***The seeds were first planted for this work from a curious ask: "Why am I here?"***

The answer is an autoethnographic study about understanding the addicted artist and the resilience and mindfulness tools that can lead to physical, mental, and spiritual health. How to build a safe space where a creative career and life can align honestly and authentically. How through the work of recovery, you are responsible for cultivating and creating your own gratitude design practice.

From skies and skills to plows and pixels, this work digs deeper into the history of hardships. It examines how farm life lessons are a continuum from before my time in history, and how now even with all the progress and new technologies, the original ways of cultivation, employment, and spirituality have persisted even to how I run my design firm today.

My goal is that you might look inside yourself at what you are numbing from, and what practicing gratitude might look and feel like to you. Old patterns and habits create pressure to be perfectionistic, not feel enough, not feel at all, and only stay at surface level. These behaviors have a long term unhealthy effect on designers and can lead to burnout, depression, and addiction. Through personal work and research in recovery, beliefs can change, blindspots can be overcome, anxiety can be reduced, and depression can be alleviated by creating a safe space.

A safe space to share creates acceptance and abundance thinking. It makes room to realize you have a choice to heal the addicted artist and cultivates a mindset that makes a life truly fulfilling.

CULTIVATOR AND CREATOR

LORILEE RAGER

# CULTIVATOR AND CREATOR

*An autoethnographic study understanding the addicted artist*

LORILEE RAGER

# *Cultivator and Creator*

LORILEE RAGER

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the Graphic Design program at Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier, Vermont.

By Lorilee Rager
2021
*Approved by Master's Examination Committee*

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CULTIVATOR
AND
CREATOR

*for*
*Will and Luke*
*I love you a bushel and a peck*
*and a hug around the neck*



Spelling is not writing. W. B. Yeats, one of the greatest of modern poets, spelled terribly.
— Natalia Ilyin

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Google map image of Long Vue Farms field

## WHY AM I HERE?

The seeds were first planted for this work from a curious ask, looking away from the logo files on my desktop out the window, “Why am I here?” I reflected on how creatives look falsely to our clients for approval, permission, and purpose to fill that void of feeling not enough. Then an uncomfortable rock bottom forced a look inward, plowing deep into the roots of my childhood on our family farm.

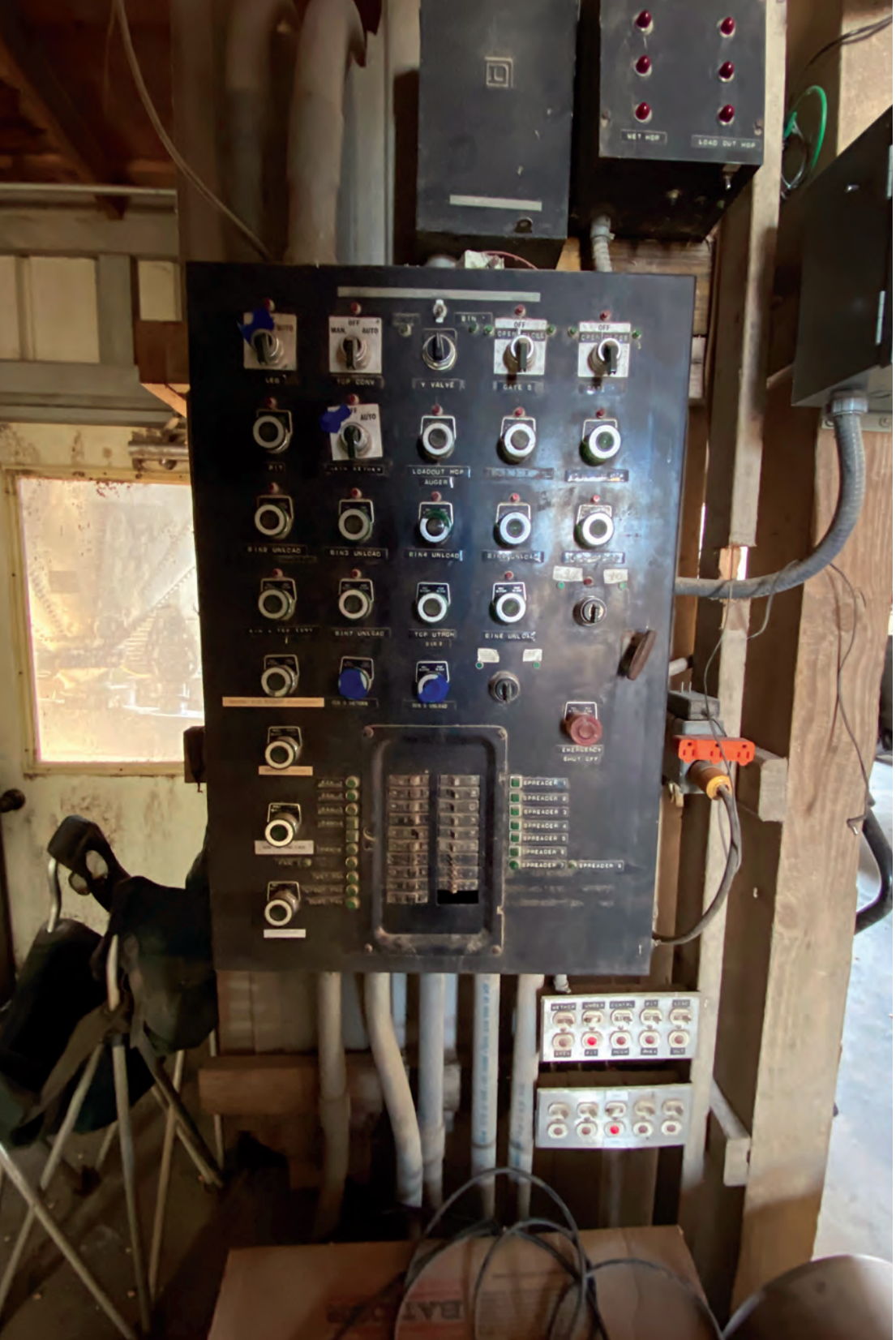
This thesis is an autoethnographic study about understanding the addicted artist and the resilience and mindfulness tools that can lead to physical, mental, and spiritual health. For example, it explores how to build a safe space where a creative career and life can align honestly and authentically. In addition, how through the work of recovery, you are responsible for cultivating and creating your own gratitude design practice.

This gratitude design practice is accomplished through resilience, optimism, and mindfulness. From skies and skills to plows and pixels, this work also digs deeper into the history of hardships. It examines how farm life lessons are a continuum from before my time in history, and how now even with all the progress and new technologies, the original ways of cultivation, employment, and spirituality have persisted even to how I run my design firm today. Writing revealed a continuous theme of hope and gratitude in hard times that I was unaware I practiced. This constant optimism, hard work ethic, and gratitude outlook founded on an agrarian Christian rural raisin’ is what motivated me to work so hard in life in the hope that by helping, producing, and making it all, I would be enough. I had been focused on peacekeeping and seeking external praise, not realizing what I was searching for was inside me all along.

My goal is that you might look inside yourself at what you are numbing from, and what practicing gratitude might look and feel like to you. What form does it take? Does your approach to projects begin in gentle, honest questions, kindness and mindfulness, with the power of saying no to what doesn't align with your authentic self?

Old patterns and habits create pressure to be perfectionistic, not feel enough, not feel at all, and only stay at surface level. These behaviors have a long term unhealthy effect on designers and can lead to burnout, depression, and addiction. Through personal work and research in recovery, beliefs can change, blindspots can be overcome, anxiety can be reduced, and depression can be alleviated. An unflinching look inward, facing truths and fears, can be the answer to a better work/life balance. Because we cannot separate who we are as an individual from a meaningful professional life, learning a healthier design practice is the yield of this harvest.

A safe space to share creates acceptance and abundance thinking. It makes room to realize you have a choice to heal the addicted artist. The rules are not rigid brand standard guides, but rather you make choices of your own. Curiosity, imagination, and all the tools within you can merge with your values, beliefs, and experiences. This in turn cultivates a mindset that makes life truly fulfilling. There will be a shift (and yes maybe more income), all by default through authentic joy.



Grain bin system control panel inside dump shed of Long Vue Farms

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*I'd like to give many bushel baskets full of thanks to a lot of folks:*

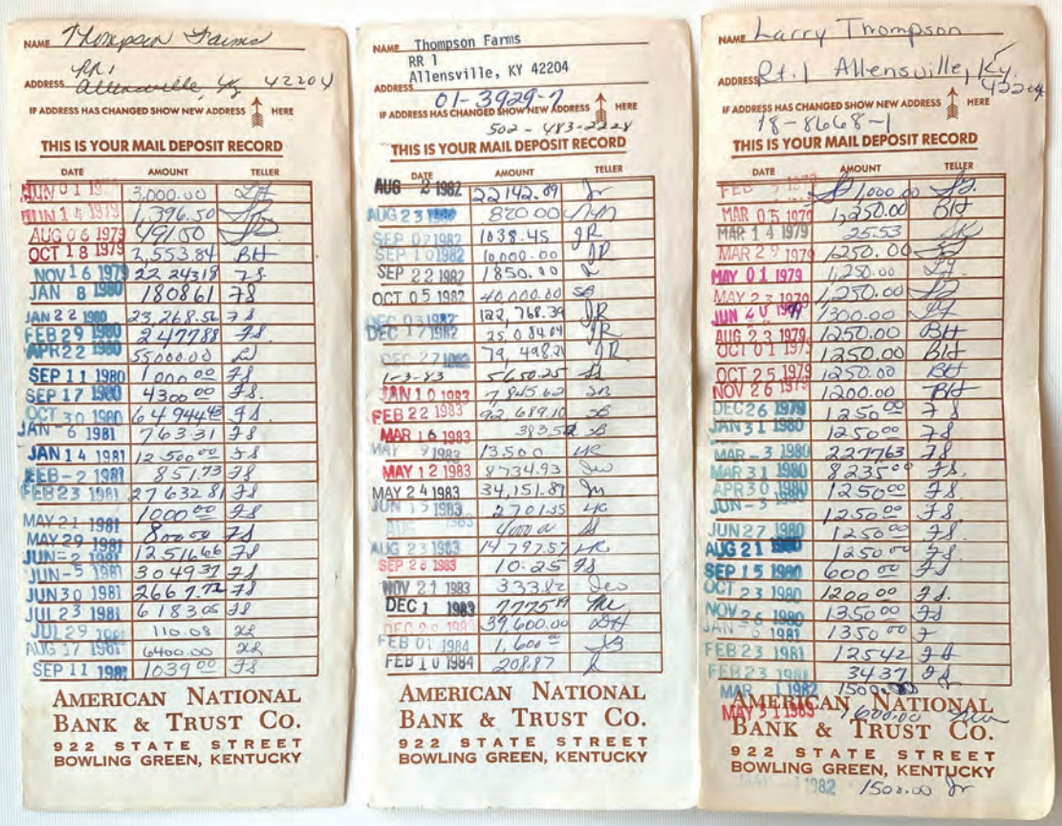
*My first art teachers: Lelia Cole, Darlene Groves, Doris Kelly, and Kay Drew. My fine arts professors at Austin Peay; also Rachel and Barry for trusting me to teach a little there which started this journey. My parents, sisters, cousins, and clients who filled my morning pages. My dear friends who supported both intoxicated Lorilee and now sober me. Maggie for InDesign struggle support. To Katy for reading every misspelled word from the beginning to her sister Julia editing every word here at the end. My entire team at Thrive Creative Group who allowed me to skip out every afternoon to write my way to today. HR, Will, and Luke for their encouragement, kindness, patience, understanding, and accepting my growth.*

*Vermont College of Fine Arts' entire faculty, most of all my advisors for hours upon hours of keep going's from Natalia Ilyin, Ziddi Msangi, Yoon Soo Lee, and Lorena Howard-Sheridan. Also, the fellow students, cohorts, Thesis Butler Sarah, and the Dewey Lounge crew that always accepted my southern drawl.*

*It would fill all the pages and all the grain bins on the farm full with all the gratitude I feel for so many others that were a part of the seeds it took to harvest this work. All I can say to everyone else that cared for me, let me cancel supper plans often, kept me sober and the boys fed, is bless your heart. Truly, blessings to you for loving me so well.*

*Eating is an agricultural act.*

*— Wendell Berry*




Bank deposit ledger from farm archives showing jarring fluctuation from harvest, droughts, and price per bushel values

## INTRODUCTION

In case you have never farmed, been a graphic designer, a child, had anxiety, helped raise kiddos, used humor, avoided conflict, had any bad habits you were ashamed of, been a bad speller but a good writer, or visited Kentucky, I thought right here would be a good spot to gather and gab about what you're about to read. This thesis began on the icy sunrise of a spring day in my dorm room from a desperately curious question: "Why am I here?"

I tell a few old stories about how I began to understand the addicted artist, resilient rituals, and a holy history of old habits, and how I have now doodled my way into a more healthy life and gratitude design practice. It's no secret that this work caused me "to about have a full come apart" during the last two years. That's the Southern way of saying I hit rock bottom: a feeling like you're about to have a nervous breakdown, or a panic attack, because of the hard spot you've uncovered inside yourself.

There's confessions about mixing up my letters and numbers in grade school and how my story telling skills make everyone feel better and more comfortable in a room. Yet, after helping folks feel better, smile, and get along, I needed to 'take to the bed' as my Grannie Thompson would say. I discuss how I finally found a safe space that brought me calm and a moment to catch my breath while also helping me recharge my energy in a healthy way.

These next few pages are about how I learned to stop looking ahead at the weather expecting a storm of fears, how I realized more clients and cocktails weren't making me happy. How I discovered the inward truth that I couldn't design my way out of the stress and struggles with accidental charisma.

How I've cultivated skills from a rural farm life into a creative design life today: working, preparing, and plowing through with resilient skills I had all along. How exploring my history revealed that the power of mindfulness was in the soil beneath my own feet. This journey fostered growth, courage, and responsibility to find my purpose, refine and align my values, nurture what is within, and tend to my roots before I try to help water yours.

Send us a little more →H2O←




Lorilee, 8 years old, on the farm wearing Sears Husky jeans hemmed by hand

PART ONE

# RURAL ROUTE ONE

I'd ask you to close your eyes and take a deep breath but then you couldn't keep reading. Imagine with me a homestead just beyond the coal mines of Kentucky and the Smoky Mountains, right near the Tennessee state line. The hills roll gently, the soil is rich and tillable, and the views from the front porch are of bluegrass and wide open spaces. You are on beautiful Long Vue Farms in Keysburg, Kentucky.

To help you find your bearings a bit better, Long Vue Farms is just an hour north of Nashville, literally on the state line between Kentucky and Tennessee. Looking out from the back porch, the backfield tree line you see is the Kentucky-Tennessee border. Today the farm is 800 acres of small grains growing in some of the richest, flattest, most tillable (and profitable) soil in South Central Kentucky. This is my home.

Long Vue Farms is smack dab on the line between Todd and Logan Counties. It's so rural that we often speak in terms of the county lines and old farms for landmarks. We're just past the old Shelton place and Gilbert's road. If you get to the Y in the road you've gone too far. I've always said when giving directions to the farm, "Right when you think you've gone too far and feel lost, just go one more mile." It's the old Maude Gill place, where I was born and raised.

It's true about the farm being on the county line, which led to some complicated situations. When I was little, our address was Rural Route 1, Allensville, Kentucky. Yet our phone number was a Guthrie City number 3-2057, but we were to vote in Adairville. Growing up, neither county wanted to send a school bus to pick us up, each claiming we either weren't in the county or on the route.



It was an hour ride both ways on the school bus. Miss Fran was my bus driver and gave me a whole pack of double mint gum when I got off on Fridays.

The two counties also fought over who paved the roads that far, and there wasn't any 911 to pick up when we called about the barn burning. "Doo-doo-do! We're sorry that's not a working number," was all I heard as I looked out beyond the towering mechanic shop and watched flames leap and flash like fireworks, engulfing our largest tobacco barn. I guess the smoldering sawdust piles got too hot inside from firing the tobacco, plus how the whole building was coated in creosote.

We didn't farm tobacco anymore after we lost that crop. Dad said that a tobacco plant destroys the ground anyways, that it sucks the life right out of soil, making it hard to grow any other crops after it. I can remember a few great uncles whose beloved Marlboro Reds seemed to do that to also.

In 1976 the Maude Gill estate and farm had been abandoned and was going up for sale at auction. No one wanted it, maybe because it needed so much work. No one else claimed that spot on the map, so my father did. In an interview with my father, he said, "Because we sold our equipment business in Bowling Green, Kentucky, we were willing to relocate since your mother's family was all here. We were looking for another business like large scale farming." Our family got to build our own little community from scratch just the way we wanted. We paid to have electricity run to the house and built our own new dump shed and grain bin system. It was a massive investment, as well as a great feat, to run miles of county electricity, waterlines, and a grain storage system in the middle of nowhere. We made new roads together and had a nice gravel drive for many years (which I raked a lot to help the mud holes), but today it is paved with the finest concrete. One sign of a successful farmer is when he can afford to pave his own way.

As reflection has pointed me towards my sense of place and the farm, I have realized the world through this lens was all I knew as a child, all that mattered. Now, through this work,



PREVIOUS PAGE: Maude Gill family and estate 1885, purchased by my family in 1976





I have looked closer, zoomed into sharp focus, and begun to notice where it blurred, where it was lost, found, scuffed up and broken. These roots may have gotten buried and hidden away, yet I still carry them with me.

My memories rumble with the deep roar of our grain dryers, echoing off the metal grain bins behind the house. Sleeping to that sound is better than any white noise app you're plugged into. The wind gusts easy now and then, the leaves swirl, and fall harvest season is here. The men are trucking soybeans in from the fields and filling up the bins. Dust covers the windshields of all the farm trucks parked by the shop, sticking to the heavy early morning dew.

We've already had one frost that began to knock the bright yellows, reds, golds, and oranges from the trees, flecking the fading bluegrass like confetti. The grounds are softly, slowly surrendering to the latest cold snap. I can see the bright leaves beginning to dim and curl as the edges get darker. They remind me of the cinnamon brown sugar corn flake crust from Mom's sweet potato pie we always have for the holidays.

The quilted place mats monogrammed "Happy Fall Ya'll!", the hand towels and aprons, all patterned with oranges, browns, golds, and amber plaids, welcome us to a time to give thanks–for all that we harvest, all we worked for, and all we stored. Now it is time to rest and eat well. The work on the farm is paused while we pray over the potluck.

Butter melts in the sweet corn dish from the heat of last summer's hard work shucking and silking the silver queen we put up with Grandma Smith. Mom's fresh sourdough bread rises as the cranberry slips out of the can. The Ball jar lid pops on the fresh canned September white peaches. Those are our family's favorite, they were put up frozen after we bought them at Jackson's Orchard and are really something to give thanks for, yum!

Through the mud and the mess outside and in the world, this is a moment to take a deep breath, close your eyes, and be thankful. It's time to bow our heads and say grace. Saying your prayers is the go-to way to get through each day, especially in the hard heavy times, and a must in the happy heartful times.





Grandma Betty Smith with daughter Linda, my mother, Easter Sunday 2019

I remember watching the 1965 film *Shenandoah* one of the first times with my grandma and the wonder of seeing something so similar to my own culture on TV. Jimmy Stewart–whose mannerisms and voice remind me so much of my Grandfather Thompson–plays Charlie "Pa" Anderson, a father of seven in Virginia during the Civil War. Pa doesn't allow his sons to fight in what he believes "isn't our war." They farmed and did all they could to work together to make their father proud. At Thanksgiving, Pa says grace over a large family at a large table before a large feast:

> Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cook the harvest. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you Lord just the same for the food we're about to eat. Amen.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Great Uncle Ivy Bellar, farmer and carpenter, taking a smoke break in his tobacco barn

My own father's prayer at the beginning of every holiday's meal went something like this: "Dear Heavenly Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thank You for the roof over our head and all that You've given us and done for us. We thank You for this day and our daily bread. We give thanks for being able to gather





together with our loved ones. We also thank You Heavenly Father for those that have gone before us (my father usually choked up big here), and we look forward to the day we can all be together again. Thank You for this land, the rain when we needed it, this meal, and this wonderful life. We thank You for all we have and all You've given us and done for us. In Jesus name, Amen." "And God Bless the corn!" Luke, my son, would shout with a smile.

We'd all laugh, trading glances and gentle squeezes on the arm as we'd say: Ladies first, line up, here's your plate Grannie, grandkids will get you your sweet tea or coffee.

Then a cue for the little ones to hold tight, don't jump in front of Grandma, help her to her seat at the big dining room table. Ensure canes, walkers, ice tea glasses, and decaf coffee make it to the table with napkins, forks, and buttered bread. Now line up to get your plate, no more bread either, we saw you eat another piece while you took Grandma's to her.

The peaches thaw a little beside the tub of vanilla ice cream over on the dessert bar in the kitchen while we eat dinner in the dining room. The Chess pies cool and set, and meringue as high as my hand tops the chocolate pies, soft and bubbled up like a calf's slobber sucking from the bottle. Boy howdy, we gave thanks.



My father Larry, far right, inspecting a new combine



Father, Larry Thompson operating a planter at Long Vue Farms 1980

Those were the calmer seasons in farm life, when both our bellies and grain bins were full and the ground was too hard to work. That's when I saw my father do a rare relax for a few hours on a holiday and spike his boiled custard. Being responsible for so many mouths to feed while farming to feed the world, too–I understand how the weight of it can drive someone to drink. Agriculture is an intense and stressful line of work. Paul Harvey's great speech turned 2013 Dodge Superbowl Ad, "Then God Made A Farmer," really says it best:

> God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bails, yet gentle enough to tame lambs and wean pigs and tend the pink-combed pullets, who will stop his mower for an hour to splint the broken leg of a meadowlark. It had to be somebody who'd plow deep and straight and not cut corners. Somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk and replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week's work with a five-mile drive to church.
>
> "Somebody who'd bale a family together with the soft strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh and then sigh, and then reply, with smiling eyes, when his son says he wants to spend his life 'doing what dad does.'" So God made a farmer.

Father, Larry Thompson in wheat field 1990


U.S. NAVY



PREVIOUS PAGE:
Bellar Family at County Fair, front row left Grandma Betty age 8, 1939

Ms. Maggie Bell, House-keeper to Landlord Alzada Gill

PART TWO

# THE MEMBERSHIP

Those who call the rural Kentucky farming community where I grew up home are part of what I like to call "The Membership." That's what the eponymous character of Wendell Berry's beloved novel *Hannah Coulter* called her farming community, and it sure fits mine. Our membership is full of landlords, farmers, homemakers, tradesmen, teachers, and preachers. Some of these folks wear a different one of these hats depending on the day of the week.

You can usually guess by their dress what day it might be. There's the handmade thin, patterned, sleeveless house-coats and cotton culotte britches for warm week days; the light plaid western-cut shirts decked out with pearl snaps paired with practical, western-cut work khakis; the solid shoulder-padded wool dress suits with thick hose and Sunday purses. I can still smell the Juicy Fruit gum from helping Grandma grab hers from the mud room closet. I remember how it would swing from her arm as she hung onto the arm of my grandfather. I can see him stepping proudly out of church wearing his Indian arrowhead bolo tie and Sunday boots, the church's lovely stained glass doors arching above his head.

My membership included caretakers of the land, who worshiped together and played rook on Friday nights, all together, all the time. A community of uncles, cousins, neighbors, and homemakers, all hard workers, each one with a special talent like wiring, welding, sewing, or sign painting that put their hands to use working together to make the farm successful.




Long Tue
FARMS



Uncle David Wayne Smith, baby brother to my mother, kind, quiet and loyal

There are many moving parts to harvesting a successful crop, and each one of us used our strengths to keep the full operation going. My grandma cooked lunch for everyone every day: the best fried chicken, fried okra, fried potatoes, green beans, and cornbread, hot on the table by eleven o'clock without fail. Our life wasn't like an episode of the famous variety comedy show *Hee Haw*, all overalls and lazy dogs sleeping on the porch. Our farm bustled with welders, mechanics, painters, carpenters, cooks, and all sorts of business partners. Because of how hard we worked, and our reputation of being good stewards of the land, by the time I left for college we were operating nearly 10,000 acres of high yield crops like corn, soybeans, and wheat. We hoed miles upon miles of crops across two states and over five counties.

If you could afford it, a tractor could do the work of two or three farmhands. In Berry's Novel, Hannah Coulter observes, "Tractor's don't get tired, you can work at night. Tractors made farmers dependent on big companies like never before." Now I know I came along way after the industrial revolution, but on tractor delivery day our membership gathered around this new piece of machinery like a spaceship had landed. My father would have us girls "read the manual from cover to cover" and listen close to the tour of the machine by the salesman. It was up to us to show Uncle David

PREVIOUS PAGE:
(L) Wedding portrait of Landlord Alzada Gill who upon her death left her farm & home to me

(R) My sister Mandy Bryant owner of Long Vue Farms today





Wayne, Uncle Durell Jr., Mose, Woody, and Lawrence how to use it 'cause they couldn't read nor write. Other farmers down at the Crop Service Office, a bit jealous, would say, "That green paint is sure expensive," as we sipped early morning coffee and they asked what all can that new thing do?

The membership of my childhood not only worked in the fields but also to restore the old Maude Gill place. Even today, the front porch has started rotting in places and is in need of repair. Many other farmhouses in the area have fallen due to neglect, hollow shells of past farms that were once full of family, consumed and overgrown by kudzu and full-grown trees. To my family, the rich history of this Eastlake-style Victorian cottage built in 1885 has been worth preserving. Together we all worked for years on the house, replacing the real wood siding, rebuilding gingerbread trim, and plastering the crumbling walls. It was hard work that took intricate detail and patience, but it had to be done to stop the house from falling in on itself. I now realize maintaining this house is a forever, ongoing project, just as you might care for your own self.

Many of the early farmhands in the membership have passed away, but their memory, love, and work still suffuse the farm. The workforce of 1976 solidified when Grandfather and Grannie Thompson moved from town to help on the farm. They brought with them Woody and Jean Snell, who lived



Cousins Lil' Ivy, Connie, & David Wayne at the Bellar Reunion every first Sunday in August

in the tenant house across the field. Not long after that some local neighbors, Jab and Virginia Cheatham, started walking to the farm each day to work with us, Jab in the field and Mrs. Virginia in the house with us girls and Mama. They were too poor to own a car and too proud to ask for a ride.

Peacocks had taken up residence in the farmhouse before we arrived, and there was no indoor plumbing or central heat and air. Needless to say, there was plenty of work to do. My cousin Craig, a teenager from the city struggling with his extra religious mother and extra abusive alcoholic father, eventually moved in with us. He was the son my father, with three little girls, never had.

My mom's brothers David Wayne and Durell Jr. came on over once Granddaddy and Grandma Smith retired from dairy farming. Other full-time loyal helpers later joined who felt like family; Mose and Lawrence I remember best. Mose taught me how to sharpen my pocketknives and called me "Boots" because my hand-me-down ropers always seemed just a hair too big as I clumped around the shop. Lawrence taught me how to run the bush hog, especially how to get up under and around trees without getting all cut up from the limbs.

Uncle Ivy, another of my grandma's brothers, was a carpenter. He always smelled like the best mix of paint thinner, Ivory soap, and sawdust. He fixed up and painted buildings all around the farm and helped to restore the house one room at a time. I spent hours helping him, or really, just following him around. He would let me paint when no one was looking and cleaned me up when I accidentally leaned on the old Carriage House walls as I talked his head off. He also repaired and wired a little cabin we used as a playhouse growing up.

An interesting fact I learned from my research: Our little cabin playhouse was actually known as Taylor's Cabin. Mrs. Virginia had told my mother that when Maude Gill lived on the farm until her death in 1974, our now playhouse was where Mr. Taylor Mitchell lived. He was known then as the yard boy and helped around the home milking the cow, hooking up the horse and buggy for trips to town, and gathering eggs from the coop. Although I never knew him,



Uncle Durell Smith, Jr. with bushhog & tractor always joyful, helpful, smiling, known for his craft of welding & painting




Grandfather Thompson just before he left for errands after slipping me a Werthers candy, a wink, & $20 dollars



Cousin Craig Burgess with Mrs. Virginia Cheatham, neighbor & friend, who helped work in the house

I think of him as one of the earliest members of the membership caring for the farm.

Now one of the most cherished members I'd say was Grandfather Thompson, my dad's father. He was on up in years, so Grandfather was assigned to run all the errands to town, such as running to get parts, fueling trailers, and buying seed bags and chemicals. He called the house every morning at 5 a.m. to get his orders for the day, such as where he needed to be, what men needed to be transported to what fields, and whether I needed to be picked up from preschool at the Church of Christ. I loved when he picked me up because it often involved a secret stop in town for soft serve ice cream cones from the Bethel Dipper Dairy Mart.

More recently, I have learned of others who helped out even if I didn't know about it at the time. One such member was my Great Uncle Lee, part of my namesake, Lorilee. My Grandfather Thompson paid for his little brother to go off to college while he stayed back to keep the family farm. Uncle Lee became an engineer in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He worked on WWII secret government projects. He made good money but lived farther away so he helped financially when times on the farm were bad ("fair to middlin'" as Grandfather Thompson would say) in the 1980s. He bought us things like our first microwave and our first cars when we turned 16.

Berry's Hannah Coulter described her membership as a caring, reliable, hardworking group willing to endure the hot days and push harder to get the crop in before the storms. They were loyal to the crop and the people they worked beside. They were kind, quick thinkers, always planning the best routes around sink holes while welding a broken axle and making sure the next day's seed and fuel wagons were topped off. Each one of the members had individual talents that when they came together could complete a harvest from cultivation to combining. This is how our membership worked.

This mindset of the membership is how I built my design firm. I often refer to the work of my web designers as the carpentry you don't see undergirding the design of a new house. Like you just trust the toilet will flush when you push down the pretty handle, and the light switch or Amazon Alexa will brighten the room, it's like magic. Designers have a hand in the nitty gritty that makes that same abracadabra magic. Like the magic my father made as a farmer, doing his part to make that loaf of bread and everything bagel appear on the Whole Foods shelf and the five-pound bag of Martha White flour pop into your Instacart.

My team of creatives work in positions that take advantage of their skills as makers. With the farm membership in mind, I've created a culture where we care for our clients and meet their production needs just as my father taught me to respect and care for our landlords. We don't need much land to sit a laptop on, but I've always expected my team to have the same love and dedication to design come rain or shine.

My childhood membership gave me a sense of belonging, self-worth, confidence, and comfort that made me feel so much love as a child. Helping things grow is all I ever knew how to do. This way of growing up makes me feel that the work you do matters, this work feeds someone. I feel the same way about what I do as a designer. Building a team like on the farm, of loyal people you care about and work side by side with, supporting each other's strengths and working together solving problems, is my every day. A small business owner helps the community, helps humanity, and makes a difference in the world.



Great Grandma Bellar with family showing five generations together at the Bellar Reunion



Grandfather Thompson, a neighbor & Uncle Claude Duckett

We worked shoulder to shoulder on the farm in the heat and the dirt for a common goal. It wasn't about a man or a woman, black or white, it was about the daily work together to help the farm and care for the membership. To grow the best, most bountiful crop we could in the company of people who tended to and watched out for each other. We knew the responsibility and the stress of our task, but we never stopped, not one time did it occur to us to give up on the work or each other. Through hail storms and heart attacks we were together, keeping the tires rolling and offering a helping hand.

Larry Thompson 1993 with award winning soybean crop. Photo shoot was for Soybean Digest, where immediately following he suffered, yet survived, a heart attack



*In order for persons or projects to grow they require a safe container.*

— *Julia Cameron*

PART THREE

# SAFE SPACES

My research into the origin of my "attitude of gratitude" started with a search for its authentic roots. I was researching, reading, and interviewing family to uncover why and who was responsible for this habitual approach I unconsciously applied even when design projects and drinking had me spinning my wheels in anxiety and rage I was trying to ignore.

This research led me back to the rural acres of my farm and interviews with my family to uncover the foundation of who I am. With my mother, I revisited long forgotten memories of where I first felt safe and grounded. I'd lost my footing as an adult running my design firm and chasing deadlines and clients demands, so remembering with my mother the times where she found me content, happy, and comforting myself in a healthy way began to reconnect me to that authentic gratitude I'd lost touch with.

I realized that before the era of Netflix, news feeds, and nagging neck cramps, I had created safe spaces for myself where I could soothe my soul by myself. Rediscovering this gave my inner voice a jolt of "goodness gracious" like I've not felt since I was a child. I needed a space where I allowed myself to play, be messy, pray, and recharge. I learned that the solitude of a quiet, peaceful, safe place to retreat, rest, play or hide is an important part of where gratitude grows. This was an important realization, that you always need that safe space in our life. A place to be authentic, be creative, and nurture yourself. A place to make all your own, where you can hide, heal, and dig into your feelings.

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Back field corn harvest Long Vue Farms from grain bins

Google map image of Long Vue Farms field

My earliest memory of a safe space I created for myself came out of a series of interviews with my mother about the farm house and the history of its structures. In the middle of acres of sunrises, stress, storms, and starlit nights, where all you could hear were howls from coyotes and the cooing of mourning dove, I made for myself a space. My mother tells a story of looking for me for hours when I was 8 years old. After searching all over the farm, the dog pen, and the playhouses, she found me under the dining room table. This is where I had made my first safe space. With a soft ribbon-edged blanket, a handmade sock monkey, a cabbage patch doll made from pantyhose and yarn, and a bucket of crayons, I sat happily alone. I also never seemed to be without a legal pad for doodling swiped from Dad's desk drawer and a tape recorder for storytelling. Mom said after that, anytime she couldn't find me she knew to look in the quietest corners of the house.

It was a perfect place to hide on happy quiet days alone or from louder, harder ones. The hard days I was too young to understand why, I just knew it was safer in my soft blankets hidden away. Those were the combine header broke kind of days, or the drought dust choke us out kind of days, or the banks declined the farm loan kind of days. Those days my father shouted the most, and I knew it was best to stay in my safe space and color harder.

Our dining room was the room where I felt safest, bedded down like the bird dogs out in the pens. We only used the big dining room for real special holidays and birthdays, like Easter, Thanksgiving, and Granddaddy Thompson's birthday; most other days it was forgotten about, pleasantly dusky, with Mom's hand-sewn tasseled drapes drawn. Marbled maroon wallpaper covered the cracks in the plaster walls and ornate dental crown molding adorned the walls like icing topping a cake. I piled my softest blankets beneath the china plates stacked on the table by Mrs. Virginia. The china cups sat in rows, washed of Grannie's custard and waiting to be put up in the cabinet. The silver lay shiny and polished in the velvet box on the antique sideboard beside Great Grannie Sweats crocheted linens, freshly laundered and ready to be tucked away. Grandma's thick, cranberry red



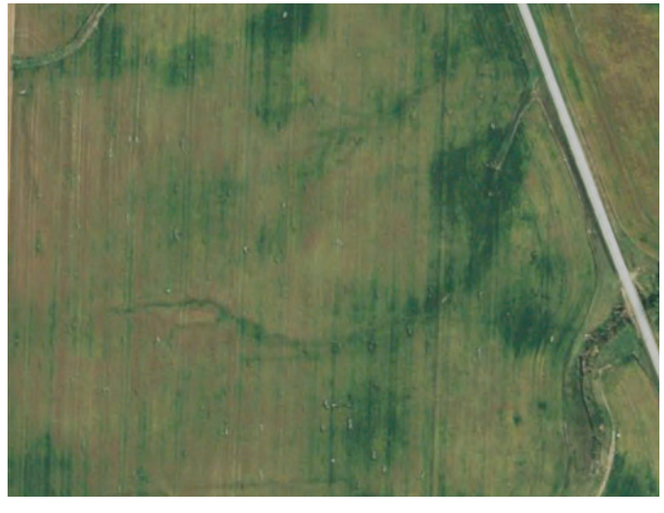




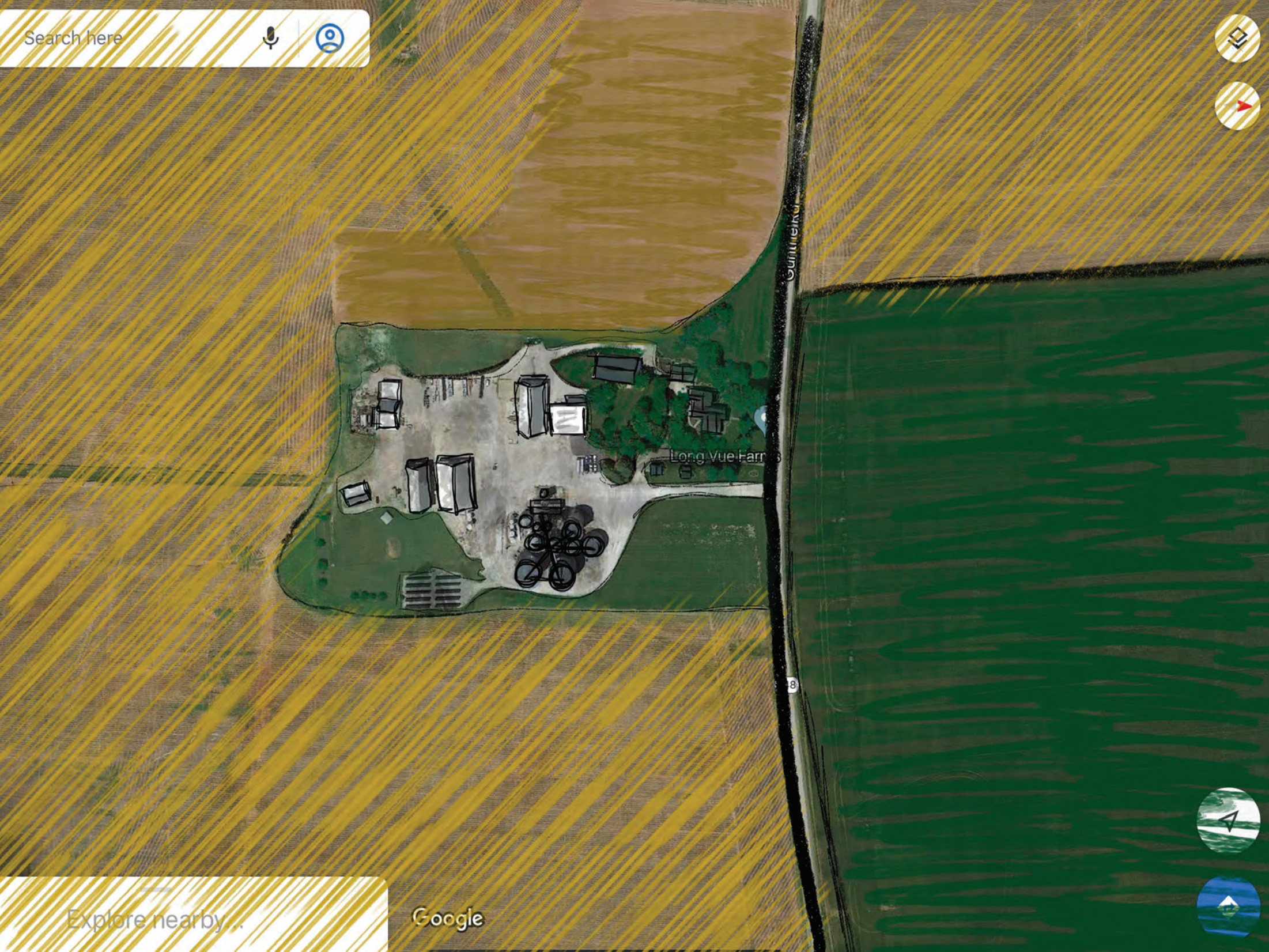
crystal wine glasses cast a rosie glow as they patiently awaited their next party pours. Jewels glittered on the heavy brass railroad lamps Grandfather Thompson had rewired from oil-burning to electric (his retirement hobby as an antiquer was paying off). Lace doilies draped over the entrance to my sanctuary, protecting me and the mahogany table. It was a magical place of suspended disbelief, gently sparkling like the crystal chandelier above me.

Safe spaces and hard days have intertwined throughout my life, and I've learned through my work how making a safe space for yourself creates the conditions for authentic gratitude. As Mom told her story, I remembered other safe spaces I found around the farm as I grew older, like in the garden with my grandma. Later in college, my first studio drawing class became a retreat from the bush hog bullshit barked at me from my father. The safe space I've made today is my home studio for grad school where I write away the hard times in a healthier, healing way.

Author Julia Cameron says, "In order for persons or projects to grow they require a safe container." So as I began to seek, I wondered: Where is my safe container? Where did I lose it? Where do I buy a new one? I have realized from my research that as a child I made it on my own and that today I still carry it. I carry the ability to grow and make and play in my own safe container, and it has been inside of me all along. A classic Oprah ah-ha moment.



Google map image of Long Vue Farms field


Search here
Long Vue Farm
Explore nearby...
Google

Embarking on this inward, unflinching inspection of my sense of place helped me uncover my own resilience, response, and recovery tools that I used as a child and had long since forgotten. This research revealed that my safe spaces were a place made by me, just for me, to retreat with buckets of art supplies, soft blankets, and objects that brought me joy and comforted me. They were spaces that nourished and grounded me in my own inner peace, joy, and calm, but along the way I had gotten distracted and disconnected, an ever busier designer pushing pixels around.

Client meetings, clients' changes, new work, negotiating contracts, begging for payments, stopping scope creep, learning tax laws… with all these competing demands, I lost my way. I lost where I was planning to go, going back over messy client notes, answering phone calls and texts, managing missed deadlines, and learning to say no to *pro bono* work. There wasn't time to pause, rest, eat well, play, raise my children, or care for myself. It seemed the days, months, and years flew by as I tried to design my way out of my stress.

More logos, more meetings, and more revisions became my priority. To stay up on design trends, sign codes, and in hand dates, I learned to drink my coffee strong and my drinks stronger. Working harder and faster, no thought spared for soothing myself, it seemed like numbing myself made more clients happier. In my interviews with my mother, her words cast a frightening mirror of watching my father do the same for years. As he worked to build a farm from 800 to 8,000 acres, so grew his struggles with stress and addiction from trying to run the perfect farm, with the perfect family, in the perfect town. For me, Red bull and vodka and a little Xanax hushed that voice in my head for the afternoon pop up meeting that kept the client happy.

Through researching my habits, I realized I had lost touch with my safe spaces. My addictions obscured my self-awareness so that I lost sight of the soft blanket skills I used to rely on. This research uncovered unhealthy, learned behaviors and lack of boundaries I was ashamed to admit, like how I'd turned to drowning my hard times with hard liquor like my father. I had lost my creative, calming, coloring, childlike ways.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Google map of Long Vue Farms with coloring by Lorilee

Google map image of Long Vue Farms field

Not only am I a recovering alcohol abuser, I'm a recovering people pleaser. I was so busy drinking, pleasing, and mirroring everyone else's feelings and actions around me, I lost sight of the safe space within me.

My research revealed that I had forgotten how to pause and rest. As a child, after helping everyone on the farm with chores, I knew to soothe myself by making a safe space to be my creative, authentic self and fill up my cup. But somehow along the way, I had turned to booze to get me where I thought I needed to go faster and just ignored the problems. I stopped making art from a place of love and became disconnected from my sense of worthiness.




Writing safe space in Lorilee's home studio


HEY
PLAYBILL
AM 10 07



*Buy land–it's the only thing*
*God ain't making no more of.*

*— Will Rogers, Mark Twain & My Father*




PREVIOUS PAGE:
Sunrise Long Vue Farms

Labeled fuel tanks at Long Vue important to not confuse because fuel for tractors cost less but is illegal to use in road trucks

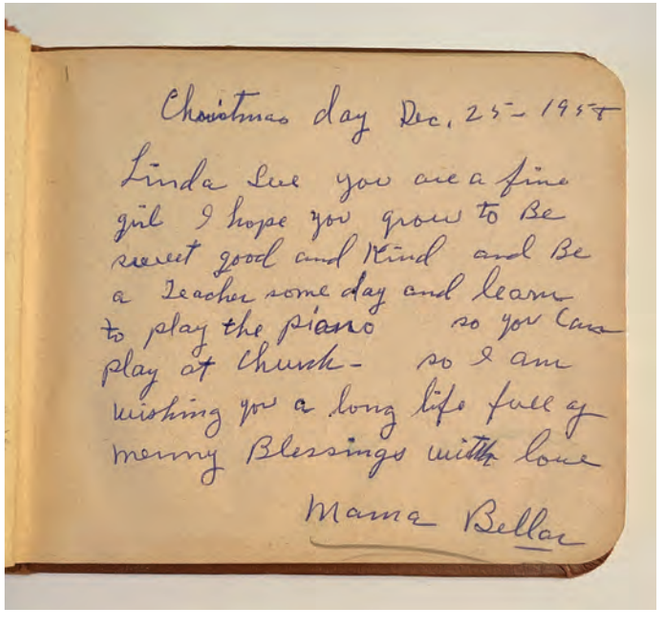
PART FOUR

# OBJECTS & IMACS

Growing up, I watched the women in my life seek permission and guidance from the head of the family and church for any new thoughts. It just wasn't the Southern hospitality way to speak up, speak out, and express any emotions other than gratitude and grace. My training is shaped by my church's influences of loyalty, fear, and gratitude mixed with boxing up anger and sadness. In the Church of Christ it was taught that male leaders were best and women were to have submissive roles. The church follows the New Testament rules of women being allowed to teach if under close supervision of a male elder. Our roles were supporters and helpers. It was unspoken that as a child we didn't speak up or cause any conflicts. We were there to learn to live and love the Lord.

As I grew into a young adult and experienced life outside my church and home, I began to try to fit my learned beliefs into my life. The college art studio classes and design life I was learning about became entangled with this farm and church life that had helped form me. So I looked at my male professors as elders, seeking permission and approval of projects, following the rules of modern design strictly. And then when I started my graphic design practice, this natural flow of learned beliefs continued. I looked at clients like the fathers, farmers, elders, and design professors in my life. Through the hard times and difficult clients, I kept the continuous theme of gratitude and hope in everyday tasks I was raised to believe. I kept trying to please.

No matter how much I was stressing about the client who needed my help New Year's Eve for that January 1st


Christmas day Dec. 25- 1958
Linda Sue you are a fine
girl I hope you grow to Be
sweet good and Kind and Be
a Teacher some day and learn
to play the piano so you can
play at Church- so I am
wishing you a long life full of
merry Blessings with love
Mama Bella

Autograph book, a Christmas gift to my mother 1958

Winter Season Sales Event pop up, I always looked for that silver lining to be thankful I had a client who needed me. "Just thankful for the work and happy to help." "No worries! Here if you need me," were the automatic replies. Like work on the farm, whether keeping my stressed out father's tractor tires rolling or my mother's chores all caught up and kitchen cleaned, design felt the same. Figuring out the needs of the client by reading their expressions and emotions, problem solving for them as quickly as possible to help them, and handing a finished design over for approval. Putting out design fires and pop up storms for the client was the role I was thankful to be filling. It's how my relationship with my father was, how preachers and professors taught me to be, and how I watched my mother serve them: always kindly and with a grateful heart, listening well, unspoken complaints.

My mother lived out this role each day, hitting the ground running ready to be at whatever position was needed for the farm. She seemed to literally run to the kitchen like it was Christmas morning when farming was good. Mom cooked us eggs, bacon, grits, toast *(note: We are a toast family, in case you are a biscuit one. There's a difference, you know. A can of biscuits*





*was expensive and only served a few when you could get a whole loaf of bread that would feed more mouths and last much longer!)* and had the coffee made and the cantaloupe fresh from the garden cut and served with cottage cheese, all ready for my father before he even appeared in the kitchen.

I watched these strong Southern women–my grandmother, my mother, neighboring farmers' wives, grade school teachers, and Sunday school teachers–raise babies, some not even their own, raise gardens and meringue pies while mending shirts and shoes and setting supper on the table each night. I saw how they lived and loved hard-headed, head-of-the-house men, whom they were loyal to every day. These were resilient, tough women using their best skills to survive the only way they knew how.

I watched them reading the signs of their man's emotions like we did the weather. From sunburns to seed bags, they could read what needed tending to each day without a word spoken. Seeing the hard grit jaw line and sweating hands, knowing to hand off the mason jar of sweet tea and tea towels of sandwiches. They knew by the way it was snatched up, with a curse word or with two hands and a kiss on the cheek, what



Bird houses at Grandma Betty's home

to expect when delivering supper to the field. The weather radio reports and the depth in the dirt rows showed them what they could do next to help make it easier on the men to do their job.

The daily work included having the socks, shirts, and sex laid out for the taking based on the mood of the man. Then up early the next day handing out lunch boxes and the landlord checks as the men ran out the door. These women were the unspoken, unthanked backbone of the Membership. No one ever spoke about the hardships or spoke up to the harsh men; just a pat on their shoulders on their way out the door. Sometimes I caught a secret sigh of relief as her hands rested on the windowpanes before a little smile to me, and a wink, and back to the dishes in the sink for a quiet moment of washing in peace. The unspoken winks of these women are the words I am writing today.

I didn't fully understand this as a child, nor the responsibility on my parents to feed us (and the rest of the world) while mapping out the next field to plant and fighting the government on farm bills and farm credit service loans. This was my earliest exposure to designing, planning, budgeting, and surviving. Watching the grain markets price per bushel drop while pickup trucks and payroll taxes climbed just meant we must work harder. My parents tried to focus on what they could control as we watched the storms roll in.

This way of living was hard on my father. The lack of profits and the rise in expenses of farming led to a short fuse, a tall glass of bourbon, and more than a few heart attacks in our family. So when I watched my father bow his head and my mother clasp her hands together to pray through the chest pains and clinking pennies, I began to do the same. On these days we gave thanks for the fried bologna we had on the table and whatever we were able to get in the hard dry ground that day. The gratitude practice of hope in hard times, problem solving, and resilience while giving thanks was cooked into me right there with the bologna.

In the most difficult times, my mother stood over the sink trying to scrub away her doubts with the dishes. My father would head out the door early, aggressively tucking in the back







Quilt made by my mother, Linda Thompson

of his firmly pressed plaid work shirt with pearl snaps. He would look at himself in the mudroom mirror one last time, making sure his hair part was perfect, his belt was aligned, and his pliers holster was secured on one hip with chapstick, knife, pocket calendar, and ink pen on the other.

Dad's daily uniform never changed. I never saw him in sweats or shorts or anything but that work uniform, except Sunday. Sunday was a suit and tie in the morning, then back into his farm attire for the afternoon's work. He would snap for his cup of coffee, black. He'd fix the cuffs of his western cut work pants, perfectly pressed by Mrs. Virginia down the road, then slam the heavy wooden screen door, often saying, "'Tis better to look good than to feel good anytime." We needed to keep up appearances that all was just fine, never letting the hunger, the hangover, or the hardships of real life show.



In *The Age of Homespun*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich writes:

> Nineteenth-century Americans understood that objects tell stories in speeches, memoirs, and poems, and on scraps of paper that they pinned, pasted, or sewed to the things they saved. These were stories about patriotism, family pride, and household industry, about resolute farmers, disappearing Indians, and grandmothers who spun and wove by the kitchen fire. (6)

I watched my mother be a proud homemaker, doing laundry all day every day, cleaning and cooking every meal from scratch, then sitting by our wood burning stove in the evenings to mend my father's shirts, cross stitch, make her own dresses and ours, while rocking and humming so peacefully. When as little girls we'd ask why Dad seemed so mad, she defended and excused any ugly feelings my father may have expressed that day on the pressures he was facing. That if we were quiet and sweet it would help him, so we gladly were.

Cross stitching samplers for hours under the sewing lamp next to her corner cupboard, I watched Mom's stresses melt away in her making. In my family, especially the women are loyal patriots. My mother is a homemaker first and always, even though she loved teaching and interior design. Holding a college degree in each, being a homemaker still took priority. A skilled quilter and canner, who fiercely loved her husband and girls no matter what our flaws, she spent her life devoted to being a homemaker.

*The Age of Homespun* goes on to say:

> The compulsive farmer threshing by lantern light on a winter evening would not hesitate to drive through deep snow the next day to bring a load of wood to his minister. Formal entertainment in such communities was commonly stiff and quite unsuccessful, but daily work created more spontaneous pleasure. (16)

This is the person my mother encouraged us to see in my father, to think of how very hard he worked on the farm for

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Farmhand, Brandon holding American flag by grain bins for Veterans Day social media post



Cross-stitch sampler by my mother, many hang throughout the house



us all until the weather stopped him. Tired and worn down, he would still wash up to take more wood to nearby shut-in widows. Many times I got to ride proudly with him, carrying the boxes Mom prepared with us–usually a basket full of jams and jellies we'd put up with Grandma, homemade banana nut breads, a large wedge of wax covered cheese, oranges, slices of country ham, and a small handmade, quilted pillow cross-stitched with holly leaf. I know now that we had barely any to spare, but no matter what we would split and share with the landlords to show our thanks.

This is the part of my father I most admired. The charming, kind, helpful community leader who, when not angry at the bankers and the bushel yields, was grateful and promised hope to everyone whose land he farmed, always instructing me to be thankful and appreciate the spiced fruit tea and homemade cookies offered at our neighborly visits. "Thank them for letting you farm their farm. Tell them we'll have a good harvest and get them a check very soon. Show them what your mother made for them. Always make eye contact and speak up if spoken to," Dad instructed as he nudged me inside each storm door.

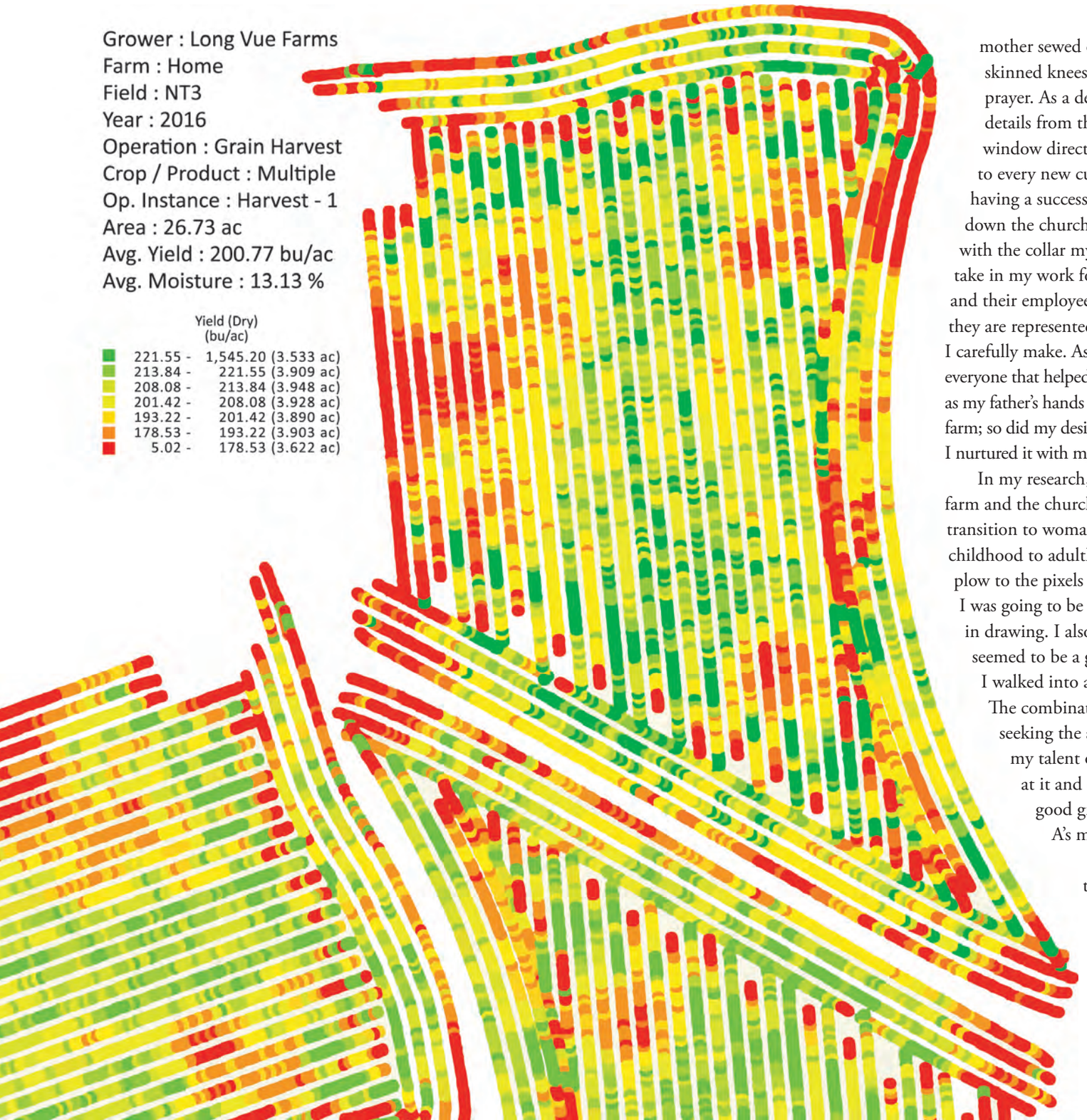
*The Age of Homespun* may be about life in pre-industrial America, but it still very much reflects my childhood of 1987, my family and my lifetime: "The character-building virtues of rural life and the importance of women's work in the domestic setting… an acknowledged but undefined backdrop to the more heroic acts of revolution." (18)

This echoes through my life today as a graphic designer. There is heroism in the daily vocation of helping stressed, overwhelmed, and often angry clients bring shape and life to what often starts out as a vague and undefined backdrop.

Like my parents' daily work in the fields and the home, daily practice of my craft has been my approach to graphic design. Like the homemaker in the 1700s, my mother and grandmother created objects crucial to a home, such as clothing, bed linens, and baby dolls, at the same time putting food on the table and raising children. As a designer today, I create objects that seem like small pieces but in truth are crucial to the client's enterprise. With the same threads, my




The Family Circus comic book found in my childhood bedroom while researching




mother sewed our Easter dresses, mended shirts, bandaged skinned knees, all while rocking us and giving thanks in prayer. As a designer, rebranding a small business with details from the door hours signage, to the drive thru window directional signs, to the fun swag bag handed to every new customer, all are essential pieces to a client having a successful business. The way I confidently walked down the church aisle for communion in the Sunday dress with the collar my mother had newly laced is the pride I take in my work for my clients. The confidence a company and their employees and even their customers feel about how they are represented is a direct response to the objects I carefully make. As my mother's hands made so much for everyone that helped us grow and mature into successful adults; as my father's hands tended the seeds and the finances of the farm; so did my design business grow and flourish as I nurtured it with my own hands.

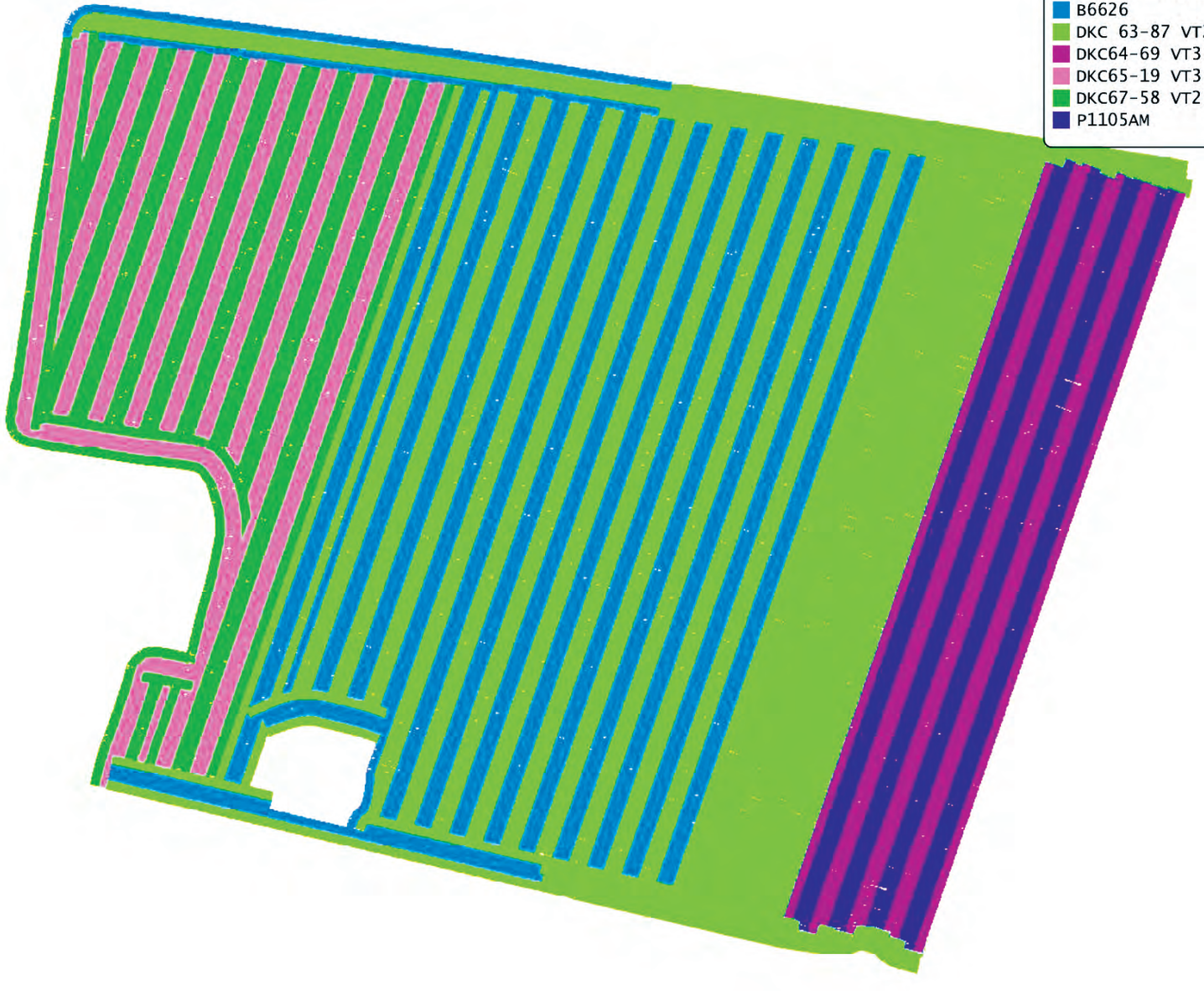
In my research, I've traced how my training from the farm and the church continued to influence me in my transition to womanhood. My dreams carried me from childhood to adulthood, from the farm to the city, from the plow to the pixels of art school. As a child I didn't know what I was going to be when I grew up, but I did know I found joy in drawing. I also loved to help everyone on the farm and seemed to be a good listener who made folks smile when I walked into a room; I was fiercely loyal and loved big. The combination of not wanting to fail and desperately seeking the acceptance of my father drove me to follow my talent of drawing into school. I knew I was decent at it and that just showing up to class meant I'd get good grades. Since art classes made me happy and A's made Dad happy, it seemed like a win-win.

Throughout school, I felt I was different than most everyone around me. While others seemed to work well doing math and spelling and could recite all the presidents, I was doodling totem poles on the wide ruled paper thinking Washington D.C. was near California.

Ag Leader Tech SMS Harvest map software

# Alzada - AG1 - Planting 2014

985 Darnell Rd.
Allensville KY, 42204
(270) 483-2228



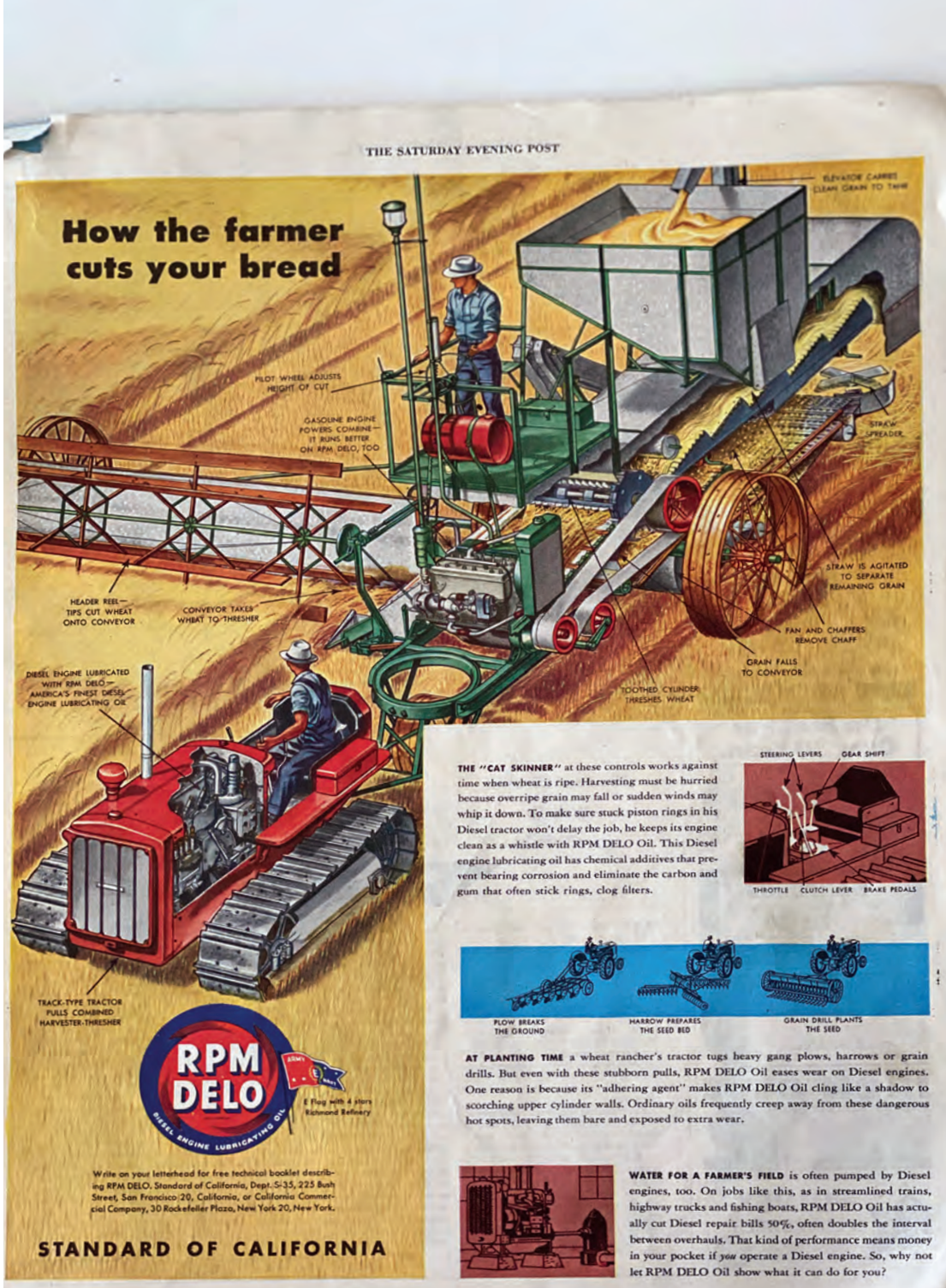

This is a software produced map of an actual field. This field located at the Mrs. Alzada Gill farm is of a test plot showing a color coded graphic of the variety of seeds planted. From the tractor cab, the farmhand creates a color coded map of what variety they are putting in the ground to later see what produced best. During harvest another color coded map is created from the combine yield monitor to show you the yield. They are also careful to harvest in strips and weigh each variety for more accuracy.

I liked drawing and making posters and changing the fonts on the word processor in Freshman typing class way more than writing the paper for English. I wanted to create every program for the school play and paint the backdrops for the school dance. It wasn't like this permed chunky tomboy in her husky jeans from the Sears and Roebuck catalog had a date anyhow! I may not have seen the letters and numbers as easy as most, usually making my 2's and b's backwards, but with an offer to make next month's corkboard classroom calendar and a few knee slapper punch lines, I'd pass the class on charisma and construction paper.

Once in college, my loyalty and desire to help paired up with my new technology skills to make things easier to read on the farm. When we got a computer for bookkeeping or new software and satellites for the John Deere combines, I helped plan data exports and lay out reports for everyone to read. I took great joy in confidently making color-coded harvest plans, land maps, and diagrams on how to use the new grain elevator systems. I liked making easy-to-read lists of phone numbers for the Membership to keep in their pockets and spreadsheet forms to track the mileage, weights, and moisture test results of the grain trucks. Using my visual and technology skills, we advanced from hand printed manuals to digital PDF. Moving from plows to printer support kept me more out of the way of my father's angry fits in the field.

As hard as I tried to love the farm like I did in my childhood, after art school I knew I didn't want to work the family farm anymore. I did design the farm data, but I didn't understand the data itself and couldn't be the bookkeeper and payroll clerk my father needed. I loved to photograph, design, and draw all that lived in the cornrows, not calculate the bushels made from them. But even though I knew it was time to leave, I desperately wanted to keep the peace.

I'd always admired the story of Dolly Parton and how she left her country home to follow her dreams to be a singer. Her determination, Southern roots, and courage to leave home, sing her heart out, and live her truth inspire me. In her memoir *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business*,




Ad Saturday Evening Post August 1945

she says when others criticized her for leaving country music to make her leap to the pop music world, her response was, "I'm not leaving it, I'm taking it with me to new places. Abraham Lincoln was great not because he was born in a cabin but because he got out of it." (Parton, 187) There was something in her I recognized in myself. Her ideal seemed like the way I wanted to live if I was ever able. I had the mindset before recovery that a woman needed permission to change; that you needed to consult with the men in your life about any choices you made. This training from my childhood would continue to influence me for a while longer.

As I approached the age to think about colleges, I knew a few things for sure. I wanted to move to the big city sights and modern sounds and get away from the old house and stressful bins and buckets of my father's rule. My father told me I had to go to college, and there's nothing wrong with that I see now. Later my mother told me his dream was I would find a good, Church of Christ city man who didn't farm. Men like that didn't really exist in our neck of the woods. Most girls from my hometown hoped they would end up "barefoot and pregnant" as they say, married to their high school sweetheart, in a new doublewide behind their mama's and their memaw's. Now, don't get me wrong, there's not a thing wrong with that way of life if you're happy. It just wasn't something that really appealed to me. Still, as a well-known charming bad speller, I was doubtful I had what it took to make it in academia at the college level with no great aunt Mildred as my chemistry teacher helping me along. On the other hand, I lacked no confidence in my street smarts, and with coloring and a little charisma I knew I'd eventually land on my feet wherever I was sent.

Most women in my family and town, if they worked, were grade school teachers, teachers aides, or school secretaries. These were good jobs in the county and rural farming areas because of insurance. The farmers made it clear that they made the real money, so working in the school system was where most of the women went for the benefits and built-in day care for the kids. This career path was a problem for me for two reasons: Remember that real bad speller thing? Oh, and I didn't like little kids much.

Grain Bin inventory tracking chart located in the dump shed for truckers to mark & show where each landlords grain was stored & how much grain is in what bins

Dad's advice was: "You're going to David Lipscomb University in Nashville whether you like it or not." Yes, that's how a farmer's daughter's advice works. "It's a Church of Christ school where you'll meet lots of nice people and get a good education," he said, adding, "Study something you like and then figure out a way to make money at it."

So naturally, as I applied to Lipscomb, when it was time to write down my 'major,' I chose Art. There was always the underlying suggestion from my parents that I would eventually change it over to Education and be able to fall back on being an art teacher. However, as I began to take studio classes, I quickly fell in love with the old letterpress, printmaking, and design classes. I'd never seen anything like it. When I got to my second year and began working in dark rooms, then on a computer with type and electronic imaging, I was in love.

After trying to live for my father for two years, in 1998 I transferred away from Lipscomb. As I now understand from *The Body Keeps The Score*, holding in your feelings and numbing emotions affects your health. For me, it had been coming out in the form of anorexia and alcoholism for a few years when emergency gallbladder surgery was the wake up call my mother needed. She helped me move in with my sister and enroll at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. I was closer to Grandma and happy to be free of daily Bible study and chapel.

I got all A's in my art classes that semester and met real people who geeked out over CD cover designs like I always had. I traded feeling unusual for *avant garde* as I learned the inner workings of programs like Quark and Illustrator 7. My days were filled with Exacto blades and zip drives, and I forgot all about the fields and farmers of my past. I was way too busy unboxing my first Bondi Blue iMac and helping set up this modern marvel in the school's new lab. I thought I had all I'd ever need at my fingertips.

As my skills grew and freelance work picked up, I realized I needed a Mac of my own. This brought back thoughts of the farm. Much like we leased tractors and paid for co-op grain storage until we were able to buy our own tractors and build our own bins as we rented more land and had more landlords;




John Deere Disk Operating Manual 1980



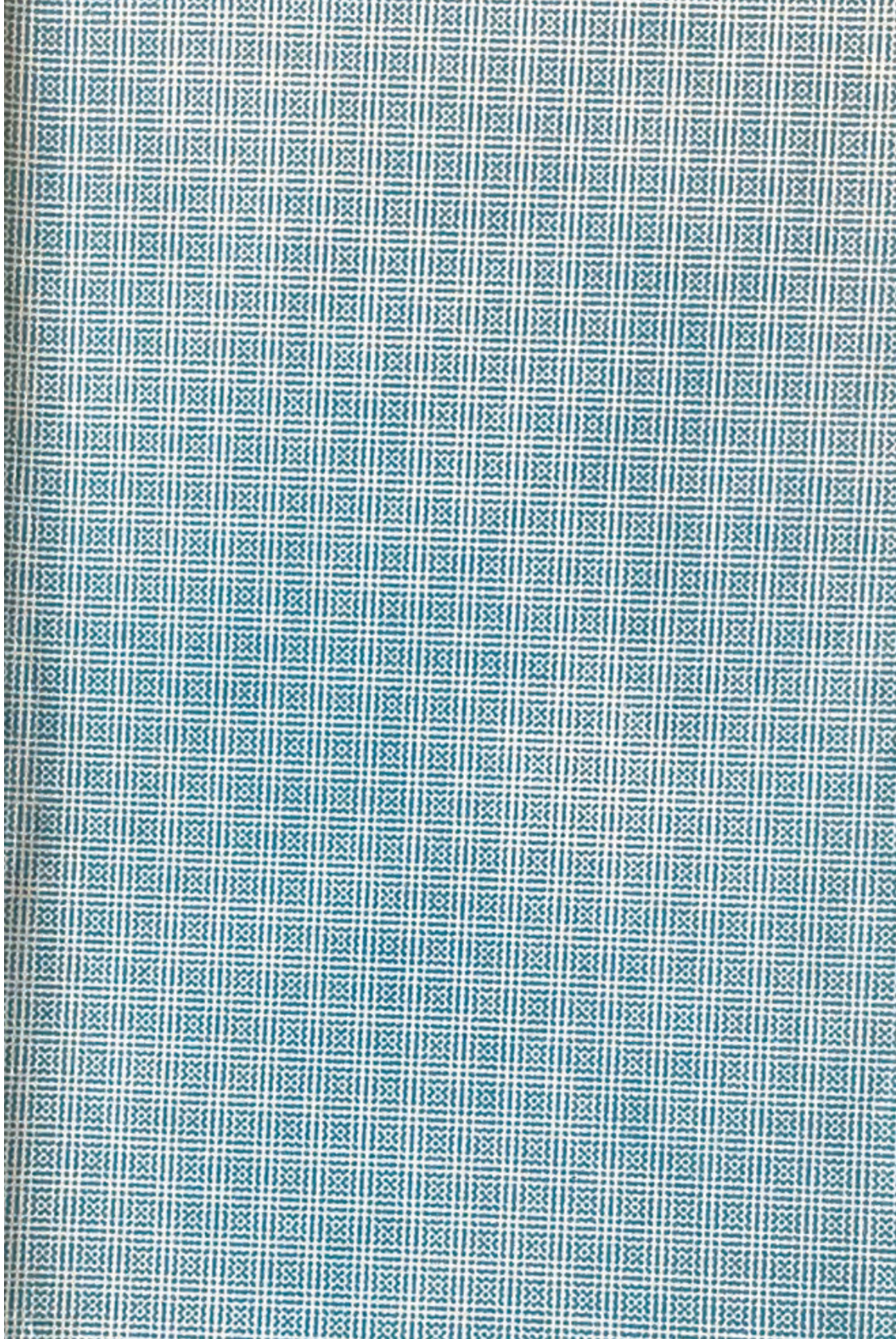
the limitations of the computer lab hours and available machines had started to prevent me from making deadlines and work as much as I thought I needed. I needed my own Bondi Blue iMac, my own zip drives and printers to plow my own way.

So I made an appointment with a banker who handled the farm's banking and at 19 took out my first ever personal loan, placing a lien on my car. That bank later became one of the first clients at my design firm. I built my career from the ground up from that point. I went to school in the mornings, waiting tables in the evenings and freelancing at night. I used the work ethic I learned as a young adult on the farm to "keep the tractors rolling", assuming that's how everyone managed it all.

Come to think of it, I don't really even understand one of my favorite Dolly Parton songs, *9 to 5*. Do you ever wonder what it would be like to work 9 to 5 with Dolly? I sure have and think it would be just dandy. *9 to 5* is a peppy, fun, catchy little tune, even if it's about working in an office where you don't get the appreciation and compensation you really deserve. She does throw in that it's "gonna roll your way," keeping that glimpse of hope I always love. But after jamming out with Dolly, it always dawns on me that working as a farmer then a graphic designer all my life, I've never actually worked 9 to 5.

On the farm, when you had to bush hog a pasture you didn't stop mowing until it was too dark to see or it rained you out. Once I got back to the shop in from the rain, my father had me service the tractor before leaving. There wasn't really a time to clock out, you just kept working to improve the task. You can always service the tractor, fill it up with fuel and oil, check the tire pressure, wash it clean and inspect the blades, rain or shine. There was always a lesson to learn, something to improve on, to make the crop better, the tractor ride smoother, that might save time and make you faster. Always more to do so the next day was better and my father stayed happy. That's the only way I knew how to work, so that's the only way I knew how to be a graphic designer. But I've learned that's not how everyone works. My career has had its share of breakdowns, downpours, and droughts, acres of

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Quilt made by Great Great Grandmother Bellar, 1900



Deposit envelope security pattern 1977

grumpy, demanding clients and all nighters trying to please them. Like farming, there is so much more to graphic design than just the granular design of a logo.

Even after we work for weeks perfecting a new brand for a client, when it's approved it's just like when the rain would come on the farm. We aren't nearly done. We still have hours of making final files, full color, one color, web versions, JPEGs, PNGs, and PDFs. We clean up the files, organize the client folders, file the stock images, rename the files FINAL, send the paperwork to the bookkeeper, and zip a folder for the client to download. Then we help the client with swag, signage, social media, and even getting the logo on their QuickBooks template. Early on when I'd work on a brand, I had many roles that were outside the regular scope of a designer, but I did it anyway with a smile. You see, I had only charged them for a logo, but then they asked for a business card, letterhead, and quarter page ad for the high school football program.

As the firm grew larger and there were employees to take more orders, revisions, consulting, and go the extra mile just like me, I would come back from a meeting and find we'd missed another deadline because they spent the day researching the best awnings for a different client. Um, we were not Thrive Awning Design. However, we asked the detailed questions, project managed, and became experts on the installation of emergency awnings to make sure the logo looked just right. Doing all this while making no extra money and missing other deadlines, I quickly understood my own father's stress when he discovered that we'd run out of fuel on the back side of the field or that someone misread the labels and mixed the chemicals wrong, killing an entire crop of winter wheat. Situations like this take extra men, extra time, and waste valuable time (and money) backtracking.

I worked many extra late nights on many extra out of scope items, never saying a word to the client just as I didn't say a word to my father about extra work after hours on the farm. I often made the excuse to myself: At least I'm doing it because I want to. I'm doing it because it makes them happier. I'm doing this because I'm thankful to even have a client. I'm doing this to help them, I'm taking care of them.





But in reality, I was afraid. I didn't have the words "No ma'am" inside my body. My training didn't include any lesson about saying no, pushing back, and this kept me petrified to speak up or bill a client for more of my time. I was afraid they would get angry and tell others bad things about me or my business. I was afraid to tell anyone I was exhausted, struggling to make payroll, and obsessively focused on peacekeeping and problem solving all aspects of my life all at the same time.

I've never admitted out loud that I really wanted to stop working at 5 p.m. I really wanted to tuck my boys into bed instead of them falling asleep in front of the TV on endless DVR Mickey Mouse loops. I really wanted to learn to cook a homemade meal like my mom and grandma always did for us instead of ordering pizza again. "I really can't." "No, I'm out of the office." Those words didn't exist in me before this grad school thing I'd run away to.

They say old habits are hard to break. This work helped me see where my belief in a do all, be all, say yes more, work harder way of living wasn't just my father's fault or my clients'. I'm responsible for setting my own boundaries and using the healthy tools I've learned to overcome. I sought to be liked by everyone, all the time, no matter what the cost, worrying myself to death about what others thought about how I lived. Being a "real designer" meant keeping the peace, making clients happy, and boxing up my anger and stress. I thought I should be asking better questions, doing more revisions, working faster, bumping up to the gig internet, going to more clients' events. I thought this would bring me peace, joy, and real gratitude. Instead of looking inward, I thought getting out there more and saying "yes" all the time was what my design practice was supposed to be.

After 40 years living that way and 15 years running my studio that way, it hit me that this strategy simply no longer worked. Through my study of resilience, discovery of safe spaces, and recovery, I've learned the importance of clear upfront communication. I discovered that discussion and healthy argument actually help calm the anxiety that builds up rather than adding fuel to the fire, as I once believed.




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I now understand the importance of transparency for the scope of a project and laying out clear expectations for both myself and the client. It isn't about working until you're hung up in the mud, tired and beat down and about to explode. I have finally found my "No ma'am."

These lessons are not separate bins to store the grain in either. The same lessons learned in my design practice go hand in hand with my personal life. Understanding that the fears rooted in those childhood Kentucky corn fields are not inescapable was required for overcoming them. Once I knew I wanted to change, it was just a matter of taking the steps to dissolve the old habits. Having a safe community where I could share how I struggled with the old thoughts that it was not right to speak up, out, or against my father, my design professors, or my clients, and writing about it, helped set me free. This freedom released resentment, grief, anger, revealed addictions and habits, and put a stop to (most of) those unbillable extra hours I used to take on.

I've learned to align the design life with my life. I don't need a stiff drink to escape or a Xanax to walk through my home. I've looked at my roots, my resilience, and my recovery and understood it was time to revise it all: Remaking my old contracts and work systems, setting new expectations for out of scope items. I took on my own fears and finally understood I'm the one responsible for my journey. To be transparent now is an incredibly good feeling.

It's important that what we do and what we make for our clients, our craft as designers, is done in a healthy way, with respect, healthy boundaries, and value of our time. I know what it's like to be extremely busy and extremely broke; it's not what we're all living for in this life. I couldn't understand how I was so busy, working so many hours, and somehow not making enough money to feed my family or pay the bills. It reminds me of how the scope of motherhood is so much more than you thought it would be; the boundaries get blurry and you end up doing so much more than you think. I see now how I was afraid of saying no, afraid of speaking up, afraid to ask for the deposit upfront and the outstanding balance due.

PREVIOUS PAGE:
1980 Deposit book in farm archives



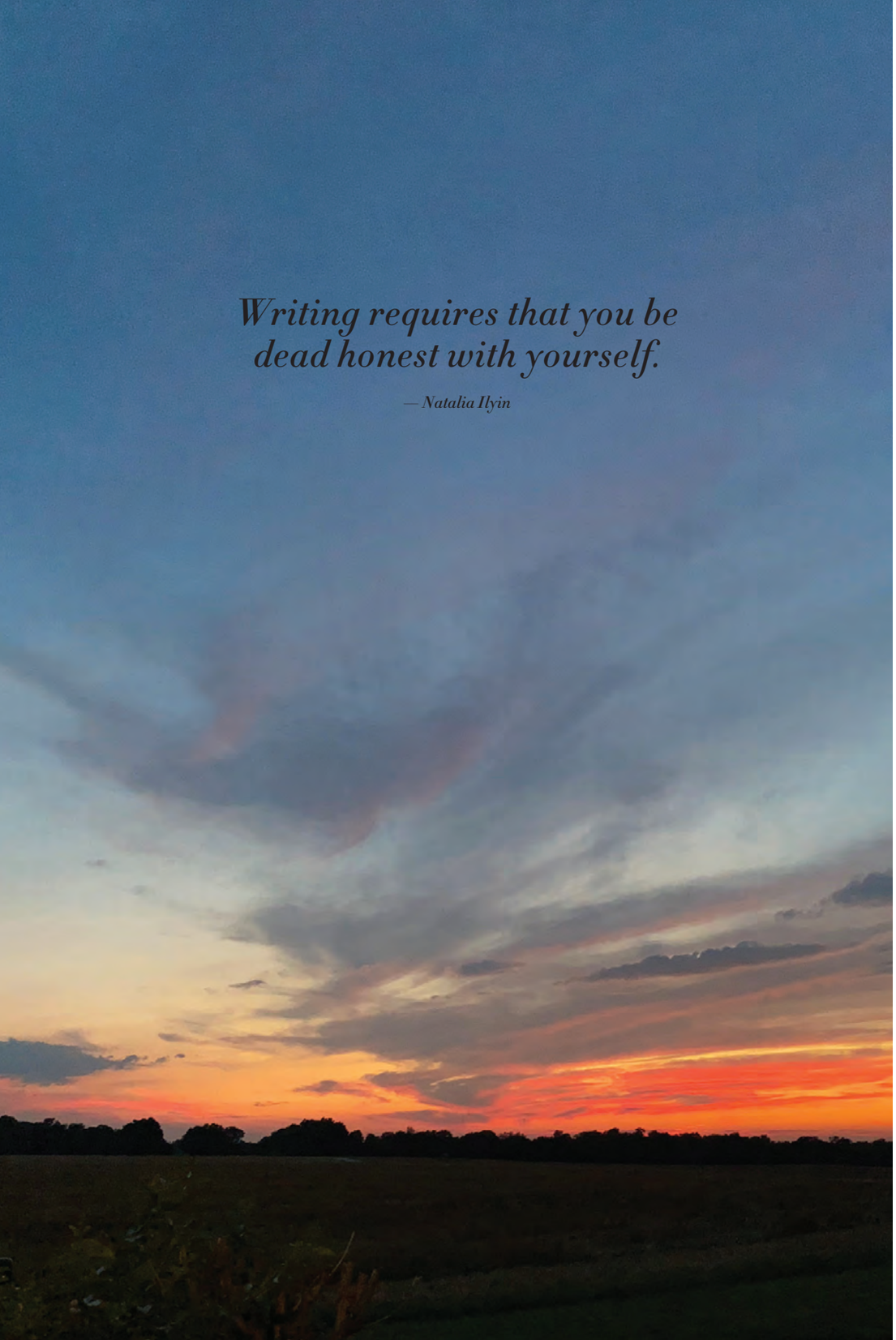


I now understand that the folks who get mad at you for speaking up, or even fire you as a client over it, those people are not, and never were, the kind of folks you want to work with. I no longer fear them telling others that I spoke up for myself because those kinds of clients only know others just like them. The good news is we don't want more clients like that. And what is the worst they would say anyway? "Ooh, don't use that Lorilee. She stands up for her business, and herself, and her employees. Can you believe the nerve? She actually charged me for her time!" What I say back to that is you can't get an extra steak at a restaurant without paying for it. You can't add a second floor to your new home once the builder hands you the keys to your brick ranch.

The same lessons are important no matter who the client is, or what my relationship is with my father now. I am responsible for my communication, transparency, boundaries, and standing up for myself. These are imperative values as a designer. The key is understanding it's up to you to create them and communicate them. Don't blame bad clients, like bad crop years, for accepting the abuse. This is hard earned advice learned through this work. I sought to find my own why, my own understanding of myself by digging up the roots of my gratitude design and the habits from my training that were no longer working. Seek and ye shall find.








PREVIOUS PAGE:
2004 flip phone photo of wheat at farm

2020 Sunset at farm July

PART FIVE

# CRISIS OF CHARISMA

Being full of accidental charisma, optimism, and gratitude I know is not the norm. I'm one of those people who gets stopped by the grocery bagger for 20 minutes listening to their woes in the heat of summer while my ice cream melts. I make friends easily but accidentally because I simply put my phone away, remove my sunglasses, smile and ask, "How is your day treating you?" It's hard for me to leave a party because I'm typically commiserating with the valet about his recent breakup because I noticed he seemed sad as he asked for my ticket. Sharing a smile and some sweet Southern hospitality or words of encouragement in this busy world with a stranger who's so kindly helping me has accidentally gotten me into strange spots. It also regularly has me cleaning melted ice cream out of the carpets of the car and never wanting to speak up if you put mayo on my sub instead of the mustard I actually asked for. I don't really want to disturb the sub shop teen, as they seem distraught with the dairy mishap. So then I feel it's my job to comfort them and eat the mayo.

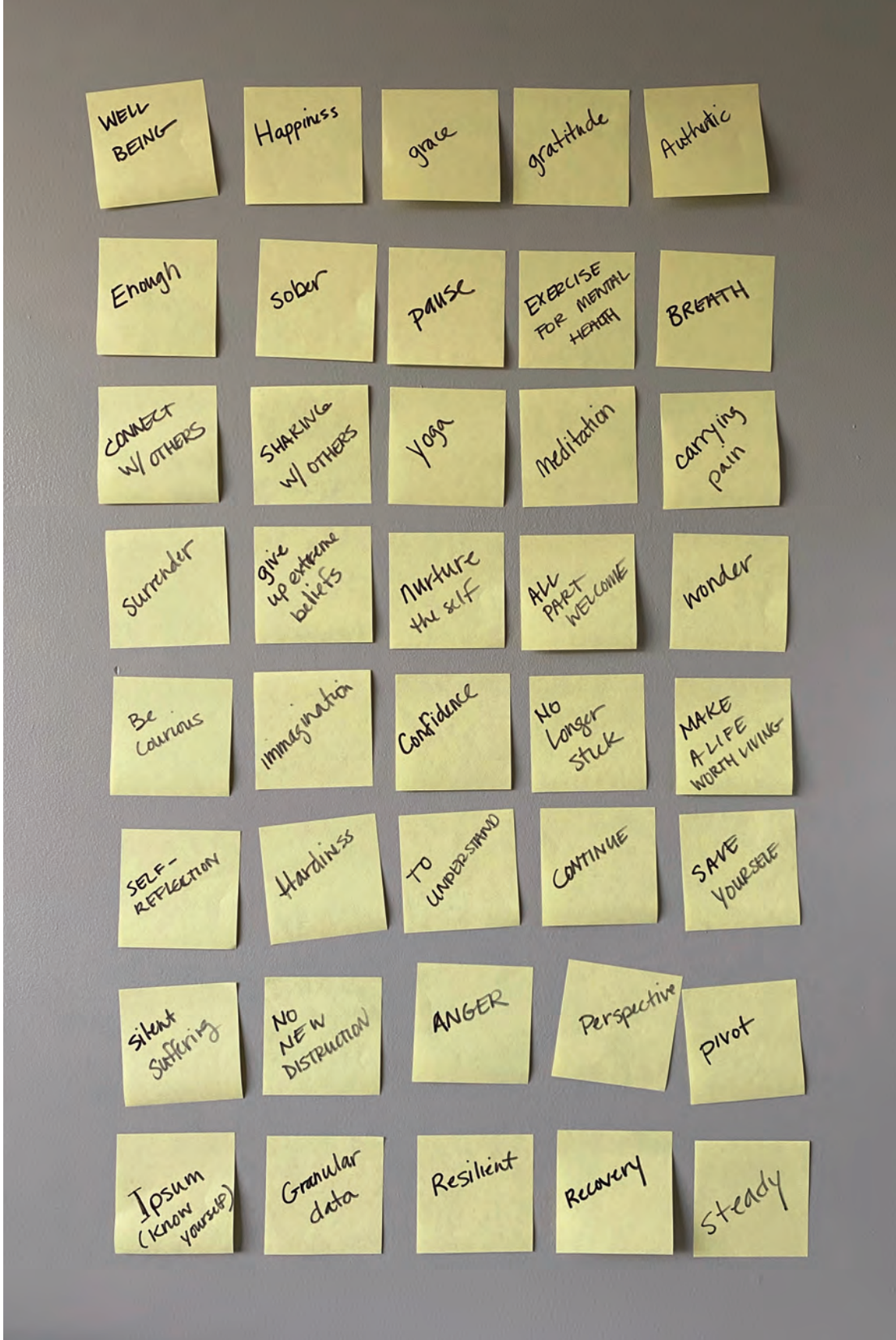
So this crisis of accidental engagement with a spark of obligated charisma has always followed me around. As I explored my behavioral patterns and personality traits in my research, this accidental charisma felt like a clue to my cultivation as a graphic designer. It felt like another important aspect of this gratitude design practice, the piece that helps me learn what a client's needs are on a deeper level. From my research and reading, as well as behavior assessments like the DISC Language, Myers-Briggs, and Enneagram Types, a common finding was my personality is geared to avoid conflict

and keep peace among others in order to keep myself calm. In short, I am a peacekeeper and people pleaser.

Beginning early on the farm there was plenty of evidence I believed my job was to keep my father calm and the crops happy. Yes, I felt I had the powers to do both, I was a pretty confident kid, what can I say! My conflict avoidance continued as a designer, trying to keep my professors and clients happy and calm with the perfect design, following instruction and criticisms to a tee while attempting to be the most agreeable, compelling, and charming kid in the class. This required habitually avoiding direct questions or giving direct statements. My strategy was to observe discussions without participating, never giving opinions that disagreed out of fear of upsetting someone. This was meant to keep the peace and my own internal feeling of calm and steady at ease. I got really darn great at acting overly interested in an idea to keep someone comfortable and talking to abort the grumpy I always feared would be cast my way.

In my mind, conflict of any kind wasn't good, nor was it lady-like, as my mother had often reminded me. No matter how minor or major, I assumed going against the grain would make someone blow up on me like my father often did. It was embedded in me to be a little lady, say your prayers, and keep everyone happy. Do what you're told, do as I say not as I do, and never speak up. So instead it seemed best, in class and in client meetings, to smile, shut up, and design what was in front of me. Where I came from it was half considered rude to disagree anyways.

For my whole life, I had been allowing people to project onto me. We are all simply projecting our own issues on each other, and as designers we are expected to pick up the pieces. Author Mark Nepo in *The Book of Awakening* shares the story of a visit to an ice cream shop with his wife as an example of how he realized he projected. Loud nearby customers made him grow uncomfortable at the shop, so he asked his wife, "Do you want to leave?" She replied, "No. I'm happy here. Do you want to go?" In that moment he understood, and so did I. But I never complained about the projection and therapy sessions dumped on me as a designer by clients,




Studio wall of Post-its of themes from morning pages to help clear my head

by unhealthy parents, by other relationships. And I denied to myself that I was projecting my own fears of conflict, working my body and mental health into a depressive-addictive state of burnout. I was forever keeping the peace.

This peacekeeping tool of mine, I came to find out, is common. Not only is it common, it's a key characteristic in *The Enneagram Style Types* personality assessment of the type number 9. The Enneagram, which places people into one of nine personality types, stems from combining traditional Christian-based wisdom with modern psychology to better understand each other and have better relationships based on your strengths. Tools like this and others including Myer Briggs Personality Typing and DISC Behavior Style Language have helped me understand my own self better as well as the people in my life, employees, clients, family, and friends. I have used these personality types for my own personal growth in overcoming my fear of conflict, helping communicate better, and building more successful positive relationships with those behavior styles different than my own. This has allowed me to build healthier, even better communication skills as I learn and heal in recovery. My goal is to be able to speak stronger and more confidently in my profession and within my own family dynamics.

Now before you go nodding off on me like after Sunday supper, I'll explain here where things start coming together. Early in my research on behaviors and personality, I read the book *The Highly Sensitive Person* by Dr. Elaine Aron. I connected how accidental charisma is a tool used to avoid conflict. Aron recommends if you have this fear of conflict, that making a statement to calm the tension of a hard conversation begins by being honest. This honesty is a new soft beginning for me, but Aron suggests beginning with something like, "...but I just want you to know I care about you and I appreciate you struggling through this with me." This honesty helps balance out accidental charisma and conflict avoidance.

This honest to God truth telling seems to be a theme throughout my research. Natalia Ilyin talks about honesty right out of the gate in *Writing for the Design Mind*, saying, "Writing requires that you be dead honest with yourself." (4)

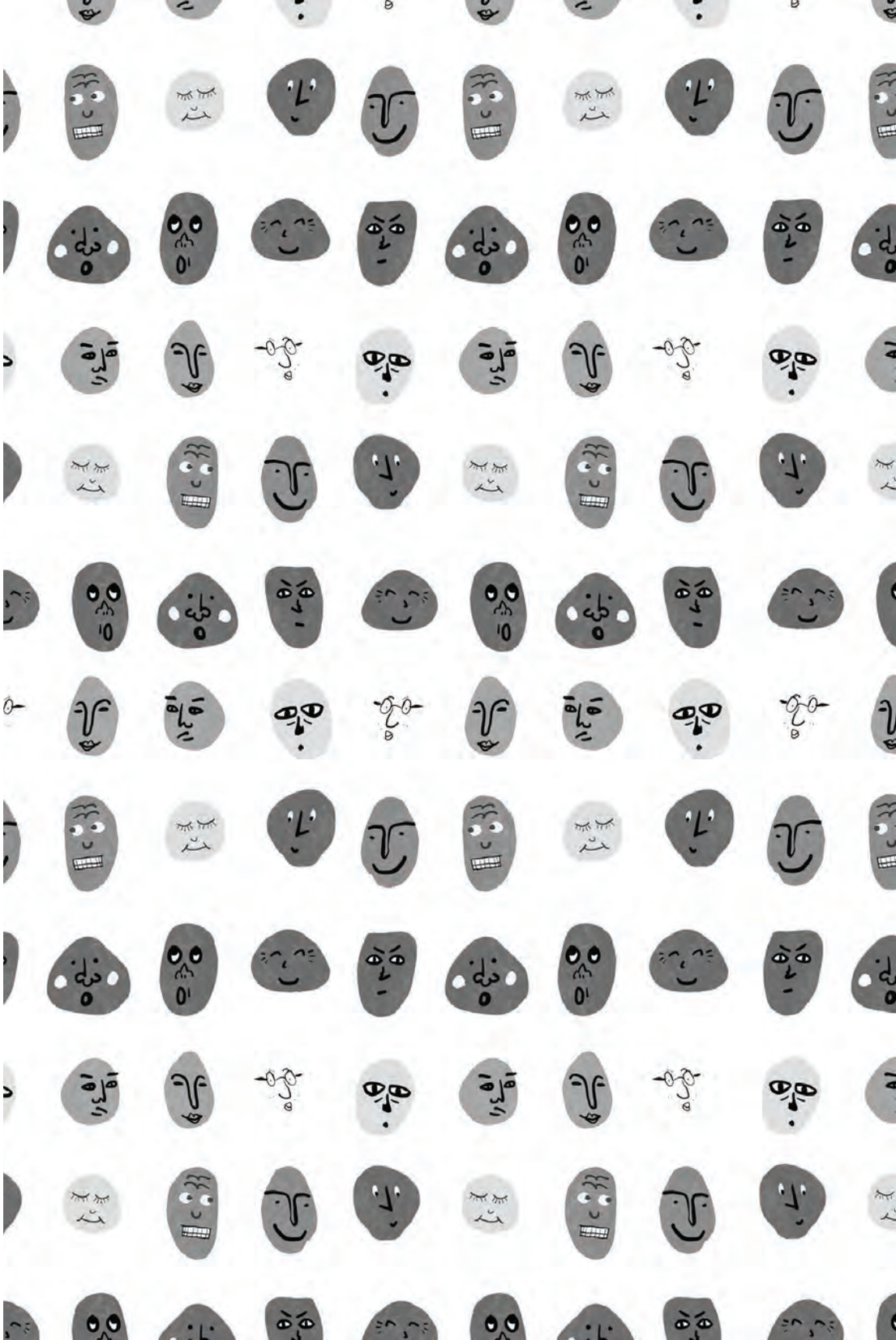


Illustration of faces of emotions & feelings

So does Laura McKowen in her memoir on sobriety, dedicating an entire chapter to "The Truth About Lying," in which she states:

> What you'll find—what I've found—is that the truth is ultimately life-affirming. Even when it's ugly and inconvenient and has the potential to dismantle your life. It feels like relief and freedom, I believe (and this is my pseudo-scientific woo-woo explanation) because the energy of truth is in integrity with the energy of the Divine. Not in a "this is good and now you're not bad" way but in a "this is real and therefore you can stand on it" way. The truth has a soft-click sound. It is a release valve. The truth is uncomfortable but expansive; lying is uncomfortable and confining. You know the difference when you feel it.

Through my focus in recovery on such honesty, reading and applying these tools has helped me feel calmer, more hopeful, and genuinely more grateful.

I have noticed that this honesty manifests physically on the body. Over the course of this work, I began to see small changes, less anxiety and less need to box up my feelings. I began to feel more steady, even physically in my core. Using these understandings and methods to have coversations I considered conflict inducing, helped to clear the red splotchy blotches on my cheeks and neck area that were so uncomfortable and embarassing.

To speak honestly and make a statement of clarity is a wonderful example of how you, if a highly sensitive person, can safely state 'how you feel' when you're ready to speak up, which is honestly the most terrifying thought I used to have. Now it's like a breath of fresh air for how to approach conversations that otherwise I would have likely avoided and kept inside. Keeping these emotions boxed up left an opening for anxiety triggers to creep in; regret for being in an uncomfortable position, crossing your own personal boundaries, and causing a reason to drink that night. This cycle of regret, shame, blame, and abuse seemed to circle back to my accidental charisma.







By exploring the behaviors and personality characteristics of the Enneagram Type 9, I gained a deeper understanding of how I work as a designer and how I numb as an addict. Areas in my life revealed themselves even where I didn't realize I struggled: self-care, authentic truths, and old beliefs and systems I was afraid to confront. That avoidance caused me to live an unwell design life. The Enneagram also helped me to relate better to how stressful life on the farm had been, and see more clearly the toll the pressures of feeding the world had taken on my father. This was a mirror onto my life now as an adult, running my own graphic design business and carrying these inherited habits that were taking a toll on me as well. My study and work has revealed the toll of toxic positivity; how trying to bypass real feelings, the muddy mess of real life, can transform into compulsory gratitude, work addiction, and alcohol addiction. This inspired an awareness to focus on a new practice of healthier habits and rituals, giving myself permission to make a safe space mentally, physically, and spiritually in both life and design to nurture myself better.

I now have a better understanding of the liminal space I occupy each day; to stop trying to control or predict the next future design emergency and keep it from happening and instead be grounded here in the present.

Learning to live a mentally well life free from addiction is not a side project. I realized we don't have to live in disorder, that we can handle a lot more in life than we give ourselves credit for. It seems like we only hold on to the worst thing that happened today, or the biggest failure of the week, or feeling ashamed for eating that last bit of Grandma's chess pie before bed. That negative self talk, that unhealthy blow up on a co-worker, the road rage at the old tan Buick that pulled out in front of you… it's all taking up energy we don't have to spare.

I had believed what society told me, that you have to be one way or the other in your beliefs and feelings. You must be either/or, black or white. You aren't allowed to change or feel conflicting emotions at once. You should never dwell on the negative, like the anger and grief you feel.



Yet in my research, I realized those on either side of the thinking see it as optimism versus pessimism, introvert versus extrovert, instead of overcoming the split to see all that's in between. That there's no need to feel shame about the hard stuff, or hide from it, or numb it. You don't need to be ashamed of the Southern drawl and twang of country music in your voice. We all want to "find out who we are and do it on purpose," as Dolly says.

This journey is the messy muddy middle of real authentic life. I learned I can use my roots of gratitude and still feel healthy core emotions like grief, anger, and fear. Denying these feelings, boxing them up, and avoiding them means they will only resurface later in unhealthy forms. I feel I can now embrace the Enneagram Type 9 Peacemaker role as a designer. From my Enneagram Institute online assessment:

> Type 9 exemplifies the desire for wholeness, peace, and harmony in our world. Nines are easygoing, emotionally stable people. They are open and unself consciously serene, trusting and patient with themselves and others. Their openness allows them to be at ease with life and with the natural world. As a result, others generally find it easy to be in their company. They are genuinely good-natured and refreshingly unpretentious. Because of their peaceful demeanor, Nines have a talent for comforting and reassuring others and are able to exert a calming, healing influence in difficult or tense situations. They make steady, supportive friends who can listen uncritically to others' problems as well as share their good times. In work settings, they can be excellent mediators, able to harmonize groups and bring people together by really healing conflicts.

I had the opportunity to ask Joel Hubbard, the speaker and founder of *The Art of Growth*, his thoughts on where gratitude comes for a Type 9. He said, "The 9 tends to be hopeful and grateful for and toward others but not for the self. Gratitude for the 9 is comforting. It is much easier to choose gratitude

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Wheat field after July harvest





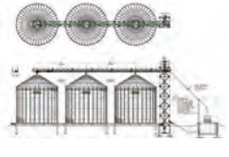
than to be driven by dissatisfaction, appetite, strong passion or desire as these can be disruptive."

I thought, "Disruptive!? No ma'am! I spend my days avoiding disruption." He had described earlier in the series how a 9 needs a calm, steady inner water, which I totally relate to needing always. This makes perfect sense as to why I naturally choose gratitude: It's the most comforting path to peace.

The other drivers Joel mentions, dissatisfaction, appetite, and strong passion, are disruptive for this 9 to even read. This is precisely why I have researched my gratitude design, wanting to understand how I work, live, and play. Why in a stressful situation, or after a bad day, do I naturally turn to gratitude and optimism versus anger? Why am I known for never holding a grudge or wanting revenge? I wondered why these ways have never crossed my mind.

Now it makes perfect sense to me as a designer. Type 9's choose gratitude because it's comforting when all the other responses are too scary for us. That is why we stay quiet and compliant in the face of clients who are verbally abusive or want to jazz up the design with curlz font. It is the same reason as artists we tend not to charge our worth or value ourselves: We avoid disruption for the client and hold the disruption inside of us. But avoiding conflict has consequences; the feelings grow inside of you and become unhealthy, turning into addiction, anxiety, explosive anger, and more.

One of my biggest takeaways from my research is this: The only solution to the suffering you are feeling today is to no longer stuff it. Surrender. Stop holding it in and understand the freedom that comes in being honest, open, and communicating clearly how you feel. Acceptance and growth are in the mess and the mud, and there's no template, no liquor hard enough, no harvest big enough to fix what you stuff down and deny. It's not going away by making more files and plowing more fields; it's right inside of you. No matter the mess it makes, if it's your truth—it's allowed.





ABOVE:
Illustration representing sharing your story

RIGHT:
Taylor's Cabin, and later my playhouse on the farm



Heaven, by the late Shea Wright

PART SIX

# MOURNING PAGES

They say denial is not a river in Egypt. My denial of the unhealthiness in my life revealed itself to me when I began the daily practice of writing morning pages as laid out in Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way.* This exercise of journaling my thoughts each morning first thing–three pages of longhand, no more, no less–was life changing. It took doing it daily for a few weeks, setting up a routine, before a true stream of consciousness began to pour out of me. At first I bypassed my emotions, covering up anything but happy and joy in my first few weeks of morning pages. I kept imagining someone reading it or felt like it wasn't safe to be real. But hiding between those college rule lines was the horrible hangovers, a rocky marriage, and depression. I was not ready to address these situations honestly–yet!

Eventually, though, from this uncomfortable daily practice raw feelings emerged. It took time, patience, and grace, but eventually the morning pages gave witness to my feelings of anger and sadness. Big scary feelings felt smaller and better after a few strokes of the pen. I admitted how my habits of people pleasing and drinking my way through conflicts was secretly killing me. I told my story for the first time, out loud to my composition notebooks one day at a time.

The practice helped me get outside the system and see my problems clearly. Now I could see key warning signs of where I was so unwell, how I was ignoring my basic needs to help more clients, make more money, buy more alcohol, and numb away my struggles. I had grown to hate myself, for my fear of conflict, for my charisma that opened the door for people to

take advantage of me, for my optimism, for my desire to help others, and especially for my spending my talent as a graphic designer doing nothing but say yes. I didn't understand how one person could build a successful award winning business, with a loyal, loving team of eight, with her dream car, her dream house with a pool, two kind kids, and a sweet dog and still hate herself. I realized I lived in shame, insecure and ashamed of who I was.

I thought for a very long time I needed to change who I was at my core. I thought I was faulty somehow and never fit in. I tried to drink into a new me that I should be. I ate my way through it to soothe the hurt. I thought I needed to be for everyone else, every client, every call, every person, depending on the moods of whoever was in front of me or needed me the most. I felt who I naturally was wasn't good enough, wasn't deserving enough, I simply needed to be smarter, work harder, and please more people. Like my father, I had to keep up appearances and do whatever it took to keep those tractor tires rolling, rain or shine.

What I knew was I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I felt crazy and helpless, but I was faking it while numbing out between the client calls, employees egos, teenager tantrums, and family farm struggles. I was boxing up the daily feeling of overwhelming anger with bottles of booze, and the denial was manifesting itself into shingles, crippling arthritis, and panic attacks. I knew I wanted this level of hurt and pain and disorder in my life to stop.

I could see in the pages that I had designed my way into a mess of a life using gratitude to try to keep all the tires spinning for everyone else except myself. The clients, the kids, the ex-husband, the best friend, not to mention my sick and hurting sisters and my heartbroken, now divorced mama. But never me. Keeping up Mom of the Year, favorite granddaughter, social media coffee status, best boss, community leader, and gym member (just to name a few) was burning me from both ends. The more hats I said I would wear, the more I lost sight of any place I could stop and rest in. I felt like I was running a design triage, treating my symptoms by chasing shots of coffee with lunchtime tequila,





an afternoon Tito's while popping a crumb of Xanax to make it to the next meeting. Still the panic attacks kept creeping up day after day. I could no longer hide from the addiction and anxiety disorders given to me by my self-appointed job as 'solver and saver of everyone else.'

So when I hit the ice in Vermont two years ago to begin grad school, I was still ignoring all the signs, the cold sweats, blinding shingles, panic attacks, and morning shakes. Instead, I pushed harder to try to save my parent's divorce crisis, one sister's nervous breakdown and the other's divorce too. Oh, and I was trying to save some of my own clients from spinning out of control and going under, help my employees battling cancer, and not show my grief over the sudden death of my business partner from a brain tumor. There wasn't even any time to think about my kids right now, much less my own health.

I believed my happiness would come when everyone else around me was happier. I thought my mood depended on your mood. If there was plenty of money in the bank the rest of my issues would work themselves out. I pretended I was happy/fine/spiritual/sober. I pretended I felt normal and didn't need another drink, that I didn't want secretly to die. The practice of my morning pages focused me inward, showing me that I was trying to fill my spiritual self with more design, more clients, more drinks, more meds. I caught a glimpse while learning to write with *Writing for the Design Mind* of my truths: who I was pretending to be versus the writer who was eager to begin the search for who I really wanted to be instead of who I was taught I should be.

The more pages I wrote, the more my work, my stories, my experiences to tell, my sense of place in history all spilled out of me in bushel baskets full. It provided that steady feeling I needed back from my childhood safe spaces, a familiar calm I was craving inside of me but hadn't stopped to listen to. Finding my voice brought out a confidence and truth I had boxed away. When I made time for self care (what I once thought selfish) like meditation, I got a glimpse of the girl I wanted to be. Being unwilling to change my hard-headed, know-it-all, I can fix or solve you, pick the pantone color best, outward looking ways wasn't working.






Dorm room first view at VCFA, April 2019



Suddenly I could see the tired little girl I wrote to, sad, always joking, never angry, scared, and I wanted to remind her she really was enough and it's ok to nurture her artist within.

I started nurturing myself by doing hypnosis therapy for anxiety. During this I remembered times from my childhood when I was safe. I was instantly a child again in the warm sunlight of the garden with Grandma, but after the sessions I'd slip back into my old habits of numbing with drinking. I could see in real time as I wrote the morning pages writing where they would creep back in. The warning signs were showing up story after story; whether I was talking about cultivating the land or creating for a client, patterns of resilience, recovery, and reward all appeared.

Slowly but surely, I began to stay sober a little longer, write a little better, communicate with a client successfully, stress free, and caught another glimpse of the girl I wanted to be. I made a safe space in my studio at home, and a steady feeling filled my chest. I no longer believed the lies I had told myself and the world of the perfect designed life I thought I lived; as the mirage of me needing to be perfect and in control started to fade, the panic attacks like a vice grip in my chest began to ease. I began to understand the cost I had been sacrificing was my own mind, body, and spirit. Elizabeth Gilbert asked the question, "What are you willing to give up in order to become who you really need to be?" When the girl I wrote to in grad school became honest, when she came clean, she admitted she was tired and needed to pause–and I finally heard her. The old excuses of hard liquor and harsh clients became as weak as the watered-down happy hour specials I used to crave. I cried through pages telling her that I hear you, I promise, I just didn't know how to help you at first.

So I held on to the pages, white knuckling each day. I was coming from a failed life full of boxed up issues. I had a false-gratitude filled bank account, a false belief in a pixel perfect life, fighting for every breath between panic attacks and people pleasing. I had held in my heart flutters, covered my bleeding cuticles, and cried as the client list grew. So starting out writing just three notebook sheets a day seemed simple for silly grad school. Maybe it is a lot of hard work,






Client, Tom Cunningham facebook graphic

but the old ways of thinking, more logos, more contracts, more clients, were harder. I had always designed ways to help others survive, so maybe I could do it for myself.

As I wrote, I realized the mud and the mess at my first residency was the rock bottom I didn't see coming. I was back on the dorm's old hardwood bunks, stripping me down raw. I could see again out the window, the bare trees, that rural quiet place, catching the tiniest glimpse of everything I'd let spin out of control. I looked back over my shoulder at the dorm room desk, all spilled out in empty bottles, heartburn meds, coffee pods, and Kleenex. My client Tom Cunningham had died last night, the text read.

Vermont, grad school, looking out that old window, alone with my thoughts in that dorm room: Tom and I had just talked last week about his chest pains when he brought me a check to the office a few weeks late. How we were running ourselves crazy as entrepreneurs, both laughing, that we find ourselves at our desks most days before 7 and me kidding about trying to fight off a drink by 10. Only I knew I wasn't joking.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Sunrise view from my dorm room window, April 2019





Me confessing panic attacks and Tom working until 2 a.m. tiling the new restaurant kitchen floor. He'd fired the guy doing it because his work wasn't as perfect as Tom needed. Our last conversation bragging how hard we worked, all day, every day, and wondering if anyone even cared.

The text from his son while I was in Dewey Lounge, high and drunk, asking if we'd design the funeral program for his dad. I said of course, free of charge.

Out of booze to keep me company and out of range for an Uber to save me from myself, I felt my chest tighten. I'd packed in my luggage Gatorade and water bottles from home, filling them with vodka and hiding them in my shoes; there was just enough for one more Yeti full.

Revisiting this in my morning pages is now one of the more real, raw, crisp moments in my life. In this space, no one was there needing me to fix something; no one was a client, or a kid, or a family member needing my help. My tired eyes met the kindness and care of strangers in a cafe who wanted to know me–who I was, not who my clients were, or who my father is, or what I can do for them.




First Semester Documentation project Day 1 April 2019

Grad school was a place where these people looked inward at me, where permission and surrender seemed welcomed, Adobe Creative Cloud armor removed, pixel pitchforks laid down. Where membership and community made that old familiar safe space feeling flicker again.

After that week, I arrived home and claimed the corner of my spare bedroom for school work. The first day I laid down and rested there, my head spinning from this residency experience with only a towel and Tito's. It was a new space I made in my house just for me where, little by little, I placed imaginary boxes and buckets of thoughts. I went there to hide away from everyone and read, make, write, and think about all the air castles I wanted to build. I stocked my space with books, markers, and paints. I wrote morning pages where I spilled my truths and tangled with old stories of resilience and recovery. I wove my story together, exploring and researching my honest thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. After each packet and advisor meeting, I began to feel an authentic gratitude, abundance, and self-worth glow.

Writing began to fill the hurting holes without me even realizing. In my small daily ritual of writing, I began to feel joy like I couldn't remember since I was a child. This new permission to live my truths began to unbox feelings I'd avoided because of fear and shame. I began to drink less and breathe more. I began to see with a new lens of awareness all the good, bad, and gratitude within me, without my inner critic tearing it all down. I could hear the cooing of the mourning doves outside my window and felt real moments of grounding.

So I wrote it out. I wrote it all to save my life. Natalia Ilyin wrote in *Writing For The Design Mind*:

> A real student is a person who seeks out difficult spots in order to figure out how to get out of those spots. Showing up to do something you've never done is a hard spot. (125)



I was in a hard spot, and the only way out was to write. I didn't write to finish it for a client, to meet a deadline, or to





solve someone else's problem. I wrote three pages by hand every single day. I wrote about not wanting to write, I wrote about rabbit hunting, dogs, dads, drinking, and design. I wrote about water jugs, c-sections, corporate designer penis pics, and pixels. No matter how badly I wanted to quit, I had this burning in my gut to keep going. Just finish the three pages. With no end game, no expectations, no finish line.

I was someone who subscribed to worldviews largely with a "You'll be fine, just rub some dirt on it," or a "Bless your heart." I realized I was avoiding any of the real hard spots with a stronger drink, harder work, and just be thankful for that new client. I had been white knuckling my way through the day in between panic attacks and Pinot Noir, and I was tired of my own bullshit. Finally I began to do something I'd never done before in my life... seek out my difficult spots until I realized the bullshit wasn't my truth anymore.

Eventually I began to want to write more than I wanted to drink. This stemmed from establishing meditation and other habitual exercises from *Writing for the Design Mind*. I learned to pause and observe where my sense of place had landed me. I evaluated and pondered the questions within my own mind like, Why am I here? Mindfulness merged with healthy tools to stem the urge to numb away and box up my feelings. Bit by bit, piece by piece, moment by moment, this helped me build a quiet, sober, safe space.

I discovered, with great surprise, that what was within me would heal me if I would allow it to be heard. I learned how to use my own buckets of self care and personal truths to fill myself up with real, authentic gratitude. This journey in grad school has stirred up roots of resilience and the permission to grow, change, and heal. I no longer live in the fight or flight mode I'd been in most of my life. I now run projects and even my boys bedtimes being proactive instead of reactive. I've stopped waiting for the next shoe to drop, stopped preparing and planning for the next raging client or problem to fix. The daily practice of writing revealed to me my sense of place, my story, my habits; sharing my truth gave me an authentic feeling of joy and gratitude. I learned a big brand client won't solve your pain and a drink won't fix

your marriage that's falling apart. The inward look, the deep dive, must be done to fill up your tank. If the good Lord's willing and the creek don't rise, I believe by sharing my own research, story, and truths that other creatives can cultivate this work inside of themselves too.

The unspoken worry, suffering, and hardships are stories we must tell to feel freedom and to listen to our own deeper understanding. I can see now the blindspots where there were triggers I ignored. I understand how they could take me to the ground, and ER sometimes, with anxiety if I didn't get the design to "pop" enough or the drink down fast enough. How my control of it all was an illusion, and how I normalized the unhealthy parts. How I lived in a false sense that I was the peacemaker, responsible for controlling every part of the day, every project, and every person. How I believed that any failure was my fault, continuously masking and boxing up anger, sadness, fears, and my drinking problem. In my grad school graphic design community and my alcohol recovery groups, I can feel an unspoken knowing of such suffering and hardships, to listen to where each other has been. In recovery, it's the sharing and storytelling of others experiences that help you resolve some unsolved part of your past.

Letting out these truths with trusted, like-minded souls helps us set down our heavy loads of shame. Writer Laura McKowen says it best:

> One stranger who understands your experience exactly will do for you what hundreds of close friends and family who don't understand cannot. It is the necessary palliative for the pain or stretching into change. It is the cool glass of water in hell.

Some part of sharing what we've each lived gives voice to parts of you you've not yet listened to inside yourself. Whether dreams or struggles we were afraid to tell anyone about, or parts of ourselves we aren't so proud of, we discover common threads where our stories interweave and feel less of a failure, less scared, less of a weirdo and alone. This witness to human courage, resilience, pain, and joy helps us have examples of ways to carry on.



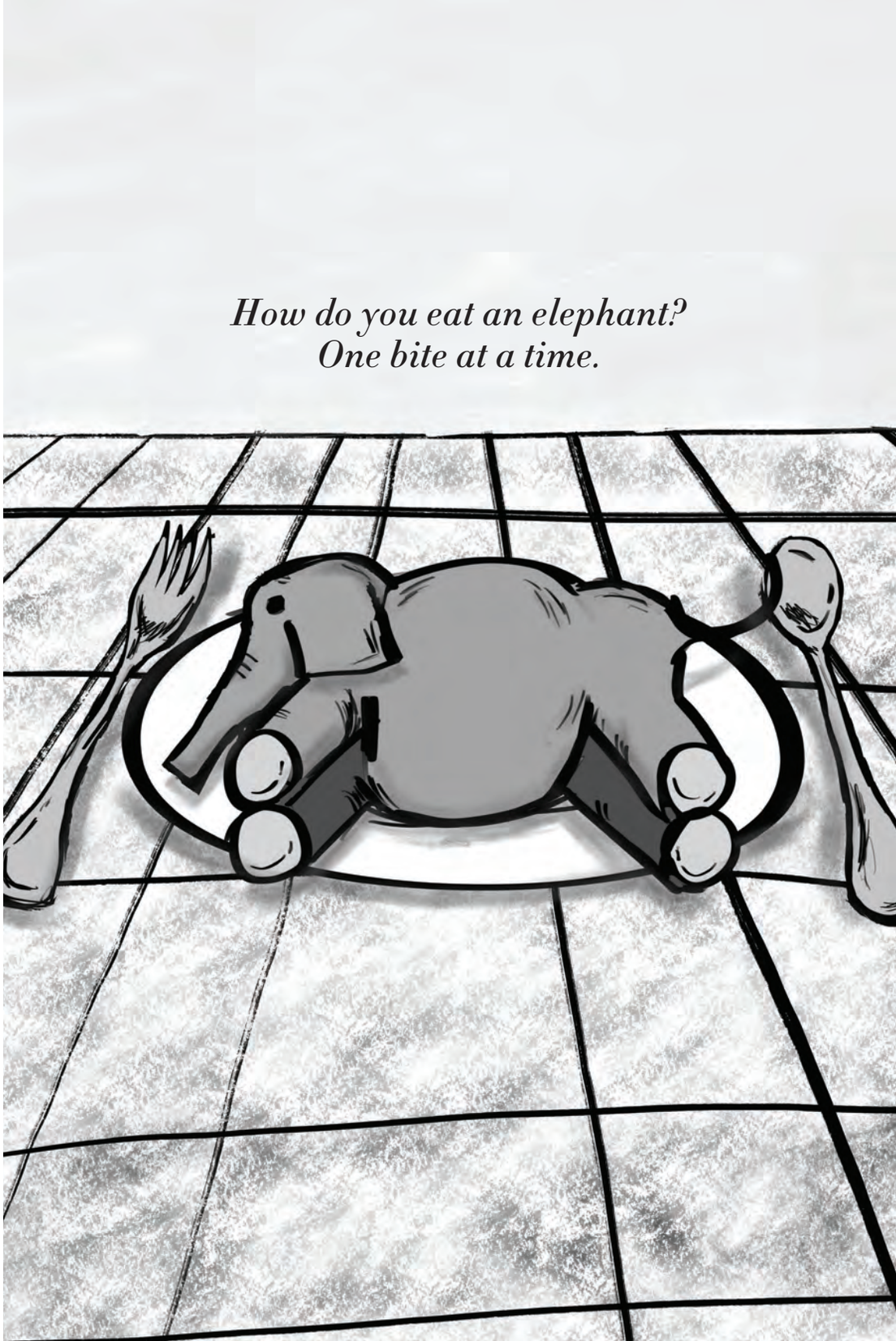



Illustration after writing about the elephants in the room

We find a common safe space where we realize we are all only trying to survive the only ways we knew how. Hearing someone else's stories makes your own feel a little less lonely.

And now I forgive myself. I forgive my inherited beliefs and responses, understanding in this work that they are nothing but learned behaviors and habits from my past. My brain was hijacked by addiction and anxiety, but now through grad school and recovery, I have begun to trust myself and my own thoughts again. This is a change only I can make. Only I can break the old patterns and cycles that make me sicker. Through reading, researching, and writing, I can take responsibility for my own truths. Blaming clients, kids, a swing shift factory working ex-husband, or angry father for my troubles wasn't getting me out of my struggles. Only I can save myself instead of numb myself, and only I can design a world I want to live in.

Those alone, scary first days of grad school and sobriety were never actually as scary as the real days I was living unwell before this work. For me, making a safe space with writing, meditation, and drawing, being creative and curious is where I begin to experience moments of authentic steady. Not a medicated steady, not a false steady boxing up and ignoring pains, but an authentic realignment to my real sense of gratitude that lives within myself. I had lost it and didn't even understand why before this work. Now I practice listening to my body, understanding my limits, appreciating my strengths, feeling my feelings. I know myself better and use new practices to begin my days better. I know now when to push or pull, or when to surrender and give myself permission to pause. I take care of myself first now, before the client. Like the flight attendant says, you must put on your oxygen mask first before you help the passenger beside you. I breathe first.

I am no longer responsible for everyone's fights, floods, and fires. I don't start the day with the biggest hangovers and loudest 911 client problem while scrolling through vulgar Instagram memes. I have realigned, a calm new sober and clear steady that I work each day to sustain. I was raised in a rural life where the goal was to sustain the earth. The farm's sustainability to produce the best and most was a constant





battle we fought together. Through those hard, hot times and hard, heavy work, we simply knew no other way to be. No, I don't discount the work ethic I learned there.

Today I take the good from it and leave the rest to fall back into the earth. The way of that resilient, rural life is to survive and like a crop through a drought, build enormous strength. This is precisely where this thesis comes from. In the end there is justice if you are exposed to that amount of stress. There are coping mechanisms that come from it. The work ethic is what gave me this enormous strength to overcome in search of my own sustainability.

Sustainability, the Oxford Dictionary says, is the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance. I had ignored my own depletion, believing if I made more logos and more money, it would make a better relationship with my father, my marriage, my kids, and by default somehow it would build back my own natural resources eventually. I honestly thought I could design my way out of my hole by filling it with others' happiness and homepage designs. I have learned the answer is nowhere but within me.

I now know that I am a creative designer who can write. I am so grateful that these pages helped me rediscover my 8-year-old self who knew how to make space for herself. Whose safe space, in all the scary, hard, happy, and sad days, was filled in a healthy, healing way: playing, drawing, storytelling, and resting alone. I know now, no matter what the storms may bring, that I don't need a drink to numb away from it, that I don't have to pretend to be perfect and justify the joy. That I create my own inner steady for calm and inner peace, not from controlling someone else's calm or chasing Xanax with wine in the middle of the day. Anna Quindlen said, "The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself." The reward is, however imperfectly, to fully, freely, breathtakingly believe in my own confidence and courage to live right now, unashamed of my past or my roots. To be my true self: I am a peacekeeper and a Southern storyteller. I am a cultivator and creator.







PREVIOUS PAGE:
One of the farmhands in the military flew over to say howdy

Original sidewalk at the farmhouse

PART SEVEN

# GRATEFUL STEWARDSHIP

As my work writing has filled the daily pages, so has my history of habits like you approach each day with gratitude and hang on tight to hope. Like the children's Bible song cheerfully sings, "Rise and shine, and give God your glory, glory!". You can give thanks and have hope that the seed you planted yesterday has anchored and begun to grow, that there are lessons to be learned from the history. That with a little faith, the field notes in your pocket and the plant beneath your feet might light the way to the change you need for the future.

That children's Bible song shares the message of Isaiah 60:1: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." This belief, to wake up as the sun rises and be happy and give thanks, has long been a way of life in agrarian communities. This message was communicated, taught, and practiced through some of the earliest forms of text, layout, and bookmaking as well.

*The Book of Hours* are some of the earliest evidence of the roots of agriculture and how they begin to merge with graphic design. These beautifully illuminated manuscripts were popular during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Well before the good Lord blessed my heart upon the corn rows of Kentucky, these texts documented Christian rituals and the cycle of daily work in the field through text and imagery.

*The Book of Hours* had a simple text layout with vivid depictions of field work, great feasts, and prayer. The contents were highly customizable for different languages, scripture, and seasons. This design made it easy enough to rework the books for specific groups, local traditions, or even budgets based on what someone could afford to commission.





A Dutch book of hours, ca. 1470. Boston Public Library

This history hints at my why... If I want to understand why gratitude design is ingrained in me, then what are the deeper origins of my gratitude design? This history can help me better contextualize my recovery and growth. Those moments plowing along were planted long before my time. *Books of Hours* depicted everything from angels, dogs, flowers, and fruit to landscapes, musical instruments, plants, weather, small towns, and scenes of the New Testament. The layers of history in these vellum sheets, field notes, stories, and drawings were scribed just like my own pages, typed and textured as an inheritance and a monument to life's journey.

Seeing these familiar images makes me feel less afraid and alone in my hard truths. The darkest dirt is the richest and has the most to teach us if we'll be honest and willing to look, listen, and learn from it. While examining the rocks and old roots of my life, taking notice of the small joys in the new life that's pushing through the ground, I have learned to feel the good with the bad of the earth and accept where I am now. My story was worthy to be told, but just like ignoring a plant, denying the past and ignoring its true needs kills it, and my avoidance of my past was killing me. Once you understand yourself, you can begin to embrace yourself. You begin to care for yourself and love yourself. You understand you are enough and that there is great abundance in your future. Like the *Book of Hours* depicted the daily work of the common man, each day's work is an opportunity to find peace and joy within. Like the growth of the grains, you can cycle back to the earth and bloom new again, and through your daily rituals continue to work and grow.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Long Vue farmhands making grass waterways to retain top-soil & save gully prone areas in fields



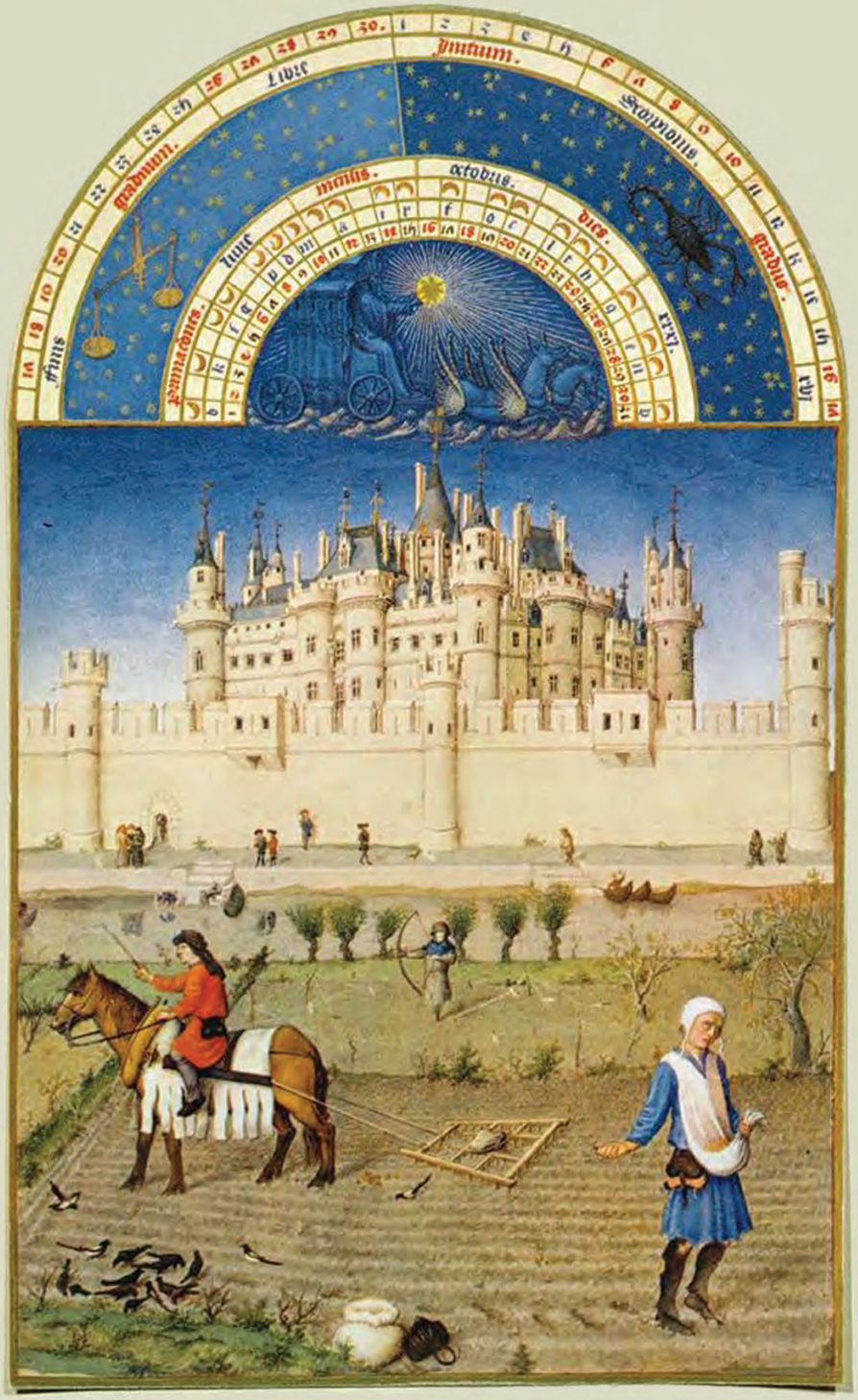


In an interview with my sister, Mandy Bryant, who now owns and operates Long Vue Farms, I asked her what were some lessons she's learned from the farm if she were to leave it in a book. She said: "One of the best lessons I've learned growing up on a farm is how a seed must be buried and die to itself to produce fruit. It's biblical. And it's so symbolic of life. I'm so amazed how year after year we can use the same piece of dirt to bury another seed and grow new life that goes on to sustain all life on earth. No matter how rough or wonderful the harvest is each year, we get to try again the next and start all over. I always watch the seed being planted and think to myself how amazing it is that we get to watch such a transformation and benefit from it. The same happens to us as people season after season."

As *The Book of Hours* shows, life is full of failures as well as bountiful harvests and there's no one set of rules to go by, but there is a tool set. I understand now: There is no perfect way to farm. No perfect way to design. No perfect way to parent. But there is your own way, based on your roots, your past, and where your feet are today.

There's simple and beautiful rewards in being a designer beyond the pretty logo. Like the farmer, there's more to it all than making a bushel basket of grain. How you beat the odds, fix and solve the tough spots, and at the end have a bountiful crop to share and provide for your family; this work feeds the world, yes, but it also fills the farmer. Working in a way where you love what you do reaps an inner reward. Design gives that feeling of satisfaction, self worth, and reward when you've made something out of nothing. There is stewardship and purpose in working each day to understand something new or design a small business owner's dream into a sign or help communicate a good message for a good cause.

The author and Kentuckian Wendell Berry says, "So, friends, every day do something that won't compute… give your approval to all you cannot understand… ask the questions that have no answers. Put your faith in two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years… laugh. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts… practice resurrection."




The Book of Hours pages by the Limbourg brothers for Jean Duc de Berry, brother of King Charles V of France. Among the first illuminators, they rendered specific landscape scenes with great accuracy and sensitivity. The books linked agricultural cycles with religious readings. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing/ART RESOURCE, N.Y.



Herman, Paul and Jean de Limbourg, from Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 1413-16, ink on vellum (Musée Condé, Chantilly). The figaure in a blue robe on the opposite side of the table is a portrait of the patron, Jean de France, duc de Berry. Photo Credit: Archive for Research on Archetypal Symbolism

This is how my Southern Kentucky farmer's daughter translates those sunrises and seeds into a gratitude graphic design practice. We as designers get to do something that won't compute every day. We can have faith in that open canvas, like a fresh field ready to be prepped for planting. We can be joyful in the unlimited pixels to produce bushels of creativity to communicate what no one else can.

But this also means saying no more, and yes less. For example, not helping make the packaging design for a secret military grade bomb explosive gel with an unlimited budget. Also, not frantically working all nighters for that demanding client who never responds to your emails or respects your boundaries. As the saying goes, 'Lack of planning on their part doesn't constitute an emergency on mine.' Going after the career ladder with only money in mind will not fill your soul. The rich and rewarding work comes from within yourself and using your craft as a designer for the good of the world you live in.

And it also means keeping your inner asshole in check, even when you come by it naturally. I had to learn that striving for the perfect crop, without a weed in sight or a drop of grease on my hands, wasn't normal or achievable. This way of always making ordinary situations catastrophic, my father raging violently and smacking the Kentucky Fried Chicken box from my sister's hands as she delivered suppers one night, was about so much more than a greasy steering wheel. The same way one of my design professors didn't even look at my actual work or give constructive critique, just raked me over the coals for rough matte board edges and fingerprint smudges on the back, penciling the comment derisively, "Did you chew off this board with your teeth?! Yikes! Yikes! And Double Yikes!"

There was a time in my career I was quite proud to carry on and spout off all my big heavy neurotic design practices, slicing everyone like paper cuts. More white space, more modern, and goodness gracious clean up that grid! I echoed my influences and applauded the corporate suits, from the sports car sales rep on one shoulder to the macho marketing manager yes sirs on the other. I was living in a space between egos, but it was as comfortable as running the bush hogs on the tractor, my blades only further sharpened by design professors in school.



Front porch view of home, the Maude Gill farm house



After all, “Deadlines don’t care about pixels.” This was told to me by a senior marketing VP one day when I stopped by his big shiny corner office at corporate. There had been a bit of heated discussion in the creative team meeting that morning I wanted to know more about. Franco, a self-styled Lead Graphic Designer, was mad. He was also proudly German, only drank the stoutest of beers, and kept offering to show me his penis on AOL Instant Messenger chats while working late nights remotely. Apparently he was mad about the Christmas marketing team’s needs. He was in charge of the website design for the holidays, with festive-themed tasks assigned to him.

So I, being the ‘keep everyone happy’ team player, wanted to see if I could smooth it over and make peace with the VP guys. I sat down and Mike the VP offered me some Scotch from his desk drawer. I declined, surprisingly, knowing I had an hour and a half commute home and a newborn and two-year-old to feed and bathe. I sat there, playing dumb about the heated exchange between him and Franco that morning.

It seems Franco had been given a deadline a few weeks back for a new “Country Christmas” website look. I was honestly unaware of this request, but from my traditional Southern upbringing, I know Christmas is a big deal at the Opryland Hotel. People travel from all over the world (they told us, though really I suspect it’s more like just inside the state of Tennessee) to see 100 foot Christmas trees and green and red laser shows while the Mandrell Sisters sing “Joy to the World.”

Franco seemed completely insulted by his task list, or maybe it was Mike’s corner office taunting Franco in his cubicle across the way he found insulting. Prior to the merger of our teams by corporate, Franco and Mike had been equals on the company flow chart: one a marketing manager and one a design manager. Yet as we came up the flight of stairs into our new mauve-carpeted creativeland lugging our Macbooks and monitors, there sat Mike, already in the last open office. The corner office, mind you. Already set up, stating to us he had asked to move in the night before because of an early conference call.

Franco made it clear to his co-workers, although sometimes in German, so maybe not so clear, that he was highly educated, sophisticated, and not impressed with our Southern ways.



Cornerstone discovered from family farm shop recently burnt believed to be written by Grandfather Thompson “God is great”

PREVIOUS PAGE: Harvested corn field no til method with Winter wheat beginning to grow, irrigation pivot in the background, November 2019, Corn stalks provide ground cover and hold in soil moisture better, soil health is one of the main reasons for choosing no till practices

*Every day do something that won't compute... give your approval to all you cannot understand... ask the questions that have no answers. Put your faith in two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years... laugh. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts... practice resurrection.*

*—Wendell Berry*







He had worked tirelessly day and night on his clean, simple, perfect, modern, extra-white space, lifestyle magazine-themed new hotel website. It was simply not going to be disgraced with the reds, greens, and glitters of a Christmas theme. He had been secretly protesting the holly jolly jazz-it-up request for a while now, as Mike told it. So when the CEOs didn't have their Santa's sleigh comps on the website on time, we were all told we'd be called into the next meeting to explain to the executive board why we couldn't follow simple directions.

Mike had his leg crossed, shaking his foot nervously while sipping his Scotch, looking out his large high-rise window. You could see he was stressed, running his hands through his long unwashed rockstar hair; his true missed calling was to be a musician, as he reminded anyone who'd listen. He sat up, clasped his fingers together, and then jabbed a pointed finger at the cubicle wall outside his office, on the other side of which sat Franco headphones on and brewing mad, and he said, "We don't really care about his work." Mike leaned in hard at me and growled through gritted teeth, "All that matters is the deadline."

This was something that hit me right in the face, and I've remembered it ever since. I wasn't offended by Mike's words. I wasn't offended by the way Franco was, it wasn't like he was talking about my kids. It wasn't personal. However, I had thought Franco's superior beliefs on design and standing his ground were something to admire. Other than the penis flashing, I thought he was a pretty cool German-sports-car-driving guy with talent and an ego problem. But before my tired afternoon eyes, the perspective suddenly changed.

It was from Franco I had learned to try to be more perfect and had prided myself on doing so. I had believed I was taking the extra time, the extra hours, the late nights and weekends doing something over-the-top extraordinary. When Mike spoke out, I realized that the Senior Vice President checking his email from the golf course or showing off our teams' work to the CEO from a Blackberry screen, claiming it for his own, really, just really, only cared about the deadline. Being so zoomed into the pixels seemed suddenly not very important at all. Why were we working all night trying to make it so perfect, again?

PREVIOUS PAGE: Tyler of Long Vue Farms holds a sprouted seed while checking seed germination progress, Corn roots can grow up to 6.5 feet below the surface before the plant reaches maturity





I walked back into my cubicle that day and saw Franco with Santa's sleigh on his screen while he called his wife to say he'd be home late. He was throwing in the towel and giving the website some holiday fucking cheer, damn it. He was zoomed all the way into his art board adjusting the blue in Santa's beard. I, on the other hand, packed up my laptop, headed home, and didn't plan to stress so much about the perfect pixel anymore, just that I turned it in on time. After New Year's, I was 'released due to budgets' from that freelance gig, via a tweet from Mike. Franco was fired soon after. Corporate sold out. They no longer have a custom website, a graphic design department, or a corner office space for Mike.

The lesson I guess is we're all expendable. So why be assholes to each other? That wasn't who I wanted to be.

No matter how hard we work, no matter how many hours of care, research, sketches, revisions, and worry go into tirelessly creating, the world doesn't care, they just want it now. I no longer let instant gratification culture run my anxiety. The clients who constantly asked 'Can you get this to me yesterday?' and 'I need that asap' no longer fit with what I have learned from my research, recovery, and reward findings.

I have my own company and team of designers now, and I work to help them understand the nature of assholes. Don't take it personally when our clients seem to aggressively pressure and attack your work ethic, and don't take your personal time to do it or stress over it. As they project on you their personal struggles, debt problems, and political views (as they have with me over the years), we respectfully don't engage. This new practice involves discipline: Do your very best in the time allotted, submit it, and go home. Respect your boundaries, enjoy your rest time, and don't be the last one in the office every day, looking at the last pixel on the page.

And good news! So far no clients have died from hearing no. When my team tells them, "No, sorry, you already approved this design. Additional changes will cost extra;" when we no longer text the client back on Saturday



night freaking out about their website being down; when we have to follow up with, "Your invoice was 90 days past due, QuickBooks says that you've viewed the invoice 7 times, and we called you and sent you late warnings;" it's okay.

The good clients see the value in the work and respect that we are people, too. My dentist has been a client for 10 years. For a long time, I just thought he happened to pick me because he cleaned my teeth. Turns out my work ethic, communication skills, and design sense have helped his dental practice grow. A car dealership client began to use my company for ad design 15 years ago because we always bought the farm trucks from them. Today they are one of the leading multi-brand dealerships in the state of Tennessee, run by Mr. Sid Johnson's daughter Kathryn, who respects my company, design, and morals as a fellow woman-owned business.

I admire the female leaders doing the tough work of running companies and raising families without addictions and unnecessary anger. I admire successful, optimistic, charismatic women and how they use those skills but with toughness. The designers, creatives, and childhood heroes I admired were such great influences, I now realize, to my own resilience and gratitude life. Dolly Parton, Oprah Winfrey, Judy Garland, Julie Andrews, and Carol Burnett have appeared in my research and are connected by their mental toughness, bravery, and strength to respond resiliently in life, no matter what they faced. They stayed hopeful, optimistic, and grounded.

But I also think about how my mother never spoke of her contributions on the farm and how I always felt like I accidentally happened to be a designer, that I accidentally fell into this client or that project. I noticed this dismissiveness in many of the women in my research. As Julie Andrews said in an interview to CBS Sunday Morning about a new children's book club she was starting: "I think it had more to do with– well, you know, I was just a working girl in my teens, traveling around England, singing my heart out, learning my craft. But once I got to Broadway and Hollywood, the films drew me into that particular work, and I found that it was what I wanted to embrace, because it was giving me so much pleasure.



Window view while landing from VCFA residency April 2019 of Kentucky farmland in Todd County, where Lorilee recognizes the Hampton Farm

Those movies led me into this concern for kids, and I think probably subliminally I was trying to give them as good a feeling as I could. I have no idea if that comes from my own childhood. It was just the way I stumbled forward in the world. Does that make sense? I hope it does!"

And I reply in my mind while reading it… "oh my yes, Mrs. Andrews, it surely does." We as women often sell ourselves short and don't give our skills and talents and passion the credit they deserve. It is our compassion, ideas, and understanding that make us great designers. We know what needs to be communicated versus just selling something that may or may not be needed in whatever color seems to sell better. We take advantage of opportunities, and it isn't an accident.

During my research, I took myself on an artist date to hear Carol Burnett speak in Nashville. It was an evening of laughter and reflection on her life. When she took questions from the audience, someone asked about what made her not ever give up while she was struggling to make it big as an actress. Her response was so simple. She shrugged, as if it was no big deal, and said it was her mindset all along. She just approached each and every obstacle in life with optimism. She told a story about a role she just knew she was right for and could really do well. She was certain she did an amazing job at the audition, and was certain she would get the role; yet, when she was standing on stage beside another actress, they didn't call her name.

Carol said she quickly bowed, congratulated the other actress, and walked off the stage. Then she paused in her story, gently holding her chin as she recalled the memory, and with a warm smile looked up to us, saying, "I told myself, it just wasn't my time," adding, "It was her time. Not mine. My time will come." Then she hopped into a cab in New York and went back to her tiny apartment to return the dress she had borrowed from her roommate and immediately begin studying for the next audition. She never gave up on herself.

The optimist in me constantly reminds me when bad things cross my path: This is only temporary. This is key to what can make us stronger, more resilient designers. The way we get through each problem is by using our positive mental toughness and designing our way out of it, realizing and





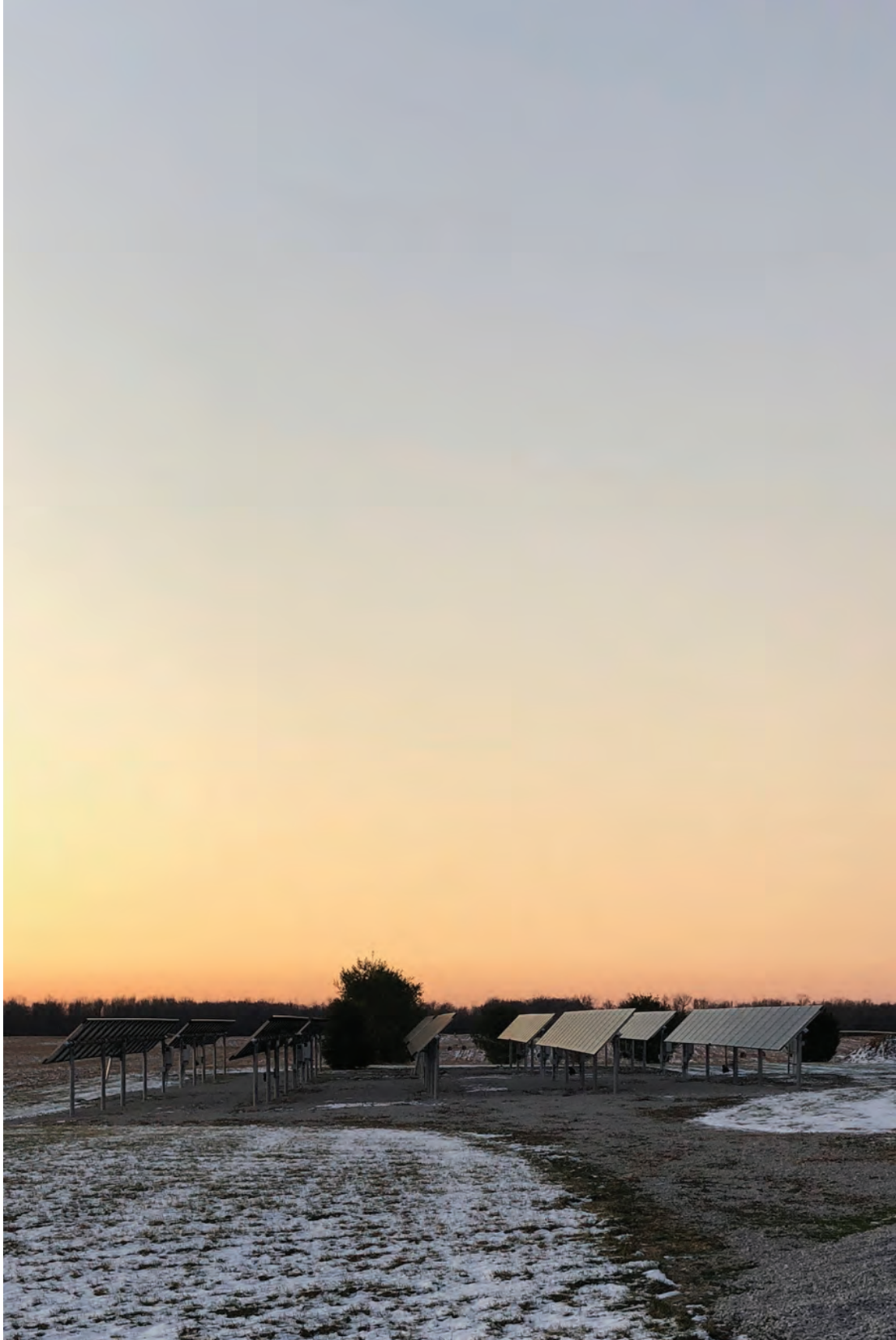
reminding ourselves this is only temporary, another time is coming. This is such an important aspect of gratitude design, a way to approach the same problems we all face but as a healthier, happier person. It makes you into a better person, doing better design, from a healthier safe space, both mentally and physically. In turn, you are doing better work for the client and the world. You will still have the client with the neurosis who will dump on you, but these tools and practices can help break the cycle.

Using this practice of gratitude design in a healthy way, I've gained the confidence to trust my qualifications from my own lived experience. I have learned what I bring to the table, and it's not just a cool Apple Pen. We are more than artboards and instruments. The designer is the person who's supposed to make solutions to help your business grow. Our job isn't to take the orders and wrap up something in a nice bow and hope it sells. Like with farming, we didn't just throw out a handful of seeds and pray. Farmers are the experts to feed the world; a farmer's hands, heart, and head is a part of every equation that makes a successful yield. As designers, we are also a key part of the equation. If you need your taxes done, you call an accountant; you go to doctors and lawyers for their expertise, too. If you need a brand for your new business, you call a designer.

This confidence is not a given; it takes nurturing. Gratitude is my sense of coherence, my steady. Yes, I still want to escape some days, but I know the tools to ground myself, and the problems no longer feel so big and scary. Yes, I still want to run away to a cottage on the coast some day, and I no longer have to hide that dream. I know I want to live with gratitude, freedom, and collaborate with humans I align with for the greater good in the world.

Stewardship is the common thread. We are all responsible for taking care of the world and each other. Like farmers throughout the ages, resurrection of the crop year to year is still the farmer's job that provides and feeds our bodies and cares for the land. Through this work, the true purpose of design has been resurrected within me and inspires me to use what I've learned for the greater good.

Instead of focusing on making more or feeding the world's obsession with materialism, my gratitude graphic design practice is now to be a good steward–of my past, of my employees, of my communities, and of myself. Stewardship comes with great responsibility, but it is powerful and each small act changes the world.



Long Vue
Farms Solar
panel system





PREVIOUS PAGE:
Front soybean field view from grain bins

Close up of Johnson grass, a weed, at Long Vue Farms by my son Luke

PART EIGHT

# SIDE HUSTLE HANGOVER

Over the course of this work, I've come to the realization that side projects fail faster. We all have tried to help a friend on the side for their kid's birthday party invite or our grandma for a cookbook cover design, and we never can seem to get to it or we rush through it. It's not giving a task we care about the proper time it deserves. That's the kind of 'being too busy' feeling trap I used to get stuck in that kept guilt and shame in my gut.  A new practice in meditation, writing, and a mindfulness focused approach to my daily habits, values, and boundaries helped fill up my inner gratitude cup of ambition and along the way helped my design practice, too. I'm still grateful for family, friends, and all those clients, but now I am unapologetically grateful for who I am. What's the bushels per acre or the ROI in this? One life saved–my own.

The key is remembering you have a choice. Always. You can pause, breathe, and stop for a piece of buttered toast.

So the other night I was texting with a friend, confessing that I'd eaten buttered toast for breakfast. I felt the need to confess because I've been pretty devout recently to be extra healthy in all the ways. It's been a strict lifestyle of no alcohol, no Xanax, and clean eating. I'd been good at staying up on this wagon until that day.

You see, that wagon is really big, heavy, and piled up with lots of things. Where I come from, a good wagon can carry a whole field of tobacco. It works well for yard sales to pull up the stacks of clothes from the house to the road side and makes the perfect stage up at the town square for singing the national anthem for the Fall Festival.




Semis pulling into dump shed to unload grain into the pit



Well, my metaphorical wagon has some pretty massive weight to carry and pull along some days. It's packed full of a lot of work, a demanding family, a little grad school, healthy living, sober living, and don't get me wrong, it's full of joy, too! There's a little space for gratitude and the ever-needed knee-slapping humor as well. However, staying on that wagon is not nearly as easy as it feels like it ought to be.

Daily we're all busy. Contrary to popular opinion, busy isn't something to be proud of, and it's not a specialty to be listed on your resume. It is, however, a commonly used word by many who don't really have it all together. So I focus each day on controlling the busy, planning the chaos, and being extra efficient and productive. Each day it's a conscious effort to get all the things done, right, well, and on time. Hour by hour is planned, budgets are set, all while meeting your step count, stand up goals, water ounce intake, and helping the kids make more healthy choices, spending less money, feeding the dog, and repeating it all over again the next day.

So mid-morning of my extra efficient day when the buttered toast skipped across my path, I slipped off my wagon. After my 5 a.m. workout, morning pages, and a big proposal meeting at the local Chamber of Commerce, I got a message that my grandma was in town. She was just down the street at Moss's Country Kitchen having a late breakfast after a doctor's appointment. I didn't realize it, as we so often don't, but I was inching toward the edge of my wagon. I hadn't had any breakfast but had had my two large cups of coffee, and after my charming presentation performance I was feeling drained. I knew some quality time with my grandmother would be just the right thing even though it was not on the day's schedule.

I called her back to say I was headed to the diner. She said she would order for me so I wouldn't have to wait, as she knew I was busy. Right as I sat down, so did a platter of scrambled eggs, hash browns, bacon, and two pieces of white bread toasted with delicious butter, dripping and shining in the reflection of the pick up window heat lamps. I took a deep breath and scooted the hashbrowns off the plate and on to my grandma's.

You're a little thing and need to eat more, I told her as I winked at the hovering waitress. Next a handful of jelly tub packets were set between us. Grandma needed help getting them open. I have to agree, those small little rectangle tubs are "hard boogers to get that shiny corner ahold of to peel back. Why do they make them things so dern hard?" Grandma asked, trying not to feel embarrassed about her old hands not working as well as they used to.

From there I ate my eggs and inhaled another cup of coffee. Next up was the extra greasy bacon with another cup of joe topped off by the sweet and efficient waitress. She was on us like a preacher with a collection plate. "Ready for a warm up?" She asked after every sip we took out of the classic white diner mugs.

I hadn't seen my grandma in quite a few weeks, as she was quick to remind me. She mentioned how I'd been too busy jet setting all over the country. She was referring to my trip to Vermont for grad school and then to Florida for beach time on the boys' Fall Break. Just before that, I hadn't been able to make it by her house when they were putting up pear preserves. So she needed an update on me and a good reason why I couldn't be there for the canning and conversation. She said they had a large time with Aunt Lonetta and Aunt Mildred and she had three jars for me in her kitchen I needed to come get.

As we got caught up on life, talk turned to the weather. She said the upcoming Farmer's Almanac predicted a wet but mild winter, and so did the woolly worms. It came time to open up more jelly, and my toast was still just sitting there beside me. My scrambled eggs and bacon hadn't really filled me up, and Grandma was certainly not done talking. The waitress was also eager to keep us in coffee.

So, as I jellied her toast some more, I mindlessly jellied myself some and took a bite. I think my brain was in shock. As the warm melted butter and light crunch of the toast and squish of jelly entered my mouth, I was instantly happier. My forehead did tingle from the sugar rush, but Grandma never missed a beat



The view from my hotel room during my first trip to NYC for an Ellen Lupton Type workshop 2019, I open the curtains thinking surely it would be of a lush central park landscape view with the Statue of Liberty waving proudly




My studio safe space where rituals are practiced like Morning Pages writing, Top amateur tip: Do not waste time looking for a 'pretty' notebook do have a good pen & mug



talking about the hams she needed to get for Thanksgiving prep as she reminded me, "Be sure to get yourself one next week when they're on sale at Walmark's."

We wrapped up our chit chat and finally asked the waitress to take the coffee cups away and bring us the check. The conversation was the best I'd had in weeks, I told her, as I helped her up and out the door, and I was delighted to know her new hearing aids were helping her. The diner had a handwritten sign on the door that they were hiring for two chefs and a waitress. I told her we should apply and she laughed loudly, saying, "Oh gosh, ain't no way I could, babe. I got too much to do cooking for the church and the senior citizens center." Nevermind you, she'll be 89 in a few weeks, has neuropathy, and can no longer stand more than just a few moments without help. However, yes, I agreed with her that she surely is too busy to come cook at the diner.

As I sat in bed that night about to turn out the lights, I didn't log the toast in my weight loss app. I wasn't thinking about how it had been another 'busy' day. I thought about what my friend had texted back: "Everyone needs the occasional buttered toast." I no longer needed to feel bad or guilty about the confession of calories or the time I took with Grandma away from all the busy. Never be too busy to enjoy some occasional buttered toast.

It's in these little pauses, fleeting moments of toast and face to face talk with your grandma, where you find your steady. Mindfulness helps to ground you so you can begin to feel that slightest shift, that your sense of place is within you. Right where you are is right where you can grow. It's not in a bigger client, or next year's goals, or holding on to past grief, blame, shame, and fears. It's a daily practice of rituals you design and build in the soil you're in today. It is within you and forever giving, just like the farm always gave to me. What I needed was already there when I approached it with willingness, surrendering to my inner voice that knew all along what I needed to hear.

Before this work I would likely not have paused for the time with my grandma or mindfully enjoyed the buttered toast. Yet I have learned slowly, through daily meditation and writing, how much I needed to change my habits and daily

rituals to include what really matters to me. I no longer let the busy and the bullshit run my day. By connecting with myself through simple small meditations, writing has helped to draw my awareness inward. Instead of the artificial outward distractions of our loud world running my anxious mind, my own thoughts began to speak up, and I listened.

The rewards I've discovered in this work are in the daily exploration, imagination, creating, and making as a designer. In these small moments, being willing to wonder and be curious is when I reach understanding and then enlightenment. Then naturally the discovery and joy leads to gratitude. This openness is my happiness, and how I still get lost in the work of making logos and websites from the seeds of needs, ideas, hopes, and dreams. Thinking I get paid for this as a living is an incredible gift of gratitude. And it doesn't hurt that this career doesn't have me worrying about the weather.

The key is the same today as when you were a child drawing and coloring: Enjoy the messy and have fun in the making. Don't worry about or focus on the failures. Experiment and live in your truth as a designer daily, and love the seasons that come and go and cycle, and notice how each one helped you grow. Track the soil, weather patterns, and what you already had deep in your roots already within you. Be the steward of your own life and appreciate how the land looks today.

My father often said in business, "Look out for number one because nobody else is going to." As selfish as I thought that sounded back then, I took this to heart in this work as well as life, and now I know I had to show up and learn about my sense of place. Examine my past, where I came from, my truths and beliefs. Because only I could.

You can't skip forward to the sweet corn at Thanksgiving without the sowing, growing, and harvesting. When you start in the field making that first pass with the plow, you have to circle back and make sure you've covered your ground. That's where the gratitude design life begins to bloom. Only you can plant your purpose. Tend to what matters, thankfully, bit by bit, day by day, and the rewards will come. It requires faith and devotion to the work, and in yourself. Trust that the sun will shine and the small daily work in you will grow.



*Settling into this basic sense of okayness is a powerful way to build well-being.*

*— Dr. Rick Hanson*



It is still a work in progress, but because of this work and recovery from addiction, I have begun to understand I have a choice in life. I have a choice in the everyday; small, simple choices each day. I have begun to understand how operating under stress, anxiety, and addiction messes with your mind. Yes, I'm talking about the noggin, the brain, specifically the prefrontal cortex. Like Bessel Van Der Kolk says in *The Body Keeps The Score*, part of my research has helped me understand the brain in more detail and how it adapts to the pressures of occupying a burnout-addicted, people-pleasing designer:

> Basically our stress hormones are meant to help us move, or fight back, and get out of the situation. If they keep being secreted, they keep you in a state of hyperarousal or put you in a state of helpless collapse… You have difficulty filtering irrelevant information. Gradually, you start feeling threatened everywhere. Instead of being focused on what is going on right now, your mind stays on the alert for threat, while you basically feel helpless to do anything about it… Things that other people see as simply unpleasant or irritating, are perceived as a threat to your very existence… You get trapped in your reactions without having much control over them.

Finally, I have given my brain the rest it deserves. I have given myself permission to feel my feelings and make decisions based on my needs. From there, my imagination and curiosity began to grow again. I found authentic joy in writing and making art in my new home studio. As I began to feel less pain, heart ache, and anxiety because of these new practices, I craved more. I learned in this work to be reliant on myself to fill my spirit, energy, and wellness, no longer seeking it from others or the next big design project. From this new daily pause and inward look, I found in myself true acceptance, love, and success.

This work gave me a natural inner peace that I created on my own. The reward has helped my stress and anxiety levels all but disappear. I feel my overall nervous system, immune system, and sleep system all have a balance. Yes there's still peaks and





valleys, highs and lows, but they are not as dramatic and quick fused. My breaths are deeper, my hand steadier, making my body's inner bobber steady, like a fishing pole in the pond.

Overcoming panic attacks without medicines and alcohol is a huge win. Having the ability to meditate for five minutes and visualize that I am ok, right now, right here, and visualize myself in my safe spaces is nothing short of a miracle. In his TedxMarin talk, Dr. Rick Hanson said, "Settling into this basic sense of okayness is a powerful way to build well-being and resources in your brain and being, and it's a way of taking a stand for the truth." Me and my brain are taking our stand in sober soothing.

World renowned spiritual teacher and New York Times bestselling author Eckhart Tolle discussed in a *Super Soul Sunday* interview with Oprah how COVID-19 reminds us of the two polarities of life: order versus disorder. Eckhart explained how the current global pandemic, which is a time of chaos and disruption, is an invitation to accept the present moment for what it is. Eckhart shared how he believes we can suffer less during the pandemic, how this time might lead us all to a new spiritual awakening. The importance of stillness, the way in which our consciousness extends beyond physicality, and why love is to recognize another as yourself.

In my recovery practice and self care, I have also learned the importance of seeing yourself. Telling yourself, "I got you." Really looking at yourself in the mirror each day and seeing, feeling, and facing your own truth. In the tiny moments, brushing your teeth, to be in that moment. Not multitasking on your phone or watch or podcast. Looking yourself in the eye. This daily small act will begin to fill your buckets with your inner truth. From there, thoughts will arise: What do you think, how do you feel? Sit with those feelings and feel them. If it's pain, ask: If my pain could speak, what would it lovingly say? Doing this will be part of a new ritual. This begins the small shift in self awareness. I examine myself without judgement or denial. The shouting sounds of fear in my head became just a whisper, and I now find great joy as I look at the hard places inside of me. I was addicted to approval from others and the false high of client



approvals. Now I understand and feel an authentic reward in self love, acceptance, abundance and the simple rituals like breathing, mediation, and writing.

Part of dealing with the hardiness in the land and in life is to begin each morning calmly and quietly with a pause while you read the land and practice gratitude for all you have at your feet. Then you think about, What's my plan today to make this vast land that I own, that I'm responsible for, grow better. In this almost meditative state you'll find the richest places to plant, and then to sow, water, repair, and reap the beliefs that will carry you forward. The seasons come and go, the cycle of the seed dies and plants grow, the sun rises and sets, there's always that look onto the horizon. You use your experience from years past, the weather and land conditions right now, and the future of the unknown storms and droughts that might appear, and press forward today. It's simple (but not easy) to design a life you want to plow through every day, rain or shine.

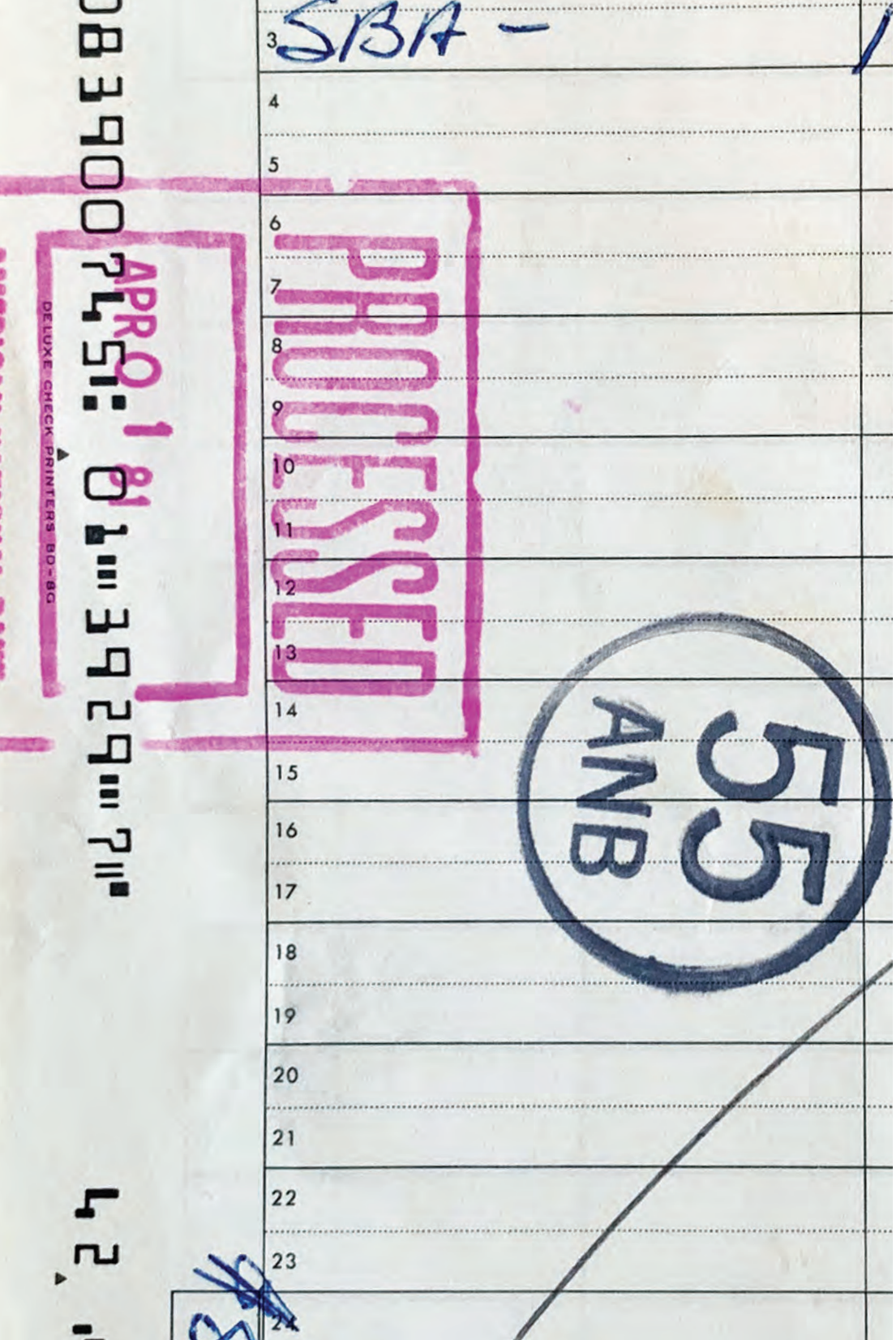
You cannot control what yield life produces, but you can make the choice to care for yourself and the earth a little every day. You can build your safe space and gather your buckets, harvesting all the goodness your heart can hold and leaving the rest behind. It's not just one logo or one seed. It's a thousand tiny seeds you care for a little at a time that add up to the bushel baskets full of joy, hope, and happiness you seek.




Handmade Dolly Pardon ornament from Etsy




Johnson's Grocery, Keysburg, Kentucky. Where we were able to charge groceries like bologna, ham & cheese loaf, and cracker jacks. He allowed us to pay him back monthly. Owner Mr. Johnny Johnson often made me handmade slingshots out of old leather scraps, rubber hoses, and whittled branches.




Processed deposit ticket with an SBA loan 1981

PART NINE

# DRUNK DATA

Through this grad school work, I learned my struggles with being grateful above all else that had led to addiction and collapse were bigger global issues. These beliefs are failing us all. Female alcohol use disorder in the U.S. increased 83.7% between 2002 and 2013, according to a study sponsored by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). *The Lancet*, a highly respected British medical journal, reports, "No level of alcohol improves health."

We are slowly killing ourselves by self-medicating with a substance society tells us is safe in controlled amounts. In fact, it is fueling our anxiety and panic attacks, increasing depression, obesity, cancer and so many other things. I was suffering in silence for most of my life, feeling alone and like I needed the drink. The truth is, I don't. I just needed to learn to love myself, to be a part of a community, and make a safe space to be myself. I now understand I live with the same issues these studies talk about, how the impact of alcohol extends beyond health into families, crime and disorder, and the workplace. How drinking impacts others' mental health when it comes to my drinking.

This was my backyard growing up, but we never spoke about it; we only gave thanks. No wonder the farmers I knew growing up died early of heart attacks, suicide, or alcoholism. Consider the amount of stress to feed the growing world's population, plus trying to produce 10x the amount of food from the same acre today compared to 1980. Consider that the price of a base model Chevy pick up in 1976 was $8,800.00 versus today at $36,100.00, while at the same time in 1980 a bushel of wheat's average price at sale was $4.56 and in 2019, $4.94.

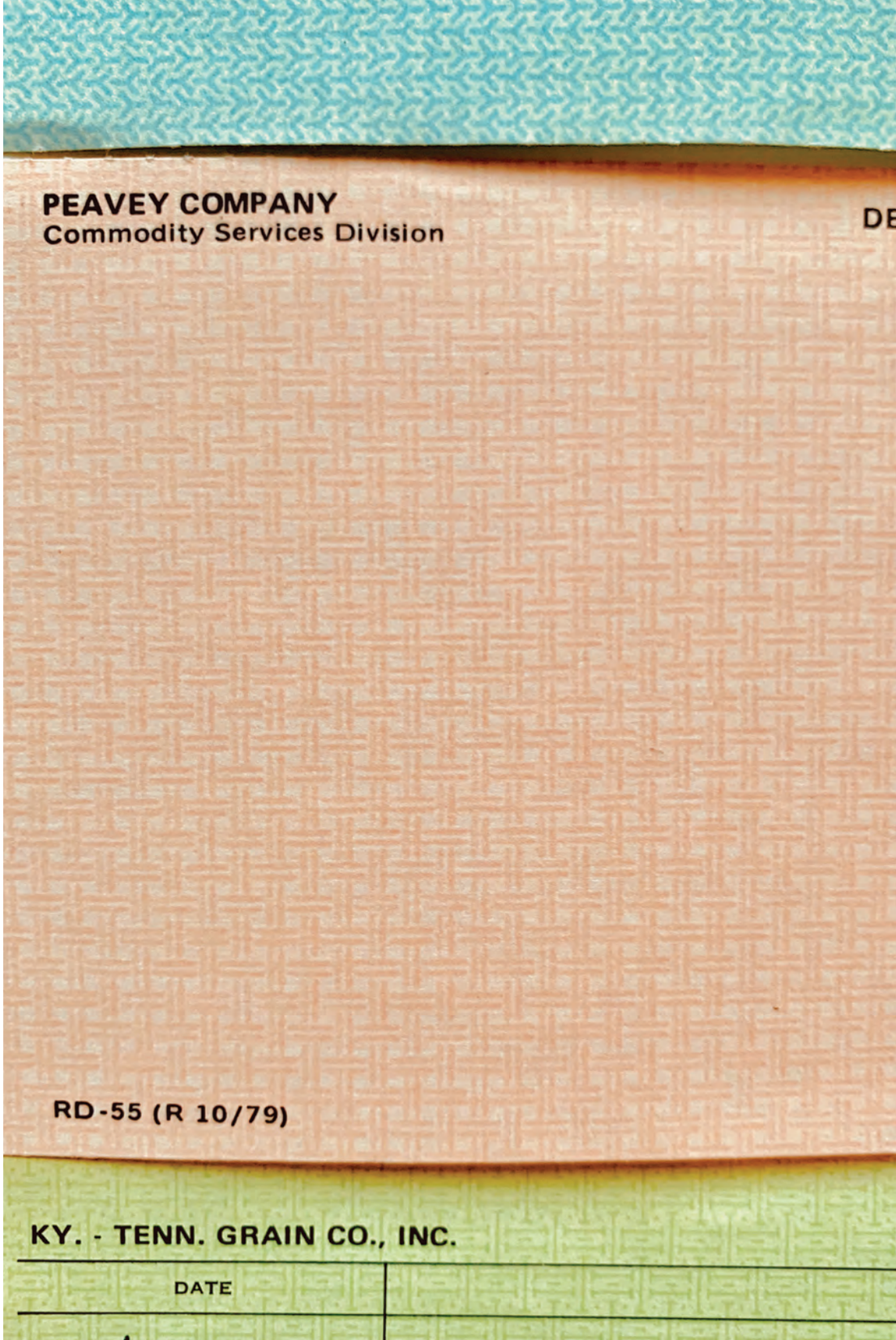
What stats do we need to finally pay attention to addiction, trauma, and old bad habits? Our mental health, our hours online, the pressure to design more, work faster, make it pop, is killing us. We need to consider the ROI of more likes, more subscribers, all the engagement we are trying to shove down everyone's throat, while we vomit up the hangover the next day.

The responsibility is ours. As author Laura McKowen says, "It's not our fault, but it is our responsibility." It's time to pause. Breathe. Look inside at ourselves and our truths. At what we are really drinking to numb out. At what we are shouting in anger at other people and at the fake news we were taught to believe. What's our role in this as makers? What have we been designing that fuels sickness? What is true? What is false? What are you making to help or hurt others? What are you boxing up that is killing you?

Targeting and taking advantage of behavior styles like scarcity thinking, feminism, new motherhood, religious fervor is wrong. We must, as designers, look within ourselves at why we are here. We must be willing to stand up for ourselves and learn to write, argue, and say no to what we won't want to do. To no longer contribute to these outdated ways of thinking. We must learn our own histories. Use our powers for good instead of evil, to help not hurt. For the greater good and our own mental health.

This means starting where you are and working on the most beautiful project within yourself. Understanding who you are isn't something to be ashamed about. For me, being driven by hard work, sometimes tunnel vision, peacekeeping, optimism, gratitude, enthusiasm, and high sensitivity are in fact the same behavior styles that make me a pretty awesome human.

I am looking through the same lens but with new beliefs, and it is helping me use my tools to change the world instead of self-destruct. This means taking even the smallest grain to begin to fill your bucket. Being disciplined to love yourself enough to make morning rituals that help you. Facing problems you used to box up and drink away. Maybe drinking isn't your thing, maybe it's food, or smoking, or sex that you're using in an unhealthy way to soothe.




From farm archives check stub security patterns

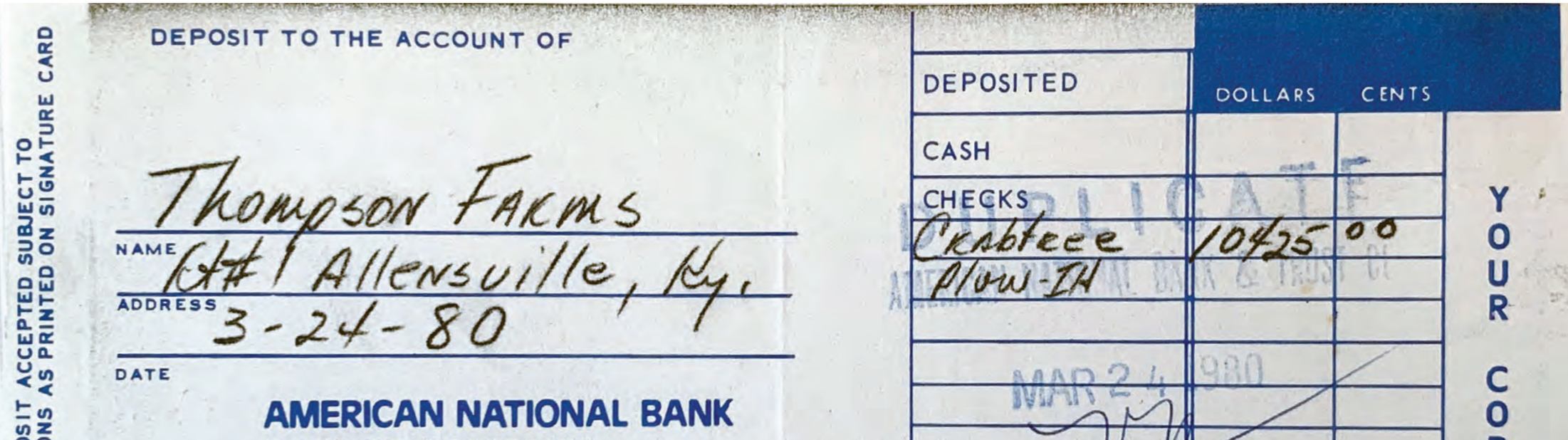
Bessel Van der Kolk says in *The Body Keeps the Score*:

> How many mental health problems, from drug addiction to self-injurious behavior, start as attempts to cope with the unbearable physical pain of our emotions? If Darwin was right, the solution requires finding ways to help people alter the inner sensory landscape of their bodies. Until recently, this bidirectional communication between body and mind was largely ignored by Western science, even as it had long been central to traditional healing practices in many other parts of the world, notably in India and China. Today it is transforming our understanding of trauma and recovery.

This isn't the pretty design files you may have imagined, but it's the beginning to true beauty. It's the hard parts that give you the most reward, like a 4:30 a.m. alarm so you can sweat it out at the 5 a.m. gym class. Killing a glass of water before a cup of coffee to hydrate your body. Taking breaks to pause, unplug, and breathe daily. Not scrolling mindlessly through Instagram for 45 minutes when you need to sleep and rest. This self-care is not as glamorous as the spa days and champagne you see on your social media feed and geo-fenced ads. But it's also less expensive and there are less hangovers and shame to deal with. Trust me, it never gets old waking up headache and hangover free.

To really live a grateful design life, you won't follow trends or find perfect "how-to guides." You will make a choice to build a life you don't need to numb away. This looks like saying no to things your old habits always had you saying yes to. Facing your failures and not adding any new destruction to your day. Letting go of instant gratification and thinking of your long term life needs instead of the short term wants. Not mandated positivity and bypassing negative thoughts, but welcoming all thoughts: facing them all together, the disappointments and delights, holding space for them all. Hearing your subconscious voice that's been telling you all along how it is you get in your own way. Listening to your body lovingly when it's telling you it needs to be taken care of. It's being kind to yourself and understanding you are enough, just the way you are.

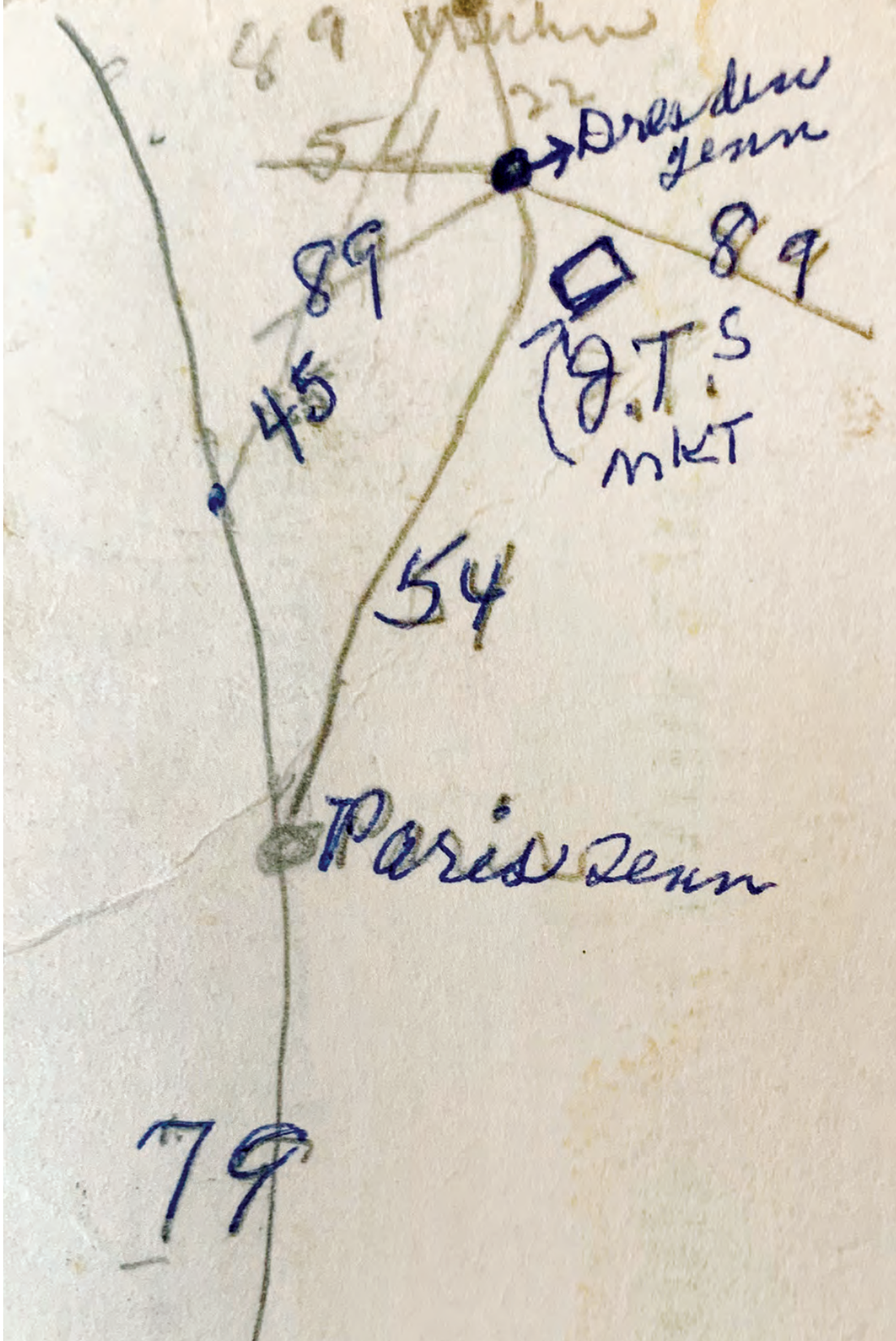
It takes changing the path of old habits and patterns of thought that tell you you must please and be everything to everyone. Not trying to fix problems that are not yours in the first place. Choosing yourself over your anxiety and self-made pressure to run help someone else in the name of "kindness." Focusing time on yourself, and being the greatest project you've ever worked on.



By exploring your thoughts, your feelings, and what brings you joy, you'll begin to learn what really gives you gratitude. By making, writing, and researching your sense of place, you can begin to build a new daily practice of rituals that nurture you. From the soil of my beginning to the spirit of me now, I understand that I am here to not only take care of myself, but also to help my fellow designers live the gratitude design life they deserve.

From the Middle Ages to Middle Tennessee where I live today, many have worked through their own journey. Growing and harvesting, resiliently regenerating, designing a life that not only grows but gives. The effort of the journey is a key part of the experience. We all have bare fields to work within us. We all have territory to nurture. Not every storm we prepare for or map we design works out perfectly. The strength lies within your roots and willingness to do the daily work. The work of daily rituals to make a safe space for creating, designing, and feeling authentically grateful. This is where you learn you are enough, to live well and find genuine joy. These are small but mighty moves that add up.

Brené Brown said, "Stories are data with a soul." I hope that is what you have found here.




Map drawn on back of business card by Grandfather Thompson

# MORNING PAGES




1 DAY SOBER: MAY 12, 2020

*P. S. Great job, kiddo! You read my thesis. Bless your heart! As a thank you, I thought I would leave you a little postscript here, followed by two morning pages entries. This thesis all began with that ritual. I found happiness in writing; a safe space where I love to sit with my favorite mug, playlist, and pen. Because of this writing practice, I found mindfulness and gratitude. My wish for you is that you will find it too.*

**Morning Pages Entry, August 15, 2020:**

I felt the water on my toes this morning in the shower. As I mindfully stood there, it felt like a mini-massage. Like acupuncture, humming, little easy vibrations over the tops of my feet. I paused, took a deep breath. It made me smile.

Recognizing, feeling, and listening feels delightful. The fact that I'm not rushing out the door, overtired, hungover, often angry, at what I had no idea–feels like such a surrendering relief. I don't know if I have ever noticed the feeling and calm of the water on my toes. If you have not, I highly recommend it.

The warm tingle of life is good right now. Very good. There goes that optimism and happiness oozing out automatically. I spent the last month wondering what's underneath that? Looking at the underneath, the hidden feelings, where are they? What are they? I'm looking.

I am happy simply drying my toes. I am feeling peace in my chest as I pat dry the calm. I'm feeling love in the fluffy towel as I dry the drops at the end of my longer than ever wet hair. Noticing that I am not feeling worried, anxious, or stressed. I would describe this feeling as ease.

Ease is not to be mistaken for any lack of projects, problems, and grad school packets due on my calendar. My head wants me to hurry up, move on to the next seasons of thinking, nail down action items. "Pick up the sloth's pace," my inner voice says. That voice sounding very much like Cinderella's stepsisters terrorized me a few days this month, asking: What are you even doing? What are you going to do next? Where do you even fit in? Where does someone like you even belong in the academic world?

Using my new tools in grad school research and recovery, I pause. A new rule of no negative self talk and super powers of optimism quickly helps me to flip this Negative Nelly noise in my head.

MORNING PAGES




I stare into the mirror saying, “I got you,” and talk as kindly to myself as I would a best friend. Thinking about, what is one of your passions? What is something you could talk about forever? What if there were no rules in the whole wide world, what then would you make?

The kind words begin to fill the buckets. Familiar words like gratitude, joy, optimism. Admiring my charisma, while admitting to myself on the other side of the shelf there’s trauma, recovery, healing, and mindfulness. Closing my eyes, hand to my chest, I take a big deep breath in and hold for 4, 3, 2, 1, and out through the mouth. There now, don’t we all feel better?

I see my hardiness, resilience, kindness, toughness, courage, boundaries, fear, anger, conflict, self compassion, curiosity, and imagination. I got you. Toweling off I tell myself to keep going, one day at a time, one piece at a time, just give it 1% today, just try, it took 3 big tries to get sober, maybe third times the charm. Bless your heart. Remember Dolly and find out who you are and do it on purpose. *xo*

**Morning Pages Entry, January 12, 2020:**

I sit at my office desk this morning. A desk that I own, of the business that I built, in a building with my name on the deed. The glow of the computer screen is casting a soft white light onto my notebook as I open it. I pick up my pen ready to scribble across the page. It’s an overcast, rainy, drizzle of a day.

I tap the spacebar and my study playlist begins. I’m listening to Suite Bergamasque: Clair de Lune, and the sound of spraying water hissing, as the world’s commuters are zooming by through puddles just outside. The dog snores and readjusts her curl as the heat kicks on. The coffee is piping hot off the rim of my cup. It’s morning pages time.

I am reflecting on the map dot where my feet touch, the longitude and latitude of my life. My career has been insanely fun. Yes, some days more of the insane side surfaces than the fun, but the fun side is time spent helping so many folks communicate better. I help them communicate better their sellings, their tellings, and their deals of the day.

MORNING PAGES



9 MONTHS SOBER: FEBRUARY 12, 2021

I don't know if the job I do is never ending or if it's beginning, but there is a change and a new something brewing. I can feel it swirling around me like the wind is whistling and gusting outside.

I used to dread the rain, fear a storm, run and hide, and wait for it to be over. Over so I could go back to the calm things, the same routine things, but today the energy feels different. Like a good rain is here to wash away yesterday's grime. It even is soothing me, and calming me. It's putting me at ease instead of into a panic. Maybe it's the rain, or maybe it's the Wolfgang piping from my playlist now, but it's good, so very good.

Waking up early, exercising, fasting, coffee, and pausing to write is a new treat, a treasure, and reward for surviving another day. Just thinking back to the to do's and tasks, and looking ahead to the tomorrows–we have this simple moment right now to pause, appreciate, and be mindful of where we are. In this moment I think back on how I got here, why am I here, and even glance just a bit further up the road to where my next "here" is going to be? It's ok if we don't know these answers, we do know we can just enjoy this moment and the clean wash of a good rain. I think of Rainer Maria Rilke words and how they comfort me, "I beg you, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them."

Why focus on the good rain? Because anxiety can quickly rush back in. When running behind, anxiety builds. Feeling rushed, full of a week of dreaded meetings, lunch appointments, and so many people messaging in all the ways trying to connect, they need help, need attention, it mentally drains me. It seems to get to a point when you feel you might drown as you add up all the things, on top of being off schedule. Then, the small drops feel heavier. Feel them? The dog is sick, one child has detention, and one has no gym shorts. Upset young adults make upset mom adults too.

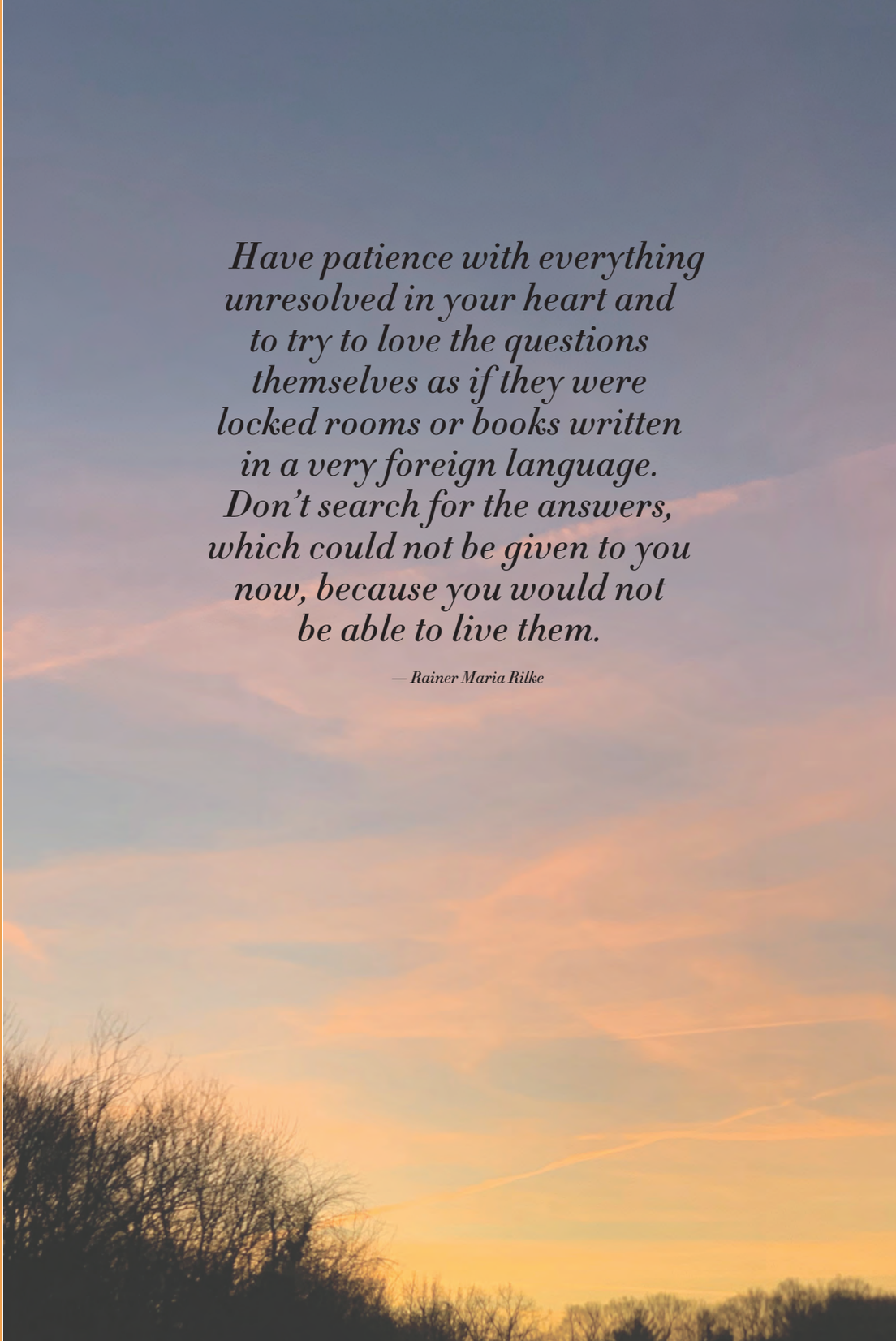
So, right now I'm trying to recenter myself. I'm being mindful, and intentional. Yes, I'm 37 minutes behind my schedule, as I glance at the clock, but think of what's been accomplished today....

5 a.m. gym (check), kids fed a healthy breakfast (check), the teenager fearfully drove us to school in the rain (check), the criminal reported to morning detention (check), I remembered my arthritis meds (check), I showered and washed my hair, and pooped! (check, check, check!) It's always so very nice when that task is over and flushed away before employees show up! The dog can be taken to the vet after lunch, the coach is not going to fail us for lack of gym shorts, and more have been ordered from Amazon to be here tomorrow. Royal blue shorts surely will get us into college?

I am slowly coming down from the demons that are trying to talk me into biting my nails, grabbing ChickFilA, or running away. We are going to make it through this day I assure you. Stay with me! It's only 8:07 a.m. Keep writing. Ding, buzz, the lunch meeting just canceled, see we feel better already. The coach understands not all people can fit into mediums. The detention hour has been served and the sun is beginning to shine on to my page. The coffee is strong and so are you.

Taking the deep breaths, we start the playlist again, we sip, write and calmly take a moment. Fire up the diffuser next, wild orange energy oil is pumping up into the air, it was Shea's favorite. The meds for the aching knees are helping, I tell myself as they burn. We'll write out our whole week of appointments in our planner next so no surprises take us down in battle. Don't you feel better already?

You know there's always going to be something, someone, some event that will throw you for a loop, but remind yourself and really believe that it's only temporary. It's not permanent. It's going to pass. You are going to get recentered, anchored, and back to steady. It may not be easy each time or as quick as you'd like, but I've learned to surrender to the feeling and the build up of the stress. I don't fight it anymore, I don't ignore it, or avoid it. I don't try to stuff it down into a box. I just let it in, look it in the face, and even welcome it into the day. The realization and acknowledgment of it isn't as scary as you think. Take it in, and make a plan, piece by piece, of how you will take back your mind's control. You can work your way right back into listening to the good rain. *xo*




WELCOME

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# COLOPHON

## CARBON 14

DESIGNED BY JOSEPH CONIGLIO IN 2003. CARBON 14 IS A FONT SET MADE UNDER PRESSURE. LITERALLY. INSPIRED BY DYMO EMBOSSING LABEL MAKER GUNS FROM THE 1960'S. I USED THE ORIGINAL LABEL MAKER GUN TO MAKE EMBOSSED LABELS ON THE FAMILY FARM. THIS FONT HAS THE SAME NOSTALGIC CHARACTERISTICS FROM MY CHILDHOOD. DYMO INDUSTRIES, INC. WAS FOUNDED IN 1958 TO PRODUCE HANDHELD TOOLS THAT USE EMBOSSING TAPE. THE EMBOSSING TAPE AND HANDHELD PLASTIC EMBOSSING LABELER WAS INVENTED BY DAVID SOUZA FROM OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA. THE DESIGNER DOES NOT CLAIM CREDIT FOR THESE ALPHABET CHARACTERS, BUT DOES TAKE CREDIT FOR SHEPHERDING THEIR INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY IN A NEW USABLE FORMAT. SAYING: THIS FONT SHOUTS TO REMAIN LEGIBLE. IT HARDENS AS IT AGES BUT DOES NOT TURN BRITTLE.

## Didot HTF

For about 100 years in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several members of the Didot family were active in Paris as designers. They were also printers, publishers, typefounders, inventors, writers and intellectuals. Pierre Didot published books and prints set in typefaces designed and punchcut by his brother, Firmin Didot. The development of hot type and then digital type saw changes to the basic font style, due in part to a common problem with not only the Didot font family but also with the Bodoni fonts. The conversion to digital resulted in a problem called "dazzle" where the fine thin lines in the smaller point sizes would disappear. In 1991 Adrian Frutiger was inspired by the study of the early Didot fonts. He came up with a solution for Dazzle by adapting the fonts with the creation of a heavier weighted stroke in the smaller sizes. A similar solution was created by Jonathan Hoefler in his adaptation that he named HTF Didot when he was at H&FJ. The Linotype Didot and HTF Didot are still widely used to this day in many forms of digital printing, particularly in books and magazines where an elegant old-fashion look is desired.



## Adobe Garamond™

The Adobe Garamond™ font family is based upon the typefaces first created by the famed French printer Claude Garamond in the sixteenth century. This serif face was created by Robert Slimbach and released by Adobe in 1989; its italics are influenced by the designs of Garamond's assistant, Robert Granjon. The Adobe Garamond design is considered one of the most versatile fonts available today and certainly one of the most attractive and graceful in print. It is also one of the most eco friendly types to print because the letterforms use less ink than other similar faces.

## Franklin Gothic

The original Franklin Gothic™ typeface was the third in a series of sans serif faces designed after American Type Founders was founded. In the early 1900s, ATF's head of typeface development, Morris Fuller Benton, began to create the type designs that would influence American type design for more than 40 years. The Globe Gothic™ face was his first sans serif design, which was followed shortly thereafter by Alternate Gothic. Around 1902, Franklin Gothic was cut, although it was not released as a metal font type until 1905

As he designed Franklin Gothic, Benton was likely influenced by the earlier sans serif designs released in Germany. Berthold had issued the Akzidenz Grotesk® series of typefaces (later known to American printers as "Standard") in 1898. Akzidenz Grotesk inspired the cutting of Reform Grotesk by the Stempel foundry of Frankfurt in 1903, and the Venus™ series of typefaces by the Bauer foundry, also of Frankfurt, in 1907.

