

Spirit Grooves Archive

Miscellaneous Writings — Book Three 2026

Articles 201–300

By Michael Erlewine

SpiritGrooves.net



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Gratitude

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 4, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6ed2fa2c-6c7c-4fc6-a749-c1611719b80b_1754x2048.jpeg

After many weeks of struggling, I finally got the SSL-Certificate to my website (SpiritGrooves.net) working properly. It has always been safe, but the SSL-Certificate was installed improperly and when you went to the website you saw a warning that the site was unsafe.

I had been working on it for weeks, on the phone with tech support at two different companies for hours at a time, going back and forth, waiting through the phone tree of one company and then the other. Each company said the other had to fix it. I can't tell you how frustrating and exhausting this ordeal was.

I finally gave up and called my oldest daughter Lotis who is a web manager of web masters for a large company, and it took her some time too, but yesterday she fixed the problem once and for all. I am so grateful! What a nightmare.

And speaking of gratitude brings to mind my dear mother, long gone from this world, for whom I will be forever grateful.

What can one say about their mother; I imagine a lot of things. In my case, my mom was the greatest mom to her five sons, of which I am the oldest.

Mom was always right there, taking care of all of us, and as we all created families, feeding us and eventually our kids too, way beyond the age she should have had to.

She did all that and was simultaneously a really excellent fine artist. Here is a batik she made of me back in the 1960s, capturing just how wild I was back then. It is quite large and hangs on the wall of our new exercise room.

My mother won all kinds of art awards and was an exhibitor in the Ann Arbor Art Fair for many years. Her maiden name was Phyllis Carey and she was Irish and my dad was Dutch that moved into Germany. According to my DNA, I am 73% Irish, however that works.

Anyway, my gratitude for my kids and their kids is great. Thank You!

[Photo of a batik of me as I was in the 1960s by my mother.]

EMAIL

Alberta Clipper

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/75ec5d4a-d71c-4369-b975-35da800ec923_986x1024.jpeg

Thursday: It's about five in the morning, the temperature outside is a cozy 17 degrees Fahrenheit and there is probably about four inches of fresh snow on the ground. It's even chilly inside and I have the thermostat cranked up about as far as it goes.

I want to eat something warm and get under a blanket. Some cooked grains (Kanjii) sound pretty good just about now. I'm wearing flannel shirts these days; I like the Black Watch plaid.

I should do something other than noodle here on FB, but instead I am writing this and thinking about making something warm for breakfast. No cold cereal.

I need to go next door to our dharma center and do some things, but the wind is howling outside, the snow blowing, and I just don't feel like doing that just now.

I could go back to sleep and top off my sleep budget, but perhaps I won't do that. I've done my weight training, rowing machine, etc., and also shaved, cut my hair with a "Flowbee," and took a shower, so that's done. I like to have everything I have to do done, so I can just do nothing for a change.

I could do more exercise, but one knee is hurting due to my handyman gyrations in the last couple of days putting the exercise room together.

So, I'm sitting here, listening to the wind howl, walking to the front door, looking out at the snow swirling in the air, and walking back here where I am writing this.

I settled on some yellow thin-skinned small potatoes that we oven roasted yesterday. I sliced them up, put them in a cast iron fry pan with a little olive oil, and added some cooked collard greens and some chick peas that I had to use up. It was good.

Nothing like a snowstorm to set the scene for a quiet winter dawn.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Equanimity

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 7, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5c56e7c1-ae12-4d92-88e5-78097a1e9054_1024x1024.jpeg

Battling my own prejudice, my tendency to put a thumb on my own scale.
How dumb is that?

Equanimity is precious and yet so hard to master and maintain.

It's particularly clear when Margaret and I are house hunting. If either one of us is overly attached to a house we are going to look at, it is clear that we have to discount what the other one says to the degree that they have their thumb on the scale.

Usually, we both snap out of it and together we see why or why not we aren't going to bid on a house.

Every once in a while, we both want a house and still the house is not for us. Our bid is turned down or we wake up to whatever imperfections we ignored just in time. If we don't, we just bought a house!

The pendulum of bias swings from one extreme to the other. Those extreme times, while short, are just that, extreme. Anyone can be equanimous in the middle of the pendulum swing, few can at the turnarounds, the extremes.

The habit of leaning into our prejudice is a hard one to break. How do you tell a prejudice as opposed to just liking something? You can tell because you are not at rest.

And what a wonderful feeling it is when we are not prejudiced, after being hurled around this way and that on a given topic.

How restful just experiencing anything without an edge on, one way or the other. Take it or leave it, as the case presents itself. Judge something on its own merits rather than on a bias.

And how rare!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Media Made

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e7f0b5e6-7823-4361-80a6-29caacdc2d4b_1732x1208.jpeg

[Just for fun, a brief history of my exposure to media.]

When I was a young boy, I lived out in the country in a house my parents had built for them. I rode into the city to and from school each day on a bus with other kids. The school bus picked me up and dropped me off at the end of our driveway each day.

I always looked forward to getting back home on the bus, running into our house, and listening to my favorite radio programs. We had a large, tall wooden radio, and I would sit down on the rug below it and listen. As my brothers came along, they would join me.

There were no televisions back then, only radio. We listened to radio shows like:

Amos 'n' Andy

The Great Gildersleeve

Captain Midnight

Jack Benny

Burns and Allen

Dragnet

Gunsmoke

Lone Ranger

Red Ryder

Have Gun – Will Travel

Bob Hope

Superman

Batman

Boston Blackie

Dick Tracy

Sam Spade

Cisco Kid

Death Valley Days

Roy Rogers

TV came along later, and like the huge radio consoles, it too was a large wooden box with a tiny little screen, and my brothers and I would all gather round the box and watch TV. However, as mentioned, before that it was just radio.

With television, tiny screens and all, came a plethora of shows, in particular a whole genre of westerns, action, and mysteries.

Tim Tyler's Luck

Have Gun – Will Travel

Guns smoke

Bonanza

Wanted: Dead or Alive

Rifleman

Cheyenne

Maverick

Sky King

Sergeant Preston

Roy Rogers

Zane Grey

Gene Autry

Jim Bowie

Gabby Hayes

Lash Larue

Fury

Hopalong Cassidy

Howdy Doody

Man Without a Gun

Rawhide

Wagon Train

Zorro

Rin Tin Tin

Lassie

Davy Crockett

Tom Mix

I don't remember ever having to NOT watch television or being told not to. We watched when we watched and that was that. We did pretty much the same with our four kids. They watched whatever they wanted. As for their kids, my grandkids, not so much. Media has taken over and needs rationing.

At the same time, from when I was very young, there were movies in theaters and they were in Technicolor and widescreen -- Cinemascope, Cinerama, Panavision, etc. And of course, much later, there were 70mm films shown in special theaters, such as IMAX.

As a kid I was raised on the original full-length Walt Disney Cartoons, unmatched back then, movies like Snow White, Dumbo, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Cinderella, Lady and the Tramp, Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, and others. And the thousands of Disney shorts, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, and on and on.

And then, in more recent times, when I was a teenager or older, movies began to stretch out, getting longer and longer. Hour and a half film became two hours, and then three... until before I knew it movies became the series we have today, some stretching out for eight or ten seasons, hundreds of segments. They no longer easily fit on a single DVD. Streaming is almost everything today.

As founder of the All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com), one of the two largest film databases on the planet, movies and video were an important part of my life and I did my best to document film and video because they literally are a pictorial history of our society as it grew and were so much a part of my life.

Today, 2024, my favorite mini-series are those written by Taylor Sheridan, because for me they are just the right mix of story, action, and character. Sheridan wrote series like Yellowstone, Lioness, 1883, Landman, 1923, Tulsa King, Wind River, Sicario, Mayor of Kingstown, and Hell or High Water.

“Yellowstone” hit me like a sledgehammer; I couldn’t get enough of it, and I’ve never seen a better presentation of wranglers, ranch hands, cattlemen, cow hands, and the like. And I was raised on old B&W westerns.

If I ask myself, what is it about Taylor Sheridan’s series and films that are so mesmerizing, the answer is ‘blue collar life’, something a middle-class kid like me never saw enough of, yet there is something about the skilled trades and working outside of an office that fascinates me. And with Sheridan’s films, I often get a long look at the views, long enough to relax and take it all in. I not only get a great movie, but I also get a bit of education on those rougher ways of life and the beauty contained in them.

[Photo of Taylor Sheridan.]

EMAIL

What Can We Do?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 13, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cc4b6f29-c65a-47ab-af91-d643a4fadf40_2048x2048.jpeg

What I tell myself, is that I won't be deterred and thrown off track by what is probably going to happen for the next four years or longer. The ensuing chaos of politics, seeming impossibility to get anything done by Congress, the political in general, and world wars are seriously distracting and will be.

Yet, where I'm at and the trajectory I am on has not changed a lot, all things considered. At 83 years I am on the path toward personal EXFILL and the world condition in the U.S. can't change this all that much.

I very much want to not harm this world but, as my daughter May Erlewine's song "Leave a Good Feeling" says so well, to leave a good feeling:

The swell of events, just the world continuing on, dictate a trajectory we can't avoid, yet how we handle it is more or less up to us. Becoming an island in that sea of change, isolation, does not make much sense either.

I well remember the high mountains of Tibet, the couple of times I have been there. I would be standing in the sunlight and it was hot, yet if I stepped one foot away into the shadow of a building it was almost freezing. This current world situation reminds me of that.

It seems we are between a rock and a hard place, damned if we do and damned if we don't.

I try my best to mind my own business, but it seems my 'business' requires I have one foot in the door of current events, so that I am not blindsided. And often I find myself stumbling over my own feet.

No doubt we are going to at least witness whatever is about to happen and what will go on. No, I'm not about to move to Canada. Perhaps some good will come out of all this, if only what serves to unite many of us as to what's clear to see.

At best, I am just a dharma-oriented version of Andy Rooney, an essayist and commentator.

Do we need to eat Pabulum to be well or will some version of Pasta Puttanesca bring the best out of us?

When I used to drink beer, it was seldom-to-never the dark or sweet lager beers; I loved the bitter pilsner beers, like Becks, St. Pauli Girl, and the like. With pasta, I like the Arrabbiata, Vodka Sauce, and Puttanesca best, although my body cannot take a lot of spice. With Mexican food, it's the Carne Asada, although I don't eat meat any longer.

So, which side am I on, this side or the other? And what's the difference? And are not sides the hallmark of Samsara --duality?

PARMENIDES

Each to each the sorrow tells:

Find another.

Alone is borne the pain,

Alone the sorrow,

Alone the joy,

Today's tomorrow.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Tides of Life

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 14, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a9a6ec4e-84ba-4d3f-983f-88d9acab72f6_1024x1024.jpeg

When I lived just two blocks from the Atlantic Ocean on the north shore of Boston, it was obvious that the tides are important to be aware of. You could see the tides working and I would walk on the wet beach when the tides were out and watch the waves beat against the retaining walks when the tide was in.

There are tides in our life as well, daily tides, monthly tides, and longer tides that we don't know the cause of, yet we feel them beating against us. Some days we are up, and some days we are down. We never know what the next day is going to bring.

And the mood of the day can turn on a dime, just as the sun can be out one minute and gone the next.

As they say, "make hay while the sun shines," so strike while the iron is hot and make the most of each moment.

How best to deal or work with a situation that turns against us overnight or in a moment, in a blink of the eye?

I know from bitter experience that fighting against the tides of life, opposing them, is useless and only makes the situation worse. However, we can learn to use the tides.

So, if I feel my hackles getting up, best to cool my jets and back off. I know of no way to 'mess' with the roll of the tides and gain anything whatsoever. Other than to surf them. Give the situation time; that usually helps.

And to get in a stew thinking about it all day is another waste of time, as well.

No resistance is best. Go limp, so to speak. Work with the tides. Be passive, which means let it pass, much like in the Bible it frequently says, let it pass.... Like "This came to pass" or "That came to pass." These situations don't come to last, but rather pass.

I very much like a song by my daughter May Erlewine, with the line that says, "Trouble ain't built to last." It is very positive; give it a listen

“Rise Up Singing” by May Erlewine.

And here are a couple of free books on the moon and the tides that might be useful.

“Vision of the Eclipse”

https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/vision_eclipse.pdf

“Mother Moon: Astrology of the Lights”

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/MotherMoon.pdf>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Astrology is Cultural Astronomy

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 17, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c6c63f73-0afb-4c28-8dbf-15d6ffcd4d68_1382x1039.jpeg

Astrology, simply put, has to do with the meaning of astronomy, what astronomy means. In other words, astrology is cultural astronomy/

Anything else, mystical, psychic, mind-reading, seances, and on-down-the-line is not relevant. An astrologer may also be a psychic or mind-reader, but that is not astrology's bailiwick. Astrology is about astronomy. Period. End of story.

I understand that many astrologers are spiritual polymaths, perhaps, adept in many things. Yet, the astrology part of them has to do with what do these astronomical events portend or mean, if anything? And astrologers agree to disagree about what astronomical events mean. Indeed they do.

Of course, with sixty years and more of astrology under my belt, I gave up altogether, long ago, trying to argue the case for astrology with the general public or even with astrologers themselves.

Astrologers who claim and insist that astrology is a predictive science, predictive of the future, including the stock market, my only comment is that astronomy can predict very accurately where the planets and heavenly bodies will be in the future and what interplanetary events will occur, yet IMO astrology only pertains to what do these planetary and heavenly astronomical events mean. What do they portend? In that sense, astronomy can predict the future of astronomical events. And astrology is about explaining what these astronomical events mean.

However, when the cart comes before the horse, and we claim to predict the future, we have left the realm of what astrology can do and entered that of predicting events like a fortune teller. Many astrologers claim to that. Perhaps they can. All I can say is that I cannot predict the future myself, except as I mentioned, in tabulating forthcoming astronomical events.

A Mars/Saturn conjunction may suggest many interpretations, I agree. Yet to go from that to predicting everything under the sun, with no explicit astronomical reasons given, we are entering the realm of fortune telling, or an attempt to do so. I diverge from that kind of astrologer.

For example, if we can predict the stock market, there is no good reason why we should not be very wealthy by using that information. In fact, as corroborative with this I actually have some experience to report.

On July 30-31, 1988 at Matrix Software in Big Rapids, Michigan, we held the first "Natural Cycles Conference," featuring 17 experts in cycle research of one kind or another, including a great many who are considered experts in the stock market and financial cycles.

Instead of having a bunch of experts giving lecture after lecture, I wanted to instead have dialogue rather than monologue, so we had round-table discussions dealing with long and short term cycles, circadian rhythms, and related cyclic phenomena, with particular emphasis concerning stock market and investments.

Speakers included Arch "Sam" Crawford (stock market), Pat Esclavon-Hardy (stock market), Jeffer Horowitz Executive Director of the Foundation for the Study of Cycles, Bill Meridian (stock market), John Townley (life and career Cycles), Norman Winski (stock market), Carol Mull (stock market), Mason Sexton (stock market), John Van Zandt (cycles research), Larry Pasavento (stock market), Jim Twentyman, Neil Michelsen (cycles), Gill Herrera (stock market), Mr. & Mrs. Greg Meadows (stock market), William Eng (stock market), Michael Munkasey (natural cycles) and of course Michael Erlewine (tidal and natural cycles). There were a few more. In addition, some 80 other folks showed up to witness and attend the conference. There was quite a bunch of us.

Before I put on my critic-hat, I want to say we had a wonderful time with some very nice people. It was fun.

Yet, as a critic, I have to say this, and I will not name names. Because there were so many speakers, the agreement was that we would feed them all and put up as many as we could, and we did. However, each of them had to find their own way to get here.

And what I found out, and this is the critical part, many of them could not afford to get here and we had to end up paying for their travel and slipping them money on the side just for them to get to the conference, and these were all stock-market people who had come up short.

And here is my point. If these folks are experts on advising people how to make money with the stock market, one would think that the first thing they would do would be to make themselves a pile of money so they could turn up to conference like this one. That did not see the case.

So, IMO, there was screw loose with many of these folks that although they made their living giving advice to others, that for themselves they were unable to make money with the stock market. Go figure.

So, indeed I consider myself an astrologer and have since around 1960 or so, over 60 years. And I have worked hard to expand the technical part of astronomy so that astrologers could see if we can explain what all these heavenly events mean.

What it boils down to is, are our interpretations useful enough to provide any guidance in life?

For me, they have, and I have published a great number of free books explaining what I have understood about all of this. Here is the link.

<https://spiritgrooves.net/#&panel1-4>

As for what other astrologers do and say, it's all over the board, IMO.

[Photo of some of the 1988 speakers at the first "Natural Cycles Conference" at Matrix Software in Big Rapids, Michigan.

EMAIL

The Thin Times

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a9c15bdc-04b0-432c-9ae6-272202173ad8_1024x1024.jpeg

[How trivial, yet how very much present.]

Wave forms and the cycles of everything, good, bad, and indifferent. The swing of the pendulum.

I will have a run of blogs here and just as they first arrive without notice, when they play themselves out, they vanish as easily, leaving me with no inspiration and usually exhausted.

The point where the breath of life is out and not yet returning.

They have exhausted themselves and me in the process. This is the way life is, a bit of feast or famine, at least in my book.

Over time, finally, I am learning to go with the flow, so to speak, write with abandon when the inspiration is there and accept the lack of inspiration when it vanishes, just as I do the influx.

I don't like to feel that I am a victim when there is no inspiration, any more than I see myself blessed when it flows. This is what I mean when I say that life is cyclic, that Samsara is cyclic, going up, down, and around. There seem to be tides in everything, just as the old saying says that the only thing that does not change is change itself.

Only change is changeless. I have no choice but to affirm that.

So, the part I don't like, the part that makes me wince and

'take note', is when there is no insight or urge to write or do anything at all. Yes, those times grow less and as usual I still wait them out as not quite a happy camper.

How to embrace that too, the unhappiness, my perhaps being a little unhappy, yet I am able to even take note of these empty or turnaround times. I believe I just used to suffer them not so consciously.

Do I welcome them, the void and empty times? I can't say that I do, yet I AM celebrating them consciously at this point. Like right now. I am blogging on

the lack of insight instead of complaining. Well, perhaps my even noting of these empty times is a more subtle form of complaint, but I also see the futility in doing that.

Ah yes, the Tibetans have been there, with their three types of suffering: The suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and all-pervasive suffering.

Does my 'taking note' of these 'thin' times further extend them? I don't think so. Their turning around always turns them around and if I can celebrate that turning point as well, through awareness of them and in verse, perhaps they are not there at all, or hardly there. Will the circle ever be unbroken?

"What Goes Around, Comes Around."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Time and Cycles

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/56959444-237d-4f56-991e-be30a8cf5953_1024x1024.jpeg

[This is a long one folks, so I understand that you may not have time to step through this. This is an introduction to what is called esoteric or occult astrology for those who have the time and can pick up on it.]

What does it mean for us to endure?

Everything is cyclic, starting with our heartbeat, with our lungs and breathing, etc. It's all about cycles and their persistence.

Take for instance a comet and its return. If a comet only flies by once and never returns, there is no reminder that the comet exists. It came and went, a single appearance. If that comet does not cycle and repeat itself, it's soon out of memory.

This is true for all cycles and, as mentioned, without the beat of a return, like a beating heart, our breathing, the lunar cycle, the solar cycle, each planet's cycle, etc., it's out of memory, out of mind.

In other words, it is only by returning, repeating, repositing, that we continue to exist. Posit, posit, posit, posit. Like that. Everything has its heartbeat.

It's why I study astrology because it is a study of planetary and cosmic cycles. As an astrologer, for example, we speak of a Saturn Return at 29.4 years, and every 29.4 years after that until our life is worn out. The various planets return to their original positions as follows:

Mercury: 88 Earth days

Venus: 225 Earth days

Earth: 365.25 days (1 year)

Mars: 687 Earth days

Jupiter: 4,333 Earth days (about 11.86 years)

Saturn: 10,759 Earth days (about 29.46 years)

Uranus: 30,687 Earth days (about 84.01 years)

Neptune: 60,190 Earth days (about 164.79 years)

Pluto: 90,560 Earth days (about 248 years)

And the Moon takes 27.3 days for its sidereal period, and 29.5 days for its synodic period.

The 'sidereal period' is the time each planet and the Moon takes to complete one full orbit around the Sun (or around the Earth for the Moon), while the 'synodic period' refers to the time it takes a planet or the Moon to return to the same position relative to the Sun, or for the Moon, the Earth.

I don't want to get too technical in such a short article as this, but the idea is that everything we know returns or persists only by continuing to posit itself. Everything has a beat or rhythm, like a heartbeat, although the persistence of something like a rock or 'thing' may persist for a length of time we are not aware of.

Astrology is all wrapped up with the concept of time.

The great and small cycles of the planets provide the guide for most of what passes for time in our world. It is often commented how many astrologers are also musicians. Music, too, is all about time. In Tibetan Buddhism, the study of astrology is part of what is termed the Kalachakra Tantra. Kalachakra means the wheel or cycle of time. Even beginning astrology students know that Saturn is the lord or prince of time. Saturn rules the material world. An understanding of Saturn and its sequence of time is essential to any serious study of astrology.

The return of Saturn to its natal position around the age of 30 (29.4 years helio) is an important astrological event and what is called a climacteric year. "Never trust anyone over thirty" is, by now, a well-known slogan.

The completion of ANY planetary cycle, especially for the first time around, marks a very significant change in our life and consciousness. The return of Mercury in the chart of an infant at three months marks the onset of what has been termed "adult awareness."

Around this time the child's motor responses switch from reflex to voluntary. He or she begins to see in color! The return of Venus at some 7 1/2 months is when the baby first can discriminate between itself and its mother. A duality occurs that allows appreciation.

At one year, the Earth return, most children get up and begin to walk. The "terrible twos" (18 months) marks the Mars return, when baby discovers

emotions and struggles for independence — looking outward for the first time!

And at 12 years, Jupiter returns, marking the onset of adolescence and the beginning of a real sense of time. After the Jupiter return, the individual begins to pick up on and to monitor the most definite of cycles, that of Saturn.

The most dramatic return has to be the return of Saturn to its place around 29.4 years of age. In a very real sense, it marks the end of time for an individual. Saturn is the marker of time. And here we begin to dip into what is called esoteric astrology, an area not well understood even by most professional astrologers. I have always been fascinated by it.

Saturn, the great marker of time, drags out its wheel or cycle for a full thirty years. During all of this time, Saturn is tracing out new territory (for any given individual) against the backdrop of the zodiac. It is going around for the first time, with no repeats thus far. We have all seen the beer commercial that tells us that "You only go around once!" Astrologers wouldn't agree with that, but we do know that first cycle or circle around the zodiac is an important one.

The first cycle of Saturn (first 30 years) fills the life with a sense of the future, always leading toward somewhere. The great time measurer, Saturn, keeps time for us like a metronome. We measure our life against its constant ticking and the beat appears to lead us toward the future.

This regular sequencing of events plays our life out like a movie score — a great and constant heart beating within us, giving birth to the moment. Saturn is concerned with the external and the sequence of external events that provide our particular set of circumstances. We come to depend upon its very regular movement. We are cradled inside this first Saturn cycle, like a baby in the womb. It never occurs to us that this very constant beating, like the surf washing up against the shore, could ever change, much less lose meaning for us. But change it does.

Very few of us are prepared for what happens on the esoteric plane at the Saturn return. Saturn does complete the circle of the zodiac and begins to repeat itself — go around a second time. However, as most of us are wrapped up in time and its circumstances, Saturn's return marks a dramatic change in our life — how we conceive of time itself.

The image I would like to convey to you is that of a child leaving its mother's womb. With the Saturn return, we pass beyond the grasp or cycle of time and walk out into eternity. Like a ship leaving port, we sail straight out into the blue.

The image of the astronaut floating out there in space on the end of a thin tether is a good one. We are born beyond gravity or the grave and begin a new weightless or enlightened existence. Sound strange?

Perhaps, but this is a fair description of the actuality. Here is an esoteric truth, yet a truth so exact and real that it boggles the mind. Each of us passes beyond the grip of Saturn and floats beyond the grave (gravity) into middle age. "Never trust anyone over thirty" is a common refrain.

As Saturn turns to repeating itself and begins to go over ground that we have already covered in this life, our absolute fascination with it (and time) fades. In the middle of life, we begin to stir and wake up to a life beyond time. There are many names for this experience in the occult literature. Perhaps the most common is the term "silence." We are said to enter the silence. Perhaps, entering the silence is nothing more than stepping beyond the noise or music of time. Can you hear the silence? Emptiness? However you may wish to spell it, we do go beyond time, and not at life's live-long end, but right in the prime or middle of life.

Another of the great esoteric truths is that death is only an illusion. Or, if we must think in terms of death, then the death that all speak of comes not at the end of life, but more smack dab in the middle of life. The so-called prime of life is also the passage from within life (within the grip of time) to beyond time and into a new life — a threshold, a passing beyond or passing on. This is where the phrase "born again" comes from.

This great event, and the rites of this momentous passage from within time to without or beyond time, is the Saturn return around the age of thirty years. And this passage follows on the esoteric or psychological level the exact same sequence of events found in the physical birth of the in fact. In other words, there is the birth canal ... the moving down it ... the birth of the head ... the birth of the body, and then moving free of the mother, etc. Even the birth of the placenta!

Each of us peeks out and steps beyond time at about thirty years of age. However, very few of us are prepared for this event, can witness to it, or have the least idea of what is happening to us. We lack the training needed to prepare us to experience this great initiation with consciousness or awareness. Most of us are numbed by the sheer magnitude of what happens. It can take years to register this momentous event. Some never remember or put it all together and become aware of what is so obvious. We fail to celebrate this great life initiation.

Let me slow down and repeat the main idea being presented here: All planet cycles measure our life and are important objects of study. Yet time, and the kind of event consciousness that the everyday world measures, belongs to the sphere of the planet Saturn.

Saturn measures and rules time, circumstances, and the sequencing of everyday events. Therefore, the cycle of Saturn, and its return at around the age of thirty years marks an important esoteric event or initiation. This event is so profound and pervasive — SO VERY OBVIOUS — that there is little or no conscious recognition of it.

Instead, there are endless innuendoes and oblique references to this great passage from within to without, from having time to having none. There is a constant subconscious murmur taking place, a hum of reference to this initiation, this event in the lives of each of us. We don't recognize it.

What I am saying is: Time stops at thirty. The trickle of new events that have led us toward the future ceases when Saturn begins to repeat itself at 29.4 years. A great hush falls over our life as we sail beyond the circle or cycle of time into what can only be called eternity. Like the astronaut pushed free of the mothership, each of us spins off into space, turning and floating ... turning and floating ... trying to figure out what has happened.

Eternity just in time itself

When time repeats itself, it stops for all practical purposes. No more does it call and beckon us with the promise of an endless linear progression. We each begin to experience the circularity of it all, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Under Saturn's seal or cycle (under age 30), we are led toward the future as to some place that we might achieve or get to. At thirty, we begin to realize that our mode of travel, our way of life, is a goal in itself — the way to go. In other words, the place we are traveling to becomes our mode of travel, the way we get there. Shakespeare might have said "Call what carriage as ye may, your hearse." Chuck Berry said it: "No particular place to go."

The movement I am describing here is from within the womb of time to outside (without) or beyond time. Once outside, we begin to view those still within time as babies asleep in the womb, while we find ourselves as born free of time for the first time in our lives.

A palindrome is a word, verse, or sentence that reads the same forwards as backwards. "Able was I ere I saw Elba" is a famous one that refers to Napoleon. The fascination with palindromes becomes an obsession at the

level of the esoteric. There is a point when each of us begins to read life backward as well as forward — no difference!

Better yet, we begin to read life as a circle or cycle. The Saturn return at 29.4 years stands out like a great beacon in our lives. It is what is called a climacteric year. There is a great stream of souls leading up to this event and another stretching off into middle-age beyond this time.

The younger souls can but imagine what someone is talking about who has taken the Saturn return initiation. Their life is filled by the incessant hum and drum of the Saturn cycle laying down each beat and measure of time for the first time, first 360 degrees. It fills the mind up with activity.

A few souls, with a thirst for the esoteric, can peer beyond the womb of time for snapshots of what is to come — glimpses of eternity. The older souls can tell the younger of what is coming, but most young listeners cannot hear that well.

And we might ask, what is the point of hearing or prefacing such a natural event? Why not let nature take her course? There are many possible answers to this question. My own feeling is that once upon a time we were trained or prepared for esoteric events such as the Saturn return. We were prepared to experience it in a conscious way, to appreciate and know what it was that is happening to us at the time it happens rather than to piece together some story from hindsight many years afterward.

What I am speaking of is nothing more than the "awareness" of life that all esoteric students encourage. Awareness of what, in fact, IS and is happening — happening right now. To measure and appreciate life as it happens and preparation for these events can be important.

Just as the doctor tries to adjust the infant in the womb so that it enters the birth passage in a natural way, so too we can set the sails for our inner birth. Like a sailing ship, we come from within the womb of time to sail beyond time in our particular version of eternity. It can matter to us how our sails are set and how we take the winds of change.

This is why I write on this subject. I had the good fortune to receive instructions on this subject prior to my Saturn return. And although I had great difficulty understanding what was being presented to me at the time, some glimpse into the reality of this passage did filter through to me. Like a baby in the womb, I did prepare myself for what was coming and I did experience a portion of it with awareness or consciousness. And yes, it was more than worthwhile to do so.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Winter Solstice: It's the Pagan in Me

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 20, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/211e2b08-f90d-4301-8721-140eff43d5da_665x670.jpeg

Saturday December 21, 2024 at 4:21 AM EST

Thanksgiving is my favorite legal Holiday, but you can have the rest of them. I am not much of an officially-declared holiday person, especially if we are talking about New Year's Eve. My daughter May does a huge New Year's Eve concert (usually sold out) that reaches beyond midnight, to which I am, of course, always invited, but I have never gone.

Where I do go on New Year's Eve is to bed, and early at that, way before Midnight. I just don't care about calendar holidays. My family does its best to tolerate me; they like a good celebration, drag out the board games, and party it up. I am sorry to disappoint them.

But I am not completely holiday-less. I have my own idea of holidays, and the Solstices top the list. Those of you who read this blog know I love New and Full Moons, and especially eclipses. I am not sure that 'love' is the right word. Let's just say I observe the lunar cycle regularly. I take note.

For example, we just had a rather tough New Moon on December 1, 2024 at 5:27 PM EST, so we are on an upswing by now or at least having a shift in emphasis. What does get my blood moving, however, are the solstices, especially the Summer Solstice, but the Winter Solstice is second on my list and just as important.

Of course, the Winter Solstice marks the last dark day of the year (at least my year) and the moment when the Sun (you know I love the Sun) begins to move northward once again. Things literally get brighter. I know, at first, we only gain a few seconds more light with each sunrise, but within a month or so it can be many minutes a day, and thankfully they all add up to the Spring Equinox!

I am definitely a creature of the light. I don't hate darkness, but I tend to wade into it looking for the end of the tunnel. This particular Winter Solstice will be on Saturday December 21, 2024 at 4:21 AM EST. That is my holiday or 'holy' day. I actually do celebrate it each year, perhaps not with balloons and confetti, but with a deep inner thankfulness and joy at the thought of the

return of the Sun. The Tibetans say that even lighting one match can end eons of darkness; just think what the Sun does each day and each year.

And of course, if you study the history of celebrations, you would be hard pressed to find one more celebrated than the Winter Solstice. What we call New Year's Day does not hold a candle to the Sun and the Solstice celebrations. They go back as far as we know time.

As for how I celebrate the Winter Solstice? I don't cook a turkey, go to church, stay up late, eat too much, take the day off, or any of that stuff. I do offer my thanks from deep within myself and I am glad inside at the thought of the return of the Sun and the possibility of another spring and summer as the Sn moves northward. Each summer is so precious.

Some in my family laugh at how much I make of that little bit more light that each day brings after Winter Solstice. But as an astrologer, to me everything is about cycles or circles (actually spirals).

Jim McCarty, a friend, who founded and played drums for the Yardbirds, went on to make an album called "Out of the Dark" in 1994 that I just love. I have played it for others and many don't get it, but I get it and love it. This album is a breath of the Sixties spirit that somehow lived on. In that album is a song "What if Summer Never Came," the title of which says it for me.

We all have some music that is our secret joy, music that perhaps others never get no matter how we try to share it. Well, McCarty's album "Out of the Dark," is one of my secret pleasures, music that somehow escaped from the 1960s, a time capsule from that era, which sums it up for me.

It never fails to take me back there and renews my heart. Oddly enough, it is more accurate in spirit than the 1960s themselves were. Enough said. Thank you Jim! Here is the song "Out of the Dark" by McCarty.

Final Album:

So, I look forward to the Winter Solstice this week and that spark of new light.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

This Day

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 20, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c94d3b7c-d3c4-4e14-878b-436a42b26e6b_2048x2048.jpeg

It was snowing when I went to bed and snowing when I got up; it's snowing now. The snow trucks are rattling by like slow-moving trains. It's cold outside. So, what do I do?

Well, first I did everything I have to do. It's my day to clean, vacuum, and mop the lower bathroom, back hall, living room, entryways, and another room. Also, clean the downstairs bathroom and the lower bathroom. That was about 3 AM. Next, I had to shower (I forgot to shave) and change my clothes. I'm clean.

Then I did all my exercise training, rowing machine, weight bench, etc. I still felt the cold.

So, I did something I have not done in a long time; I made Chile with no meat, two 28 oz cans of kidney beans, lots of sauteed onion, large can of diced tomatoes, some chili powder, half a bay leaf, and even a dash of cacao powder. It's cooking on the stove now and it's 5 AM.

That's as far as I got. What I do from here on out, other than to eat some chili, I have no idea. The weather report says no sun today and more snow. That means probably no photography. I need sunlight most times.

Do I want to write something? Not sure. Perhaps. It's too snowy to go to the grocery store, at least not until the roads are clear. Perhaps I will study some dharma texts.

Oh yes, I did my laundry; it's in the dryer now.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Blue-Collar Fever

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 23, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/20377d0e-21cc-4ca4-ab59-4173bc9dacee_1024x1024.jpeg

[This is just a question, not a statement. I'd like to know what you think about this.]

As you may know, in the 1990s I founded the All-Movie Guide, one of the two largest movie and video databases on the planet. Why? Because I love film and popular culture, I wanted to preserve and honor it. I also founded the All-Music Guide, which still is the largest music database on the planet. Here in this post I'm looking at video and film.

I started young with video, back in the 1940s, watching full-length movies like Walt Disney's cartoons. I grew up on that and endless short cartoons. I have mentioned this before. Anyway, these days I have this observation that I would like your thoughts on. Here it is.

I can remember when video documentaries, although few, were just that, documentaries. I'm not sure when documentaries turned into reality TV, but they sure did. I was never very interested in 'Reality TV', except perhaps, early on, for something like "Candid Camera".

My interest in Reality TV sparked when it segued into series that showed another side of life entirely, shows like "Gold Rush," Timber cutting, python hunting, alligator hunting, diamond diving, precious gems, not to mention scores of shows about being left out in the woods when winter comes on and surviving. Of all the series of reality videos I have seen, the most striking and real was "Deadliest Catch," which is about fishing for King Crab and others in winter in the Bering Sea. The meaning of team work is displayed there.

What's happening here?

To me, most of these new reality TV series are themselves a sign, like thermometers, taking the temperature of modern life. The need watching them is telling us something?

We are obviously not getting enough of reality-in-the-raw, so we have to pipe it in to our lives. It's similar to the series by writer Taylor Sheridan, like "Yellowstone," "Landman," "Mayor of Kingstown," "1923," "1883," and others, which either glorify the reality of the old west or life out-of-the-office, the

various blue-collar trades, or the wranglers in “Yellowstone” and the oilmen in “Landman.”

And so, I find it interesting to find myself steadily losing interest in stories, fiction, animation of any kind, and find myself hungering for something that smacks more of real-life experience, like the above-mentioned series.

And as mentioned, I never got into the family reality TV or into shows like Trump’s “The Apprentice.” They didn’t spark me at all. Instead, I found myself watching reality shows like hunting for alligators (or Burmese Pythons) in the Everglades, or finding precious jewels, wherever. And I got into survival shows like “Alone,” “Castaways,” “Alaska: The Last Frontier,” “Swamp People,” and even the popular show “Survivor.”

Somehow, I was tired of made-up fiction, cast movies, shorts, and the what-have-you that I grew up with. I am hungry for something that is at least a little bit real, and for me, the least scripted, the better.

Yet, I have to ask myself, what is this major shift in me? Why this hunger for non-fiction?

The only thing I come up with is that life, this modern life, perhaps prompted by the virtual online media that more and more of us enjoy, is denying us the actual real-life experience that inside we hunger for.

Or is online experience itself a new kind of life experience that, although meaningful, is wanting in some life-experience vitamins we need and used to get.

And from these current reality series we get a shot of reality, some life vitamins, in that they exhibit real emotions or real suffering, or even the scripted series like “Yellowstone” that writers like Taylor Sheridan provide feature wranglers or blue-collar workers.

I’m not an expert and I’m just asking the question, putting this out there and wondering what others are experiencing.

I was raised as a naturalist, so I’m not getting as much or perhaps enough natural outdoor experience as I used to. Or, since I worked in an office for many decades, even though I insisted it be a home office so I could be with my family, there is something missing in my diet of actual experience., that I used to get.

And I’m getting it in these reality series, soaking them up, and being stimulated by what could best be described as the blue-collar trades that perhaps I did not rub shoulders with enough in my inside-office jobs. I feel it in

those tradesmen and women who are out of the office and in some sense working free or closer to the grain of life.

You tell me; I'm asking. What are your thoughts?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Funny Story: Englebert Humperdinc

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 24, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/fbbb5824-796a-48e5-9f4e-4a71e2bbb555_1548x1024.jpeg

[This is Christmas Eve, so I will tell a little Christmas Eve story, not about Santa Claus or reindeer, but a real-life story, one I find fun and funny.]

This is a story from back in the days when I was running AMG, the All-Music Guide, All-Movie Guide, All-Game Guide, etc., probably around 1992. For those who don't know AMG, it is the largest music review and biography database in the world (<https://www.allmusic.com/>), while the All-Movie Guide is one of the two largest film web sites in the world, and so on (<https://www.allmovie.com>).

Anyway, I founded and created AMG, was its president, and at the time of this story we had perhaps about 150 full-time staff and over 500 free-lance writers. Aside from a massive web site, we also produced a series of printed music guides. To make this happen meant that we had to divide up all of the great musicians and composers in the world among our music editors and the hundreds of free-lance writers we worked with, having each music writer doing this or that band or musician.

Of course, great musicians like Bob Dylan, Billie Holiday, and the like were picked by the most well-known writers, and so it went on down the line. When all was said and done, there was only a single group of musicians that none of our staff or any of the free-lance writers wanted to do, and that was those easy-listening musicians you sometimes see selling their albums through infomercials on late-night TV, singers like Roger Whitaker, Tom Jones, Richard Clayderman, Roger Williams, and sometimes John Denver and Barry Manilow. You know the type of commercials.

Many were crooners that you seldom saw on sale at record stores (except in the remainder bins), but they were all over the late-night commercials. You get the idea. This story is about one of those lounge singers, Englebert Humperdinck. Not one of the hundreds of writers working for us wanted to do his biography and rate his albums. The same was true for a number of these easy-listening types.

As the founder and head of AMG, it fell upon me to do something with these elevator-music late-night wonders, and so I held my nose and just did it

myself. This was years before I could openly admit to myself that I actually liked some elevator music when in the right mood. Anyway, that's off-topic.

The bottom line here is that it was up to me as leader to write the elevator-music biographies and so I went through the album chronology of many of these easy-listening singers and groups that, as mentioned, seemingly only appear selling their special kind of romantic elevator music through late night TV commercials, and this included the singer Englebert Humperdinck. And that completes the intro for this story. On to our yearly family vacation.

My wife Margaret loves to go to the lake and once a year this usually involves renting a cottage somewhere on Lake Michigan and spending an entire week there. Now personally I hate vacations. To me they are the most boring times of the year, times where I sit around and tap my fingers waiting for them to be over. This was before I really got re-interested in nature photography. Of course, Margaret and the kids had a wonderful time, which is as it should be. I would just wait these vacations out, impatiently.

For me, because I love what I do, my day-to-day life already was a vacation so, as they say, you can't salt the salt, thus my attitude toward vacations. This particular year we had rented a cottage up on Cathead Bay near Northport, Michigan at the very tip of Michigan's lovely Leelanau Peninsula. It really is a beautiful spot, but not a place I want to spend an entire week at, at least back then. I had no access to a computer, no Internet, etc.

Anyway, there I was, bored out of my mind and counting the days until we could get home and back to normal life. I was looking through one of those local event newspapers when I came upon the name "Englebert Humperdinck."

Of course, I remembered him as one of those creepy late-night crooners that I never cared for. As it turned out, he was playing at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, some forty-five minutes or so from the cottage. I was no fan of Humperdinck's, but I had done his biography and all of that... and, most of all, I was really bored.

By God, for a lark, I decided we would just go to that show and have a good laugh. It would be a diversion from the sand and shore that I was already so tired of. And so, we did. I got tickets and when the evening of the performance came, Margaret and I headed off to Interlochen's great outdoor (partially covered) auditorium. It would be fun.

And we had good seats, right in the middle and close to the front. I was more than ready for this lounge act featuring Humperdinck. As a professional music critic, I have reviewed all kinds of music, all kinds of singers, musicians, and so

forth. So, I was totally ready to handle someone as inconsequential to my mind as a fellow named Arnold George Dorsey who had taken as his stage name a lesser-known 19th Century classical German opera composer. Give me a break. This would be a trip. And then it began.

Suddenly Humperdinck was there on stage in front of me. In the flesh he looked much more human than the musical caricature that I had envisioned in my mind. In fact, he was downright handsome and radiating charisma. Whoa... this was not what I had expected. And then he began to sing.

And did he sing! I was stunned. Before I knew it, I was sitting there with tears running down both cheeks, absolutely mesmerized, thrilled by the music (I am a romantic at heart). Try as I would to control myself, I couldn't help it. The music was overwhelmingly wonderful and I was swept away before I could catch myself and resist. That was just how it was.

And so, it went. What a great performance. It was a lesson to me and a fabulous concert. Humperdinck had the audience, including me, in the palm of his hand and he took us on a trip we did not know how to take for ourselves. It was just incredible.

Anyway, to me that is a funny story. Thanks for listening. And happy Christmas Eve!

EMAIL

Ann Arbor Love Story: How I Fell in Love and Got Married

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2c2764f8-0861-4e8f-afb-66d7340273ed_1533x960.jpeg

[Of course, I have told this story before, but I thought I would post it here again. It's not a Christmas story, yet a good story for reading on Christmas. Love stories are never old and it's never too late for miracles.]

Ann Arbor has always, for me, been a romantic place, perhaps because I grew up there. Not sure if others feel that way about the town, but I certainly do. After all, it was the one place in all the world that I fell in love with a woman and married her.

I guess I had been looking for her ever since I was in Tappan Junior High School, or perhaps before that when I was going to Catholic school at St. Francis of Assisi, just across the street.

Through all my early years, despite all the other interests and activities I had going on, deep within me, there was this search to find my life partner, the woman that I would love and who possibly could also love me. I am not always that easy to be around.

And I can't forget all those late-night walks around Ann Arbor when I was unable to sleep, just walking the streets, hoping against hope, to run into "Her." Well, as it turned out, it wasn't quite that easy. It took time for me to settle down and even be ready for marriage, although I was not aware of that thought. Here is my story. I am sure there are those reading this who have a love story too. I don't think there is a law against telling these stories. Here is mine.

As a musician about town, there were always women who wanted to get to know me, but I grew tired of dating, one-night stands, and short flings. I wanted someone that I really loved and to be with for the rest of my life, you know, the traditional marriage -- a partner. And that is apparently a lot to ask from the universe. Anyway, she sure took her sweet time in showing up, but she finally did, and I am thankful for that.

I was thirty-years old and still had no serendipity. I thought that perhaps I had first to build a nest. For many years I slept on a tiny mattress that I had specially made. It was so thin, little more than a pallet on the floor, and very,

very narrow, not built for two. But then in the January of 1971, for no reason I know, I found myself getting rid of the little mat in favor of a real mattress, in fact, a waterbed, something I didn't need, so who was it for? I'm sure I didn't know, but it was some kind of ritual all the same. Or was it a case of coming events casting their shadow?

As mentioned, I had kind of reached the end of trying to get together with this woman or that -- flings. I was serious about getting together with a partner and had more or less given up short flings in favor of more permanent or serious relationships. My latest attempt was with a very nice young lady and we both did our best to put something together. In the end it did not work out well and we did what we could to remain friendly, but it was not easy. That great love I yearned for and wanted to feel was still not there. That's just how it was at the time of this story. And I am getting to what happened next, the good part.

I used to play music on Monday nights, just myself and my old portable Wurlitzer piano, at a place called the Odyssey Bar. It was at 208 W. Huron Street in Ann Arbor, just off Main Street. If I remember right, Wednesday was "Wine Night" at the Odyssey and they served this cheap Boone's Farm stuff, but we drank it just the same.

So, once in a while I would wander down on wine night to hear a band I liked called "Buddies in the Saddle." And way up at the front was a big, long table, sort of reserved for the local regulars; at least all my friends would sit there. It was set parallel to the stage-front.

So, there I was, sitting on the far side of that table from the stage right in the middle of wine night, but drinking orange juice. My love of alcohol was an on and off thing. I never drank all that much and when I did, I was often sorry.

Anyway, I knew most, but not all, of the people at our table that night, but certainly not the dark-haired woman sitting across from me to my right and perched on an old piano. But she had apparently noticed my orange juice and made a point of calling me out on it, and loudly, so everyone could hear. After all, this was wine night.

"Drinking orange juice? What are you, some kind of pansy?" Well, that got my attention for sure, and she probably had no idea that as a performer I had no qualms about speaking up in a group or that I was not as shy as the orange-juice guy she thought she was teasing. I could be direct too, so I got right in her face, but in a friendly way.

I probably made her squirm a bit and wish she had just left me alone. I can't remember exactly what she said in response to my challenge, but the last part

of it was something to the effect she wanted no more conversation with me and that "this is the end of it!" And then something really strange happened, something that has occurred only once or twice in my life.

And that is, as I responded to her ending our conversation, I suddenly could hear my own voice speaking in the silence of my mind as if I were listening to myself talk, as I said out loud to the woman: "This is not the end; this is just the beginning!" As I spoke, I found my own words ringing in my head and took them in as almost some kind of cosmic message. "What was that all about?" I thought, and then dropped it. Nothing else happened that night.

Instead, it all happened about a week later at a favorite Ann Arbor bar called "Mr. Flood's Party," a place that I often performed at. They had a high (but small) stage that looked out over the room, and nestled right near and under that stage was a long booth, one that could seat a bunch of people, but you had trouble getting out of because of the length and the fact that it was a cul-de-sac.

So, I was sitting toward the back of that long table in Floods, having a beer with a group of friends. I was kind of wedged in back there and all was good until the woman I had been having that relationship with walked in the front door. Now, as I mentioned earlier, we were not getting along and I could tell from the look she gave me as she came through the door and spied me sitting there that she was not too happy with me.

Worse, there I was, stuck at the far end of the booth and surrounded by friends. She had me in the perfect spot to perhaps take me to task in public, which I assumed she might be about to do. And she quickly sat down at the end of the table near the door, blocking my only exit. I was trapped.

Well, I couldn't have that, so while everyone's attention was on getting this woman, and before she could settle in, I climbed over the back of the wooden booth and was out of there, heading deeper into the bar looking for a seat and hopefully more friends, pleased that I had escaped what could have perhaps been an awkward scene, coward that I was. However, I quickly saw that all the tables were full, and the only open seats were a few barstools.

As I moved along the bar, in front of me I saw that same dark-haired lady that had teased me at wine night about my drinking orange juice. She was sitting on a barstool, and there was an open seat right next to her. Any port in a storm, thought I, and quickly slipped onto the seat beside her, saying something like, "Hello you nasty old woman," to remind her who I was and what she had tried to do to me last week. She smiled.

Yet, it seemed that my sitting down with her was OK and we were soon trading small talk. It turned out that her name was Margaret. And then the most amazing thing happened. She told me that she already knew who I was and that we used to live just down the street from one another on Division Street and would at times pass each other walking from here to there.

When she said that, I did remember seeing her one day while I was carrying some stuff from Circle Books (the metaphysical bookstore up on State Street where I worked) to my room on Division Street, and back, about two blocks away. To get there, I would cut through the corner of the First United Methodist Church lawn at Huron and State.

And there, sitting on some low steps at a side entrance to the church, was this same young lady. I remember that when our eyes met that day by the church my heart went out to her, and perhaps that feeling was returned. I don't know. It was just something a little magical that had happened in passing. As you know, I was always hoping to meet "The One."

Anyway, sitting on that bar stool in Mr. Flood's Party that night, it all came back to me. And when I realized who she was, I was startled and looked into her eyes more intensely and one of the most profound moments in my life just spontaneously arose.

In a flash, I was somehow looking through and beyond her personality and deep within her mind. And I was struck to the heart by the purity and innocence I saw there, despite the attempts on her part to appear tough and world-wise.

She seemed so completely vulnerable and open to me. To my surprise, all I wanted to do was to protect her, to endlessly care for and love this woman, and shield her from the sorrows and sufferings of what I knew life could bring. I had never felt this way about anyone before, not even close.

At the same time that I was overcome with feelings of wanting to care for this lady I had just met, I also had some kind of metaphysical revelation as I tend to do. I am always having these insights and visions.

For all these years I had been looking for someone just like me, but of course a woman -- some other "One." There was me over here (this One) and I was looking for my counterpart (another One) over there, someone who would love me like I loved her. And this is a little hard to explain, so please bear with me.

Then, in that moment at the bar, I realized for the very first time that in all the world there was no other "One," but as the Greek philosopher Parmenides had pointed out so long ago: "Being Alone Is."

There had never been two, but all along only one. My idea of "alone" and being alone, which I had held close all those years morphed on the spot into a new concept, that of "all one," almost the same word. I finally got it. This was a profound realization and not just a passing experience. I don't consider myself a philosopher in any sense of the word, yet I do consider myself a phenomenologist, someone who studies their own mind and appearances.

It became clear to me that all dualities resolve into one, sooner or later. So, there was no independent being, "me," over here and then another independent being, "her," over there. Yes, of course, there were two persons, but only one being.

As the Greek philosopher Parmenides said, "Being alone is!"

Well, being alone was all I had ever known, but this being "all-one" twist was new to me, and more than welcome. And in that moment, sitting on a bar stool at "Flood's Party, for me, at long last, the two became one, or as the poet wrote "The dewdrop slipped into the shining sea."

I know. I can't expect to be understood here; I can only tell it like it was, as I remember it. Anyway, at that moment when I looked into her eyes, all of this just happened, spontaneously and without thinking. I write it down here in words, but in reality, it just happened. I finally understood that the idea of the "two" that I carried around all my life were already one and always had been so. It was my mistake to separate them. And it was Margaret's person through whom I realized this apparent eternal truth.

And to take a note from the movie "Jerry McGuire," she had me from that first moment of insight into her purity. I was gone, no longer looking or able to honestly continue in good faith to look outside myself for some mysterious "other," for I had just realized that there was (and could be) no other "One." It was a logical impossibility.

But here 'was' Margaret, and it was she through whom I realized this truth. I took this as a good sign and just naturally responded with my entire being. My heart changed right there on the spot.

And I felt that unless someone like me, who could see how precious she was, cared for and shielded her from the harshness of life, she, like some rare flower, might be lost in the struggles life brings. I just could not bear the

thought of this and, in that instant (and probably for the first time in my life) I put someone else's welfare above my own – Margaret's.

I guess, at least for me, that's what love is. There was no way I could just have walked on by her in my life (as I had with other relationships) and just leave her there to sort it out. Not possible. It was already too late for that. For the first time I felt personally responsible for another human being and, as mentioned, I was more concerned with caring for her than I was for my own comfort. And for me that was news!

You might say that it was love at first sight, from that very first moment when I looked deep within her mind (or my mind) -- whatever. And for me, that was it. I was hooked. I had already and without question just said "I do" or "I will" to her in my mind, but she didn't know it yet. In truth I was as married as I have ever been from that night on, and not three months later when we actually held the ceremony.

Anyway, later that evening Margaret and I left the bar together and, for the most part, have never been separated since. As mentioned, we got married a few months later and have remained so for going on 54 years. Lest you get the wrong idea that marriage for me is just a dream, it's not. It is hard work, but what they say about death and old age fits here: it beats the alternative. At least that's my view.

I share this to point out what I have come to know love is and how it happened. So that's the story of how I fell in love and got married. I was thirty years old. She was twenty-three.

I met Margaret March 26, 1971 and we were married about three months later. We had only \$200 for a wedding and had it outside under a 200-year-old oak tree, with a couple of hundred friends. We made our own food, which was nothing more than French bread, potato salad, and beans. Our dear friend Tecla Loup made Margaret's wedding dress, the heart-shaped wedding cake, and was the Maid of Honor. My English Bull Terrier Manley was the entertainment, swinging like a propeller on a rope from a limb of the oak tree. We didn't stand on ceremony, but we did have one. It was great!

Today we have four grown kids, three daughters and a son. And we have eight grandkids.

Here is a video of our English Bull Terrier entertaining all of us at our wedding.

[And here are some shots of Margaret I took from a video that my brother Stephen took back in 1971, soon after we were married, when the two of us ran a greenhouse in the middle of winter in Ewart Michigan. Isn't she lovely?]

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Domain Names for Sale

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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I have these URLs for sale. I hoped to eventually use them, I can't do everything, so some of you might want them to start a business of forum.

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As Bodhicitta is so precious,

May those without it now create it,

May those who have it not destroy it,

And may it ever grow and flourish.

Memories of Joan Baez and Bob Dylan

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7b59e4c3-c073-4fba-91e1-22febd86473b_2898x2049.jpeg

Early this morning, in the middle of the night, on 'YouTube', I came across a copy of the song "Diamonds & Rust" (1975) written and sung by Joan Baez, and hearing that again, a whole lot of memories came flooding back. Here is the song:

Even today, I can't hear "Diamonds and Rust" without being deeply moved. Although this song came along some ten-years later than when everything happened, yet the moment it captures was back in those early 1960s, for me particularly in the spring of 1961. I will share that.

I can remember sitting around in the 'MUG' (Michigan Union Grill) in Ann Arbor, sitting at one of those small gray Formica tables in the first room of the MUG with Joan Baez, having coffee with her, just the two of us. Those were some good times.

Many of the folk artists who came through Ann Arbor back then, people like Bob Dylan, the New Lost City Ramblers, The Country Gentleman, Jack Elliot, and others, stayed wherever we could put them up. However, Joan Baez's first album was released in 1960, so by 1961 Baez was already getting famous and had money to stay wherever she liked. At that time, the soprano voice of Joan Baez was unlike anything we folkies had ever heard.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s I would hitchhike to New York City often. Back then, unless you had some old junker of a car to borrow, you hitchhiked. Heading out of Ann Arbor, the bad places to get stuck hitchhiking were down by the prison in Dundee, Michigan or trying to get around Toledo, Ohio, that sharp left turn toward the East Coast. Once you got past those areas, it went pretty smoothly, usually. And we would hang in the Village in New York City, sleeping on floors wherever we could. I must have hitchhiked the New York City route some ten times or so.

We were all part of what was called the 'folk revival', and all of us were doing what we could to revive the music of rural America and endless ballads and tunes from England and the rest of Europe. Music artists like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan were not writing their own tunes yet, but just helped to restore and protect (revive) whatever went before us.

It would only be a few years there before I segued out of the folk revival mode as I discovered that country and city blues did not need revival, but were alive and well, playing across town, separated by a racial curtain. For this post, let's talk about what was for me the tail end of the folk revival and my travels to places like Greenwich Village in NYC.

I remember being there with Perry Lederman and Bob Dylan back in June of 1961. Lederman is how I met up with Dylan. They were already friends. Perry Lederman was a phenomenal instrumentalist on the guitar. If Dylan and I were in touch today, we would still marvel at what a player Lederman was.

Lederman played Travis-style, which we used to term "3-finger picking" and his playing was unmatched. Perry Lederman was not a vocalist, and when he did sing it was not special, but he could play like no one I have ever heard. When Lederman took out a guitar, people would listen and marvel. Each song was like hearing a mini-symphony, with an overture, the main theme, variations, and an ending. It was crystal clear and drilled right into your brain.

I traveled with Lederman a number of times and later in 1964 spent time with him during the year I spent in Berkeley, California where both of us were living at the time. After that, I don't believe I ever saw him again. He died some years ago now and, although there was a CD issued after his death, it was not of his early playing, but something made later and not representative, a shadow of himself, IMO.

Perry Lederman was also an expert at finding and selling old Martin guitars, scavenging them out of attics and garages, fixing them up, and selling them. While traveling with Lederman, I have seen some of the best and rarest old Martin guitars in the world, like double and triple-0 martins with intricate purfling around the edges, rosewood orebony bridges, and intricate inlaid necks and headstocks, sometimes with the Tree-of-Life design.

It would be hard to put a price of any kind on these guitars today. I had one for a while, an old Koa wood Hawaiian guitar. I wonder what I ever did with it. Anyway, back to New York City and the spring of 1961, a time I was hitchhiking with Bob Dylan.

I have memories of Izzy Young, the proprietor of the "Folklore Center" on MacDougal Street in the village. We would hang out there because we had no place else to go and also because that is where you met other players and like minds. Back then, we all smoked all the time, Lederman, me, Dylan, everyone. Cigarettes, caffeine, and some alcohol. That was the thing. Not much alcohol back then.

I don't know how many days we were in the city on this trip, which was in June of 1961, but it was probably a while. We were hitchhiking and tended to spend at least a day or so at each main stop before moving on, guitars in hand.

Plus, Lederman's mom lived in Brooklyn. I remember visiting her one time and she served us matzo ball soup and I sat at a small kitchen table by a window looking out. I quietly ate my soup while Perry and his mom got caught up. I don't remember how we got out to Brooklyn or back to the city. It could have been by bus. Hitchhiking in the city was not so good.

What I do remember is one night during that trip being at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in the West Village with Dylan and Lederman. The three of us were all just hanging out. In those days we stayed up late, usually most of the night. Who knows where we would sleep, but it was not often comfortable, and we were in no hurry for bed.

That particular night, I remember the guitar player Danny Kalb was playing at Gerdes. He was being featured that night or week. Kalb later became part of the group "The Blues Project."

I am sure Kalb was enjoying his prominence, and I can remember him playing, the lights on him, and Dylan, Lederman, and I standing off toward the shadows. Perhaps it was packed, because I recall walking around in a crowd and there was not a lot of light.

Bob Dylan was not happy about Kalb. I think we all felt that way because Kalb did have an air about him of 'better than thou', and who could blame him. He was the man of the hour that night at Gerdes Folk City. That was 'The' place.

I can't remember whether Dylan played a few songs later that night himself or perhaps he or Lederman played some tunes elsewhere. I don't recall. But I do recall his being irritated by Kalb, and dissing Kalb was not hard to do. As mentioned, Kalb was just a little too full of himself at the time. After all, Gerdes was where all of the folkies wanted to play. And Dylan had played there with the great bluesman John Lee Hooker that previous April.

Thinking back, I don't think it was jealousy on Dylan's part with Kalb. Dylan was not petty, as I recall. He was probably just itching to let all of us know he was 'Bob Dylan' and wondered why nobody could see this right off. Back then (and it is not so different today), if you had something to sing or had worked on your stuff, you wanted a chance to play and show it off. Dylan was a nervous type and it showed.

Keep in mind that back then Bob Dylan was still trying to find out for himself who he was. This was just before he recorded his first album, that coming fall.

I can remember another time, in Ann Arbor, about a year later, when Dylan came to town. He looked me up because we knew each other and I helped him put on a concert at the U-M Michigan Union, and they even spelled his name wrong on the poster. That's how early this was in his career.

Anyway, the next morning after the concert, Dylan and I were sitting in the MUG (Michigan Union Grill) at one of those little gray Formica tables for hours, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes while we waited for a review of the concert that Dylan had done the night before as part of the University of Michigan Folk Festival on Sunday April 22, 1962. As mentioned, I am told that I helped make that gig happen. I don't remember.

Yet I do remember that Dylan was very concerned about how it went over. That is most of what we talked about. He wanted to know how he was received last night. This was before he had the world at his feet.

When the "Michigan Daily," the student newspaper paper finally came out and we got a copy, sure enough Dylan got a good review. With that he was soon at the edge of Ann Arbor, backpack on, guitar in hand, and hitchhiking to Chicago and the folk scene there. That was perhaps the last I ever saw him.

Back then, there was an established route that folkies like Dylan and me travelled. It went from Cambridge to NYC to Ann Arbor (sometimes to Antioch and Oberlin) to the University of Chicago to Madison and on out to Berkley. It was the folk bloodstream that we all circulated on, either hitchhiking or commandeering some old car for the trip. Most of us hitchhiked.

As mentioned, early folk stars like Joan Baez did not hitchhike, but they still sat around with us in the Michigan Union drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes.

And another time I remember hitchhiking with Bob Dylan and Perry Lederman, heading out of New York City down the road to Boston and on up to "Club 47" in Cambridge. Here was Dylan, standing on the side of the road with a big acoustic guitar strapped around his shoulder, playing, while I stuck out my thumb.

I remember the song "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," in particular. Even though I did not know at the time that this was the "Bob Dylan" who would become famous, it was still pretty cool. This is the life we all wanted to live back then. We were chasing 'The Beats' and reviving folk music.

And Cambridge was another whole city and atmosphere. For some strange reason, I seem to remember the Horn & Hardart automat there and trying to get food from it.

The folk venue “Club 47,” like “The Ark” in Ann Arbor, was one of the premier folk venues in the country, even back then. Today Club 47 is known as ‘Club Passim’ and my daughter, May Erlewine, a well-known singer/songwriter in the Midwest, plays there on her east-coast tours.

Cambridge was where we left Dylan that that trip. He was heading out west hitching along the interstate 90 toward I believe it was Saratoga Springs or perhaps Schenectady, New York for a gig. Perry Lederman and I were hitchhiking on over to New Hampshire and Laconia to attend the annual motorcycle races there, which is another story. I don’t know where we slept at the races. I remember it being just on the ground, but still kind of cold out at night, even in June.

And the motorcycle races were incredible. Large drunken crowds that, when the official races were not being run, would gather and the crowd would part in the middle just enough to allow two motorcycles to race each other, running first gear while the crowd cheered.

The problem was that the crowd pressed in too close and every so often one of the cycles would veer into the crowd and the handlebars would tear into someone’s chest. The ambulances were going non-stop way into the evening. And it seemed the crowd never learned. It was scary and very drunk out. I remember riding on the race track itself on the back of a big Norton motorcycle at almost 100 miles an hour, not something I would do today.

This all took place in mid-June of 1961. The Laconia, New Hampshire races were held from June 15 through the 18th that year. This would put Dylan, Lederman, and me in Gerdes Folk city some days before that.

As to what kind of “person” Bob Dylan was, in all sincerity, he was a person like any of us back then, a player or (in my case) a would-be player. Dylan and I are the same age, born a month or two apart. All of us were properly intense back then. I was 20 years old in 1961. So was Dylan. Imagine!

I vaguely remember Dylan telling me he was going to record an album or had just recorded one; it could have been the Harry Belafonte album where he played harmonica as a sideman on the tune “Midnight Special,” I don’t know. I believe it was later that year that Dylan recorded his first album on Columbia. I don’t remember seeing him much after that, other than later in Ann Arbor.

Something that I got a lot, mostly years ago now, way back then, was the comment that Bob Dylan really can’t sing. I addressed this in an article I wrote years ago, some of which appeared in the biography of jazz-guitar great Grant Green in the book “Grant Green: Rediscovering the Forgotten Genius of Jazz Guitar” by Sharony Andrews (Grant Greens daughter) and published by

Backbeat Books. My full article is called “Groove and Blues in Jazz,” which is at this link for those interested, and below is an excerpt:

“Groove and Blues in Jazz”

<https://medium.com/@MichaelErlewine/groove-and-blues-in-jazz-efd4b4f31cf1>

Here are some notes I wrote about Grant Green: THE Groove Master

“All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the groove that most people have no idea what’s up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul-jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered.

To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. A lot of people used to say the guy can’t sing. But it’s not that simple. He is singing. The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that WE can’t yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time... enough years... that gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvety-toned singer.

Dylan’s voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now, that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too.

Someday everyone will be able to hear it, because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan’s voice is exposed for just what it is — a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap is changing it even now.

Billie Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever-blooming flower. You (or I) can’t hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there.

We try to absorb it, and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!), she entrances us into a delightful dream-like groove, and we are lost to criticism. Instead, we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us. Shakespeare was the master at this. You can’t read him and remain conscious. He knocks you out with his depth.

Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest — to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into ourselves.

Grant Green puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it, the opposite of ego. Green knows that the groove is the thing, and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master.

[Photo of Joan Baez and Bob Dylan that is in the public domain.]

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Making Blues Time

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 30, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8eb71e05-e3b4-41da-9636-9bf98da3c120_1440x1920.jpeg

By Michael Erlewine

Something I want to discuss here that is not often talked about is how musical time is created. The classic Chicago blues players, like all great musicians, literally “make” time rather than follow it. They don’t just follow along in time like most of us do when listening, tapping their feet. They set the time, inset the time with their music, but it goes deeper than that.

Every once in a while, you and I might look at our watch and see what time the clock says, but the time in between those clock-checks goes unchecked. It just passes, like the old song from Sandy Denny, “Who knows where the time goes?”

I certainly don’t know where it goes. My point is that while clock time seems to be regular, what goes on when you and I are not watching the clock can be anything but regular. In other words, time contracts and expands like an accordion, especially when it comes to musical time.

The really great blues players, and we all have our favorites, actually can ‘make’ time. Time is also something we make. My favorite for “making” time would have to be Big Walter Horton, the Chicago blues harmonica player. In my opinion he could make the best time I have managed to hear. He could show me the best time I have ever had musically, the very best time I have experienced. All great music does this.

And I have of course (like we all do) my own sense of time, you know just going along each day, like each of us are doing now by reading this – taking our own sweet time.

But with Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, and other blues greats, somehow their music takes over time as I know it. They can overtake my personal sense of time and replace it with the kind of time that they make, which is for me a much vaster sense of time, you know, a more expanded time, time enough to do other things in -- extra-ordinary time.

When I hear it, I can synch up or resonate to their time and it becomes (for the moment) my time too. Big Walter Horton (for me) is a great director or

conductor of time, and I gladly groove along with him to his beat. You can experience this on the Vanguard "Chicago/The Blues/Today!, Vol.3, the cuts with Bid Walter Horton and Johnny Shines, like "Black Spider Blues."

Great blues players can expand or stretch time and, in that expanded time, these musicians give listeners more room to experience or listen, creating an aura, almost like an envelope with their music, an envelope in which we have more room or space to know ourselves, to relax within, to be ourselves, or to just think and be here now. Making time and being in the time that is made (whether our own or made by others) is what this article is about. Musical Time Beyond Time

Great blues players can expand or stretch time and, in that expanded time, these musicians give listeners more room to experience or listen, creating an aura, almost like an envelope with their music, an envelope in which we have more room or space to know ourselves, to relax within, to be ourselves, or to just think and be here now. Making time and being in the time that is made (whether our own or made by others) is what this article is about.

Musical Time Beyond Time

'Making' time is one of the hallmarks of the great blues musicians. Most of them are gone and I have resigned myself to not hearing their kind of expanded musical time played live any longer, although I can still hear it on some recordings. It is gone.

However, to my surprise, I actually experienced this form of blues time live some years ago after a very long hiatus. It was at a Michigan music festival called "Wheatland," held not far from where I live here in mid-Michigan. Perhaps 10,000 or more people attended it.

They had a musician there named Aubrey Ghent, a lap-steel player from somewhere in the southeast; I believe it was Florida. Ghent plays gospel music and, sure enough, that day he was making time like the old masters. I was spellbound.

I had not heard profound "blues" time like that since back in the day around Chicago and places like that. And Aubrey Ghent was sitting up there on the stage making blues time, making it just like they used to.

Sure enough, Aubrey Ghent was 'making' the time. It immediately put me back in a musical space when I used to listen to players like Muddy Waters, a space where a blues player would take over time as I knew (as I lived it) and would put me through something I could not put myself through, taking me

on a trip and to a place where I sure liked to go, but did not know how to get there by myself.

Aubrey Ghent had that kind of sense of time and one of the songs he displayed it on was, to everyone's surprise, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," the Bobby McFerrin tune. The whole audience just stopped whatever time they were having and went on Ghent's special sense of time for a while. And of course, the rest of the night we were all telling each other about that incredible music. What I am after here is what makes that kind of music-time incredible.

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Maybe at the end, after you listened to Ghent, you would say to yourself, "Wow, that music was 'really' good," yet, IMO, it is way more than just the music being 'good'. Most of those present had just experienced something that they never had before and that some of us hadn't heard for a very long time. And maybe they can't quite remember it or maybe they remember it later, slowly, over a period of time, calling it back into memory with satisfaction, a little bit of that sense of time, reading it back to themselves.

Anyway, Howlin' Wolf would put me through something like that when I was with him. And another blues player who did that to me was Chicago's "Magic Sam." Some of you may not know of Magic Sam, but he was one of the most virile, seminal guitar players that have ever played the guitar. And he also was an incredible singer, and I 'mean' incredible! You can hear what I am pointing out here on the Delmark album "West-Side Soul" by Magic Sam here:

http://www.amazon.com/West-Side-Soul-Magic-Sam/dp/B000004BIF/ref=pd_sim_m_2

And in the re-release of his Cobra and Chief Recordings from 1957 here:

https://www.amazon.com/Essential-Magic-Sam-Recordings-1957-1961/dp/B000059RVO/ref=sr_1_1?crd=G8CY2NG8UB5K&dib=eyJ2IjojMSJ9.O nXdDcmYr7_n9g3RBOsCwdZE_I_Ur8mL9fVfx1xynXGjHj071QN20LucGBJIEps.pCyyoOqRrv8MnhL0qaomsdm-

I first heard Magic Sam live in Chicago back in the mid-1960s in a venue with one of these large rooms like you used to find in some of the Chinese restaurants in the major cities, the ones with really low ceilings. I am talking about big rooms, where they have all these little tables and chairs that go way back in the distance. You can't even see the end of them, and in this case, everyone was already standing. I couldn't see Magic Sam. I had just squeezed in the door and was flat up against the back wall, as the place was packed. All I could make out were heads and hats as far as I could see. Yet I could hear this incredible sound coming from somewhere way up front. It was Magic Sam's voice, which immediately made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. I had never heard anyone sing like that. It was literally a shimmering sheet of sound. It was Magic Sam making his own special time. That kind of time was rare then and almost impossible to find live now. Magic Sam, "All Of Your Love."

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Magic Sam, "All Of Your Love."

In my opinion what we are getting from blues players today, and I don't mean to offend anyone, so I will try to say it gently, is that with the blues music as it is today is that it used "sound like this," as in: "it sounds like Howlin' Wolf." To myself, I just call it "reenactment" blues.

Today we are now reenacting something that used to be there but no longer is like: Howlin' Wolf used to be there, but he is no longer with us, and so on. Or we could just say that no one sings like "The Wolf," and those who try are

just re-enacting or trying to imitate Wolf. The operative word here is ‘trying.’ Obviously, they are not Wolf.

The problem with younger players re-enacting Wolf’s songs is that they always make me think of Wolf, and whoever is singing does not really sound like Wolf. This spoils it for me because there is no comparison. I would rather these young players just sing Wolf’s songs in their own voice and with their own experience, so I could hear ‘them’, and not hear them through a Wolf filter, and almost by definition a lousy one at that. That’s just me.

Consider this: Most musicians listen to someone like Howlin’ Wolf or Big Walter Horton and they set about to learn Wolf’s style, to play Wolf’s licks, and so on, perhaps in hopes that they can make the kind of music Wolf makes. But this is just exactly backward to what would actually be needed to create the effect of a Wolf or a Muddy Waters, and this point may be a little subtle, so bear with me.

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Playing Wolf’s licks, and so on, will never get you there. Wolf was not doing that. Aside from some earlier influences, Wolf was not trying to resemble anyone. He had managed to get his mind and consciousness (whatever we want to call it) into a certain state so that ANYTHING he played already has that Wolf sound and perfection. It is already perfect “Wolf” because it was Howlin’ Wolf. You can’t imitate perfection and why would you want to?

Therefore, to play like Wolf played, you would first have to perfect not just your guitar, voice, and harmonica licks, but your very mind, your consciousness, not to mentioned paying your dues, and get yourself into a state where anything you do, including playing music, will already ‘sign’ and exactly signify you and where ‘your’ head is at. Do you understand? Don’t work on the licks only, but work on perfecting yourself, your life, your consciousness, and where your mind is at. Then whatever you do will sound right, at least right for you. Anyway, back to “making time.”

The main blues players from back in the 1960s were all incredible, but the greatest time-maker of all time (for me personally) was the harmonica player Big Walter Horton. He could set or make time better than anyone I have ever

heard. I refer you to Volume Three of the “Chicago/the Blues/Today!” album on Vanguard, and the song “Black Spider Blues,” as an example.

Horton plays there with Johnny Shines and the two of them are making time together. Here is a link:

http://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Blues-Today-Various-Artists/dp/B000000EJO/ref=sr_1_4?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1291988413&sr=1-4

And it is perfect. If you were to add someone else, like another player, the time would probably immediately change for the worse and the expanded sense of time that I can clearly hear on the record would be lost, unless that player too was of the same caliber and vintage.

And by “making time,” I mean this: We all have a sense of time. Musicians who play regularly know that on the really good music nights they can make time slow down or somehow expand; time stretches. I may not find the best words here.

The energy and effort put out by the musician to build or create the musical time actually creates not just a slowing down or expanding of time, but also produces some kind of mental or psychological space in which the audience can think or exist in. It’s like making some space, clearing out the mental cobwebs, when I listen to one of these masters; they somehow give me a timeout from ‘clock time’, time to perhaps know more about myself. I get in their groove. I learned this years ago in a little bar in Ann Arbor called Mr. Flood’s Party.

Musicians, at least this one, constantly worry about how they sound. You know, is it good or good enough? Anyway, back then, playing harmonica and singing in that bar along with my brother Daniel (on guitar), I had a good night. I felt that finally I was playing what I intended to play, and I looked out at the audience, thinking, well somebody might be giving me the thumbs up, like “Michael, you’re doing good man!” But there wasn’t any of that.

As I looked out at the audience, everyone was in some sort of trance. They were all looking into their own mind as if in some kind of reverie. And I suddenly realized what was happening and said to myself: “Oh, I get it now. It’s not about me!”

Great musicians make space in time. They expand time into space and make more room. They make room for us to live in. They ‘make’ time and in that expanded time people can get some very personal and specialized jobs done, like thinking or feeling whatever they need to.

We all do this, and music is not the only avenue. For example, I work a lot. And I get up at two or three in the morning and I work until five at night. I might take a nap. And then somewhere around 6 PM I like to watch a movie. It doesn't have to be a whole movie, or it might be two movies. It often is just a little bit of a movie. In that movie time, that down time, I am, of course watching the movie, but I am also mulling things over that happened that day in my mind. I am resting the mind or resting in the space of that movie watching.

Movies may be the most common form of meditation for most people, because we really are just looking at a spot on the wall and holding very still. Isn't that what some meditators do? Anyway, in that down time I get things done in my mind that I need to do, while I am watching the movie. I am processing the day's events. For me, it is very relaxing and actually quite necessary.

When great blues players play, they create a similar kind of time in which we, the audience, can get into and experience with and through them. So, these great time setters, the great blues musicians (great musicians of any kind) take over our sense of time, take over what we can call clock time, this time or that time.

We might say afterward, "Oh, isn't that an incredible guitar player" or we could also say "Wow, he or she took me on a trip." Musicians make time and, in that time, we have our own personal experience. It is not only about 'their' music, but also about our life. That is the point here. That is what great music is all about.

I can remember one example and it's a good one. In Chicago, back in the mid-1960s I went into a club, a tiny little place (I forget the name of it; it might have been "Mother Blues") that Howlin' Wolf was playing in. There was nobody there. There was only Howlin' Wolf and next to him there was his wonderful guitar player Hubert Sumlin. That's it.

So, we came in and it was almost totally dark. There was just a little bit of light up near the stage. Wolf was sitting on a wooden chair way up front and singing like only Howlin' Wolf can sing. And for a while, time just stopped. It was not so much that time stopped, as it was that the walls, that whole place I was in, faded and gradually became transparent.

Not just the walls, but from the walls on out forever. What remained was this singular consciousness (I guess it was me) floating in an ocean of translucent space. And scout's honor, I was not on drugs! Everything just went void.

For that time, I forgot where I was in my life. I had to reach inside to get a hold on myself, and there was nothing to get a hold of. Wolf's voice and the power of his musical time had taken over mine. I could have been anywhere in the universe – somewhere, and yet there still was no place. Place had nothing to do with it.

I was transfixed by Wolf's time. And of course, I came out of it, but it was like: how could I forget this? That's what I mean by time. Wolf's time was better than mine. I wasn't even prepared for the experience; it just happened. He took me deeper than I could get by myself. It is like one of those times when somebody dies that is close to you. Those events kind of stop you in your tracks and make you, for a time, more open. You are popped out of your groove and open to alternatives. Life is new again.

That's what happened in Wolf's time.

Toward an Explanation

What am I talking about here and how does it work?

This is where words can fail, but I will give it a try. You may have to meet me halfway. Have you ever been in one of those car accidents or near accidents when you see it coming, but maybe you can't avoid it? It is easy to find these events when driving on ice. Your mind concentrates and you are "right there." Time slows down and everything seems to be taking place in slow motion.

That is somewhat similar to what I am pointing at here when I use the term "making time." In times of stress, intense awareness, or extreme concentration, time stretches and slows down. You can see it all happen. Time just somehow expands or makes room. "Making time" with the blues is like that for me.

The standard blues progression is just twelve bars which keep repeating themselves over and over. In order to take control of that progression and go deeper with time, the blues musician has to concentrate (be aware) and articulate each bar of that blues progression, putting the brakes on here and rushing to catch up there. What matters is to emphasize and willfully stress, accentuate, or push the time leading up to this or that chord change here, and drag out the turn-around or what-have-you over there.

If a musician is aware or present enough, and has enough experience, he or she can articulate the blues so that, although clock time just ticks on along as it always does, the end result of the effort is to expand time, slow it down, and we go between the clock-ticking seconds into what can only be described as expanded time, time in which we are beyond the distractions of the

moment (our regular life) and able to taste or experience what is beyond, beneath, above (use your own words here) the normal. I don't want to call it eternity, because that term has been overused, but it is somehow outside time, however marginally or temporarily, our normal sense of time is.

This then is what I mean by "making time." Musicians do this all the time (pun intended). And really great musicians give us such great time or can make time so well that we can hitch a ride with them, even if only for the length of a song. For those moments we are in their time, traveling with them, part of their mandala, and they are taking us deeper within conventional time to something greater than that. It is easier to experience this than to put it into words. Let me try another metaphor.

The discipline, energy, and articulation of making music can create more room in time than we normally have – expansion or extension. Think of it as an aura or envelope of normal time that somehow expands time as we know it (and the moment) into something deeper and wider – stretches time.

The more that the musician is able to work the time, the more of an aura or special space surrounds the moment, and in that space or in that extra room, there we are, experiencing it, living it. We are experiencing not only the music, per se, but the music allows us to experience ourselves as well, to go where we can't usually get to on our own, except perhaps rarely. And this brings up the question: what is music?

I won't go there just now, but when great musicians make time, and we experience that expanded time, we use it like money to think about or spend however we like. It is not only about their music; this experience is beyond the music, if you mean labels, lyrics, notes, song titles, and albums. Music is not only about what it means, as in the words of a song, but those words and notes are only references, means and ways to experience the heart of music, the purpose of music, which is to experience what I can only point to here.

The words and sound of music depend on what they mean, the sense it makes. And 'sense' is always an experience, something sensual, not an idea or thought. When great blues musicians make time, we sense it, hear it, and have a deeper actual and sensual experience. We live it with and through them. Often that experience is 'special' because we can't get there from here, not from our normal day-to-day experience.

That is why we listen to music. A great musician is capable of transforming our day, sending us back home in the mind with a deep experience and sometimes with a new sense of direction.

There, you have the general idea of making music time. Please don't read this article as a know-it-all statement from me, but more as a question, something I am thinking about and interested in, something to be discussed.

[Michael Erlewine interviewing Muddy Waters, photo by Stanley Livingston (C) All Rights Reserved.]

EMAIL

The Pendulum Swing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 31, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/89beba82-256b-4509-aec6-51e288cc15a6_2048x1365.jpeg

As the great siddha Chögyam Trungpa pointed out to me, I have to work on my outbreath, letting go, relaxing. He said to let it all go out, and he closed with “Don’t worry, it will come back.”

I’ve made a habit of exhausting myself, of letting all the air out of my balloon, and then waiting out the turnaround it takes from breathing out to breathing back in again, on life’s larger scale.

However, that pause or station from outbreath to inbreath in my monthly or yearly cycles is a still moment or time that is challenging, the part of the pendulum swing that is motionless. It can appear static, finished, in what otherwise is an ever-changing continuum.

How far out is far-out? Well, I believe that is different for different ones of us, but exhaustion is exhaustion. Our in-and-out breath reminds us every minute, so that should be a help.

“As above, so below,” that old chestnut, gives us the picture, yet those large-scale swings, with their stations of static pauses, never fail to get my attention, islands of stasis in what otherwise is a sea of change.

What do I do when I’m exhausted and everything pauses? Look around? What do I see?

Not even the end of a pendulum swing is the end.

Reminiscing today.

When I was a teenager, I lived for two years (1956-1958) in Swampscott, Massachusetts (156 Elmwood Road) on the north shore of Boston. I fell in love with the sea, the Atlantic Ocean. I spent a lot of time climbing the cliffs near King’s Beach, dodging the massive waves that crashed on the rocks at hightide, or walking the empty beach looking for shells or digging for clams in the wet sand.

I scuba-dived in the cold waters of the Atlantic in the summer and watched the sand sharks slowly moving among the deep beds of kelp. I was the

sailboat crew and raced a Yankee Dory on the ocean in the yearly Marblehead Regatta with my captain Beans Marino. Our boat was named the 8-Ball.

And I studied the marine life of the north shore of Boston and put together a 35mm slide show that won the top biology award for my high school in the spring of 1957 and got me a trip to MIT to receive the award. I flunked the entire grade that year because I have never liked being educated. I like to educate myself and know just how to do it, unless I find a life teacher.

The smell of the ocean, the salt in the winter air, and the sound of the waves on the beach left an indelible mark on me. I learned about the tides, coming in and going out. I walked the beach alone and gazed out at the sea. I was 16 years old.

WHAT TO DO

It's too late now,

To repair what's gone,

What I meant to do,

And might have done.

I did what I could,

Which is what I did.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Ann Arbor's "Indian Summer Restaurant"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 31, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2883e7bb-d115-48c1-b520-e288aed9c9fe_1275x1226.jpeg

In most towns restaurants come and go. When I was growing up in Ann Arbor there was a restaurant at 315 South State Street up near the University of Michigan campus called "The Virginian." It was not related to the TV show but was a typical American restaurant. I don't recall ever going inside. However, in October of 1971 an organic farmer (and friend), Ken King along with Rick Peshkin founded the "Indian Summer Natural Foods Restaurant" in the space where The Virginian used to be as 315 S. State Street in Ann Arbor. Ken King was co-owned and head cook of Indian Summer and went on to form "Frog Holler," a 165 acre of land located 30 miles from Ann Arbor. His partner Rick Peshkin, food purchaser for 'Indian Summer', opened 'Frog Holler Produce' and also 'The Produce Station'. "Frog Holler" has been a frequent purveyor of fresh produce to the 'Ann Arbor Farmer's Market' since 1972. Using their own words, the Indian Summer Restaurant staff wrote "Natural foods restaurant, offering complete vegetarian meals – whole grains, fresh vegetables, salads, juices, home-mad breads and desserts, herb teas, and more. Back in those day, a whole-foods restaurant was unheard of, so this was significant because as one of the first examples of the old guard being replaced by the new alternative-culture (I refuse to call them "Hippies."), suddenly on one of our main streets was an organic foods restaurant where I was welcome, the owners of which I knew, and they actually had food that I would eat! People from all over the area would come, young new-age folks like myself, to eat food there, especially their whole-grain pancakes with maple syrup. Who could forget them? And they had incredible un-yeasted bread fresh each day produced by a spiritually-minded baker by the name of Dana Wilkinson. What an experience to just walk uptown to Indian Summer and have a whole-food breakfast or lunch. It was amazing to me! It was like my generation was taking over. We were coming of age. This was our idea of a restaurant. And now a bit of a disclaimer. Everyone who meets me knows what an enthusiast I am. If I get my mind all wrapped around an idea, I think might be fun, I am like a bulldog with a bone about seeing it through. And it came to me one day that everything about Indian Summer was great except the décor. The way it looked inside was a hangover from past restaurants that had been there - drab. And I never pass up a chance to help create a new sense of space or

mandala. I offered to paint some designs on the walls for them and they were foolish enough to let me do just that. And of course, being a good entrepreneur, it is hard to talk me out of whatever my dreams are set on. At the time I was deep into macrobiotics (still am!) and along with the macrobiotic craze came a love for Japanese culture, design, and everything Asian. Macrobiotics more or less came from Japan. I wanted to make a visit to Indian Summer memorable by having simple food symbols all over the walls. No one stopped me. Of course, I knew very little about designing restaurant décor and not all that much about Japanese design. After all (so I told myself) I designed the logo for Eden Foods in 1969 and as an astrologer about town, I picked the date when Eden Food first opened. Why not do something striking on the Indian Summer walls? It seemed like a wonderful idea to me. I naturally love color, design, and making large images visible to all. At least that is how I remember it. And so, in I came, paint brushes in hand, and began creating these large 4-5 foot logo-like designs on the walls of Indian Summer. Of course I liked them. But I especially was enamored at the time with honeybees, the hive, the cooperation in the hive, and so on. I had read all kinds of books about bees and beekeeping and eventually owned some beehives of my own, but had never kept any actual bees. Anyway, I got it in my mind that along the back wall, where the servers endlessly came in and out, was a perfect place to put a honeycomb and some honeybees... and I did just that. I had honeybees on the right and left side of the back wall and a huge honeycomb with yet another bee sitting on the comb stretching across the center. You can check out the photos here for more details. So, what's the problem? Well, the problem came when customers who were not so fond of bees or any kind of "insect" at all began to complain about all these giant insects on the wall. It 'creeped' them out. It never occurred to me, very much a honeybee lover! And up to that point the staff at the restaurant went along with me as well, until customers started complaining and then, like any good businessperson, they went along with the customer, who is after all 'always right'. The next thing I knew is that I was given like ten-minute's notice that they were painting over everything I had done which is why these few photos are kind of 'not good'. I cleaned up a couple photos since the reflection was drowning out the image. So, there you have the story of my very brief career as a restaurant decorator and designer. I had failed to realize that not everyone liked the honeybees, at least to look at them, and to many folks they appeared all too much like some nasty insect. And yes, my feelings were a little hurt for, from my point of view these were all very lovely images with a simplicity and boldness you don't find everywhere. In fact, it was soon true that you didn't find that kind of boldness and simplicity anywhere. They painted it over. I have a number of these kind of entrepreneurial failure

stories I could tell. But right now, I should I tell you in detail how a created and designed my own restaurant, the “Two Sisters Café,” and what an endeavor that was. Here is the link to my own restaurant I built and decorated with the help of my family, and decorations particular by my daughter Anne (the artist) and ran for four years, just to show that I learned from my first venture with Indian Summer how to make a proper restaurant. LOL. The Two Sisters Cafe <https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/Two%20Sisters%20FIN.pdf> [Graphics by me.] EMAIL

The Blues in Jazz

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/742f2e9a-9972-42f5-b227-70523489c658_2010x1336.jpeg

[This article took a lot of work to put together. I did this because I myself have walked the path of looking for the blues in jazz. Not that I don't like the other forms of jazz, I do, but most of all I like bluesy jazz, yet years ago I had no idea where to find it except to listen to jazz until I found the blues in this genre. I share this with those of you who appreciate it. I don't claim to be an expert, just an appreciator of these genres. Please accept it, if only for the in-depth information on finding 'The Blues' in jazz music.] Music is good for the soul. It is one of the best medicines that I know of and the better the music, the better I feel. Hearing the good stuff makes all the difference. And that is what this article is all about -- how to locate the best blues music. Blues is so radical -- such a root music -- that it fuses with and gives rise to other music genres with ease. Jazz critics point out that the roots of jazz can be found in the blues. This article is about where in jazz blues lovers can hear and feel those roots -- the blues in jazz. A little background on where I am coming from: I have been a blues and jazz lover for over sixty years. In the late 1950s and very early 1960s there was a strong jazz scene in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I grew up. This was before liquor by the glass became legal in 1963, after which a lot of the jazz scene moved into the clubs. Most any night of the week, but in particular on weekends, there was live jazz played in houses and apartments. Teenagers like myself were tolerated and we hung out. Players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob Pozar, and Bob Detwiler were playing straight-up bop and exploring some cool jazz. The music and the parties often went on all night. On occasion, I heard Cannonball Adderley and others play in one of the many Detroit clubs like the Minor Key. Jazz records were big too. I can remember staying up all night listening to John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" album over and over when it first came out. This was about 1960. I fell in with the folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s and managed to hitchhike all over the country several times. A fantastic guitarist by the name of Perry Lederman, a young singer/songwriter by the name of Bob Dylan, and I hitched together for a stretch. Later I helped to put on the first Bob Dylan concert in Ann Arbor. During that time, I hung out with the New Lost City Ramblers, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, the Country Gentlemen, Joan Baez, and some other great folk artists that you may never have heard of. It was in those years

that I got introduced to blues and gospel music. The “Swan Silvertones,” an a-capella gospel group of infinite beauty had an enormous effect on me in 1964 when I first heard their records. I had also been listening to classical music for a number of years, yet had no real guidance. I spent all of 1964 listening to and learning in depth about classical music from a real expert. Then in 1965 I helped to form a band called the Prime Movers Blues Band in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Although we never recorded, we were no slouch. Iggy Pop was our drummer, avant-garde composer “Blue” Gene Tyranny our keyboardist, music guitar-maker Dan Erlewine played lead Guitar, Jack Dawson (later in the Siegel-Schwall Blues Band) on bass, and I sang and played amplified harmonica. Sometime in 1965 we heard the Paul Butterfield Blues Band live. That changed my life. We got to know those guys and they introduced us to all of the blues we had not yet found out for ourselves. We became, in an instant, the Prime Movers Blues Band. That was a time. The net effect of all of this was that, during the 1960s, I listened to blues records day and night trying to learn to play the licks. And I just loved the music. In the mid- 1960s, thanks to Bob Koester of Delmark Records, I heard players like Little Walter, Magic Sam, Junior Wells and many others live in the Chicago clubs. Later, working with various blues and jazz festivals, I had the good fortune to interview (audio and video) just about any blues player you could name (scores of them) that was around back then, and most of them still were. This article is about the blues in jazz, and I am getting to that. My first love is the blues and it took me some time to get much into jazz. At first, about the only way I could hear jazz was through a blues filter, so any jazz I got into had to have those blues elements. Now that I can find my way around the jazz catalog, I know that it contains some real treasures for blues lovers. But don’t expect just the standard 12-bar blues progression. Blue notes are found in jazz, but seldom in the form we are used to in blues recordings. It is the blues as a feeling, the soulful experience of the blues and gospel elements that can be found in jazz. So, I am writing this for blues lovers who may want to explore jazz through the same blues doorway I went through. The jazz I love is the blues in jazz whether that means bluesy jazz, funky jazz, original funk, soul jazz -- terms which I will explain in due course. I tend not to like (as much) jazz that does not have some kind of blues or modal element in it. Swing and bop, to the degree that they lack the roots sound of blues and gospel, fail to hold my attention. They are too frenetic for me. I like my jazz with blues, please. Something I realized some time ago is that jazz (and most kinds of music) are either energizing or calming in their overall effect. If you are the kind of person who needs something to get you moving (to energize you), then you will be attracted to music that is agitating and energizing like: marches, Dixieland, bop, free jazz, and other forms of progressive jazz. It appeals to

those who need that cup of coffee in life -- get a move on! It stirs you up. However, if you are a person (like me) who tends to be very active and sometimes even hyper, then you need music to relax and calm you like blues, original funk, soul jazz -- groove music. It helps to get you in a soothing groove that dissipates energy -- relief! Regardless of the fact that as a person we may (in general) be drawn to music that either stimulates or calms us, at times all of us may need some pick-me-up music and at other times some slow-me-down stuff. You will find that the above (admittedly simplistic) concept works very well. Blues and the blues that is in jazz (for the most part) has to do with the release and expression of feelings. The effect is calming to the system. It is "get down" and relaxin' music. Here is a brief tour of the bluesy stuff in jazz. I hope you find it useful.

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF BLUES IN JAZZ

This is an abbreviated history because I want to just skip over the standard playing-the-blues-progression in jazz stuff. There is not much of it anyway. If you like blues, you already know that by now. For now, we will also pass on all of the old-time blues found in traditional jazz -- the early New Orleans jazz. There is plenty of great old blues and blues-like music to hear there and you will want to hear it someday. But it is just too much like the blues that you already know. The same goes for what few blues tunes came out of the swing and big-band era. You don't need a guide to check swing blues tunes out because there are not that many of them. When you can find them, they are pretty much straight-ahead blues songs or tunes played with a big band. Further, the arranged feeling of the big band is not up to the impromptu kind of blues feeling you may be used to, so let's pass on that too. When I speak of blues in jazz, I mean some get-down funky blues sounds in the jazz that you have not heard before, so let's just get to that. If this history stuff bores you, skip over it and just read the recommended albums list. Start finding and listening to some of the picks. As mentioned, we will pass over the earlier forms of jazz including the New Orleans varieties, Dixieland, and swing. However, since a lot of the bluesy jazz that may interest you grew out of bop (bebop), you will need to know what bop is and how this music style came to be. We will start there. Bop (bebop) -- Bop distinguished itself from the popular big-band swing music out of which it emerged by that fact that it is most often played in small groups. You can hear each of the players as separate sounds. And while swing can have a groove that soothes you, bop is wake-me-up music. Its faster tempos, more elaborate melodies, and complex harmonies do not tend to establish a groove. It is more frenetic, even frantic, than swing. In other words, this is not relaxin' music. Bop has an attitude. Unlike the large swing bands, where there were a few featured soloists, most members of the small combo could and did solo --- democratic. In addition to an increase in improvisation and solo virtuosity, there was little dependence on

arrangements. And fast tempos too. Bop is more energetic (read agitating) than swing, with the rhythm section keeping the time on the ride cymbal. Bop tunes can be very fast, often with elaborate harmonies and complex chord changes that take an expert player to negotiate. In fact, fluency in bop became the benchmark of the young musician. Bop is a sophisticated music that can be, for many, somewhat of an acquired taste. In this respect it resembles classical music. Here are some bop artists and a sample album of them at their best: BOP ORIGINATORS Charlie Parker (just about any album; the box sets are the best) Dizzy Gillespie, "Dizziest"/Bluebird Thelonious Monk, "Thelonious with John Coltrane"/OJC Bud Powell, "Genius of Powell Vol. 1"/Polygram Dexter Gordon, "Our Man in Paris"/Blue Note Miles Davis, "First Miles"/Savoy Fats Navarro, "The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1- 2"/Blue Note Sonny Stitt, "Constellation"/Muse J.J Johnson, "The Eminent Jay Jay Johnson Vol 1"/Blue Note Max Roach, "Freedom Now Suite"/Columbia Lucky Thompson, "Lucky Strikes!"/Prestige Tad Dameron, "Mating Call"/Prestige 1950S BOP PLAYERS: Sonny Rollins, "Newk's Time"/Blue Note Jackie McLean, "Let Freedom Ring"/Blue Note Oscar Peterson, "The Trio"/Pablo Clifford Brown, "Brownie"/Emarcy Phil Woods, "Pairin Off"/Prestige Kenny Dorham, "Una Mas"/Blue Note Barry Harris, "Live in Tokyo"/Xanadu Tommy Flanagan, "Thlonica"/Enja 1970S-1980S BOP REVIVAL Richie Cole, "New York Afternoon-Alto Madness"/Muse Chris Hollyday, "Ho, Brother"/Jazzbeat BLUES IN BOP: Thelonious Monk, "The Thelonious Monk Trio"/Prestige Miles Davis & Milt Jackson, "Bag's Groove"/Prestige Miles Davis, "Walkin'"/Prestige Horace Silver, "Senor Blues"/Blue Note HARD BOP Hard bop was a reaction to the somewhat brittle and intellectual nature of straight bop. Hard bop distinguished itself from bop by its simple melodies, slower tempos, and avoidance of the (by then) cliched bop chord changes. The constant up-tempo frenetic quality of bop pieces is absent. Tunes are often in the minor mode, much slower paced, and often moody -- more feeling and thoughtful. Hard bop reaches into the blues and gospel tradition for substance to slow the up-tempo bop music down, stretch the time out, and imbue the music with more feeling. It was as if jazz had once again found its roots and was nourished. The public thought so too, because it was more approachable than bop. Hard bop is one big step toward establishing a groove, but it lacks what has come to be known as a groove, as in "groove" music. Blues lovers will appreciate the more bluesy nature of hard bop, but probably still yearn for more blues yet. HARD BOP PIONEERS: Horace Silver, "Pieces of Silver"/Blue Note Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, "Moanin"/Blue Note Cannonball Adderley Quintet, "Quintet at the Lighthouse"/Landmark Nat Adderley, "Work Song"/Riverside Art Farmer, "Meet the Jazztet" Chess Crusaders, "Freedom Sounds"/Atlantic Lou Donaldson, "Blues Walk"/Blue Note Kenny Dorham, "Trumpet

Toccata"/Blue Note Donald Byrd, "House of Byrd"/Prestige COLTRANE-INFLUENCED HARD BOP Wayne Shorter, "Native Dancer"/Columbia Freddie Hubbard, "Hub-Tones"/Blue Note McCoy Tyner, "Sahara"/Milestone Herbie Hancock, "Maiden Voyage"/Blue Note Joe Henderson, "Page One"/Blue Note Weather Report (Joe Zawinul), "Mysterious Traveler"/Columbia MAINSTREAM HARD BOP: Sonny Rollins, "Saxophone Colossus and More/OJC John Coltrane, "Blue Trane"/Blue Note Wynton Kelly, "Kelly Blue"/Riverside Clifford Jordan, "Glass Bead Game"/Strata-East Booker Ervin, "The Book Cooks"/Affinity George Coleman, "Amsterdam After Dark"/Timeless Charlie Rouse, "Two Is One"/Strata-East Harold Land, "The Fox"/Contemporary Blue Mitchell, "The Thing to Do"/Blue Note Kenny Dorham, "Afro- Cuban"/Blue Note Oliver Nelson, "Soul Battle"/Prestige Hank Mobley, "Soul Station"/Blue Note Wes Montgomery, "Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery"/Riverside FUNKY JAZZ Some hard-bop players like pianist Horace Silver began to include even more feeling in their playing by adding blues riffs and various elements from gospel music to their playing. Silver, considered by many to be the father of funk, describes funk: "Funky means earthy, blues-based. It may not be blues itself, but it has that down-home feel to it. Playing funky has nothing to do with style; it's an approach to playing... "Soul" is the same basically, but there's an added dimension of feeling and spirit to soul -- an in- depth- ness. A soulful player might be funky or he might not be." The hard-bop jazz that they were playing became in Silver's hands still more earthy, bluesy or, as it was called, "funky". This was jazz, but with a funky flavor. It is quite easy to distinguish this funky jazz from the all-out jazz funk described below. I really like funky jazz because it sometimes has a groove, but I love jazz funk better because in that music there is a total groove. Horace Silver, "Song for My Father"/Blue Note Cannonball Adderley "Somethin' Else"/Blue Note Nat Adderley "Work Song"/Riverside Bobby Timmons, "Moanin'"/Milestone THE BLUES GROOVE – GROOVE MUSIC The whole thing about groove music is that everything exists to establish and maintain the groove. Solos, egos, instruments -- what have you, only exist to lay down the groove and to get in it. There is a steady constant beat that can become drone-like or trance-like. You get in a groove and you stay in the groove and that feels good. There are no absolute rules about what makes groove music. Anything can happen as long as the effect is to put you in and keep you in the groove. It often has a Hammond organ in the sound, but not always. It can have any number of instruments doing all kinds of solos and what-not as long as these things don't break the groove. Everything exists to create and maintain the groove. Blues lovers tend to like groove music because the blues is nothing but a groove. Groove music can be up-tempo or slow, bright or dark, but the net effect of getting in a groove is always to satisfy and relax. There is always a constant

rhythm section driving the groove, invariably danceable. Grooves always have a funky, earthy flavor and blues and gospel elements are essential. All grooves are bluesy, by definition. It can be as funky and nasty as you want to be, but groove is not stir-it-up music. It is always cool-you-down music. If it is not relaxing, then it is not groove. Which is not to say that groove is not energetic or fast paced. It may sound wild, but the final effect is a 'groove'. Although I hesitate to characterize it this way, groove music is always a little trance-like. The result of the funkier, 'baddest' piece of groove music is a bit of clear sailing -- relaxation. Get in the groove! That's the place to 'BE'.

ORIGINAL FUNK (SOUL JAZZ) The transformation of bop did not always stop with hard bop or even funkified jazz. Some players dove rather than dipped into the 'roots music' and an even more bluesy music was born that came to be called funk or soul jazz. For the first time, we are talking about real groove music. Funkified Jazz, also called soul jazz, jazz funk, original funk, or just plain funk is a form of jazz that originated in the mid-1950s -- a type of hard bop. It is often played by small groups -- trios led by a tenor or alto sax, pianist, guitar and often the Hammond B3 organ. Funk music is very physical, usually 'down and dirty'. Funk or 'Soul Jazz' emerged as a reaction to the bop/cool jazz (cool, intellectualized) prevalent at the time. Funky music is everything that bop/cool jazz is not. It is hot, sweaty and never strays far from its blues roots. The term "soul" is a link to gospel roots; "funk" links to blues roots. This fusion of jazz with blues and gospel elements became known as "Soul Jazz" during the 1950s, partly through the promotion of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet as a "soul-jazz" group. Fast-paced funk pieces have a bright melodic phrasing set against a hard, percussive dance rhythm. Funk ballads are never more than a few steps from the blues. Above all, this is dynamic relaxin' music that is easy to listen to -- the groove. Those of you who like blues and R&B (and gospel), but find some jazz just a touch remote, may well like original funk. There is no better music to kick back to than this. Jazz funk is sometimes called "original funk" to distinguish it from the contemporary funk sound of the James Brown/George Clinton variety. Along with blues and gospel, original funk or soul jazz had some R&B (soul music) elements thrown into the mix and the resulting fusion was even more to the public's taste. Soul jazz has remained one of the most popular and successful forms of jazz to this very day. Bop is stir-it-up music while funk or soul jazz (no matter how up tempo or percussive) is at heart calm-you-down or groove music. Here are some classic funk albums: Eddie Lockjaw Davis, "Cookbook" vol. 1-3/OJC Gene Ammons, "Gene Ammons Story: Organ Combos"/Prestige Arnett Cobb, "Smooth Sailing"/OJC Red Holloway, "Cookin' Together"/OJC Willis Jackson, "Bar Wars"/Muse Ike Quebec, "Blue and Sentimental"/Blue Note Jimmy Forest, "All the Gin is Gone"/Delmark Bobby Timmons, "Soul Man"/Prestige Johnny

Hammond Smith, "Breakout"/Kudu Harold Vick, "Steppin' Out"/Blue Note Stanley Turrentine, "Comin' Your Way"/Blue Note Houston Person, "Soul Dance"/Prestige Grover Washington, "Mister Magic"/Motown Harold Mayberrn, "Rakin' and Scrapin'", OJC-330 Cornell Dupree, "Coast to Coast"/Antilles Les McCann, "Swiss Movement"/Atlantic (soul jazz) ORGAN COMBOS At the heart of original funk and soul jazz sits the Hammond Organ, 400 pounds of musical joy. I have had two Hammond B3 and still have a digital Hammond today. This unwieldy piece of equipment can do it all -- work by itself, as a duo, trio, quartet, or with a full band. It is a full band. More important is the fact that the Hammond-organ sound pretty much defines real funk. There is something about the percussive sound and the adjustable attack/decay effects that, coupled with the famed (rotating horns) Leslie speakers, epitomizes that music called funk. Whatever the reason, you will find a Hammond organ at the center (or as backup) of the majority of soul jazz recordings, not to mention contemporary funk and R&B recordings. Jimmy Smith is the man who tamed the great beast and turned the Hammond from a roller-rink calliope into a serious jazz instrument. The story is that Smith locked himself in a warehouse with a Hammond for almost a year and came out playing that sound we all love. And Jimmy Smith is just the tip of the top. There are many great Hammond players that are every bit as great in their own way, names like Richard Groove Holmes, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, Charles Earland, John Patton, Larry Young, and others. Put a Hammond organ and some drums together with a tenor sax or guitar and you have all you need for some real funky music. This is groove music par excellence. And this is my personal favorite music. Jimmy Smith, "Back at the Chicken Shack"/Blue Note Jimmy McGriff, "At the Appollo"/Collectables Jack McDuff, "Live!"/Prestige Richard Groove Holmes, "After Hours /Pacific Jazz Don Patterson, "Genius of the B-3"/Music John Patton, "Let em' Roll"/Blue Note Shirley Scott, "Blue Flames"/OJC Charles Earland, "Black Talk"/Prestige Charles Kynard, "Reelin' with the Feeling"/Prestige Larry Young, "The Complete Blue Note Larry Young"/Mosaic Joey DeFrancisco, "All of Me"/Columbia THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF SOUL JAZZ Soul jazz sometime gets a not-so-great rap. Anything so potent and popular lends itself to misuse and a great many so-called soul jazz albums were recorded that had no "soul" -- bad commercial funk. On the theory that you never know what is enough until you have more than enough, artists sought to increase their popularity by making their music more and more commercial until, in the end, they lost touch with the roots of the music -- the soul. To make matters worse, the advent of bop and the various forms of progressive jazz that grew out of bop, gave birth to a somewhat elitist, conservative, and overly intellectualized attitude -- the jazz purist. This purist looks down on jazz that partakes too much of its blues and

gospel roots, and any R&B influences are really frowned upon. These mainstream jazz purists used the overt commercialism aspect of soul jazz as grounds to dismiss the entire music off-hand. Funk and soul jazz was somehow (in their opinion) not as worthy of respect as the bop or progressive jazz they admired. The fact that soul jazz is the most successful and popular form of jazz was cited as further proof of its commonness. This elitist attitude is now on the decline and soul jazz is beginning to take its place in the history of jazz as a legitimate form of jazz. Soul jazz reissues are a hot item. It is a fact that most great jazz performers also have a funky or soul side and albums to prove it. Often very little is written about the soul jazz side of these artists. Well, there you have a quick tour of the funkier side of jazz -- groove music. It is important to point out that soul jazz, although always popular with the people, has received short shrift from the jazz elite. The attitude is that groove music is something, like the blues, which should be kept in the closet -- keep back. That time has passed. GROOVE MASTERS We are coming out of a time when jazz has been measured by how outstanding the soloist is -- how high can they fly? Critics only seem to know how to rate what stands out. This won't work for groove music. In 'groove', the idea is to lay down a groove, get in it, and deepen it. Groove masters always take us deeper into the groove. These artists are our windows into the groove, and their hearts become the highway over which the groove can run. They reinvest. And we ride the groove. This is why jazz critics have either passed (never got it) over groove masters like Grant Green and Stanley Turrentine or heard something but did not know what to make of what they heard (and felt). If music is not viewed as such an intellectual thing (something to see) but more of a feeling kind of thing, then groove masters can be appreciated. You may not see the groove masters, but you sure can feel them. In groove, the solo (and all else) only exists if it adds to the groove. Witness Grant Green's incredible single-note repetitions. Who would ever think to do that? You wouldn't dare think of that. It is done by pure feeling. It feels good and you keep doing it. Nothing to think about. Stanley Turrentine has been laying down grooves for many a year for all to hear. I am surprised at how many books don't even mention him. Grant Green has received even shorter shrift. There have been a few voices crying in the wilderness of soul jazz criticism. Producer Bob Porter of Atlantic Records and Bob Rusch of Cadence Magazine have always known and told us about the groove. Recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder is another pre-eminent groove expert. More than half of all great soul jazz sessions were recorded by Van Gelder. The next time you hear some real groove music, in particular if there is a Hammond organ on it, just check the album for this engineer's name. GRANT GREEN: THE GROOVE MEISTER All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the

groove that most people have no idea what's up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered. To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. Early on, a lot of people said the guy can't sing. But it's not that simple. He is singing. The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that we can't yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time... enough years... that gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvet-toned singer. Dylan's voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now, that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too. Someday everyone will be able to hear it because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan's voice is exposed for just what it is – a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap is changing it even now. Billy Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever- blooming flower. You (or I) can't hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there. We try to absorb it and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!) she entrances us in a delightful dream-like groove and we are lost to criticism. Instead, we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us. Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest -- to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into ourselves. He puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it. He knows that the groove is the thing and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master. I hope that some of what I have written here will help blues lovers push off from the island of blues out into the sea of jazz. You can always head back to the solid ground of blues if you can't get into the jazz. Blues and jazz are not mutually exclusive. Blues in jazz has been a thrilling ride (groove) for me and I have found a whole new music that satisfies much like the blues satisfy. I listen to groove music all the time. If you find some great groove tunes that I have not mentioned here, drop me a line. I want to hear them. **BLUES IN JAZZ AND R&B** There are forms of blues in jazz other than the

groove music presented above. Here are a few notes on some of the major styles: **BLUES SINGERS AND SHOUTERS** There are blues singers who tend toward jazz and almost all jazz singers sing some blues. This is not the place to point these out since they are more-or-less straight-ahead blues singers when they sing blues. The one exception, of course, is Billie Holiday. IMO, Holiday is probably the most seminal singer ever recorded. But is her music the blues? Everything she sings is way beyond blues and blues is supposed to be the root music. Holiday is the equivalent of Delta blues singer Robert Johnson in that she is seminal -- pure source. Period. If you have not listened to Billie Holiday and gotten into her music to the point of real distraction (being moved!), then you have missed one of the premiere music experiences of a lifetime. Enough said. **BLUESY JAZZ** There is also a style of blues-laden jazz that is not so much funky as downright bluesy. Kenny Burrell is perhaps the chief exponent of this style of jazz. Bluesy jazz has a slow or mid-tempo and is easy to listen to -- relaxing. It makes great background or dinner music and yet is integral and stands on its own merits as a music. A lot of artists play bluesy jazz; some play it often. Much bluesy jazz can establish a groove. Kenny Burrell, "Midnight Blue"/Blue Note The Three Sounds (Gene Harris), "Introducing the Three Sounds"/Blue Note Ron Carter, "Jazz: My Romance"/Blue Note Grant Green, "Born to be Blue"/Blue Note Ray Bryant, "All Blues"/Pablo Red Garland, "Soul Junction"/Prestige Wynton Kelly, "Kelly Blue"/Riverside **BLUES/FUNK SAX HONKERS, SCREAMERS, AND BAR WALKERS** Although the emergence of blues sax can be traced all the way back to the great Ben Webster, the honkin', screaming tenor sax of the bar-walking variety originated with Illinois Jacquet and was carried to its logical conclusion with the R&B sax of King Curtis. The term "bar walkin'" came from the habit of emotionally driven sax players walking on the top of a bar among the customers playing at a frenzied pitch -- often in contests with another sax player walking from the other end of the bar. This honkin' blues-drenched sax style was as much performance bravado as sheer music. As Cannonball Adderley said about the funky big-toned sax, "It's the moan inside the tone." Since many of the main players in this style hailed from the Southwest, players in this style are often referred to as "Texas tenors." Some of the main artists in this style include Al Sears, Big Jay McNeely, Willis Jackson, Sill Austin, Lee Allen, Rusty Bryant, Hal Singer, and Sam "The Man" Taylor. Most of these players came out of the large swing bands and either formed their own groups or found work in various R&B settings. This raunchy honkin' music scratches that blues itch and satisfies. This is often groove material. Since many of these sax players can (and often had to) play it all -- blues, R&B, honkin' sax, soul jazz, straight jazz, etc., they are listed here together. I have made some notes to guide you as to their main directions. If you can find the 3-CD called "Giants of the Blues and Funk Tenor

Sax"/Prestige (3PCD-2302- 2), you will get a superb 23 cut collection with many extended solos and liner notes by Bob Porter. Worth ordering or searching for. SAX: BLUES, R&B, FUNK: HONKERS AND BAR WALKERS Lee Allen (R&B) "Walkin' with Mr. Lee"/Collectables (R&B) Gene Ammons (R&B, bop, soul jazz) "Boss Tenors -- Straight Ahead from Chicago 1961"/Verve Sil Austin (blues) "Slow Rock Rock"/Wing Earl Bostic (R&B) "Best of Earl Bostic"/Deluxe Rusty Bryant (R&B, soul jazz) "Rusty Bryant returns", OJC Arnett Cobb (blues, soul jazz) "Smooth Sailing", OJC- 323 King Curtis (R&B, soul jazz) "Soul Meeting"/Prestige Hank Crawford (soul jazz) "Soul Survivors"/Milestone Eddie Lockjaw Davis (blues, soul jazz) "Cookbook, Vol. 1-3"/OJC Jimmy Forrest (blues, bop, soul jazz) "Out of the Forrest"/Prestige Frank Foster (blues) "Soul Outing"/Prestige Johnny Griffin (bop, hard bop, blues) "Big Soul Band"/OJC Eddie Harris (soul jazz) "Best of"/Atlantic Coleman Hawkins (blues, hard bop) Red Holloway (soul jazz) "Cookin' Together"/Prestige Joe Houston R&B Honker (Honker, blues) Willis Jackson (R&B, funk) "Bar Wars"/Muse Illinois Jacquet (Honker, blues, R&B) "Blues: That's Me!"/OJC Big Jay McNeely R&B (Honker, blues) Wild Bill Moore (blues) (Look for him as a sideman) Oliver Nelson (blues, out) "Soul Battle"/OJC David Fathead Newman (R&B, soul jazz) "Lonely Avenue"/Atlantic Harold Ousley (blues, soul jazz) Sweet Double Hipness"/Muse Houston Person (soul jazz) "Goodness"/OJC-332 Ike Quebec (blues, soul jazz) "Blue and Sentimental"/Blue Note Al Sears (blues) "The Swingville All-Stars"/Swingville Hal Singer (blues) "Blue Stompin'/Prestige Sonny Stitt (bop, soul jazz) "Soul Summit"/Prestige Buddy Tate (blues) "Tate's Date"/Swingville Sam "The Man" Taylor (blues, R&B) Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (blues) "Kidney Stew"/Black & Blue Ernie Watts (blues, bop, soul jazz) "Ernie Watts Quartet"/JVC BLUES IN FREE JAZZ Blues in free jazz are present; the notes are there. The problem is that the constant beat is missing and thus the groove never gets laid down. More important, most free jazz is stir-it-up music rather than cool out. While this is great music, it is not groove music. Here are some outstanding examples of some blues in free jazz. Archie Shepp, "Attica Blues"/Impulse Oliver Nelson, "Screamin' the Blues"/New Jazz Charles Mingus, "Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus"/Candid John Coltrane, "Love Supreme"/Impulse Sun Ra, "The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra"/ESP Ornette Coleman, "Tomorrow is the Question"/Contemporary BLUES IN JAZZ- ROCK AND FUSION The Same is true for most jazz rock as for free jazz. The notes occur but the energy is more agitating than not and the groove is seldom established. Crusaders, "Crusaders 1"/Blue Thumb David Sanborn, "Backstreet"/Warner Brothers Mahavishnu Orchestra, "The Inner Mounting Flame"/Columbia Miles Davis, "Star People"/Columbia THE GROOVE GUIDE TO BLUES IN JAZZ Here is something that I wished I had when I first started to get into groove and blues jazz -- a quick guide to the best recordings. It can

save you both time and money. These are some of the main jazz (and R&B) artists with a strong blues content. You will want to hear them out. In each case I have tried to point out key albums that are worth a listen from a blues or groove perspective. The albums are rated and reviewed, (where possible) to give insight into why these might or might not interest you. A short biography is also included and sometimes additional notes on how to approach the artist from a blues perspective. We would need a whole book to do this right, and the All-Music Guide to Jazz (2nd edition) is available when you are. I am sorry to say that many of the albums listed below are not available on CD. Some probably never will be. Although I love CDs, I have had to get back into vinyl to hear a lot of this music. Many of you will also -- back to the old record bins. It's worth it if the music is there. And it is. I hope you enjoy this short guide to groove music.

LANDMARK JAZZ ALBUMS Putting aside the 'blues in jazz' aspect, here is a list of landmark jazz albums that every jazz lover should hear. And this does not just represent my personal opinion. Any serious jazz listener would agree that these are classic albums that should be heard at least once. Whether you like them or not does not matter. It will show you the wide world of jazz and help you figure out what you do like, which directions to take, etc. One thing is certain: if you don't like these albums, it is not because they are lousy performances, but because it is not your kind of music. This list is admittedly weak in traditional, swing, big-band jazz, and fusion. Air, "Air Lore"/Arista Mose Allison, "I Don't worry About a Thing"/Rhino/Atlantic Louis Armstrong, "Hot Fives and Sevens Vol 1-3"/JSP Art Ensemble of Chicago, "Jackson in Your House"/Affinity 9 Count Basie, "The Original American Decca Recordings"/MCA Sidney Bechet, "The Bluebird Sessions"/Bluebird Art Blakey, "Jazz Messengers with Thelonious Monk"/Atlantic Anthony Braxton, "For Alto Saxophone"/Delmark Clifford Brown, "Jazz Immortal"/Pacific Jazz Dave Brubeck, "Take Five"/Columbia Ornette Coleman, "The Shape of Jazz To Come"/Atlantic John Coltrane, "A Love Supreme"/MCA Chick Corea, "My Spanish Heart"/Polydor Charlie Christian, "Solo Flight"/Columbia Miles Davis, "Kind of Blue"/Columbia Eric Dolphy, "Out to Lunch!"/Blue Note Duke Ellington, "Blanton-Webster Band"/Bluebird Bill Evans, "Sunday at the Village Vanguard"/OJC Keith Jarrett, "The Koln Concert"/ECM Erroll Garner, "Concert by the Sea"/Columbia Stan Getz, "Getz/Gilberto"/Verve Dizzy Gillespie, "In the Beginning"/Prestige Herbie Hancock, "Maiden Voyage"/Blue Note Billie Holiday, "The Quintessential Billie Holiday Vol. 1- 9"/Columbia Milt Jackson "Bag's Groove"/Prestige Roland Kirk, "Rahsaan"/Mercury Shelly Manne, "At the Blackhawk"/OJ Charles Mingus, "Mingus at Antibes"/Atlantic Thelonious Monk, "Genius of Modern Music Vol. 1- 2"/Blue Note Wes Montgomery, "Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery"/Riverside Fats Navarro, "The

Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1- 2"/Blue Note Oliver Nelson, "Blues and the Abstract Truth"/Impulse Herbie Nichols, "The Art of Herbie Nichols"/Blue Note Oregon, "Out of the Woods"/Electra Charlie Parker, "The Charlie Parker Story"/Savoy Bud Powell, "The Amazing Bud Powell Vol. 1-2"/Blue Note Sonny Rollins, "Saxophone Colossus"/OJC Sun Ra, "The Heliocentric World of Sun Ra Vol 1"/ESP Cecil Taylor, "Unit Structures"/Blue Note McCoy Tyner, "The Real McCoy"/Blue Note

Fresh Is Fresh

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 3, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2cfca4c7-76b1-4f65-ab14-361310d2b3ec_1024x1024.jpeg

When I write something, I like to get it out, posted. I believe writing should be fresh because even tomorrow, it's no longer the same. As the poet Yeats put it:

"The grass cannot but keep the form where the mountain hare has lain."

I believe that.

Fresh words are just that, fresh. Tomorrow they will not be as fresh, chances are.

Words. I don't deny I wrote them, and of course I wish they would stay fresh as long as possible, but yesterday's posts are already old compared to right now. We all know that change is the only constant; we constantly change.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are the best, and fresh fish is the only way to go. IMO, words are no different. Fresh is of this moment; we are united in it.

Of course, we have things that last. That's what religion is said to be all about, what is unchanging, yet we all know that stasis and static are not unchanging, so let's be real.

I am intrigued and often amazed at, as the old song said, in "What a difference a day makes." I know from constant experience, writing here since 2007, that speaking to today, the moment we all share helps to bring us together.

I'm very religious, but the religion I am "very" about is the dharma, and the dharma champions change above all. Everything changes and the ankle bone is connected to the leg bone, and on around. You can count on it. Nothing remains as it is. Nothing remains still.

Nothing still remains.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Not Fade Away

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 3, 2025

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https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2dd66534-622e-4769-a1f9-9aa035fd532e_2048x2048.jpeg

I'm gonna tell you how it's gonna be
You're gonna give your love to me
Love to last more than one day
Well, love is love and not fade away
Well, love is love and not fade away
Well, love is love and not fade away
Love, love is love and not fade away

After five years of house hunting, our interest in doing so is fading. We certainly have loss of interest in moving, having not found a house we like that we can afford. Realizing that, what we are finding out is that we don't want to live in these houses we are looking at, ones that we almost bid on.

The truth is, we don't quite know what we are doing, meaning we are trying to 'like' houses that we don't really want to live in. This is not a good sign. And you have like 24-hours to make a huge life decision, and thanks to overbidding, sometimes by 20-30K. We have trouble making snap decisions. By the time we get our minds right about a house, it's sold.

We like where we now live and have lived here for some 45 years. So much history has gone down, it's like a museum. Our dharma center (Heart Center KTC) has been open since the 1980s, Matrix Software which was started in the 1970s in Ann Arbor, but moved here in Big Rapids since 1980. AMG, All-Music Guide, All-Movie Guide was born here in the 1990s and eventually moved to Ann Arbor. And on and on.

Where we live here in Big Rapids we have streets we can ride our bikes on, great places to walk in town (alleys, cemeteries, etc.), a wonderful stream about a block away, and many trails to walk, plus a 900,000 acre national forest just a few miles away, not to mention the huge Muskegon River running right through town.

We have a ton of space, enough rooms to sleep more than ten people. We have been driven to move by the wish to be closer to our kids, who themselves are scattered all over Michigan – Traverse City, Lansing, Ann Arbor, and Canton. With the housing shortage, prices have climbed for the past five years and continue to climb. It's slim pickings out there in terms of offerings. And, as mentioned, we seem to always be a dollar short and a day late.

And the recent change in realtor fees is, IMO, just another way to get money from those of us trying to find a house. I only see more fees potentially falling on the buyer, of course. What a joke.

I feel sorry for younger folks who are just starting out and looking for a home. At least we now have a house that is totally good, where we have lived for almost half a century.

The only thing missing is being nearer to our kids, grandkids, and friends. We'd like to be able to just drive across town and see our family. Right now, we have to drive 1.5 hours to Traverse City, about two hours to Lansing, or three hours to Ann Arbor and Canton to reach them. As we are getting older, the drive becomes increasingly more difficult.

So, here we are, in a good place, safe, and not in a town with much fear and danger. And if we add in the Covid factor, which is still very much with us here in the Midwest, you have a recipe for isolation with a kind of forced shelter in place.

Now that we are retired and have time to hang out, we are not close to any family to do so, trying our best not to just fade away ourselves. Bummer.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Tripping the Light Fantastic

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7182e6f4-9036-457d-a2dd-1685c748f253_1536x2048.jpeg

Well, to the best of my ability.

What about those times I don't feel like doing anything at all, including not doing anything at all. Those are twisters. I can't win for losing.

It's cold outside, about 15 degrees right now and dropping. The little added electric heat in my room is not making it. The cold woke me up, my feet got chilled. Time to get that extra blanket. And there have been three X-Class solar flares in the last 24 hours or so. OK, I'm distracted.

The things I could do, the things I should do, aren't getting done, at least not now. I tried to sleep, but I'm already up again. I think I will make a blueberry pie and am defrosting blueberries we froze from some time ago. They look fine.

I'm not good at making crusts, so I will make a cobbler crust on top of the blueberries and no lower crust. I can do that.

It's only 10:30 PM and I'm up, with a long night ahead and who knows when sleep will come. Probably not soon, so I will have to punt past Midnight into the wee hours and see when sleep is possible. I'm going with the flow.

Meanwhile, what? Offhand, no idea. I can always write myself asleep if it comes to that. Or I can do tomorrow's exercise today, in the night, just to kill time and have it behind me. I just did that.

You can only push so far into the future before you get back to where you are. That's a 24-hour cycle for you. I'm not trying to get to morning, only to sleep, yet where is that?

No doubt, I'm irked.

And so, what I've done. As mentioned, first I did all my exercises for tomorrow, tonight. Then, casting about, I decided to make that blueberry cobbler. Why not?

I couldn't be bothered with the whole top and bottom piecrust, so a toss-it-on cobbler crust is how I went. I mixed the now-unfrozen blueberries with some

zest from a lime and juice from the lime, a little oil, a touch of vanilla, and some maple syrup.

The cobbler dough was organic whole-wheat flower, baking powder, baking soda, and some water, mixed lightly and put on as a top crust by hand. It's in the oven and I'm waiting.

I feel better already.

[iPhone photo by me of the Rustic Blueberry Cobbler.]

EMAIL

Sunday, Sunday

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5027251d-56cc-43f4-ae5d-d8dc38860b2f_2048x1896.jpeg

Fourteen degrees out last night, so perhaps that will bring us clear and sunny skies this Sunday morning, although the weather report says, 'cloudy all day'.

Nevertheless, the sun marches northward to spring. It will come.

What to do indoors until I can go outside again, I'm not sure. I still have a tendency to just wait, and waiting counts as something to do, and that is wasteful and painful at the same time.

I've run out of series-TV to watch. I've seen the ones I can stand and can't bear the rest.

Oh yeah, there are plenty of things I could and should be doing, but the interest is just not there... now. Their time will come.

Dreaming of spring and what I will do when it comes is a reflection of my past persisting into the present, paying no attention to the old dharma advice from the great Mahasiddha Tilopa, "Don't Invite the Future."

I had to get the weekly trash and recycle out to the alley this morning and it was cold. Our neighbor dog Vincent, a young Akita was out and waiting where our yards meet. He can hear me coming and was barking away.

I tell Vincent to sit down and shut up, and he does, barely able to hold still. I give him a 'cookie' (dog biscuit) which I do if he is good, which is momentary. He very delicately takes the cookie and then begins barking again. I give him a second cookie I brought out for his companion dog, but she is not out in this cold. And then Vincent my barking friend, I'm out of there.

So, that's about all I HAVE to do today, so now what do I want to do? Darned if I know. Not much.

I will let myself stew in the waters of the present moment and, like the Magic 8-Ball, wait to see what comes up. I'm curious.

Some things invite thought, but I let them just bounce off of me for now; perhaps I will think about them later, if at all. Same goes for doing stuff. Not gonna' happen.

Taking up projects? Not likely when it's a good day to do nothing at all. As mentioned, I am expert at just waiting. Have waited all my life. Anticipation is often better than the reality.

[Not the real "Vincent." Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Prebiotics, Probiotics, Postbiotics

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 11, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0e4b2c15-7ad7-4e27-89c3-bf6fd4f35787_1024x1024.jpeg

This last summer, while traversing the meadows around where we live, I picked up a deer tick and did not manage to find it soon enough. It not only embedded itself in my arm, but it also soon cast a bright red ring around it that extended down my arm.

Of course I removed the tick, but the infection got worse and I ended up at our local urgent-care early one morning, where the doctor decided I needed to go on a round of antibiotics since I did not catch the wound soon enough.

The problem with antibiotics is that along with the bad bacteria transmitted by the blood-feeding tick, antibiotics also wipe out all or much of the good bacteria in the gut. It can take months to rebuild a healthy set of bacteria in our gut using probiotics and related measures. That was the case here. Leave it to me to screw that up.

I am trying to restore the flora in my GUT. I am looking into Prebiotics, Probiotics, and Postbiotics. And I am asking you folks for any experience or advice in doing this, brands, types of probiotic bacteria, and all of that.

Meanwhile, I am busy sending messengers to my gut using various probiotics and other stuff, trying to find a happy medium. I could use some suggestions please, if you have them.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Gut

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 12, 2025

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I'm still on the GUT patrol here, learning what I can, and thanking you for all the input. I'm gathering various forms of intestinal bacteria, to be the flora and fauna of the large intestine.

Also figuring ways for intestinal flora to get across the rivers of acid that are in our stomach and come out the other side still intact and alive to the large intestine where it can create a home and flourish as I need it to.

Most forms of intestinal flora are decimated or worse while passing through the stomach, although there are a handful of tough probiotic flora that are undeterred by stomach acid and march right through. The following probiotic bacteria can do that. survive:

Lactobacillus species (e.g., *Lactobacillus acidophilus* , *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* , *Lactobacillus plantarum*) – These are among the most common probiotics and are found in yogurt, fermented foods, and supplements. They are acid-tolerant and can survive transit through the stomach. Look for these in whatever probiotics you are taking:

Bifidobacterium species (e.g., *Bifidobacterium bifidum* , *Bifidobacterium longum*) – These bacteria also have a high resistance to stomach acid, and they are often used in probiotic formulations. They can colonize the gut, supporting digestive health.

Saccharomyces boulardii – This is a type of yeast that is not a bacterium but is also considered a probiotic. It has a remarkable ability to survive stomach acid and is used to support gut health and prevent or treat diarrhea.

Enterococcus faecium – This bacterium is another example of a microorganism that can survive acidic conditions and is sometimes included in probiotics.

Streptococcus thermophilus – This bacterium is often used in the production of yogurt and is known for its ability to survive stomach acid and thrive in the intestines.

I know, this probably is not the most interesting topic to be reading, yet I am finding that so much of our life depends on all these probiotic bacteria and I have recently found out in real-time how antibiotics can virtually wipe all that flora and fauna out of our large intestine and allow bad bacteria to flourish, causing us all kinds of pain and mess. For example, here are the prebiotics and probiotics I am working with include:

PREBIOTICS

In the past I paid attention to probiotics, but never understood well-enough what ‘prebiotics’ were, much less saw to their care and culture.

Prebiotics are naturally occurring, non-digestible fibers or compounds that promote the growth and activity of beneficial microorganisms, such as good bacteria, in the gut. Unlike probiotics, which are live beneficial bacteria, prebiotics act as food for these bacteria, helping them thrive and support a healthy balance in the gut microbiota. By nourishing the beneficial bacteria, prebiotics can help improve digestion, support bowel regularity, and potentially reduce the growth of harmful bacteria. They are essential for maintaining a well-functioning gut, which is linked to overall health and immune system function.

Common sources of prebiotics include certain types of dietary fiber found in foods like onions, garlic, bananas, asparagus, and whole grains. Prebiotics can also be added to functional foods and supplements. As they are not digested in the small intestine, they travel to the colon, where they are fermented by gut bacteria, promoting the growth of helpful species such as Bifidobacteria and Lactobacilli. This process can help improve gut health, boost immunity, and may even have benefits for conditions like constipation or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Essentially, prebiotics serve as food for the good bacteria in our digestive system, helping them thrive and contribute to overall gut health. If you don’t provide that food, all the probiotics you have may not have enough food, i.e. anything to eat.

Prebiotics pass through to the colon, where they are fermented by beneficial bacteria. They very much improve digestion and regular bowel movements. And these helpful bacteria are crucial for our immune system. Here are some I am working with.

Prebiotic: Inulin Powder (Chicory Root) – Not digested or absorbed in the stomach, but stays in the bowel and helps ‘good’ bacteria grow.

Prebiotic: Galacto-oligosaccharides (GOS) – Prebiotics act as food for ‘good’ bacteria in the intestines.

Prebiotic: Acacia Gum

Prebiotic: Sunfiber – excellent prebiotic for microflora balance.,

PROBIOTICS

As for probiotics, here is what I am currently working with”

Probiotic: ‘Saccharomyces Boulardi – S’ probiotic yeast that can survive the stomach acids and help colonize the intestinal tract.

SUPER REDS: New Zealand Kiwifruit extract, Red Grape Skin Extract, Pine Bark Extract, Boysenberry Extract, Blackcurrant Extract, Grape Seed Extract, and Fulvic Acid – superfoods that fortify the immune systems, protect the body from oxidative stress, and promote ‘good’ bacteria in the gut.

Saccharomyces boulardii – This is a type of yeast that is not a bacterium but is also considered a probiotic. It has a remarkable ability to survive stomach acid and is used to support gut health and prevent or treat diarrhea.

Probiotic: ‘e coli nissle 1917’ – a nonpathogenic probiotic bacterium used to treat gastrointestinal and inflammatory bowel diseases.

Probiotic: Lactobacillus rhamnosus LA801 – a friendly type of bacteria.

Probiotic: Tributyrin (from Corebiome) – Supports a healthy microbiome, intestinal walls, and balance flora.

Other probiotics that are in the Kefir and Greek Yogurt I am taking include:

Bacillus coagulans,

Bifidobacterium bifidum

Lactobacillus Lactis Lactobacillus Rhamnosus Streptococcus Diacetylactis
Lactobacillus Plantarum Lactobacillus Casei Saccharomyces Florentinus
Leuconostoc Cremoris Bifidobacterium Longum Bifidobacterium Breve
Lactobacillus Acidophilus Bifidobacterium Lactis Lactobacillus Reuteri

Why so many?

For example, the Kefir I am taking (Lifeway Kefir) has 12 different probiotics in it. Why not just one or two?

It seems the experts on the gut feel the shotgun approach is best. Take a whole bunch of probiotics at the same time and see which (in your gut) survive and flourish and which don't make.

Once you install probiotics that work for you, they can continue to replenish themselves. If they don't, we have to take them each day or so or at least periodically.

As mentioned, weaker gut bacteria, which are more sensitive to stomach acid, can be protected in pill or capsule form using various encapsulation techniques. These methods help shield the bacteria from the harsh acidic environment of the stomach, allowing more of them to reach the intestines alive. Some common techniques include:

1. Enteric Coating

- What it is : Enteric coating involves applying a protective layer around the pill or capsule that only dissolves in the higher pH environment of the small intestine, not in the acidic stomach.

What it is : Enteric coating involves applying a protective layer around the pill or capsule that only dissolves in the higher pH environment of the small intestine, not in the acidic stomach.

- How it works : The coating material (often made from substances like polysaccharides, cellulose, or acrylic polymers) resists the stomach's acidity but breaks down once the pill reaches the more neutral pH of the intestines. This ensures the probiotics survive and are released where they are most needed.

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2. Gastro-resistant Capsules

- What it is : These capsules are made from materials that protect against stomach acid, similar to enteric coatings.

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- How it works : The capsule is often made from specialized materials like HPMC (Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose), which resists stomach acid but

dissolves in the intestines. This ensures the bacteria are protected as they travel through the stomach.

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3. Microencapsulation

- What it is : This involves enclosing the bacteria in tiny protective particles, often made from natural substances like starch, lipids, or proteins.

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- How it works : The bacteria are suspended in a carrier material that can resist stomach acid. These microcapsules can also offer controlled release, allowing the probiotics to be released slowly and steadily as they move through the digestive system, ensuring they reach the intestines in viable form.

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4. Freeze-drying (Lyophilization)

- What it is : This process involves removing water from the bacteria by freezing them and then placing them in a vacuum. The bacteria remain dormant and dehydrated, which makes them more stable for storage and transport.

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- How it works : After freeze-drying, probiotics are typically encapsulated in a protective coating or material to prevent them from being damaged during transit or by stomach acid. When consumed, they rehydrate and become active again once they reach the intestines.

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5. Liposomal Encapsulation

- What it is : This method involves enclosing the probiotics in tiny lipid-based vesicles (liposomes), which are similar to the structure of cell membranes.

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- How it works : The lipid layer around the probiotics protects them from stomach acid and enhances their absorption once they reach the intestines.

How it works : The lipid layer around the probiotics protects them from stomach acid and enhances their absorption once they reach the intestines.

6. Dual or Multi-layer Capsules

- What it is : Some probiotic supplements are made with multiple layers, with the outer layer designed to protect against stomach acid, and inner layers designed for controlled release.

What it is : Some probiotic supplements are made with multiple layers, with the outer layer designed to protect against stomach acid, and inner layers designed for controlled release.

- How it works : The layers may be designed to dissolve at different pH levels, ensuring that the bacteria are gradually released at different stages of digestion, with a significant portion surviving the acidic conditions of the stomach.

How it works : The layers may be designed to dissolve at different pH levels, ensuring that the bacteria are gradually released at different stages of digestion, with a significant portion surviving the acidic conditions of the stomach.

These advanced encapsulation technologies ensure that even weaker, more sensitive, probiotics can be delivered to the intestines in a viable, effective form.

Anyway, I am on the job of sorting all this out because I need to for my own health. Hope some of this information is helpful to others. For example:

Trying different things, for a while I tried to eat just heavy protein (like canned tuna), without all the vegetables, grains, etc. that I usually do. That was a HUGE mistake, because it ignored the prebiotics, foods that nourish the gut. What happened is that my gut was changed by just eating so much protein with no salads, vegies, etc..

The gut flora and fauna morphed and became very harsh and stinky too. I had the smell of tuna start oozing out of my skin and am in the process of turning all that around. Prebiotics are not just 'side dishes' for protein. They are essential for a healthy gut.

I am not a doctor or an expert, so you may want to run your own probiotic consumption past your local MD. Like many of you reading this I am just trying to get my gut happy and working as it always had until I took antibiotics and wiped out my inner flora and fauna, whatever it was.

Lesson being learned!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Dear Dr. ChatGPT...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 13, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/03e9ae23-3ec7-456d-938e-582b54a5ece6_2048x1505.jpeg

I know, you cannot depend on ChatGPT for accurate information, so please save your fingers from typing a warning. I get it!

However, and this is a for-real 'however'. Of course I tried calling real doctors. Would it surprise you that I can't see one for months because they are so scheduled up? I don't think so.

I finally took my health problem to the local Urgent-Care, and while I did not get a real doctor, I did get a doctor-like assistant who is perhaps almost a doctor.

I brought urine and fecal samples, but found that virtually no one wants to see my poop. My urine they took, but required a fresh urine sample right on the spot, so to speak.

It turns out I had no bacteria in my urine that would require an antibiotic, so I had to take my poop with me.

Then, giving up on that, I canvassed the area for someone in Urology or Gastrointestinal medicine. The only thing I found was there was no one locally who could do that. They did have a doctor that came to our town every few weeks and had for years. Only, he was booked up months in advance. Hmmm. What to do?

Well, I did what I should have done first, which is ask ChatGPT what it thought. I was careful describe in great detail everything that was going on with me, and in one second ChatGPT spit out a diagnosis in full detail. And it was accurate.

It appears that I had done two things wrong, back-to-back, and they created like a perfect storm for my gut biome.

The first was that, due to checking for a tick bite, I had to take a round of antibiotics. I should know, because this has happened before, that antibiotics wipes out most of our good flora in our gut biome and we have to start back to almost zero in replenishing it.

Next, the other thing I did wrong, and this was as wrong as wrong can be, I decided to stop eating so much and just eat some heavy protein and see if I could sustain that, lose some weight, and keep it simple.

I had a bunch of these 3.5 ounce cans of very nice wild-caught tuna filets, so every day or so I ate a can of that, right out of the can without any side dish. This went on for a month or so before it kicked back on me.

Well, that concentrated tuna did not go well with wiping out the flora in my biome. Suddenly my stool went through a metamorphosis, but did not come out a butterfly. I will spare you the poop details.

The upshot was that, for some reason, after a month or so of eating canned tuna, the smell of fish (that tuna) was coming out of the pores of my skin and in my breath, even weeks after not eating any more tuna.

At first, I imagined the tuna smell came from some clothing I might be wearing, but nope. That was not it. It was me that was emitting that fish smell. Never happened before.

I had seen folks who ate too many carrots turning orange, but not this kind of poop syndrome.

Well, the long and the short of it is that ChatGPT, to my satisfaction, diagnosed it as 'Dysbiosis,' which fit my symptoms to a 'T'.

All I had to do (and am doing) was pay attention to what are called prebiotics, which boils down to eating a regular diet with salads, grains, and especially veges and apply that to some probiotics, which I am doing.

All of the above I probably didn't have to tell you, yet I feel it is my bona fides for turning to ChatGPT for advice. And it was very detailed advice, a whole report. And I checked that report, term by term, on the Internet to verify the diagnosis.

My point in writing this is to confirm my suspicion that the future of medicine, at least for diagnosis, is not waiting months for a doctor to have time to see me (or us) for ten minutes as I do now..

In the future, I believe we will be using something like a medical ChatGPT instead. And of course, it probably won't be much different than the ChatGPT we now use, just enough different for them to charge us as much money as possible.

As mentioned, I read and reread the report and then cross-checked it against looking up all the terms that ChatGPT used to verify it.

It was a whole lot easier and gave me the attention my worries deserved about my condition. No, we can't do surgery on the computer and so on, not yet anyway, but in a society where getting medical attention in a timely manner, unless you go to the ER is becoming increasingly more difficult.

Right now, we already have diagnosis by Internet with a doctor on the other side. I have done that a couple times. I am not talking about that, but having just ChatGPT on the other end of a call. And what are our local doctors going to do when ChatGPT or its equivalent takes over and a real doctor only is available if all else fails? We are heading that way, folks, IMO.

And I will say this. Since the coming administration claims they want to cancel Obamacare and there are still a huge number of folks without any medical insurance and information out there, thank the lord for ChatGPT because it is clear to me that, medically speaking, it is going to get better every year, so for those without medical insurance having ChatGPT available to all is a godsend.

[Graphic by me.]

EMAIL

Working the GUT

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 16, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Having to learn about GUT flora opened up a whole new world for my health. I had to learn a lot and did.

However, I also found all of the information somewhat confusing. The whole idea of “Prebiotics” was new to me, that we are responsible for what we feed our gut, that we are the provider. Recognizing that others will perhaps have the same confusion, I wrote a little script, a program, to mine ChatGPT for some basic information and format it for easy viewing. I include that information here in the hope that it can be useful here. This is mostly very researched information, so ChatGPT is not making anything up.

This is the information you will need to figure out your way through the wealth of information and learn how to feed your own hungry tummy and gut.

Please download it while you can in this PDF file and have it around. Yes, there are books about this, but here is the main data and information about some of the major prebiotics, probiotics, and post biotics in one place.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Jas Obrecht: An Ann Arbor Music Treasure

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 17, 2025

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Jas Obrecht, back in that day, with Eddie Van Halen.

Jas Obrecht today in Ann Arbor.

By Michael Erlewine

In just a few minutes of conversation with Jas Obrecht, a longtime Ann Arbor resident and part-time WCC instructor, I knew I was in good company. We first met years ago. Obrecht is deeply knowledgeable about music and its history, especially here in America, and possesses the technical expertise to write about it all in detail.

I don't subscribe to many magazines because I simply don't have the time to read everything out there. However, I make it a point to read everything Jas Obrecht writes on Talking Guitar . It's always at the top of my list, and I eagerly look forward to each new post. Jas Obrecht isn't just well-versed in blues, jazz, and classic rock—he is also a brilliant writer.

When it comes to blues, a genre I especially love, I can only think of one writer who matches Obrecht's caliber: the late John Sinclair.

Jas Obrecht worked as a staff editor at Guitar Player Magazine from 1978 to 1998 and has written more than 150 cover stories for various music magazines. He is a wonderful interviewer and has archived hundreds of audio interviews with famous musicians . He frequently posts them as podcasts on his "Talking Guitar" YouTube channel. So far, these include in-depth conversations with Eddie Van Halen, Jerry Garcia, Tom Petty, Jorma Kaukonen, Jeff Beck, Neil Young, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Bert Jansch, the Allman Brothers, John Lee Hooker, and everyone in the Rolling Stones. They are all available for free.

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He has also authored several books, including *Early Blues: The First Stars of Blues Guitar*, *Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarists*, *Talking Guitar: Conversations with Musicians Who Shaped Twentieth-Century American Music*, *Stone Free: Jimi Hendrix in London*, *My Son Jimi* (coauthored with James "Al" Hendrix), and more.

Obrecht's *Let It Roll: The Essential Blues Sessions* column appears in every issue of *Living Blues* magazine.

Currently, Obrecht serves as editor-in-chief of the *Talking Guitar* YouTube Channel and the online *Talking Guitar* magazine at jasobrecht.substack.com, which features interviews, transcriptions, articles, and podcasts.

If you haven't yet seen, read, or listened to Obrecht's work, I highly recommend taking a look.

— Michael Erlewine, founder of All-Music Guide (AllMusic.com)

[Photos of Jas Obrecht today, and back in the day with Eddie Van Halen by Jon Sievert.]

EMAIL

Color Me 'Grainless'

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Not brainless, but 'grainless'. My food history and the particular food regime I'm on has kind of hit a wall with the destruction of my gut by antibiotics recently. And I further damaged my gut by eating mostly protein, in this case canned fish, which only complicated things by bringing on dysbiosis, leaving me with a sour gut at present.. And it's that I have been working on these past several weeks.

And then my FB friend Tracey Ann suggested the book "Super Gut" by Dr William Davis, which I took a look at and then ordered. I had scanned through a couple of books on the gut previously, but found very little that rung a bell for me. However, the William Davis book "Super Gut" did.

This book is packed full of bell-ringers, so that each page is worth a detailed study and whatever action it inspires. And I am on the case, so to speak.

And before I knew it, I was teetering on the edge of falling off the 'whole-grain' train I have been on for years, since the later 1960s. Wow!

I have decided to give up grains of all kinds, at least for a while, which kind of wipes out my entire menu. I'm in the process of making my own kefir and yogurts, and repopulating my gut with defined prebiotics, probiotics, and postbiotics and all that which is required.

Since I'm already more vegan than vegan, I am now right up against not knowing what to eat and how to eat it, if only because I now know what not to eat any more of.

My interest in fermented food goes back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s, when we lived up on a hill right on north Main Street in Ann Arbor, across the street from the Huron River and Lansky's junkyard. We raised our first two kids there, even giving birth to one of them in that house at 1041 N. Main Street.

In the Michigan basement of that house we had all kinds of wooden barrels with bamboo hoops, Mugi Miso (barley), Hatcho Miso, Kome Miso, and kegs of UME plums, bran pickles, and others. We even tried making our own tofu from scratch back then, and Sweet Rice, not to mention loving the staple of Lundberg Short-Grain Brown Rice. I could go on and on. All grains are seeds, but not all seeds are grains. I am still eating seeds.

Back then, we were learning Macrobiotics, the cooking and the theory. In 1969 I designed the logo for Eden Foods and picked using astrology the date and time they first opened. Anyway, it has been from then to now.

And here I am putting aside all whole-grains, at least for the moment, rice, corn, barley, oats, and the other members of the grass family that are food staples.

It's a country I have never travelled, a diet I have never tried, and I'm trying it. Indeed, could it be that whole grains, aside from being my chosen food, are also the cause of considerable problems. I don't know, yet I will try to find out. I'm already making kefir and busy collecting prime candidates for prebiotics, probiotics, and post biotics. I've got a number of kefirs ramping up their output just two feet from where I'm sitting.

If you have experience with all this, please chime and share it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Snake and the Knot

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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The Ven. Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche:

“Whenever an affliction occurs, we should just look at it and rest in naturalness. When the affliction of anger occurs, we should look at its essence and ask, “Where did the anger arise?” Anger seems like something strong from the outside, but if we look at its nature, and ask, “Where did it come from?” “What is its essence?”

“When we investigate like this, we come to see that its essence is empty. If we then rest in the expanse of the nature of the affliction itself, it naturally disappears. Whether it is anger, desire, or delusion, when we rest in the expanse of the natural state, it is liberated the moment it appears. “Many great masters in the past have explained this with the example of tying a snake in a knot. When you tie a snake in a knot, the snake will gradually loosen the knot and untie itself. It is the same here: the afflictions are self-liberated and naturally disappear when we look at them and see their essential nature.”

No matter what the affliction, we don’t want to tense up and grow tighter, but rather just the opposite, relax and let go. Let the knot unwind itself.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Tales from the Prebiotic

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cdf5e3cb-b6a6-4a1d-83b0-1a8805f2b19b_1024x1024.jpeg

By Michael Erlewine

It's 08:30 AM and it's -5 degrees out, which is cold. I'm still on a tangent that is turning into a main focus as regards rebuilding my gut, the microbiome. It looks like I am putting aside all grains, which is a massive change in direction as far as my eating goes. Huge. So, you may be hearing about all this, unless I find reason to abandon this exploration.

As I look into prebiotics, probiotics, and postbiotics, of course there are interesting stories. My favorite one so far is this one, the discovery of *Escherichia coli* (E. coli) strain Nissle 1917. It is intricately linked to an interesting case during World War I. In 1917, Dr. Alfred Nissle, a German microbiologist, made a notable discovery involving a soldier who exhibited resistance to a number of diseases.

Alfred Nissle was conducting research on E. coli and its potential effects on gut health and disease prevention. During the war, a soldier who had been serving in the military developed an unusual resistance. Despite being exposed to a variety of diseases, including dysentery and other gastrointestinal infections, this soldier did not contract any of them, even though his fellow soldiers fell ill. The soldier had remained completely gut-healthy during the military campaign in the Balkans, contracting neither dysentery, typhoid fever, paratyphoid fever nor any other gastrointestinal infections such as diarrheal diseases, which were common and problematic in the harsh conditions of the trenches during World War I.

The soldier's remarkable immunity to these diseases intrigued Nissle, and he decided to investigate the microbiological factors that might explain this anomaly. After further examination, Nissle discovered that the soldier's intestines contained a particular strain of E. coli, which was notably different from pathogenic strains of the bacterium.

Nissle hypothesized that the soldier's intestinal microbiota, specifically the strain of E. coli found in his gut, played a crucial role in preventing infection. The strain of E. coli isolated from the soldier was a non-pathogenic type that appeared to have probiotic properties. These properties likely helped

maintain a healthy balance of intestinal flora and possibly outcompeted harmful pathogens, offering protection from infection.

Following this discovery, Nissle further investigated the strain and identified it as a potentially beneficial *E. coli* strain for human health. The strain was named *E. coli* Nissle 1917 in honor of the year it was isolated.

Over time, it was recognized for its beneficial effects in preventing or treating gastrointestinal disorders, especially conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and various forms of diarrhea. The strain has been used therapeutically as a probiotic in many countries and is still used today for its beneficial effects on gut health.

The discovery of *E. coli* Nissle 1917 was made possible by this soldier during World War I who, despite exposure to common diseases like dysentery and other gastrointestinal infections, remained healthy. As mentioned, the key factor was a unique strain of *E. coli* in his intestines, which protected him from these diseases. This finding led to the identification of *E. coli* Nissle 1917 as a beneficial strain with probiotic properties, marking a significant contribution to the field of microbiology and the understanding of gut health.

This particular probiotic has to be shipped live in a refrigerated container, which I had done. I am now taking a round of *Escherichia coli* Nissle 1917 to help sort out my own microbiome, which will go on for some weeks. It's not likely that when I stop taking this strain of probiotic that it will remain in my gut. However, that is not its intention or use.

It is there to sort out the good and bad bacteria and clean up the gut and then vanish. It is mostly available in Europe under a brand name "Mutaflor," so you may have to search for it. I did.

<https://feelgoodnatural.com/shop/mutaflor/mutaflor-sale-60-caps-30-days-supply/>

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Life As a Picnic

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Life is filled with eddies, swirls that carry us into or out of our mainstream path. Today I share with you this profound song my daughter May wrote.

May Erlewine “Waterfall”

We are always an instant away from a deluge, our being swept away. Life is tenuous, very fragile. And we never know what is just around the corner of time.

That being said, I find myself launched midstream by the act of giving up all grains, after literally a lifetime of them. Gastronomically speaking, it’s a new world. Everything has to be reviewed and reconfigured, who knows how long this will take.

It’s good for my sense of humor because it requires a lot of humor just to come out eating. Everything is connected to everything else and has been all my life. No longer.

I’m busy making my first probiotic yogurt and that will take days, if it even works. Meanwhile, I’m continually casting about for food, running to the grocery store, and planning out future meals, while all around me are the remnants of decades of eating grains. I will have to save what grains we have for guests or donate them to charity.

I’m not going to just throw it out, not until I prove to myself the value of a grain-less diet. Now I can’t eat the bread, frozen bread, crackers, cookies, and the list goes on.

In the meantime, bring out the nuts and seeds, of which we also have a bounty of around here as well. As for nightshades, I like them, so they will stay, although I have to find some non-grain noodles to make spaghetti with.

No longer are there the endless leftovers of cooked rice, pasta, breads, crackers, cookies, pies, and all of the grain train. Lucky, we still do have the vast pots of beans; thank goodness for that. When they say hunt and gather, that’s no joke. Eating is becoming more of a pull together something to eat, piece by piece, and eat away at it.

Hunter and gatherer, here I come. Meals have become much more like an all-day picnic with no main meal. Eat as you go. Endless hors d'oeuvres. Obviously, I have a lot to learn and no easy way to learn it.

Where before, with grains, I tended to eat a lot more and then seek out a nap. With this grain-less diet I find I have time on my hands, quite a lot more of it. There I am, not napping, not momentarily paralyzed by a food or sugar high, but just right here present in the present moment.

Is that good or bad? Obviously, it's hopefully good, but I have to learn what to do with all this extra time. As mentioned, there I am, just looking around where before I was somewhere knocked out by a carbohydrate high.

There no longer is a staple like rice or bread, nothing to hang on to, no security blanket. It makes the kind of snacking that eating some crackers or having a piece of buttered bread offer as a memory. Yet just snacking or stuffing our mouth, creature comforts, is now a nervous memory, not to mention the bodily response, like a sugar or carbohydrate high, bringing on a nap or rest period.

Replacing that, well, there is no replacing that. Instead, there is continued awareness with none of the time out that snacking and sugar highs brought. You are on the spot all the time. No rest of that kind. It is right 'here' that you are.

So far, I'm coming up against the lure of past food and eating habits. So, if I'm looking for that 'heavy' yang food that will just knock me out for a spell and give life meaning, I have to look elsewhere because it's not available in the old forms. And unconsciously I'm still looking.

The eating books say that when you abandon grains you will find yourself at a loss for three to five days, and that is an understatement. I actually do find myself at a loss and very much aware of that at the same time.

Nevertheless, "Inquiring Minds Want to Know."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Blast From the Past: My Music

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

January 22, 2025

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My playing in West-Park in Ann Arbor

The Incomparable Irma Thomas

By Michael Erlewine

I am feeling a little nostalgic this bitter winter morning. I just read the book on a friend of mine, the great blues guitarist-- "Michael Bloomfield: The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero" by Ed Ward. Excellent book. I don't blog much on my musical background, but I have one. Here is a little taste of that.

Back in the 1960s the musicians I really loved and looked up to were players like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, Otis Rush, Little Walter, Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, and the list goes on, mostly the great Chicago blues players. And I had the chance to meet these artists, interview and hang out with them, plus hear them playing live in clubs and other venues. I was a total fan of these folks.

I am sometimes asked why I didn't spend more time listening to my own peers, groups like the Grateful Dead, Janice Joplin, The Band, and so on. My answer is simple. Their music didn't interest me.

If that sounds flip, it's not meant to. It was because those players who were my peers were people much like me. No matter how great they were, we all drank from the same cup. We were all derivatives, all drawing inspiration from the same musical root- sources, those great rock, blues, and jazz players who came before us. It was not disrespect, but a simple camaraderie.

For example, I met and hung out with Janice Joplin at the Grande Ballroom in the mid- 1960s, where we both played. She was cool, no doubt. But I had already heard the original "Take Another Little Piece of my Heart" by Erma Franklin and "Ball 'n Chain" by Big Mama Thornton.

I spent a whole late-night talking and drinking with Big Mama Thornton, so I know where Joplin was getting her stuff. Joplin was a popular singer, but she was no Big Mama Thornton. We both revered Big Mama Thornton. Joplin herself would be the first to say so.

It was the same with the Rolling Stones. Of course I like their tune "Time is On My Side," because that is an Irma Thomas song. What's not to like, but I like the original by Irma Thomas much better.

Thomas is one of the greatest woman singers I have ever heard. Period. I had the chance to pick her up at the airport, have dinner with her, and hang out some years ago and it was out of this world. Later that night at the gig, Irma Thomas changed her set list to include many of her early songs that I especially love, just for me. We are exactly the same age. I can't say enough about what a great artist Irma Thomas is.

If you have never heard Irma Thomas (and you love R&B), here are a couple heart- stoppers to give you a taste:

Irma Thomas: "Two Winters Long"

Irma Thomas: "I'm Gonna Cry Till My Tears Run Dry"

So you get the idea. It is not that I was somehow too good for the music of my peers. It was because it wasn't their music and in almost all cases the original was better, and they knew it too. That's why they covered it in the first place.

It's the same with the Grateful Dead. We were all studying the same root music. I remember jamming with Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead in West Park in Ann Arbor one sunny afternoon in the 1960s. It was fun, but we were both reading from the same playbook of those great artists that we revered, most of whom were still living.

An exception would be Jimi Hendrix. Although he too had roots, he transformed those roots into something really new, IMO. Hendrix was unique in this way.

There is one other exception, only one group I can think of among my peers that I would acknowledge myself a "groupie" of, and that was the Paul Butterfield Blues Band." When the Butterfield band burst on the scene in late 1965, we were spellbound.

Although Butterfield and his band later made a number of albums, IMO none of those albums captured the experience of hearing that band live. And I should know. As a 'groupie' I heard them many times.

And we hung out with the Butterfield band and even recorded them. In the spring of 1966, my brother Dan and I recorded an early version of the Butterfield band's landmark tune East-West in "Poor Richard's" club in Chicago, before it came out as an album. "East-West" is considered the first extended rock solo (13 minutes) ever issued on an album, and it served to fuel the future of any number of heavy-metal artists.

Our recording of East-West is the first complete rendering of this tune that is extant. If I remember right, we were sitting behind a curtain on the stage recording this, but I could be wrong. My brother Dan might remember. Anyway, the recording we made was issued on an album called "East-West Live" by the Butterfield keyboard player Mark Naftalin in 1996.

There were many reasons the Butterfield band's imprint on us was so profound. For one, they were just that good, and they were a racially mixed band as we sometimes were. That first Butterfield album stopped us in our tracks and our band was never the same again. That was probably the time we added the phrase "Blues Band" to our name, making it the "Prime Movers Blues Band." That first Butterfield album served as a wakeup call to an entire generation of White (would-be) blues musicians, a notice that we could go ahead and try to play the blues, "whiteness" and all, and so we did.

Even to this day, Butterfield remains one of the only white harmonica players to develop his own style (another is William Clarke) -- one respected by black players.

Butterfield has no real imitators. Like most Chicago-style amplified harmonica players, Butterfield played the instrument like a horn -- a trumpet. He tended to play single notes rather than bursts of chords. His harp playing is always intense, understated, concise, and serious -- IMO only Big Walter Horton has a better sense of note selection.

When I knew Butterfield (during those first three albums), he was always intense, somewhat remote, and even, on occasion, downright unfriendly. He liked the persona of a Chicago macho guy. Although not much interested in other people, he was a compelling musician and a great harp player. But Butterfield liked to mess with your mind. Here is an example.

I can remember one time Butterfield and I were sitting out in our van, in an alley of Chicago, probably smoking something or other. He was explaining that he was left-handed and that only left-handed people would ever amount to anything in this world. The rest of us were shit-out-a-luck. That was Butterfield's humor.

It is true that he held the harmonica opposite to the standard right-handed player who holds it in his left hand. Butterfield held it in his right hand, upside down, with the low notes to the right.

Michael Bloomfield (lead guitar) and Mark Naftalin (keyboards) in the Butterfield band, also great players, were just the opposite -- always interested in the other guy. They went out of their way to inquire about you, even if you were a nobody like we were. Naftalin continues to this day to support blues projects and festivals.

But it was Butterfield's lead-guitar player, Michael Bloomfield, who most stands out in my mind. Bloomfield actually was our friend. He cared about us. We could feel it.

Michael Bloomfield also played lead on Dylan's album "Highway 61 revisited." Michael Bloomfield is one of the greatest guitarists I have ever heard, and I have heard a bunch. Bob Dylan thinks so too, as this quote from a Rolling Stone article (May 2009) shows:

"The guy that I always miss, and I think he'd still be around if he stayed with me, was Mike Bloomfield. He could just flat-out play. He had so much soul. And he knew all the styles, and he could play them so incredibly well. He was an expert player and a real prodigy too. He could play like Robert Johnson way back then in the 1960s. He could play the pure style of country blues authentically." – Bob Dylan

In my experience, Michael Bloomfield was always filled with light, positive, and interested in helping others into the future. If there are bodhisattvas wandering around in this world, Bloomfield had to be one of them. I am running out of space here, but let me give you just one example of Bloomfield's compassion that I personally experienced.

For those of you who are too young, the "Summer of Love" was San Francisco and the Bay Area in 1967, when more than 100,000 hippies showed up at the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco wanting to hang out. I happened to be there for that summer. In fact, I made a point of it.

My entire band and I drove all the way across the country (and back) in our 1966 Dodge Van. We had our band name (The Prime Movers) all over that van, but most people thought we were a just another moving company even though across the front of the van we had the slogan "Gonna Ring a Few Bells in your Ears" a quote by legendary New Orleans performer Jessie Hill from his song "Ooh Poo Pah Doo." Any of you remember that song? Here it is for those of you with open ears:

How we crammed all of our band equipment and the entire band (I think there were five of us), not to mention five suitcases into that Dodge van and managed to get it across the U.S. is beyond me. We just did it, took turns driving, and made it a non-stop trip. I can remember waking up as we crossed the Continental Divide to find us moving at a snail's pace surrounded on all sides by a huge flock of sheep. That moment was a long way from what we were going to find in San Francisco and Haight-Ashbury.

And of course we had no money and no place to stay once we got there. We just went there cold because we knew it was happening. And here is my point:

It was our friend Michael Bloomfield who cared enough about us to find us a free place to live for the summer, which turned out to be the Sausalito Heliport, where many music groups practiced. We crashed on the floor. I remember some famous woman singer gave us \$5 at the heliport for food. It might have been Gale Garnet ("We'll Sing in the Sunshine"). We had zero money.

In fact, we played blues outside on the pavement next to a local Sausalito Black rib-joint for food, just to have something to eat. We ate a lot of ribs that summer. The Sausalito Heliport was just across the San Francisco Bay Bridge to the north. However, the band and I spent most of our time in San Francisco and Berkeley, where we auditioned and/or played at all the major Sixties clubs, places like the Avalon Ballroom, The Straight Theater, The Matrix, The Haight A, and even the Fillmore Auditorium. We also played in Berkeley at the New Orleans House and other places

And there is more to my Bloomfield story. It was also thanks to Michael Bloomfield that we played the Fillmore Auditorium. Bloomfield not only found us a place to stay, but asked us to fill in for his band the "Electric Flag" when they could not make a gig, at the Fillmore itself.

It was August 29th of 1967 at the Fillmore Auditorium that we opened for Cream on what I believe was their first concert in the U.S. or at least in San Francisco. For those of you who don't know about Cream, it was the British rock supergroup featuring Eric Clapton on guitar, Jack Bruce on bass, and Ginger Baker on drums. Their songs included many classic blues tunes and, of course, their smash hit "Sunshine of Your Love."

I watched Cream (with needles in their arms) shoot up speed in the green room before the show. And I had a shouting match with Fillmore promoter Bill Graham at that time about how to mic our amplifiers. Graham wanted to run our sound directly through these giant walls of speakers, but I wanted them to mic our amps through their own speakers, so our particular (the old Fender

Concert amps) amp sound would be preserved. I am sure I was wrong, but at the time it seemed so right. And shouting with Bill Graham was almost required in those days.

Anyway, I wanted to share with you my history as a groupie and my undying respect for the compassion and genius of Michael Bloomfield, certainly someone worthy of my respect. Also, a bio I did on the Butterfield Blues Band here:

<https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/The%20Paul%20Butterfield%20Blues%20Band.pdf>

[A photo of me playing harmonica in the West Park band shell in the 1960s, probably the time I was playing and jamming with Jerry Garcia.]

As to what we sounded like, we sounded like this, an excerpt from the few recordings that exist:

EMAIL

Grain Rush

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7b59c422-4d45-4baa-a6fa-fcd6942c14db_1024x1024.jpeg

When I was a kid and we had our huge Thanksgiving dinner for the family, I got stuffed and would crawl behind the living-room couch and take a nap.

That's not too different from my more recent habit of getting a carbohydrate or sugar rush from grains (like a plate full of spaghetti) and kind of crash for a while until my food rush would die down, not a comfortable feeling.

What prompted all of this came from what I call the "Grain Rush."

Overloading my plate with carbohydrates, especially refined carbs and sugars, can cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels, followed by an insulin response to bring those levels down.

This often results in a "sugar rush" followed by a crash, leading to fatigue, irritability, and potential cravings. Over time, this pattern can negatively affect our metabolic health, contribute to weight gain, and increase the risk of insulin resistance or Type 2 diabetes.

Also, but not unimportant, is that I can't afford the time spent and cloudiness of the various sugar and carbohydrate rushes as they aspect my various dharma practices. I don't want any more of those mini comas that come with the various grain rushes.

Putting aside grains and eating a more balanced diet with fiber, healthy fats, and protein can help mitigate these effects and stabilize blood sugar. I just have had to cut out the grains, which is a huge shift and not easy to do.

One good thing is, without the sugar and carbohydrate rush, and the mini coma they inspire, for the most part, the mind is just clear as it naturally is. I chose to drop grains because I tired of the need to sleep or have forced time out due to sugar highs.

This new approach may be in part due to smaller portions, not piling the plate high, finishing ALL of it, and then finding a place to park myself until the grain-rush passes and I'm mobile again.

I am done with that and while I have not finished figuring out a new diet, I am on the case. For example:

I just tasted my first probiotic yogurt, in this case the *Lactobacillus reuteri*, a classic. I kind of stumbled through making it, but now that it is done, in the refrigerator, and sampled, it tastes very lovely indeed. Now, if I don't drop dead from it, I see a delicious future sampling this and others and repopulating my gut.

I'm kind of heading into an "all food is medicine" approach to health. This kind of grew out of, aside from my current gut problem, my learning to trust my inner cravings toward particular foods.

I'm not new to this, but over the years (decades) I have learned to trust my hankering for this or that food as a sign that my body is telling me it needs it.

And with this current change, I'm kind of swept over the top of the dam and into the lake. I finally realized that I'm the provider for my gut probiotics. It's up to me what I feed my microbiome and if I skimp on the feeding, I'm going to end up with a sour gut. Our gut microbiome wants a smorgasbord, a wide range of food, what are called prebiotics.

Eating has never been so clear-minded. No more sugar or carbohydrate rush and mini coma.

For those who may need this, here is a list of some of the more popular probiotic strains, their uses and the temperature they are best cultured at.

According to Dr. William Davis, MD, these probiotics are beneficial for various aspects of gut health, digestion, and overall wellness. Here's a breakdown of their best uses:

Lactobacillus reuteri (98.6°F to 102.2°F) :

- Best Uses : Supports gut health , particularly in reducing inflammation and balancing the gut microbiome. Helps with intestinal motility and may alleviate symptoms like bloating and gas. Promotes immune function by enhancing the gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT). Useful for oral health (helps reduce dental plaque and supports healthy gums).

Best Uses :

- Supports gut health , particularly in reducing inflammation and balancing the gut microbiome.

Supports gut health , particularly in reducing inflammation and balancing the gut microbiome.

- Helps with intestinal motility and may alleviate symptoms like bloating and gas.

Helps with intestinal motility and may alleviate symptoms like bloating and gas.

- Promotes immune function by enhancing the gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT).

Promotes immune function by enhancing the gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT).

- Useful for oral health (helps reduce dental plaque and supports healthy gums).

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Lactococcus lactis (86°F to 98.6°F) :

- Best Uses : Primarily used in dairy fermentation (e.g., yogurt, cheese), where it helps with lactic acid production and enhancing digestion. Supports gut flora balance and aids in the digestion of lactose for those who are lactose intolerant. Contributes to gut health by encouraging beneficial bacteria to thrive.

Best Uses :

- Primarily used in dairy fermentation (e.g., yogurt, cheese), where it helps with lactic acid production and enhancing digestion.

Primarily used in dairy fermentation (e.g., yogurt, cheese), where it helps with lactic acid production and enhancing digestion.

- Supports gut flora balance and aids in the digestion of lactose for those who are lactose intolerant.

Supports gut flora balance and aids in the digestion of lactose for those who are lactose intolerant.

- Contributes to gut health by encouraging beneficial bacteria to thrive.

Contributes to gut health by encouraging beneficial bacteria to thrive.

Streptococcus diacetylactis (86°F to 98.6°F) :

- Best Uses : Often used in dairy fermentation processes (e.g., buttermilk, cheese) for lactic acid production and producing diacetyl, which imparts a buttery flavor. Supports digestive health by promoting beneficial bacteria in the gut. Can contribute to improved digestion of dairy and enhance the absorption of nutrients from food.

Best Uses :

- Often used in dairy fermentation processes (e.g., buttermilk, cheese) for lactic acid production and producing diacetyl , which imparts a buttery flavor.

Often used in dairy fermentation processes (e.g., buttermilk, cheese) for lactic acid production and producing diacetyl , which imparts a buttery flavor.

- Supports digestive health by promoting beneficial bacteria in the gut.

Supports digestive health by promoting beneficial bacteria in the gut.

- Can contribute to improved digestion of dairy and enhance the absorption of nutrients from food.

Can contribute to improved digestion of dairy and enhance the absorption of nutrients from food.

Lactobacillus casei (86°F to 98.6°F) :

- Best Uses : Known for promoting digestive health and supporting the growth of beneficial gut bacteria. Often used in fermented foods (e.g., yogurt, kefir) to improve digestion and reduce gastrointestinal distress such as diarrhea or constipation. Supports the immune system by enhancing the gut's immune defenses.

Best Uses :

- Known for promoting digestive health and supporting the growth of beneficial gut bacteria.

Known for promoting digestive health and supporting the growth of beneficial gut bacteria.

- Often used in fermented foods (e.g., yogurt, kefir) to improve digestion and reduce gastrointestinal distress such as diarrhea or constipation.

Often used in fermented foods (e.g., yogurt, kefir) to improve digestion and reduce gastrointestinal distress such as diarrhea or constipation.

- Supports the immune system by enhancing the gut's immune defenses.

Supports the immune system by enhancing the gut's immune defenses.

Saccharomyces florentinus (77°F to 86°F) (likely referring to *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*):

- Best Uses : A yeast-based probiotic that is beneficial for gut health, particularly for promoting healthy intestinal flora and balancing the microbiome. Used to support digestive health and may help with diarrhea , especially when caused by antibiotic use. Useful in treating gastrointestinal infections or as a supplement to enhance gut function.

Best Uses :

- A yeast-based probiotic that is beneficial for gut health, particularly for promoting healthy intestinal flora and balancing the microbiome.

A yeast-based probiotic that is beneficial for gut health, particularly for promoting healthy intestinal flora and balancing the microbiome.

- Used to support digestive health and may help with diarrhea , especially when caused by antibiotic use.

Used to support digestive health and may help with diarrhea , especially when caused by antibiotic use.

- Useful in treating gastrointestinal infections or as a supplement to enhance gut function.

Useful in treating gastrointestinal infections or as a supplement to enhance gut function.

Leuconostoc cremoris (68°F to 86°F) :

- Best Uses : Primarily used in fermentation of dairy products such as cheese, where it contributes to flavor development and overall digestibility of the product. Known for promoting gut health and helping to balance intestinal flora . Supports immune health and digestion , particularly in people who have difficulty digesting dairy.

Best Uses :

- Primarily used in fermentation of dairy products such as cheese, where it contributes to flavor development and overall digestibility of the product.

Primarily used in fermentation of dairy products such as cheese, where it contributes to flavor development and overall digestibility of the product.

- Known for promoting gut health and helping to balance intestinal flora .

Known for promoting gut health and helping to balance intestinal flora .

- Supports immune health and digestion , particularly in people who have difficulty digesting dairy.

Supports immune health and digestion , particularly in people who have difficulty digesting dairy.

Bifidobacterium breve (98.6°F) :

- Best Uses : Excellent for maintaining gut health and promoting a balanced microbiome. Often used for reducing bloating and improving

intestinal regularity . Can help with digestive issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or constipation. Supports the immune system and promotes the health of the gut lining.

Best Uses :

- Excellent for maintaining gut health and promoting a balanced microbiome.

Excellent for maintaining gut health and promoting a balanced microbiome.

- Often used for reducing bloating and improving intestinal regularity .

Often used for reducing bloating and improving intestinal regularity .

- Can help with digestive issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or constipation.

Can help with digestive issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or constipation.

- Supports the immune system and promotes the health of the gut lining.

Supports the immune system and promotes the health of the gut lining.

Bifidobacterium lactis (98.6°F to 104°F) :

- Best Uses : Often used to improve digestive health , especially in individuals with constipation or diarrhea. Enhances the immune system by boosting gut health and promoting healthy gut flora. Can aid in reducing inflammation in the digestive tract and improving overall gut barrier function . Known to support lactose digestion , making it beneficial for those with lactose intolerance.

Best Uses :

- Often used to improve digestive health , especially in individuals with constipation or diarrhea.

Often used to improve digestive health , especially in individuals with constipation or diarrhea.

- Enhances the immune system by boosting gut health and promoting healthy gut flora.

Enhances the immune system by boosting gut health and promoting healthy gut flora.

- Can aid in reducing inflammation in the digestive tract and improving overall gut barrier function .

Can aid in reducing inflammation in the digestive tract and improving overall gut barrier function .

- Known to support lactose digestion , making it beneficial for those with lactose intolerance.

Known to support lactose digestion , making it beneficial for those with lactose intolerance.

Lactobacillus rhamnosus (86°F to 98.6°F)

- Best Uses : Helps with gut health and intestinal balance . Supports immune health , particularly in the gut, and enhances the immune response. Effective for managing diarrhea , especially antibiotic-associated diarrhea and traveler's diarrhea . Improves vaginal health and may help with urinary tract infections . Useful for reducing bloating and improving overall digestive comfort.

Best Uses :

- Helps with gut health and intestinal balance .

Helps with gut health and intestinal balance .

- Supports immune health , particularly in the gut, and enhances the immune response.

Supports immune health , particularly in the gut, and enhances the immune response.

- Effective for managing diarrhea , especially antibiotic-associated diarrhea and traveler's diarrhea .

Effective for managing diarrhea , especially antibiotic-associated diarrhea and traveler's diarrhea .

- Improves vaginal health and may help with urinary tract infections .

Improves vaginal health and may help with urinary tract infections .

- Useful for reducing bloating and improving overall digestive comfort.

Useful for reducing bloating and improving overall digestive comfort.

Lactobacillus plantarum (86°F to 98.6°F)

- Best Uses : Supports intestinal health and reduces inflammation in the digestive tract. Helps alleviate symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) , including bloating, gas , and cramping . Promotes gut flora balance , especially for those with gut dysbiosis. May help detoxify and improve digestion , making it beneficial for individuals with lactose intolerance .

Best Uses :

- Supports intestinal health and reduces inflammation in the digestive tract.

Supports intestinal health and reduces inflammation in the digestive tract.

- Helps alleviate symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) , including bloating, gas , and cramping .

Helps alleviate symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) , including bloating, gas , and cramping .

- Promotes gut flora balance , especially for those with gut dysbiosis.

Promotes gut flora balance , especially for those with gut dysbiosis.

- May help detoxify and improve digestion , making it beneficial for individuals with lactose intolerance .

May help detoxify and improve digestion , making it beneficial for individuals with lactose intolerance .

Bifidobacterium longum (98.6°F to 104°F)

- Best Uses : Supports gut health by promoting a balanced gut microbiome. Known for reducing bloating and improving intestinal regularity . Can help improve digestive function and alleviate symptoms of constipation and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) . Has anti-inflammatory properties that can help with gut-related conditions like gastritis and colitis .

Best Uses :

- Supports gut health by promoting a balanced gut microbiome.

Supports gut health by promoting a balanced gut microbiome.

- Known for reducing bloating and improving intestinal regularity .

Known for reducing bloating and improving intestinal regularity .

- Can help improve digestive function and alleviate symptoms of constipation and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) .

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Bifidobacterium bifidum (98.6°F)

- Best Uses : Supports gut health by promoting beneficial bacteria and suppressing harmful bacteria. Helps with the digestion of food and alleviates intestinal distress . Commonly used for reducing bloating and gas . Enhances immune health , particularly in the gut, by improving gut barrier function.

Best Uses :

- Supports gut health by promoting beneficial bacteria and suppressing harmful bacteria.

Supports gut health by promoting beneficial bacteria and suppressing harmful bacteria.

- Helps with the digestion of food and alleviates intestinal distress .

Helps with the digestion of food and alleviates intestinal distress .

- Commonly used for reducing bloating and gas .

Commonly used for reducing bloating and gas .

- Enhances immune health , particularly in the gut, by improving gut barrier function.

Enhances immune health , particularly in the gut, by improving gut barrier function.

Saccharomyces boulardii (86°F to 98.6°F)

- Best Uses : A yeast-based probiotic that is particularly effective in treating diarrhea (including antibiotic-associated diarrhea and traveler's diarrhea). Restores gut microbiota and helps treat gastrointestinal infections , including those caused by *Clostridium difficile* . Supports gut integrity and can help reduce inflammation in the intestines. Often used to promote gut health after taking antibiotics or other medications that disrupt gut flora.

Best Uses :

- A yeast-based probiotic that is particularly effective in treating diarrhea (including antibiotic-associated diarrhea and traveler's diarrhea).

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- Restores gut microbiota and helps treat gastrointestinal infections , including those caused by *Clostridium difficile* .

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- Supports gut integrity and can help reduce inflammation in the intestines.

Supports gut integrity and can help reduce inflammation in the intestines.

- Often used to promote gut health after taking antibiotics or other medications that disrupt gut flora.

Often used to promote gut health after taking antibiotics or other medications that disrupt gut flora.

Streptococcus thermophilus (107.6°F to 113°F)

- Best Uses : Commonly used in fermentation for products like yogurt and cheese . Helps with lactose digestion , making it an excellent probiotic for individuals who are lactose intolerant . Supports gut health by enhancing intestinal flora and improving overall digestive function . Known for its ability to produce lactic acid , which is beneficial for maintaining gut pH.

Best Uses :

- Commonly used in fermentation for products like yogurt and cheese .

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- Helps with lactose digestion , making it an excellent probiotic for individuals who are lactose intolerant .

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- Supports gut health by enhancing intestinal flora and improving overall digestive function .

Supports gut health by enhancing intestinal flora and improving overall digestive function .

- Known for its ability to produce lactic acid , which is beneficial for maintaining gut pH.

Known for its ability to produce lactic acid , which is beneficial for maintaining gut pH.

Enterococcus faecium (86°F to 98.6°F)

- Best Uses : Used to support gut microbiota balance , promoting healthy digestion and overall gut health. Helps with digestive issues such as bloating , irregular bowel movements , and gas . Known for its ability to

reduce inflammation in the intestines and promote intestinal immune health . Supports the growth of beneficial bacteria while inhibiting harmful microbes in the gut.

Best Uses :

- Used to support gut microbiota balance , promoting healthy digestion and overall gut health.

Used to support gut microbiota balance , promoting healthy digestion and overall gut health.

- Helps with digestive issues such as bloating , irregular bowel movements , and gas .

Helps with digestive issues such as bloating , irregular bowel movements , and gas .

- Known for its ability to reduce inflammation in the intestines and promote intestinal immune health .

Known for its ability to reduce inflammation in the intestines and promote intestinal immune health .

- Supports the growth of beneficial bacteria while inhibiting harmful microbes in the gut.

Supports the growth of beneficial bacteria while inhibiting harmful microbes in the gut.

Bacillus coagulans (86°F to 98.6°F)

- Best Uses : A spore-forming bacterium that survives well in harsh conditions, including heat and stomach acid. Supports gut health by improving the balance of beneficial bacteria. Particularly effective in alleviating digestive distress such as bloating , gas , and irregularity . Can help prevent or alleviate diarrhea and IBS symptoms. Promotes immune health and aids in overall digestive wellness .

Best Uses :

- A spore-forming bacterium that survives well in harsh conditions, including heat and stomach acid.

A spore-forming bacterium that survives well in harsh conditions, including heat and stomach acid.

- Supports gut health by improving the balance of beneficial bacteria.

Supports gut health by improving the balance of beneficial bacteria.

- Particularly effective in alleviating digestive distress such as bloating , gas , and irregularity .

Particularly effective in alleviating digestive distress such as bloating , gas , and irregularity .

- Can help prevent or alleviate diarrhea and IBS symptoms.

Can help prevent or alleviate diarrhea and IBS symptoms.

- Promotes immune health and aids in overall digestive wellness .

Promotes immune health and aids in overall digestive wellness .

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Stop Fossilizing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bdf9e6c7-31c7-47da-8ea1-66e269b3c6de_1024x1024.jpeg

Well, I'm turning the corner, away from grains, like turning an ocean liner around. I'm grain-free and just working off the vestiges. The chief obvious change is the clear-headedness. No more carb or sugar rushes and confusion. Also losing weight. And an increase in internal energy. All important.

Indeed, food is medicine.

This grain-free diet is not for everyone. I am getting older, actually old, and the dullness from carbs, their sugar overload, and crash is just too obvious.

I would never have made such a huge diet change had I not screwed up my gut by eating only one food (for the most part) for a few months. I could feel my energy plunging and the sharpness being sanded off my mind. I didn't like it.

And the catalyst came when I finally understood what 'prebiotics' were and their relationship to probiotics, the strains of bacteria in our gut, and that prebiotics are the feeding of our gut.

I was not doing that, not providing food to the flora in my gut. No one was feeding it, least of all me! And it is my responsibility.

I have changed that, learning to offer my gut a smorgasbord of foods of all kinds, and it's responding. My previous use and dependence on grains, going back a lifetime, was turning into concrete, and my life force was like a thermometer dropping.

You young folks can probably get by with grains, pasta, flours, breads, yet I can no longer. Even though I was eating only whole grains, it was grinding me down to a halt. I had to change it up and have.

Tough job, yes, but so freeing to feel more like a hunter/gatherer again. No, this is not a paleo diet, leaning on meat. Not doing meat. Fish, yes, after a while here, but not now. That's what I ate too much of for those months.

Nor do I expect or urge any of you to make such a drastic change. Monitor your own mind and energy flow.

I was fossilizing right here on the spot and deserve better than that. My dharma, in particular, thanks me. The improved clarity alone is worth the switch.

As mentioned, I am telling you about my experience, not suggesting it for others unless it fits.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Islands in the Food Stream

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d38c9ecb-6683-45da-ab8f-cba15559dd93_1024x1024.jpeg

Time can be foggy, a smear of reality from way back then, but clear as yesterday, a window in time.

Pulling together a meal is pure magic when you have no idea what to eat. Eating without wheat or any grains is a lesson in patience, with a dash of humility thrown in.

I was so used to the rush from carbohydrates that it's hard to break the habit and not expect some kind of coma-like slam to come over me.

And now I have to find food that does not punctuate my day with time outs to recover from sugar rushes or other interruptions after eating -- food storms.

All of this while winter pushes steadily on toward spring, but that is nowhere close, and it has been bitter cold here in the north-west of Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

In this massive change of diet, it's like walking around chest high on my tippy toes in a lukewarm swimming pool, continuing to realize foods that I will no longer eat and at the same time hoping to find ones I can, while at the same time making the mistake of not yet being able to know what I am looking for.

It's not the old breakfast, lunch, and dinner plate as I am used to, but rather islands or islets of food in the stream of time that I sample and not just eat the whole thing until I'm full.

The incongruity of the situation is kind of the rule of the day and finds me a bit lightheaded and wandering around, yet with an acumen I am not quite used to.

No doubt, I am surfing the waves and not being plowed under, which to me is a good sign. A segue into another time, not another time dimension, but a new time of life. One door closes and another opens, a portal and I'm passing through.

A dream is a poem of light.

A dream come true is a waking dream that is real.

There is no waking from waking. Awake is awake.

Life itself is said to be a waking dream, with the accent on 'waking', being awake. This poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, written in 1877, is the first poem of his that I got to know, so many decades ago.

GOD'S GRANDEUR

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell:

the soil is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."

A scientist of the mind, which is called a phenomenologist, someone looking at the inside reflected on the outside, and vice-versa. I have been a phenomenologist since I was young.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

'X" On Out

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8d5ced01-07d7-403c-b6c2-46206e14ceb2_1024x1024.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/76376a08-3640-496b-b3c2-4902a47eb69d_1152x2048.jpeg

Cold out. Below is a photo in our living room of the Nelson Platform Bench, which I built and finished with some guidance from a friend. We are indoors most of the time. Just too cold out. As for my new food regime, I am eating a variety, a variety of different foods, some dairy, mostly vegetables, no grains, no meat, eventually some fish for Omega3s (salmon, tuna, mackerel).

I know grains like the back of my hand, having used them all my life. It's great not to have a nagging feeling when I eat a sandwich or have pasta that along with the food comes a little stomach battle, a carbs surge, crash, and regret. Now, no more regret other than for the convenience and habit of grains.

The idea of a mini-smorgasbord or a plate of Ethiopian food, with dabs of this and that. Some eggs, but not too much. I tried an omelet and frittata, and I don't need all that. Just an egg or two every once in a while. A lot of Kefir and homemade yogurt with strains of bacteria for my microbiome. Small meals through the day, instead of large ones. It's all coming together, a day at a time.

I don't know yet what I'm doing but am a good student and absorbing a huge amount of info. As they say, there is no free lunch, yet diversity and smaller size portions are key.

Your suggestions and experiences have been very helpful.

On the dharma side of it, this diet shift has made it possible for me to be more clear, and to not bog down in carbo or sugar spasms. All my life until now I just put up with the carbs/sugar rush, crash, and normalization. This new diet requires more work in the kitchen, yes, but it is worthwhile.

Also keeping up my exercise regime, yet very much waiting for spring and being outside. My lungs have cleared up, I am losing weight, feel lighter, healthier.

The only problem I have had is ‘wondering’, sometimes with a fine panic, as to what I can and should eat from here on out. It takes time to forget the past and discover how to use all the things I can eat.

As for the world news, I’m just putting the politics or wars on the back burner and not biting at every pronouncement from the new White House, and there is nothing but endless news.

The keystone and pointer for me here is clarity of the mind, plus ease of transition through time, and mainly respect for the present moment, plus enjoyment of the same.

For whatever reason, I had worn out grains after an entire lifetime of eating them and never knowing what life is like without them. Now I know, although it is complicated to switch to a no-grains diet, so far it is very worthwhile. A lot more time being just clear minded, the joy of variety and no carb storms, and a quite natural way to lose weight.

I received a yogurt incubator today and can put away the heating pad I was using, back in the medicine cabinet. It was tricky to keep the temperature of the heating pad at yogurt levels.

All in all, I’m more intentional, present, clearer headed, and food satisfied than before.

I am a good learner. It took me reading in two books on gut health before I came across the book “Super Gut” by cardiologist Dr. William Davis, MD. I could tell at a glance that the Davis book was filled with actual experience rather than conceptualizations.

Every page of the David book is jam-packed with tested experience because I can just tell when an author knows what he or she is talking about. The other two books just left me cold.

So, that’s my update. Very busy days, but all very positive. It’s like a new door opened and I walked through it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Live and Learn

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 26, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/eaeca88d-0578-4fd6-98fb-d1d83db6c73f_2048x1834.jpeg

I'm learning, yet it is costly and time intensive. Take my yogurt makers. Here is the rub.

A problem to face with making yogurt at home is having a constant temperature on the yogurt over something like a 36 hour culturing time. The storebought yogurt is produced with a very much shorter time period, supposedly because they don't want to let it grow longer because they make less money that way. Yet, experts like DR William Davis, cardiologist, say that unless you culture the yogurt for a longer time (36 hours), you do not grow the probiotics numerous enough to really change your gut flora.

One yogurt maker I bought and tried had a 2 qt. cylindrical glass jar that slipped down into a tall container which heated from the bottom up.

What I found out is that because of the tall cylindrical and narrow shape, the jar heated very unevenly. I could have 104 degrees F toward the top a 117 degrees F at the bottom. Some of the strains of probiotics I want to culture require lower or higher temperatures than the static 100 degrees F.

A much better type of yogurt maker, one that is low and flat with 8 small glass jars that also had water poured into the yogurt maker that surrounds the small jars that helps to keep a constant even temperature, and the 8 small glass jars made sure the jar was neither too high or too wide, thus keeping everything evenly heated.

Here is a photo of the tall yoghurt maker I am sending back, and the new low and flat yoghurt maker that I have ordered. I love the simplicity and space saving footprint of the tall yogurt maker, but NOT if it can't hold a stable temperature. I always learn the hard way.

Let me sum this up:

Dr. William Davis makes an interesting point about yogurt fermentation time. His argument is that many commercial yogurts are made with faster methods, meaning they don't spend enough time fermenting to accumulate a sufficient amount of probiotics and beneficial bacteria. Longer fermentation (up to 36

hours, as he suggests) allows more time for the bacteria to grow, potentially resulting in a more potent probiotic content.

Probiotic Growth : When yogurt ferments longer, the bacteria have more time to multiply. A longer fermentation process, like the 36 hours, might lead to a higher concentration of live probiotics, especially the beneficial strains like *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* .

Reduced Lactose : A longer fermentation time also means more lactose gets broken down by the bacteria. For those who are lactose intolerant, this could make the yogurt easier to digest.

Tangier Taste : Longer fermentation results in a more acidic, tangy yogurt because the bacteria are breaking down sugars into lactic acid.

If you want to experiment with a longer fermentation time to mimic the conditions Dr. Davis recommends, you can adjust your homemade yogurt process by simply allowing the yogurt to ferment for a longer period (e.g., 24-36 hours).

While commercial yogurt is made quickly for mass production reasons, homemade yogurt allows you to adjust fermentation times for a more potent, personalized probiotic experience. By using many small jars sitting in water of a constant temperature, all parts of the culture can be reached by the heat. That's what I have learned, the hard way.

[Graphic by me.]

EMAIL

Feed Me

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 27, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b3eb55ad-9257-4a5b-b62c-df6cda26d238_1024x1024.jpeg

[Aside from this introduction, down-page is an amended list of prebiotics and probiotics with their intended use and best temperature to cultivate them. If you plan to culture yogurt, you might save this list since it is hard to find this much information all in one place.]

With a no-grains diet I am learning a lot.

One thing I have noticed since I started with a no-grains diet is my weight training exercises. Without all the carbs from grains I am substantially weaker and become tired more quickly with repetitive weightlifting than I used to.

I remember my daughter Anne who was two times the woman's cross-country track champion of Michigan, who used to say when they ate a lot pasta, the night before the night before because it built up their energy.

This is because instead of having the sugar rush, and water retention, etc. that comes from a high carb diet (as with grains), the body without grains instead has led to a reduction in water retention and virtually no carbs that store water and instead of bringing a sugar rush, my strength (with no grains) now comes from drawing on stored fat, which is harder to exchange quickly but probably more beneficial to me because I need to lose some fat. With carbs, I did not lose much weight yet had more immediate energy. I also have very little hunger now that I am off grains, and very satisfied with what I am eating.

Yet, it is fascinating how quickly this quick carb energy is missed. Everything we do as a cause has an effect, which makes the concept of karma even more telling.

What I thought was that what I ate was whatever I wanted to eat. The problem was that I was off my contacts, not in tune with my intuition. What I did not understand was that my gut's microbiome consisted with an almost infinite series of bacteria, whose wellbeing was dependent on me, 100%.

And I further did not understand that a whole fleet of probiotic bacteria had found homes all up and down my gut, from my little intestine, some 22 feet for the little and about 5 feet for the very much larger cecum or large intestine.

And that there were specific types of probiotic bacteria allocated for particular slots from the top of the little intestine all the way down to the bottom of the large intestine. And they all required specific foods from stem to stern, so to speak. And here is the ringer as I understand it.

I and only I am responsible for feeding these strains of live bacteria and it takes almost a smorgasbord of food types to feed all these little critters and if I did not offer them such a variety they would fall into the habit of only providing healthy probiotics for those specific kinds of foods I offer them and the panoply of probiotics that I did NOT feed them would gradually die out and vanish from my gut or be overpowered and sidelined.

I have to provide this variety, this smorgasbord of food by kind of covering the food waterfront and providing for all.

We don't have to go on any particular diet to want to have a healthy gut microbiome. We can do it anytime by just feeding our gut with a healthy variety of food and further assist by either taking probiotic capsules each day for a while or making homemade yogurt fueled by a capsule and some starter, like two tablespoons of Inulin... or both, which I am doing. Of the two, according to Dr. William Davis, the 36-hour yogurt is the superior way to get the probiotics over the stomach-dam, so to speak, and into the gut microbiome.

Making your own yogurt is inexpensive and delicious, yet that's not the main reason I am doing this. Commercial yogurt, in order to make more money, does very short runs in terms of time spent culturing the probiotics, like maybe 12 hours. According to cardiologist Dr. William Davis, whom I follow because he communicates actual experience, makes it crystal clear that our microbiome needs very much more time spent in culturing, like 36 hours in order to ratchet up the bacteria count high enough to actually be helpful to the gut. We have to do that at home.

And moreover, there is not just one strain of probiotics to consider, there are dozens and each one specializes with certain problems we may be having.

Probiotics are live bacteria that benefit your gut, and they can help with a variety of gut-related problems such as IBS , lactose intolerance , constipation , and immune support .

Prebiotics are fibers that feed and support the growth of beneficial gut bacteria. They play a vital role in maintaining a healthy microbiome and improving digestion.

If you're aiming to improve a specific health condition, selecting the right strains of probiotics and prebiotics will make a significant difference. You may want to consult with a healthcare provider to personalize the selection based on your needs.

As mentioned, probiotics are live beneficial bacteria, and prebiotics are food for these bacteria, supporting their growth and activity. Different strains of probiotics can be beneficial for various digestive and overall health concerns. Below is a list of probiotic strains and prebiotic fibers, along with a brief explanation of their primary benefits, which may be helpful. The “*****” marked ones are the most well-known:

Probiotic Strains - Optimum Temperature & What They're Good For

1. *Lactobacillus acidophilus* Optimum Temperature: 37°C to 42°C (98.6°F to 107.6°F) Good for: Supporting digestion, managing lactose intolerance, and enhancing immune system function.
2. *Bifidobacterium bifidum* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing gut inflammation, supporting immune health, and maintaining a healthy gut flora balance.
3. *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Preventing and treating diarrhea, boosting immune health, and supporting gut barrier function.
4. *Bifidobacterium longum* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Supporting digestion, reducing inflammation, and balancing gut flora, particularly in older adults.
5. *Lactobacillus plantarum* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing bloating and gas, improving gut health, and alleviating symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
6. *Bifidobacterium animalis* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Supporting gut health, alleviating constipation, and improving digestion in the lower gut.
7. *Saccharomyces boulardii* Optimum Temperature: 30°C to 37°C (86°F to 98.6°F) Good for: Treating and preventing diarrhea, particularly diarrhea from antibiotics, and supporting the immune system.
8. *Lactobacillus reuteri* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Supporting oral health, reducing symptoms of IBS, and balancing gut flora for overall digestive health.
9. *Streptococcus thermophilus* Optimum Temperature: 42°C to 45°C (107.6°F to 113°F) Good for: Aiding digestion, especially in individuals with lactose intolerance, and helping with the breakdown of dairy.
10. *Lactobacillus casei* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Improving the overall balance of gut bacteria, reducing IBS symptoms, and preventing gut infections.
11. *Bifidobacterium breve* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing gut inflammation, alleviating constipation, and promoting healthy gut microbiota in infants and adults.
- 12.

Lactobacillus gasseri Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Weight management, reducing abdominal fat, improving gut health, and alleviating IBS symptoms. 13. *Enterococcus faecium* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Supporting gut health, improving immune function, and preventing harmful pathogens from overgrowing. 14. *Bifidobacterium lactis* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing constipation, improving immune function, and enhancing overall gut health, particularly in older adults. 15. *Lactobacillus johnsonii* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing inflammation, supporting weight management, and promoting gut health, especially related to the upper gut. 16. *Bifidobacterium infantis* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing symptoms of IBS, particularly gas, bloating, and discomfort, and supporting the gut of infants. 17. *Lactobacillus salivarius* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing inflammation, promoting oral health, and protecting the gut from harmful bacteria. 18. *Rhodotorula mucilaginosa* Optimum Temperature: 25°C to 30°C (77°F to 86°F) Good for: Supporting skin and mucosal health, and potentially reducing fungal infections. 19. *Lactobacillus helveticus* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing anxiety, improving mood, and supporting overall digestive health. 20. *Bifidobacterium breve* Optimum Temperature: 37°C (98.6°F) Good for: Reducing gut inflammation, improving gut flora balance, and alleviating symptoms of IBS. 21. *E. Coli Nissle 1917* Optimum Temperature: 37°C and 42°C (98.6°F to 107.6°F) Good for: As for the purpose of *E. coli Nissle 1917*, it is a well-known probiotic strain with a number of health benefits, primarily related to gut health. It has been shown to:

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21. E. Coli Nissle 1917

Optimum Temperature: 37°C and 42°C (98.6°F to 107.6°F)

Good for: As for the purpose of E. coli Nissle 1917 , it is a well-known probiotic strain with a number of health benefits, primarily related to gut health. It has been shown to:

- Promote gut health: It can help balance the microbiota in the intestines, preventing the overgrowth of harmful bacteria and supporting overall digestive health.

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- Support immune function: It has immunomodulatory effects, helping to enhance the body's natural defense mechanisms.

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- Assist with gastrointestinal disorders: It has been used as a therapeutic probiotic for conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), including ulcerative colitis.

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- Reduce intestinal inflammation: The strain may help reduce inflammation in the gut, potentially offering relief to those suffering from digestive issues.

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Including E. coli Nissle 1917 in yogurt or other fermented foods can offer a convenient way to deliver these benefits, though it's always good to consult with a healthcare provider before using it for specific medical purposes.

Prebiotic Fibers - Optimum Temperature & What They're Good For

- Inulin Optimum Temperature: Stable at room temperature. Can degrade at very high temperatures above 50°C (122°F). Good for: Feeding

beneficial gut bacteria, improving digestive health, and supporting the immune system.

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- **Fructooligosaccharides (FOS) Optimum Temperature:** Stable at room temperature, but excessive heat can degrade them. Good for: Stimulating the growth of beneficial bacteria like Bifidobacteria and Lactobacilli , and improving gut transit time.

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- **Galactooligosaccharides (GOS) Optimum Temperature:** Stable at room temperature. Excessive heat (over 50°C) may reduce effectiveness. Good for: Stimulating the growth of beneficial bacteria, especially Bifidobacteria , and helping to alleviate constipation.

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- **Pectin Optimum Temperature:** Stable at room temperature. Should be kept away from excessive heat. Good for: Feeding beneficial bacteria and improving gut motility. Found in fruits like apples and citrus.

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- **Acacia Fiber Optimum Temperature:** Stable at room temperature. Good for: Supporting the growth of Bifidobacterium and Lactobacillus , promoting gut health and helping with constipation.

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- **Beta-Glucans Optimum Temperature:** Stable at room temperature, but high heat may reduce the effectiveness of the fiber. Good for: Supporting immune function and promoting beneficial bacteria in the gut. Found in oats and barley.

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- Resistant Starch Optimum Temperature: Resistant to heat when cooled, but high temperatures (over 60°C/140°F) may degrade its form. Good for: Feeding beneficial gut bacteria and improving insulin sensitivity. Found in unripe bananas, cooked and cooled potatoes, and legumes.

Resistant Starch Optimum Temperature: Resistant to heat when cooled, but high temperatures (over 60°C/140°F) may degrade its form. Good for: Feeding beneficial gut bacteria and improving insulin sensitivity. Found in unripe bananas, cooked and cooled potatoes, and legumes.

- Xylooligosaccharides (XOS) Optimum Temperature: Generally stable at room temperature. Good for: Promoting the growth of Bifidobacteria and supporting gut health. Found in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

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- Lactulose Optimum Temperature: Stable at room temperature but should be stored in a cool place. Good for: Helping to manage constipation by promoting the growth of beneficial gut bacteria.

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- Mannan-Oligosaccharides (MOS) Optimum Temperature: Stable at room temperature. Good for: Supporting immune function and promoting the growth of beneficial gut flora. Found in yeast and some plant foods.

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- Fructans Optimum Temperature: Stable at room temperature but can degrade at high heat. Good for: Feeding beneficial bacteria like Bifidobacteria and helping to improve gut health. Found in foods like onions, garlic, and wheat.

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- Short-Chain Fatty Acids (SCFAs) Optimum Temperature: SCFAs like butyrate are generally stable at body temperature and are produced by gut bacteria from fermenting prebiotics. Good for: Supporting gut lining health, reducing inflammation, and improving overall gut function.

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[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Burning Off the Fat

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/32900ba5-7f60-43f0-9371-45a187b64416_1024x1024.jpeg

As a phenomenologist by nature means I always look into my own experience for answers, and right now my main current experience is a life changing event in diet.

In this post I will update those interested in what is happening with this new diet, which for me means an actual change of life. I have been eating grains since I was a baby on pablum and trained in macrobiotics in the early 1970s. I have been very attached to rice, especially Lundberg Short-Grain Brown Rice. Going cold-turkey on all grains is a bit of a shock to the system.

I have been off grains and carbs for several weeks now, long enough for my body to begin switching from eating grains with its carbs glucose rush and crashes, to giving up grains so that I am now eating very few carbohydrates and working to restore internal probiotics by reworking my gut and eating my own body fats -- ketosis.

And the problem with eating our own accumulated body fat is that within that fat are frozen in place and stored a lot of heavy metals, pesticides, environmental pollutants, BPA, Phthalates, old medicines, and other toxins.

As our extra body fats are consumed to produce energy, all of the above toxins are released back into the bloodstream, causing headaches, fatigue, nausea, constipation or diarrhea, skin issues, body aches, and even mood changes.

I am going through that now, a bit strongly, since I went at this change of diet "whole hog," so to speak, losing weight for sure as the toxins are released in my bloodstream.

And so, I'm having to stay hydrated, watch my electrolyte balance, and so on. Vegetables like broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, etc. can reduce the intensity of the detox system (ketosis), and I am detoxing, feeling headachy with higher blood pressure, etc.

The toxins will clear my system in a couple days or soon at least. Aside from this detoxication process, my mind is very clear because I no longer have the

sugar rush from carbs which produces glucose that burns off like the flame on gas wells and then crashes.

Without grains and their carbs, glucose burning gives way to ketosis, where for energy (since there is no glucose) my body begins to consume stored fat instead, which I need to get rid of and actually lose weight which using glucose as fuel never provided.

As readers know, I like to blog on dharma and resting the mind. However, right now my change of diet is consuming much of my day and turning my mind and life in a different direction. I'm following it out.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Winter Light

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f87c3444-c2e6-4578-b6c6-cd7823a080a3_1024x1024.jpeg

The days twist and march on toward spring, carrying us with them here in the northwest lower peninsula of Michigan. We now have 39 more minutes of daylight today on January 30, 2025 since the Winter Solstice on Dec. 21, 2024. On the Spring Equinox of 2025, we will have 4 hours and 44 minutes since the Winter Solstice of 2024.

I am in this tiny office in this house most all the winter of 2025. I have been here since March 1, 1980 when we moved in. In these cold days I find things to do or do very little. Some days I get stuff done and others I do about nothing other than those things I have to do and sometimes I balk at even that.

I'm a summertime baby stuck in a northern climate. I live for those spring, summer, and fall months when the windows can be open, and the breeze blows through. Not happening now.

I'm as patient as I can be. Everything gets old when it's cold outside. As for dharma practice, right now I'm immersed in this massive change in diet which is very immediate indeed. It's all so new. I like that immediacy, and being very present. As to what I do when everything else fails, I watch TV.

I'm like the gardener in the classic 1979 movie "Being There" with Peter Sellers and Shirley MacLain, where Peter Sellers says "I like to watch TV." That would be me.

Although I'm sure I watch too much streaming video, and I am not shy or apologetic about it. After all, I founded one of the two largest film and movie databases on the planet, AllMovie.com. I'm a pro-level movie watcher. I'm sure I could have made a living by writing movie and series reviews, but I would not like to compromise my enjoyment of video by monetizing the reviewing of it.

I have a vivid imagination and can bring almost any movie to life in my mind and see what's great about it or not. Some of my favorite movies, seen 20 or so years later no longer measure up. An example is the sci-fi "Cherry 2000,

“1986 starring Melanie Griffith, a dear favorite, which seen many years later could no longer appear as watchable for me.

And we never restricted our kids from watching just about anything. Today parents are desperately trying to limit their kids from watching TV or using the Internet. Good luck with that! IMO, all that restriction does is target what you are restricting.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Clarion Call

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6a2a1d3a-111f-4186-b497-6e076f14331d_1024x1024.jpeg

Well, at last a couple of yogurt makers arrived so that I don't have to use a heating pad or place it in the oven where there is a pilot. The problem with the above is that I had to monitor the yogurt culture to keep the temperature from getting too high and too low.

We now have two identical yogurt makers, one for Margaret and one for me, each which has a temperature gauge we can set and leave, plus the ability to set the culture time to 36 hours or whatever time we need.

Probiotic cultures require and work best at a specific temperature. In recent posts I listed the main probiotic strains and what temperature works best for each of them, and what health problems they are useful for helping.

The large intestine is like a forge or a furnace in which our food is cultured by fermentation. Our gut is often called the "2 nd Brain" because apparently it controls and affects our body in many ways.

All this change of diet started for me when I realized that the culture in my gut, millions and billions of bacteria need someone to feed them, and I knew that I was not doing a good job. I didn't know that I had to or that it was up to me.

Of course, I have been told all my life to eat healthily and all that. I didn't always do that. I ate what I liked or felt like eating when I felt like eating it, yet I seldom had any balanced plan as to what I ate.

It was not until I realized (it was brought home to me) that I alone was responsible for feeding all these tiny critters and if I did not do it properly, it could affect my health. I have to feed them every day and not just feed myself as I always ignorantly assumed.

They were 'my' gut bacteria, just like my kids were my kids. They were waiting for me to feed them and depending on how well and balanced I fed them, my health would respond. It's amazing I got as far and old as I have considering there was no one at wheel putting together a balanced diet for my gut microbiome.

If course I know a lot about food, organics, farm-raised, and all that. No problem. However, as for figuring out a really balanced diet for my microbiome, I was cutting corners every which way but correctly.

I would never feed my kids in the manner I was feeding my gut. It was that realization that sounded the clarion call.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

‘AI’ as a Camera: Illustrations

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

February 1, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/985d07ca-d88b-4876-83c0-4ee2951f029a_1024x1024.jpeg

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0f55447f-dc2a-442e-829f-67e43332e438_1024x1024.jpeg

Since I write a lot of essays and articles and post to some 20,000 or so readers, I like to include an image along with the text to set the mood or reflect the topic. This can be a photo I take or a photo I license for use, and in the last couple years this has turned into a graphic image created by AI through (in my case) a graphic software called “Midjourney.”

For these articles or essays, most often I am not looking for personal memorials, like snapshots of family or events, but rather by illustrations that evoke moods or feelings.

Although I always state if an image is AI prompted, most or many of my readers continue to see this image as a photograph, per se and congratulate me for the ‘photo’ even though I always post this disclaimer.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

I see in the future of photography two main roads or paths, taking photographs for family and personal documentation or memories, like snapshots, and impersonal illustrations that eventually will be better made though AI photography, where the supercomputer becomes effectively the camera whenever the goal is illustration rather than a memorial of something. Of course, I will continue to take traditional photos as I always have, with camera and lens, and just for the ‘art’ of photography.

It's like the question, which is more important, the razor or the shave? The shave is what we are after, not what kind of razor is used to get a shave.

It's the same with photography. Which is more important, the image or the camera (how we made the image). I know photographers are having a fit about AI images just now, but that will fade out, IMO.

It's the image that is important and not ONLY how we make it. Having made about 15,000 AI graphic images to date, I well know that prompting an image is not a walk in the park, but requires skill, hard work, and many iterations to get a good image.

Of course, a photography photo with camera and lens, by definition, will always be just that. However, after about 18 years of writing a daily article or blog, I tired of licensing photos, not because they were so expensive (although they can be), but because the selection was so difficult, and the time spent finding one so arduous.

When I first ventured into AI graphics, some years ago, the results were almost laughable, like cartoons, but as time progressed, they have gotten better and better.

And many early adopters that I knew were thrilled and considered their AI images works of art, and themselves artists, although I never saw that in their work. And, as time passed, most of these artists dropped out and disappeared. Instead, I always saw AI images not as art but as 'illustrations and heaven knows I needed illustrations.

And so, fast forward to today, when AI is doing a pretty good job at illustration, I have to struggle to find one of my photos that is good enough AND will fit enough with the topic to be used. Sometimes I just post a photo I took anyway. LOL.

The takeaway for me is that AI is no threat to any kind of photography I do, because it does not contain any personal elements other than what I choose to put into it.

However, and this is important, more and more of the time AI images come increasingly closer to satisfying what I consider important to have in a photo, however it is made.

And so, while I don't fancy myself as an artist, I am becoming a better and better illustrator and AI images are doing things for me that I could never do (or would bother to do) myself. I wonder what readers here have to say about this.

Here are a couple of AI images that are examples of my AI images.

While DSLR and mirrorless cameras are leaning into their limits, the idea of AI and supercomputers changing at least modern illustrations are just getting started.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Probiotics: Feeding the GUT

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/14bd2cde-b8b1-4d45-8351-f9bef92da9d7_2048x1128.jpeg

Finished up a 36-hour culture using *Lactobacillus reuteri*, the favorite probiotic of Dr. William Davis. This time I am using the particular strain Dr. Davis himself suggests (and sells), what he calls 'My Reuteri', *Lactobacillus reuteri* ATCC 55730 (LRDR). Pronounced "Rotor-eye."

The change of diet I am going through could be done more gradually, but I like to just pull the band-aid off all at once. And the new diet (no grains, sugars) is confusing because I keep reaching out (in my mind) for grains -- bread, brown rice, and on and on.

However, it's the easiest way to lose weight I have ever had. And the foods I am eating, for the most part, are all foods that I like. You eat the foods and the weight goes down. How simple is that?

However, let's wait and see how I am three months from now. I have a bi-yearly doctor appointment in March for which I will need a fresh lipid panel, etc. Let's see what the lipid panel tells me about my health with this new diet.

After a 36-hour culture, the resulting yogurt is more like a soft cheese. I eat it with some fresh blueberries on top, some (a little) in the morning and some in the afternoon.

This home culture is a long way from eating storebought yogurt with its variety of probiotic cultures embedded in it. However, storebought yogurt is not cultured long enough to increase the number of probiotic bacteria so they get past the 'walls' of the stomach acid and into the upper and lower intestines. My home cultured yogurt is also tangier and is a little more like a medicine than just sweet and smooth.

Apparently, with a 36-hour home culture the probiotics do overwhelm and get through the stomach acid and are reflected into the intestinal life.

In the included photo, the batch on the left is Margaret's, and she is not using milk or lactose but rather coconut milk, while on the right I am using Half-and-Half and the 36-hour culture transforms most of the lactose into lactic acid.

For those that are trying to make sense of all this, it may help for me to run through how all this works and came about.

While I got catapulted into probiotics by my gut condition, which was created by eating too much straight protein (canned fish) for a couple of months, that just was a catalyst. I first had to take a round of antibiotics after worrying about a tick bite from Lyme disease. Because of the antibiotic, my gut flora was wiped out and had to be rebuilt.

I have been eating a mostly Mediterranean diet for years, featuring all kinds of grain, and especially trying to find good bread. And while these included organic whole-wheat breads, especially sourdoughs, I still enjoyed a good sourdough white-flour French bread once in a while for years.

However, for some time (years) I have noticed a heaviness, when I put sandwiches together and ate them. It was like that at some almost subtle level there was something about wheat that was not right even though I could not pin it down, almost like I regretted that I was eating the bread. I ignored it.

Also, I was eating all kinds of grains, brown rice, oats, barley, and a huge array of grain products, crackers, cookies, etc. Something was off and did not feel so good. I kept eating all this grain just the same, and I lived with carbohydrates and sugar highs daily, and their inevitable crashes. I just went into a tiny food coma if I ate too much, not a good sign.

And so, when I found myself off the grains diet, and trying to fix my gut, of course I took commercial prebiotic yogurt and prebiotic capsules in an attempt to help with my gut flora. And fermented foods like tempeh, miso, Kimchi, and pickles were very helpful.

However, that level of probiotics numbers did limited good, IMO. And it went on until I came across the book “Super Gut” by Dr. William Davis, who pointed out that commercial probiotics were too weak in quantity to regularly get through the stomach acid and into the intestines. Dr. Davis though experience explained that much longer culturing times, like 36 hours were needed to amass enough probiotics to bridge the stomach acid.

To do this, we have to culture our own probiotics at home. I have done that and it is working. As to what I consider results, here are the following:

Clarity of mind. Without the constant carbs and sugar rush and crashes, I am just present, right there most of the time.

Just taking this 36-hour probiotic yogurt I naturally lose weight without trying. It just happens.

My gut and body feel lighter, not just by weight, but more alive. The heaviness (at least for me) of grain effects is no longer there.

And I don't have the hunger I used to have. Instead of three meals a day, I eat small meals as I am hungry throughout the day. It has a bit of the feel of the hunter and gatherer.

I do have to change my diet and find new foods to eat. This is a no-grains diet, not a Keto diet. I don't eat meat except once in a blue moon, yet I do eat some Omega3 fish like wild-caught salmon, mackerel, and tuna filets.

I eat fruits, beans, some dairy, and vegetables of all kinds. Not much sugar. And Margaret and I are experimenting with seed-based flours like almond, flax, sesame, etc. This is a slow shift and we are learning more each day. Margaret has been making crackers with seed flowers.

And so, I am launched on the sea of diet change and quite happy and well so far. I like the foods I am eating, which is not the case before this switch. Instead of constantly restricting myself, I now just eat.

For years I have, thanks to dharma training, become more sensitive to what my mind tells me I should feed by body. No, I don't go hog wild, but if I rest my mind, it tells me what I really yearn to eat and I try that.

How this will show or turn out in a few months, I will see and report here. So far, so good. Very good.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

"Dem Bones": The Skeleton Dance

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 4, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b43c62eb-9735-4b48-8721-f8014fabdef8_1024x1024.jpeg

It's about 1 AM and I am up, as usual. My latest batch of probiotic yogurt is done, after some 36 hours of culturing. Thanks to our new yogurt makers, one for Margaret and one for me, making yogurt is a lot easier.

Shakespeare wrote in Sonnet 10 "O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind"!

In what follows, I will attempt to describe and experience I can barely find words for, have patience please.

Awareness, much less realization, at least for me, takes time. I don't get it (or seldom) just all at once. Especially when it comes to matters of meaning or what we can call 'spirituality', it kind of oozes in from around the edges of reality.

It's like a second take or an insight into one of those figure-ground images. I can't just go after it, at least at first, but it is almost like a reflection, a flicker, or hologram, when some insight will mirage-like appear. What I am pointing at here is the afterthought or after-image of this whole diet change I am going through? It's more than just physical or factual.

It's still early, of course, yet if I relax until stillness, some images appear painted on the horizon of my current experience or seen out of the corner of my eye, yet they are not what I might expect.

I can't understand how a change in probiotics or diet and GUT health can result in a mental or change in life view, however slight, yet something is going on. For example:

With this new 'no-grains' diet I not only find that I am less hungry most of the time, I also find myself losing interest in various entertainments that I usually seek and enjoy, but now I don't bother with. It's almost like I am just lifted out of another kind of reactivity as well, no longer being susceptible to wasting my time on inessentials.

It's like as my body firms up with the no-grains diet, somehow my general view or awareness seems to follow suit these days, almost like a purification

of my diet invokes a purification as to my view of life itself. One thing seems to affect the other.

That's about as clear as I can word; it's a little beyond wordage, perhaps a step toward nonduality or else it is just too soon for description.

We have all heard the old saying "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps." Well, here it's more like "Pull yourself up your diet," what you eat. As my gut comes together, it somehow at the same time pulls me out of meaningless kinds of entertainment. Go figure, which is what I am doing. How could this take place?

"The knee bone is connected to the thigh bone, is connected to the ..."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Magic 8-Ball

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/474c9512-bab3-441a-b2e5-a853da4c0641_1058x1065.jpeg

As the eldest of five boys, we loved the Magic 8-Ball, and we regaled it with endless questions like did this or that girlfriend love or like us, and worse things. As I got older, I also loved the I-Ching, the Tarot, numerology, et al. As for the Magic 8-Ball, it was first published by Mattel in 1946, after an invention by Albert C. Carter

Inside the Magic 8-Ball with a 20-sided polygon with 20 answers. Here they are:

Affirmative Answers (10)

- It is certain.

It is certain.

- It is decidedly so.

It is decidedly so.

- Without a doubt.

Without a doubt.

- Yes – definitely.

Yes – definitely.

- You may rely on it.

You may rely on it.

- As I see it, yes.

As I see it, yes.

- Most likely.

Most likely.

- Outlook good.

Outlook good.

- Yes.

Yes.

- Signs point to yes.

Signs point to yes.

Non-Committal (Neutral) Answers (5)

- Reply hazy, try again.

Reply hazy, try again.

- Ask again later.

Ask again later.

- Better not tell you now.

Better not tell you now.

- Cannot predict now.

Cannot predict now.

- Concentrate and ask again.

Concentrate and ask again.

Negative Answers (5)

- Don't count on it.

Don't count on it.

- My reply is no.

My reply is no.

- My sources say no.

My sources say no.

- Outlook not so good.

Outlook not so good.

- Very doubtful.

Very doubtful.

Meanwhile, as I grew older and got my act more together, inside my own mind was an innate crystal ball that I have gradually learned to prompt. By now I have learned to lean into it and trust it more and more all the time. We all have this intuition, but at least for me it had to be vetted.

It's that little voice that whispers in our ear a best-guess as to which road to take. I know, it's a very faint voice and we don't know whether what it

whispers is true or not, yet that's why I'm writing this. Over time, and with training, we can learn to trust it. It's a question of 'Faith'.

And it's not just a thinking or 'mental' thing. It's visceral too, visceral at least enough to guide us as to what our body needs to eat or do. We can sense whether what is whispered to us is true or not. We can vet this intuition by becoming aware of it and learn to trust it, although it is a bit like walking on air and allowing the angels within us to hold up our feet.

However, at least in my case, I have to relax and allow my mind to become very still, and to kind of float in the oneness or my own mind like in a vast swimming pool. And it is universally applicable.

By that I mean this effect ranges from the highest conceptual flights of intellection to the deepest visceral emotions and feelings. We can ask our feelings, our personal crystal ball, questions and listen for an answer, and then check out if that answer is true or meaningful.

In a way, we have our own built-in ChatGPT right here in our mind and wait for an answer. While this may be very clumsy at first, with patience and training in letting the mind rest, we can hone these whisper-pointers of directional insight.

I have been doing this with food for years and am getting better and better at it, allowing my cravings or tendencies through which my body tells me what to eat to surface and then, tentatively, try them and see how they feel.

In the texts, they call the intestinal track the "2nd Brain," and that is a term that takes some unpacking. When I first encountered it, I wondered how and why they could say such a thing – second brain.

Even now I am still just grasping a sense that it does mean something. And what I can't yet gather well enough is that cultivating our gut is a powerful, powerful experience and tool.

It not only improves our digestion and nutrient absorption, but also, and this is the amazing part, it can change our mind, how we think, how we feel, how we are, and thus also who we are.

An aside: previous to our homemade yogurt, the best yogurt I have ever had was in the high plateaus of Tibet, in a tiny cement block home at the end of a road that was not even a two-track, but just some slick grass. This was fresh made yogurt from female yaks. It was astounding. Yet, I am getting close to that right here in Big Rapids, Michigan with the yogurt I am creating with special strains of probiotic cultured for 36 hours.

[Image made by me with Adobe Illustrator.]

EMAIL

Does Nothing Matter?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/44974880-e07c-496c-b06a-c51ec5a15687_1024x1024.jpeg

If you are not convinced that Shakespeare is the all-around best writer in the English language, my guess is that you have not read him.

Meanwhile, we are all monitoring the well of the present moment to see what's coming in from the future.

Try as we might, we can only get so far into the future because we can't get beyond this present moment. We can lean forward as far as we can, yet that only puts a strain on us.

What's coming to pass? As the Bible says, nothing is coming to stay, but all things come to pass.

Instead of looking for something in the nothing that often is present, consider that 'nothing' itself is something and rest in that.

And we all know the old chestnut "This too shall pass," yet perhaps not fast enough. When the future itself becomes the present, we can savor it before it too passes. Nothing remains other than what's present.

We can't get back into the past or ahead into the future. We remain in the present. What then do we do in the present?

It's called the 'present moment' because it only exists momentarily, yet it also exists forever, eternally.

The present moment is like a widow's walk, looking out to the sea of the future to see if anything's coming.

Yet that 'looking for something' is a duality. We've already lost. It's like the old phrase "When did you stop beating your wife?"

Yet a future with nothing in sight and a present with nothing in sight are similar, yet the past, what has passed, by definition, is always something or other.

And so, in the present while we are waiting for something and nothing is already present, why not examine that 'nothing' from which everything comes. That nothing is the mother of all things and life itself.

How to appreciate nothing is itself something.

Waiting for an idea, a sign, a hint, something to reflect upon, is a thirst for duality, for confirmation of our existence and continuation in Samsara. Facing that and trying to thwart that.

However, facing and resting in that emptiness is the stuff of meditators.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Grooming the Gut

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 9, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a413089b-2844-47f9-8468-089957339feb_1024x1024.jpeg

In learning about the gut, there is at least one major difference between the upper (smaller) intestine and the lower (colon) intestine, and that is that the upper intestine's wall is only one cell thick to make it almost a semi-permeable membrane, while the large lower intestine is many cells thick and not meant to be semi-permeable.

Why this is important to understand is that often with a disturbed GUT, some bacteria meant to stay in the large intestine go rogue and migrate into the upper/smaller intestine and have access to our bloodstream when they should not. They can penetrate that one-cell intestinal wall.

And there are certain probiotic bacteria that naturally take up residence in the thin-walled smaller intestine rather than the in the color or lower intestine where most go.

And *Lactobacillus reuteri* is one of these probiotic bacteria that reside in the upper intestine and protects it from being invaded by rogue bacteria from the lower intestine.

Each of the strains of probiotic bacteria have their own qualities, what they are good for. Here the qualities of this probiotic:

LACTOBACILLUS REUTERI QUALITIES

Increased empathy, social connection, reduced social anxiety

Increased dermal collagen, reduced wrinkles, moisten skin

Accelerated healing

Reduced appetite

Deeper sleep, longer REM

Restoration of youthful muscle and strength

Preserves bone density

Bifidobacterium infantis EVC001

Another very important probiotic is *Bifidobacterium infantis* EVC001. This probiotic is given to us as we pass down the birth canal from our mother's womb and is very important to our gut. For cesarean births, the infant does not get this probiotic and depends on picking up bacteria from the attending nurse for the cesarean.

Also, since most of us have about 25 or so courses of antibiotics by the time we are an adult, 90% of adults have lost this particular probiotic and need to consider reinstalling it.

The best strain for this probiotic is *Bifidobacterium infantis* EVC001, so look for that one if you can (Evivo.com). You can take it daily for a while by capsule or powder, but it is best if you make some 36-hour yogurt and take that until it is gone.

SUMMARY

One thing that I have learned from changing my diet to no-grains and probiotics is that I am less susceptible to all kinds of stuff. I am not particularly hungry all the time. If I am offered or tempted to do something, like watch a movie, eat this or that, or whatever, I find myself saying no more than I used to; this is not necessary. I find that non-temptation fascinating.

I am more content to just be right here and now or as Chuck Berry said, I have "No Particular Place to Go" and no need to go there.

I find it more than interesting how much a simple diet or modification of my gut biome can affect my life in so many other ways than the food it is supposed to affect.

And so, what perhaps seems rather simple on the surface, that I have modified my diet significantly, seems to be dictating all kinds of change in me not associated with diet and food change.

At the same time, I have an odd sense that I am straightening out or somehow getting more 'straight', rather than my usual interest in all the entertainments that life offers. It's like my life is firming up, so to speak. It's almost like I am becoming more conservative, but I'm still the liberal that I have always been.

However, somehow, I am becoming, as mentioned, less sidetracked by all the sideshows life offers me. I just don't need that anymore. I will take life "neat" as the whisky drinkers might say. Some kind of purification is going on.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Theater of the Absurd

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 9, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/df2e6d38-3154-4696-ae8d-b3ff31330079_1024x1024.jpeg

In the early 1800s, the poet William Wordsworth wrote:

“The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

Today, over 225 years later, not much has changed. In meaningless entertainment we spend our days, while the hush of twilight and the murmuring waves pass us by unheard and the wild heart of the earth beats on, unnoticed and unsought.

Shakespeare lasted until this modern time, a ship of meaning surging on through time, un-assailed until now.

William Butler Yeats wrote:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre,

The falcon cannot hear the falconer.

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold ;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

The fracture of language itself being unpacked now opens up a world of unvetted meaning that points at nothing.

What is meaningful?

Unmeaningful meaning, running in circles, chaos.

Today, there is no ‘period’ at the end of our sentences.

Instead, our only option that makes sense is careful articulation, moment by moment, that ties us down from flying apart, further exposing this vast nothing at all.

It’s that ‘nothing at all’ that boggles the mind. We don’t know what to do with nothing. Yet here it is, everywhere, and behind everything.

The exposure or advent of 'nothing' publicly is the only something we have, and yet we can't see nothing'. And we don't yet know 'nothing'.

It's the way we travel rather than where we get to that is the point. And yet the point, so to speak, is that there is no point. Never has there been. Same thing. As Shakespeare said "Much Ado About Nothing."

Finding that out is what we here in 2025 are now discovering. Recursion reiterates.

In other words, there is no future in the future, only in the present. Our future is only in the present. Our future is the present. That's what is happening.

It is 3 o'clock in the morning and we are in a snowstorm. The wind is howling outside as I sit here at this little desk, where I have worked for 45 years.

The 'Theater of the Absurd' is now, right here in 2025. As the surfers say, we are 'riding the barrel'.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"Ground Control to Major Tom"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 12, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a6e01bc8-c7f2-4366-84fb-8fbb6b0b6dc_2048x2048.jpeg

VAGUS NERVE: MICROBIOME TO BRAIN: New research provides compelling evidence that the gut microbiome directly influences brain function through the vagus nerve, a critical communication pathway between the gut and central nervous system.

Scientists at UCLA demonstrated this connection using germ-free mice—animals raised without any gut bacteria. These mice exhibited significantly reduced vagal nerve activity, which was restored once gut bacteria were introduced, confirming that microbial presence is essential for normal vagus nerve signaling.

Further experiments reinforced this link. When researchers administered antibiotics to normal mice, eliminating their gut bacteria, vagal nerve activity decreased. However, reintroducing microbiome-derived intestinal fluids restored normal function.

This suggests that microbial byproducts play a crucial role in maintaining brain-gut communication.

The study identified specific metabolites, particularly short-chain fatty acids and bile acids, as key drivers of vagal nerve activation. These molecules are produced by gut bacteria during digestion and appear to serve as chemical messengers that stimulate vagal neurons. Notably, signals from the vagus nerve extended to the brainstem, further solidifying the presence of a direct gut-to-brain communication pathway.

MORE ON THE VAGUS NERVE

The vagus nerve (cranial nerve X) is the longest and most complex of the cranial nerves, playing a vital role in communication between the brain and various organs throughout the body. It extends from the brainstem down to the abdomen, innervating structures such as the heart, lungs, digestive tract, and other internal organs.

Functions of the Vagus Nerve

- **Autonomic Control:** It is a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system , regulating involuntary bodily functions like heart rate, digestion, and respiratory rate.

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- **Gut-Brain Communication:** It serves as a direct pathway between the gut and the brain, transmitting signals related to digestion, metabolism, and even emotions.

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- **Inflammatory Response Regulation:** The vagus nerve helps control inflammation by modulating immune responses, which has implications for conditions like autoimmune diseases.

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- **Mood and Mental Health:** Vagal nerve activity is linked to neurotransmitter production, affecting mood and mental well-being. Low vagal tone has been associated with anxiety and depression.

Mood and Mental Health: Vagal nerve activity is linked to neurotransmitter production, affecting mood and mental well-being. Low vagal tone has been associated with anxiety and depression.

- **Swallowing and Speech:** It plays a role in swallowing, voice control, and reflex actions like coughing and sneezing.

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The Vagus Nerve and the Gut-Brain Axis

Summary: Recent research highlights the vagus nerve as a crucial link between the gut microbiome and the brain . Signals from gut bacteria can influence vagus nerve activity, affecting brain function, mood, and behavior. This connection has implications for neurological and psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, and neurodegenerative diseases.

Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) in Medicine

Vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) is a medical technique used to treat various conditions, including:

- Epilepsy: Helps reduce seizure frequency in drug-resistant cases.

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- Depression: Used as a therapy for treatment-resistant depression.

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- Inflammatory Disorders: Investigated for its role in conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease.

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Because of its vast influence on the body, the vagus nerve is a major focus of research for developing new treatments for both neurological and gastrointestinal disorders.

Implications for Health and Disease

These findings advance our understanding of the gut-brain axis, an emerging field in neuroscience and gastroenterology. Disruptions in this communication system have been linked to a range of conditions, including irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), depression, anxiety, and neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

By pinpointing the vagus nerve as a key conduit for microbial signaling, this research opens the door to novel therapeutic approaches. Potential treatments could involve modulating gut bacteria through probiotics, dietary interventions, or pharmacological agents to restore healthy brain-gut interactions.

Key Takeaways

- Gut-Bacteria Link: Germ-free mice showed reduced vagal nerve activity, which normalized when gut bacteria were introduced.

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- Metabolite Activation: Short-chain fatty acids and bile acids, produced by gut microbes, directly stimulated vagal neurons.

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- Brain Connection: Vagus nerve signals extended to the brainstem, confirming a direct gut-to-brain pathway.

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- Therapeutic Potential: Understanding vagal-mediated gut-brain communication could lead to new treatments for neurological and gastrointestinal disorders.

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This study reinforces the idea that the microbiome is not just a passive component of digestion but an active participant in brain function. Future research may further clarify how gut bacteria influence cognition, mood, and overall neurological health.

Here is an article with more information from CNN:

<https://neurosciencenews.com/gut-microbiome-vagus-nerve-28413/>

I am actively engaged in exploring many of the main useful probiotics, culturing them, and rebuilding my on microbiome.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

GUT Microbiome Reset

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3f73e9c8-3666-4b75-8aff-dbb35f62d400_380x366.jpeg

As mentioned in an earlier post, new research provides compelling evidence that the gut microbiome directly influences brain function through the vagus nerve, a critical communication pathway between the gut and central nervous system. One way to stimulate vagus nerve activity is through diaphragmatic breathing, breathing from the diaphragm (lower stomach) instead of higher up, in the chest.

I learned diaphragmatic breathing when I learned to play amplified harmonica back in the mid-1960s, where the breath has to be controlled, breathing both in and out, and also by singing. It became the natural way that I breathed from then on. And now I read that this must have stimulated my vagus nerve in the process.

Now, in 2024, due to having to take a course of antibiotics because of a deer tick bite, I have faced having to reset my microbiome, my gut, because the antibiotics wiped out all or most of my intestinal flora – probiotics.

And in the process, as I have read and study more about resetting my own gut and its intestinal flora, I have become aware how important a healthy gut is to my own health.

It is said that most of us, due to taking antibiotics, have probably wiped out much or most of our intestinal flora, over and over until who knows what's in there working for us today.

One important kind of probiotic strain is *B. infantis*, the original gut probiotic strain that was given to us by our mom at birth while passing through the birth canal. That's the main probiotic strain that resides in our large intestine (colon) after birth and that if wiped out by antibiotics is hard to replace.

Science says probably 90% of us have lost that particular probiotic strain through repeated use of antibiotics and might want to get it back. I know I did, and I am doing something about replenishing it. There are just a couple things we might need to know in order to do this.

One is that the small intestine and the large intestine (colon) require that different probiotic strains be present. By default, through just living, we have

something already in there. It just may not be what our body requires and runs best on. And it may contain rogue bacteria that is harmful or contributes to depression, so scientists are finding.

After studying it for a while, there are the two probiotic strains considered among the best, one for the upper intestine and one for the lower. And these particular strains naturally prefer and take up residence in one or the other of these intestines. And it is not rocket-science to replenish our two intestines ourselves or at least get it started. And we can do this at home, right where we are. Here is what you may need to know.

In general, no one probiotic is best for working with the small intestine AND the large intestine. After some research, perhaps the best is two probiotics that cooperate and work together, one handling the upper intestine (L. Reuteri) and another for handling the colon or lower intestine (B. infantis). As mentioned, for the upper (smaller) intestine, L. Reuteri is considered perhaps the best.

In addition, I am doing a full culture of E. coli nissle 1917, since it is considered very powerful and good at doing the heavy lifting when trying to reset the gut microbiome, provide immune support, and cleaning out the colon.

And I am not talking about taking a capsule or two of probiotics daily. That apparently is not enough. And store-bought probiotic yogurt is not enough, since it is only cultured for six or eight hours. Gut restarting requires a 36-hour culture with each strain based on about a quart of Half-and-Half, fueled by two tablespoons of Inulin, infused with the contents of two probiotic capsules. It's easy to do at home even without a yogurt maker.

If we ask how do E. coli Nissle 1917 and B. infantis, both lower intestinal probiotics, get along with one another?

They are not in competition and more or less compliment each other. B. infantis thrives on complex carbohydrates (like inulin, HMOs, and fiber), fermenting them into short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) that nourish the gut.

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- E. coli Nissle 1917 does not rely on fiber fermentation but instead consumes simple sugars and proteins while producing antimicrobial peptides.

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So, since they use different food sources, they're not direct competitors.

E. coli Nissle 1917 strengthens the gut barrier and helps regulate inflammation, which can support B. infantis growth.

B. infantis produces SCFAs (like acetate), which can indirectly benefit E. coli Nissle 1917 by lowering gut pH and promoting a healthier gut environment.

However there is a possible Conflict:

E. coli Nissle produces bacteriocins (antimicrobial compounds). While these help fight harmful bacteria, it's unclear whether they may slightly suppress B. infantis in some cases.

If taken in high doses, E. coli Nissle 1917 could temporarily dominate, making it harder for B. infantis to establish.

As for the upper intestine, L. Reuteri is all we need, since it prefers establishing itself in the upper intestine.

HOW TO DO IT

INGREDIENTS:

Capsules or powder of L. reuteri, B. infantis, or another strain.

Milk (high-fat, no additives) – Preferably whole milk, half-and-half, or even A2 milk for better digestion.

Prebiotic fiber – Inulin (1-3 tbsp) or potato starch to feed the bacteria.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

Glass or ceramic bowl with top (to prevent leaching from plastic).

Yogurt maker, sous vide, or Instant Pot (set to 100°F / 38°C).

Whisk or spoon (for mixing the starter).

STEP-BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS:

PREBIOTIC FIBER:

Place 1-3 tablespoons of inulin to bowl (or another fiber like potato starch). This helps feed the bacteria so they multiply during fermentation.

ADD THE PROBIOTIC STARTER:

Open 1-2 probiotic capsules

Stir gently but don't blend too aggressively (to avoid damaging bacteria).

Add Qt of Half&Half

Mix with powder thoroughly

Incubate at 100°F (38°C) for 36 Hours

Can be put under a heating pad (but must maintain 100 Degrees F by padding

Some ovens with pilot light can be useful, but control temperature by cracking the oven door

Placing bowl by heat duct can work.

Keep the mixture at a constant temperature in a yogurt maker, sous vide, or an Instant Pot on the yogurt setting.

Do NOT stir or shake during fermentation.

Why 36 hours? This extends bacterial growth cycles, ensuring trillions of CFUs.

REFRIGERATE BEFORE EATING:

After 36 hours, transfer the yogurt to the fridge and let it cool for at least 4-6 hours before consuming.

The texture may be thinner than commercial yogurt, but this is normal.

HOW TO USE IT:

Start with 1-2 tbsp per day and gradually increase.

Can be eaten alone, mixed with fruit, or blended into smoothies.

BEST PROBIOTIC STRAINS:

Lactobacillus reuteri – Upper Intestine. For skin, gut, oxytocin, and immunity.

<https://www.oxiceutics.com/products/myreuteri>

Bifidobacterium infantis -- Lower Intestine. For digestion, gut repair, and fiber metabolism.

https://store.evivo.com/pages/evivo-powder-probiotic?_gl=1*lym43z*_ga*MTQ5MzE4ODMzOS4xNjkwNTU1NDA0*_ga_GT6P2EJCD7*MTcwODM2MjkwMC4zMy4xLjE3MDgzNjI5MDUuNTUuMC4w

E. coli Nissle 1917 – Lower Intestine. For gut barrier support. If you are doing the B. Infantis, you don't need E. coli Nissle 1917. It comes from Europe refrigerated and is expensive, so it's a hassle. Contact me if you need info.

Ask questions here if you have them.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Puzzling Diet

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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I am having a little bit of a turnaround with the diet which warned might happen, but I did not anticipate it. Everything I am finding out is not what the books say. The whole diet is foundering, but just a little.

I am indeed resetting my microbiome which was important and it is happening. However, the part about cutting out ALL grains is morphing a bit. Yes, I am mostly cutting out grains, but not entirely. Ultimately, what I want is to balance my diet.

However, it starts to look like what I am doing is right on the cover of William Davis book “Super Gut: A Four-Week Plan to Reprogram Your Microbiome, Restore Health, and Lose weight. I am reprogramming but gut flora.

The main problem I have run into, among several, is that instead of losing weight, which I did lose a few pounds, I have ended up gaining weight which is not something I need, so....

I am putting the whole jigsaw puzzle of a diet back together and it will produce a somewhat different picture.

I have reworked by microbiome, and will continue to make homemade yogurt with various strains of probiotics. That’s fine. I have to keep in mind that the life of a probiotic bacteria is very brief, a matter of hours, days, and perhaps weeks. It is best (and probably necessary) to keep eating 36-hour probiotic yogurt for the foreseeable future.

In the process, I have found non-grain crackers, some decent cookies, and the like, which will work for me. That’s good.

I have not found any bread substitute and will have to depend on the corn tortillas to cover that. As mentioned, I’ve decided that I will use some corn tortillas, ones that have no preservatives in them. And I will use a very limited amount of Lundberg Organic Short-Grain Rice, but sparingly instead of a whole plateful, I will have a cup or half a cup of brown rice and treat it more like medicine.

And I will throttle back a bit on any dairy, cheese, butter, eggs and the like, but not cut it out entirely.

I will have frozen salmon, but I will not use canned salmon, tuna, or sardines because of the threat of encouraging trimethylamine (TMA) in my system, which I am still getting over.

So, what this diet boils down to is something like, after restarting my gut microbiome, I will be on a Mediterranean-style diet, with occasional fish, some cheese, eggs, and probiotic yogurt of a special kind (36-48 hour incubation). I will not attempt to go whole-hog with wheat (pasta, etc.), but will perhaps nibble around the edges of wheat products, but will use some very plain corn products.

I don't have a replacement for pasta, although

I tried garbanzo bean pasta and, for me, that's a no-go. I'd rather go without.

And so, that is the state of the union on my sweeping diet, several steps forward and one step back.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

As Above, So Below

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Sunny and cold it is. I'm getting ready to head out for my bi-annual doctor's appointment and I have list of questions, of course.

My evolving diet continues to evolve, however it is settling down to a gentle roar and establishing a pattern.

I have decided to not eat wheat, bread etc., but not never, just generally. Instead, I will eat corn (hasa marina) tortillas with no preservatives and I may make my own tortillas. I am thinking about it, and I have two pounds of hasa marina sitting on the shelf.

Margaret is forging ahead making yogurt without milk, and this time she made her own cashew milk and is incubating it with L. Reuteri probiotic. So far it looks very healthy and active. Perhaps cashews have more fat in them. If the cashew yogurt is really good, I might try that too.

Meanwhile and otherwise, I have lots of interests kind of in standstill, which is something I do when I get even-near spring. I am a glutton for waiting and it is stupid I know. Sometimes I just pause almost everything and just wait for spring. It is very enervating and tedious, but, "Oh Well."

My photography is just sitting there, flickering in the gloaming of winter. Same for a bunch of stuff.

I'm in the process of restoring a wooden hobby horse that my brother Danial made, but it also is just sitting there. I have put on a new tail of real horse hair, fashioned some leather ears, and need to make or find a bridle. Yet, there it sits. Nothing happening. I could go on.

I like to sit on one of the south-facing couches and kind of bathe in the sunlight shining in. That's great.

All of the things I imagined I would do when winter comes, mostly are not done or even ventured. I don't know why I even pretend.

Yes, I am watching and monitoring my mind, in dharma terms. I'm doing that, of course, because I can't avoid it.

And so, it's too soon (middle of February) to go on strike until Spring. I have no excuse and perhaps with a little more light as the sun moves northward each day I will wake up to being more useful to myself.

Meanwhile, what I am pondering today as I feel the sun coming in the window is the image of the night sky with stars and the plane of the galaxy AND the galaxy we have right here within our gut of billions of active bacteria. Are they connected?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"Send for the Doctor and the Doctor Said..."

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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My blood-pressure doctor is the last filter I have to run my new no-grains diet past and I did. And there is a problem, and it changes things ... a little bit more.

My LDL (bad cholesterol) rose a lot since last summer when it was a golden '41'. My recent lipid panel registered it at '84', a huge jump. However, and this is important to follow if you are interested in these kinds of things.

My current lipid panel (and the '84' for LDL) is always reporting my system as of 3-6 months ago, it is NOT reflective of where I am right now, even though it was taken a few days ago. Why this is, probably because it takes time to turn the large ship of the human body around...

And when I go back and look where I was three months ago with health and diet, I was in that area after I took antibiotics to ward off Lyme disease, which was a real slump as to what I ate, how much, and all of that. I'm still recovering.

In other words, my recent lipid panel was a reflection on where I was back in the November-December period of time in 2024.

This doctor, my main doctor, says that I should keep on taking my super probiotic yogurt twice a day, lose at least four pounds, limit my eating of eggs to 1 egg a day, or 7 eggs a week, and cut my cheese consumption in half.

All this is very doable and still gives me limited freedom to at least pretend I am eating what I want to eat. And that's plenty of eggs if I want to eat eggs, and I can limit the cheese, etc.

I am not interested in eating anything 'wheat', other than perhaps the tiny crust on a bunch of pot pies Margaret and I made back in the fall.

I'm planning, as earlier reported, to eat hasa-marina tortillas with no preservatives in them or make tortillas from scratch myself. That will be as close to bread as I get.

I need to keep my exercise up, as well. I don't seem to have prostate or kidney problems.

So, things are a bit shuffled around, but the overall picture remains roughly the same, a Mediterranean-style diet, which I have been doing for years, minus the pasta and other wheat products. Little to no meat and the occasional fish, but not canned fish for a while. I poach salmon in water and consider it like a medicine. And I eat a lot of fresh blueberries (every day) with the probiotic yogurt I make.

With age, the role of prescriptions and supplements takes on an outsized role. I only have two prescribed medicines, Hydrochlorothiazide (water pill) and a statin (blood pressure). The rest at things like Viamin C, K2, D3, magnesium, and things like that.

So that's the state of my health up to now.

"I asked my family doctor just what I had, I said Doctor (Doctor), Mr. M.D. (Doctor), Now can you tell me what's ailing me (Doctor)?"

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Sun is Heading North

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 22, 2025

THE SUN IS HEADING NORTH

The Sun is out, it's 31 degrees F here, and Margaret and I are out walking the neighborhood streets with our running shoes, dodging the odd bit of ice and stepping over mini icebergs. It's a bit cold when the sun has your back, but with the sun in your face and the wind behind, it's almost perfect. I know, I have months before I can get enough sunshine to forget about it.

Grandkids coming for a visit today, so getting ready for that. They will stay in our dharma center, which you can see the side door of through the kitchen window.

Spent the day studying cholesterol with a lot of help from herbalist Jim McDonald, a Michigan treasure.

<https://herbcraft.podia.com/>

And of course, busy culturing more probiotic yogurt, this time *L. Reuteri*, that likes to make its home in our upper intestine and is very gentle in my experience. I culture a batch for 3 hours and end up with 9 6-Oz jars ready to eat.

Did a little photography today, like some shots in our kitchen, one I include here.

Spring is just around the corner, I wish, but a round corner at that. Still sorting out my health concerns, putting them to bed one at a time. I just have to keep on it. Getting older means just that, getting old. I like to sit on one of our large couches in front of a series of tall casement windows on the south side, when the sun shines in.

When I finally get to enshrining the present moment, I have no choice but to immerse myself in it. The Zen in me is reawakening, so to speak.

EMAIL

What is Patience?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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I'm back from a whirlwind overnight trip to Traverse City and the birthday of my daughter May's daughter Iris, who is now eleven years old. It was a wild time filled with kids, huge ballons, music, dancing, playing, and included a couple dozen adults. Margaret and I came early and helped to set up. We stayed the night at Margaret's brother's home, Lynn and Julieanna Frost, plus their dog Bear. Also shopped at the legendary Oryana Coop and their hot bar. Searching for food we could eat and then eating in the car. We were wearing masks, so no sit-down eating.

The party was fun and very loud. LOL.

I drove both ways, and on the way home I had an interesting experience. I don't know what I was thinking, perhaps I was not thinking or barely thinking. Regardless, I found myself shunted to the side of my normal talkative attitude, somehow just being still. Or it could be a temporary or new-found patience holding firm. I don't exactly know or care. I was beside myself, but not upset and still am, having by now reached home.

Whatever it is, I found myself putting-off topics perhaps well-worthy of thinking about in favor of simple stillness.

It felt like I was doing nothing at all, not picking up where I left off, but just continuing to let things pass. This modern world is so messed up that there is no simple solution to the myriads of tangents that are now skewed and off-center.

There is not simply setting the world straight. The best I can do is try to keep myself on a level path, like a gyroscope maintains its orientation and angular velocity.

Anyway, mum was the word. I let topics pass rather than speak to them. And again and again, until there was an even stream of silence but also vigilance. Not much like the me that I know or have known.

Biding my time? Not really, because it had no end.

More like being in a parallel universe or to the side in this one, and not really watching, yet not not-watching either. No subject, no object. Just continuum.

There was nothing and no one there or not there. That's my point, that there was none and no one. So, what was there?

As mentioned, there is what appeared as patience or the equivalent, perhaps with so much to regurgitate that nothing comes up.

When the universe said 'wait', it meant for a long time.

And so, back home but don't feel like sleeping, yet I may have to 'lay' myself down as I would an object.

There is no right thing to do, meaning nothing I can do is going to feel right in this continuum, because this continuum is continuous, and I am in it more than I am out or even care to get out.

As mentioned, it's never ending because it continues. And it has no beginning. I can't say what it is because I don't have the words. It's beyond words, yet still very much there. I don't want to leave it, yet I should rest. It could be just tiredness and exhaustion speaking.

Whatever it is, it has struck me dumb and unwilling to break its silence even though I am still writing words here. These words are beside the point, because it's beyond words and description, yet completely present.

It's a kind of form of goodbye, but not a simple negation.

And it's not fully present or the center of attention, either. It can't be negated.

In other words, it is not either there or not-there, yet it is.

What exactly is patience?

[Photo by Margaret.]

EMAIL

James Burton: The Guitarist Who Defined an Era

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 27, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8689e7d0-c755-4eb5-9018-06acd0eae05a_686x546.jpeg

In my life, perhaps the most virile and consistent studio and backup lead guitarist in modern music history is James Burton, one of the most influential and versatile guitarists in the history of rock and roll, known for his exceptional playing behind iconic artists like Ricky Nelson and Elvis Presley, among others.

Here is a brief biography of his work with various bands and artists, and some of the famous songs he played on.

Full Name : James Edward Burton

Born : August 21, 1939, in Dubberly, Louisiana, USA

Genres : Rock and roll, Country, Blues, Pop

Occupation : Guitarist, session musician, bandleader

Instrument : Guitar (primarily electric guitar, in particular the Fender Telecaster).

Years Active : 1957-present, James Burton began playing guitar at a young age and was influenced by the early pioneers of rock and roll. His unique ability to blend rockabilly, country, and blues styles made him a highly sought-after session guitarist. By his teenage years, he was already a standout performer, known for his clean and precise finger-picking technique and his distinctive sound.

Key Collaborations & Groups:

Ricky Nelson : Burton became the lead guitarist for Ricky Nelson's band in the late 1950s, playing on many of his hits. This collaboration helped define the "rockabilly" style and the early sound of rock and roll. Notable Songs : "Hello Mary Lou" , "Travelin' Man" , "Poor Little Fool."

Elvis Presley : Burton became a key member of Elvis Presley's TCB (Taking Care of Business) Band in the 1960s, playing on numerous studio recordings and live performances., Notable Songs : "Burning Love" , "Suspicious Minds" , "Viva Las Vegas."

The Spade Cooley Band : Burton also worked with Spade Cooley, a country-western bandleader, contributing to the crossover of rockabilly into the mainstream country scene.

The Everly Brothers : In the 1960s, Burton also worked as a session musician for The Everly Brothers, known for their harmonies and rock 'n' roll hits.

The Monkees : Burton played guitar on some of The Monkees' early recordings, adding his distinctive sound to the group's pop-rock hits.

Gram Parsons : Burton was a key member of Gram Parsons' band The Flying Burrito Brothers, contributing his electric guitar to their mix of country, rock, and soul music., **Notable Songs :** , "Hot Burrito #1," "Sin City."

John Denver : He played guitar on several of John Denver's hits, including "Thank God I'm a Country Boy."

Emmylou Harris : Burton contributed to Emmylou Harris's albums, further showcasing his ability to blend country and rock.

Frank Sinatra : Burton's session work extended even to legendary artists like Frank Sinatra, where he brought his rock edge into different musical styles.

Signature Sound and Influence: James Burton is often regarded as the father of the "chicken pickin'" guitar technique, which is a style that involves rapid, percussive picking and a sharp, bright tone, primarily in country music. His sound, with its clean lead lines, quick improvisation, and blend of rockabilly and country, has been a major influence on guitarists like Keith Richards, Jerry Garcia, and Brad Paisley.

His work with Elvis Presley, in particular, is often hailed as some of the best guitar work in rock and roll history. His innovative solos and rhythm parts on Elvis' 1960s hits helped shape the sound of the "King" during the pivotal years when Presley was transitioning from his earlier rockabilly roots to a more polished, mainstream sound.

Famous Songs and Solos:

"Travelin' Man" – Ricky Nelson : Burton's clean, bright lead guitar lines became a trademark of Nelson's hits.

"Burning Love" – Elvis Presley : Burton's energetic and melodic guitar solo helped make this song a timeless classic.

"Suspicious Minds" – Elvis Presley : Known for its dramatic tension, Burton's guitar work helped drive the song's emotional intensity.

"Sin City" – Flying Burrito Brothers : A perfect example of Burton's fusion of rock and country.

"Hot Burrito #1" – Flying Burrito Brothers : Burton's guitar shines here, adding a signature sound to the country rock genre.

Legacy and Recognition:

James Burton is often hailed as one of the greatest session musicians in rock history. His influence can be heard in the work of countless musicians across various genres, and he has been inducted into several halls of fame, including the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001 as part of Elvis Presley's band.

He has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the prestigious "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the International Guitar Hall of Fame.

In addition to his work as a session musician and bandleader, Burton remains an active performer, continuing to tour and play with many of the artists he has influenced. James Burton's guitar playing has had a profound impact on both rock and country music, and he is widely recognized as one of the genre's true pioneers. His ability to adapt to different musical styles while maintaining his unique voice has solidified his legacy as one of the greatest guitarists in history.

Since the 1950s, Burton has recorded and performed with an array of singers, including:

Hoyt Axton , The Beach Boys , The Beau Brummels , The Byrds , J. J. Cale , Glen Campbell , Shawn Camp , Kim Carnes , Carlene Carter , Johnny Cash , Rosanne Cash , David Cassidy , Mark Collie , Judy Collins , Elvis Costello , Marshall Crenshaw , Rodney Crowell , John Denver , Cass Elliot , Phil Everly , Bobbie Gentry , Arlo Guthrie , Hager Twins , Emmylou Harris , Emmylou Harris and Rodney Crowell , , Dale Hawkins , Ronnie Hawkins , Chris Hillman , Jan & Dean , Sammy Johns , Nicolette Larson , Jim Lauderdale , Drake Milligan , Ronnie Milsap , Joni Mitchell , The Monkees , Michael Martin Murphey , Michael Nesmith , Randy Newman , Harry Nilsson , Tom Pacheco , Brad Paisley , Gram Parsons , Michael Parks , John Phillips , Elvis Presley , Johnny Rivers , Kenny Rogers , Evie Sands , Billy Joe Shaver , Frank Sinatra , Nancy Sinatra , Tom Snow , Buffalo Springfield , The Tractors , Tina Turner , Townes Van Zandt , Sammy Walker , Gillian Welch .

[Photo by Ken Ross.]

EMAIL

Grain-Free Living

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 28, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8c2d7151-044a-4423-9916-ab88974c79a3_1536x2048.jpeg

The recent no-grains diet grinds on. It has its ups and downs. I am staying away from wheat and other grains, but will use whole-corn and take a little brown rice as needed to get fiber to a meal, but just a couple of tablespoons. The various no-grain products I tried and mostly had to give away to StarBurst or throw out. For me, they just were inedible.

On the upside, consider Margaret's new cashew cheese, by with the L. Reuteri probiotic strain. It is as good as any imported soft cheese, and it is powered by probiotics as well.

I have settled on "El Milagra Corn/Maiz Tortillas.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0813XG2JC?ref_=ppx_hzsearch_conn_dt_b_fed_asin_title_1&th=1

For \$24, I got 144 tortillas (12 packs of 12) shipped to my door. I immediately froze most of them, but have been enjoying them, warming them in a pan (or not) as needed. These are as good or better than any I could make myself, so I count that as a blessing.

I continue to make 36-hour yogurt with various probiotic strains, mostly L. reuteri, which resides in the upper intestine and is very delicious.

And I still eat some fresh (frozen) salmon, poaching it in water, so there is not any burnt skin or whatever, and putting a small piece of the cooked salmon in a corn tortilla with salsa (La Victoria Suprema Mild), some lettuce or cooked cabbage and enjoying that.

I also am eating some eggs (7 per week) and some cheese (only the harder and longer cultured cheddar, Swiss, Parmesan, etc.) and no soft cheeses. As mentioned, for a soft cheese we now have this very delicate and fine cashew cheese to enjoy.

And I'm not saying much about vegetables, but they are a mainstay. I'm moving away from potatoes a bit, but enjoying Brussel sprouts, Bok-choy, romaine, zucchini, cabbage, carrots, celery, onions, etc. Also, fruits, especially fresh blueberries, which I eat with probiotic yogurt twice a day.

Simple-Mills products have been a godsend, although expensive. They make all kinds of crackers and cookies that are very nice, but some are too salty for me.

And so, bumpety-bump I'm moving along with the drastic diet change of giving up wheat products, at least for now.

Learning a lot because I have to learn a lot. No choice. Gotta eat something and that something is under examination.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Whirlwind Tour

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 3, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f16380ae-3089-48d1-b953-d699fe81b951_1536x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/03b2be73-c13d-481c-bfd7-70c95eefa20b_2048x1536.jpeg

Back from about a 500-mile trip around the state to visit all four of our kids, first such trip in quite a while. Drive, drive, drive and try, try, try to find food we can eat, even more difficult.

Also, we were present at a large get together to celebrate the passing of a well-known university teacher and playwright of a good friend, with hundreds of people gathered together in very close quarters and Margaret and I about the only ones wearing a mask.

There was a lot of good music, poems, and stories, with my daughter May Erlewine closing the show with a song she wrote called "The River Jordan." The crowd exploded with applause. This is not that performance, but give it a listen if you have that kind of time..

And it was cold traveling.

There was face-to-face sharing, stories and problems with our kids, things to be talked through, the kind of connection only face-to-face can make possible. Tears and laughter, and memories for after, plus moving on from place to place.

Sleep was little and food was marginal.

One treat was an early morning trip to the Matthaei Botanical gardens just outside Ann Arbor. Although in the early spring, we walked the trails, very muddy with the trail grass matted down by winter. I include some snapshots.

We are back home and picking up where we left off.

[Snapshots by me.]

EMAIL

Gene Hackman Passes

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 4, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c4749020-9919-473c-b345-b4be476bd748_518x626.jpeg

Actor Gene Hackman was found dead in his home in New Mexico with his wife Betsy Awakawa. Hackman is one of my favorite, favorite actors. IMO, Hackman was authentic in every role of his more than 100 films.

Hackman is an iconic American actor and novelist, widely regarded as one of the greatest actors in Hollywood history. Born Gene Alvin Hackman on January 30, 1930 , in San Bernardino, California, he grew up in a troubled household and had a challenging early life.

Hackman served in the U.S. Marine Corps before moving to New York in the late 1950s to pursue a career in acting.

After studying at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, Hackman began working on the stage and appeared in television roles.

His big break in Hollywood came with his portrayal of a troubled and violent criminal in "Bonnie and Clyde" (1967) , where he played the role of Buck Barrow, the brother of the infamous Clyde Barrow. His performance earned him his first Academy Award nomination .

Hackman's career skyrocketed after this, and he went on to become one of the most prolific and versatile actors of his generation, known for playing a range of roles from heroic figures to antagonistic ones. Over the course of his career, Hackman amassed an impressive collection of film credits, earning two Academy Awards (one for Best Actor for *The French Connection* (1971) and one for Best Supporting Actor for *Unforgiven* (1992)) and several other nominations.

In the late 2000s, Hackman retired from acting and shifted focus to writing, penning novels in the crime and thriller genre. He remains an admired figure for his diverse body of work, which spans multiple genres, and for his unique ability to disappear into roles.

Notable Facts:

- Hackman was married twice and has three children.

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- He is known for his collaborations with directors like William Friedkin , Francis Ford Coppola , and Clint Eastwood .

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- Despite his fame, Hackman was known for being private and often avoided the Hollywood spotlight, living a relatively low-profile life after his retirement.

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Here are 20 of Gene Hackman's best films , showcasing his versatility:

- Bonnie and Clyde (1967) – Hackman's breakout role as Buck Barrow, one of the iconic crime drama's main characters.

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- The French Connection (1971) – His most famous role as detective "Popeye" Doyle, which won him the Academy Award for Best Actor .

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- The Conversation (1974) – A haunting thriller by Francis Ford Coppola, where Hackman plays a paranoid surveillance expert.

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- The Royal Tenenbaums (2001) – A quirky, critically acclaimed film by Wes Anderson, where Hackman plays the estranged father of a dysfunctional family.

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- Unforgiven (1992) – A Western directed by Clint Eastwood, where Hackman's portrayal of the corrupt sheriff earned him the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor .

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- **Crimson Tide (1995)** – Hackman plays a naval submarine captain opposite Denzel Washington in this tense, action-packed thriller.

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- **Hoosiers (1986)** – A beloved sports drama where Hackman portrays a high school basketball coach, earning acclaim for his powerful performance.

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- **The Conversation (1974)** – Hackman is a solitary surveillance expert who becomes obsessed with a potentially dangerous conversation he records.

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- **Mississippi Burning (1988)** – Hackman co-stars with Willem Dafoe in this gripping drama based on the FBI investigation into the civil rights murders in the 1960s.

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- **The Birdcage (1996)** – A hilarious and heartfelt comedy where Hackman plays a conservative politician.

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- **Enemy of the State (1998)** – A fast-paced action thriller where Hackman teams up with Will Smith to expose government corruption.

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- **Superman (1978)** – Hackman plays the villain Lex Luthor, marking one of his most memorable villain roles.

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- **The Package (1989)** – A political action thriller where Hackman plays a soldier involved in a covert operation.

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- Runaway Jury (2003) – A courtroom thriller based on John Grisham’s novel, where Hackman plays a manipulative jury consultant.

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- Heartbreakers (2001) – A comedy film where Hackman plays the wealthy husband of a woman played by Sigourney Weaver.

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- Behind Enemy Lines (2001) – Hackman plays a high-ranking Navy officer involved in a military operation during the Bosnian War.

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- French Connection II (1975) – A sequel to The French Connection , where Hackman reprised his role as Popeye Doyle.

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- Class Action (1991) – Hackman plays a controversial attorney involved in a lawsuit against an auto manufacturer.

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- The Quick and the Dead (1995) – A Western film directed by Sam Raimi, where Hackman plays a ruthless gunslinger.

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- Target (1985) – A thriller about a father and son who get caught up in an international conspiracy.

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Gene Hackman’s career is a testament to his exceptional range and talent, with roles spanning action, drama, comedy, and thriller genres. He remains one of the most respected actors in Hollywood.

EMAIL

Beware of Online Fraud: A Story

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/72108d3b-f9cb-4d8c-934b-23f9077bcc80_1024x1024.jpeg

This is a story most of you should read because you too could easily fall victim. The cons and scams on the Internet have reached a new level, raised the bar big-time. No more warning signs, as these cons prey on innocent and ignorant people like you and me. Today I know from experience. Here is the story.

It started with trying to reach Roku because it was messing up. And Roku did not post an obvious way to reach them on their website, like a phone number, but wanted us to open a case and wait 24 hours (or something) and we needed it for an event that was being streamed.

Since Roku did not post a phone, we Googled the web for a Roku phone number and found one. And we dialed it.

The only problem is that the phone number we found labeled 'Roku' was a scam, a fake phone number that was answered by this fraudulent company that began to ask us questions supposedly in attempt to refund about \$15 for the problems Roku caused us.

But the catch was that they asked us to open our bank account on our computer to see if the \$15 refund/credit they sent was deposited in our bank account. That was a major mistake because somehow, they were already in our computer and seeing what we saw – going through our computer finding passwords and bank account info.

They never asked us for permission to enter our computer and probably one of their prompts such as "Shall we continue" or something like that was asking us to click on the button they showed, and the clicking of that button was in fact asking us if they could enter our computer and they did. They walked right in. When we clicked it, they were immediately inside with no sign that they were. We were clueless, at least at first.

And they then continued to ask questions, but I was now standing there and when they asked us for the name of our bank, I could see they would next ask for our account number next. And as I realized this was a scam; we pulled the plug on our computer before anything more could happen. Yet, it was already too late! We had been had.

Also, a weird mono-color screen (poorly made) appeared as they began asking more questions. However, as mentioned, even though I had pulled the plug to crash the computer, it was too late.

They were even able, when I plugged the crashed computer back in, to make their screen come back up and they had taken control again of our computer. We immediately called the bank and told them the problem and they thought they had protected our money. But they had not.

This was now 5 PM and the bank closed.

Yet, in a few minutes it suddenly appeared on our computer screen that \$25,000 had been moved from our savings into our checking account. And it turned out that this was in preparation to withdraw the money and steal it.

And there was nothing we could do. We could not call the bank because they were now closed.

So, I jumped up, pulled on a coat, got into my car and drove the five-minute trip to the bank, where I parked my car illegally and raced to the bank door, which was locked. It seemed no one was there.

With both fists I pounded on the door, but most workers were already gone. Finally, one man came to the door and I tried to explain to him the problem. He opened the door and let me in.

It turned out this was branch manager Chad Nastoff himself. He was kind enough to bring me into his office where he immediately began to madly type away on the keyboard for quite some time. He was scrolling through all kinds of pages and instructions, working as fast as he could to help us.

After some time, Nastoff informed me that he believed he had blocked the removal of any money. I went back home. Margaret and I breathed a sigh of relief.

And it was not long after that evening until the bank's fraud division called us and informed that for-certain they had blocked our account and made sure nothing could happen.

We were notified that we had to go to the bank in the morning at 9:30 AM and they would remove our current online account and help to create an entirely new account, which is no small job because all our autopay accounts would have to be transferred to the new account.

We showed up and Chad Nastoff, the branch manager ushered us into his office and spent over three hours with us, patiently and kindly going through

the arduous process of creating a new account, moving the various money, and helping us through the most important autopay accounts, in particular Social Security, and other income streams. He then went on the phone and tackled one after the other various autopay clients.

In fact, it took from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM, over three hours to just do part of the heavy lifting. Chad did all of this for us, which we sat there and signed documents.

We then went home and both Margaret and I, separately, worked until about 6:00 PM on re-establishing the rest of our autopay accounts, one by one, often waiting for a long time through various queues for each vendor. And of course, we needed the transfer of Social Security payment and others.

It's 8:30 PM now and I am writing this, but we just minutes ago got off from hours of trying to reinstate Margaret's email on her cell phone and iPad. Somehow it got wiped out through all this. Perhaps the scammers did it to her email.

So, the moral of this story is at least two-fold. Do NOT store any passwords of bank login information on your computer, especially in your contacts, which can easily be searched. Keep your passwords on paper and hold that paper close.

And secondly, don't take ANY phone numbers from the Internet unless you find them prominently on the home page of a vendor. In other words, don't search the Internet for phone numbers because these scam artists are just trolling for you to call them so they can pretend to be the company you are trying reach and steal money from you.

And again, our local Horizon bank, and our branch manager Chad Nastoff was indispensable, both calming us and tackling all the problems that arose, one by one, hours of work his part. Thank you Chad! We are your loyal customers.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The School of Hard Knocks

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/987f813b-2010-4970-a10c-87d6945347fd_1048x1048.jpeg

I've been pounded lately with problem after problem. For example, no sooner than we extracted ourselves from an attack of online fraud, and almost losing \$25,000 or more, then the next situation evolves.

In this case, it was a large molar that has been feeling 'touchy' of late expanding to a full-blown abscess, just like that. It's been coming on over the last few days, making it harder and harder to eat anything other than soft food. Then it exploded in increasing pain.

My dentist lives an hour away, so yesterday found me on that two-hour roundtrip to the dentist. He lives quite a distance from our town. And of course, there was no nice way of dealing with this toothache. My dentist took x-rays and showed them to me. This tooth had to be extracted right now, today while at the office. And so it was.

And worst, this tooth was part of a three-tooth bridge, which meant the bridge had to be cut in two with a tiny rotary saw, and the entire bridge removed. The extracted tooth had three roots, each of which had to be removed under a lot of pressure. I had to have three rounds of antiseptic until the pain was tolerable. Eventually, all three roots were extracted. After the socket heals, I'm going to need an implant put in and waiting all that out, which takes months.

And so, as I stumbled out of the office in the late afternoon sun, it took me a few minutes to get my bearings, before I undertook the hour drive back home. The tooth pain was gone and aside from being exhausted, my mind was clear as a bell. I was alone so I had to be careful driving. I took it slow, although I was on a major highway with a 75 MPH speed limit. Cars and trucks were whizzing by me.

If that was not enough, tomorrow I go into the hospital to get a heart monitor wired to my chest to monitor some strange events going on there, some of which seem to have been caught with the EKG graph on my Apple watch. The heart monitor will have to remain on for a week.

So, there you have it. I continue to look forward to spring and I'm literally counting the days to the equinox. I'm not complaining, just explaining why patience and pain have happened to be my friends, of late.

For me, this is a time of elimination.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Going Free

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/72f8be25-7b02-47ba-85d0-a14038eb8d58_1024x1024.jpeg

As I travelled the highway for a couple hours yesterday, I was amazed at the beauty of all the trees and their branches along the route, naked of leaves from the winter, stabbing at the afternoon sky. So delicate and so important to our collective health.

I'd like to get out and photograph all of this, if the stream of current events in my life calms down to a gentle roar, instead of back-to-back chaos.

This crush of impending events has to slow down to a trickle to give me the room I need for extending life beyond the simply corruptive. I need for the sun to keep coming back out, bringing spring, and for me to get out on the trails and back roads to just take all that nature in.

I don't have time for much else, but the 'much else' that the news and current events bring each day swallows up time, until there is little left for simple quiet, like:

The shaft of sunlight that breaks through the canopy of the forest trees, illuminating the forest floor. The ripple and soft bubbly sound of the meadow's creek. The back country gravel roads leading nowhere in particular but on and on, taking me with it. I need the peace.

There is no 'reason' on these trails and two-tracks, other than being there and sharing in them. We don't have the plethora of wildlife that I find in Florida's Everglades, which I have been to a number of times. Michigan forest life is relatively sparse, even empty, in those regards.

Yet, the beauty of Michigan lakes and vast wetlands speak for themselves and gather me up in the embrace of the present moment. Spring will come, and the lazy days of summer follow, with nowhere to go other than right here and now. I will be there.

Will I photograph all this or just bask in it for my own love and experience of it? Both, I am sure.

Margaret and I will walk those trails before they become dangerous with ticks. We will at times drive the two-tracks of the 900,000 acres of the Manistee

National Forest, which is just a mile or so from where we live. One can get lost in there without a compass.

As mentioned, wildlife is scarce, but there is a continuous stream of birds coming through here in the spring and heading south in the fall, and their calls are the soundtrack of our summer.

We walked yesterday in the sunlight and at a temperature that did not seem cold, one of the first times this year. We wore tennis shoes and kept on the sidewalks and streets yet could see into the forests that the snow was vanishing.

Still, it was too icy and snowy to go into the forest without boots, and more snow is predicted today or soon, and we will go back and forth between sun and cold as spring comes, like waves on a beach.

We won't think of winter for as long as we can, until the months turn into autumn, and we have to go inside again for what seems like a long time. Yet right now we are at the other end of that stick, and winter is on the run, or close to it.

T.S. Eliot in his poem "The Waste Land" wrote:

"April is the cruelest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain."

I look forward to those spring flowers again.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Striking at the Heart

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2214efa9-5a38-43fe-9b69-97cbe0b199b0_350x470.jpeg

Time out for something special. In my life there are a few poems that I know by heart and that I take to heart. They are precious to me. Shakespear's Sonnets are one of them, yet here is my most read and most remembered poem.

"The Leaden and the Golden Echo" by Gerard Manely Hopkins, who was born in 1844 and for my taste the most original poet of the 19 th century. He wrote this poem around 1879 and died in 1989 at 44 years of age. It is best read aloud by you, but here the poem is read by Dylan Thomas, who reads it the best I have heard. Still, I prefer the empowerment of reading this poem aloud by myself. Every word rings true to me.

THE LEADEN AND THE GOLDEN ECHO

Maidens' song from St. Winefred's Well

The Leaden Echo

How to keep - is there ány any, is there none such, nowhere known some,
bow or brooch or braid or brace, láce, latch or catch or key to keep Back
beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, from vanishing away?

Ó is there no frowning of these wrinkles, rankèd wrinkles deep dówn? no
waving off of these most mournful messengers, still messengers, sad and
stealing messengers of grey?

No there's none, there's none, O no there's none,

Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair,

Do what you may do, what, do what you may,

And wisdom is early to despair:

Be beginning; since, no, nothing can be done

To keep at bay age and age's evils, hoar hair,

Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay;

So be beginning, be beginning to despair.

O there's none; no no no there's none:

Be beginning to despair, to despair,

Despair, despair, despair, despair.

The Golden Echo

Spare!

There is one, yes I have one (Hush there!);

Only not within seeing of the sun,

Not within the singeing of the strong sun,

Tall sun's tingeing, or treacherous the tainting of the earth's air.

Somewhere elsewhere there is ah well where! one,

Óne.

Yes, I can tell such a key, I do know such a place,

Where whatever's prized and passes of us, everything that's fresh and fast flying of us, seems to us sweet of us and swiftly away with, done away with, undone,

Undone, done with, soon done with, and yet dearly and

dangerously sweet of us, the wimpled-water-dimpled, not-by-morning-matched face,

The flower of beauty, fleece of beauty, too too apt to, ah! to fleet,

Never fleets more, fastened with the tenderest truth

To its own best being and its loveliness of youth: it is an ever-lastingness of, O it is an all youth!

Come then, your ways and airs and looks, locks, maiden gear, gallantry and gaiety and grace winning ways, airs innocent, maiden manners, sweet looks, loose locks, long locks, lovelocks, gaygear, going gallant, girlgrace--

Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath,

And with sighs soaring, soaring sighs deliver them; beauty-in-the-ghost,
deliver it, early now, long before death

Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and
beauty's giver.

See; not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost; every hair is, hair of
the head, numbered.

Nay, what we had lighthanded left in surly the mere mould

Will have waked and have waxed and have walked with the wind what while
we slept,

This side, that side hurling a heavyheaded hundredfold

What while we, while we slumbered.

O then, weary then why should we tread? O why are we so haggard at the
heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed, so cogged, so
cumbered,

When the thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder a care,

Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept

Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it) finer, fonder a care
kept.

Where kept? Do but tell us where kept, where.--

Yonder.—

What high as that!

We follow, now we follow.--

Yonder, yes yonder, yonder,

Yonder.

[Gerard Manley Hopkins]

EMAIL

Hike You Very Much!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 10, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f86aa771-c613-42c4-8da6-87330f5968e1_2048x2048.jpeg

At last, I seem to be turning a corner, coming out what I could only call the downward spiral of old-man winter. I know. It's not yet spring, yet some warm temperatures for the last few days allow me to get out and walk in the sun in the woods, boots and all.

The snow going. The snakes have not yet come out of their boroughs to sun themselves. The Mourning Cloak butterflies have not come out of their cocoons, and I have yet to see my first water strider in the streams, or any trout for that matter.

Yet, the worm has turned and I feel I'm emerging from wherever I have been for six months or more. I feel the sun on my face. I've walked a couple of miles in the woods two days in a row of late.

My lower back and midsection are loosening up as I twist and turn ever so slightly with each step on the forest floor, which itself is still frozen flat. I will know when my feet can feel the earth loosening up and my feet fluid again.

I did have one mental gyration that counts and that is at last realizing that I cannot hike with a big camera and tripod for miles and miles as I used to. My largest camera, a decent lens, and tripod weigh about 12 lbs. It's heavy (and awkward) to carry, and setting up ever little while to take photos makes Margaret wait for me or walk forward and walk back, so I have decided.

For the most part, I will take my big camera rig in the car when we travel the back roads. Yet our aging bodies want to hike more and meander less, so I'm going to hold my nose and get the best iPhone I can and learn to take some of the photos with it that show up here on my blogs.

That will be the Apple iPhone 16 Pro Max, which has the ability to produce reasonably nice photos if I lean on it. And, for the most part the 16 Pro Max shoots 48mm raw files and delivers DNG files, plus several other features that I can master.

So, I will get one tomorrow and trade in an earlier iPhone 13 Pro Max.

I can still shoot as much as I want with my Hasselblad X2D and lenses, which I will do, just not when I am hiking. I need to get out on the trails with Margaret and hike as long as I am able.

So, that was BIG decision and healthy one I believe.

Here is an iPhone photo with my current iPhone after Margaret and I walked out Mitchell Creek here in Big Rapids, Michigan to where the two streams fork.

As you can see the ice has still got a grip on the streams. As for the trails, I was wearing Canadian Jack boots which are more-or-less waterproof, so while the trails still were partly ice and snow covered, we picked our way through the trails.

This was the first time this spring that we have gotten this far out. It would have been too much to drag 12 lbs of camera gear including a tripod that far, at least too much for this 84 year old (in July).

[iPhone 14 Pro Max]

EMAIL

Feeding the 'Hall Monster'

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 13, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3b8aaf2a-8703-4792-8485-41198a94b8a7_1024x1024.jpeg

Probably, very few of you , if any, can remember the “Hall Monster” in a very early video game for home computers.

I can't help but wonder whether the flurry of minor crises in my personal life flow in tandem to the current political and world events. I'm not saying this is true, only that it seems to be happening?

And I'm not alone in that I know others are dancing in tune with the world crises around us. Something IS going on here that affects a lot of us, or so it seems to me.

This is not a new notion or idea for me. Back in the middle 1960s, my first dharma teacher Andrew Gunn McIver, who had been a traveling Rosicrucian initiator, and settled in Ann Arbor for his later years and took me on as one of his pupils.

He was very direct in making me aware that whatever was happening nationally or locally in the newspapers also happened to Andrew in his own life. In other words, Andrew's personal life reflected what was going on around him in the world, in a “as above, so below” manner.

It seems that the chaos going on politically and in world events is mirrored or at least reflected in the lives of many of us, certainly in mine.

I have had one minor crisis after another in lockstep. Of course I try to surf it but sometimes I barely break the surface of my over-my-head immersion in minor chaos.

Well, something is coming out of all this, perhaps only me, a little at a time. I am getting a handle on myself and getting my personal chaos sorted. I'm coming out of it, so to speak, or at least it seems to me that I am.

Now, if we all can get a grip, perhaps collectively we will emerge with a new sense of discipline, one that will be a correction to that chaos we sense around us in the world just now.

For one, I can't follow everything that politics spews out each day. I have had enough, more than enough, and I don't want to encourage a diet of the kind

lies and aspersions being thrown around by politicians, now on both sides of the aisle.

So, I am piloting myself more away from social events and more into natural haunts, forests, lakes, rivers, marshes, back roads and two-tracks, that kind of thing.

It seems to me that older folks like me are not of much interest to the younger generations. Even I can read that writing on the wall.

And so, to the degree I am able, I will wander the woods and trails that Michigan has so many of. Of course, I will continue to report on this blog what I see is going on with me and I always appreciate what readers experience, as well.

However, mainlining what the current politics are feeding me, not so much interested. I did four years of that, on tippytoes, and I can't afford it any more. Once burned, twice shy sort of thing.

I feel the need to rally with myself, family, friends, and Facebook friends, and not feed the 'hall monster' a la an old video game.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

iPhone Forever

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a676ba8d-1fee-49b7-950d-9b023e53ff7a_1024x1024.jpeg

Well, I don't know about forever, but my iPhone has been part of my Apple connection along with my iPad, and then there is my Apple Watch which I need for heart monitoring. As for computers, Although I have had many Apple products from the beginning, Apple-IIe, Macintosh, iMacs, Max Pros, etc. I still prefer and use the Windows PC for my computer.

Anyway, I got my new Apple iPhone 16 Pro Max and have painfully transferred all my files from my old iPhone 14 Pro Max to the new iPhone. Margaret inherits my old iPhone, and I traded in her iPhone 13 Pro Max. So, good cameras all around.

Why does it take hours on the phone with tech folks every time I get a new piece of hardware? I can see that every company is going nuts trying to prevent rip-offs this way and that way. Someday they will be able to protect us and themselves, I hope. Recently those 6-digit passcodes have made it much easier to verify ownership.

And now I am at the liberty of exploring the iPhone as far as cameras and photos are concerned. It's going to take some time to get the new phone sorted, as this is kind of fiddley stuff, as most of you may know.

Will the iPhone 16 Pro Max do the job and be any kind of substitute for my big camera systems? I say yes and no, which is kind of like saying to some degree "it has to."

I want to hike the trails, and at almost 84 years of age I don't see me carrying the big cameras, tripod, and camera bag more than a mile (and back). Yet, I can carry the iPhone as far as I can carry nothing.

The quality of the photos varies with the cameras in the iPhone, with the most recent 16 Pro Max, offering three front-facing and 1 rear-facing.

- Main (Fusion) Camera: 48MP with a 24mm equivalent lens (f/1.78 aperture). Raw file.

Main (Fusion) Camera: 48MP with a 24mm equivalent lens (f/1.78 aperture). Raw file.

- Ultrawide Camera: 48MP with a 13mm equivalent lens (f/2.2 aperture). Raw file.

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- Telephoto Camera: 12MP 5x telephoto (120mm, f/2.8).

Telephoto Camera: 12MP 5x telephoto (120mm, f/2.8).

- Front-facing camera: 12MP (f/1.9).

Front-facing camera: 12MP (f/1.9).

Even with the iPhone, I have to minimize the weight of the iPhone, a water bottle, and a compartment for snacks or whatever. To do this I tried out a waist band that will hold the thermos of water, the iPhone, and a pouch, but no go. It's too much like a girdle, not that I ever wore one. LOL. It restricts my mid-torso from flexing. Not good.

I've settled on an old small messenger bag, which I can carry all day and not tire. In addition, I have built a notebook of dozens of trails, bogs, lakes, and marshlands all over Michigan, which Margaret and I will explore. We keep it in the car.

If we go by car and there is little hiking, I can bring a large camera system and a tripod. Yet, I cannot leave the large system in the car and then hike. Too many car breaks-ins. If there are trails and hiking, I will bring my iPhone 16 PRO MAX and do the best I can with photographs, certainly good enough for most online blogs.

The bottom line is that at my age I have to roll with the flow and take care of myself. I still have my large camera systems for studio work or places where we don't have to hike far. I can live with that or will have to.

In other words, I am no longer devoting my time to being anywhere around the political refrain that is unceasing, IMO. I have heard enough, all around.

Let nature be my source. I believe whole-heartedly with what is called in dharma terms "The Lama of Appearances" to be my guide, as it always has since I was a child. Nature does not blink but tells it like it is. I can synch to that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Lunar Eclipse: The BIG Picture

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d166e456-f9e4-40c6-9541-d7bc1d80aa61_2000x1144.jpeg

Oh yes, the lunar eclipse. It peaked about 2:58 AM EDT March 14, 2025 this morning. I was up and working. This lunar eclipse is part of a double eclipse, with a second solar eclipse coming two weeks later on March 20, 2025.

As legend would have it, when we have a double eclipse like this, the two-week period between the eclipses is some kind of visionary time, when an imprint is made in our consciousness. Some folks will be sensitive to it, while others may not. I am definitely taking it in and acting it out, like it or not.

Well, astrologers are geeked about the planetary lineup in the geocentric chart for this lunar eclipse, with Saturn, Sun, North Lunar Node, Neptune all lined up and Venus, Mars not far away. A rough Mystic Rectangle is formed, with no hard aspects, which I read as a very profound and deep psychological time for us. I too am an astrologer, but I geek up at something else, which I will explain.

I am more interested in the heliocentric chart for this lunar eclipse, with a grand trine pattern (3 points roughly 120-degrees apart forming a triangle, in this case with Saturn and Neptune at the base of the triangle forming what we call a “Kite” configuration. That suggests we are getting the big picture all at once, and aligned with that is a T-Square with Jupiter as the focal tip of that. This suggests not only that we GET the big picture, but we get the details as well, thus we see the forest AND the trees.

Jupiter as the focus physically (actively) at the tip of the T-Square suggests that this whole thing affects our path or vocation. The word for Jupiter in Sanskrit is ‘Guru’, so our guru or guide is revealing to us, as mentioned, not only the entire forest but also the individual trees that make it up.

My reading of this is that the world is finally getting the whole picture of what we are up against in all this politics, war, and shenanigans. Whether that ‘big picture’ will imprint and embed itself deeply enough, we shall see, but with this lunar eclipse a ‘complete’ photograph has been taken, so we will see how that develops.

We have been shown. It has been written.

[Charts by me.]

EMAIL

From a Dream

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 16, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4b302e12-a536-4727-81f3-dcf8c7210cbf_1024x1024.jpeg

I have gone to paint the sunrise in the sky,
To feel the cool of night warm into day,
The flowers from the ground call up to me,
The self I think I am is hard to see.
[Literally, a poem written from a dream.]

Time for Nothing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/96d5313f-8172-474b-89f0-861870e3852e_1024x1024.jpeg

Excuse me for the moment,
No matter the reasons why,
I just need more time to do nothing,
But gaze into clear empty sky.

"Relax, As It Is"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/857aece5-51a5-487f-8bd3-160fabf7118e_2048x1365.jpeg

The low-hanging fruit, as they say, is what we already have but don't know how to use. Why not start there.

We search for new vistas, for new lands to know, yet the most obvious is the obvious, what we already have accomplished and yet are unaware of. Since the dharma texts say there is no beginning, we don't have to begin. We never began. There is nothing to accomplish. As Gerard Manley Hopkins put it:

"O then, weary then why' should we tread? O why are we so haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed, so cogged, so cumbered,

When the thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder a care,

Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept

Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it) finer, fonder a care kept.

Where kept? Do but tell us where kept, where.--

Yonder.—"

In fact, the nature of the mind is 100% perfect, untouched, yet still present here and now. All it lacks is our awareness of its presence, its existence. And that we can do something about.

And so, nothing has to be done because whatever could be done already has been done. It all exists!

We just have to become aware of the nature of our own mind and take note. And we can do that.

I'm not saying it is easy, because at least for me that is not the case. I find it very, very difficult, yet not impossible.

However, it can't be done by 'trying' to do it, because as mentioned there is nothing to be done that has not already been done. So, don't try. That's the big message.

Instead, just rest in this present moment.

And if you think that is easy, it is not. We can't 'try' to rest. We can just rest.

Yet, that means letting go completely.

And 'letting go' is beyond any control because it is already going. Just try and stop it.

This could take years or a lifetime.

The great Mahasiddha Tilopa put it most succinctly:

"Relax, As It Is."

[Photo by me of a Tilopa rupa (statue) on my shrine.]

EMAIL

Spring Equinox

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/868ada39-7702-4aa2-864d-78acd1d620cd_2048x1365.jpeg

The Vernal Equinox is always a significant event in my life, if only because it marks the date and time when the sun shines more each day than the night can darken.

I am a summer baby (July 18 th) and so when the sun is ascendant over the night, I like that time and join its climb to the summer Solstice on Friday June 20, 2025 at 10:41 PM, which marks the beginning of the sun's descent toward darkness.

"Make Hay While the Sun Shines" is my slogan, and my first published book in 1975 was "The Sun Is Shining: Heliocentric Ephemeris from 1653-2050."

And so, Happy Spring Equinox!

The Equinox is at 5:01 a.m. today, also known as the vernal equinox, and marks the moment when day and night are of equal length—usually around March 20th or 21st in the Northern Hemisphere. This celestial event is rich in symbolism, mythology, and celebration across various cultures and traditions. Here are some notes I gathered from ChatGPT:

1. Celestial Significance

The spring equinox happens when the Earth's equator passes directly beneath the Sun, resulting in equal hours of daylight and darkness. It signifies the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere and autumn in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a turning point in the yearly cycle, often associated with themes of renewal, balance, and transition.

2. Mythology and Folklore

- **Persian Mythology (Nowruz)** : In Persian tradition, the spring equinox marks the celebration of Nowruz , the Persian New Year, which is over 3,000 years old. Nowruz symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, as it coincides with the arrival of spring. The ancient Zoroastrians believed that the equinox was the time when the forces of good triumphed over evil, and people would celebrate with rituals of cleansing, feasting, and renewal.

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- **Greek Mythology (Persephone's Return) :** In Greek mythology, the spring equinox is tied to the myth of Persephone , the goddess of the underworld, and her return to the Earth after spending part of the year in the underworld with Hades. Her return to the surface marks the arrival of spring, bringing fertility and the renewal of the Earth's growth. This story reflects themes of life, death, and rebirth.

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- **Roman Festival (Hilaria) :** The ancient Romans celebrated a festival called Hilaria at the time of the spring equinox. It was a time of rejoicing, feasting, and playing games. The festival honored the goddess Cybele and celebrated the arrival of spring, symbolizing the triumph of life over the dark and cold of winter.

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- **Celtic Tradition :** For the Celts, the equinox was a time of balance between light and dark, and they celebrated it with rituals to honor the sun. In ancient Celtic beliefs, the equinox was seen as a time when the power of the sun began to overcome the dark forces, leading to warmer weather and the growth of crops.

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3. Modern Celebrations

- **Easter** : In many Christian traditions, Easter is celebrated around the time of the spring equinox. The date of Easter is calculated as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. The resurrection of Christ is linked to themes of renewal, life overcoming death, and the triumph of light.

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- **Japanese Cherry Blossom Festivals (Hanami)** :

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- The Japanese celebrate the arrival of spring with hanami , the tradition of viewing cherry blossoms. The blooming of sakura (cherry blossoms) is a metaphor for life's fleeting beauty, and the timing of the bloom often aligns with the vernal equinox. The cherry blossoms symbolize both the impermanence of life and the joy of new beginnings.

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- **Equinox Rituals and Druidic Traditions** : Some modern pagans and druids still celebrate the equinox as a time of balance and harmony, honoring the growing light and the Earth's fertility. Rituals may include dancing, lighting candles, and celebrating nature's awakening.

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4. Symbolism

- **Balance** : The equinox symbolizes balance between light and darkness. It is a time when the forces of nature are in equilibrium, and many cultures view it as a moment to reflect on personal balance in one's life.

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- **Rebirth and Renewal** : Spring, as the season that follows the equinox, is often associated with the ideas of rebirth, rejuvenation, and growth. This is a time to shake off the cold of winter and prepare for the warmth of the sun, both physically and metaphorically.

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- **Fertility** : In many ancient cultures, the equinox was linked to the fertility of the Earth. It marks the time when the Earth begins to wake up from its winter slumber, and plants begin to sprout and flower again.

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5. Rituals and Traditions

- **Spring Cleaning** : A common practice associated with the arrival of spring and the equinox is "spring cleaning." This tradition has roots in various cultures as a way of clearing out the old and making space for new growth—both literally and figuratively. It's seen as a time for clearing out the clutter of the past year and starting anew.

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- **Egg Rolling** : In many cultures, an activity like egg rolling or egg decorating is a tradition tied to the equinox. The egg, as a symbol of new life and fertility, is a common springtime symbol and represents the cyclical nature of life and death.

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6. Scientific and Astronomical Lore

In addition to the cultural and spiritual traditions, the spring equinox has a place in scientific discussions. It marks the point at which the Earth's axial tilt is neither away from nor towards the Sun, meaning the Sun shines directly on

the equator. This alignment is what creates the equal day and night phenomenon that gives the equinox its name.

Conclusion

The spring equinox has deep cultural, spiritual, and astronomical significance. It's seen as a time of balance, rebirth, and the start of a new cycle in both nature and human life. From ancient rituals to modern festivals, this celestial event continues to be a source of inspiration and celebration across the globe.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

1883: A Series Women Should See

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a5e610f4-3367-4f23-836d-10d82dfa2814_627x634.jpeg

I'm very impressed with the work of screen writer and producer Taylor Sheridan. Almost all of his series are top notch, and not to be missed.

Yet, one of them "1883," a prequel to "Yellowstone," following the Dutton family's journey across that Great Plains series should be seen and especially seen by women because they have an empowering message that can be found in few other places. Period.

Yes, it is about settling the far west and covered wagon trains. And yes, some of the first parts are somewhat grisly and may be hard to watch.

However, when Elsa Dutton comes on the scene, played by Isabel May, a tomboy, and recites her story, all I could think of was that every young (and older) woman should see this series. I know I want my three daughters to see it, if they can find the time. I will send them a copy and have them share it by sending it on to the next daughter.

It is a love story and also a life story that I will not soon forget and, as mentioned, I wish something every woman should take in. Let me know if you like it.

[Photo of Isabel May who plays Elsa Dutton.]

EMAIL

Home Sweet Home

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/413efcc7-9c4e-4f78-8328-46e4fe6006f8_1536x2048.jpeg

Yep, that happened. Found a lovely house online, and it had a beautiful large pond on the property, something we would love to live around and watch.

We studied it and studied it, called agents, and learned all about it. It was located in Dexter, MI, a town right next to Ann Arbor where I grew up and a town now being coveted by home buyers. We would love to live there and moved heaven and earth to be there at the first showing, cash in hand, so to speak.

We even drove down there (a three-hour trip) the day before so we could rest and be fresh for the next day (today, Saturday, the 22 nd). And as we drove down early, we went and explored the woods and terrain the house is located in, driving by the house a couple times, and so. We examined the area.

However, in the process of close approach, something unexpected happened. We fell out of love with the place, mostly by adding up all of the things about it that we did not like, ones we felt we would come to regret, like the laundry in the basement, and no photo at all showing what condition it was in. Things like that.

We also had a bunch of our family coming to walk through the place with us the next day. We ended up not even going to the open house at all, but instead got in our car and drove the three hours back to our home here in Big Rapids, Michigan. We stopped in Lansing and had Ethiopian take-out, which was wonderful. And we drove on to home.

What's the takeaway?

For me the takeaway is that we already live in an almost perfect home, one we designed ourselves and had built, at least most of it. And there is something special about living up north in Michigan that, while hard to describe, nevertheless, is present. There is no getting around it. There is a touch of the wild that we like.

And so, it looks like we will stay here, and from here we will make forays to other parts of Michigan where our kids live, mainly Traverse City, Lansing, and the Ann Arbor area.

We will perhaps miss the attractions of living near a larger city and the sophistication of Ann Arbor, Michigan where I grew up. Life is simple here in Big Rapids and we are only a couple of miles from 900,000 acres of the Manistee National Forest and innumerable wetlands.

Traverse City is only an hour and a half away, and we find that trip relatively easy to do when the mood strikes us. And we are members of the legendary Oriyana Food Coop and love to shop there.

And so, I will stop examining online hundreds of possible homes elsewhere and turn my attention to life here where we live. And lately I have been turning more and more to my history as a naturalist (since I was six-years old) and taking joy in nature and all that it offers.

The political situation in this country is not worth dedicating my life to other than, of course, voting. But following every cranny and twist of modern politics is not worth my life energy. In summer, some of you may want to visit us and we could sit outside in the fresh air and not wear Covid masks. Otherwise, I am still wearing masks in public places, but not outside in the woods and fields. There I only have to watch for ticks!

[Photo by iPhone. Our house, on the right, the dharma center on the left, the main shrine room at the back, our stupa at the back right.]

EMAIL

Ann Arbor: The Pain of Truth

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e0412671-3859-4b7b-b254-d285839f99a2_1024x1024.jpeg

The word “toxic” is used today to describe something that is dangerous or harmful, particularly as it relates to gases, chemicals, or even plants that are poisonous or cause harm to living organisms.

So, while the word originally pointed to the poison (the harmful substance itself), it has evolved in modern terminology to describe not only the harmful nature of the substance but also the victim of that harm. In this way, it is indirectly related to who is poisoned or harmed by the toxic substance or behavior.

This includes a person, situation, or place that negatively affects others. We all have them, or so it seems.

For me this relates to the old adage “You can’t go home again” that we can’t turn back time, go back into the womb, at least not in this life.

I am talking here about my old home-town Ann Arbor, where I grew up as a kid, something so dear to me it hurts.

Time has a direction-arrow, a flow, that if we go against it, at least for me, is toxic. And how many times does it take to convince me this is so? How far can I swim upstream, against the flow of time, before expiring, giving up?

We have all heard the old slogan “Go with the Flow.” If we have ever tried to reverse or go against the flow of time, we have learned that that’s a no-go. At best, we can but dream a bridge to hold back we still have from vanishing away, no matter what we wish it to do.

It’s all but humiliating to find myself pandering after my very Self in old Ann Arbor, something I actually created in my mind. It is humiliating. By now I know better or should. At least I should look at which way the wind is blowing and go with that, even if that is not where I want to go right now. I want to go home to my old Ann Arbor, but I cannot. I have tried.

The whole idea of throwing up a dam to hold back what I have yet to lose and expect that to be anything but temporary is a feeble gesture, a gesture that itself signs my situation. So, what?

So, I'm better than that, and should save what I can of my past, while and when I can. I'm a sign reader, so Michael, read the signs for God sake!

This is not a mid-life crisis, but a late-life crisis, which is beyond any reasonable crisis point and should by nature reflect resignation of some kind by now. I find myself pining for my past in Ann Arbor. I wish I could go back!

I know. We stew in our own juice, so to speak, don't water it down. It's just not what I thought or what I now think. It's just not.

Instead, it's learn, learn, learn to the very end, and there is not a last call or reprieve. I must myself go, or rather that Self I see must be the first to go. What's appropriate? Is that similar to the phrase "What's possible?"

It's always too late because it's too late.

The only good news I have is the awareness itself that I share with you. My inner compass still points north, if I just look. And so, my current takeaway is this:

By definition, the journey forward means leaving the past behind me. What part of that line do I not understand? We can't catch our own shadow.

What I find is that the place I once knew, Ann Arbor, where I came from, grew out of, is no longer there as I remember it. It does not exist anymore except in my and others memory.

Obviously, the past is a place I can't return to. In other words, in the pain of this truth, there is no respite, no place to hide or even dwell.

If I want to go home again, I must make a new home in the present, in the now, not in the past or in some hopeful future. There is no room in the 'Inn' so to speak.

Home is a memory, not a destination.

I get it! I will make a new home where I am.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Disentangled

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 26, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/87f67024-aed8-4735-b989-abd02df6fd7c_1024x1024.jpeg

As I disentangle myself from the ties to my past in Ann Arbor, which are many, what exactly is it that is freed up?

The obvious result is my own freedom from being overly attached to that time and perhaps, unless I am careful, my ability to tie myself to something else all over again. LOL.

I'm not denying my love for Ann Arbor, yet I will try NOT to do that all over again; it's like the silly-putty that we had as kids, everything I get attached to leaves an image that itself becomes warped as life moves on. And it's hard just to NOT become attached again and again, and just because I tell myself not to, does not help. Sticky, sticky.

My attachment or 'propensity' to get attached to my own history is like a magnet, glomming onto whatever it touches. It is an art not to stick or become attached to my own memories. At least for me, they are a great part of what makes me "ME." In fact, it may be all the me there is.

Or it's like the dog that pushes his head toward us wanting us to pet it again, or ourselves wanting to once-again experience the glow of our own past. This is not at all unusual, but human; I agree that we may want to relive our past. What I question is how useful is it, and how often it will work? The dog only gets so many 'pets', IMO.

Again, is it like the Silly-Putty we used as kids to copy color comics onto its surface, only to have that ability to copy fade out on repeated use. Do we wear out and become weary of our attachments?

Something I perhaps cannot explain is why the world, which to me seems more chaotic than I remember, suddenly is so contiguous, meaning the demarcations or limits and lines between entities or things seem so much more transparent or thin than they have in the past.

Today, everything seems more woven together, much like the terry-cloth potholders made with loops we used to make as kids.

Where to me life used to be more like the old song “Dem Bones,” where “The chin bone is connected to the anklebone is connected to the...” Now, as mentioned, it is more like one big life-soup where the connections between parts are each much more tenuous and transparent. Everything appears more bound together today.

Whatever the reason, I find myself drifting toward retreating from this outside political world back to what is most familiar to me when I was growing up. I am not sorry that I live in a small town with a traditional and conservative government, probably no SWAT force, and so on. I live out here on the edge of the Manistee National Forest, some 900,000 acres of wilderness. One can still get lost out here.

I am counting on the defined lines of local government here to hold things together and not so easily be swapped out for neutered placeholders to support one political party or the other.

In a similar fashion, I’m gravitating back toward my own personal life and its ‘goings’ on, rather than further risk my feelings by extending them into to the wider arena of a large city that I know nothing or less about.

I will count on my fingers if need be, rather than risk machines or operators I may or may not have control of coming at me from the outside. I’m turning that outside in, at least for a time.

I am reminded of Homer’s ‘Odyssey’, one of the most important epic poems of ancient Greek literature, where the hero, Odysseus, although tempted repeatedly with various invitations to settle here or settle there while on his adventures, steadfastly declines a life of further adventure, choosing instead a quiet life with his family on an island, a desire for peace, and a return to normalcy.

That’s how I am feeling now. I cannot depend on the external government to show me the way to anything short of chaos, when instead I can stay here, around home, in north-west Michigan, and further fix up our place, tend to my family, and spend my time with my early love which is Mother Nature. I need the sanity that the natural environment provides for me. Only that rings familiar and true to me these days.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"Geomagnetic Storm Underway"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 27, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f8088117-af1a-456b-ac1a-9b1c5cf8e56f_1024x1024.jpeg

Astro-scientists today report that a G2 -class geomagnetic storm is underway on March 26th as Earth enters a stream of fast-moving solar wind. The gaseous material is flowing from a giant hole that has opened in the sun's atmosphere. Earth should remain inside the stream for the next 24 to 48 hours. This seems to already be very effective as a disturbing event.

I don't usually react or feel the effect of the solar winds as much as I do for this one, so I suggest that you may want to keep an eye out for this high-energy disturbance. Here are a couple quotes from Spaceweather.com:

<https://spaceweather.com/>

"Karsten Berger in Muonio, Finland, also described the light show as an explosion. It was so bright, she says, "the intensity saturated the camera of my iPhone."

"The outburst was probably caused by the arrival of a co-rotating interaction region (CIR) during the late hours of March 25th. CIRs are transition zones between fast-and-slow-moving streams of solar wind; they contain shock waves akin to CMEs. This particular CIR was created and pushed toward Earth by solar wind flowing from that giant whole in the sun's atmosphere."

In my experience, this giant hole in the sun's atmosphere and what flows through it do not seem to be a light touch, but somewhat of a real deluge of energy.

Looking at my own mindstream, I find it quite disrupted, meaning I'm having trouble finding something to do, something to fix on or settle down to.

In addition, folks in my family circle are also feeling this disruption as well. In fact, this is very unusual, the degree of upset hanging fire just now.

Obviously, the politics are having a stormy time, as well.

And so, my takeaway is for the next 24 to 48 hours, hang on to your hats and don't be surprised if settling down and relaxing are difficult to achieve.

[Solar Hole that is open now.]

EMAIL

The Vision of the Eclipse

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2834cbcd-4e54-43cc-b015-7533991aed1b_610x720.jpeg

New Moon partial solar eclipse on Saturday March 29, at 5:58 a.m. EDT.

This wraps up a two-week interim time between two eclipses, a pair of them. Traditionally, this intra-eclipse period is very special time. In Tibet, before the modern time, they did not celebrate weekends as we do, like Saturday and Sunday, but instead celebrated events like eclipses, which days they set aside as a day of observation, meaning on that day you paid attention to your mind and mindstream. Your observed. Today is one of those days.

With each event like an eclipse, whether solar (as this one is) or lunar, the cosmos emits what has been called a 'tone' or vibration at a subconscious level that not everyone can pick up on.

At any given eclipse time, a subset of people around the world may pick up on this tone or 'theme' and respond to it, while most ignore or can't consciously react to it.

Those that can react or hold this tone, often called "The Vision of the Eclipse" in mind are alive to that vibration. A 'vision', having a vision, is not like the old image of a vision, a picture in the sky.

When we are sensitive to a vision, life is more vivid or piercing, and that vision remains in our mind often for some time. We can't take it in all at once, but kind of nibble at it, or absorb it slowly over days, weeks, or even months.

It takes time for us to register and absorb these visions that can come at eclipse times or during and between eclipses.

This is compounded by the very strong X-Class solar flare that occurred yesterday. By 'very strong' I mean it lasted for an unusually long period of time. SolarHam.com posted:

"An X1.1 solar flare was observed near the east limb peaking at 15:20 UTC (Mar 28). As expected, the event was responsible for an energetic coronal mass ejection. Due to the location not facing Earth, the plasma cloud should be directed away from our planet."

This whole intra-eclipse time has been very powerful and encapsulated all kind of events, including an almost perfect political storm, a powerful earthquake, and generally a very sensitive time for many of us. I know it has affected me very much. It probably will take some time for many of us to absorb all the information that has flooded out mind. I know I have found it confusing.

Some of you may benefit from reading in this free e-book

“Vision of the Eclipse: The Astrology of Lunations”

https://www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/vision_eclipse.pdf

I wrote this poem decades ago about those who wake to the vision of the eclipse:

EVERLASTING LIFE

What will in words not wake,

Clear sleeps,

And clear, sleeps on.

What wakes stands watch to see that sleep as sound.

What wakes will serve to set asleep,

Inset a sleep with standing words,

That wake,

If ever, last.

And on that last,

In overlay,

Our life.

Yes, to lay at the last a life that ever lives,

To ever last that "last" of life,

And in ever lasting life,

Everlasting,

We have a life that lives at last.

[Graphic of solar eclipse.]

EMAIL

The Authentic

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/68ccb63e-fa11-4945-a1f8-79cd5c9f9f6e_1024x1024.jpeg

William Butler Yeats poem “The Second Coming” laid this out:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.”

How accurate is that?

I focus on the line of the poem that says “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;”

I certainly can attest to the fact that the center cannot hold. Things are getting mighty thin, IMO. They flow together now, slip-stream over one another, and point in every direction. The signs are screwy, a tangled mess of pointers, the arrow ends of each line pointing every which way but loose.

I have seen this before, but not for a long time, when the world goes soft, spongy, almost out-of-focus, a Venn Diagram gone crazy.

The layers that separate, instead now dovetail, and point at each other. I have to focus and refocus to make them stand out as distinct. My world is blurred and blurring.

I no longer trust my outer view, enough. I have turned inward, meaning toward what I know best, Mother Nature, her laws and insights. I can’t trust outer events because they seem to have gone haywire just now.

For me it's a retreat toward the familiar, a recitation of the mantra of normalcy, bead by bead. Again, the pointers that point, now point all over the place, in every direction. My inner magnetic compass has sprung and points wherever it wants to point. There is no direct direction.

My world view has gone soft, lost its crispness. Life approximates a mosh pit.

As for me, these days, it is one foot in front of the other, a path I make by continuing walking. Sanity is at a premium and fake, fake, fake abounds.

We yearn for the authentic. We are on our own. In my case, I'm falling back on photography, taking photos when I can feel like it. And I don't mean taking slick photos, which I can do, but instead taking photos that look to me familiar, that bring me back to earth.

I feel like a dirigible or blimp, floating in the sky, and every meaningful (familiar) photo I take is like a guy line, tying me down, securing me to the life I remember, know, and recognize.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Signs of Spring

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/27e5f55d-c580-499d-b3d1-f0b5a7e7c7cf_588x738.jpeg

It's rain, rain, rain here and not too warm either. Falling to sleep to the pitter-patter on the roof. Not so bad.

This afternoon, between the downpouring, when it was like misting, Margaret and I drove out of town to see if the frogs were singing in the ponds. Not really, not quite yet. Heard a few, mostly Chorus Frogs.

What was very much there in the marshland swamps were two Sandhill Cranes, as loud as they can be and only about twenty yards out in the swamp. They were feeding and must be nesting there.

We heard them deeper in the woods about a week ago, yelling away, and now they were visible and flying from here to there in the open marshland. These are big birds.

And also, swimming around, was a large muskrat. I had seen him before too, piloting around on the water's surface. There is a large beaver house there too, but we have yet to see a beaver.

Yet, what took the cake, what most impressed me, and something subtler, was that for miles and miles where all the land has been brown and yellow for all these winter months, it is now ever so faintly light green. You can barely see it, but it dawns on you.

I'm not talking about green and certainly not bright green, but just the faintest of green, like from an Impressionist painting, something by Monet. You could almost not-see it at all, and yet it was everywhere, pervasive, and so welcome. What a vast sign, that touch of green!

It's thundering outside as I write this, so spring things are in motion. I must be patient, wait for the 'warm', and know that the rain forecast for the next few days is doing what needs to be done to issue the flowers from the ground. You know the old poem line from T.S. Elliot's "The Waste Land:"

"April is the cruelest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.”

As mentioned in an earlier post, every little connection to my life here in Big Rapids, especially if I break out the camera and reflect what I am seeing is one more tie to what is familiar to me. Right now, I need that. To be grounded in what I know best and to stop entertaining this political nightmare.

I have enough with becoming increasingly aware of how I pack my mind with whatever takes my mind off, well, nothing at all. LOL.

If I am not jam-packed with activity, sheer busyness, it is as if I am at loose ends. I see that clearly now. What to do about it is the question.

Recognizing the problem is the first step, and I have done this exact thing before, of course. I drift in and out of seeing my own busyness and just being busy.

I come from a life of just being busy and making sure nothing other than busyness gets through. Of course, I have to let that go. One way of letting it go is to pay it no never mind, so to speak.

Yet, as we all know, letting go is not as easy as, well, just letting go. Stop trying to let go and let go.

Of course, it is easier said than done.

[Photos of spring flowers by me, including a lousy snapshot of one of the Sandhill Cranes.]

EMAIL

Rule-Ridden: Don't Cross the Line

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/15005ddc-4a91-425c-a524-ef730ddca5f8_1024x1024.jpeg

What I'm going to talk about and point out is not rare; it's common. I discovered it in dharma teachings, and I especially discovered it in countless health instructions, especially in various diet programs, laying down the so-called 'rules'.

It has to do with the rules that define the plan. Too many instructions and I call it 'rule-ridden', meaning there are hard lines laid down that it is said should not be crossed.

Of course, I get that. These are the rules and these are the lines that should not be crossed, so don't cross them. Of course, I won't cross them if that is possible. As since I am new to this or that plan, is that possible?

However, the simple truth, which is the effective truth, is that for beginners, for those just learning, there is virtually no way that we can avoid crossing those lines, just because we are beginners! We can't just start out batting 1000, living up to the rules. Where is the compassion?

This is especially true when it comes to diet, the hard and fast lines that are laid down, like "don't eat" meat, or "don't eat fish" or "do eat meat" or "do eat fish," etc.

Or it could be 'don't eat gluten', 'don't eat cheese', or 'don't eat more than 3 eggs or fish a week', or whatever the case is. These are the rules, the lines that should not be crossed. However, we can't help but cross them.

I get that and I try to get (or listen to) the various pitches on this. And I am particularly UNHAPPY if you have a video that locks ME in and we can't skip around until we find an area or the end that makes sense to us. Those straight-jacket videos are a for-sure sign that you are just a salesperson, and the worst kind at that.

Yet, it's not much different even if you CAN skip around in the video but are still confined and walled in by the lines you can't cross, like "don't eat wheat or grains," period, end of story.

It might be preferable not to eat wheat at all, but for those of us new to this, it is not very helpful and certainly showing little understanding or compassion to newcomers. In fact, to me hard and fast rules only show you don't understand your own audience, the folks you claim to want to help.

We can't just STOP eating wheat, or stop eating corn, or stop eating grains entirely, not right away. My point is that there is too much reciting of the hard lines, don't, don't, don't and you can't, can't, can't, and not nearly enough helping us to traverse the gray area between the DON'T and what we used to doing.

I understand the 'DON'T', yes, of course. I just can't do it right away. But where I need more information is in the how do I transition to the 'Don't.' How do I get THERE from here, where I now am. That's where I need understanding and some compassionate wisdom.

Help me get there!

Don't just draw a line and tell me I cannot cross and leave it at that. That's nice for you; you have already crossed it. But it's not so good for me. I have not yet crossed it and may have little to no idea how to cross it. I am left grasping at straws like I already am!

I may need a program to help me get to where I'm going rather than just a reminder that I am not there, have not crossed the line, and have no idea how to do that.

For example:

Take my recent taking up a non-grains diet and furthering that with extensive probiotics by culturing my own yogurt for 36 hours. I've done that and am doing it every day. I love it and it's been a huge help.

However, what I don't love is being expected to just cut out every touch of grain that I have had all my life in just a few short weeks. I'm certainly not going to switch to an all meat or protein diet that induces ketosis by eliminating all carbohydrates and focusing on animal products.

Telling me to eat no grains and no carbohydrates is easy to say, but it is hard for me to do, especially when there is no discussion of how to ease into such a diet, that is, how to get from eating grains and carbs to having none of them.

IMO, this shows a lack of understanding or at least a lack of compassion for those of us trying to improve our health by this or that diet or process. Just telling me "NO" is not enough. I need all kinds of support and a whole lot of "how" to make this transition to no carbs.

The bottom line is, and once again, I am thrown on my own recognizance, to figure all this out for myself when I know little to nothing about it. It's the same with learning dharma. I learned early on (and the hard way) that compassion is crucial in helping those who want to learn to meditate properly. We need a LOT of help learning to follow the rules or truths that are laid down.

That's it. That's all I am saying here. If you know, then help others who don't know to learn to follow the rules. Help us through the process, not just give us the rules, please.

Taking this diet thing. So far, what I have learned is to take care of my own gut by feeding it properly and providing a continual flow of probiotics. What I have NOT learned is to induce ketosis (the burning of body fat). Yes, I started ketosis, but it quickly reverted back to fending for myself, as I always have.

True, I have greatly, greatly, greatly reduced eating carbohydrates which, along with the probiotics, is a huge step forward. However, when push comes to shove, I still have to just eat less and eat the right foods as I have been trying to do for decades. There is no free lunch for me, so to speak.

I wonder if those of you reading this understand the problem and if you have, what have you found to do about it. Let's discuss.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Song of the Heart

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 3, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8e2359b2-9cea-4be0-b034-ff6c844e0793_1744x2048.jpeg

The word in Tibetan is 'Tigle', which often is translated as "seeds of energy," also called in sanskrit 'bindu' or 'bija', meaning point, dot, or drop. Here I suggest that the Tigle is the seed of our own clarity.

However, the tige is not 'something' to get, find, or grasp, but rather something to know, meaning something to experience and take in, to accept and surrender to, to give way to and include, always an expansion. It is nothing for 'us' to do. We have done that.

Above all, the 'Tigle' is something to 'be' in the moment and that moment itself is an actual full immersion or non-dual experience; any experience leaves a trace, and that trace over time becomes a path, our path. And that path is a melody that is sung by the experience itself. There is nobody singing it. It is being sung to us or through us.

To understand the concept of 'tige', consider taking a single grain of sand, grit, or a small pearl between your forefinger and thumb, moving it around, backward and forward, feeling it and focus on it.

That's the kind of gracefulness and subtlety that is needed in meditation training.

You are gently moving (meaning following) the focus on the Tigle through your consciousness, resting on it and allowing it to move around and circulate. We go where it feels best, true, and authentic. We are listening while we go.

'We' are not moving it, but rather we are following its natural movement, allowing it to illustrate and present to us what naturally unfolds, rather than our doing anything.

The natural movement as that experience unfolds itself is a tune or a song, always not losing that spontaneous melody, but rather staying with it, following its natural exposition. We are experiencing and taking it in. We are listening while we are singing it. We are going where the feeling is best. We are the last to know but also the first.

It's like moving the grain of sand between forefinger and thumb, trying to feel what feels best and most natural. This movement of the grain of sand describes over time a path natural to us, which results as a song, a poem, or a story. We are knowing as we go, listening to our own song that we hear ourself singing.

Instead of our 'doing' anything ourselves, sensitivity to the Tingle helps train us to respond to what is, and to rest in that natural moment, ever deepening it.

Always feeling open for the most natural exposition leaves a trace, trail, or path; call it what you want. It is the story, melody, or tune of our exploration. That process of listening, of resting in it, becomes a habit, something we become familiar with and become an expert at. It's a complete flip from doing anything, a form of improvisation that is natural, authentic, and thus is very jazz-like.

However, this process or habit that is forming is not limited to tunes and music. It works just as well with poetry, writing, and the written Word. Or anything else!

Feeling for. Being open to that spontaneity, that naturalness, is a form of meditation, of creativity. It is what is most natural to us.

It is our finding what is most natural to us, the nature of our own mind, our own polygraph test to know through experience the truth. It is also our own creativity at work, creating.

Is it beautiful? Well, is it? I wrote this about that:

OUTSETTING SONG

That song is sung,

That singing,

Sets inside itself,

Outsetting song,

That sings,

And singing,

Sets itself,

In song.

Song that sang,

Which sung,
Is singing still.
[Photo by me.]
EMAIL

The Hasselblad X2D System

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/81b8e9b4-61b1-4f4f-aedc-e3c84b7e1695_2048x1409.jpeg

[Every once in a while, I have to blog on photography and photography equipment. I know, not much interest, so please humor me.]

I've been doing closeup and macro work since 1956, so I have at least some experience. I'm not a professional photographer because I did not choose to be. I just love photography and trying to make money with it never occurred to me. In this article I want to share my experience with the Hasselblad X2D camera.

If you are looking at all the faults with the Hasselblad X2D and not at its image quality, you miss the point. It's not an action camera, not for sports or fast-moving photography. And it's not for everyone. The cost alone scared me off for many years. How could I afford it? I had to sell dozens of top-grade lenses to have this system. It was worth it, IMO.

The X2D is for slow, methodical compositions, and color superiority (IMO), and I use it for that, yet I end up using it most of the time while my very large Nikon systems just sit on the shelf. Why? Because they can't produce what Hasselblad can produce in the way of color and granularity.

I don't have a dog in any fight. I have used the GFX 50mm, the early Hasselblad X1D-50c, the larger Pentax, the various Sony mirrorless cameras, view cameras, etc., and loved each one as best I could. I have had all kinds of Nikon cameras and scores of lenses, including the Z9, Z8, Z7II, D850, and most of the early Nikon digital back to the beginning.

For now, I have settled on the Hasselblad X2D and a handful of XCD lenses. It gets the job done. It is a pleasure to use.

While I love my Hasselblad X2D lenses, each and every one, I have a special love for the XCD 80mm lens with its wide stop of F/1.9. For Hasselblad, that's a fast lens and it can be put to all kinds of valuable uses, like controlling bokeh (the out-of-focus areas in a photo), a shallow depth of field which can produce a lovely background bouquet, etc. It is also heavy, clunky, and a drag to carry around, but it is so, so useful in the work I do that I drag it around.

I tried some of the still-new XCD 'V' lenses, a couple in fact, but ended up selling them, the 55mm and 28mm. It's not that they were 'bad' lenses, but that although they were lighter and 'newer', for my work they did not add anything that the earlier lenses could not provide. Weight is not enough, since I am not a street photographer, for the most part.

I would rather put up with the weight and the clunkiness, because in my book, the rule of thumb has always been, I will suffer the inconvenience of heavy, clunky lenses, for the sake of image quality. It's all about images.

And while almost every online Hasselblad reviewer loves the new "V" system lenses, as mentioned I bought and tried a couple, and while I agree they are great to lug around and for street photography, the bottom line is that I am just old-school enough that I won't sacrifice ANY image quality for my own comfort. Nada. These "V" lenses ended up embarrassing me for using them. Why would I do that, settle for less image quality, especially with a Hasselblad?

Now there are some of the new lenses, like the XCD 75mm f/3.4 that look like it may be something I can use, at the same time, since they are designated "P" for portable, I bet I will not trade portability for image quality either. We shall see what the good reviewers say, and good reviewers are few, IMO.

As mentioned, I have a Nikon D850, the Z7 II, and the Z8, which are fine cameras and most of the, for me, meaningful lenses, especially the newer "S" series lenses. I have had all the Zeiss Otus lenses, and even the Noct 58mm f/0.95 monster. And I do use them, of course, but aside from the NOCT, the color or depth-of-field just does not stand up to the Hasselblad, at least in my opinion, which is all I have.

When I want really great color and front-to-back detail, or the shallowest depth of field, I turn to the Hasselblad pretty much every time, because it is that good. If it was not, I would not bother.

Is the Hasselblad X2D a perfect camera? Not at all. It is just perfect on a couple of fronts, one of them being Hasselblad's color science. I can't find anything better, and the 100 MP sensor is so very helpful, as are the quality of most of the XCD lenses.

For a close-up photographer who prefers to create compositions slowly, taking my time, and often on a tripod, the Hasselblad X2D is perfect for my work most of the time. Sorry for this long-winded presentation. Please don't shoot the messenger. I would be totally happy with the larger GFX cameras and lenses if I was. I can't accept the color.

The one major fault of the Hasselblad system is that it is too expensive for my wallet, so, as mentioned, I had to sell a ton of glass just to buy used copies of the X2D camera and the 13 XCD lenses I have. I am looking forward to seeing what the forthcoming Hasselblad X2DII camera brings. It won't be a larger sensor, but I hope it has a separate knob for moving the cursor! LOL.

Of course, which camera is best is an issue where we can differ and find our differences.

[Photo by me with the Hasselblad X2D and the XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens, the first spring dwarf iris.]

EMAIL

Beside the Point

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 10, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7ca57763-e651-42d4-9cdf-e9201da18712_1536x2048.jpeg

[Just at loose ends here and I listened to a lecture on how to stop thought and had these thoughts. I share them.]

According to the dharma teachings, there is no way to stop thought and no reason to even try. Thoughts are natural, like the rain that falls. We can't stop that.

As for 'thinking', that is another story. And I don't mean being aware or taking note of thoughts arising, but 'thinking', getting on a train of thoughts and riding all day and into the sunset, is a different story.

As mentioned, it's not about stopping thought or thinking, as long as we think nothing of it. Thoughts come and go and are not invasive or even noteworthy. Thoughts are not an impediment but are just the natural play of the mind.

It's not worth chasing anything down or pinpointing something or anything. There is no point, meaning there is no point. Anywhere. Ever.

When we reach the present moment, and are able to be fully immersed, it's increasingly difficult-to-impossible to point anything out, because there is nothing there to be pointed out. We have lost our pointer to point anything out with, not that we ever had one. Why?

Because quite simply that's not the point. There is no point if we have no pointer and nothing to be pointed out

If we are still pointing something out, we have not yet reached resting immersed in the present moment. We are not immersed. If we cannot point anything out, we may have reached the present moment.

Anyway, thoughts are not the problem, thinking them, meaning getting on a train of thoughts and riding are.

If we are troubled by thoughts, we have just not gone far enough into the present moment but are hanging back dualistically. We have to let go of dualism, as in being the subject and seeing the object out "there."

Full immersion in the "Now" is required.

[Photo by me of a Calla Lily leaning toward the sun.]

EMAIL

Reflection

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 11, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/925efbb2-111b-40e5-b45b-658fc8e7d7b9_1024x1024.jpeg

Nothing, nothing, nothing.

Everything merges into little or nothing to say.

I can say 'Nothing'.

I'm not bothered by and I don't bother with thoughts. Not sure when that quality crept in, but it was quite a while ago.

Thoughts are just a natural part of our mind and don't demand or require our ownership, sponsorship, or monitoring.

Anyway, for me thoughts are on the back burner, so to speak. They run their course, yet I don't pay them any mind. I don't 'MIND' thoughts.

They are like the wallpaper of the mind,

Background radiation.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Heaven Haven

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/568e9e20-5b2b-444f-8c31-8a1c081bbe88_1024x1024.jpeg

[A nun takes the veil]

I have desired to go

Where springs not fail,

To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail

And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be

Where no storms come,

Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,

And out of the swing of the sea.

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

This kind of true rest does not seem to be happening right now in this chaotic hellish world and peace lingers as a fragile dream. What are we going to do about it? We will have to make our bit of heaven in some corner.

Frogs in the Pond

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cf5883bb-a36f-4573-b6b6-b97b37a07d1d_1979x2048.jpeg

Up before dawn and driving to the local grocery when the open and there are not many customers. I still wear a mask when shopping.

All around me there is torrential rain and the sky was filled with massive lighting and thunder. Scary. It's been very dry of late and the spring rains are here.

The lightning was not striking the ground where I was. Driving the four miles to a grocery store, four yearling fawns cross the road in front of me and hesitate to disappear in the brush. What a terrible winter it must have been for them. I can only imagine.

Later in the day, when the rain had passed and the sun came out, Margaret and I went to some of the local marshland, where we hung out.

I took photos while Margaret walked and also took photos. I include a photo of a green frog (*Rana clamitans*) who has just come out of hibernation, thin and hungry, taking in the sun. Its color is still very dark.

I'm still recovering from oral surgery yesterday and am doing fine. The painted turtles also are out in force and in abundance, as well as some Canada Geese, honking and yelling.

I am reestablishing my contact with Mother Nature and the natural world, spending more time grounding myself, hiking and taking photos, and less time wrapped up in politics and wars. I'm not ignoring the chaos around me in the political world, but just taking note of it, of course, and then dropping it, choosing to give me attention to my day-to-day life and the natural world.

This photo of a Green Frog connects me to the return of spring and another season of green.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Hasselblad XCD Lens Kit for Outdoors

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/832c0419-315d-40b1-a53c-1233aabe6a3f_1365x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d665ac1b-6b74-4f37-b3bf-21571fce890a_2048x1536.jpeg

If I'm looking for lenses I want to carry with me in the field, I get practical fast. I'm not even talking about hiking real distance, but just what I want to have in the car and available at stops I make.

I tried a couple of Hasselblad's new "V" lenses, the XCD 55mm and the XCD 28mm. Yes, I see that these are compact, light lenses, perfect for portability, yet IMO (and I am sorry to report this), whatever we can agree they cut corners on, I did not like the end results.

I know that many will not agree, and I understand. However, if I am just looking at color and the images that result, I get better images out of the older XCD lenses, as heavy and clunky as they are.

I would rather drag around the earlier XCD lenses, clunkers, bulky, and heavy as they are, at least the ones I have used. And having checked out the MTF graphics for the other "V" lenses, I just can't (or won't) use them. The new 75mm "V" lens may be an exception, but I have not decided yet about that lens.

I'm not going to get better bokeh out of any XCD lens other than the XCD 80mm f/1.9 lens. Period, end of story. So that lens is in my kit even though it is heavy, large, and clunky. No way around it and I love it.

The new XCD 20mm-35mm F/3.2-4.5 Zoom lens is superior in almost all ways, 12" minimum focus, and as good as the primes. It is on my X2D most of the time, at least when I am not in the studio

Another XCD lens that is a top performer, at least on the MTF charts, is the classic XCD 30mm f/3.5 lens. Yes, it is old-style, a little heavy, etc. yet I am NOT using it, although it is wicked sharp.

Yes, I am taking instead the XCD 65mm f/2.8, why” Because it is also very sharp and the f/2.8 turns out to be what I need to get the correct bokeh more often.

XCD 20mm-35mm F/3.2-4.5 Zoom

XCD 80 f/1.9

XCD 65mm f/2.8

The above three lens I have to have with me.

Now, another lens I might as well carry, although it too is large, heavy, and clunky is the XCD 120mm f/3.5 Macro lens. If I need to get in really close, there is nothing better, other than to use the new 9mm extension tube on one of the others, like the XCD 30mm or XCD 65mm lens.

I have tried carrying the XCD 135mm with the 1.7x tele, but enough acuity is lost with the tele that I can't use it. And it is so big that I will use the XCD 80mm lens instead. It hurts to leave it home, and I am still thinking about it, but also not bringing it. The 135mm (with or without the tele) is fine for relatively closeup shots, but for long distance, I can't use that combination.

I also have the wonderful XCD 21mm f/3.5, but the new XCD 20mm-35mm Zoom is all-around better, although the XCD 21mm has a special character that should not be ignored, but I'm ignoring it anyway.

And the two XCD 45mm (f/4 and f/3.5) I am still up in the air about, but so far, I'm leaving them at home.

As I look this over, it is obvious that a fast lens (wide f-stop) is the key to my photography. I need that narrow depth of field to isolate key focal points and also to throw the background into meaningful bokeh, thus the accent on the XCD 80mm and XCD 65mm with their larger apertures.

So, that's my run-down on a Hasselblad XCD kit that I take with me in the car.

Most of my lens choices depend upon how close (or not close) I am going to be to the subject, how much bokeh I need, how much detail I want to appear, and what kind of context or feeling I would like to express.

For instance, here is a photo of a Moonflower (*Datura*) that I wanted to be sharp in certain areas, but have the background fall away, yet, aside from the flower, I wanted the leaves to be very detailed and just as interesting as the flower itself or the bud.

So, I used a mirrorless Nikon, the Z7 II camera and for a lens the Nikon Noct 58mm with an f/0.95 that will give me a very sharp image with plenty of details and also a good bokeh for background. I don't know how much more I could say.

Or here is a photo I took just outside my office. It is as simple as could be, a table I built out of maple, with a cork coaster on it. I try to get some kind of composition that feels good or interesting to me. I only took a couple of seconds to shoot this. That's it. Do I like it? Well, I like it well enough to share it with you. Hasselblad X2D, XCD 65mm f/2.8 lens.

The flower was done a few years ago with the Nikon system, while the photo of the table I took just a short while ago with the Hasselblad system. Each different, of course. The table is more what I am doing now because I just took it.

The process of photographing is as important as the resulting photo. In fact, because of the process, the photo image is what it is.

When I strike a composition the sparks me, satisfies something inside me, it's like a window in time opens and I can rest in that moment at the beauty of the image.

That's why I do this, and I do it for me, but some images I show to others; most I don't share. Even my own family, wife, kids, and grandkids like to see maybe a few photos. Beyond that, not so much, yet I have over a million of them. My point is we do this to please ourselves, at least I do. I have never wanted to be a professional photographer. I love images too much for that.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

Worry's Warts

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/00b3a43e-a8de-4435-a269-470f2467934b_1024x1024.jpeg

My 'worries' once sent spinning, spiral down, taking part of me with them. I'm suddenly under a cloud. I'm especially feeling bad when I have done something stupid, something that can't be taken back; I have to just live with. These worries can hurt.

There is nothing like something I can't fix, that I can't do a thing about, and it sets me spinning beyond control because I have no control over it. None.

Get a few of those self-made worry pools spinning and I fog up whatever room extra I have to live with worry and shadow. I know of no easy solution and a hard fix is just that, hard.

The answer to this, which is not a secret, is simply acceptance, accepting that this is my fault and my fault alone, and that I did that.

However, turning away from worry is an art, requiring continual acceptance and acknowledgement, over and over and over, until the echo of my mistake fades away.

Rushing around trying to fix what cannot be fixed is nothing but fatigue in motion, a sign that I have passed the point of no return -- spilt milk, water over the dam.

It seems the only remedy for worry, at least for me, is time. The echo of my mistake fades in time.

I agree to forget what I find so hard to remember.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Walking on Air

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/776c00d8-86af-4a38-8b35-b3215d718563_1536x2048.jpeg

WALKING ON AIR

After a winter hibernation, I am at last getting control of my limbs once again. Margaret and I are getting out almost every day it does not rain and walking or hiking, both which help to strengthen my legs, after my long winter's nap.

I 've had to tear myself away from the incessant political and world news and let it fend for itself.

We have been hiking the local Dragon Trail, some 11 miles from where we live, which is 45 miles long and has 11 segments. The Dragon Trail is no joke, very raw and peopled mostly by dirt bikes. Both of the trails we we hiked were very narrow and banked, with 100 foot drop-offs (sheer cliffs) just a few feet from the edge of the trail.

Here is an iPhone snapshot of Margaret gazing at the Mighty Muskegon River. Inches beyond the two trees to the right is a sheer precipice of at least 100 feet. It gets my vertigo going. There are no guard rails or warning signs.

And so, day by day, we are strengthening our legs and hiking or, if not that, then walking in-town.

It's going to take a while to restore my stamina for longer hikes. This shot taken at the Brower Park Loop of the Dragan Trail, something like two miles long.

Time for Nothing

Excuse me for the moment,

No matter the reasons why,

I just need more time to do nothing,

But gaze into clear empty sky.

[iPhone 16 Pro Max photo by me.]

EMAIL

Nature: A Reservoir of Peace

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0193d2c5-6cb5-407f-aecd-931edae996a8_1536x2048.jpeg

Direct contact with nature, whether out in the woods, through a potted plant, or a view of the open sky is something I need on a regular basis, especially these days.

If I am casting around for some kind of stability in these chaotic times, what better place to find it than in Mother Nature and her laws. I have known these natural laws since I was a young child and I trust them today more than ever.

I'm not talking here just about the law of gravity and the like; nature in all of its respects can be known and trusted to be what it is.

Certainly, looking into Wall Street, politics, and everything that is in transition just now offers me very little to depend on. Government situations all around us are unstable and offer us no fiducial unless it be change itself.

And so, it is not surprising for me to be reaching back into the past, even to my early childhood when I did little else other than study Mother Nature and her critters.

As pointed out in the title of this blog, Mother Nature is an endless reservoir of peace that we can draw upon at any time. Whether I am just taking a walk in the woods or out to take photographs, much depends on my ability to be touched by what I see and experience.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins came up with a concept that struck me as true. He even made up his own word to describe it, "inscape." Inscape was to Hopkins an insight or path into the eternal or beautiful, literally the way or sign of the beautiful. Let me explain.

I look forward to my trips out into the fields and woods. They offer me a chance to get my head together, to get away from the day-to-day grind and generally to relax a bit. This is not to say that just going outside and walking in nature means that I am instantly relaxed. That usually takes time.

It is the same with taking photos. In the first ten minutes of a photo shoot, I often don't see all that much to photograph. This too takes time, time for me to slow down, open up, and 'See', to let in the natural beauty all around me.

It could be that I am still filled with all the workaday-world thoughts, the things I have to do each day, problems, and what- have-you. It takes time for my mind to relax and let go of its constant chatter. This day-to-day endless worry and thinking affects not only my photography, but my life. And here is where the word 'inscape' comes in.

As I get out there and wander through the fields or wherever, I gradually start to slow down and begin to see things that are beautiful, scenes that I might actually want to photograph or just take in. Slowly my view of the natural world around me starts to open up again, and I begin to experience things differently. I begin to 'see'. It takes time and usually does not happen all at once.

This little pattern of leaves over here or the way the light comes though the forest canopy grabs me just a little bit, touches me, and the chatter of my mind pauses and begins to skip a beat and slow down. As I walk along, some little thing or scene appears beautiful to me; I am touched by it, however lightly at first. I gradually get distracted from my daily distractions and begin to center and slip away from them.

These little moments are 'inscapes', ways out of my mundane world and into the beauty of nature or, more accurately, back into the state of my own mind or being. As I take my time, I am able to see the beauty in things once again, and what I am seeing suddenly seems worth photographing. Like most of us, I photograph what catches my interest, what I find beautiful or worthy in the world around me.

These inscapes are signals that catch my attention and they flag me down on my busy way forward to nowhere-in-particular. These moments and signs are how I stop going nowhere and manage to almost miraculously arrive somewhere once again, perhaps only at my own peace of mind.

This is one of the functions of the beautiful, to catch us in the turmoil of life, flag us down, and induce us to pull over and take a moment of rest, some time out. These moments of inscape are different on different days, and different for different people. They represent the clues or signs that catch our attention and show us the way into the beauty of the natural world, actually the beauty of our own mind.

Another way of saying this might be: what is beauty actually? What happens when we see something beautiful? Beauty is not simply somewhere out there in nature waiting to be found, but always here within us, locked within us, we who are seeing this nature, we who can once again see the beautiful.

Beauty breaks down the rush of the everyday world and opens our heart a wee bit, making us vulnerable again, more open to experience and input. Through the natural beauty outside, we go inside and experience the inner beauty of things, which is none other than our own inner beauty. Of THE inner beauty.

That is what beauty is for, to be touched on, seen, so that we find once again the beauty within our own hearts that we may have lost through the distractions of our daily life. We forgot. We look outside in nature to see in here, to see into our own heart once

again.

We can be sensitive to beauty in our photography. I would hate to tell you how many photographs I have of this or that butterfly or critter that are perfectly good photographs, but are empty of magic or meaning. They are well lit, well composed, and have everything that makes a good photograph except that 'magic' that keys or excites me.

Instead, they are 'pictures' of a butterfly, but they have not captured the essence of anything. They might as well be in a field guide – snapshots in time with no particular meaning.

The reason for this, so I tell myself, is because they just happened to be there, photographic opportunities. I saw them and I took a photograph, but at the time they did not instill or strike any particular beauty in me. This, to me, is "gotcha" photography, taking a photo because I can, not because I saw beauty in it or was moved to do so. There was no inscape moment, no moment of vision – snapshots only.

I find that it is really worth paying attention to what strikes me as beautiful or meaningful and photograph that, rather than just photographing the Grand Canyon because it is there or I am there. A lasting photograph, in my opinion, requires more of me than that, by definition.

It has to mean something to me and, for that to happen, I need to actually be moved or inspired. Photographs that have special meaning for me usually have some form of inscape into a special moment that inspires me to capture the scene in a photo.

We can wander for miles looking for something to photograph, chasing down this or that butterfly or animal... searching. Or, we can slow down and let nature herself show us the signs, the inscapes through which we can relax and begin to 'see' photographically once again. We can listen to our own intuition.

This process of inscape, of insight into the sublime in nature (the sublime within ourselves) I find to be the key to good photographs and to creating photographs that are real keepers, at least in my mind. If we don't touch our own inner self in our work, we touch no one at all, but when we are touched by a moment, I find that others also feel this. Touch one, touch all.

And we are not all photographers. This same inscape is true just for a walk in the woods, immersing ourselves in the natural world.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Exercising Our Options

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 26, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/42f7dd5a-2baf-4b78-b197-04d2480b46c6_1024x1024.jpeg

I am still repositioning myself so that I can better ground myself to Mother Nature, to the natural forces all around me where I live, which is in northern Michigan's lakes, forests, and marshlands. It is working, but like turning the wheel of the dharma, it only turns when I turn it, and it's the same with nature. I have to connect to nature, which means I have to get out in it.

And as I have written here often, I can't just march out into nature and expect reciprocation. While exposure to nature of some kind is required, drawing strength from Mother Nature requires I let go and surrender my mental constructs by allowing myself to rest in the nature of the mind, which, like all things, is the essence of nature.

Certainly, there is a challenge here, mostly with exercising my legs and torso by walking or hiking in the woods and trails. Each morning, I am sore, and sometimes I have had to skip some of my daily weight training and indoor exercises until my muscles heal. I am working on it and yesterday was the first hot day we have had. The temperature was around 80 degrees F and I was out on the trails, but still wearing a winter flannel shirt, and ended up dehydrated at that, having left my water bottle in the car. Live and learn.

We owe it to ourselves to get our body in good enough shape that we can get outside in Mother Nature and connect with it. I have to work on that and I am doing that, but so far, I mostly have some sore limbs to show for it.

As I wrote yesterday, Mother Nature is a reservoir of peace that we can draw on, yet this is another case where we have to go and meet our maker and not wait for nature to come and get us. We have to meet it halfway.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Aware of Awareness

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 27, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/391a97b9-b0f7-4bbb-b116-2422a5394811_1024x1024.jpeg

Am I aware that I am aware? That's a question that goes without saying or, as is said, you can say it again. And who is asking? Why would we ask?

And it's not like a stuck record, hiccupping on itself.

There is no place to go beyond the top except down, and it's not like that anyway. It's more like the old saying, "You can't step in the same river twice," because it is the water that is changing every moment, not the river.

It's the same with awareness. It's not what we are aware of that is the point, but rather the awareness itself, that we are aware.

Yet, how can we be aware of awareness itself?

We can't and have it also be immersive, which by definition it is. Awareness of awareness is non-dualistic, meaning it has no object to be aware of other than itself, just as we can't see our own eye.

Awareness of awareness is recursive, meaning our awareness is what we use to be aware. How can it be aware of itself, other than it is, and that by reflection, based on the analogy of an infinite hall of mirrors.

We lose all objectivity when we try to be aware of awareness itself, and when the dewdrop slips into the shining sea, and is gone.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Imagine: The Art of Art

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 28, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/30cef325-ca7d-4fbc-9427-2d9abe923d2f_1024x1024.jpeg

IMO, as regards my image work, taking a photo of something photogenic is not enough. There has to be some real composition to hold it together so that it has a future. A photo of a flower in bloom is something in itself, of course, but unless it is stunning, to be a real 'keeper' there must be some compositional component to punctuate the ordinary and make it memorable. After all, it's a construction.

I graduated, at least in my own opinion, from what I call 'Gotcha' photography decades ago, when I was chasing down critters and taking their photo. That was back then. The same is true for field-guide nature photography. At one point that was my avowed goal and purpose.

Yet, that too went the way of this Samsaric world, as all things do. It has been replaced by photos with more solid compositions, ones that hang onto your eyes and better embed themselves in the mind. Of course, I don't always manage such empowering compositions or even try for them. Yet, those images with gifted compositions are the ones that stand out as I look back on the photos I have taken.

For me, well-composed photos provide the art to the "Art of Photography." They satisfy me and hold my attention now and probably will into the future. That's the art of "Art."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Intimations

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e7c098cf-1b89-4557-99ae-13a8c0238326_1024x1024.jpeg

In describing the aging process, I find there is much that is not mentioned or seldom referred to, so I want to mention what I can, for those who may be in the same boat.

To use the vernacular, my current situation at 84 years old is quite fluid, perhaps even loose, yet not loose enough that I feel I can slip through the cracks. Resilient is the word I would use, a kind of mesh, more like a trampoline than a sieve. It reminds me of walking on a sphagnum bog, buoyant yet hopefully just firm enough not to sink or spiral down.

Oddly enough, I seem to find a little of myself everywhere I look, yet not like I carved my initials here or there, but rather I sense a familiarity that I know and recognize as part of me. It seems that the less I am here and the point of it all, the more I am everywhere. For example:

A moment in the course of a day too often turns on a memory; it could be a smell, a sound, something in the past that I never could remember or bring to mind, comes to mind on its own. It's almost a portal or window into the past that I fall into and can access once again. And it is clearer than any memory, much like being there again, yet only momentarily, more like a whiff or taste.

However, the window or memory closes as fast as it opens and, as mentioned, I could never bring it to mind by will or on purpose, try as I might, yet in that spontaneous moment, there it is again, quite vivid and real.

Perhaps this is what is called an intimation, a memory so subtle, and perhaps even vague, a sense of something that I already know or have known. I sense it more than I see it.

More real than a memory, yet with nothing of the past about it. It's like being there again in the flesh, if only for a moment, a glimpse, and then the portal closes and is gone. Was it even there? I have to shake my head and walk on, yet it lingers.

And I am left with but the mere scent of it, like a rare perfume that wafts its way deeper into my brain than I know how to go.

No, I can't just remember it or bring it to mind. It's a reality that I have forgotten, yet one more real than this moment. And so sudden and brief.

If I can be reminded, touch on it, compared to my day-to-day, it is so real and complete. It's not a door that I can walk through at will, more like a portal I can but see through, yet intensely feel.

These are different from what we call memories. These are more like sounds or scents, unfolding mini pageants or scenes, each complete in themselves, instantaneous, tiny crystal balls like those little snow scenes we had as a kid, where we shake up the crystal ball and watch the snowflakes whirl around. Mesmerizing.

They are so poignant and three-dimensional, more like a whiff or a scent than a vision for the eyes. That whiff itself takes me back and paints the scene. I can't turn toward it or attempt to prolong it. It's not a portal, more like a glimpse, peephole, a stereopticon.

These subtle moments are like splashes of brightly colored paint strewn across the canvas of my life.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"You'll Never Know"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0060e1f5-d4b7-4ca3-9f0b-323e041b2fdd_1024x1024.jpeg

"By Michael Erlewine

The Mighty Clouds of Joy, "You'll Never Know"

"You may be up today,

But you may be down tomorrow.

You never know,

"You'll Never know,

What the next day's gonna' be.

"It may bring sunshine,

And then it may bring rain,

But you'll never know.

This song, which decades ago, was etched into my brain and not forgotten is as true today as it was back then.

I am reminded that I will never know what the next day is going to bring, 24 little hours, and where will I be?

I don't know how many times I have to learn this lesson, but it seems many. And for me it usually is health related. My priorities change as the wind blows, hard and soft. And the scale of my reaction has a vast range. It does not take much to send me skidding beyond being content and out into troubled waters.

This is especially true as I age. My health is a declining asset and one thing after the other triggers a bodily breakdown. The aging body is not going to get better or even remain the same.

So, making plans for what? Any plans I have change with the bodily weather and when the body changes, I change with it. Funny that!

And ultimately it never is for the better. The prognosis for aging is clear.

I know this is not news for my readers. I only mention this because it became clear to me (once again!) over the last few days that I am not going to live forever.

The old saying that after a certain age we are just rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic rings true. What are we supposed to do, get out the rocking chair and sit in it more?

Well, certainly some reflection is in order. And I'm reflecting. I'm taking stock. I should perhaps do less, take on less, and cease projecting, starting projects.

I should slow down, or I will be slowed down naturally. I keep forgetting I am almost 84 years old, while inside I am still 25 years old.

Anyway, just sharing some of this with those who can understand. I am reading the signs.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Chili Anyone?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a6989678-5353-479d-998b-9152ca79353c_2048x1294.jpeg

I have a love affair with Mexican Chile peppers, but not too hot. I like a more gentle and mild chili powder. Yet, most of the ones on the market include cumin, sweet paprika, cayenne, and all kinds of other stuff, when I just want some really tasty chili powder with nothing else added. I tend to like the New Mexico peppers that come from the Hatch Valley.

So, I'm asking my FB friends, any of you who may know what is the best and tastiest of the Hatch variety (or similar) and can post a link here as to where I can to get them. I like to make chili, but not with meat. I love it nevertheless, so I would appreciate some suggestions please, those of you in the know.

I have some dried Guajillo Chile Peppers, which I include a photo I just took of them.

[Photo of Guajillo Chile Peppers by me.]

EMAIL

The Guiding Star

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 3, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/78c8f1cb-0fea-47e8-a5aa-2ad12a084abf_1024x1024.jpeg

The present moment contains all the future that there is, and I hesitate to take certain actions that may shunt me in a direction that I do not want to go. Every act ‘acts’ by definition and has consequences that we literally have to live with.

And so right here, at the front of the line, meaning this present moment, is where all the action is. Nowhere else. And we literally are responsible for what we do each moment, including doing nothing at all. That too is an action.

And this factor alone, these indecisions, can squelch activity, postpone progress, and send us into a loop of waiting, just treading water. I know it well.

And so, we wait for the opportunity for ‘right’ action, appropriate action, helpful action, that will signify laying groundwork that we can build on. There are endless opportunities, paths poised to be taken, yet more difficult are the opportunities they point toward and finally dictate.

And, as already pointed out, our inaction also has consequences that we must respond to, responsibilities that we assume just by waiting around.

“They also serve who only stand and wait” – John Milton.

So, of course, I stand here ready to act. If I am ready and willing, yet not able it is because, as Shakespeare’s Hamlet so eloquently said:

“And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry

And lose the name of action.”

I cannot quite see which future path is best for me. I just don’t know.

And yet, by pausing undecided, I create a dam that can only eventually burst,
unless I give it vent and let the actions flow.

And so, I wait for signs,

That I may make a signature that marks my words,

With acts that lead to some good end.

What if that 'end' is a proper process and nothing in itself. If so,

I must proceed,

One foot in front of the other,

My eye upon the Guiding Star.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, in which
is the North Star, Polaris.]

EMAIL

Better Than the Alternative...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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BETTER THAN THE ALTERNATIVE...

By Michael Erlewine

"It is such a fortunate thing to be able to grow old! There is a saying from my hometown, "A person's youth is in their fifties. From my own experience, I feel that this is rather true.

"I did not feel old when I reached fifty. I only felt a little older when I reached sixty, and a lot more so when I got to seventy. Now that I am eighty years old, I feel more significant and rapid changes. It is as if I can feel my body's condition differ from month to month now.

"For an older person, walking is more difficult. We tend to have aches in our bodies, our feet and so forth. Putting on or buttoning a shirt used to be such a simple task. Now that we are older, our shaky hands make fastening a button a tedious challenge. Older people have trouble sleeping too. Sometimes when I suffer from insomnia, I get up early and use the extra time for practice.

"We may feel unwell and our abilities, such as walking, might deteriorate by the month, but we should not allow ourselves to feel overwhelmed or upset by our condition.

"Even though we experience this process of ageing, it is important to think of it as a positive thing. Even if we have only one month left to live, we should enthusiastically seize this opportunity to recite prayers, accumulate merit, and do our practices."

End of quote.

I don't have much to add to that. A few days ago I had a very mild stroke, which did not do much damage. Before he died, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, my root guru, explained to me that he had eleven or so mild strokes as he aged. Well, I have a one major stroke, two TIAs, and not this one mild stroke, so It's got my attention.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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