

A little bit of an old home

I went on a trip this week and my change of planes was in San Francisco. I was on relatively small planes (still commercial, but one held maybe 30 people) so I walked the tarmac to get into the terminal and then again to get out to the next plane instead of going straight from the plane into an enclosed tunnel.

When I got off the plane and took a deep breath, I smiled. Completely unselfconsciously, I lifted my face to the wind and breathed in the air with an edge of brine to it.

I grew up by the bay and I also spent a few weeks every summer near the beach in Southern California. I love the smell of the ocean. Spending those few minutes breathing the air I grew up with, tasting the salt and enjoying the wind, was surprisingly relaxing. Lately, relaxation has been something I have had to focus on. That travel day, between getting to breathe such familiar air and spending almost five hours straight reading a book, relaxed me more than I had any reason to expect.

Travel is not generally relaxing. There are timetables, pressure changes, people who wear too much perfume, and the general feeling of being overwhelmed by too many people. This time, though, was different. The planes were on time. I didn't have any schedules I had to meet on the other end, just a night in a hotel room before an interview. My hip didn't object to the pressure changes. No one wore too much perfume. Someone made the mistake of eating sauerkraut on the second flight, which almost caused several people to be sick, but that dissipated fairly quickly. I like sauerkraut, but that smell in a small, enclosed space with that many people was a seriously bad idea. I got off the plane in San Francisco, checked the boards for where the next flight would be, turned around, and walked back to the gate I had just left. I can't remember ever having that happen before. All of the pieces

just seemed to fall into place for once and it was a pleasant several hour long stretch of reading a good book and actually being able to relax.

I won't be stopping in San Francisco on the way back, unfortunately, but I will be able to curl up with a good book and not worry about anything for a while. No lists, no stress, no packing or scheduling or making sure everything is done. All I need to do is get on a couple of planes on time. I can do that. In a week we'll be packing the trucks and Xander and Katja will be moving, but for a day I will not be thinking about that. I'll just be curled up either on an airplane or on a seat in an airport losing myself in the enjoyment of an interesting book. It will be easier because I got to breathe San Francisco air, however briefly; I spent a lot of my childhood curled up with books, too, and I was quite good at letting go of everything else while I was reading. I'm going to enjoy practicing that skill on the way home.

Being enough

I spent ten days on my own in December. Xander and Katja went to visit his family in Arizona. I didn't have enough paid leave to go, but it seemed like a good thing for Katja to get to spend time with her grandparents and aunts and uncles on that side of the family. I wanted to get a good start on organizing the shed, too, which is rather difficult work when a two-year-old is helping. I also, completely selfishly, wanted to get some sleep, which I did. Katja has good nights and bad nights, but she has had colds and ear infections lately so there were more bad nights than good ones. The lack of sleep had taken its toll and I was somewhat short tempered and not enjoying life very much.

I caught up on sleep. Life is much better now! I also cataloged 31 boxes, gave away nine bags of books to the VA hospital, another four bags of books to the library, and gave away some things we will not use again to a local charity. All of that was very good and made me feel accomplished, satisfied, and organized.

I also learned a few things. The primary one is that I can relax some. Between the two of us, Xander and I have the house running pretty smoothly. I like making lists, but I feel bad if I don't finish the things on the list in the time frame I set for myself. It all gets done eventually, though, and adding guilt to my life is not useful. I can run laundry during the week and have more time on weekends that is stress-free to hang out with Katja. I have a job that doesn't require me to bring work home; I should take advantage of that. Once Katja is in bed, if Xander is home, I can go to the gym for my 20 minute workout. I don't have to get up really early to work out because I can't work out for very long at the moment. Sleep is much more important than I thought, too. Life got a lot better after a couple of days of actually sleeping eight unbroken hours.

I've been thinking about all of the changes coming up in the next year. We'll be moving somewhere, so there's a new beginning in some ways. With any luck it will be somewhere it rains more than it does here. Katja is growing and changing, talking a lot, singing and dancing and climbing and running, and she'll keep getting more interesting. I'm focusing on the good things by writing one good thing about every day because this helps me remember those things instead of dwelling on things that irritate me or make me angry. Yesterday, for instance, Katja and I went for a long, leisurely walk, had lunch, and walked back to the car. We watched ducks and geese, stomped in ice, and pushed lots of buttons. We didn't hurry at all and it was incredibly nice.

Much of my life I've tried to be perfect. I was angry at

myself for my SAT score, which was not as good as my older brother's score, but I didn't know that it was actually quite high. I got smacked upside the head by a couple of friends of mine for that one. There is always someone better, someone smarter, someone stronger or faster or something. In the past year I started getting through this. I ran a half marathon. I wasn't anywhere near first, I wasn't last, and my main goal was to finish, which I did. While I was lying on the couch recovering from hip surgery I thought a lot about my need to be perfect and organized and on top of everything. I realized, slowly, that it wasn't actually making my life better. Yes, it's good to be organized, but I was getting very stressed about it if things didn't go exactly to plan, if I got behind in the morning or forgot something in Katja's bag.

It's okay. I'm enough. Xander and I together are enough.

When Xander went to England for ten days and I stayed home with Katja, I was worried that I wouldn't be very good at being a single parent. It ended up being okay. We both missed him a lot, of course, but we didn't get too frustrated at each other and we mostly enjoyed each other. While he and Katja were in Arizona, I missed them, but I also knew that they were fine and having fun.

I'm working on building a life with less unnecessary stress. It's great if I lay out my clothes the night before, but if it doesn't happen, I don't have to get out of bed to handle it. It can wait. If I have a bad day, I can stay home that night instead of pushing and going to the gym anyway. I took a nap with Katja yesterday, about an hour and a half, and because we spent most of the day out of the house and I was busy last night, the kitchen wasn't perfect this morning. I almost twitched about it, then remembered that no one really cares. It will get done tonight and it doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. It was more important to go for a walk with her, get some rest, then have fun running errands than it was to stress about whether there were a few dishes that needed to

be done.

This year I will try to remember something my mother says a lot about parenting. “You don’t have to be perfect. You just have to be good enough.” I’m not perfect. I never will be perfect. That’s okay, though. No one expects perfection except, perhaps, me, and I can work on getting over that. There is a website/series of interviews that is helping me [here](#), which you might want to check out.

I hope this year you are enough for yourself.

Half marathon recap

On June 8, I ran my first half marathon. I made some mistakes, but my primary goal was to finish before they closed the course and I managed that. I’m pretty happy about it.

I didn’t quite know what to expect. Despite the fact that I knew a lot of people were running, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the sheer number of human beings crammed into the park waiting for the race to start. I was there with a friend who is a serious runner and she was completely calm. I realized that I needed to consider races as events rather than as long runs, since the feeling is hugely different. My long runs are solitary times, not masses of people.

I started out too fast. It’s a rookie error, a normal thing. I wasn’t watching my watch and I was with a friend. It was much warmer than I expected – Alameda doesn’t usually get up to 80 degrees this early in the year – so I was drenched in sweat. I kept up with my friend through mile 8. We talked about anything that came up, nothing terribly important, but it was nice to have time to catch up. At mile 8 I decided I wanted to

go at my pace for a while. Her overall pace was faster than my normal pace, but she was doing intervals and I generally just jog, though slowly. I jogged ahead of her for two miles and then she caught up. By mile 10 I was dripping sweat and tired. At mile 11 I ran out of water and food.

There was a water stop at mile 12, so it wasn't completely awful, but it made the last three miles a lot harder. I told my friend to go on ahead. I was sore, more than I expected to be. I didn't have blisters (well, none that I noticed – there was one on my toe that I found later in the day) and I didn't feel awful, but I was out of energy. I walked much of the last part of the race and ran when I could. Xander and Katja met me about half a mile from the end, so I jogged that bit while they paced me; that was really very nice. I got across the finish line, they gave me a medal (it said "I ran for chocolate" which amused me no end), and we got a few pictures. I was, in a word, knackered.

I'm very proud of myself. I didn't finish fast, but I finished a half marathon. I worked hard to get here, and my two favorite people in the world were there to meet me at the end.



Hover factor

We just got back from a road trip. I really enjoy road trips because there is so much time to relax, talk, listen to interesting music or audiobooks, and, at least in my case, sleep. Xander is very nice about letting me sleep whenever I need to. By the time we go on a road trip, it has generally been so long since the last vacation that I am rather

exhausted. Knowing that I will be able to doze in the car is comforting.

I will write about the good parts of the road trip later, but today I have a different subject in mind. Road trips do come with their own challenges, and one that I dread is the assignment of hover factor. If the drive is one we've taken before, I know where we can stop to avoid a high hover factor. This time we were driving a route with which we were not completely familiar, so there were a couple of very disturbing restrooms.

Hover factor is a measurement of how awful the bathrooms are, specifically how little I am willing to touch anything. If I look at the toilet and I am unwilling to touch any part of it with any part of me, that's a high hover factor. If I walk in and my feet stick to the floor, even a little bit, the hover factor measurement ratchets up. If I have to look in more than one stall to find one without strange substances on the walls, that's a very high hover factor. There have been a few times in my life that I've elected to drive an extra several miles to get to a place that doesn't make me gag as I walk through the door.

I am not very picky. I do not require extreme cleanliness in gas station bathrooms, and I certainly do not expect it. I do, however, much prefer bathrooms which do not induce nausea or an urge to cover every possible surface I might touch with toilet paper and paper towels, several layers thick.

One bathroom from the most recent trip was actually quite nice. It was a restaurant (and before you say that restaurants generally have nicer bathrooms, be aware that I have been in a few restaurant bathrooms that made me decide not to eat at the establishment) and, when I walked into the bathroom, I was greeted with a faint scent of bleach. The floors were pristine, every stall had toilet paper, and I did not worry about touching the faucet handles.

I'm sounding rather neurotic, I know. All of this stems, I think, from port-a-potties when I was little. We would go to various events and I would have a very hard time dealing with the smell, the flies, the heat, and the splashes where other people either didn't aim very well or were, um, overenthusiastic. One that I remember with particular horror had a handprint on the wall. I do not know what substance was used to make the handprint, but considering the color and the surroundings, I can make a pretty good guess. I can go into a port-a-potty if I need to, and I can use it, but that is where the hover factor measurement began.

When we are driving to Arizona, we almost always stop at the Death Valley Nut and Candy Company. We get gas, since that particular drive does not have many options for gas, and I use the bathroom there because they have a very low hover factor. I can walk in, do what I need to do, wash my hands, and walk out without even once being tempted to check the bottom of my shoe to see what foreign substance may have become attached.

If you are ever in a position in which you own a place with bathrooms, be aware that you will be judged on those bathrooms, and, if the quality is lacking, if the hover factor is too high, you will lose customers. There are a few places I absolutely will not stop for gas even if I don't need a bathroom because my memory of the desperate wish to be able to avoid touching anything at all is so incredibly strong.

[A trip to Los Angeles](#)

Last week I got to go to Los Angeles. The initial reason was a business trip. That part of it was certainly worth the trip. I learned a few things that will help us in the future and I

think we gave some other groups ideas on how to make a few things work better.

The best parts of the trip, though, were the parts not involved with work. I had the pleasure of staying with two members of my family that I don't get to see often. I got in Wednesday night fairly late and then we stayed up talking much later, which was wonderful. I don't generally like staying up late, but Wednesday and Thursday nights I stayed up with no problem at all and I had a blast.

We got a long lunch at the business meeting, so I walked a few blocks to the Museum of Contemporary Art. I got to see an original Jackson Pollock! Several of the exhibits were fascinating, including a video over the course of several rooms of a young man in a deserted city, moving to his own rhythms, which got faster with each room. There was a hallway with yarn across the top in different colors and angles. As I walked down the hallway, looking up, the patterns changed. It was unexpectedly beautiful. There are, of course, always pieces I don't understand, the main one here being a large slab of polished black material (looked rather like a long table top) leaned up against a wall. I can't say I got anything from that. I don't go to museums terribly often, but I generally enjoy them when I get the chance.

The highlight of the trip, though, was a visit to the Magic Castle in Hollywood. The Castle is "the private clubhouse for the Academy of Magical Arts, Inc, a very special organization devoted to the advancement of the ancient art of magic." It's a really neat place. There are always magic acts, the food is very good, and there are a lot of neat things to see on the walls and throughout the Castle. The company was very good – my relatives had been there before, so they showed me around, and we talked about all kinds of interesting things. When we got back to the house, we talked for a while before going to bed. I'm pretty sure that between Wednesday and Thursday night I got about eight hours of sleep total.

I caffeinated a lot on Friday. I almost never do that, but sometimes it is completely worth it.

I love traveling. I don't get to do it much, although hopefully that will be changing over the next few years. I like getting to see things I can't see in Reno. I especially like places that are more culturally varied; Reno has some limitations in that area. We both like traveling together, even though it is sometimes stressful. I couldn't bring Xander along on this one because he's rather busy at the moment, but next time I go back, he's coming, too.

We were planning to go to Australia at the end of last year, but it didn't work out. We have another trip or two planned over the next few years, though. The travel bug never left; it just got delayed for a while. In the meantime, we'll go on little trips and enjoy them.

A good start

Today was the first step in something pretty neat. We bought tickets to the Nutcracker. That does not seem like a big deal, on the surface. We've both seen the Nutcracker before, and, while we do enjoy it, it's May. Why would I get this excited about tickets seven months from now?

Well, because the tickets are for a performance at the Sydney Opera House.

We're going to Australia. We've been planning this for a while, but this step is the first tangible evidence that we're actually going. Now that we have Nutcracker tickets, I feel like it's real. I know we will actually get there, one way or another, and I'm incredibly excited.

While I've been to Canada and Mexico, I've never been farther than that. I don't even have a passport (although that will change soon!) and, for a while, I wasn't sure I would ever get to travel much. We've started to get to the point, though, that we will actually have both the time and the money to travel. We have a long list of places we'd like to go, and we will probably actually get to most, if not all, of them. Possibilities are opening up, and I think I may actually get to see some more of the world.

Tonight I filled out my passport application, and I will send it in soon. It's a new beginning, a piece of joy and exploration to look forward to. It's a start.

I keep moving forward and I keep looking for joy. I'm finding it in unexpected and wonderful places. I am generally happy, and when the bad moments hit, I have these pieces to hold to help me through. My husband can make me laugh at the strangest times, our dog is always happy to see us, and the cats are always happy to have a warm lap.

It's a good start.