

AND SONS

INITIATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL



VOL. 1



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VOL. 1
CONTENTS

- 005 **FOREWORD**
- 006 **100 MILES IN THE DESERT**
- 014 **SHE NEEDS ADVENTURE**
- 016 **WHEN I MET KEVIN**
- 020 **NO EASY LESSONS**
- 028 **A GUIDE TO MARKSMANSHIP**
- 032 **THE PROPHECY ALL AROUND YOU**
- 038 **IN THE RING**
- 044 **MUNICYCLE**
- 049 **IN DEFENSE OF MILLENIALS**
- 053 **RIDING WAVES**
- 060 **LISTEN UP**
- 066 **CHARCUTERIE**
- 070 **MAKING SAUSAGE**
- 076 **SON OF A FLY FISHERMAN**
- 079 **AND TAKING NAMES**
- 083 **OVER THE WALL**
- 086 **THE ART OF THE TATTOO**
- 088 **THE LAND OF TANGANYIKA**
- 097 **DIRECTION & ADVERSITY**
- 102 **A STORY WORTH LIVING**
- 111 **WHAT DOES MASCULINITY MEAN?**

Front Cover Photo: Justin Lukasavige



FOREWORD

Where to begin? I suppose with a welcome, we're glad this is in your hands and you're flipping through it. *And Sons* began as a vision shared between a father and three sons while smoking cigars around a heater in the family garage while everyone was home one Thanksgiving. It was 2012 and we had no idea where this would go.

Over the next six years (so far), this idea would grow into an online magazine that we worked on after shifts at the bar and grad classes with each of us living in different states. From there, multiple short film series, a feature length film, and a podcast series would blossom, until we have arrived here: with Volume 1 of the anthology. We're stoked.

A little about us though... The name "And Sons" calls upon that history of apprenticeship, of following in our fathers' footsteps, of a shared experience at some core level. It's about being initiated and being a part of something larger.

We are brothers, adventure seekers, writers, sons, and young fathers. We love Jesus. We aim to explore what it means to live with authentic masculinity as we step into the complexities of this world at this wild moment. And we're honest—sometimes a little too honest—but we trust you'll know if something is genuine or not, and we'd rather spend our time being ourselves than pretending to be something or someone we're not. We hope you'll join us in that.

The idea for this magazine was born out of a shared desire to see quality content address a wider landscape than what most would assume to be "Christian" or "masculine" or any other of a slew of catchphrases. From bow hunting caribou in the Yukon to hearing the voice of God to tattoos to fighting human trafficking to making killer charcuterie on our kitchen counters... this volume has much to be explored.

A few years into this, we are really excited for you to have this hard copy in your hands. There is so much more of *And Sons* to check out on our website, andsonsmagazine.com, or on our podcast, which can be found wherever you listen to your current favorites by searching for "And Sons."

Thanks for joining us in the search for the ancient paths. We hope you enjoy this, our inaugural print edition.

– Sam Eldredge

100 MILES IN THE DESERT

BIKING THE WHITE RIM TRAIL

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGES The And Sons Team



The White Rim Trail is a hundred-mile loop through Utah's alien desert of bronze cliffs, gravity-defying spires and arches, and red sand that gathers in old river beds and holds your tires with indifference to your suffering. It's no wonder they named the park "Island in the Sky"—nothing in this world is like it.

It's not that we are mountain biking professionals. In fact, most of us hadn't been in the saddle in years, but the trip looked epic and we needed a challenge. A bunch of guys going out into the desert with nothing to do but lie around in the shade and drink smoothies just doesn't do it. So we booked our permits, snagged the last set of campsites for the season, and began to train.

The boy who is going to make a great man must not make up his mind merely to overcome a thousand obstacles, but to win in spite of a thousand repulses and defeats.
—Theodore Roosevelt

Across the country, five of us pulled our bikes out of the shed or signed up for a gym membership and felt the oddity of stationary training while the snow piled up outside. Several months later, we stood side by side at the top of the Shafer Switchbacks, overlooking our first few miles and the thousands of feet we were about to descend, when someone muttered (and not for the last time), "We totally underestimated this."

These days I live in a flat place; for the first time in my life, there is no obvious mountain range looming over the city, no invasive wildness cutting into the day, peaks swallowing the sun at 4:00. I am not used to this, and as I searched for the highest spot nearby, I found that I'd have to drive 266 miles to poke my head all the way up to 2,000 feet (give or take 300 more that make no great difference). Not the inspiration I was hoping for.







Overcoming challenges is one of the reasons I seek adventure. I don't know how everyone else does it, but I don't go out in search of failure. This isn't to say I only attempt challenges I know I can beat, just that I don't put on my climbing shoes when I see a glass building slicked in oil.

This wasn't always the case. For a while, I had given up on many forms of challenges. Out of that place of not wanting to be seen as a failure (by anyone, including myself), I stopped saying yes to friends who were going camping or to the beach to play volleyball or even just to hang out. I stayed where I felt comfortable, where I felt safe. I would probably still be there if the girl hadn't come along and called me the day after we started dating, thrilled to let me know we were going skydiving. I made no mention of my fear of heights... apparently, I would rather throw myself out of a plane at 13,000 feet than let this one beat me.

Somewhere along the line, I became someone who would say "yes" to climbing mountains again, and I realized that the air up on top tasted better, after climbing a mountain's shale beard and mossy nose in the hours before the sun

knew what we were doing. It was like breathing for real. So did the air on the sea when I sailed out on my own for the first time or when I walked out of an interview that ended with a job offer or when I told her I wanted to keep on adventuring.

Preparation for our Moab trip provided me with something to work towards. Every time the voice whispered, It's too hard, don't bother, I knew the trip would not be denied, so I kept on.

As the caffeine addict sighs relief at the first sip of the day, I've discovered that I need to overcome challenges (big or small) on a regular basis so that I might breathe in the air that is sweeter for the victory.

The developers of video games realized this: giving challenges and rewards influence the players' desire to revisit your product time and again. But there is a difference in the "real" world: the stakes are higher, the reward more physical, and the payoff greater.

Care to join me? Here is a little something from the Killing Lions journal.

Can't climb a mountain for whatever reason? How about...

A long-distance bicycle trip?

Joining the local climbing gym and overcoming your fear of heights?

Trying the "Couch potato to 5K" running program and finishing with your first 5K?

Sometimes our greatest fears provide the best opportunities for validation. Do you have a fear of speaking? Look for an opportunity to give a talk in front of some friends—even just a few guys you invite over. Or how about education—did you finish high school? If not, go back and get it done. Is there a book you've wanted to read but were intimidated by? Now's the time to press through, cover to cover.

All of these are about sticking with something to see it through, and you will be amazed at how good you feel for accomplishing that.

Three days, one crash and a trashed bike, hundreds of energy bars, a sprained knee, nights with billions of stars, early morning muscle pains, thousands of cheers and offers of encouragement, and a hundred miles later... we did it. ■

Wanna watch the films?

Visit ANDSONSMAGAZINE.COM/FILMS



SHE NEEDS ADVENTURE

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

Halfway up the verdant mountainside of the Sentinel by the Sea (a hill by comparison to the Rockies, but glorious by Irish standards as it rises from the North Atlantic) my wife Susie looked back at me, and I saw a familiar gleam in her eyes. Though she was raised in a flat place, Susie has the soul of a peak-bagger—a term we use in Colorado in reference to those people who aim to reach the summit of as many mountains as their legs will carry them up.

That look, part breathless joy and part thirsty adventurer, told me there would be no going back down until we had gotten as close to the summit as time would allow.

I've followed my wife up several mountains, including Mt. Whitney (tallest in the lower 48), Mt. Yale in Colorado, and Kinabalu in Borneo. I say "follow" because it is always, always her desire that puts us on the top. I love adventure, love hiking and climbing, but the love that Susie finds in the ascent and summit of high places is powerful.

The truth is, she loves adventure. Maybe even more than I do in some ways.

I don't think this has anything to do with being a man or being a woman. As human beings, we inherently need beauty and life; our souls dry up without them. I've found that so many things point to our need for God, but the need for adventure is unique.

As kids, we knew the world was a fairytale land full of exotic fruit and bizarre animals, meant to be explored. The God who created the Himalayas and the Great Barrier Reef imbued us with an adventurer's spirit.

However, I'm not what you would call a triple A personality. Left to my own devices, I might not venture up any peak, let alone head to the climbing gym for years at a time. I can get very comfortable not seeking adventure, which is sad because I love it. Like most things that are good for me, there is something that holds me back. Steven Pressfield calls it "resistance" in his book *The War of Art* and claims that every artful, enriching thing is opposed. I call that the Enemy.

Susie's thirst for adventure, travel, and exploration was one of the attributes that drew me to her. I need someone by my side who will push me into the things I know I want, instead of sitting beside me in the comfort of our home, content to watch another season of Anthony Bourdain and wishing we could taste the fruits ourselves. She needs adventure on a deep level, and pursuing adventure together is one of the richest experiences I know.

Not every woman is the same, of course, but as human beings, we all share a need for adventure. We tend to think it's just a guy thing, but it's not. Not at all. Adventure can be so romantic. Maybe it's exploring the Champs-Élysées or hiking the Annapurna Trail or rock climbing at the one spot in town down by the river.

But it doesn't have to be physical adventure either: some may want to learn a new language, try different food spots around town, or move to a new country. Whatever form your adventure takes, the key is to pursue it together. Invite her into the adventure, and let her invite you into hers.

When I owned a motorcycle, I loved taking rides along the ocean or up into the hills of central California. No matter how much I enjoyed those times, it was when Susie was with me, laughing and shouting into the wind, that I truly enjoyed myself. Like just about everything else in life, adventure is better when it's shared.

The truth of it is that she needs adventure, as much as I do, and the more we pursue it together, the more life and the more of God we experience. ■





WHEN I MET KEVIN

WORDS Rachel Douglas Swanson IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

When I met Kevin, I was six months into a year of volunteering in Philadelphia. The year was about “incarnational living,” a term that was often interpreted to mean “being the hands and feet of Jesus to the people in our neighborhood.”

I lived with five other young women, sharing meals to make our food budget of \$17 per person, per week, stretch a little further. On weekdays I walked a mile with my roommate to volunteer in the local middle school’s front office, becoming an expert in toner replacements and attendance monitoring. On weekends we were active members in the Baptist church two blocks from our house.

But I met Kevin because I wanted to do something more. The year had to be about more than just school paperwork and singing in the church choir. So I started volunteering at My Brother’s House, a men’s homeless shelter that provided semi-permanent housing and a day program.

Kevin had been at My Brother’s House for many years. He was a Vietnam vet, though he rarely talked about it. Instead he would talk about his favorite daytime TV shows or his children, with whom he’d fallen out of contact. It was rare for him to be without a deck of cards, and many of our afternoons were spent playing hands of gin rummy.

Kevin was also an alcoholic.

But he attended Alcoholics Anonymous daily, joining the small cadre of men from My Brother’s House. He wanted to stay sober.

Our friendship formed on our walks to the Italian restaurant down the street. Like most of the men in the house, Kevin let the social worker keep his monthly government checks in her safe. He once told me he was scared of what he might do if he was responsible for his money.

So at least once a week, we would walk together to get his favorite stromboli meal. Kevin left the money transaction to me, eagerly sitting down to enjoy his greasy cheese and pepperoni feast. He was quick to cut off a slice to share with me.

During those meals, Kevin started to tell me the stories. Stories of his time in Vietnam. Stories of his return. Stories of a childhood with little stability, a childhood of scarcity. At times he was filled with regret for the ways he had hurt others, especially his children. Many times the conversation would turn to talking about God.

“I’ve done some bad things, Rach, I’ve done some bad things.” He would shake his head. Each time I’d answer, “God loves you, Kevin. God will always love you.”

We continued on like this, the weeks passing one into another; but not a week went by without our trip to buy a stromboli. It became a ritual, the unlikely pair of us walking down 15th Street together.

“You say you love the poor? Name them.”



On my last day at My Brother’s House, the men threw me a party, complete with party hats and ice cream. Bobby did his cha-cha dance, Carlos played the guitar, and Simone presented me with a card, signed by all the men.

Kevin hugged me goodbye, tears in his eyes.

I left Philadelphia a week later.

While I looked out the window of my airplane, thinking about all the stories from the year gone by, there was no way I could have known that Kevin was in a hospital bed, dying of liver failure. Sometime during my flight from Philadelphia to Minnesota, Kevin passed away.

And for a year, that felt like the end of Kevin’s story.

The next summer, sitting next to a swimming pool in Atlanta, I told Kevin’s story to my cousin. I recited it from memory, the path of it well beaten in my mind. The words were familiar, having spent a year trying to make them make sense. I ended the same way I always ended. “So I don’t know what it was all for. When he died, he was still drinking. He was still homeless. What was the point?”

“Rachel, don’t you see?” My cousin had tears in her eyes as she continued, “You got to be with Kevin during the final days of his life. You held Kevin’s hand in the final months of his life. He was able to die knowing that he was loved. And now Kevin is healed.”

Maybe healing can look like a six-month sobriety medallion, and it can look like playing a hand of gin rummy. Maybe grace can be found reading the words of scripture, and it can be found watching daytime TV with friends. Maybe lives can be changed while sharing a stromboli.

The computer at My Brother’s House was a dinosaur, the yellowed plastic frame taking up most of a table. Taped to the monitor, on a piece of paper the size of a fortune cookie, were these words: “You say you love the poor? Name them.”

I have a lot left to learn about loving the poor. But as I think about my friendship with Kevin, I can’t help but think that it starts with an action, a vulnerable step toward relationship.

It starts with a meal. ■



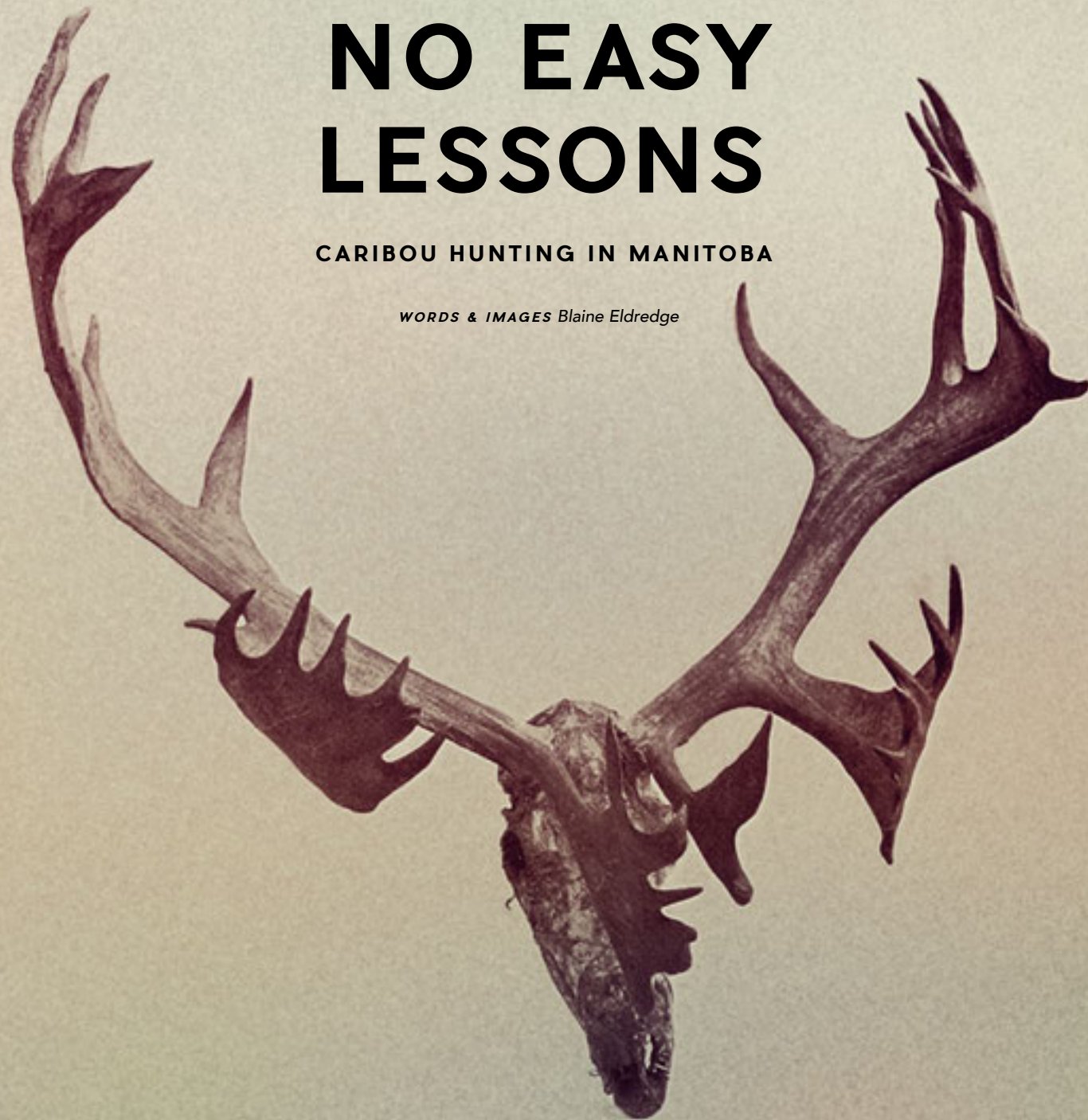
“When [Jesus] wanted fully to explain what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn’t give a theory. He didn’t even give them a set of scriptural texts. He gave them a meal.”

—N. T. Wright

NO EASY LESSONS

CARIBOU HUNTING IN MANITOBA

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge



A couple weeks ago Padre and I got up to bad weather. It had been raining all night, so loud we sat up several times to shake our heads and wonder if the sound on the tarp could be replicated, maybe by filling a tumble dryer with nickels and other, smaller tumble dryers, but sometime before sunrise the wind kicked up, and so the rain was driving sideways into the quarter-inch ply that made one wall of our hut.

Also the temperature fell, so when we did get up we sat in our sleeping bags a while, remarking how bad the weather was for shooting bows. Maybe wiser folks would stay inside, wait, not soak their boots, but I doubt it, because we'd only just made it to northern Manitoba. And anyway, we thought, we'd probably not see caribou in that rain until they were so close we could drill them with a slingshot, so we got up and ate some biscuits and went out looking for our guide, a real Canadian mensch named Paul.

Out on the tundra, the wind was exactly as bad as we'd thought. This was no good, because finding caribou is not like finding other big game animals. At least, not the ones I knew—elk, deer. To find those you do climb hills but secretly, passing from cover to cover and glassing from rocky shocks. There's not much cover in the tundra. It unrolls in long, unhurried vaults, like a sheet parachuting over a bed frame. To find caribou, you hike along the rocky peaks, watching for moving animals miles away. Once you're close, the strategy changes, but still, we hadn't seen any caribou, and so we hiked north of camp to where a rock cairn and an antlered skull marked Manitoba's northern boundary, staggering under the wind.

We'd gone maybe a mile when Paul stopped at an esker to check a distant field, glassing through the rain.

I should name one other thing. Go somewhere new and it takes a while to see stuff. This is true in new cities, when all those crowded, unfamiliar sights come in together and make it hard to find a restaurant or a parking space. But it's especially true in the woods. You have to know something pretty well to pick out exceptions, the way you have to know a person pretty well to know they're acting off. Animals are usually exceptions. Paul had seen does and geese and other birds no one else could and just then he saw the dark blot of a caribou bull, half hidden in the rain and grazing in the field a mile below us.

"There's a bull," he said.

Dad and I looked for a bit and picked him out. In the rain, it was hard to tell how big he was, but he looked good, and so we hustled down into the little valley where he was. Between us, there were tamaracks. In the middle of the field, there was a marsh. After a short conversation we decided Padre and Paul would head to the far side, and I'd stay where I could see him, since several bulls had vanished unobserved the day before. Padre and Paul moved off, and when they hit a good spot I snuck, bent-over, to the edge of the trees.

There were maybe ten caribou browsing in the rain, but only one reasonable bull, and he lay down, so I hunched up under a tree and got dripped on for a bit. Then one of those hunter's instincts said "Get back a little," and I saw that if the caribou moved, I couldn't chase them without moving from cover, so I crawled back to other trees. Good thing—in a minute, the bull stood up, and the cows, the bulls, the one I was watching, all took off to my right.

The day before, Paul had said you couldn't catch caribou. That was probably true, but I've tried with every new animal I hunt until I know it's impossible, so I took off along the strap of trees. I pounded through a few marshes and broke some limbs and then came out just as the herd capped the next hill.

Dang. I figured that was it, but they were still milling over there, and there were trees on the leeward side, so I ran straight at them. I crossed a field, entered the trees, and rounded an evergreen just as the bull stepped out.

He wasn't huge. I hadn't seen many caribou but he seemed fine. And he was the one I'd been chasing, which makes a difference. I stepped back, pulled an arrow from my quiver, knocked it, drew, and stepped back around the tree. The bull and a buddy were right there. I made a noise. They stopped. I took aim on one, the bigger one. Then I hesitated, and he turned and made to move off. I made a noise again, he turned, and I thwacked him.

It's one of those moments bow hunters shake their heads at. The arrow punched a hole in one shoulder blade, then the other, slipping the boiler room where heart and lungs are all stacked up. Then the bull took off, and when I made the top of the hill to see where he went, he was still running.

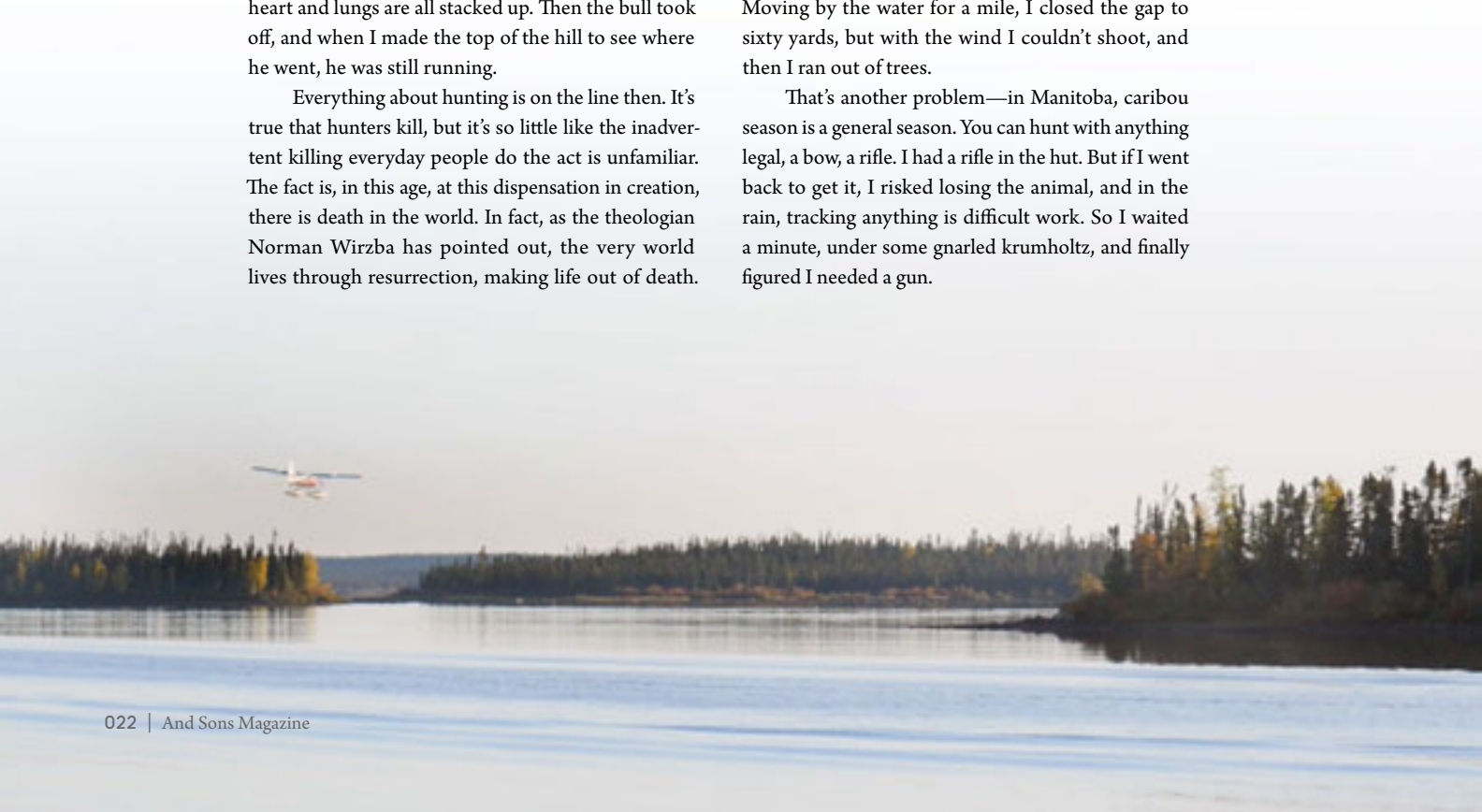
Everything about hunting is on the line then. It's true that hunters kill, but it's so little like the inadvertent killing everyday people do the act is unfamiliar. The fact is, in this age, at this dispensation in creation, there is death in the world. In fact, as the theologian Norman Wirzba has pointed out, the very world lives through resurrection, making life out of death.

So it's also true that things die so that other things can live, and here's the complicated bit. As men committed to restoration, we're advocates for life. We fight for our communities and our friends and also for habitats and animals in how we live and shop and what organizations we give to. But that isn't enough. Since there's death in the world, there's an obligation to rule it. To determine what the death of things will mean for me and my family. When it comes to that, I could outsource it, let other people kill anonymous animals on my behalf. But I don't, and when I've hunted, when I've gotten close enough to an animal to make a decision about its death, we're bound together more intimately than just about any creature outside a covenant. The caribou, the particular animal, a known thing, will sustain my family, and in exchange I'll work to finally kill it in a way that honors it, is clean, diminishes suffering. An arrow, slipping through both lungs, is better than cold or starvation or other things.

So to shoot something and have it run off is about the worst thing that can happen to a hunter, not because I'm disappointed, but because I care about the animal. It's sort of like mishandling a conversation with someone you love, but with dramatic stakes.

The caribou, though, had not disappeared. In fact I almost caught it again, running first to a nearby lake where there were trees then trailing it from cover. That's because when you're chasing any animal, especially a wounded animal, you'd rather not it know you're there, because then adrenaline and other hormones will kick in and drive that animal across the continent. Moving by the water for a mile, I closed the gap to sixty yards, but with the wind I couldn't shoot, and then I ran out of trees.

That's another problem—in Manitoba, caribou season is a general season. You can hunt with anything legal, a bow, a rifle. I had a rifle in the hut. But if I went back to get it, I risked losing the animal, and in the rain, tracking anything is difficult work. So I waited a minute, under some gnarled krumholtz, and finally figured I needed a gun.



So to grab something; here
it's not about the worst
thing that can happen to a hunter...
It's sort of like mishandling a
conversation with someone you love





... making decisions where
life, death were included
in the outcome something
was happening

Running the direction of camp, a number of things happened, notable among them that I cursed my bow and the inefficiency of arrows and my aim and everything else that makes hunting uncertain, forswore a number of things forever, and then found Padre and Paul, totally uninformed, in another part of the tundra.

"I drilled a caribou," I said.

"What!" Padre said, I think trying to reconcile the news and my face. "Where?"

"Just over there," I pointed, "In the shoulder. He's gonna die," I said, "I need a rifle."

Padre and Paul, hunters themselves, understood, and we busted up to a hill, left Padre to watch the bull, and went back to camp. It's hard to be thoughtful in a hurry, but I found the .30-06, loaded the magazine, sealed the bore with tape, and tossed a handful of ammunition in a rangefinder case hooked to my belt. Then I took off again, back with Paul to the hill, where Padre thought he had a bead on the caribou.

"He's bedded down," he said. He had to hole up inside his jacket and clear his binos with toilet paper, so each look was precious. "Think he's on the far side of that field."

That was enough for us—Paul and I crossed the marsh again and entered the trees on the far side. There were rocks strewn everywhere, like misshapen helmets, and slippery, and it took a long time to get down through the trees. Despite a lot of effort, all our binos but Padre's were all clouded with rain. We couldn't see much, near or far, so we only had a guess about the bull when we finally came out of the trees.

The grass there was hip-high and soaked, the rain so many cold needles. Paul took a step right, to see if the bull was near a little tarn, and then the bull stood up. That was it—I saw he bled from the shoulder, he was the same animal. I dropped to a knee and found a tree the wind had bent over and knocked him down quick.

It's an odd moment. Anytime you finally chase and kill big game there's heaviness. One time, out of college, funds were thin. Then, out of the blue, two friends not better off—really, worse off—than myself send me \$250 in the mail. I could barely take it, the generosity. I knew I couldn't deserve that cash. I also

knew deserving wasn't the point. It's one of a few things that gets close to the feeling of approaching downed animals. But also, the hunt wasn't perfect. You'd like it to be fast, almost tidy, but hunters know it doesn't always go that way, so it was with odd mixed emotions that I shouldered the rifle and walked through the grass to the bull—he was little, I saw now. Not his body but his antlers, and while I didn't care, I also sort of cared.

But then a few things. First, Paul slumped down and lit a cigarette. He took a drag, and said "Well, I'm proud of you. Some guys—they don't work that hard to finish the job. You got it done." That was true, and it helped. Next we dressed the bull, skinning down the spine for the quarters, opening the chest cavity from the spine for the heart. There's an unshakable gravity there, the weight, I mean the spiritual weight, of the animal's life. I don't know anyone who could enter into that kind of communion and not feel undeservedly honored. Also we found that the shot had been good—the arrow went through both shoulders and somehow missed everything important. That's a mystery, but hunting is something you do with skill, it was good to know the skills were there. The real thing though, was the Father. While I was running back for a rifle, I asked him what I should do, hoping for useful advice or, better yet, for an offer to snatch the caribou's spirit from his body, ending the thing.

Neither happened. Instead, the Father said, "There are no easy lessons."

Not exactly comforting words, but true. Maturity was happening. The territory of discernment, of real perception and judgment, isn't easily won. It's heavy soil. It's worse when I've got to stay judicious when hard work goes awry, when there's a wounded animal and it's my fault. But those are the places where maturity forms. It's a process that flies in the face of the world, where things are fast and neat and cheap. Creation, and the kingdom, is an extraordinary place. Hunting, and that difficult hunt, is at least a revelation of how little I value the Kingdom most of the time, on account of how cheap I think it'll be to become someone who can live there. ■



A GUIDE TO MARKSMANSHIP

WORDS Blaine Eldredge IMAGES Sam Eldredge

It's a strange fact that while Dad and Sam tend to hit what they aim at, so much so that I asked them, and this seriously, to stop shooting animals in the heart (which we eat), I have missed some heroic shots. I'll spare you details, but this year marked the beginning of a quest to become a marksman. Not a decent shot. A marksman, the ancient attribution of elegant, reliable accuracy. Without anything else for preamble, here's what I've found.

THE GEAR

It's a fact in every discipline your limits are determined by your gear. Ask anyone—while Davy Crockets everywhere get by with recycled rifles there's a level of excellence only quality delivers. I wanted equipment to aspire to. And since I always wonder what other people tote and why I'll be forward here: a Vortex Viper HS 4-16x50mm rifle scope and a Tikka T3 SS Lamin .30-06.

TIKKA T3 SS LAMINATE .30-06

I like Tikka because my dad likes Tikka. Also the action, the movement of the bolt to chamber and eject a round (as well as cock the firing pin and engage the sear), is liquid-smooth. Plus the rifle weighs the right amount. At just under 7 pounds, it's light enough to carry all day, heavy enough it doesn't wobble while shooting.

Rifle calibers in the US are confusing, because a caliber is the bullet's diameter, and here, we don't adhere to a common unit of measurement. If there's mm after the caliber, it's a metric measurement, if not, it's imperial, aka inches. But there's more eccentricity still. The .30-06 Springfield, which I like as an all-around rifle, has a bullet diameter of .30 inches. The other part's a date—the thing was adopted in 1906.

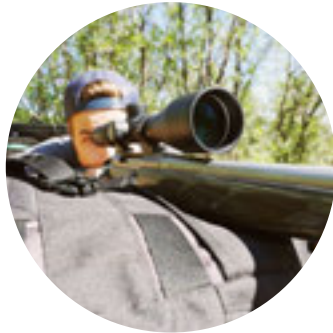
VORTEX VIPER HS 4-16X50MM

I've liked Vortex for a long time because a hunting hero of mine, Steven Rinella, swears by the company, and because they came on the scene several years back to shake up the game and have since delivered. They fix their scopes with an extra low-dispersion, multi-coated, scratch-resistant, water and fog-proof glass that gathers light the way certain stars attract the spotlight. That's key—it means you can shoot in those dusky hours while the sun remains a suggestion. The scope has all kinds of features I'm not qualified to introduce, but one in particular, unique to Vortex, stands out. An unlimited unconditional lifetime warranty that is exactly what it sounds like.

Scopes are defined in terms of their magnification and the size of their objective lens (the lens on the side of the target). 4-16 means a minimum 4x magnification and a four times zoom range—4, 8, 12, 16 and everything in between. That's way more than enough for hunting, but it's perfect for shooting and becoming a superior shot. A bigger objective lens means the scope gathers more light means shooting in less of it. 50mm is big. Scopes are attached to rifles with scope mounts. I talked to a number of gunsmiths around town, everybody agreed these make or break a good setup, and too often guys settle there. Don't, was the point.

THE TECHNIQUE

I'm going to break the advice I aggregated into five steps that make sense to me. These are for practice and developing skill. They're not an acronym to apply on the range. Hopefully it's true other beginners feel these answer common questions.



1. NEUTRAL BODY POSITION

There's a way people are supposed to stand, and it's heads over shoulders over knees over toes. So the first thing is to raise the scope all the way to your eye. Because hunters shoot in tricky positions this isn't always possible, but the principle's a guiding light. Don't arch your neck, don't lift your shoulder, don't let your chest go all concave. Hunters almost always shoot from what's called a bladed stance, one foot in front of the other, if they're standing at all. You can practice it this way: stand with feet shoulder width apart, chest at 45 degrees from the target. Keep your back straight and put your hands on your hips, like someone's taking a picture and you want to seem impressive. Your head will naturally align. Then, raise your hands to a shooting position. Presto—neutral bladed stance. If you're prone the same principle applies. Lay the rifle on your rest/backpack/rock pile and slide your body in behind it, knees apart, ankles on the ground. The fewer moving parts, the better. It's all the twisting, rocking, writhing that torques the rifle and interferes with the shot.

One other thing about the neutral body position—I don't know whether this just works for me, but because I don't walk around with a rifle, I don't have a lot of stamina holding it steady standing or kneeling. As a bowhunter I'd step outside and draw, aiming an arrow at the fence, and practice holding steady, most days. With a rifle it's harder to do that safely and not freak out neighbors. I do two exercises, both forms of the deltoid lateral raise, to address this deficiency. One is a standard standing lateral raise, the other is a bent over lateral raise, only with my feet on the ground and my hips on an exercise ball. It seems to help. Light weight, five-ten times, three sets, to steady that ol' shaky arm. Obviously, other shoulder exercises don't hurt.

2. SIGHT ALIGNMENT

This is another way of saying, make sure the rifle is pointed straight. It's easy enough with iron sights—either the sights form a single shape, or not—but trickier with a scope. The first thing is to have a gunsmith mount your scope while you're there, testing it for fit. This is worth checking every couple years at least. I like triathlon, and most athletes do a bike fit every year, just because bodies change. And that's triathlon—at the end of the day, you're riding a bike. Much more important to have a good fit pursuing big animals.

Back to sight alignment. With the rifle raised to your shoulder, head unbent, you should see straight through to the reticle (the crosshairs), without a shadow around the edge of the scope. If you've ever borrowed a buddy's rifle at the range, you know how the opposite feels. You bend your head, it's hard to look down the absolute center. Solve this problem by making sure your equipment's a perfect fit every year, and that it's comfortable across shooting positions.

Then, focus on the reticle. With iron sights and handguns, this means focusing on the pin at the tip of the barrel. In a scope, it means focusing on the crosshairs and not on the target or animal. For most people this is a self-evident point, but, like all such points, there's a long-winded explanation. It has to do with the fact the reticle aligns your body behind the shot—focusing on the target obscures torsion in the firearm.



3. BREATHE

I think everyone has seen a sniper film and knows breath is everything but there's varied advice out there. For a while I thought this revealed a lack of consensus but it turns out most folks work from a common principle. Here it is: muscles work best with lots of oxygen, but breathing changes the shape of your torso.

Application: for your muscles, it'd be best to shoot with a lungful of air, but that's not possible physiologically, because holding your breath after an inhale makes your chest tense. Notice: tell someone to hold their breath, and they stop after an inhale. You'll see tension in their shoulders. Tell someone to stop breathing, and they usually stop after an exhale. Usually, they're relaxed. That's why most marksmen shoot in the pause just after an exhale, the bottom of the breath. Most everybody'll tell you that.

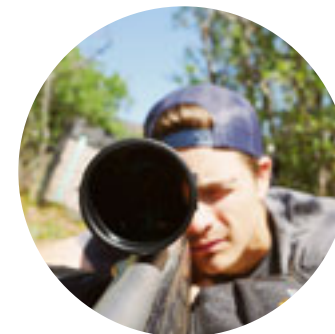
Hunters make an exception. They'll suggest you take a breath, let half out, then pause and shoot. Hunting, you're often out of breath. You've just climbed a hill, you're really excited, etc. So stopping halfway gives your body a little oxygen reserve. That means more time to steady the shot. An alternative is to take two short breathes and a longer pause after the exhale. The trick is to practice breathless and develop the pause that works best for you. I have a buddy who does jumping jacks before shooting to perfect his breathing under duress. Something of that kind is helpful for most hunters.



4. SQUEEZE

Everybody talks about the trigger, and for good reason. It's the nexus of the shot. The key is constant pressure so nothing twists the gun. To do this, put the center of your finger pad on the trigger—it's where most of the nerves are and gives you the best information on what's happening there. Then, squeeze, or press, don't pull. Great shots wax poetic on this point, how the shooter applies a constant pressure all the way through the action. I've heard it described as drawing a line down the rifle until well after the shot. The image helps me. It explains why it's important to shoot your rifle often, so you learn the shape of the line.

There's two other points here. Know where the trigger break is (shoot often) but don't anticipate it (the trigger break isn't the end of the shot). Folks talk about letting the shot surprise you, and it's a good way of saying, don't pull for the shot. Press steadily and draw the whole line.



5. FOLLOW THROUGH

When I learned to shoot a bow this always blew my mind. I'd be on the target, I'd make a clean release, and then, forgetting myself, I'd look up too early to see the shot land. The arrow would be wide afield. This is follow through. A shot begins in the bow or gun and ends in the target. It's your focus that drives it there. Don't stop pressing the trigger, don't change your body position, until the bullet's driven all the way into the target. Anything else shakes the rifle too early—much earlier than you think—and throws off the shot. Great marksmen take this to extremes, observing the impact, taking another breath, then chambering another round and setting the safety and all that, never moving their body. It's the commitment that's the key to a great shot.

One final key point. Do all of this often. Regular repeated practice defines excellence in anything. Shooting is no different. ■



THE PROPHECY ALL AROUND YOU

WORDS John Eldredge IMAGES Richard Seldomridge

“I’m having a crisis of imagination,” my wife said to me just the other day. “About heaven.” It’s been a tough year for our family and those near us. A tragic suicide, followed by the loss of our first grandson. Eight months of chronic pain—the kind only narcotics give you any relief from—ends in a total hip replacement for Stasi. Having lunch with some dear allies, they tell us their nine-year-old boy is going blind. And then a friend calls us a few weeks ago to say her body is shutting down and she has months to live. I could go on; we’ve just been around too much loss, and when you do, you grow weary of this hurting world and wonder if the next chapter is really going to make it all worth it. Thus the comment about heaven.



And it made me sad, because there is such thievery behind that confession. We have been robbed. Our imaginations are victims of identity theft, and we are left utterly broke.

Look at the evidence: What are you fantasizing about? For me, it's a stream in a canyon that takes massive effort to get to so nobody ever fishes it and I haven't been there for two years and can't wait to get there this month with a fly rod and no curfew. I'm fantasizing about a road trip through the west. The evening float we do on the Snake River. Heck—I'm fantasizing about the cinnamon twist from the French bakery and the coffee ice cream I know is in the freezer. It's human nature to daydream.

And you? What are you fantasizing about these summer days?

Very few people are fantasizing about heaven. And I get it. C.S. Lewis said you can only hope for what you desire, and frankly, most of our images of "heaven" just aren't that desirable, so they don't fill our souls with hope. I'm glad Stasi named it as a crisis of imagination because

that is exactly what it is—not a crisis of doctrine, not even of belief, but of imagination. We can't conceive of it, so we simply don't think about it. Vague ideas do not awaken fantasies. The schoolboy does not dream of his wedding night, but the young groom, having relished it, is already dreaming about tomorrow night.

After Stasi confessed the crisis, I simply replied, "Think of the Tetons." Her face lit up like a young girl who wakes and remembers it's her birthday. I was referring to Grand Teton National Park in the northwest corner of Wyoming, a place where the Rocky Mountain West does some of its best showing off. It also happens to be our favorite family place, filled with summertime joy and adventure. Alpine hikes among cathedral peaks in order to rock jump into cold, clear lakes. Huckleberry picking with black bears. Watching moose and grizzly and bison and bull elk in their happy sanctuary. Canoeing the Snake River at dusk, when mist begins to fill the meadows and wildlife comes out to drink, slipping along silently on the river surrounded by virgin forests, and you feel you have stepped into The Last of the Mohicans. For us, it is a magical place.

And that's the key—imagination needs a magical place. "Think of the Tetons," I said, and suddenly her face looked 10 years younger, and I went on, "There you go—that's the Kingdom."

Now—is this just wishful thinking? Am I just offering a kind of vapid comfort, a sweet and syrupy all-dogs-go-to-heaven kind of theology?

Buckle your seatbelts.

One of the most stunning things Jesus ever said, one of the most absolutely-blow-your-mind revelations that nobody seems to have paid much attention to, is this:

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." (Matt. 19:28-29)

Pay very close attention to that first part: "the renewal of all things." Jesus describes the next chapter of our lives as the restoration of everything we love. A claim so wildly bold and outlandishly hopeful, how can we not have this

tattooed on every part of our body? A revelation repeated in Acts, and (pardon) Revelation:

For [Jesus] must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. (Acts 3:21)

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:5)

The renewal of all things simply means that the earth you love—all your special places and treasured memories—are completely restored and renewed and given back to you. Forever. Eden was our home, and Eden is our destiny.

But nobody seems to have heard this or paid much attention to it, because, for one thing, nobody I know is fantasizing about it. When was the last time you eavesdropped on a conversation at Starbucks about the restoration of all things? And for another thing, everybody I talk to still has these sick, wispy views of "heaven," as a place up there somewhere, where we go to attend the eternal-worship-service-in-the-sky. I don't even like the word heaven anymore, because it has been so saturated with religious poisons, leaching in

from underground like the water table poisoned by a toxic waste dump.

Meanwhile we fantasize about that boat we'd love to get, the trip to Patagonia, the chocolate éclair, or the girl in the cubicle next door. Of course we do—we are made for utter happiness.

But the restoration of all things—now that would change everything.

Which brings me back to imagination, the Tetons, and the message summer is singing to us.

God speaks through nature. Can we just start there?—God clearly speaks through nature. Creation is no accident—it is a proclamation. A wild, bold declaration. (This will rescue you from so many things; pay very close attention.) Every day, sunrise and sunset remember Eden's glory and prophesy Eden's return. So what is summer proclaiming? Allow me a story.

Last week I spent two very long days in the hospital with a friend. Hospitals are melancholy places. Don't get me wrong—they can also be places of immense relief and hope. I think the people that serve there have taken a heroic stand on the side of hope.

*Drink it in, friends. Let it speak.
You don't need a bucket list,
because all of it is yours, forever.
Very soon.*

But let's be honest—on the user side, no one there is there because they want to be; they are there because something is wrong, usually very wrong. It is a community of the hurting. People don't play pick-up games of Frisbee in the halls of hospitals. You don't hear folks loudly cracking jokes. The corridors are filled with hushed tones and a shared sobriety. Apart from the maternity floor, the staff, patients, concerned visitors all agree, This is serious business. Somebody could be dying in that room you just walked by.

I'd just spent 48 hours in a hospital room with my dear love, and I had slipped into that place where you come to think this is all there is in the world—monitors going off all day long, staff coming in and out with urgency, hushed hallway conversations, the stupor of drug-induced rest, the IV and cold rooms and artificial everything. I left at 5:30 to go grab us some dinner, and as I stepped outside, I was literally hit with a wave of the glory of a summer evening. It was wonderfully warm. The cumulus clouds were building towers for their evening show. Meadowlarks across the field were singing and singing. I could smell flowers; the aspens were shimmering. All the wonderful fragrances and feelings of summer.

It was like experiencing The Renewal of All Things.

Summer is God's rescue from all the creepy things we've been taught about heaven. Summer is the annual pageant on behalf of The Restoration of All Things, all nature practically shouting at us because we are tone deaf. That's why you love it so much. We pack up the car and head to the lake or the park; we break out the grill and have friends over, laughing late into the starlit evening; we dive into waters and bake in the sun; and in this way, we get a good, deep drink of the Great Restoration.

Drink it in, friends. Let it speak. You don't need a bucket list, because all of it is yours, forever. Very soon. I had lain down under the shadow of a great, ancient beech-tree, that stood on the edge of the field. As I lay, with my eyes closed, I began to listen to the sound of the leaves overhead. At first, they made sweet inarticulate music alone; but, by-and-by, the sound seemed to begin to take shape, and to be gradually molding itself into words; till, at last, I seemed able to distinguish these, half-dissolved in a little ocean of circumfluent tones: "A great good is coming—is coming—is coming to thee..." (George MacDonald, Phantastes) ■



IN THE RING

AS TOLD TO Blaine Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

Rick Welliver, a lightweight boxer with 10 years of experience and more than a dozen professional fights, is the founder of Spokane Boxing, an open club in Washington. We met him several months ago and were immediately intrigued by his introduction: “The best thing you can do to take a kid who’s doing nothing and put him on the track to doing something is open a boxing gym.”

AS: *Okay—you’ve got our attention. Why is a boxing gym the best way to get a kid doing something?*

Rick Welliver: What boxing does more than anything is rip you wide open. It reveals you. If you think you’re a tough guy, you learn quick you’re not. If you think you’re a hardcore guy, you realize you’re not. When you break it all down at the end of the day, it’s just about getting it done. I’ve seen guys who are violent guys—or want to be violent guys—and they get in the ring and realize within minutes, “Oh, I’m not that guy.” And then all of a sudden you want to learn. And with learning a discipline comes discipline, comes confidence. Most people who are dealing with bullying issues—they’re being bullied or are a bully—have the same problem. It’s fear. Boxing strips that all away. You can play football. You can play baseball. You don’t play boxing. It reveals you. It builds you.

AS: *You talk about using boxing to combat city violence. But these people here are still fighters. Why is boxing an effective way to fight violence?*

RW: Boxing teaches a kid discipline. He learns to know how to focus his violence. Nobody ever wants to be a bad kid. Nobody ever wants to be an unruly kid. I think what these kids are missing is an identity, and they think being tough gives them an identity. And structure. I don’t separate the kids from the white-collar guys coming in. Worst thing I could do is separate the kids. They see people who are achieving something and say, “I could do that.”



You know what's not cool? Not having a job. Not having a life. Not having a goal. That's what's uncool.

AS: *We've heard you talk about the importance of toughness here in the gym. How do you understand it?*

RW: Toughness is how a boxer thinks about their work. You think, oh, it's not cool to work at McDonalds? You know what's not cool? Not having a job. Not having a life. Not having a goal. That's what's uncool. Tough is learning a plan. Tough is remembering that you wanted to do something. That's boxing.

AS: *What do your fighters need? What are you trying to teach them in the ring?*

RW: Boxing is a little bit of everything. Mostly it's about heart. It makes people realize they're capable of doing more than they ever did. And focus. You have to focus. I say, "Okay, give me 40 minutes of your time. You're going to get in the ring now." And then the person they were at 9:00 is not the person they are at 9:45. That's the key. Focus. Most of it's repetition. Most of my coaches—these guys are phenomenal coaches. They know you have to get a kid to train himself to focus everything on where he is. We've seen it have great results.



AS: *What do you ask of kids learning to box?*

RW: Have a plan. You have to have a plan. What do you want to be? You better think about it. Because I'm going to ask in a week. "Well, I think I want to be this. A welder." I think, "Okay. Be a welder." I've had kids say that. "Go be that." Boxing is not your life. It's not even an identity. It's just a part of it that makes you realize, "I can do more, I can do more, I can do more."

AS: *What do you say to the guys who think they can't?*

RW: I say you're wrong. You have what it takes. Everything about you has what it takes. This ain't rocket science. It's boxing. You can go to a boxing gym. How do you guys feel here being in this gym?

AS: *Us? Oh—we love it.*

RW: Right? It feels great. Do the math. Anybody can be in a boxing gym. Anybody can learn to jab and hook. It's about discipline. I think most kids really want discipline, actually. But they don't realize discipline happens when you enter a place with other people. We work a lot to build a space with the people here. You just need to get in here and learn to get it done. Most people don't think you need to learn to finish. You do. Finishing. That's boxing. ■

MUNICYCLE

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

There's something ironic in the fact that YouTube has launched a new generation of adventure seekers. Ironic because we typically watch the latest video of some parachute-wearing guy jumping off a building from the comfort of our couch in veg mode. Then comes the day we see *The Video*—the one that touches our heart's undying need for adventure.

My friend Naz picked up unicycling when we were in high school, and I made plenty of fun of him for it. Unicycling? How about a tight rope and some juggling to round off that lady-killer of a hobby? Yet as soon as he offered it as a challenge and a skill only acquired through tenacity, my honor was roused, and I sank my teeth into mastering it. After hours and days, I was able to ride down the street without killing myself. When we weren't riding down to the mailbox, we were watching YouTube videos of all those unicyclists better than us (that self-deprecating motivator you just can't help).

Then it happened.

Within the bowels of the internet, we discovered a unicycling video we couldn't stop watching. It showed a man on a unicycle riding down a mountain. He wasn't just riding the unicycle down the mountain—he was careening down mountain biking trails, over logs and drops, as if the unicycle were made for it, as if he were made for it.

During those seemingly endless stretches of killing time, bad ideas start to look pretty good—especially to guys. We started on dirt roads, riding over gravel and gentle hills on our little learning unicycle with plastic pedals and a small blue wheel. It was way better than riding to the mailbox, but we quickly learned that our little blue unicycle wasn't exactly made for rugged terrain.





Back on YouTube, we also discovered that the man's unicycle in the video was a Mountain Unicycle, or "Muni" for short. Specifically made to ride down mountains, it had a knobby tire more aggressive than any bike tire, metal pedals, a bombproof frame, and a handle on the seat to hang on to for dear life. With a Muni under me I felt invincible... until my first real mountain unicycle ride.

Careening down steeper and rockier single-track trails, hovering between balance and eternity, the feeling of invincibility vanished along with my breath. But that feeling was quickly replaced by another one, a better one.

"Deep within my stomach, beyond the rush of adrenaline, beyond the fear, lurked a real sense of danger—and a real sense that I could overcome that danger."

Deep within my stomach, beyond the rush of adrenaline, beyond the fear, lurked a real sense of danger—and a real sense that I could overcome that danger. As trees whipped by, as gravel loosened under my tire, as gut-wrenching drop followed gut-wrenching drop, my heart beat faster and faster until it learned a new way to beat altogether. Tears streamed out the corners of my eyes from the rushing wind as I tasted something far deeper than mastering a skill.

I was tasting true adventure. And it was wonderful.

And it is wonderful, riding through misty forests and down ski slopes abandoned for the summer. Yes—we do wear helmets, gloves, and guards that cover all of the leg to above the knee. Sometimes it feels like we're just along for the ride and gravity does the rest, but other times, the amount of control a Muni offers far exceeds any bike. As every gain or loss of speed, every turn, is directly controlled by our legs, the amount of control is so direct that it's almost intimate. Whether we cruise down the trail or brutally crash is up to us and us alone. We have a say in whether we conquer the danger or the danger conquers us.

That is adventure.

Last summer, coming off a difficult trail in Whistler, Canada, we passed a couple of mountain bikers heading the other direction. Giving us a once-over, one of them chided, "You're missing a tire."

Without much pause we responded. "It takes twice the man to ride half the bike." ■



IN DEFENSE OF MILLENNIALS

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGES Hannah Holland

I'll start by not excusing myself.

One is usually tempted to hold out an opinion like a bird with a broken wing—cautious, protective, and unsure if you'll see the potential of flight or think only to put it out of its misery. So it would be easy to qualify my thoughts by pointing to all of the negative (though at times humorous) attention my generation has received over the course of the past year or so.

Or by defending myself with the protective veil that “everyone has different thoughts.” But that feels like being politically correct ... leaving room for others to contribute to the conversation. In truth, I think we fear being regarded as narrow-minded and insensitive more than we fear having others disagree with us.

The truth is there has never been a generation before us like the Millennials. We grew up and went to school and sought jobs and lives in a world carried by rocket fuel into the future of technology and inter-connectivity. It's had some serious effects on us, not all of which are positive; but more often than not the “tsk-tsk” and misunderstanding from the generations before us only helps broaden the gap between our worlds.

I want to show you my world, through my eyes, but given the limited space I have, I'll settle for a few examples. The internet was nothing more than a means for military computers to exchange information a decade before it was something found in every household in the western world—and most households all over the world.

I wasn't born yet when it was stumbled upon, but I was around to watch a computer brought into our family basement and a telephone cord plugged into the back. I remember the whining and clicking of the dial-up connection.

And now my phone can send and receive information at an astronomically faster rate. It can transfer money instantly. I can see a friend's face on the opposite side of the world and talk to them for free ... and so much more. Yes, it's a wonderful thing. And yes, it makes us impatient and feel the need for other things to respond in a similarly speedy fashion. Granted. But what isn't often noticed is the other effects this has had on us.

Millennials have been the marketing guinea pigs of the internet. We've been fed information and taught to seek what we need while those only a decade older than us sat in offices and spun out marketing campaigns the likes of which had never been seen before.

Yes, this affects purchasing habits and self-image and general happiness, but more than that, it has given the Millennials a fine-tuned sensor for the authentic and the commercial. We do not like being sold to.

Maybe what would be most helpful is remembering what it felt like to be young and full of fire and dreams and hope. Remember that no one walked straight into fully developed life with everything figured out.

This may help explain why so many Millennials don't follow news sources in a traditional fashion. It also explains why some are leaving evangelical churches to return to orthodox institutions. It should give some suggestion about where our cynicism and incredulity come from. If something triggers our sensor and comes off as disingenuous, if it reeks of marketing or some ploy to use emotions for the sake of profits, if it doesn't feel authentic, then we're long gone.

And there's more.

The shrinking of the world through the internet has given us front row seats to a changing landscape. We've witnessed governments toppled through social media. We've lived through a recession and watched companies dump loyal employees without flinching. We've been told to reach for the stars and go on to college, then we come away with so much debt it ceases to be a comprehensible number and find none of

the jobs the brochure promised. In our world, the lives of everyone we have ever known are glamorized and filtered and paraded across our screen. We struggle with envy and isolation in a system meant to connect. More cynicism.

And yet—what continues to show up in all the data collected about Millennials is that we care about other people. We want our purchasing power to matter and go to companies that take care of the families that help make their products. We care about justice and human trafficking and the fragile ecosystems of the earth. We want fulfilling jobs, unbiased news, and financial security.

Here at *And Sons*, we talk a lot about the need for my generation to grow up, be initiated, and embrace the process that probably feels too slow for most of us. This is all true, as it was true of every generation that came before and all that will come after. We do need fathering and to learn to breathe in a world charged on speed and getting things “now.” But we also need a serious dose of understanding from the generations who went before us.

Our world feels smaller than it was 10 years ago, and because of that it feels bigger as well. In a space where everything is possible and overnight success is touted as a New American Dream, it's easy to understand the listlessness this imbues. We want powerful things for the earth, we try our best to seek what feels real and meaningful, we are hounded by possibilities and accused of being selfish.

Maybe what would be most helpful is remembering what it felt like to be young and full of fire and dreams and hope. Remember that no one walked straight into fully developed life with everything figured out. Remember that we're your sons and daughters and that the internet has been our boarding school; we've been raised up by teachers called “information,” “media,” “globalization,” “marketing,” and “war.”

Of course we want meaning. We know the world is full of meaningless destruction and pain and corruption. Our battle isn't with fascism but with fear. Our weapons aren't built of iron and lead, but with words and truth. Our hope of victory isn't found in treaties and governments, but in purpose and life.

We are the Millennials. We are your children. We have more in common with you when you were our age than perhaps you thought. ■





RIDING WAVES

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGES Keaton Hudson

Well, it's finally summer. With that comes gloriously long days, board shorts that don't fit quite right after a winter of hearty meals, and the call of water. Here in Minnesota, we've got lakes galore (way more than 10,000), but at the moment, I'm missing the tide. There's something about the ocean. Something about salty air and the endless horizon that has hooked men for thousands of years—it pulls us out into deep water to hunt for food, explore new lands, and test ourselves in an environment quite indifferent to our fate. Water so often symbolizes life. The ocean has the vastness of God about it.

I have always loved the sea, ever since I was a boy and could dash across the hot sand and play in waves that felt so big at the time. Now that I'm older, I've found that while I must go farther out to find the same rush of a quickly building crest looming above my head, the ocean still makes me feel small. It's a wonderful feeling.

I learned the surfing basics in Hanalei Bay, on the north shore of Kauai. With a foam longboard and that special kind of humiliation a teenager feels while learning a new skill, I tasted for the first time something surfers have been feasting on for years.

Riding a pair of skis, a snowboard, or even a bobsled down a mountainside covered in snow is a fantastic experience, but it also feels a bit like taking advantage of a situation. There is the snow and a steep slope, and given enough skill and the right gear, I can slide down in one piece. Failing that, I can go back and try again, because the slope is exactly the same.

Waves are different. They are part of the ocean in a way that feels inseparable; the mountain is consistent on any given day, and immovable, whereas the ocean waves are moving beneath you and dynamic. Catching them isn't simply a matter of taking advantage of a stable situation. Whether you have a board, a boat, or just your wits about you, those waves are going to push you around, and only with considerable skill will they push you in the right direction.

Now, I'm no surfing guru. In fact, I've only surfed a few times in my life. In college, I inherited an old swallowtail board, which—on my first time out with it—got plowed by this gal who may have been paid to kill me. Honestly, I should have had someone who knew what they were doing help me out. Instead, I slapped some duct tape on it and called things good. My surfing career was not a stylish one.

But we have friends who grew up on the water and ride those waves like they were born on one. Every time we watch them, that longing rises again to do what they can, to experience the intimacy and the thrill only they know.



*Hark, now hear the sailors cry
Smell the sea and feel the sky
Let your soul and spirit fly
Into the mystic.
-Van Morrison*



Entering the world of surfing seems to require only a few things, each worthy of cultivating no matter the sport: patience, balance, an eye for and awareness of nature and the world around you, and lastly, joy. Joy like the kind you felt when school let out and the whole of summer stretched before you, so you ran out of those classroom doors and didn't look back. Of course, there's a whole lot more to it than that, but that will get you going.

On a surfboard, riding a wave, it's amazing how connected I felt to the ocean. What had only seconds before been a faceless force of nature quite suddenly wasn't faceless anymore. It was like the sea was winking at me. It was as though I had finally gotten the punch line of a joke told long before I was born. ■



LISTEN UP

WORDS John Eldredge

We were a good couple hours outside Jackson, Wyoming, down a few dirt roads and well into the Gros Ventre, when I looked down and saw my gas gauge teetering between empty and bone dry. I felt like such an idiot.

simply hadn't paid attention as we passed through town and half a dozen gas stations, and there we were, way out in the middle of nowhere with far less than a snowball's chance of making it back to town. My shame was followed quickly by despair. Then I stopped—or something stopped me—and a very simple, calm thought passed through my mind. You could pray about this.

It was summer 1979; I was 19, and I'd only met Jesus about six months earlier. The whole Christian thing was brand new to me, the baptismal waters still wet behind my ears. But I was as passionate a fisherman then as I am now, and it was the promise of good fishing that had gotten us out of town in a jiffy and into a real mess. So I thought I'd try the prayer thing out. It went something like this:

Me: "God, I need your help. I totally blew it. What do I do now?"

God: I'll bring you gas.

I'm serious; that was it. He spoke very clearly, inside, and that was that. Good enough for me. I mean, heck—God's going to bring us gas, so let's go fishin'! We had lunch and pulled out our gear. About that moment a group of college kids pulled up in the classic hippie flower-power VW van and asked if they could have our campsite. We explained we weren't staying the night, just fishing.

Me: "But could I catch a ride into town with you? I ran out of gas."

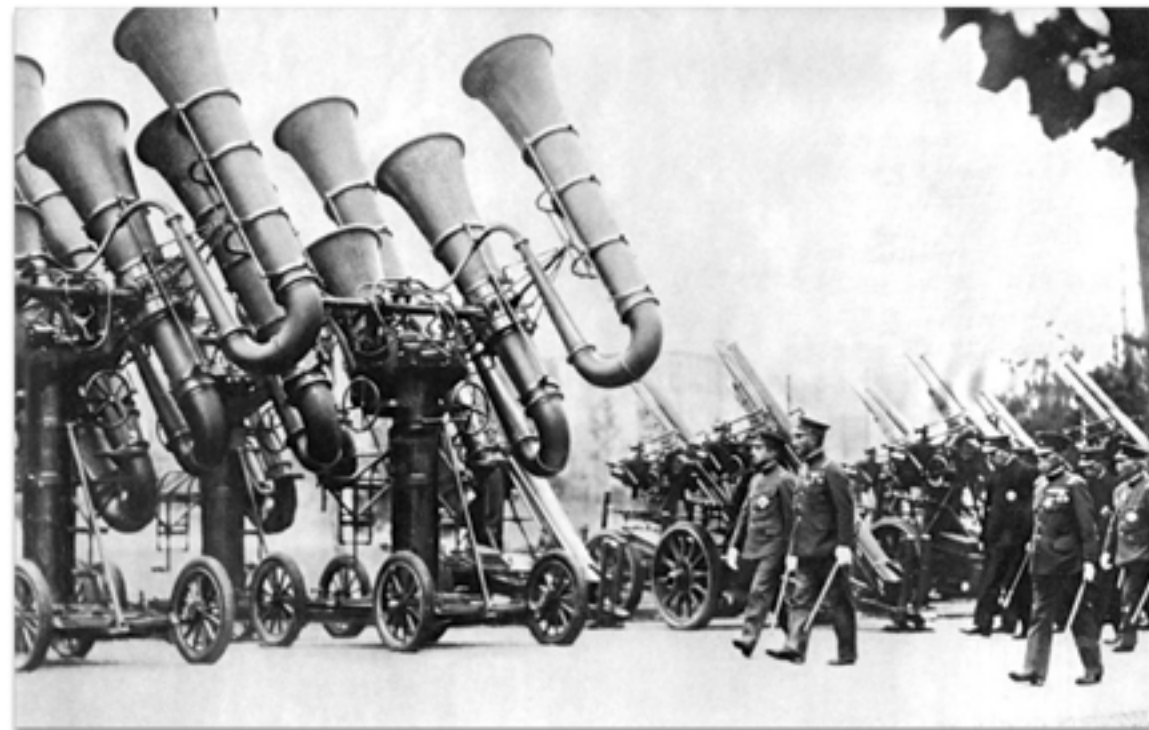
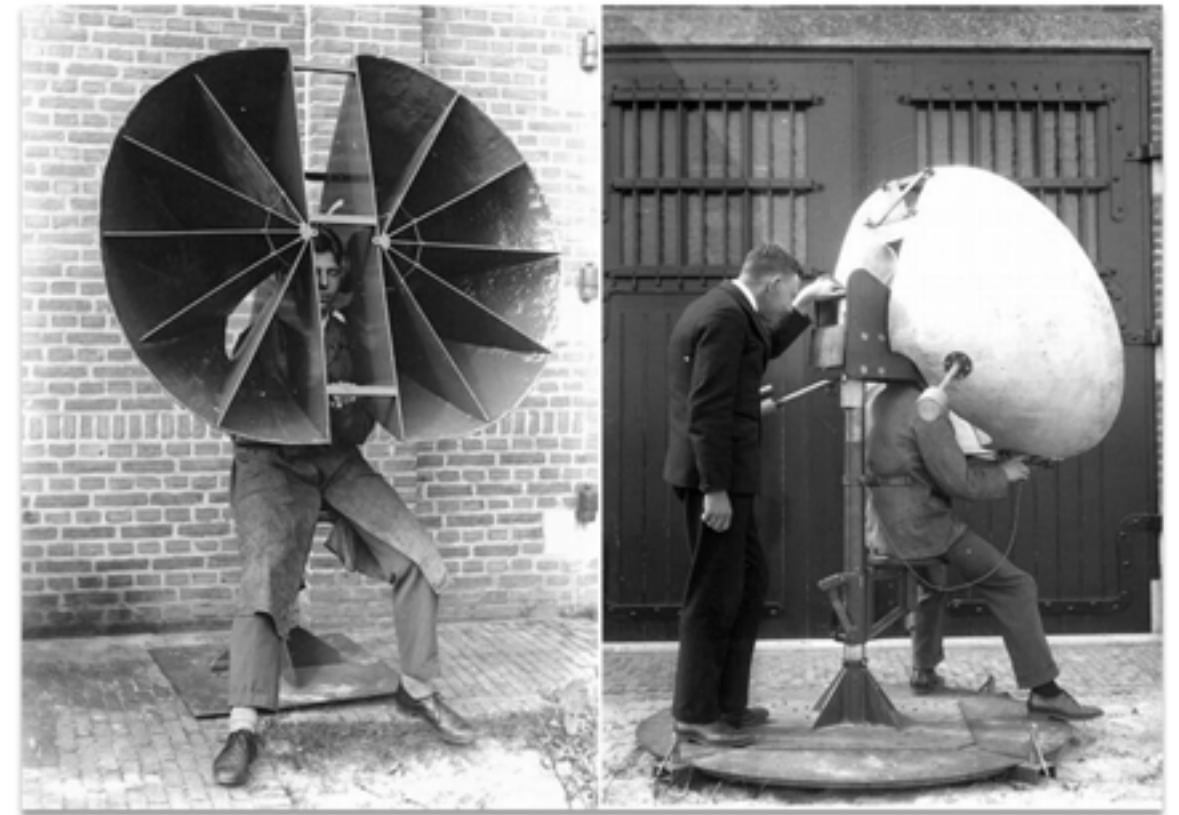
Them: "No problem, man. (Everybody said "man" back in the day.) We'll bring you gas."

Wow. Just like God said. So we spent the day down at the creek, and late afternoon returned to our car, and there were our new pals with a five-gallon can.

That day was an introduction into a whole new adventure for me—that God speaks, far more than we realize, and learning to recognize his voice can open up wonders galore and rescue us from innumerable mishaps.

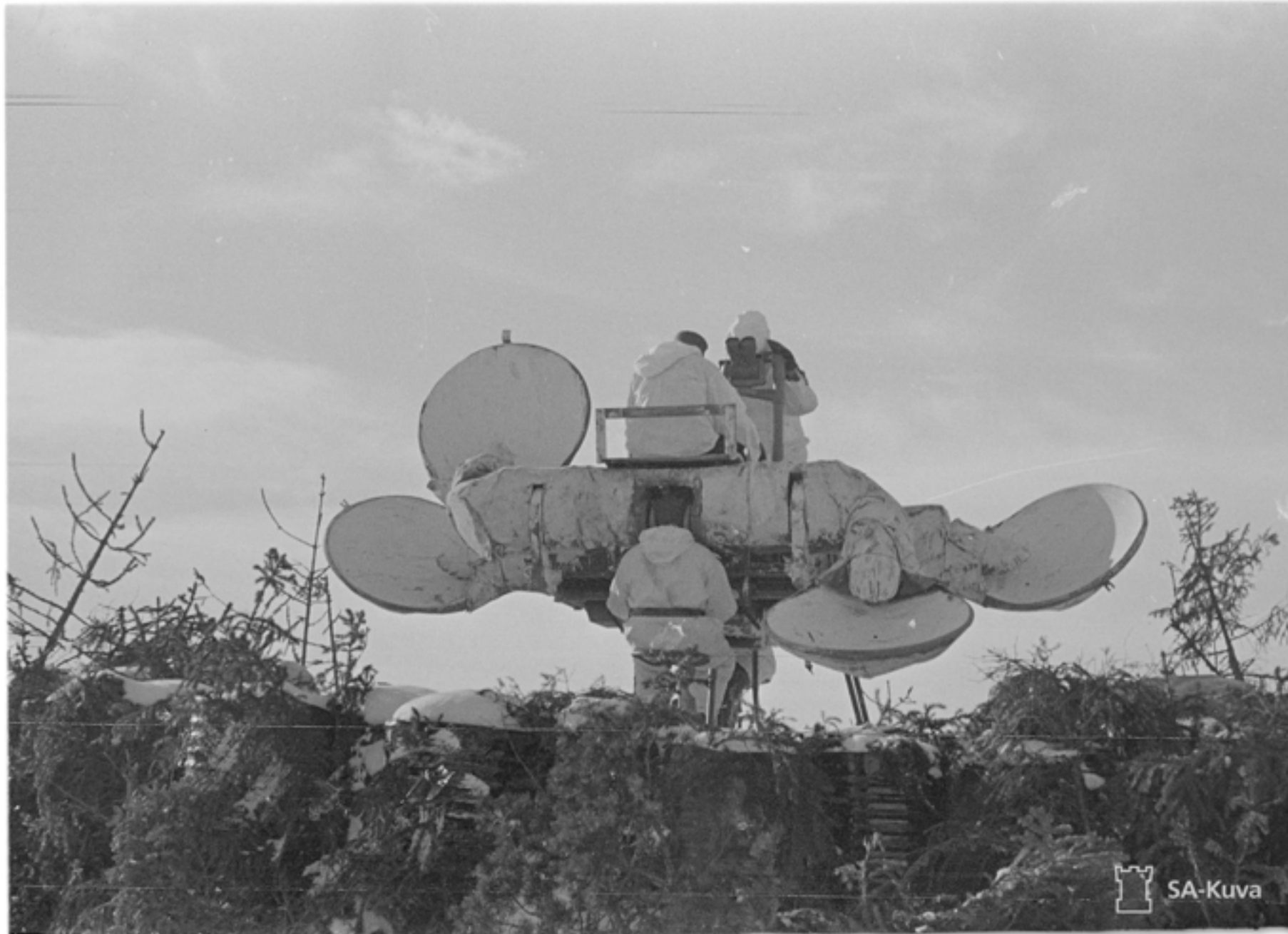
Learning to hear the voice of God is one of the great lost treasures of the spiritual life. Somewhere along the way, some Bible scholars got to teaching that God doesn't speak to his people any more, which is psychotic, and blasphemy. Psychotic because God is above all a communicator, and we are too, and any relationship requires communication, and more than anything God wants intimacy with us, and can you imagine two friends trying to be friends but never talking to each other? Blasphemy because the idea that God only speaks to us through the Bible is not what the Bible says!





WAR AND THE ART OF LISTENING

It's an obvious but intriguing fact—though radar wasn't developed until 1935, planes emerged in 1905, ships millennia before. And, since war's existed almost from the word go, folks have faced a dilemma: how do we find out where all these planes and ships are? Enter acoustic detection. In the 1800s, ships employed a kind of exaggerated stethoscope to navigate in the fog. After WWI, Denmark established an Air Watch Service to detect foreign aircraft. Those guys used the ear horns above to listen for planes. Evidently it worked, because the Danes created increasingly enormous versions of the low-tech solution. The Japanese improved upon the concept, building rolling racks of "War Tubas" near Anti-Aircraft batteries. Great Britain topped the lot, building a veritable fortress of massive acoustic mirrors, for a simple reason: the country's an island, but islands are vulnerable to air attack.



Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice.
 (John 10:1-4, The Message)

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...
 (Hebrews 3:15)

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.
 (Revelation 3:20)

In fact, the whole Bible is the story of God speaking, personally, to ordinary folk like you and me and of the gift it was to them to hear what he had to say. It's time we take this treasure back!

Now, to be fair, that story from '79 was one of those early "freebies" I think God gives the young believer to encourage us on our way. Usually it takes a bit more practice; hearing God's voice is something we learn over time—just like playing an instrument, driving a car, or casting a two-weight to skittish brookies. Anything you enjoy doing, I'll bet, took some learning. But it is worth it. Let me offer a few helpful tips to clear some of the fog.

Settle down. I just can't hear when I'm freaking out. I have to calm down, take a deep breath, and give some space to let God speak. Sort of like getting a good night's sleep—if you are stressing out about it, it's pretty much guaranteed you aren't going to. Settle down, get out of the drama, get quiet and listen.

Ask simple questions. You don't learn to ski on black diamonds, and you don't learn to hear God speak to you by starting with major life issues like, "Should I quit my job and move to India tomorrow?" or "Should I ask Jessica to marry me tonight?" God will speak to those issues, but you've got to start with simpler stuff. "Do you want us to go camping this weekend?" "Should I ask for a raise?" I'll even start with something as simple as "Do you love me?" because I know the answer is "Yes," and that way if I hear "No," I know I'm not yet settled and tuned in.

Don't fill in the blanks. What I mean is this: If I'm asking God, "Can I buy the motorcycle?" I've got to be honest enough and open enough not to "fill in the blanks" and speak for God. I've got to be willing to hear either yes or no, or I'm not really asking. Surrender is huuuge when it comes to learning to hear God's voice. If I'm not really open to hearing "no," I'm not really open to hearing.

Give it time. Especially on bigger questions like school and jobs and relationships and trips we really want to take, we've got to give God some time to speak. Honestly—I know folks who stop and ask God, wait about 10 seconds, conclude he isn't going to answer, and go off to do whatever they think is best. Slow down. Ask your questions of God, and listen. If you don't hear anything, give it a few days. He'll speak.

Allow for creativity. God speaks in all sorts of ways. Certainly through the Scripture; also through good counsel. But he is so creative, and he loves to be playful with us. I can't count the number of times I've opened a book I was reading, and there in the next sentence or paragraph was the answer to the question I'd been asking. Listen for God's voice within you (he lives inside you, remember), but also allow for lots of creative ways he might want to speak. Movies. Books. Songs on the radio. Something a friend casually says. Stop signs (pay attention to stop signs!).

Get confirmation. Especially on the big stuff. Do not base life-threatening decisions (whether it be big wall climbing or career change or mission trips or marital relations) on a one-time listening prayer experience. Ask God to confirm it. Get some backup before you leap over the falls. I'm not discouraging leaping—I'm just saying make sure you heard God right on major choices.

I probably have more than a thousand stories since that weekend in 1979—stories of rescue, stories of joy, stories of unexpected gifts that have come because I have learned to listen for the voice of God. He speaks, and it is our right as sons and daughters to hear his voice. Do not try to live your life without this. ■

CHARCUTERIE

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Edredge

Charcuterie is preservation. It comes from two French words, flesh (chair), and cooked (cuit). In the 1400s in France, the butcher's guild didn't allow the sale of raw meat. They instead perfected a swath of preservation techniques from salting to smoking to dry curing. These techniques stifled disease and improved the life span of the products. But they also introduced, not incidentally, a level of craft and complexity producing some of the best-tasting food around.

I became interested in that when I began to butcher whole animals and wondered what I could make, besides steak and burger. Take smoked hams. You start with choice cuts, the sirloin or something similar. Fine on their own, sure, but soak the sirloins in a saltwater solution (aka brine) several days, smoke-roast them, and you've got salty, spicy hams, with an almost appalling tenderness. Take, say, an elk brisket. Dredge the brisket in dry cure, let it rest in the fridge a week, smoke it, and you've got an intensely salty, resilient meat, almost ruby red, with the texture of ham in cajun stew. The products were exceptional. But the craft, the care, skill, and dedication required, elevated the process. Recently, I made a fresh chorizo with so many bird's eye chilis Luke and Sam and I ate it sweating, shaking our heads in gratitude and pain. Here in the United States, charcuterie is in its infancy, much like American winemaking just after prohibition. It's tough stuff—no one makes great sausage their first try. But in the practice, you can attain a rare and almost unmatched view into eating, from engaging large animals to butchering, salting, waiting, cooking, and feasting.





DRY-CURING BACON

1 Pork Belly
Dry Cure

A Three-Finger Pinch of Herbs
(like Sage and Thyme + Spices like Black Pepper)

Everyone should make bacon once. It's available on menus everywhere, but very little of what you see is really bacon. Bacon is cured pork belly. This should be obvious by now, but, curing is preservation. We preserve things because they're worth it. There aren't museums dedicated to 1990's flannel shirts. No one adorns their desk with a photo of the junior prom. Bad pork bellies make bad bacon, thus the aberration available at most breakfast joints. Here's the good stuff:

1. To make good bacon, trim a good pork belly so the edges are square.
2. Dredge the thing either side in a basic dry cure.
3. Add whatever spices you associate with morning bliss—black pepper, sage, thyme, or maple sugar and syrup, or black pepper and garlic are all good ideas.
4. Seal the belly in a plastic bag and let it sit several days in a snug container, like a roasting pan, flipping it every other day. When it's firm to the touch, it's cured.
5. Cook it to an internal temp of 150 degrees F, either in an oven set to 250, or a smoker similarly adjusted.
6. Cool it so the oils approach homeostasis. After that, you can slice it and heat it in a pan and enjoy what is perhaps the most profound umami experience in the kitchen.



SMOKING SHREDDED BBQ

1 Pork or Elk Shoulder
(or a pair of Pig Hocks or Elk Shanks)

1 Tbsp Salt
2 Tbsp Pepper
1 Tbsp Paprika
2 Bird's-Eye Chilis

Shredded BBQ is easy to smoke because you don't need to regulate it's temperature on account you're not actually roasting the meat. The smoke is flavor; the meat will cook later, in a crock pot.

1. Get a tough bit of muscle, something well-used, like a shoulder or even a shank or hock. Make sure you remove the meat from the fridge an hour or so before you smoke it. The meat needs to develop a tacky exterior, called the pellicle, for the smoke to take.
2. While we're on the topic, a word about smoke. Smoke is an astonishing grab bag of tiny, heat-released compounds, some of which are very tasty, carried heavenward by escaping gases. The gases color the meat. It's interesting, but the flavor of wood is more a factor of the kind of soil the tree grew in than the variety of tree. Recently I've been able to source applewood from a couple wooded lots by town—the nuances, both in the color and smell of the smoke, are fascinating.
3. Coat the meat liberally in kosher salt, pepper, and, if you're me, paprika and (a couple) pulverized bird's-eye chilis. For an arresting sweetness, include a little maple sugar (in the smoker) or maple syrup (in the crock pot).
4. Put the thing in a smoker, keeping the temperature as low as possible.
5. Smoke it for 4 to 6 hours, depending on what you have time for. I use the aforementioned apple wood because I like a heavy smoke.
6. Transfer the muscle to a crock pot and cook on low for around 6 hours, or up to overnight, until the meat shreds easily. Sink the meat in bbq sauce and devour with a side of acidic coleslaw or pickles.



BRINING HAMS

1 Rear-Quarter Roast
3/4 Cup of Salt
1/2 Cup of Sugar
Two-Finger Pinch Curing Salt
Citrus

(Either 1 Halved Lemon, 2 Halved Oranges or 3 Halved Clementines)

Everyone should brine everything, no exceptions. Take olives. The raw fruit isn't edible. But, sink them in a saltwater solution and let them sit, and you get a delicious, varied side. Ditto pickles, brined cucumbers. That this is true is further demonstrated by the fact every box of Morton's Kosher salt enjoins you to brine a turkey. A brine is basically as much salt as can bond to a bucket of water. The salt will penetrate the meat and soften it. As it does, it will take it's neighbors along. Brine pheasant with citrus, and the resulting meat will have a wonderful, tangy sweetness. Brine elk shoulder with chipotle peppers, and the resulting dish will have a mysterious, semi-sweet spice. Make like Mortons and brine your Thanksgiving turkey. Use a temperature probe to tell you when it's done, and you'll have a superlative bird. I like to brine pastrami but pastrami is complex, so here we're making ham.

1. Bring 1/2 a gallon of water to a boil. Keep the other half nearby.
2. Dissolve the following: 3/4 cup salt, 1/2 cup sugar, a pinch of curing salt.
3. Let the water cool/add the other 1/2 gallon to speed the process. Don't brine in hot water.
4. Add the citrus.
5. Sink the meat in the brine—I use a plate or a glass storage container to keep the whole thing submerged.
6. Let it sit three days in the fridge. That's a lot of days, but remember, a ham is a salt punch in the teeth.
7. Smoke the meat to an appropriate internal temp (see bottom). Hams are also great basted and roasted.

Resources

BUTCHERING & COOKING TECHNIQUES

***Buck, Buck, Moose*, by Hank Shaw**

Probably the best guide to breaking down an animal, but also, a wonderful cooking primer. It explores aging, enzymes, the difference between brines (salts) and marinades (acids). This is a cookbook you could read on a plane, if you wouldn't disturb your neighbors with images of animal butchery. Dad was given this book for Christmas—now, it's on my desk.

***The Complete Guide to Hunting, Butchering, & Cooking Wild Game: Volume 1: Big Game*, by Steven Rinella**

It's cool Steven talks about hunting, but, unless you're brand-spanking new to the pastime, probably not the best hunting book per se. BUT. There's a great section on breaking down large animals, as well as great basic recipes.

Bon Appétit's series of videos "Handcrafted"

There's a great tutorial on butchering hogs, as well as sheep and cows, which are good facsimiles for many game animals.

CHARCUTERIE

***Charcuterie*, Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn**

This is where everybody starts, for a good reason. Ruhlman and Polcyn sparked a charcuterie revolution with this book. It introduces very nearly everything and has dynamite recipes.

***Sausage Making, The Definitive Guide*, Ryan Farr**

Ryan is native sausage guru, not bad for an American. He never freezes his meat, and his book is in color. Wonderful, complex, tasty recipes.

** If Ryan Farr's book is already gone from the library, try Home Sausage Making, 4th Edition: From Fresh and Cooked to Smoked, Dried, and Cured: 100 Specialty Recipes, by Charles Reavis and Evelyn Battaglia. It's the same stuff, a bit more extensive, and excellent.*

MAKING SAUSAGE

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Edredge

1 Pork Shoulder/Elk Shoulder/Chuck Roast

Just under half (42%) as much Fat as Meat

Basically, all sausage is 30% fat, 70% meat, though the champs refine that ratio. If you're using pork, don't mess with it—pork shoulder is already 30% fat. If you're using wild game or something such, you'll need to add quality pig fat.

2-3 Tablespoons of Salt

A little (little, little) Pinch of Curing Salt

This Crazy List of Spices:

A sausage has a lot of fat and usually a lot of spices. You're making a single product representing a whole plate, so don't be shy: a tablespoon or so of finely-chopped pasilla chilis, ancho chilis, chipotle chilis, 4-5 bird's-eye chilis (if you like heat), tablespoon paprika, teaspoon chopped chives, cilantro, thyme, tablespoon tomato paste, 3/4 cup vinegar, splash of red wine.

There's a popular bit of slander about sausage I'd like to correct. You know the one—that everyone likes sausage, but no one likes to see it made. That's insane. The saying refers to Upton Sinclair's, oh-no-a-worker-fell-in-the-grinder sausage. It refers to modern, grocery store whoops-there's-blood-offal-and-cow-crap-in-the-sausage sausage. Real sausage is exactly as enjoyable to make as it is to eat. It's the jewel of charcuterie. In fact, though this article could go a dozen directions—dry curing, smoking, brining—we're putting all that online and elevating one craft. Sausage making. Because there's whole books devoted to it, and most people have never tasted a real one.

There's a simple reason for that calamity. A sausage is a delicate object, an unstable architecture of interlocking protein and fat. Get it too warm, too cold, freeze it, mass produce it, and you've got something that resembles sausage about as well as corn-flakes-dumped-in-the-toilet moonshine does scotch.

Here's how to make it. You need a meat grinder, or a meat grinding attachment for a stand mixer. I use an antique Bosch scavenged from behind old rice sacks in my mother's pantry. It's a gem. Then, you need a way to regulate temperature. I use an infrared temperature gun. Buy one—they cost 15 bucks and make you the only one of your friends to own a temperature gun. Here, we'll adapt a chorizo recipe from Ryan Farr, because I love chorizo and it's wonderful uncased.



1. START WITH GOOD FAT AND A PIECE OF COLD MEAT, A QUALITY SHOULDER.

During the whole process, nothing should ever go over 40° F. Put the muscle in the fridge. Take out the fat, and cut it into quarter-inch cubes. Freeze the lot on a cookie sheet. Return to the muscle. Trim off excess fat and silver skin, then cut the meat into quarter-inch cubes. When the meat is trimmed and cubed, lay it out, one-layer thick, on a cookie sheet or cutting board. Freeze the meat until the sides are slightly crunchy.

While the meat chills, prep your grinder. You can do all kinds of things to help the process—chill the snake and die and blades in the fridge, for example—but a lukewarm grinder won't sabotage you. Nest a large mixing bowl in another, larger mixing bowl filled with ice. Remember temperature—you're trying to achieve a stable suspension of meat and protein. If it gets warm, the protein breaks and falls apart, the sausage turns to bread crumbs.

2. GRIND THE FAT AND THE MEAT.

This is really fun if you don't put the blade on backwards or heat up the fat or mash meat down the feed tube. I did all those things in the learning process, attaining unmatched levels of aggravation. If you do it wrong, the meat will smear. Smear means you stop grinding meat and start crushing individual proteins—the meat starts extruding from the grinder like tooth paste. Stop. Check for the above mistakes. The meat should fall through the feed tube onto the snake and vanish towards the die. A moment later, bright, qualitatively homogenized meat will push out from the die and stack up like al dente noodles in the chilly bowl. Continue until everything's ground.

3. AT THIS POINT DON A WIZARDS HAT.

Now comes the farce. Here science gives out and craft reigns supreme. A farce is pretty much cold sticky sausage. As the meat and fat are mixed together a protein, myosin, dominates. Myosin binds the meat and fat. The ensuing mixture is tacky. Undermix the sausage and the farce breaks. Ditto if you overmix. For this step, a stand mixer is fine. You dump the meat and fat into the mixing bowl, put on an appropriate paddle, and mix on medium for 60 seconds. Then add some very cold liquid and mix another 60 seconds. According to the sausage-making sages, human hands are better for this step, because human hands contribute just enough heat to help the farce along. So, skip the stand mixer, combine the meat and fat in a bowl, add spices, and mix until a little gob of sausage sticks to the underside of an outstretched hands. 60-120 seconds is a good standard, but it's a feel you're going for.

At this point you get to eat some sausage. Make a test patty and cook it, slowly. You can brown the sausages later, like a heathen. Browning, aka the Maillard Reaction, crushes subtle flavors and makes the sausage taste sweet. That's fine, but a test patty's cooked to see whether its constituent salt and spices need to be adjusted, so go low and slow. Taste. Savor. Adjust spices as needed.

4. YOU'VE MADE A SAUSAGE.

For now, leave it uncased, cooking it into patties. Realize that you've now tasted an ancient food product and are distinguished among your companions.

It's interesting, the USDA recommends cooking pork to an internal temp of 145. That's already down from 165, but it's not really necessary for reasons we won't explore on account I'm running out of space. It has to do with agricultural practices and weird statistics. ■

** A little tip here: when I started making charcuterie, I had really, really poor knife skills. This became apparent when I tried to make sausage. Muscles are covered in a slippery, semi-transparent connective tissue called fascia, or silver skin. It's collagen that cooks down wonderfully in broths but makes sausage impossible to chew. Plus it knots up your grinder. If you've never filleted a fish, which, full disclosure, I hadn't until recently, or made a watermelon sculpture, or anything else like that, silver skin is crazy hard to remove. Practice makes better, but the best thing is to have a sharp knife, and to set the fascia you're removing face-down on a cutting board. You then cut across the meat, keeping the blade of your knife angled towards the fascia, which resists cutting, and most of it should come off as a single piece. This process is like the aforementioned fish fillet.*



Do you like olives?

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGES Wookie Jones

I have the most incredible book for you. It's as though the author had you in mind when they wrote it. Each chapter is a mystery, full of twists and turns you'll never anticipate. It's going to break your heart, but in the best of ways. You're going to fall in love with the main character. They are so complex and you get to watch them grow from chapter to chapter. You'll be so influenced by them that you'll feel like you're growing right alongside them, and I wouldn't be surprised if you are. I would have given you this book sooner, but I didn't think you were ready. I'm so excited for you. It's going to change everything.

Did you feel pain?

That's what it felt like when my wife and I found out we were pregnant. For years we were terrified of the prospect. It felt like the death knell of all our dreams. If we got pregnant, how would we travel to Japan? When would we get scuba certified and dive the great reefs of the world? Would we have to give up all those nights with a bottle of wine split between us, those early morning ascents of Colorado 14ers, our sleep in general?

But then, over the past year, something began shifting internally for the two of us.

Maybe it's been watching our parents grow older and knowing that someday we will wish our kids had had more time with them. Maybe it was seeing couples traveling with their baby strapped to their backs, watching little ones with fishing poles in hand or running off with tent stakes, that has made us look forward to inviting our children into all the things we love. We began to see having a child not as the end of our story, but as the beautiful adventure of the next chapter.

We were making the internal shift from "pregnancy is bad and means we've lost our freedom" to "this is something amazing, something we want." We knew we couldn't be totally prepared for all this would mean, but for two strongly independent people, even making that shift was life-changing.

I started thinking about what this would mean for me: a father. Suddenly the stakes got much higher on just about everything. I needed to be able to provide for my family in new ways. More intimidating still, I needed to be able to impart value on a developing mind. From being a good person, to being strong, inquisitive, loving, and grounded. I needed to come to terms with what I believe about faith and food and philosophy and storytelling in ways I had never wrestled with before. As Jonathan Safran Foer wrote in his work *Eating Animals*, "Feeding my children is not like feeding myself: it matters more."

I was coming to terms with the depths of what a father is, how I would take up the role, and I tried to anticipate much of what I needed to know as I strained to lift the fabric of time and catch glimpses of that undulating future.

And then early one morning in February, my wife called me into our bathroom, where she stood holding the positive result that changed our lives forever. We were going to be parents. No, we are parents. There, inside my beloved's womb, is the growing body of my, of our, child. It couldn't be denied. We believe that child has a soul, right

now, a soul that lives outside of time. We believe we each do, which means we are parents to that soul, long before we hold the child in our arms.

Two souls in one body. Two hearts. Two sets of hands and feet and eyes and lungs. In a moment we became parents, pregnant with new life, new possibilities, and the whole world felt like it had turned on its head. I knew what pregnancy was. I had no idea what pregnancy is.

I have the most incredible book for you.

We began to look at development photos that matched where our little one was week to week. Vitamins, no alcohol, no caffeine, careful with which essential oils she used, what are we going to do about the office when we make it a nursery?

We shared the joy with family and close friends, knowing that the first trimester is dangerous waters. We had a sense that we were going to have a son, and every day the miracle knit itself together. Fingernails, spinal cord, beating heart—we loved this little person and wondered what they would look like. My son and I almost shared a birthday. Two and a half hours separate the day he entered the world from the day I celebrate mine. As I stood in our bathroom, looking at his body in my wife's hand, it felt like my whole world had stopped. Except that while her body went into labor, this isn't called "birth," it is called "passing." You need to be alive to have a birthday, and my son wasn't alive; in fact he hadn't been alive for the past week, but we had only learned this in the last 24 hours.

On March 30, around 11 p.m., my wife almost fainted during her shift at work and was sent to the emergency department. I got a ride over as soon as I heard. We feared what might be happening. Somewhere inside, we might have told you that we knew. There were no tears when my wife saw the ultrasound, no tears when there was no heartbeat, no tears when we were informed we had had a missed miscarriage and that our son's heart had stopped a week ago.

The next 24 hours were more like flashes of color and emotion than anything like real life. Words seemed to have lost their meaning. There wasn't space for concepts like loss, heartbreak, and labor. Our world became the size of a hospital room. Pain, cervix, saline, blue gloves, plastic wedges, morphine, tissue... I tried to help as she vomited everything she had, then dry heaved everything she didn't. I remember calling and canceling our dinner reservations, like my brain wanted something normal to do. There wasn't space to understand or grieve.

The ER doctor tried to do a manual extraction of the "tissue." Our nurse told us how she had had a miscarriage at the same time as us, and how the four natural births she had gone on to have were nothing near as physically painful as her miscarriage. Still, there were no tears. There were no categories for what was happening. We didn't know to be grateful that the doctor couldn't get the body out. We didn't know that if they had we might not have been able to keep his body.

Back home the following night, at 2:30 a.m., my wife called me into our bathroom. The same place we learned we were pregnant not so long ago. A lifetime ago. The body of our son, in my wife's hand. Perfect, human, broken.

It's going to break your heart.

That world that had been turned upside down was ripped apart. Grief like I had not known came crashing down and smothered us, smothered me. There he was, that unknowable future, and gone already. My chest was ripped out and lying somewhere on the floor. I was four years old and not strong enough to hold up my world. I did not know what heartbreak was.

We placed his body in the world's holiest matchbox and held each other and wept. A few days later, we buried Patrick Samuel in the mountains behind my home. Surrounded by family, we blessed his body; we spoke the broken words of broken hearts and prayed more for ourselves than for a soul whose fate we do not question. And then time betrayed us and refused to move like it should. Hours became days, and weeks became minutes. Tides of loss and grief came in and out. As C. S. Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*:

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me.

Others began to share their own stories of miscarriage with us, and it felt like nearly everyone we know has been touched somehow. I want to fall at the feet of those friends who have shared their stories with me before—I did not understand. My wife is a nurse, so we know the statistics,

that somewhere between 20 and 50 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage, with so many of them unnoticed. We know that it is often nature's way of ending a non-viable development. That does nothing for what it really is.

It is a person. A promise. A new beginning. A life. A dream. And real, true, sometimes overwhelming grief.

It may sound strange, but I've become grateful our story went the way it did. So often, men and women experience miscarriage in dramatically different ways. For the woman, there was life inside you, there was the physical experience of being pregnant, and the loss is palpable and real. I've heard stories of husbands who never saw a body, never had a tangible experience of presence, and therefore never really experienced loss. The mind breaks and takes the brunt in ways the heart cannot. It's traumatizing in entirely different ways.

I'm so grateful I got to see him.

I've found myself asking impossible questions lately. I want to know answers to things that can never be. I want to sit my son in my lap and ask him what he thinks about the feel of a cold stream moving around his feet. I want to know his favorite time of day; do you wake full of life and excitement like your mother, or do you stay up late into the night and look up at the stars like your father? Do you have a cowlick like me?

Do you hate the smell of mushrooms cooking? Where do spend your time? What kind of stories do you like? Do you chase dragonflies, or do they scare you as they dip and dive? What is your favorite color, your favorite season, your favorite dinosaur? Do you like olives?

Did you feel pain? Do you miss us?

Do you think me silly for asking questions you can't answer, for shedding tears when you are well and whole? I want to flesh out the person I anticipated knowing on this side. I want glimpses of the story, of the book promised to me, when all I got was a book full of empty pages.

All those things we thought we were giving up—the alcohol and caffeine, the travel and adventure, the personal freedom—we know meant nothing. I would give them all up for one more day with my son.

Then slowly, gently, we found ourselves wanting to say "yes" to life again. It won't replace what we have lost. It won't change our story. But we don't want death—or the fear of another death, or of another after that—to be the final word. We will hope and open ourselves up to whoever is next and whatever story that might bring.

It's going to change everything. ■

Do you have a cowlick like me?

SON OF A FLY FISHERMAN

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Momin Arju

I believe that trout exist, I really do. They exist, I swear they exist, despite that all evidence leads to the contrary.

The sun plays and dapples over the tannin stream that lazes through this Colorado valley. I wave my hand over my neck and face to scatter the biting flies as often as I can spare it, and with a two-weight fly rod in one hand and the dark green line in the other, that is not very often. I believe in fish, that they like to eat, but there has been no proof, and my faith is beginning to wane. Two hours on the stream, my brother behind me a bend or two, and my father ahead out of sight, and I have not caught a thing. No bites, no looks, nothing. Casting again, the dry fly follows the line of the cast and gently lands in some willows. I do believe in willows. I know them intimately. For what feels like the fiftieth time this hole, I cross the stream, spooking any fish that might have the audacity to prove their existence into deep nooks, and fish out my fly from the malleable plant.

The two-weight was a Christmas gift several years ago. It spends most of its time in the shed, save the few summer weeks I return home to once again brave the streams of the Yampa Valley. I tell myself I do it for the scenery. After bad hunting seasons, hunters describe what they do as “armed hiking;” with the absence of success, there is the crushing self-awareness that you’re just walking through the woods with a gun. The sentiment is similar. Except I’m not even that armed. But the scenery is indeed gorgeous as I once again send my line up the stream, floating my fly down the line of bubbles that mark the line of the current. Nothing. My internal spiritual crisis is broken by a loud whoop from upstream. The whoop is followed by a laugh, and I can just make out the unmistakable and exquisite arc of a rod with a fish on. My father has caught yet another fish. I think that makes the count in the lower thirties.

I have grown up watching my father fish. In the early spring, we’d drive out to find the caddis hatch, or in the summer hike to hidden rivulets. Mystery would overtake me as I watched such grace-filled arcs roll out, almost in slow motion, the line of a perfect cast

moving through the air, resting on the water so tenderly it would break your heart. It was watching magic happen in real time. The magic of unseen years of practice, learning, and experience laid out in a single instant. The fish thought it was beautiful too, so much so it’d be a damn shame to let such casts go to waste and so would hurl themselves on the fly in acts of reverence.

My casts almost seem an insult. Like a slap, my line hits the water. And if it’s not slapping the water, it’s caught in the bushes. There is no hope for fish, but it is not about the fish. In my frustration, it seems that every desire, every insecurity, every unhealed place in my heart hiding in dark and secret places comes together—and comes down hard—on the singularity of fly fishing. My anger surges on my own inability, which seems directly linked to the injustice of the world. My shame is unfolded in the lonely wilderness to buzzing flies and an unforgiving sun from which no hat can save me.

It is not about fish. It is about the haunting of that inaccessible wealth of experience and time to which those who go before me seem to have the keys. It is my identity and ability. When my anger and frustration come to a head, heavy as a porter on nitrogen, what is spoken is, “You will never.” Never cast well, never catch a fish, never be skilled, never be competent, never be as beautiful or timeless as your father.

I say to Dan Allender, “There is no Justice in the world.”

He responds with eyes holding that haunting wealth. “No. But there is Mercy.”

I cast again. By an act of God or by the gentleness of the sudden uprising of wind, my line lands soft and silent on the water. The fly floats still across the stream and then, pop, slurp, it disappears in suddenness. I point the tip of my rod up to set the hook more out of an act of shock than of collected accuracy. It is a beautiful brook trout. I wet my hand in the cold water and gently remove the hook from the trout’s stiff lip. The internal world is turned to exhilaration, and in exhilaration, a silence. In that two-weight rod, frustration meets desire. There is an irresistibility to that haunting wealth of experience that is revealed in skill earned over a lifetime. Of tilling soil to richness. Fly fishing is my way of engaging with inheritance: Shall it be the sins of my Fathers, or shall it be their glory? My desire is to put in the hours. To till the soil by facing the loneliness and the unforgiving Colorado sun, the tannin streams. ■



FIG 1.
IMPRESSIONISTIC PATTERN FLIES
CDC Caddis Emerger

4 CATEGORIES OF FISHING FLIES



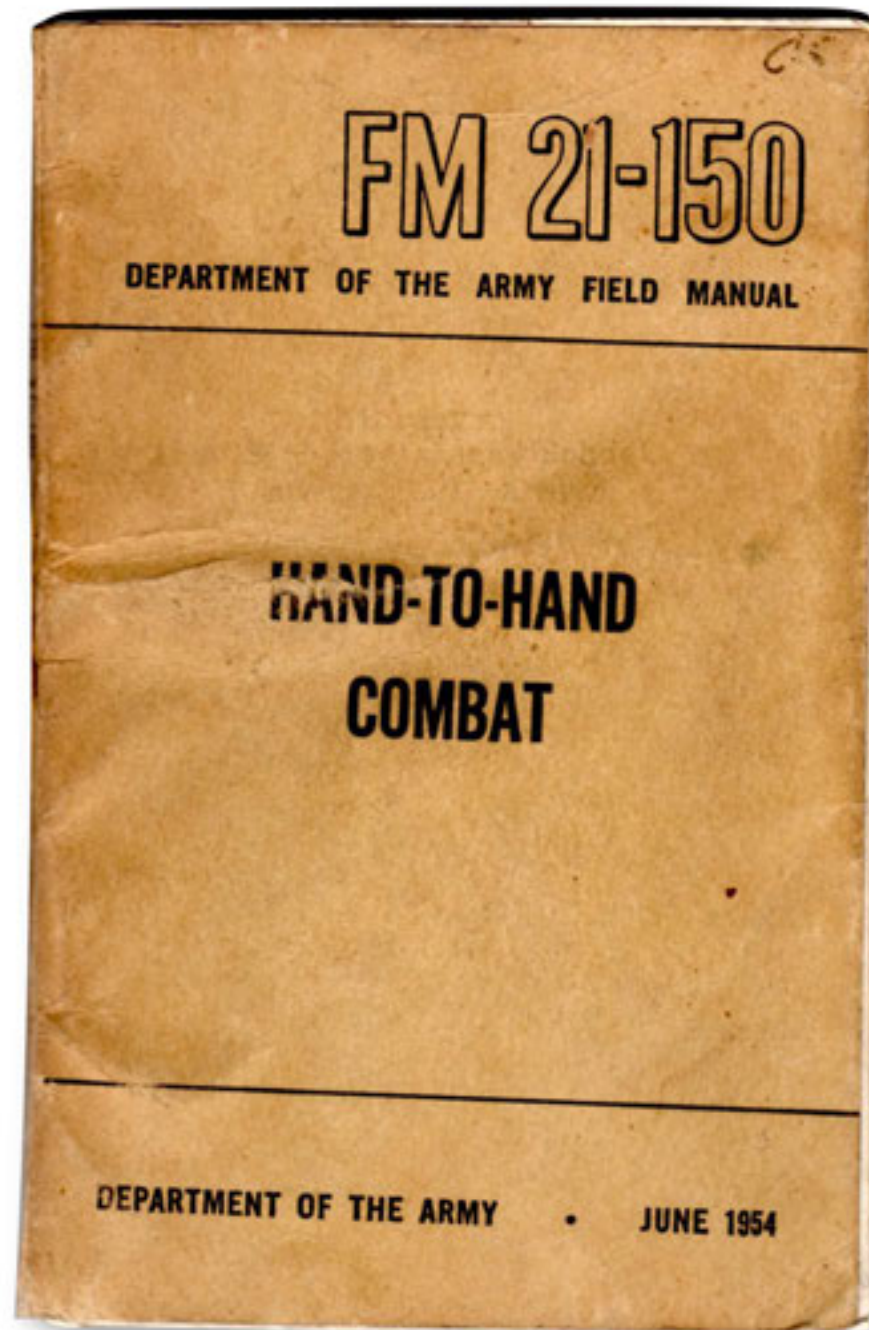
FIG 2.
SEARCH PATTERN FLIES
Beadhead Hare's Ear



FIG 3.
ATTRACTOR PATTERN FLIES
Rainbow Warrior



FIG 4.
IMITATIVE PATTERN FLIES
Thorax PMD



AND TAKING NAMES

WORDS John Eldredge

Yes, it had been raining, but we didn't know about the hail.

It was a freak of nature. One of those random cloudbursts dumped a thousand frozen golf balls along a stretch of Highway 395 10 miles ahead in preparation for our arrival. We were blasting south from Bridgeport, making time in Frank's '81 Ford Econoline, one of those big old vans preferred by churches and kidnapers.

We were going too fast coming around that bend, and the hail appeared too quickly for any real reaction. "Whoa...what's that white stuff...is that hail?" But by then we were doing 360s, graceful as a figure skater, spinning over those big icy marbles into oncoming traffic and the irrigation ditch on the far side. This took you longer to read than it took to happen.

I put my hand on the dashboard to brace for the flip I knew was coming and prayed the only thing I could pray, the only thing I really needed to pray: "Jesus!" Next thing I knew, we were hanging upside down (seat belts do work) with oil pouring in through the instrument panel, laughing, actually, with the giddy light-headed relief that follows a near head-on.

Some prayers just happen; they are "the cry of the heart." No training needed when it comes to this kind of prayer. I've uttered it thousands of times. Bet you have, too.

Like when the phone rings and the bad news starts to spill and all you can do is say, Father...Father...Father, your heart crying out to God. It's a good kind of prayer, rising from the deep places in us, often unbidden, always welcome to his loving ears.

But I think most folks get stuck there, which is kind of like ending your education somewhere around fourth grade. There is more.

The other kind of prayer is far more intentional, where we take up sword and shield and start making an impact through strong, determined prayer. I call this kind "the prayer of intervention." Meaning we are intervening. Men do not have to be passive victims of life until God chooses to do something; he has given us power and authority to change the course of events ourselves. Men are meant to intervene, to engage, to make a difference. It's in our DNA. But first we need to get a popular misunderstanding of prayer out of the way.

"I'm pounding on the doors of heaven," a friend said recently, "I'm not giving up 'til God moves." They are in serious need, and they're going for it. That's good—that's really good. But they are laboring under a horrible idea: that God is waiting for them to ask enough times—or ask with enough meaning or faith or whatever—to get him to move. A heinous—though popular—view of prayer. Any decent father would do better for his son. God is not a reluctant participant in your life, bothered, really, by your requests, unwilling to act until he gets tired of hearing the sound of your voice.

Passivity and masculinity never, ever go together.

Let me suggest a far better way to look at prayer.

Man was meant to rule the earth, and though we royally screwed up our first pass at that, God didn't switch to Plan B. He intervened in and through Jesus of Nazareth to restore you as a man, his son, and put you back in the action. "Rule and subdue" is still the mandate. When we pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth," we are acting as agents with God to kick open doors, to enforce his Kingdom. We are partnering with him to bring about change.

Augustine put it this way: "Without God, we cannot, and without us, he will not." Like trying to push a stalled car out of traffic, it goes a whole lot better if someone is pushing with you. That's a much better way to look at prayer—as partnership with God, agreeing with him, aligning with him, the two of you getting things done together.

When chaos hits, some guys just let it roll over them and don't even bother praying. They surrender without a fight. Resignation. Others do pray, but like orphans, standing way outside the gates of Heaven, hoping their cries will eventually move a very busy and lofty God to throw a scrap or two their way. Desperate and alone.

The men who are getting things done see themselves as sons of God, working alongside their brother, Jesus, fighting to bring about a turn of events in the midst of chaos. Those guys are seeing some great results.

Oh yes—prayer works. Not those quick little prayers we toss up hoping to score on a heavenly lottery ticket, but the passionate, authoritative prayers you see filling the Psalms. Remember, the Psalms were written by guys who had killed men in hand-to-hand combat. Kinda reframes our view of prayer—this isn't storytime at Sunday school.

Give it a try. Read through the Psalms until you find a few passages that really put words to where you're at right now. Then pray them with fierce intention. As in, every day for a week or two. This will rally things inside you, call forth the strength of your spirit. It will also produce remarkable results in your world. Here are a couple of my favorites:

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. (17:6-9)

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.

Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. (143:8-10)

As I look back on it, I realize that prayer I uttered in the nanoseconds before disaster was both a cry of the heart and a prayer of intervention. For I also meant, "No to death. No to our enemy. No to disaster, for I proclaim Jesus Christ right here and now over us!" It worked, by the way—for here I am, writing to you years later. You are not a victim. Things can change. Passivity and masculinity never, ever go together. Not even in our spiritual life. Especially not in our spiritual life. ■



No. 9—FRONT STRANGLE

Grab the head, bringing it forward and down; drive knee into jaw and apply full strangle hold, driving thumb into "Adam's apple." After securing strangle hold, drop opponent to ground immediately so as to prohibit him from obtaining any other hold on you.

Note:—A strangle hold always means the placing of one forearm across the front of your opponent's neck. This should be strengthened by use of the other arm. The aggressor's forearm is pressed against the neck and the thumb driven into the "Adam's apple." Complete strangulation is only a matter of time. It takes a strangle hold but a few seconds to render a man absolutely incapable of effective resistance.



No. 10—BACK STRANGLE

The rear strangle can be secured in two ways. If you are face to face rush at your opponent, butting him in the jaw or jab two fingers in his eyes; jump to his side and rear, at the same time bringing the arm forcibly across the throat, and pull him backward, then take a full strangle hold, at the same time drive right foot to back of opponent's right or left knee throwing him out of position and force him to the ground and strangle.



OVER THE WALL

AS TOLD TO John Eldredge

We recently covered the first of some profiles we want to share with you of folks out there doing amazing work, some of whom seem to have some wild connection to us. This month's story began with an email we received last year that started with a photo of a permit caught on a fly in Belize.

That got our attention. Do you know how hard it is to catch permit with a fly rod? We have several bad stories. Then we read on in the email: "Sometimes I may not want to thank you. Your books, along with the Spirit, propelled me from a safe corporate career as an engineer to a wild adventure in Guatemala, rescuing broken girls and seeking justice for them. In just a few minutes, I will play the defense attorney and 'cross examine' a 10-year-old victim of sexual abuse, a girl who just an hour or so ago sat with me at lunch and was just a little girl. Tomorrow I will be her legal guardian in the real trial. Earlier today I was with prosecutors who are taking the declaration of a 12-year-old...and so it goes. We have 60 girls here, and our team is transforming the system in Guatemala as they heal, redeem, and seek justice for these girls." We forgot all about the permit and began a dialog with an amazing man doing beautiful and tragic work in Guatemala.

And Sons: *Let's start with just some data on Oasis—when did you get started? How many girls live there? What kind of help do you have?*

Corbey Dukes [his real name]: Construction for Oasis was started in 2000 as a general home for girls. The first girls were there in 2005. I came as director in 2009, and we soon after transitioned to a ministry focused on sexually abused girls. Being a victim of sexual crimes is the price of admission to Oasis now, and that has driven us to become a very deep ministry—residential, intense therapy, legal support, and a focused spiritual message. We have a staff of 29 Guatemalans and 11 missionaries from the U.S. and U.K. There are 56 girls in residence, with five babies, seven in independence transition, and 23 in our reunited families, for 91 total.

AS: *Holy cow. We have spent time in Guatemala and know how brutal it can be down there. How did you get pulled into this work? What's your story?*

CD: I distinctly remember sitting in a dead church when I was 12 years old, with the preacher droning on about Matthew 25—the sheep and goats. It occurred to me that, to the best of my knowledge, no one in that church was

particularly concerned with actually feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc. So this must all be crap. I checked out on the whole God/church thing. For 21 years, I drank, used, and chased women with extraordinary gusto—even into my first nine years of marriage. At 33, I had a daughter—and a marriage about to end. We attended a Christian marriage conference (I'm still not sure how) and became Christians—saying the prayer and actually having the emotional experience. A couple of job changes later, I have my hand on the brass ring of corporate life, when Jesus starts telling me there is more to him.

AS: *We can already feel where this is headed. He has a way of radical disruption.*

CD: I remember having a feeling that is perfectly illustrated in *The Fellowship of the Ring*—that scene where Gandalf is about to reach down to the floor and pick up the ring. There is a sudden flash of danger and a recognition that "You don't really want that." So I let it go and went on staff at my church as administrative manager. Then came, "What have I done?!" To go from multi-million dollar budgets, high-pressure projects, and first-class corporate travel to the minutiae of a medium-sized church was BORING.

AS: *No need to convince us of that. How did Guatemala get into your blood?*

CD: My pastors asked me to take on leadership of our missions program and I leapt at it, mostly to have something to do. And Jesus destroyed me. Remember that 12-year-old who walked out on God because no one was interested in “the least of these”? Jesus now ruined me with the least of these. In addition to a lot of local stuff, we started short-term trips to Oasis in Guatemala. I became highly invested. I helped former Oasis directors with leadership issues and emotional support. While there with my daughter’s youth team, the director at the time asked to speak with me. I thought I was in trouble because we had absolutely trashed the Oasis girls with games that involved chocolate, water, whipped cream, etc.

[AS: We zone out for a moment, trying to recall a game from our youth ministry days involving chocolate, water, and whipped cream...]

CD: She told me that she wanted to let me know that she was done and was resigning that day. I immediately heard God say, “You are next.”

My wife, Janie, and I prayed very hard not to be sent. Guatemala is not the coast of South Carolina, and we had a daughter starting her junior year of high school and another in middle school—not ideal ages to move to Guatemala. We kept hoping it was an Abraham-and-Isaac deal and God would pull a more qualified person (someone who at least spoke Spanish) out of the bush. He did not, and six months later, we left South Carolina for Guatemala.

[AS: Now we are silent because we are pretty much blown away by his courage...]

CD: Once I got here, I found out that in the 16 years the ministry has existed in Guatemala, there have been seven directors; no one lasted more than three years, most far less. It is, frankly, brutal.

AS: *Umm...so how long have you been there?*

CD: Seven years. Just today, I was talking with our social worker about an 11-year-old we just received. It seems every year I think it cannot get worse, and then a girl who has experienced

worse comes. I have faith that Jesus will overcome the darkness, but man, it looks like there is absolutely no limit to how far evil will go. Your books are part of the reason Janie and I have been able to not only persevere, but take on ever greater challenges. We have not just hung on but grown.

AS: *What’s changed in your view of Jesus and his Gospel since you got involved in this?*

CD: Like a lot of people, the gospel I was presented was based on avoiding hell. Don’t get me wrong—I think not going to hell is a good thing. But I can’t recall a single time I have shared that message with these girls. They have already been there. I share the Gospel Jesus seems to focus on: “The time has come. The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the Good News.” Change your thinking about yourself, God, and his heart; believe that God cleanses and restores, and live like a citizen of his Kingdom. I think the Gospel is about the restoration of the heart now and living as if you believe your heart is being restored, living like a citizen of his Kingdom now.



AS: *Many of our readers are ready to drop it all and go like you did. What counsel would you give them before the jump?*

CD: Just be sure you are ready. In seven years, I have seen lots of people come and go in other ministries. You, your wife, and family have to be tight and willing to follow Jesus, together, over the wall. Then read Jeremiah chapter 20 and know that your life will be more like Jeremiah’s prayer than pop Christian radio. “You deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me” (20:7). That pretty much sums it up. Jesus is leading you into HARDER, not easier, and you will cry out, “WTF?” a lot as you deal with emotional pain, budgets, and living in a place that is not the Mall of America. You will feel he has left you dangling and people are laughing at you for taking his stuff so seriously while they live the Facebook life.

AS: *Seems like you are speaking out of some pain here.*

CD: “Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all

day long” (20:8). The majority of people will have a glazed look in their eyes once you move past talking about what the food is like. They don’t want to know what you know. After a few years, you will find yourself with your wife alone in the corner of the dinner held in your honor, because you don’t relate to most of the conversations. You realize that you are suffering from PTSD. “But if I say, ‘I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (20:9).

AS: *We see it. We get it. Preach on.*

CD: That is my prayer and thought life more often than victory dances. If you feel it is a Jeremiah-sized call, meaning, “I will do it no matter how much I get my butt kicked,” then you may be ready. But even then, theory is a lot different from reality. There have been many days—MANY DAYS—when my wife and I have felt that is all there is to the story. Let’s go back to the U.S. But then Janie will say, “So how do we pretend we don’t know?” We’ll share a bottle of wine, make love, fall asleep, and head back in the next day.

AS: *What is bringing you hope?*

CD: It is not all a bummer. I have a drawer full of notes from the very girls I am here for, encouraging me, “No te rindas.” Don’t give up. I have also been stunned by Jesus, by the courage of little girls and by the bond I have with my wife and daughters. I love my wife more than ever and am in awe of her bravery and trust. I am thrilled every time a girl fist-bumps me before she goes into court, and I love leading this staff, following Jesus over the wall. I understand what it is to have a fire in my bones, and I love that. I love trusting that Jesus will rescue me, and if not, then knowing he will say, “Man, that was awesome. Crazy, but awesome.”

AS: *If someone wants to help, what can they do?*

CD: Come take me fly fishing. Short of that, pray for our courage, perseverance, and physical protection. We work to send people to jail, and they don’t like that. We work with severely hurt girls, and they can hurt you out of their pain. We work with a judicial system that can make some bizarre decisions. If someone is moved to help materially, then contact Kids Alive (kidsalive.org)—we can host teams, and we can use any giftedness or gift. ■

THE ART OF THE TATTOO

INK IS NOT JUST FOR SAILORS AND INMATES ANYMORE.

WORDS Luke Eldredge

Art is a conduit to, and from, the Truth. —Vic Bobb

Body art is more acceptable now than it has ever been in the West. A well done tattoo is a badge of prestige on a university campus. But like the ink itself, tattoos go far deeper than simply being “in.” Something else is going on here. Why the popularity of the tattoo?

I think it has to do with permanence, with beauty, and with identity.

“Time flies by when you’re having fun,” or so the saying goes. Time does fly by, but so does fun, so does joy, so does life. All things fly before us, flashing and disappearing. Not only our time in this life, but all aspects of our lives seem to be temporary. That job, that relationship, that high-tech toy, that holiday—all obtained with hidden expiration dates. Transience—what is more terrifying?

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

Our hearts were designed with the intention of experiencing life, and life to the full. We crave it. Yet not merely life, but eternal life; our hearts crave the eternal. Yet this temporal world offers just about everything but the eternal. A tattoo directly opposes the transience of the world. It is a material representation of the eternal.

I got my first tattoo—at 20—for many reasons; one of the most fundamental was to oppose the transient nature of life. To remind myself that joy is not temporary, that it is eternal life that is our promised inheritance.

And then there is beauty. There are few vessels that hold the capacity to remind us of glory as does art. Knowing this, we’ve marked our conduit of glory upon

just about every surface shy of the moon—the sides of buildings, cell phone covers, water bottles. Even our very beings, permanently, in the form of the tattoo.

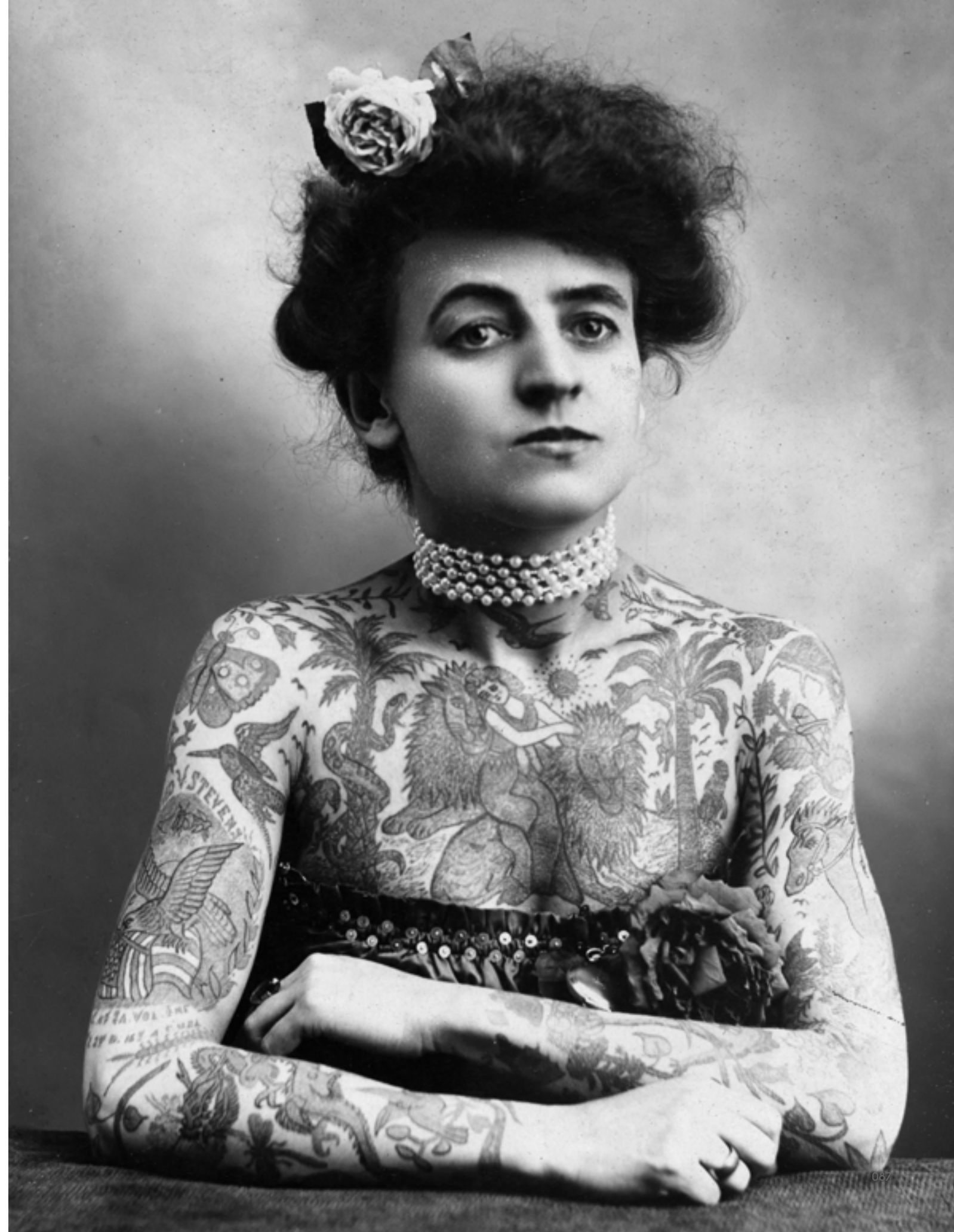
The possibility of the forearm or back as a canvas is the possibility for exquisite art. But as we all know, possibility does not necessarily mean guarantee. The sketchy tattoo parlor culture and the Christian tattoo fad don’t exactly spark the flames of my imagination. However, tattoos are becoming far more than a simple act of rebellion. It’s a unique medium that offers a unique kind of beauty.

Joy and life are not the only crucial elements of ourselves that appear fleeting. Our very identity seems to be fluid, to the point of running. We can change our clothes, our hair, how we talk and act, what we do. We can change our identity. It takes a lot more pain and trouble to change a tattoo than it does to change your friends.

A second cause for my first tattoo was to remind me of the deepest truths of my identity, the truths that will not change. This is the first star of two: they are Tarvan, the Lord of Victory; and Alambil, the Lady of Peace from Prince Caspian. In the story, they represent the coming of the proper king of Narnia. For me, it represents the promise of Christ’s return as well as my identity as a man of victory and peace.

The beautiful captivates the imagination and stirs the heart. Art in the form of the tattoo intertwines these elements of permanence, beauty, and identity. Even the most hesitant among us take a second glance at the half-sleeve across the room that catches our breath.

Because nothing reminds us of the truth of our identity and the reality of this life the way art does. ■





THE LAND OF TANGANYIKA

WORDS & IMAGES Sam Eldredge

"We feel very unsure about our choices, because you could give 30 years of your life to something and then it could be swept away in an instant. That's Africa."

—Wonde

DEC. 30

We drive into the wild desert near the border of Kenya via a winding dirt road. We sit atop the safari seat on the back of an old army Land Rover. Hours of passing Maasai villages with their circular defensive homes. My first wildlife sighting is a dead zebra on the side of the road, something I find reminiscent of a bad comedy.

Upon arriving at camp, we explore the dry riverbed that will be our home for the next few days, looking for firewood and finding small brown monkeys, impala, kingfisher, guinea fowl, Thomson's gazelle, and ostrich. A few older Maasai men arrive in our camp and are content to sit in silence, watching us and sipping the tea we offer for what seems like several hours. They carry spears, and their ears are looped in the traditional warrior fashion. It's an unsettling experience to have eyes trained on you without ceasing, whether the perpetrator is armed or not.

Jan 1: We wake up to monkeys in the trees over our tent. The sound of birds calling from off in the bush is deafening and wonderful. From our campfire in the riverbed, we watch baboons and impala cross from impenetrable wild to impenetrable wild, seen only for a few moments as they move in the early morning air.

The sun is oppressive. As Hemingway put it in his *Green Hills of Africa*, "It was cool in the shade, but if you stirred into the sun, or as the sun shifted the shadow while you read so that any part of you was out of the shadow, the sun was heavy." We go on a drive looking for giraffe and elephant, but find none. On our way back to camp, I spot what looks like four feet of black mamba slipping into some whistling thorn acacia.

Jan 4: Our second day on safari with Abi, we venture into the Ngorongoro caldera. Driving up through red dirt roads, the walls gouged into caves by tembo digging for minerals, we pass cape buffalo glaring at

us as we speed by. The crater is dizzyingly beautiful. Everywhere are zebra, wildebeest, and cape buffalo. In isolation are lion, rhinoceros, flamingo, hippopotamus, elephant, and a few eland.

Jan 12: Up early to prepare our packs for the climb up Kilimanjaro. We will take the Lemosho route with our 12 porters, an embarrassing number for just the two of us. The drive to our gate is nothing short of insanity as we pass other massive trucks and pikipiki bikes that seem to service the vast potato farms at the mountain's base. White sacks filled to the brim line the winding dirt road.

Our lead guides, Gaudence and August, speak very little English, and we speak very little Swahili, so our slow pace is mostly punctuated by the stream of porters passing us by. For most of the walk we are alone with our thoughts, breaking the silence every now and then to call attention to the jungle around us or some thought we had about what kind of home we envision ourselves living in. By the time we reach camp, the crew has set everything up and dinner is nearly warm.

Jan 14: A cold and restless night of sleep gives way to a clear morning. Everything is covered in frost, and looming over it all is the peak of Kibo. The stars last night were incredible. Our hike today to Shira 2 is an easy, short walk under the gaze of the mountain. It's a beautiful alpine country. Large stones lie scattered upon the ground, and it feels like giants lived here in another age.







Jan 16: Day 437, we have made camp at Barafu, 15,000 feet above sea level. Our longest day yet, and it is far from over.

I am tired, but happy to be here and within striking distance of the peak. We have the afternoon and early night to rest before we set off at midnight to attempt the seven-hour ascent.

I want a beer. And a shower. And to be off this bloody mountain. But I want that summit ... to feel strong and competent and to share a victory with Susie. God is my strength and my portion forever.

Jan 17: Susie and I have said that this trip is the most mentally challenging excursion we've been on. Days and days of hiking without ever feeling closer to the peak, and now six days in we finally begin what feels like the long-awaited goal. When the alarm goes off at 11:15 p.m., we pull on all our layers and gear, our muscles already sore from five days of hiking, our nerves already frayed with anticipation.

After a half-cup of tea, some crackers, a bite of some fruit bread-thing, we don headlamps, grab our trekking poles, say a prayer for strength and warmth, and begin.

It's midnight, so all we can see are the rocks at our feet and the lights of the other teams in front and behind us, with an unspeakable display of stars above. Climbing in the dark is actually helpful. You have no concept of time or distance, so you don't think about the seven hours it should take to reach the summit; you just think about one foot in front of the other.

At first, it's too warm for all our layers. We pull off mittens and fleece jackets, only to scramble to put them back on 20 minutes later. It gets cold. Very, very cold. You believe you will never be warm again. You forget that you ever were warm.

Each step takes me higher than I've ever been: 16,000 feet ... 17,000 feet ... 17,500 feet ... 18,000 feet ... except I don't know where I am at any point. It's only up. We stop for a break twice. The first time, my Camelbak has frozen, the second, my Nalgene as well.

You're lost in your head—tired, counting steps, praying, trying to warm your hands while still using your poles, losing faith that you can or ever will reach the top. It's mentally brutal.

And then there's a sign ahead. It's Stella Point (the lower summit of Kili). We can't believe it's here, but after cheering a little we continue on another hour to Uhuru Peak, the summit at 19,341 feet. We have reached Uhuru at 5:45 am, one hour and 15 minutes sooner than we expected.

The sun has not yet risen, and it's so cold my fingers still hurt three days later from the few minutes of exposure it took to snag a few photos.

It's so cold we're forced back down to Stella Point to drink tea and watch the sunrise. It's incredible, and we stay as long as we're comfortable. Then we begin the slide down an avalanche chute to reach our camp one hour later, and afterwards ... the long trek back to the bottom. ■



DIRECTION & ADVERSITY

WHEN IS IT A “CLOSED DOOR”?

WORDS John Eldredge (Padre) & Sam Eldredge

IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

The *And Sons* team recently did a podcast on this very topic. We had planned to do an article in tandem, since each medium allows for a different approach to the same topic, and we felt it was important enough to visit twice, if not a thousand times.

Sam: I was scrolling through my feed the other day—an expression I don’t love, by the way—and found myself reading a post by a friend of mine. She lives in another state and has been pursuing her career in music for the last decade, and a photo of her on a stage somewhere accompanied her post. I was curious what the story was, and so I looked closer at what she had written. What I read didn’t tell me much of anything other than that some doors had closed and she had shifted to a different opportunity that had opened and she was grateful for everything and her new direction.

The phrase “doors closed” would normally have washed over me without a second thought, but it didn’t this time. For some reason, I became aware of just how many stories I have heard that go like this one. And I found myself wondering how you tell the difference between an open door and a closed one. What if the door is open but there is going to be difficulty you need to overcome, or what if it’s closed and you’re just banging your head against the wall?

In the last year, I have worked on a number of creative projects and made many decisions with my wife about the course of our life. From writing a book to starting a family to making another film as a team, it seems like I’ve been in a constant state of making decisions, large and small. In most of them, I would have loved to know without a doubt what God was calling us into, à la this metaphor around “doors,” but it seems like that language is only used retrospectively.

I’ve found myself wanting to know the difference, if not beforehand, then at least during the choice. How do I know if I’m supposed to submit my manuscript 50 times, and if it gets rejected to submit it another 50 times, or to just stop because I’m a poor writer with nothing to say? (Hypothetical example here... sob) It seems like I’ve stumbled back into the world of wanting direction and to walk with God, and I hear all the philosophical and theological implications in the back of my mind... so I have to ask you, Dad, how do I begin/continue to make decisions well... to interpret events well?

Padre: After you brought this up, I realized we've never actually had a conversation about the whole "open door, closed door" way of looking at things, and I share some of your frustration with the language. It's too vague, oblique. What do they mean by "open door, closed door"? Is it simply a way to justify taking a direction we want or giving up on another? You said that people seem to use the terminology mostly in hindsight, after the fact, which I think is true, and I think that exposes how unhelpful the terminology is in the moment. So let's clarify what the tension is, which will allow us to better talk about it.

Something seems to have become available (a door has opened)—a job opportunity, an invitation to travel, a new relationship. Does that availability itself imply it is God's will for us? Something we've been chasing or merely desiring becomes unavailable (the closed door). Does that fact confirm we weren't meant to have it?

One assumption I live by is that everything worth having comes with some sort of fight: "The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Joy is opposed; love is opposed; clarity is opposed (ironically); your career and calling are certainly opposed. So the problem with assuming that a "closed door" indicates it wasn't what God had for you is that you would walk away from far too many things that in fact you were supposed to fight for, to kick open a seemingly closed door.

So I think the real issue (and we didn't get to touch on this in the podcast) is actually something more like this: How do I discern the will of God in the dynamic flow of circumstances? Does that seem closer to the mark?

Sam: Yeah, I think that's more of the core issue. I realize we are touching on free will and the "dignity of causation" and all that. At the end of the day, I know I must make my decisions as though they matter and as if they are mine to make, and I've also experienced decisions that were full of the life and goodness that so often defines life with God. I've also experienced difficulty that was his invitation as well, so I'm not always looking for the cushy way out, but if it's difficulty without purpose... oh man.

We have touched on this before, but it feels important to be reminded that we aren't the only players on the field in this. If God has intention for us, then evil does as well, which isn't a category for many of my own decisions. It adds a layer of complexity that isn't just "door open, door closed," because now adversity could be the thief who wants to steal, kill, and destroy.

Padre: Right. Or it could be timing. Or shaping you as a man. Or it could just be something we're supposed to walk away from. So the issue is interpretation. How do we interpret circumstances like "open" and "closed" doors? What do they really mean? Because as we are pointing out, simply the open or closed may mean any number of things. Circumstances are simply not enough to tell you what is right.





Which brings us to this: How do I interpret what is going on in my life? I'd call that a \$6 million question. A very important question.

What I wanted to say after the podcast was something like this: There are two types of "Christians" out there. The first category are people who believe in God, go to church, but beyond that, pretty much live their lives as practical agnostics. They don't seek out an intimate life with God. They toss up a few prayers, and they want to know what is best for them, but they don't develop a conversational intimacy with Jesus. These are folks who tend to use open and closed doors as "signs" like someone else uses tarot cards or dice. It's very superstitious, really. The whole open and closed door lingo, I think, reveals a lack of intimacy with God. It's spiritual roulette.

The second type of "Christian" is someone who—prior to needing direction on a job or relationship or whatever—is working on a deeper life with God. They are coming to know God, know his ways, know his heart, know his "voice" in their life. So when the need for interpretation comes, they have already laid a foundation for getting help interpreting opportunities and setbacks, because they have a friendship with God.

Too often the issues, tensions, and frustrations around "interpretation" are not really the issue at all.

Sam: So the real issue is friendship with God. Somehow an easier and much harder answer all at once. I can't blame the folks who look for signs after the fact, since I've done it more than once, but it does make me want to ask before I jump. And deeper still to learn how to hear what God is saying and what he is inviting me into.

Padre: At some point we choose to become an apprentice of Jesus, we choose to become a disciple. We take the narrow road. And one of the surprises that comes is that issues of interpretation, which once seemed so foggy to us, are actually not confounding at all. Peterson paraphrases it this way in *The Message*:

"I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you've picked up this bad habit of not listening. By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one—baby's milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God's ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong" (Hebrews 5:14). They have some practice; they are experienced in the ways of God.

So the issue isn't guidance; it isn't What should I do? The issue is maturing with God; the issue is How come you don't know what you should do?

But we'd rather blame it on open and closed doors. ■

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A STORY WORTH LIVING

WORDS Blaine Eldredge IMAGES The And Sons Team

DAY 1

In all, there were thirteen of us. Six on kitted out BMW 800 GS motorcycles, two cameramen/trailrunning enthusiasts, one director, two on support crew, and two drone operators with their three ships, as they call them. Since the team needed to stay reasonably well coordinated while capturing distinct shots, avoiding foul weather, traffic, and bulls, and recording anything spontaneous, we were connected through a scale model of the system used to storm Normandy: SENA headsets and portable two way radios and cell phones and primitive hand signals. It's hardly surprising, then, that our convoy moved like the credence of Israel across the Old Testament, and so while we pulled out, technically, on Sunday morning, August 9th, we pulled out two hours behind schedule for our first canyon shots.



The first hour of driving was familiar: out Highway 24 towards the Rocky Mountains and Lake George, where we pulled off into 11 Mile Canyon. The canyon was our warm up. Dan had flown in three days early to practice, but he'd done that practicing without the heavy equipment now in our panniers and tank bags. It was with those bags that we began skidding, stopping, and loosening up along the South Platte River. Several miles in, when the trail turned back from of thick bed of washout sand, Dan turned on the com to ask if this was like Engineer pass, the obstacle three days away. The silence that followed was long and provocative. "It's—um," Jon said, "Good practice for Engineer!"

It was. The backcountry double track led on through pine forests and out to grazing land. In the open country, we could let a little of the tension from our shoulders. The roads were long undiscovered highways through low hills. Far to the south, the Sangre De Cristo mountains appeared, a confusion of atmospheric blue angles. But they were too far away to be relevant, even in anticipation; we were laughing, fist-bumping, full of the solace empty roads bring when we turned, down through a set of scalloped valleys, to Bart's ranch.

DAY 2

We were headed south, way south, to the Sand Dunes, at the tail end of the Sangre De Cristo mountains. It was going to be a long day, mostly on the highway, and it was a fine day for it. The mountains south of Guffy were overgrown with dusty grass and speckled with huge granite erratics.

We drove quickly down to Texas Creek and the Arkansas River, then through Salida to Hayden Pass, and then down the 285 toward Monte Vista. Somewhere along the 285, there's a gator farm, I mean an alligator farm, which, on that particular Monday, was hosting a gator wrestling tournament. Opportunities like that don't come every day, and so we hurried down the 285. Of that road, there's not much to be said, except that it's the drivable variation of a scatter plot, and it was paved by Bruce Springsteen fantasists, who believed that the best highways are empty and lead nowhere at all. Even so, and despite their best efforts, you come, eventually, to the many oddities that litter that highway as though cast off from an exodus of idiosyncrats. The 285 improved with the hour, though. At half past five, the emptying highway was rouged almost red in the thickening light. To the east, the sand dunes were splashes of flame. We barreled down the highway to the ramshackle outbuildings that marked the gator farm, ten minutes before close.

The woman at the desk gave us a wave. "We're, uh, the film crew? We called ahead." She squinted, gave us a Just one second signal, and vanished into the back. A moment later, Anakin Skywalker came through the door and handed Jon a four foot alligator. The gator, it turned out, had lived some years as a pet, and was comparatively tolerant. He smiled amicably for the camera, befriended Jon, and we left in five minutes, the only on-schedule shoot of the trip. Really, though. I have nothing but praise for the ingenuity of that farm. It was born from a stack of moldering tilapia who needed to be fed

to something and now houses upwards of 300 alligators, not one of whom busted out, fought Giant Shark, chomped Hook's leg, or otherwise slaughtered a wildebeast. What a decent place.

DAY 3

Jon's motorcycle was stuck in a sandpit. Jon was lying on his back. We were not helping him, because we were a mile away, filming in the dunes. Jon's bike was stuck. The how of his situation was obscure. The why was printed across the face of Eli, our contracted aesthetic genius, as he smiled down at him. "Incredible footage!" he said. It would become the day's refrain.

We called it Blue Angels. Sam would park his tire a few feet off the bumper of the crew truck, and the rest of us would stack up like a motorcycle Tetris game. So aligned, we drove Wolf Creek pass, up through avalanche tunnels to the postcard lookout on the far side. It's not how we'd prefer to ride—after the first pass, the team sprawled out on the side of the road to let the adrenaline ebb. "People are going to write us," Sam said, leaning against his motorcycle, legs splayed. "They're going to write us and say You &#*\$* idiots. Why can't you just drive like normal people." Jon dug for a bar. "Professional driver," he said, with his brazen smile, "closed course." Incredible footage.

At the top of the pass, we switched to drone footage, and so drove like people who have passed their driver's test. We filmed the incredible overlook and the unslung highway until no one could take any more, and then drove down to Arboles. Our friends there are horse people.



Jim wears a fine white cowboy hat and Fern wears lovely pressed shirts embroidered with paisleys and emblazoned with rhinestones, but a full description of the pair would read like an exaggeration. I am convinced they are the original of which western culture is an imitation. They live on a ranch surrounded by hay fields and red hills covered with juniper trees. It is southwest, overshadowed, we maintain by wild west. We arrived in the evening, with the smell of hay appealing to that special lane of unremembered youth almost every person has.

DAY 4

In the morning, we left Arboles for the Million Dollar Highway. That particular road is an exaggeration of watercolored rock from Durango to Ouray, built to remind passersby of a past life in photography.

In the boom and bust cycle of frontier towns, Silverton was probably a blank charge: it is ten dune buggy rental shops circumvented by an old railroad track and nourished by western-themed pizza restaurants. And it doesn't matter, because the overhanging mountains are so casually enormous they would reduce any town, however developed, to an unnoticed afterthought.

In town, we stripped the bikes to their skeletons and picked up dune buggies from Rock Pirates, our backcountry connection. There are, I expect, regular people in the state of Colorado, but they must be scattered with strategic precision in the unseen hamlets of the state. The two men renting the assault vehicles were written in to the tail end of a Red Bull commercial. Bearded, with those haunted, veteran eyes. "Watch out for sheepdogs," they said, "Those things will kill you." Good advice, it turned out.

The road wound along creeks which would have been crystalline but were stained, recently, by a mining accident, and ran in opaque yellows. The mountains overhead were crisscrossed with narrow tracks, and frowning like the shorn visages of the patriarchs.

The feeling of foreboding grew. Somewhere up ahead, the road broke apart to snarls of uncovered stone and steep switchbacks. At every bend, we searched for our turn uphill. Finally, just past a derelict jumble of mining equipment, Sam pointed to a white, gravelly path headed uphill. "We're here," he said, and we left the smooth dirt. In an instant, we were alone with the growl of our engines, growing suddenly with the climb.

If you've ever seen a bighorn sheep work its way uphill, you'll have a good idea how these bikes move. They bound and lurch up rocks; they shake over slate like a huge set of shoulders. And the bikes were heaving now—roaring up the narrow trail just washed with rain. In the lead, Sam bucked over increasingly unimaginable contradictions of exposed stone. Padre was close behind him, and Dan and Luke and Jon and I scrambled up the rock in the back. To the south, the trail overhung a huge alpine valley, but to the north, and dead ahead, it was a complication of mountain ridges, and in a few seconds, we had cleared the trees and were out among them.

The bikes did wondrously. They seemed almost eager to climb: we drove quickly, never quite overcoming the continuous surprise of our success, up loose shale and ribs of hard stone to Hurricane pass, then down again into a swale of alpine tundra and a herd of several hundred rather upset sheep.

Sheep. The word loitered, waiting for its referent to arrive on the evening bus. Up ahead, Sam slowly pushed a path for Israel, and behind, Jon worked his headset furiously. What a thing to be upset about, I thought, and then noticed the three white shapes tumbling down from the mountain. The radios connected. "—NOT STOP DO NOT STOP FOR THE SHEEPDOGS SAM DO NOT STOP." It occurred to me that these people had never heard of Australian shepherds. These were Dyre wolves, roaring at Sam's heels. But helmets do not show emotion. Sam turned his head. He looked quizzical, as he yelled at the dog, and raced by, and Padre looked downright impassive as he drove, slowly, passed Cerberus.

DAY 5

The next morning the mountains were dusted with frost. The fire ring, which had seemed spacious the night before, was now downright prohibitive, and we stood, feet in the ash, to warm our legs by the coals. To the west, our road wound up several thousand feet of uninterrupted shade towards Engineer Pass.

This was not yesterday's road. The track rose in irregular spasms, leaps, and sudden turns. After yesterday's difficulty, I was surprised to see that we could ride at all, and not only ride, but ably, up a continuous epilepsy of road fringed with wildflowers and surrounded by alpine valleys. As Dan had often said, beauty soothes fear, and we climbed the first few hours, stopping, periodically, to film, without an incident.





Until the trail turned and rose over a tough rocky section. It all happened in a chain. His rear wheel unlocked, sliding sideways on the gravel. His front tire slammed into a stone the size of a coffee table. The bike sprang over it, but, falling, Padre's hand caught the throttle. The rear wheel landed spinning and threw the bike off the edge.

From below, we saw a bike falling, suddenly, only to catch itself on a little burl of rock. Overhead, Jon raced away. He'd seen that the bike couldn't be recovered without the crew and flew after them. Meanwhile, Luke and I staged at the switchback. Padre held his side. He was covered in dust, talking to Sam, and Sam shook his head. "It won't come up," he said, with finality. The bike was a bad show. Padre had landed hard, leaping from the motorcycle as it went off the edge.

From where it hung, headfirst off the cliff, the valley below could be seen filling with clouds. Beneath his riding jacket, Padre's ribs were muddied with bruises, and the same bad feeling, which had clung to the bikes since Hurricane, filled the scene. Even Sam, whose immortal enthusiasm had not lessened with the rain coming on, just shook his head. "That first try almost snapped my leg," he said. He and Jon conferred. "Well—it's not coming up," Jon said, "So—we'll just ride it down."

The five of us, and the crew, held the bike in place while Jon slipped, downward, into the saddle. It felt a little too much like holding the gate for a bull rider, but Jon was in the stirrups, so to speak, and so we righted the bike with his hand on the brake. There was a path down, sort of, a little rideable dirt, and Jon nodded at us to get clear. He started the engine. The bike rolled forward.

You know in cartoons, how the character runs off the cliff, and then hangs in midair, safe until he realizes his danger? That is, I swear, how it happened. Jon tilted the bike over into the dirt trough. The bike hung a moment, and then bounded down, almost too quick for concern, and stopped on the road below.

The trail down from Engineer is remarkable from any angle. It winds through alpine forests to grassy meadows and then on to canyons, all overrun with brooks and streams. At the far end of that road is Lake City, a charming town where a waitress gave Dan a trash bag full of ice and a flyfishing store hung out a "Congratulations, Dan!" poster. It was for us, whoever else it was for, and we rode on through the rain, which finally came, to a campsite somewhere near the

Powderhorn River, where Morgan and Alex had outdone themselves and set out chips and salsa toe to toe with whiskey and ice water.

DAY 6

The next day was a long chain of passes. My memory of that particular ride is, I admit, reconstructed. I was sick that day, and rode with so much nausea my stomach was sort of smeared from Montrose to Buena Vista in an uninterrupted yellow line. That aside, the riding was beautiful. Alex and Morgan had come in on a byway just to the east of our intended route. They gave it rave reviews, and so we added a few miles to see Round Mountain and Blue Mesa.

Just before leaving, Jon patched Padre's motorcycle together with quickset epoxy. Jon, by the way, is British. I don't know how this hasn't come up till now, but there it is. He has an

*You know in cartoons, how
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and then hangs in midair,
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That is, I swear, how it happened.*

international accent, a nice smile, and the genetic memory of those Brits who never settled down to farm. For them, the empire is not a notion but a neighborhood, and so even broad, impossible tasks are just a question of the right people in the right place. Who doesn't know a few people? The bike looked like something Shelley wrote. But Jon was confident, and the motorcycle held together as we drove a dirt track up through red sandstone to a high, sage plateau, and then down again through a slot canyon to the highway.

At the head of that canyon, Sam spooked a two ton bull and was only saved from a bullfight by six feet of cattle guard. We took Highway 50 past Blue Mesa Reservoir to Gunnison—there's a bay in that reservoir named the Bay of Chickens, which is ridiculous, and just past that bay, there's Gunnison itself. From there, we turned north again through Ohio City to Pitkin. It's an amazing place, though

I haven't got time to explain why (we learned to hunt there), and the roads are good, so we drove up a few miles of dirt toward Cumberland Pass, and then past Cumberland to Cottonwood, and the long downhill to Buena Vista.

On the East side of Cottonwood Pass, the road's a tarmac Valhalla. It drops down the valley in huge, alpine horseshoes. You can eye your exit straight across the valley three hundred yards away. The road unravels through alpine draws with the Arkansas river valley always visible beneath it.

Driving a motorcycle on unspooled tarmac isn't like anything, and it's for that reason motorcyclists love it. But if it were like anything, it would be like casting a fly rod—you chuck the line behind your head, and then you wait, wait, for a precise but ultimately mystical amount of time as the line unrolls and the rod "loads." When the rod is loaded, you feel it tense like a muscle, and if your timing's good, the rod will fling the line with the impossible strength of an object doing the exact thing it was made to do. The motorcycle enters the turn at its bottom speed. You don't stare at the turn, you stare through it, and as you lean the bike, and roll on the throttle, the motorcycle sinks its weight against the road, and pulls forward as though set along a track. When you feels the bike do that, you can throttle forward to almost any speed you please, safe as swinging in your mother's arms. Jon and I rode it once, and then turned around, and rode it again. With the pass behind, the team drove the last fifteen minutes to town in a rapture.

DAY 7

The last morning, we left Buena Vista for Leadville, and then Leadville for Minturn, and then drove on to State Bridge and the last dirt of the trip. By the Colorado River, the temperature brushed the bottom of 100 degrees. The palette of that landscape is stripped from the surface of Jupiter. Oranges, amaranth, alloyed copper and bronze and dusty cerulean grasses. Not for the first time, we marveled at the variety of the state, and rode out compact dirt past the Colorado frontier towns that spring up by the river every summer.

On the far side of the Colorado, our road climbed out of the tableland and into the cool groves of aspens that turn the state into an enormous gold ornament every autumn. It was the offroad riding you dream of: abandoned ranch tracks tying together the byways of the state. ■

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VIRTUE
SUCCESS
VIR
MASCULUS

Latin virtue term normally virtus moral strength, high character, goodness, manliness, valor, bravery, courage (in war)

mid-14c, "belonging to the male grammatical gender," late 14c, "of men, male," from Old French masculin "of the male sex" (12c), from Latin masculinus "male, of masculine gender," from masculus "male, masculine; worthy of a man," diminutive of mas genitive maris) "male person, male," of unknown origin. Meaning "having the appropriate qualities

MASCULINITY!!!

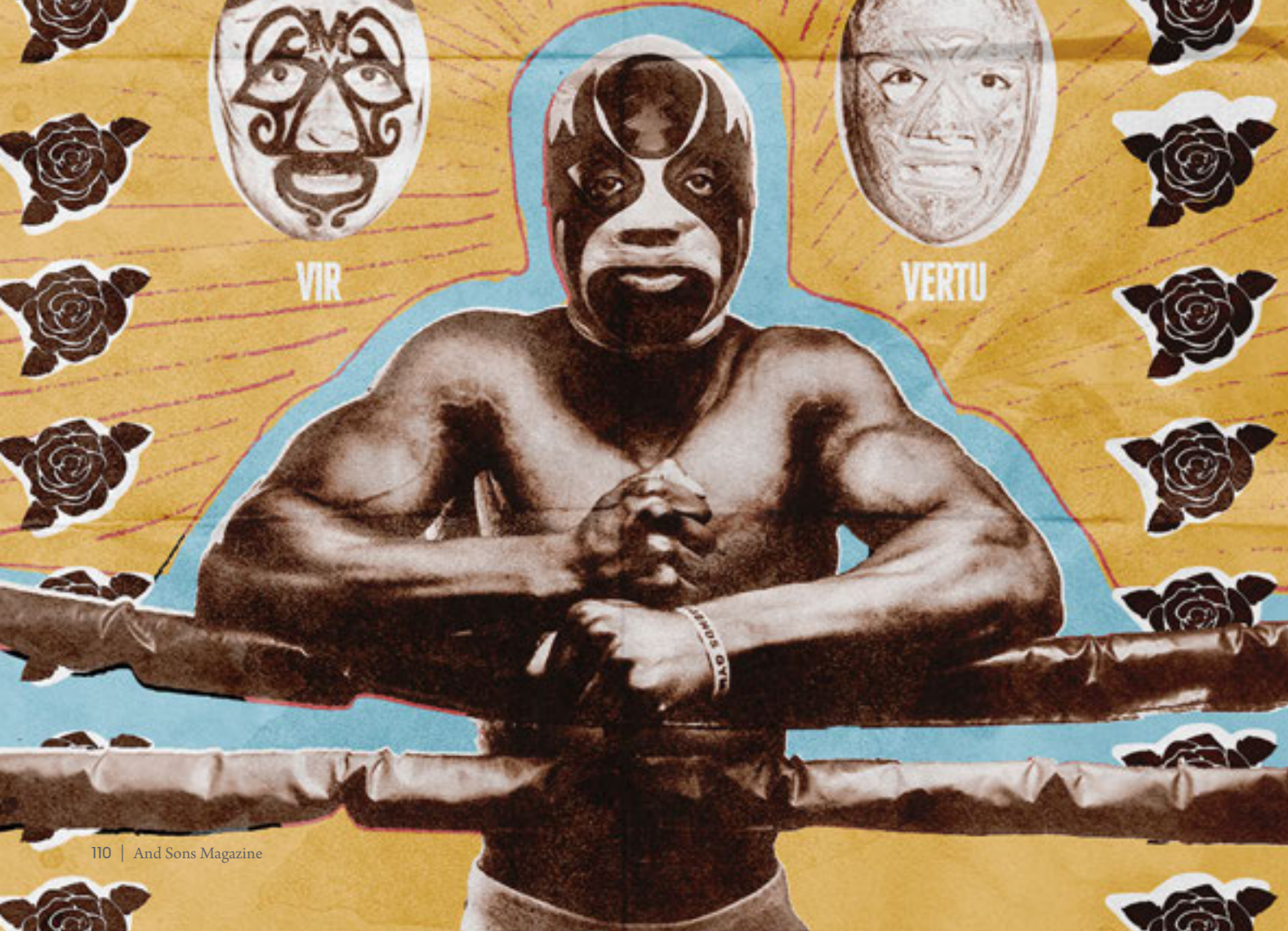
A BATTLE OF MEANING



VIR



VERTU



WHAT DOES MASCULINITY MEAN?

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

Colorado Springs is two hours away from just about everything, which meant that most of the things we liked to do as kids were two hours away and bookended by long, meaningless drives. No one really likes road trips before they can drive their own car, and we already knew the scenery, so we came up with ingenious but ultimately banal ways to pass the time. (Pay attention, next time, to what younger kids do on road trips, and you'll find they're all basically savants.)

I spent several years counting syllables on my fingers, but eventually figured out that spoken sentences are almost always between 20 and 30 syllables, and the game was over. So I took to defining words. A road is a flat place for driving a car. A hill is two touching slopes. A cup is a skinny bowl for drinking. Like I said, savants, but I liked that game, because I felt like all my words corresponded to concrete, definite things that could be moved around like chess pieces.

Of course it sounds ridiculous, and it is, but it isn't all that different from what Adam and Eve spent their time doing, and it's an infectious, difficult exercise. Meaning is hard, elusive, fast, gymnastic, and resilient, and most people never take a moment to decide about it. Chesterton wrote that we are all under the same "mental calamity," having forgotten who we are, and I would add that we have forgotten what everything else is, too.

Stay with me one more sentence. A deep, prevailing experience of disorientation is one of the great afflictions of our age—it cuts the heart—and if we're going to get a handle on what the hell is going on, we're going to have spend a little time defining the core elements of our experience, like man, masculinity, success, freedom, virtue, community, so that a few definite objects can hold down our lives the way stakes hold down a tent.

By way of example, let me offer three of my favorites. They are the coordinates within which I've triangulated a great deal of my experience. Hold on to your hat...

1. Virtue

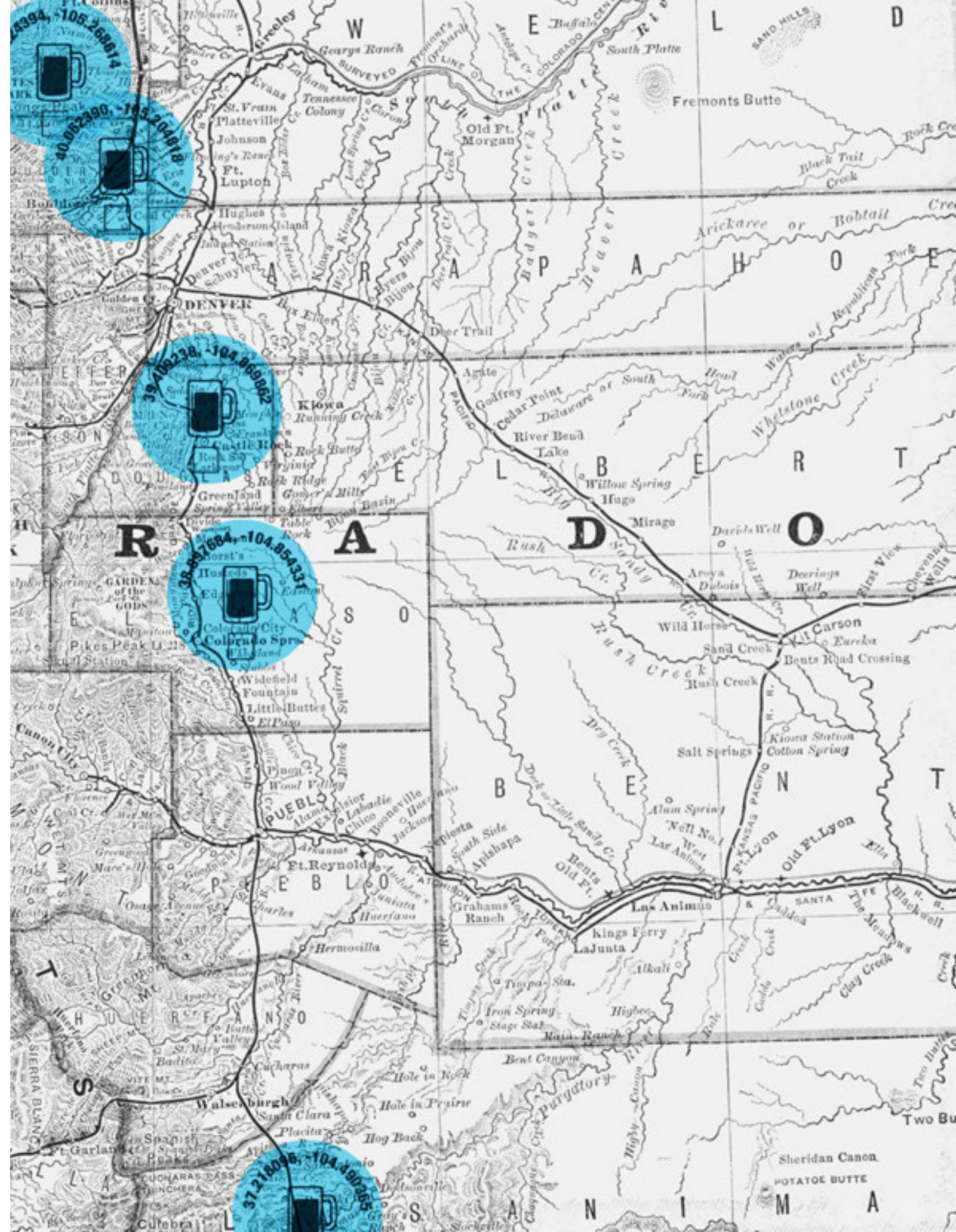
Virtue is derived from two Latin words: Vir and Virtus. Vir means man. Virtus means valor. The best description of virtue, which I received from Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft, is manly strength. If we read it the other way, that will sort of change what we think it means to be a strong man, since the very elements of manly strength are prudence, justice, restraint, and fortitude, as well as faith, hope, and love. Not muscles, not callousness, not coldness, not stillness, but virtue. If you're concerned about becoming a man, we have a litmus test available. What qualities are you developing? Are you becoming prudent? Are you becoming just? Most of all, are you becoming loving? They are not all the elements of manly strength, but they are the pillars of the castle where all the rest live, like knights of the round table.

2. Masculinity

Masculinity is a noun, but it's a tricky one. It comes from masculus, which means male, but it sort of means male-ness, the way personality mean person-ness. But of course, personality doesn't quite mean person-ness. It describes the specific quality of an individual person, the way in which their specific-ness plays itself out in the world. Too often, we use personality to excuse a person's irritating qualities, but it's supposed to call attention to their singularity. They have a special way of doing things, and when they do it, we know no one else could. Masculinity is like that. It describes the singular way a virtuous man does things, a quality to his actions that is absolutely unique. It is probably best understood as worthiness, as in, worthy of a man. We are born male, but we have the hope of masculinity, waiting to crown our very best actions the way laurels crown runners. Masculinity is what a man living well looks like. Of course, the term has been mutilated beyond all recognition to describe what fallen men looks like—proud, callous, loud, rowdy. But go back to virtue. If a person's manly strength doesn't look virtuous, it isn't manly, either. It isn't worthy.

3. Success

This one is especially important. William James wrote that the shallow cash interpretation of success bred the moral flabbiness of his age, and the same could be said for ours. We think success means achievement, as in revenue or position or influence, but it doesn't. Success comes from the Latin verb "to follow." It literally means one thing coming after another, as in, The king will be succeeded by his son. Now, that might sound a bit disconnected from the success or failure of our work, but it isn't. Success is probably best understood as a measure of skill. We're successful if we know what follows, as in, what to do next. The person who knows the right thing to say after an awkward revelation in a conversation is a success. The person who knows how to troubleshoot their engine when the car starts stuttering is a success. The person who knows how to process their internal world is a success. Success is used to describe the person who has a deep, intentional understanding of their immediate world. It isn't huge. It doesn't have anything to do with numbers. In fact, success tends to be small, because success describes a kind of local mastery that is only possible within narrow, specific arenas of our calling. ■



AND SONS