

Eventually, I added a **Donate** button to allow grateful readers to show their love – measured in dollars, naturally. That generated exactly zero responses. Zee. Row. Along with the other rejections and dead ends (real and perceived), it all just felt pointless. I was a young Alvy Singer facing the

inevitable outcome of an expanding universe. Homework? What's the point?

But I'm open to reasonable persuasion. This is your chance to ensure that the hard-hitting social commentary and enlightening cultural musings that you've grown accustomed to over the past year keep on coming. After all, as Tanya3756dc reminds us: "At all times care for it up!"

Do you, patient reader, love me the way my T3756dc does?

If you send me an email (rob at jakelegg dot com) – imploring me to, for god's sake, don't stop the blog, the world will be a bitter and barren place without it – I will take your plea under advisement and perhaps send you a commemorative tote bag. (No, I won't.) The more you beg, the more you fawn, the more your vote will count.

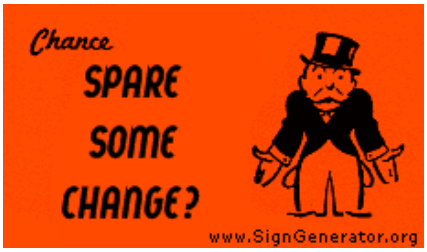
If you really want your vote to count, click on that **Donate** button at the top of the right column and drop a few shekls in the tip jar, I will come to your house and recite a blog post written specifically for you while I massage your neck and shoulders with essential oils. (Much as I'd love to, no. Not really.) Remember, the more you give, the more you truly love me.

I've done some calculating, and I figure if ten of you donate about $5000 each – or if 50 of you donate $3246 (that's less than ten dollars a day!) – everything is gonna work out fine, the blog will continue, my dog will get to eat again, and I can get a new coffee mug that does not leak.

Give, or the blog gets it.



Operators are standing by.



Actually, the jangle of coins makes me nervous. Quiet folding money only, please.