

So today (11-10-22) is my birthday; I am 73. This is a notable day for me, because I was not sure I would make it this far. My Grandfather, Sam Sterler died by drowning when he was 74. My father was 72 when he died. So, this number – 73 – is in between and has some meaning for me. I don't feel in competition with Sam or Bernie, but this birthday brings me a sense of history and my place in it. My Mother always said "life is short". I first heard this from her around 5 years old; it did not mean much to me at the time. Aimee said this to me dozens of times over her life – it was one of her favorite sayings. I can still hear her saying this now; and it feels very powerful - today.

I don't feel so much insecure about dying as I feel incomplete. I still have something to say and do. I want more life so I can fix "things" in myself and the world. I want to know and discover and explore some new territory that I have identified. I find life exciting; brimming with new possibilities; so "things" do not feel complete for me. The horizon or goalposts are always moving for me. I like the fact that my perspective and/or scope of how I see things changes. I will probably never feel my life is complete. I like this idea.

To be sure I am insecure, no question. I don't see how it could be otherwise, for me. Why am I insecure? Well, it is a circuitous kind of story; that always comes back to how small I am physically and mentally. How I see, is flavored by what I see, and what I want to see, and, want to be. It starts with being aware of my own awareness. I am not even a drop in the ocean of consciousness.

Consciousness is the strangest part of “reality”. To be aware, is, funny and surprising. I find myself in a kind of motion pictures – movie scenes – all the time. Consciousness, in my mind, is like a camera recording a movie that is playing all around me. How did I become the director of this mental camera? I am constantly on stage in a never ending “picture” or “show”. The theatre is in my mind’s eye. How I was casted for these parts is not always entirely clear. All of a sudden I am playing a part and I question: “did I write this story”? I have a jumble of emotions, ideas, desires, aspirations, inclinations, and dispositions that tumble around in a big lottery type bin in my head. Then some part of me – picks a winner, And the winner is.....? I am picking lottery winners all the time – every day – moment – in my head. I feel like the mega-millions announcer on weekly TV. I should dress better if I am going to be the MC on this TV show. Oh, I forgot, no one sees this show but me – it is not public TV. It is a show, but it is a private show in my head. How did this game/story get set in motion? What keeps it in motion? I have no idea! I look at all the players and stories around me and I am astonished. It is not just people stories; but bugs, birds, buildings and bacteria. What a cacophony of characters and props. Is this theatre of the absurd? It certainly feels strange a lot of the time. And, I do not find it particularly easy to always stay on track in these stories. My focus can get really wobbly in a hurry.

What do I know about my consciousness? My fast answer is – not much. However, I am a lover of what is and what I see – because denying reality hurts more than accepting it. What is real is not always entirely clear. So, I have a system of evaluation for what is

real, fake, counterfeit, distorted, corrupt, useful and desirable. It is a kind of court system with a whole cast of characters and levels. There is a superior court, court of appeals and Supreme Court. There is also a small claims court. I can play any character or evaluate any issue in this legal drama and many times parts blend, as do the courts. I can sometimes be the defendant, prosecutor, as well as the judge, jury and executioner.

So, I have the lottery show, the crime and punishment show, and a lot more “systems” or shows going on in my head. Like the artist factory, the eating and exercise extravaganza, the spiritual show, the economic formula/experiment, the love story, the sleep saga, the writing expedition and many many others. That’s a lot of stories or drama going on! Who are all these characters; are they all from the same planet – the planet ME? There does not seem to be any shortage cast, characters and scenarios happening. It is all very interesting and a bit perplexing.

I find life fun. I try and make it interesting for myself. How do I accomplish interesting? That is done by the mechanic – engineer part of me. Interesting is a mixture of components both real and imagined. I create interesting on the fly, or many times quite slowly and deliberately. It can be a complex phenomenon or rather simple. It is composed, usually, of facets almost like a recipe, but it is much more than just a formula. It has the element of mystery; of the unknown. It also has in no small part – desire. Things that are interesting can be painful, hurtful and/or destructive – or not. Things that are interesting are like a butterfly

alight a flower, resting, thinking about where to go next. Interesting can be both a verb and a noun at the same time. Interesting usually requires an element of courage. One way to portray or describe interesting is by pictures. Pictures can be depicted in various ways – they can be visual or they can be concepts, emotions, experiences, facts and many other ways and/or combinations of all the above. I have recently compiled a story of the house in Cazadero. These are pictures that I took of the process of building the house. Some of the pictures are recent or brand new in order to cohere the story. I hope you enjoy this story/vision and find it interesting:

<https://woodart.net/projects/cazadero/>

My story is not done – yet. I do have visions for a better version of me and the world. Whether or not that happens, remains to be seen. Visions are like dreams/aspirations. Dreams are both an anchor and a climbing rope to scale mountains. I feel it is important to have dreams; it does not matter if they are actualized. To see beyond what is, is what “interesting” is all about. I have to think outside the box, if, I want something different. Thinking outside the box doesn’t mean I will get what I want or something desirable. Sometimes what I think brings disaster – a train wreck. I have had a few train wrecks in my life. However, even from train wrecks I have grown – sometimes substantially. I am not advocating train wrecks, believe me, but veering off the established path can have benefits. And even train

wrecks can become treasures. If I want rewards, I usually have to take risks.

For example the project in Cazadero was a big risk in many ways. I was almost 60 and out of shape when I started this project. The fact was I was FAT. A bigger concern for me at the time, was, did I have enough money? It was very questionable from the get go, if we had enough money to finish the job. The reason I did as much work as I could by myself, was to conserve funds. The goal was to finish the job and not owe anything on the house completion. When I did need assistance I did not hire professionals, as a general rule, I hired young, strong, coordinated unskilled men. I knew I could get the right results from these newbies, if I trained them. I had more time than money and confidence in my teaching ability. However, I know certain trades are best left to experienced professionals – concrete finishing, drywall and taping, excavation and road building, septic and water wells. Most all other trades in residential construction I am familiar with. It has been my style over the last 45/50 years to become professional in various trades – then teach them to newbies. It saves up to 2/3 of the labor cost in construction jobs. Labor is the single biggest cost, by far, on any project. A lot of the time on this project I did not hire even a newbie, because I could not pay them. So, I just trudged along and did the work myself. A welcome exception was my sister Lynne; who worked for 8 months for mostly free – I am forever grateful. Friends and family helped occasionally, but most of the time I was on my own.

However, my big partner in Cazadero and all other jobs in the last 40 years – Susan Hrastar. Without Susan there is no Cazadero or really anything else I have built. Susan supported the family and project financially, but more importantly she supported the process psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. Susan guided me through the tough times and out of the swamp I sometimes created. Susan is the rock in my life. Susan pulled me out of train wrecks and guided me every step of the way. Whatever success I have I owe to her. She is level headed and a practical thinker. A good partner – we have balanced each other over the decades. It is not a perfect relationship; but we have made it work. I am grateful. We are strolling down the homestretch – still together.

The Cazadero house is the fifth new house Susan and I have built together and lived in. This may be our final resting place. At 73 I'm getting tired. I do not know if I have the stamina and/or desire to build another big box. Building a house can get a little intense; the way I do it. I really like to build things; however, I am not as strong as I used to be and I tire out pretty fast these days. Getting old and worn-out is a lot of fun – NOT. Oh well, I guess it beats the alternative?

The way I have oriented my life is not for most people. Being self-employed is not what most people want. Self-employment does have insecurity built into it. It can be scary to captain your own ship. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022 labor report, roughly **6%** of Americans are self-employed; I had role models in my Grandfather and Father. The potential to make

more money was always a big draw for me. However, the idea of relative freedom has always been the main point in my mind. I say relative freedom because there are always constraints in anything you do. For me, employees, suppliers, market conditions, government agencies and regulators, customers and luck all impact “relative freedom”. Any and all of these things can sink your ship. Unforeseen contingencies can come out of nowhere and they frequently do. Susan and I have dealt with some peculiar stuff over the decades,

Human beings are funny creatures. We tell ourselves stories and then we live by facsimiles or versions of those stories. The stories we tell are not always clear or accurate. Sometimes the story is deliberately fabricated. Why do we construct a fantasy or fanaticize? Perhaps it is wish fulfillment or a leap into projected possibility. Humans constantly reach for the unknown. Or rather the unknown invades and plagues our perception. The unknown is all around us and demands attention – cannot be ignored. A disturbing fact is that the more we learn; the more we discover we do not know. Knowledge for the human intellect is haunting. Yet we crave knowledge. Knowledge is a vehicle to power. Power is addicting. Knowledge and power go hand in hand; sometimes we bite off more than we can chew. We usually seek a balance between knowledge and power; but it is common for things to be out of whack. Sometimes the reasons are easy to see, greed, envy, lust, etc. Sometimes the imbalance is not very palatable and we try to ignore it. We can be cowards - sometimes. To Know Thyself is usually easier said than done. I am hoping you get a little clearer picture of me. Actually, I am mostly hoping to get a

better understanding of whom and what I am. I have had some adventure in my life. And I am looking forward to a few more “thrills” before I exit. Wishing you the best.