

FEELING THE JOY IN GRAVITY

Here is a memoir I wrote as I was beginning to regain brain function, beginning to have hope of returning to the world. It's a "letter from the underground," written when I had gotten back enough brain power to write it, but early enough that I could still remember, could still FEEL what it had been like to be without a brain, to be Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz.

The blessing of the human psyche is that it will heal itself, and many, many painful memories fall out of accessibility. But at this time, early on, I could still remember what it had really been like:

"Sick people are boring. I mean really boring. Boring as hell.

We have nothing to talk about except our illness and our injury and our limitation. We bore ourselves; I can only imagine what we do to the rest of you.

The problem is that when you're in long-term chronic illness or injury, your horizons constrict. We can't see as far as you do.

Our ability to think is limited, and closes in on itself. Nothing is so important to us as feeling better, and until we do that, nothing will be so important to us as the fact that we feel bad.

The very nervous system with which we could experience other things in life is impaired, so we sense less than you do. The very brain that imagines and conceives and delights and envisions and pictures things and people and places and events has stopped doing those things.

That's just not happening in our brains and minds, thus in our hearts, anymore. We live in brain-fog, seeing through a glass darkly, feeling through a thicker veil of perception than the rest of you do.

Our ambition is to be able to do the little daily normal things that you don't even notice that you do, let alone notice that you are able to do. Our dialogue is so often internal, because we spend so much time alone and without human contact and uninvolved in human activities, that inward turning becomes normal, becomes attractive, becomes simply what is. It's the "is-ness" of our existence.

Life is lived very close to the chest, to the vest. You hold your cards close, because there are so damned few of them, and they have to last you hand after hand after hand. The rest of you get the cards shuffled, and you get a new deal. You play with a changing hand. We play with the discards. We become the discards.

We bore the crap out of you. Of course. You have lots of experiences every day. Ours are limited to the ministrations we receive from people who are paid or otherwise obligated to deal with us.

Our experiences are internal; they are physically unpleasant, emotionally charged and depressing, always turning us inward, ever inward.

The world expects less and less of us, gets more annoyed that we can do less and less and offer less and less and participate less and less and give back less and less.

Less is not more.

Except, if we pay attention to the subtleties, and if we're lucky and actually do make progress, we begin to notice out of the corners of our eyes that life is different than it was

before we went down. We are different than we were before we went down.

No pain, no gain. Well, how about a lot of pain? A lot of gain? But what's the gain? It's subtle. You have to look for it. If you think it's going to be the ability to do everything you once could, you'll get frustrated and miss it.

The gains are like faeries, like butterflies, like lightning bugs in the existential night. They flash off and on as they begin to return. Like the power coming back on in your house after an outage, it tends to come back in a couple of spurts before it's online.

Character, it's called. I've got some character to offer you now. More than I had before.

I'm not so exciting as I was.

I won't have as many good times at your side, or in your bed.

I won't share so much of the fruit of the vine.

But I will share what I can from the tree of knowledge.

Gravely leaning into its trunk, I sit in its shade, waiting for an apple to fall on my head.

Waiting to feel the joy in gravity."

