

# Writing the Everyday Now: A Collection

The Butterfield Library Everyday  
Writers



**“The Beautiful Thing About  
Garbage”**

Awake?  
Not  
asleep  
Working?  
On  
Automatic  
As I ready things to move  
I sort and throw.  
Time is my enemy  
Not my foe.  
I'm all set up  
In fine order -a win  
For this I am grateful  
Possessions - into which bin?  
Pile 1: throw  
Pile 2: keep  
Pile 3: undecided  
I'm alone - unguided  
It's now 4 A.M.  
Slumber I must seek  
The iPhone ☐-my world  
On my person - I must keep!  
No where found  
Let's go to bed  
No! I can't sleep  
I get up instead!  
I wake up Warren  
From his deep sleep  
With this request  
Which seems quite foreign.  
“FIND MY PHONE” APP:  
How do we use it?  
I wait, I ponder  
Anxious - as I sit.  
YES! It's not lost!  
In a vehicle - moving.  
We jump into the car  
Accelerate - zooming!  
FOUND!!!  
☐ iPhone 5  
At the dumping ground  
Who knew?



---

# Adrienne Dent

---

## Making Sense of Things

I begin my morning making sense of things in the studio—a light wisp of incense—magnolia, spice and an undertone of wood—helps with this. My mind drifts to dirty clothes upstairs and the dry, cool day. The song of clothes on the clothesline lures me off course, a vision of shirts and socks dancing in the air.

Upstairs I gather, fill, and run the laundry. Returning to the studio (too) many minutes later I find a powder worm of limp brown ash. Above it, the remaining incense tip cauterizes a termite-like half tunnel along one edge of a smoking yoga block. Incense burns hot, and the smell of singed foam mingles poorly with a cloying cloud of Nag Champa. My lungs resist each thick breath of air.

Fuck. I bolt the incense nub to the bathroom snuffing it out with a hiss under water. In the studio I throw open the window, the screen screeching its resistance. With heavy foot fall, long strides, I retrace my way back upstairs for the fan, yanking its cord from the outlet near the floor exactly like you're not supposed to.

Left, right, down, right, left down . . . back down the stairs I thunder. A frenzied search farther down the basement stairs yields a broken extension cord (who returns a broken extension cord to its place?!!) and leaves me hollering, "Rob!" out the back porch door. Despite my embodied urgency, a small voice possessing a prim air—asks, "what might the neighbors think? . . . Do you have to be so loud?" Rob looks up from a pepper plant, pauses, unplugs from his audiobook, and walks toward me calmly—a little too calmly, "Do you need something?"

Yes!" I do need something.

I declare this with alarm, panic, and an edge of annoyance—irritability only increased by a glimpse of my overreaction, the slight hyperbole in recounting to Rob the nature of the emergency, and the fevered response to a perceived drama. A fraction of me sagely notes "this" is not about incense burning, dirty laundry, or a melted, pockmarked yoga block . . . BUT a larger fraction—like a wild crowd—elbows out, screams, "Fuck that, the amygdala owns this!"

Minutes later, with the fan propped on a chair at window height, its hum a softening lullaby, my breath deepening and the air about me clearing, I register what eluded me—that my petulance, the outburst, intensity of words, tone and demeanor, the hyper reactivity are a gift of these times, the natural effervescence of days and weeks of uncertainty, suppressed grief, powerlessness, existential angst, empathy fatigue, and so much more. Months of pressure building, gathering force, power and intensity, pressing outward, daring the smallest crack to surrender space.

And "this" having expanded, the room lightens. And there is Rob, so lovable in the yard outside the window and the air moving around me in a room coming to life, mobiles swaying, the teabags fluttering, the morning sun playing across textures, the sound of water running through the pipes to the washer upstairs, of birds and a distant train horn, a whiff of coffee and things begin to make sense, constraint and resistance become bubbles of possibility dancing before me like shirts on the clothesline on a beautiful cool, clear day.



## The View from the Kitchen Table

The view from the kitchen table has changed so much over the years.

I love family and I love having people around, but it is usually just me right now. I look through the round, streak free glass to the floor below and think back.

When I was a child I sat briefly except on birthdays where there was cake. My chin came just over the table for a long time. My brothers and sister were around. Another time my dad brought home this new invention called an air conditioner to put in the window. We sat around patiently, while he read the directions and plugged it in, waiting to see it create cold air. And much to my surprise it did! Those memories stick in my mind.

One thing is always the same. I keep it clean and clear with something beautiful in the middle--flowers, a porcelain piece, a bowl, something shiny, like my mother always did.

I keep it inviting so that new arrivals have a clean slate. When my kids come home the table is full of things. I want to clear it but I am grateful: Soon it will be clear again like it is today.

Now two of them can't be here. They are living in other countries and not allowed to come home without great difficulty--one not being allowed to return at all because of COVID restrictions. No one seems to want Americans right now.

I am remembering past Christmases when we were always at my mother's and father's. Mom insisted and she was right. We created many memories around that large kitchen table. Mom constantly in motion cleaning, cooking, "Whose book is this? Whose jacket is that? Whose Barbie doll?" And then she would sit for brief moments of dinner before popping up again.

Many years later the grandkids were there, laptops on the table. After dinner a fresh table so we can play Scrabble--which I hopelessly try to join in on, sometimes cards--which I love, and less often Monopoly--which I am never quite sure about. And it stays all evening until she clears it or enlists others to help. The view from the table is always news or baseball depending on who is in the room and Mom.

Now my table and Mom's table, too, are quiet. Dad has passed on to look over and take care of Mom. Sometimes I have a friend over. Often, she has my brother and sister in, helping out and having a meal, playing a game, watching the news--always the news. This seems to keep Mom's life in some type of order. Less often baseball for obvious reasons--very few games and no rowdy audience. We are Red Sox fans and they always let their opinion be known.

Mom and I have started a new habit of visiting by video computer. It took a few months for Mom to get the swing of this technology but by now she has the hang of it and I am impressed. She will call me or I will call her and we visit for quite some time. It feels as if we are across the kitchen table from each other. That connection across the web is that strong. And it is what I think will get us through this unusual time of missing family around the kitchen table, because Christmas is undecided.





## This Morning's Visitor

The thermometer read thirty-nine degrees outside when I wandered out back into the garden this morning. Several small green tomatoes on the vines sat ready to be wrapped in paper towels in the orange colander resting on top of the kitchen radiator so they would redden at summer's end. I drew my winter coat around in the brisk air and pulled the roomy white hat over protruding ears. I smelled the fireplace of the neighbor next door, who wasn't waking me up anymore with his water sprinkler sounds at 4:30a.m. because the bedroom windows remained shut.

Drawn to the overgrown browned stems, leaves, and tendrils from unwieldy cucumber plants and an orangish yellow half-bitten tomato laying on the garden's floor, a thrashing noise caught my attention. Side to side, before I could focus more clearly on the hubbub, a grayish brown blur rushed between the metal fences. Back and forth faster than imaginable, the creature finally stopped to settle on the ground. A scared, shaking, surviving rabbit, stuck in the fenced-in world into which he jumped, crawled under, or immersed himself. Caught amidst weeds and dying plants and unable to get out. Caught in the garden like I am caught.

"Don't be afraid, bunny. You'll figure out a way to get out. I'm stuck inside too. You look like you want to get out. Are other rabbits depending on you? Were you born here in that hole near the fir tree and grew up nearby? Is this your home, hare, and I'm the intruder?"

The rabbit heard my words, turned part of his slightly shaking head around, just a bit. His white tail flicking, pulsing, hardly moving, almost standing still.

"Try to find the way you came in. This can't be your first foray inside. Just the first time I caught you being caught."

Wished I hadn't left my phone on my desk on the early morning venture. Quite unlike me so patterned to having a way to be reached in my pocket or hand, but was anyone acting typically these days? Life was different now. Imagine talking to a cottontail caught in my garden plot and conversing with squares on my computer screen?

"Stay there, little one. No one will hurt you. Be right back." I felt a pressing need to rush back inside, not to stay, not to check on others living inside who depended on me but to get my phone, to document what was happening to post on social media, to say I was here in this silent world where I feared the virus could enter our lives and destroy it even more.

As I turned the corner from my porch and reappeared with phone in hand, the rabbit leaped high into the air, soared past the garage, so healthy, bold, and long in its torso, with its darkened fur and huge white tail, that never became visible as he sat on the bottom of the garden, camouflaged in dead brush and vegetation. He flew in the air to freedom. A moment I missed catching except in my eyes, my brain, and my heart.

My life impacted by covid continued. The new normal. "Please return, rabbit. Tell me how you are. What you've seen. I'll remember you. I'm not sure whether life inside or outside can remain the same. Hoping for a miracle. Can anything ever stay the same? Similar to the rabbit that jumped out, I'll stay hopeful. The people inside might have one foot out the door like that rabbit had one paw out the fence. I'm here to stay. Count on me. And those green tomatoes, wrapped up in towel paper continue to redden with the hinted taste of summer sun. They don't disappoint.



## Orange Citrus

I wait in the ticket line at the Sofia bus station with the level of anxiety that no bodies beside me know. They are unfazed. My stomach is empty yet satisfied. I have been advised by faint whispers that the mafia has their eyes on me. I am under the impression that minding my own business is a form of protection here, so I splash through the puddles of blood in the streets and treat the occasional tinted window drive by as an extension of Bulgarian hospitality.

The post-soviet sternness that envelopes me has cut off the blood flow to my face. My cheeks are far less toned here, due to the lack of public exercise they are accustomed to. I'm a foreigner, but no one notices until I open my mouth and utter an exchange that exceeds what is "typical" of a back and forth.

The driver is outside the bus, tagging baggage with his diesel tinted hands. The imprint of tire tracks deepen on the surface of my brain as he throws my blue backpack into the cavity and nonchalantly motions to the next in line, cigarette intimately dangling between his lips.

Up a few steps, each air molecule loses its freedom equally, as if the Communist Manifesto is their God-given bible. My ticket reads 36B. My eyes scan to find a body in my space. I nervously migrate through the aisle, my face trying hard to maintain stone-cold status. Like a seed coerced into germination, I plant myself in the only available seat. The man to my left forgot to floss after alleviating his hangover via spoonfuls of шкембе чорба with extra garlic. The woman to my right is slurping her coffee as though it isn't 95 degrees outside the bus walls and 97 within them. If I was wearing shorts, my bare legs would be glued to the pleather underneath me but instead my jeans are congealed to my legs. The driver's hand is occupied by the silent smolder of his cigarette, the windows sealed to catch the residue from each puff.

The humidity pulls my eyelids down and Spanish speaking fills the crevices of my dream. The brackish sound waves from a woman's phone call in Bulgarian crash on my limbs. Without knowing the context, she is threatening a child who intentionally let the dog run away. Unfortunately, knowing the pitiful amount of Bulgarian I do, the run-away-dog saga is as decipherable as her passion for tomorrow's beach trip.

The only thing keeping me alive is the cross breeze hitting my left foot and the smell of orange citrus when the woman next to me opens her seltzer.



I was having my high-chair lunch when Kennedy was shot. I couldn't tell you what I was having. My mother could. Something from a jar? I was six days short of a year old.

My dad canvassed for Kennedy. It seems impossible that the man I knew was ever a Democrat. But when he sat on my sofa and I asked him if he could understand why I liked Obama, he said, "Oh, sure." A large picture of FDR had hung in his family's dining room, he said. "He was our second father."

I can't get my mind around the date. Tuesdays are always confusing to me but now I can't even hold the year in my mind. I have to stop and do math. Two days ago was my parents' 70th wedding anniversary but neither of them was here to see it.

Their wedding album, thick and white like old whipped cream, wasn't brought out much. So I didn't notice until much much later that when my mother repeated her vows she was making a fist. All her ambivalence poured into five fingers no one but the photographer and now me - could see.

In November of 1962, as my mother was being wheeled into one of the delivery rooms in the hospital, she elbowed up on the gurney and demanded to be taken to the one where girls had been born all night. That's how she got me, she said.

I was a surprise baby. Because the bank where my father worked was closed for Lincoln's birthday. My mother loved telling that story but I had a hard time with Lincoln's portrait looming from the walls of school. I pictured him in my parents' bedroom. With his giant hat and somber expression.





## Winter Is Back

winter is back  
and we're still here  
these long months  
reshaped our days  
we now  
count our breaths  
wait for a cure  
watch for signs,  
symptoms  
fever or just heat?  
malaise or just boredom?  
depression? or just  
sadness  
he rubs his hands  
in his cardigan  
worn at the elbows  
shivers, and says  
it's cold  
yes, winter is back  
and we're still here  
time for soup

I get out the soup pot  
from my grandmother's house  
it pulls me  
away from here  
to her

intent  
bent over the pot  
hair escaping from pins  
vapors pinkening her face  
fogging her glasses  
aromas embrace me  
mellowed onions  
dill sharp and green  
sweet parsnips  
all dance in the air

she fills a bowl  
all for me  
golden coins of carrot  
shreds of chicken  
slippery noodles  
she blows on each spoonful  
whispers  
her breath feathers  
on my cheek

winter's back  
time for soup





---

Margaret Hundley Parker

---

## They Are Here

I never see the elephant in the room because of the mice in the corner. The children hide things. No matter how locked in we are, I am locked out. No matter how long we are in the house with each other during this plague, there will be important things happening in front of me that I will miss.

How did my kid come home last Halloween covered in shaving cream and I only heard about it a year later? I was here. She had a headache and a fever, which I thought was from the flu shot. Our kitchen was crowded, so maybe she got shuffled upstairs too quickly. Plus there has always been a louder little sister. Anyway, turns out some “popular kids” had attacked her for being Spock. And how did it go on Halloween this year, being non-binary gay diva Spock? I was here. I was home when they got home but what did I miss?

My daughter announced at dinner one night that they didn’t want to be a she anymore. I’ve been writing about singular “they” for years, and here it is. For me, it’s a grammar puzzle: needing a third-person gender neutral pronoun when “she or he” is clumsy, but for the kids it’s about identity.

Am I still allowed to be a feminist? Is that old-fashioned like our fallen shero J.K. Rowling?

What else did I miss while I was doing the laundry? While I swept dirt out of the corners but walked over my clothes on the floor right where I stepped out of them? What big things did I miss that were happening in the middle of the room?

Have there always been so many non-binary genderqueer people and we’re only just talking about it? I think it’s partly a rebellion against our overly gendered world of reveal parties and pink and blue rows of toys. Sometimes I’ve thought it’s because feminism didn’t work so let’s all just be people. Yes, let’s all just be people.

Should I tell the children that when I was in the music business, my nickname was Little Faggot? It cracked me up. I mentioned an ex-boyfriend the other day in the car when Biggie Smalls came on the radio. Look! They said. A random building!

What else do we not tell each other? What happens in high school? What happens to my just-turned-14-year-old child? When they fell up the stairs on the way home. When they fall up the stairs and down the stairs. Are mean kids pushing?

I offer to kick asses.

I tell them to chuck the Quaker rule out the window and punch the bullies in the face. My dad used to say: Thy butt is where my foot is about to kick. Are the kids at school a microcosm of our “shithole” country? The Civil War will be anything but. Maybe the Quakers will go limp in unison. Maybe we can start an underground railroad in the backyard and let our freak flags fly in private.

This Halloween the raging pandamnit kept us two by two. The kid was going to a neighbor’s backyard. They were also maybe going to play manhunt with everyone in 9th grade. Some of those kids have snarked: do your parents know you’re gay? Yes. Are they okay with it? Yes. Do your parents know you’re straight? Do you?

I grew up with Boys Don’t Cry and Matthew Shepherd. The dark ages. So I was relieved when they didn’t go play the game with all the 9th graders. Still, the day after Halloween I saw the empty shaving cream cans on the street. The Biden/Harris sign in our front yard was covered in it.

I wonder what I missed this year.

---

Margaret Hundley Parker

---

## Happy Birthday, Pop

Today, November 12, is my dad's birthday. I was reading Moby Dick when he died, and I cried at everything but especially at the line, "...whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul...." Sigh. Melville based Ahab on his father, a "deathbed maniac" who haunts the book.

When I came back to Brooklyn after the funeral in North Carolina, Pope John Paul II had just died. The bells from the Catholic church on Prospect Avenue rang often, like they did after 9/11.

All the fathers were gone.

Today is my father's birthday. If a quantum superposition is possible, like the guy in the wine store said, then my dad is also still here. The cat is alive. Don't make us measure it because it will go away. Our fathers are still here. Our teenage children still fit in our arms. We are all still babies and teenagers and old people.

My dad's birthday is November 12, but I always thought it was the 13th. I wasn't even sure this morning until my brother and sister texted me. I've been humming "Oh Lord, It's Hard to Be Humble" lately and it always makes me think of him. And songs from Hee Haw have been popping into my head. He looked a little like Roy Clark.

I remember calling him from my Aunt and Uncle's in Key Biscayne when I was 15: happy birthday!

I remember calling him from college, from the pay phone down the hall. My new friends and I sang, "Happy birthday!" Were we drunk? Was he?

I always called a day late but he never corrected me.

Are we allowed to talk about how he died? Are we allowed to mention the door being broken down or the empty bottles of gin in the sink? Or that I'm a little hungover as I write this?

Are we allowed to talk about how I embarrassed strangers by crying in the library?

I was taking a class on Melville at Hunter when he died. My professor had written a book on Victorian mourning rituals and I pined for that – I wanted a veil, a black band around my hat, some outward sign that I was grieving, that the black hole that starts and ends the universe was happening in my chest. It was my turn to hold it.

And then I passed it along.

A year later when my daughter was born, I dreamed they met on a rooftop. She ran to him.

Today, yes TODAY not tomorrow, is his birthday. Happy birthday, Pop.

---

Margaret Hundley Parker

---

## There's a Marmot at the Bottom of my Shower (Thanks, Plague!)

My hair is falling out.

I don't know where it's coming from, but I could make a voodoo doll with what's left at the bottom of the shower. I could make a beaver, a marmot, a nest of spiders, a HUGE MISTAKE: SHAVE IT SHAVE IT SHAVE IT!

I heard on 1010 WINS that people are losing their hair right now because stress because COVID because lockdown because masks because uncertainty so people might be experiencing hair loss but Not to worry!

The radio said. It'll come back in a few months after the stress is gone. Ha! Not worried at all.

I wonder if my grandmother lost her hair when her mom died in the flu of 1918 and left her in charge of seven brothers and sisters when she was ten. I wonder if they lost their hair after the twins died a year later. Maybe that's why Aunt Foy had all those great hats, the fuzzy hats, the hats with the pompoms.

Why doesn't the hair just fall off my legs and armpits and pubes and face? Does the hair that stays on my head after a shower get rerouted? Are we becoming cavemen or astronauts?

Remember how we thought people from the future would be bald, like efficient aliens? Hello, 2021! The Year of the Wig. Brains in a jar. Disembodied.

In the time of Zoom, we're all mullets: business up top, party on the bottom. Who needs hair anyway? Just get a filter and stick your bald head in it, stay in your pajamas, and log on.



The End.

But not really.  
Because you'll all keep  
writing.  
And I'm terrible at  
goodbyes!  
-Kathy

Thanks goes to:  
Butterfield Library for  
giving us the chance to  
write our everyday. Now.  
And to all of you, for your  
compassion, talent and  
open-hearted attention to  
the power of words.

