

Spirit Grooves Archive

Miscellaneous Writings — Book Four 2026

Articles 301–400

By Michael Erlewine

SpiritGrooves.net



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If It All Comes Down to This

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/70eb3d73-4c3f-410f-9304-f28f9c6f9a67_978x977.jpeg

What's a father to do. I've got four kids, some born at home and some home schooled. Each one of them continues to impress me with their creativity and competence.

In this blog I want to talk about my daughter May Erlewine's new album, produced by Theo Katzman, "What it Takes," that just came out. Of course I have a copy, and I can't even tell you where you could get one. I know it is on "Spotify" and I'm not trying to sell you on it.

I'm just an old dad, but also a music person, and every once in a while a song will get under my skin and I'm not able to get enough of it or put it down. This is true of May's song "Down to This." Here it is on YouTube:

And I draw your attention to the following lyrics, if you will:

"And there is no sense clinging to what never will be,

And there is no sense keepin' future company.

If it all comes down to this,

And this is what this is,

I guess I'll live,

In the moment.

"If we're really made of stars,

Then there's no end to what we are.

If you've got life,

Go on and show it.

It all comes down to this.

May is almost always traveling, and I can't get to her live shows very often. Yet, this song says so much of what I live for that I want to share it with those

of you who have the time to hear it. And here is another song from that same album that also got into my head.

“What It Takes”

Live Performance:

Enough said.

“Knock-Knock-Knockin' on Heaven's Door”

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/be459a28-b675-4ff0-8b60-f8e2fde4bff5_1536x2048.jpeg

This is all about health and my recent TIA. As a TIA, by definition it was minor and didn't really leave any permanent scars, meaning it was not damaging as full strokes are.

In fact, it took me days to figure out it was even a TIA, and I did not intend to go into the ER and check it out, because you have to do that right away.

I mentioned it here on FB before I even told my family, which was a big mistake. Of course, Margaret knew. I didn't have an intervention, but I did hear about it loud and clear by at least two of my family members. I should have told them first. And they are right. I just did not want to upset them.

Anyway, in the middle of last night I thought about it thoroughly and even wrote it out and presented it to ChatGPT and more thoroughly to Grok, which is a better version of ChatGPT, IMO.

AI said I should go to the ER, and so I gave in and went.

About 4:15 AM found me in my car and driving to the hospital and sort of turning myself in. And before I knew it, I was totally wrapped up with a battery of tests that lasted until around 2:30 PM, some ten hours later. Exhausting.

I include a photo of my room, but I was not in it all that much because I was too busy being carted all over the place in a wheel chair for one test after another. Here are some of the main tests I underwent.

Echo Complete

MRI BRAIN without contrast

CT-HEAD without IV Contrast

*CT-ANGIO HEAD NECK with IV Contrast/3D POC ISTAT CREA Cartridge
CBC with Differential Comprehensive Metabolic Panel*

CT-ANGIO HEAD NECK with IV Contrast/3D

POC ISTAT CREA Cartridge

CBC with Differential

Comprehensive Metabolic Panel

[Sodium, Potassium, Chloride, Bicarbonate, Anion Gap, Magnesium, Glucose, Blood Urea Nitrogen, Creatinine, eGFR, Calcium, Protein, Total, Albumin, Bilirubin Total, Alkaline Phosphatase, Alanine, Aminotransferase (ALT), Aspartate Aminotransferase (AST)]

Magnesium

HEMOGLOBIN A1C (HGB A1C), Blood Level

LIPID PANEL

[Cholesterol Total, HDL Cholesterol, LDL Cholesterol, Triglyceride, Non-HDL Cholesterol, Chol/HDL Ratio]

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM

Well, the long and the short of it, the upshot so to speak, is that I had a TIA, as I thought was the case. It left no permanent damage we believe, but shook me up, nevertheless.

In the process I got reamed out, so to speak, by all the various tests listed above. The doctors said that for someone my age, I was remarkably healthy. They particular said I had a low LDL (bad) cholesterol factor, which is a good thing.

And so, today I had about every meaningful test I could get to sum up my state of health, so I am happy for that. It was a little “Come to Jesus” event for me and any doubts I had been having, and I had been having doubts about my health, were cleared up.

My takeaway is that I have to eat less salt, STOP snacking on salty nuts and chips, cut out on bad fats, and redouble my efforts to exercise.

I got the message and am aligning myself with the event the directions that came out of it.

[iPhone snapshot of my hospital room.]

EMAIL

Pith Instructions

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 9, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/42a3c819-2c95-4ce8-a6aa-fae1627fc4e4_2048x1442.jpeg

The clash of consonants,

The moaning of vowels.

Exercise language,

As we would pizza dough.

Knead it.

Squeeze out what makes no sense,

Leaving only what is meaningful.

I get lost in the formality and stiffness of most writing,

A circuitous path that goes almost nowhere at all,

blocking what I feel for yet can never quite find.

I end up at the beginning, following empty words that confine rather than reveal.

What has happened to our English language that it seldom connects and makes sense?. As the great poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it:

“Suck any sense from that who can.”

What’s the problem?

IMO, the problem is that today’s language is not authentic. It does not reflect actual experience, the only thing worth uttering.

When the intellectuals say “Wait for it,” they mean a long time, and none of us have that kind of time. That is why I gravitate toward what in dharma terms are called the pith texts or pith instructions.

Pith Texts, also known as pith instructions (Tibetan: men-ngak or dam-ngak), are concise, direct, and experiential teachings that distill the essence of the Dharma into practical, often esoteric instructions. They are designed to guide

practitioners swiftly to realization by focusing on the core or "heart" of a practice, often bypassing extensive theoretical exposition.

They are brief yet profound, designed to cut through conceptual thinking and point directly to the nature of mind.

My favorite and most useful pith instructions are the "Words of Advice" by the Mahasiddha Tilopa. IMO, if properly prepared, these are all the words a student needs.

TILOPA'S WORDS OF ADVICE

Don't prolong the past

Don't invite the future

Don't alter the present

Relax, As It Is.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

The Echo of Yearning

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 11, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d0b3662e-7fa3-4c56-8e53-d8f1366eb526_1024x1024.png

In my late teen years, I was enchanted by the German concept of bildungsroman, fueled by novels such as “The Wanderer” (Le Grand Meaulnes) by Henri Alain Fournier, “The Sorrows of Young Werther” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Der grüne Heindrich” by Gottfried Keller, and of course by the American “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain, “Little Women” by Louisa May Alcott, “The Catcher in the Rye” by J.D. Salinger, “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others.

These were the playbooks I studied, aligned myself with, and pursued for many years.

Of course, I diligently studied Western philosophy, in particular Existentialism, including “Fear and Trembling” by Søren Kierkegaard, “Thus Spake Zarathustra” by Friedrich Nietzsche, “Being and Time” by Martin Heidegger, “Being and Nothingness” by Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Myth of Sisyphus” by Albert Camus. And I read all 52 novels by Fyodor Dostoevsky, learned Russian, and many by Franz Kafka, “The Stranger” by Albert Camus, “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett, and on and on.

Yet, under that philosophical wrap, the whole concept of bildungsroman surged onward. Just as I searched for the blues in jazz music, I searched for the emotional warp and weft of emotional longing in Western philosophy.

And, as they say, “what a tangled web we weave”, embedding the longing of bildungsroman into European philosophy. Of course, all this eventually imploded and Eastern philosophy took its place almost completely, a clearer view of reality, IMO.

And so, what embers still burn and flash in the reaches of my mind I can only sometimes sense. My search for a partner found one and settled down into 54 years of marriage, four kids, eight grandkids, and many dogs.

By now, my philosophy is dharma through and through.

I stand here in the queue of old age, and what remains of those lusty times float by my mind’s window like an autumn leaf in the winds of time. I gather what I can from all these years.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Entering the Stream

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 12, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/819bbfde-21f7-4a27-8cca-0dffa05169459_2048x1628.jpeg

In these turbulent times, I don't plan to spend another four years glued to the tube absorbing all the purposefully disturbing news. Not at all.

Margaret and I are out of here and into the woods, streams, and meadows either just hiking or on photographic trips. Yesterday, we hiked on two sections of the Dragon Trail, some 40+ miles of narrow trails following the mighty Muskegon River downstate. The trails skirt and often follow a 100-foot cliff, sometimes a sheer precipice and others with a very steep bank.

We have scouted out a great many trails, overlooks, rivers, and streams, either locally or running all the way up to the Mackinac Bridge, some 195 miles to the north. We just go and drive to where the trail heads are and then walk out (and return) as far as we can. Sometimes I take photos, but also, we just hike.

My recent TIA stroke precipitated 10 hours of tests in the hospital, and aside from the TIA (which caused no damage), I got a clean bill of health and permission to exercise as much as I can.

I'm no spring chicken, but I am good to go and go I shall.

Photography by me.]

EMAIL

Nothing, Nowhere, and Never

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 13, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6230030d-64b3-4bc3-b094-7ebc3e86b8b1_1024x1024.jpeg

Do you have to hold real still? I don't think so.

Stillness Just is. We have but to be aware of the stillness that is already always there. In the midst of movement the mind is also still. Freeze framed.

How far can we roam or stray? As far as we want. There is no end and no beginning.

Where do we end up? Right here and now.

What's left to do? There is 'nothing' left to do.

We also do nothing.

What's left of nothing? There is nothing to nothing.

There's nothing, nowhere, and never.

Do I still have to brush my teeth?

Yep, if it's on your list!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Watching Plants Grow

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6cf5ea6e-5f17-471a-81f3-a7e00582fa33_1024x1024.jpeg

Where did the late-night romantic in me go, which was so prominent in me as a young man who, unable to sleep or unwilling to go to bed those warm summer nights so long ago wandered, walked the streets, hoping to find a partner, a woman that I could love and who would love me. I lived in a large room on the second floor of 114 N. Division in Ann Arbor.

I spent most of my time by myself, studying and playing music, but also reading European and American literature. I hung out around town as well, but since I was never much of a drinker, I was pretty much on my own. As a phenomenologist, even then I was doing what I wanted to do, monitoring my own mind stream. I never finished high school but just walked out into the world. Although I was accepted as a student at the University of Michigan, even without a high school diploma, I did not enjoy that form of education. I like to learn at my own pace and interest, so that's what I did. I'm still doing that.

On these very warm summer nights on the quiet streets of Ann Arbor, Michigan I actually believed I could see the plants on the hedgerows growing. They seemed to grow right before my eyes. I would stand in the moonlight and streetlights looking at the hedges that lined the sidewalks. To me, it seemed I was watching plants grow.

Well, meeting a life partner did not happen until I was thirty years old and, even then, only quite accidentally. I first met Margaret at 'The Odyssey Bar' and a week later again at 'Mr. Flood's Party', both bars where I used to perform music. Margaret and I fell in love that second meeting and have never been apart since.

Turning that sense of deep longing to find a life partner into actuality was nothing short of an alchemical transformation. It was not only as good as my imagination wished for, but it was also better because it was real. It finally happened.

It's some 54 years since Margaret and I met and we parted from that second night, being married only months after finding one another. We are still

together and have been kind of cloistered by Covid 19 of late, going on six years now. Next, perhaps we can learn to watch paint dry.

The Best Dog at our Wedding

A Virtual Reunion of Our Marriage

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Still Time

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/908ee71f-4efe-4473-9d5d-f1af7ad1f1f0_1024x1024.jpeg

In the stillness of time,
Nothing can be done.
Movement is the stillness in motion.
It takes no effort to be still.
In fact,
Stillness requires no effort.
And it extends forever,
Reaches far,
All the way to here.
Stillness has no dimensions
Not any.
Beyond effort,
That's where it is.
Our inner compass rests,
Without a quiver,
Pointing nowhere,
But here.
My mouth open,
My eyes raised,
Aha!

The Truth is the Future

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6c89b850-73d0-48ea-a3f2-9f28e217ae67_1024x1024.jpeg

Some of us are not looking for a vision into the future, as much as a vision into the mind itself or are they the same thing? The mind is the future because the mind is unborn, meaning it's always been there and is the same today as it ever was, with no birth or time it was born and no death of time it will not be.

This is why mind in Tibetan Buddhism 'terma', mind treasures, are so important. They comprise the future. They are what's already there that we have never realized. It has always been there.

In other words, we don't need a crystal ball or a Nostradamus to see the future. And this is because the future is NOW, this very moment, and embedded within us this very moment. And we are free to realize the nature of this mind at will, if we will and are able. We may have to learn how.

The 'Dharma' and the nature of the mind is the truth, the way things actually are. And the truth will last into the future because it is the truth. It will last until then. The truth is the future.

My point is simple. Don't expect and look into the 'future' for what is coming; instead, look into the NOW, this present moment. That is where we will find the future because it is already there now and will last until then, the future. That's why, as they say, "The Future is Now."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Authentic

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 18, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/edde4a83-7efc-43f1-bd47-eb9771269c13_1024x1024.jpeg

With a photograph, the micro-contrast or 'sharpness', call it granularity, must catch my eye, at least enough to ground me in the image as authentic. And the light and color of the image needs to be elegant, delicate enough and able to pull me into it gracefully. Authenticity, whether with a photo or a graphic is what gives me satisfaction.

Nothing is anything and anything is nothing. Without reifying and reification, gilding the lily, so to speak, what is the true nature of the mind and reality?

Authenticity.

It's seems that it's hard to do anything without exaggerating it somehow, gilding the lily. The technical term for that is reification, to reify or add on something that by accretion takes away from its authenticity. It seems we can't help it, but it clogs and obscures the authentic in us.

However, the veneer that builds up from our constant reification is overwhelming, layer on layer, until we become a statue of ourselves, frozen in time.

And this is not some rare dis-ease, but universal, like walking concrete, the result of intellectualization that adding up gradually separates us from our own authenticity. We are cocoons, encased by our own exaggerations and desires.

I don't want to put too fine a point on this because the reality is quite obvious and, for that matter, crude, all of us teetering around in our own concretized space suits caused by our own habit of reification.

Of course, this is the whole issue with Samsara, that it obscures us from reality, from realizing the actual authentic nature of the mind.

How to do that, realize our own authenticity, is the sum total of why we practice dharma.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Blessing of the Bikes

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5ca3fa29-6ddc-4f74-9080-8b8f24aec23a_2048x1536.jpeg

Not far from our town of Big Rapids, Michigan is the village of Baldwin, Michigan and since 1972 there has been an event held at the Baldwin Municipal Airport on the third Sunday in May, the “Blessing of the Bikes,” when a local minister offers a blessing to from 10,000 to 40,000 motorcycles. We’ve never seen it.

Margaret and I decided that since we have lived a only short drive from the event, we should go and actually see the blessing of the bikes. And yesterday, we did. And the weather was far from friendly.

The weather report indicated a high of around 56 degree F, with moderate winds. And so, we brought a lot of almost winter clothing, including warm boots and headed north, taking back roads until we reached M-37, the main road heading north.

Well, aside from the cold, our first problem was a complete closure of M-37 by all kinds of police. They flagged us down and stopped all traffic heading north and would not let us pass. We could turn either right or left (east or west) but could not go farther north. We were within a few miles from the Baldwin airport. Ouch!

So, we turned right and began to seek out tiny back roads that would take us around the road closure, and after a while we found our way north and back to M-37 but somewhere beyond the closure. We continued north, reached the airport, and found a place to park.

Then we bundled up and entered the airport grounds, after paying the \$5 per person fee. It was about 10:30 AM and the blessing ceremony was at 1:00 PM and it was cold out. The motorcycles were already pouring in and had been since 9:00 AM. It was cold and it was fascinating.

I’ll let these photos do the talking and give you an idea as to what it was like. There were a lot of the color black, leather jackets, and engineer boots. Everyone was very friendly, yet a certain macho tone was in the air. I was carrying a big camera and felt I was a little too visible.

After a while I took off my white Adidas Samba running shoes and put on my black leather Canadian 'Jack" boots, and swapped by big puffy wool hat for a tight-fitting beany and went back out. That was much better. I slipped through the crowd as almost like a biker.

I have always loved motorcycles, but I never allowed myself to have a big one because, as a biker there told me "It's not a matter of if, but rather when" you will have an accident on a bike. I like speed too much to trust myself to one of these 700 – 1000 lbs. machines. Another biker told me that most guys are automatically retired when they get too old to lift and move a "Fat Boy," one of these heavy Harley Davidson machines when they accidentally tip over. I can see that. There was one biker there in his 90s.

I don't know how many bikes turned out this year, but last year (2024) there were over 40,000. The actual blessing took place at 1:00 PM, and it was short. At the end of the blessing, the announcer said. "Ok, start your engines" and the entire mass of motorcycle engines roared alive in response and they all took off, streams and streams of them. We could not get to our car for quite a while.

Trust me, this was something see. Amazing.

[Photos by me can be seen on Facebook here.]

<https://www.facebook.com/MichaelErlewine/posts/pfbid02aotHD8twT6Uz3Mit1BgTAjzKxR1C9qyA8v7GzT1ZcxQXgbuqHkn1z975RPHVBDhl>

EMAIL

Chile Peppers

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4a3ca6db-e3c1-4821-92ae-414572ca548b_1024x1024.jpeg

The American diet, especially its processed foods, is riddled with salt. It's everywhere in almost everything. I have to be careful with my salt intake, which was traced to one of my TIA ministrokes.

I have been wandering into using low-heat chili peppers like ancho and guajillo peppers which have almost zero salt, as well as no bad fats.

And if I make a vegan Chili Con Carne with kidney beans (no added salt), cans of diced tomatoes (no added salt), and chili powder made from pure ancho and guajillo peppers, I end up with a chili that is essentially salt free. And Chili peppers of all kinds, as mentioned, have almost zero salt. And I have found corn tortillas with no salt and 0% saturated fat.

The upside is that vegan chili con carne, although not salty, is very flavorful, doing the job of what salt often handles.

I favor guajillo chiles, which are the dried form of fresh mirasol chilies. Ancho chilies (dried poblano) are slightly less spicy, yet for some reason I naturally like the taste and texture of guajillo chiles. Go figure.

I like a little cheese in my Mexican cooking, but I am weaning myself from that and gradually getting used to just the flavor and effect of the dried chili powder. I am getting there. Cheese, while yummy, is not good for my health, except occasionally.

There is no question in my experience that chili peppers, because of their obvious heat, cause the brain to release endorphins, which are called the "feel-good" chemicals because they reduce pain and improve mood and wellbeing. I like to feel well.

And so, I am working on my diet.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Simple Change of Oil

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ee95303b-092e-405d-b6c3-eca4ba2341c3_1024x1024.jpeg

Yep, a 20-minute oil change at our favorite garage, I had to wait around, so I walked one block down to river, the Mighty Muskegon, and in about 15 minutes I heard all of these bird songs, or my iPhone did with the free Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab app, a stunning piece of work.

Chimney Swift

Common Grackle

Canada Goose

American Crow

Gray Catbird

Hairy Woodpecker

Baltimore Oriole

Ring-Billed Gull

Northern Cardinal

American Goldfinch

Blue Jay

Warbling Vireo

Rose-Breasted Grosbeak

Red-winged Blackbird

Yellow Warbler

Mourning Dove

American Robin

House Finch

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Future is NOW

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d1986bf4-9e4c-4b98-9827-d8be7a89567b_1024x1024.jpeg

I like to joke to myself that my spirit name must be “Lack-a-Wanta, because things get dropped along the way, not intentionally; they just do. There is no guarantee we will continue to feel as we do now. I find hobby after hobby running out of ‘wanta.” It is no longer important that I do that or be seen as an expert in this or that. It’s hard to keep your old interests up to date. They tend to just drift away.

What remains is what is important, by definition. It’s the only horse still running. In way after way, we are trimming down, losing vestiges, yet not losing the path. The path only becomes more clear as competitors drop away.

Of course, the path was there all along, just not as obvious as when other interests dry up or fall by the wayside. We define ourselves, who we are, as we narrow down our interests. Trailing old interests do we go.

In fact, it’s a clear sign if a particular hobby or interest suddenly increases and demands fulfillment, meaning refilling full or completing, and then I find the next step is abandonment; it no longer holds our interest. And we can’t make it stay.

And so, what is worth doing in the long run? Seemingly, not as much as there used to be, at least for me. Everything is curtailing, cutting back, and/or drying up.

It’s time to prune the tree of me. What’s causing this?

It’s not just my advancing age, although that’s part of it. And it’s not just the continuing chaos in the world around me, although that does not help. Another factor, for me, is that we have not seen the sun here much for weeks, and even that counts.

How can I enjoy life to the fullest when around me so many people and so many countries are suffering. When it comes right down to it, the only thing I enjoy these years, at least of late, is clarifying the dharma. Of course, I post writing here, yet I no longer expect much reaction to dharma posts. I write because writing clarifies my mind, day after day. Nothing else satisfies.

When you get older, as they say, the future is Now.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

I Give Up

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/203be90c-6572-4fc2-8455-ff3e1fb0a9fe_1024x1024.jpeg

The whole point is that I trust myself to sort it, whatever 'that' is, and trust that I will be kind, understanding, and we will come together rather than be driven apart. Everything can be negotiated, or better yet, everything must be negotiated directly by us. We have to wake up and be present to do this.

I finally learned this, at least the rudiments, by the endless support calls I am forced to make about computers, iPhone, iPad, to Apple, and other companies. On the other end of the support lines, most often, are not someone that speaks clear English, but just the reverse, someone who barely speaks English and which I am stuck with, over and over and over. A simple call can end up taking hours, half a day, or more.

Instead of getting upset or having to demand that they allow me to talk with their superior (hopefully someone I can understand), I finally gave up and instead of struggling with the support person, I just put my mind to work and gently and kindly began to work with them. Of course, it makes no sense to have to do this. There should be support staff that speak perfect English, since so much that we are discussing is highly technical, so technical I can't understand it. That's why I'm on the phone.

Instead of offering the most highly skilled, fluent in English, I am shunted to some foreign country and an operator that can barely speak English and also knows very little other than to read a manual and respond to me by rote. What a waste of their money and my time. What I need is help, not another challenge. Enough for my rant.

The upshot or 'good' that comes out of all that is, that by learning to be patient, kind, and supporting of the ignorant non-English-speaking phone-support person somewhere in the Philippines or whatever country they are from, I work with them as best I can, and the results are much better.

Instead of raising my BP from the upset of not understanding them, I get the best I can from speaking with them. It's a big change in approach and one long overdue on my part.

And, simultaneously, making my peace with phone supporters, in my life I've had the realization I am capable of dealing with what life brings or offers me, good, bad, or indifferent. Surprisingly, that's news!

I find that I do have it within me to be patient and kind, even (or especially) in those very tight and difficult (for me) situations. It does not just work for phone-support-for-technical-problem conversations. It works everywhere and with everyone.

Instead of my wasting valuable energy being disturbed or upset, if I just be patient and work with whatever is happening, moment by moment, and step-by-step, everything is better and works out. All I have to do is look directly at the problem.

"Who Woulda' Thunk it" as they say. Certainly not me.

It's all about 'attitude'; if I have one, I've already lost the moment and become distracted.

Yet if I do my best to relax. I guess, for me, this is how change comes. I have to give up resistance and just deal with it, LOL.

Otherwise, it is like having one hand tied behind my back.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Trestle Bridge

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

May 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/98bea3f6-2dd8-4c64-8df6-46109d529cc3_2048x2583.jpeg

Margaret and I are determined to spend this summer hiking and traveling around Michigan. A few days ago, on a lark, we went out driving the roads east of town, with a search in mind, to find an abandoned trestle bridge across the mighty Muskegon River. This old bridge was not quite on a map, but there was an indication of where it used to be. In forty-five years of living here, we had never seen it.

We could not get at it directly because there was no longer any road to it. However, there was a 'Rails to Trails' path where there used to be train tracks. Perhaps if we walked that path, we could get close enough to go cross-country and find the abandoned trestle bridge across the river.

And so, we tried. We began by walking the old rails-to-trails path which looked like it went on forever until it vanished in a straight line. We walked but saw nothing. As we walked, we plotted with an iPhone our course on the rails-to-trails path against the dot representing the old trestle bridge, until we reached a point where the only thing we could do was to leave the path and head cross country, which we did.

Climbing over a berm, we discovered a small gorge or valley into which we descended and came up the other side, where through the trees we had a glimpse of the abandoned trestle bridge hidden behind the trees. We had found the bridge.

The bridge extended all the way across the river, and while perhaps walkable, we decided not to try it because there were areas where the timbers did not cover a drop into the river, so I just took some photos, of which I share one here.

Why it was abandoned, we don't know. Or, even what kind of bridge we don't know, yet it had to be for autos or horses. Anyway, that was our adventure for the day. While we visited the trestle-bridge, a small chipmunk kept us company, darting around on the huge timbers.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

Voices on the Wind

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 1, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a5f14589-ef54-4f2a-bd7e-662a42169d09_1024x1024.jpeg

This is the time of year when huge flocks of birds pass overhead our home here in north-west Michigan on their journey north; Canada Geese and Sandhill Cranes are among the most obvious.

For me, what could be so haunting as the huge V-formations of large-body birds crying out to one another as they pass overhead, and me, standing on the ground with a leaf rake in my hand, unable to appropriately respond to their calls. I am left, with my leaf rake, going nowhere in particular on this day.

Do I want to go somewhere too? Why am I left standing here? Am I already somewhere? Thinking does not help with these kind of feelings.

Hearing those great birds high above me seems to suck everything out of me and only time will find me back to feeling normal. It makes me weep. I don't even have to see them. Indoors at my desk, I can hear their plaintive cries overhead, calling each to the other in the cold air.

Ah yes. I'm still here.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Prairie Grass

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 4, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/23a82e5c-c08f-477b-8380-daa7a4b3338b_1529x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f8cb738e-2ce0-43a8-ba4f-55432e6bdc6e_2048x1536.jpeg

Sometimes called the “Earth’s Hair” but more often called “The Sea of Grass.” I have long been a lover of native grasses, so I dragged out some of my books on grasses, and I’ve decided I’m not having so many annuals, but instead will re-introduce grasses, especially native prairie grass. I did this some years ago, but I still only have one remaining large patch of Reed Grass growing in the back yard.

Michigan’s Lower Peninsula, including Mecosta County where we live, once supported mesic prairies and oak savannas, where Big Bluestem and Indian Grass were dominant. These ecosystems are now rare, making native plantings valuable for conservation.

Here are some of the main native Michigan prairie grasses:

Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)

Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) “Blackhawks’

Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

Eastern Gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*)

Cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*)

I have collected some prairie grasses recently and, as mentioned, am replacing annual flowers with perennial prairie grasses. They are out in the front yard in buckets waiting to be planted. Because of their height, I’m just trying to figure out where.

Included is a photo of grasses back by the shed. There is something about prairie grass that reminds me of the ocean, in particular the Atlantic Ocean where I used to live for some years as a teenager. I miss the salt air and the sheer extent of the ocean; in a similar way I love the beauty of tall grasses that can stretch on forever. They are, in a way, humble, yet they have such a profound presence, IMO.

In my memory, I have a fondness for the swell of the sea and of course right now the flow and fluidity of prairie grass.

EMAIL

Any Day Now ...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4b035c88-8ca4-42ca-a2bc-719711d1b547_2048x1367.jpeg

This fire-smoke may determine our travels this summer. Had a lot planned, but too much smoke and we can forget about going anywhere. We installed two CoWay AIRMEGA Air Purifiers. They work well and are halfway smart. We watched while its index light changed from 'blue' to 'purple', automatically turned up the fan, devoured whatever was the problem, and switched back to 'Blue'. I never said a word or made a move.

The third rail of politics, which for me means my getting as far away from modern politics as I can, at least for a while. And I wonder...

Is the start of a new day, as the sun slowly rises, still as fresh as it was when I was young? Well, yes and no. Morning still comes, and the day is fresh each day, yet I am no longer young, so there is that.

What else is out there that is untouched by time? Not much. Lake Michigan is still a vast body of fresh water, although perhaps not as fresh a water as fresh water was. We will soon be going up and down its west coastline looking for... beauty. That's if the fire smoke goes down.

Butterflies still emerge fresh from a chrysalis, as do dragonflies from their nymph cases. Frogs sing and 'Nature' is never old, yet perhaps there is less nature available to most of us than there was.

I want (I need) to go and see once again into the nooks and crannies of Mother Nature, what is still fresh and free for all.

I also want to see the huge ships in northern Michigan (UP) slowly move through the Soo locks (Sault Ste. Marie) and hear the deafening foghorn sound across the bay. I can't get far enough away from the grift of government to clear my head, but I will try this summer if only to get some welcome relief.

There is no way or direction and nowhere to turn these days that does not tell the same story of politics, war, and bitter fighting. I'm not just trying to escape and get away from it all as I am looking to see if the peace I used to know is there, that somewhere, deep-down freshness still exists. I know it does, yet I have to prove it to myself.

Modern reality is crying for purification, weeping. How will it come if not from each one of us purifying our mind and having a fresh take.

I do that by expanding my mandala practice from sitting on the cushion as I did for years, to taking a look-see and that includes this whole world. In my travels, I will offer the world of nature, and I will say what I have said hundreds of thousands of times before:

“I anoint the earth with fragrant water, scatter flowers,

and adorn it with Mt. Meru, the four continents, and the Sun & Moon.

Imagining this a buddha field, I offer it so that all beings may enjoy this pure realm.”

Please join me in this.

[Photography by me.]

EMAIL

GUT Feelings: Science, Not Fiction

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f7d4a666-abf1-43fe-b67f-fdaf57f0e5ac_1024x1024.jpeg

Scientists tell us that our Gut (small and large intestines) is directly connected to our brain by the vegas nerve.

The vagus nerve, the longest cranial nerve, connects the brainstem to organs like the stomach and intestines. It carries signals in both directions—about 80% from the gut to the brain (afferent) and 20% from the brain to the gut (efferent).

This communication affects digestion, mood, stress resilience, and even disorders like depression or autism. For instance, stimulating the vagus nerve (e.g., via diet, probiotics, or electrical devices) can improve mental health or gut function. In short, the vagus nerve acts like a superhighway, relaying real-time data between the gut and brain, with microbes, immune cells, and emotions all playing roles in the conversation.

My diet and what I eat has become such a touchy thing compared to what I remember it being as a young adult. I used to be on what they jokingly called a 'Seafood' diet. If I see food, I generally eat it. Now, not so much.

I am sensitive and I believe it is a kind of 'sense' as to what I should be eating. Never used to happen, at least not consciously.

And now, or so it seems, I am led to one food at a time, feel I should eat it and, after a couple times of eating it I sense I should stop eating it, or that I have eaten too much of this one thing and should stop, because it is no longer working for me.

I have a kind of inner radar that plans out my diet, at least in large format or scope. I don't think there is anything I want to do about this habit, neither encourage nor discourage it. I tend to just follow it.

This especially comes into play when I sense I should be eating something like canned tuna or salmon. I can feel my mouth water for it, and after a couple times of trying it again, if I do it yet a third time, let's say, in a week, that inner sense says "enough, stop eating that" for now.

And while I don't like being bossed around, even by my inner self, it seems to be at least roughly right, and I don't have any other subtle sense advising me. And so, I go along with it.

However, it does make for some sudden switch-arounds. For example, I was planning to eat one thing later today and suddenly that has been cancelled, and I am hungering for something different. I'm afraid I kind of humbly follow what my gut feeling tells me.

After all, a gut feeling comes from the gut, so it ought to know what it wants to eat. Who am I to argue with my gut feelings.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Go With the Flow

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9272d26d-2fc3-4250-a04b-788c49725467_1024x1024.jpeg

‘TIME’ does not stop, yet then it does. How do we explain that?

It’s more like we no longer step on the brakes or react to the events that emerge in time. That non-reaction amounts to a more fluid effortless sense of time.

You’d think we would feel like we were moving faster, but if you are floating down the river with the current, there is a sense of being motionless. I’m talking about the effort of reactivity and our stopping those reactions.

Anyway, this sense of not fighting time, but going with the flow, is what I’m talking about here.

Why would that not be as simple as just not making any effort and we would then go with the flow? Letting go and going with the flow is not that easy to do. And ‘Try it’, is an oxymoron.

Not reacting to current situations, at least in my experience, brings a sense of free flow, almost floating.

Not reacting is not reacting.

If we are not resisting, as if we are not reacting, we lubricate time and slide through it.

When motion itself is still and we are moving with it, with the flow, that’s a sign that we have calmed our habitual tendency to react.

Go with the flow.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Spring Fawns

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/98176e3f-5518-4bc3-a8e3-5f91b2bd1d2b_1929x2048.jpeg

Headed out to the Legend Ranch at 7:00 AM yesterday morning.

This time, instead of visiting the side of the ranch where they raise deer with invitro, etc., almost like cattle, we went to the other side, to the hundreds of acres where they let the deer run wild, create their own babies, and this is the time of year when the fawns are born and spend much of their time just quietly resting in the woods, almost invisible.

It's like hunting morel mushrooms, essentially a figure ground image that has to be sorted. The youngest fawns hardly move at all, and after a few days they are much the same, but if you get too close, they get up and walk or run away. The fawns eat about ever five hours and then rest.

Today we saw about 9 fawns. I include a photo of the one I got closest to. We drove down what seemed like endless roads, even driving through a running stream and up the other side. And then we walked, walked, walked. I carried a relatively light lens, while my fellow camera friends were carrying long and very heavy telephoto lenses, the better to see the fawns with.

As for me, I am more a close-up photographer, so I had probably the only wide-angle lens in the group (20-35mm), yet the others were ready to shoot long distance, and I was not. With my lens, I was at the mercy of waiting until the telephoto lenses had their fill, so I could walk closer and potentially frighten off the fawn.

It worked out, as we eventually came across one fawn that was so newborn that he had not learned to run away, so I got some photos too.

In addition, all this time I was fighting the Canada wildfires and the air index hovered around 65, which was tolerable, although I did have one coughing fit.

The trip was very much because of Rob Benson, a well-known taxidermist and expert on the ranch. He made it all happen, and I thank him for that. He also spotted almost all the fawns.

Anyway, we walked and walked. I very much liked this side of the ranch, where everything was naturally wild. The deer there are relatively safe, but the fawns, not so much. Even within the fenced-in ranch, there are coyotes, bobcats, and many predatory birds, especially raptors.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

AI Forever

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 10, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b5c05183-04d9-4d9e-9e9f-52cfe8dad63f_1024x1024.jpeg

AI is addictive and is going to only get more addictive as it is mixed into more and more products. I find myself using Google search less and less each day. I started out with ChatGPT but switched to GROK not long ago and find it very much better.

Either one is so much more useful than searching on Google, because it answers every little question I ask and very thoroughly at that. In fact, I copy my Grok results into Microsoft Word and save it to my disk drive labelled as whatever it is, an article.

I seem to get almost a booklet with each question, and I can go deeper and get even more.

I do believe we have to be careful what kinds of questions we ask. For example, it is not helpful or truthful to ask questions about my own personal history. All kinds of false statements, inaccurate historical facts, and the like appear.

However, if I stick to fairly common facts, I see very little to complain about, although some 'facts' seem to lean a bit, depending on how I ask the questions.

All in all, I find AI products like ChatGPT and GROK much more useful than the classic Google search engine. I see these and mini-versions of these being embedded more and more in the fabric of our lives, until they are more dependable (meaning we depend on them) than anything that has appeared up to now.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Backbreaker

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 11, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3d933e22-b6ac-41bf-99a0-39f58111c028_2048x1523.jpeg

Well, I reached the point of no return with our front garden, the one that gets all the sun. Coming out of winter, the grass overcame the garden soil and was standing about a foot high. It is now or never, time to deal with the unwanted 'weeds'.

For starters, I spent about two hours on my hands and knees pulling weeds out of the earth, the deep-seated root-balls. It took so much strength-of-grip that after doing that for hours I could not pick up something like a glass of water because my hand wanted to drop the glass.

Well, restoring the garden on hands-and-knees didn't happen, but the takeaway was it would take a week to dig all the root masses out by hand. And of course, I tried garden rakes, leaf rakes, hoes, horizontal pitch forks, shovels, and about every other tool I could get my hands on. None of them worked well enough to continue. And so, it was back to the drawing board. And forget about the philosophy of not disturbing the earth.

I researched gas, electric (corded and corded) cultivators and tillers, using ChatGPT, GROK, and Google to figure out what might work. I don't want the mess of gasoline engines, figured out that cordless tiller/cultivators are not powerful enough, even with 20V batteries, which leaves me with a corded machine.

Neither Lowes, Tractor Supply, Ace Hardware, nor Walmart had a corded cultivator in stock. The best any of them could do was several days into the future and I would pick one up at their store. That's how small our town is. Only, our local Menards had a simple corded cultivator in stock, at \$120. That seemed like a bargain compared to weeding grass root-clusters by hand.

I drove out to Menards and bought one on the spot, spent an hour putting the thing together and testing it. It was about as simple as these things came, but it worked and was strong enough to really dig out the weeds to about 8-9 inches deep. I was left with the good earth. I had to rake out many of the weed pieces.

In short, I have been two days at that, also removing a dozen or so large pavers that always managed to teeter-totter when you walked on them, even though I put down and leveled each of them on a bed of sand.

To top it off, I bought a bunch of cedar mulch in 3 cubic-foot bags and now have the cedar mulch several inches deep over the whole front garden.

I have room for a number of additional plants, although I am moving away from annual plants and not only toward perennials, but also to plants native to Michigan, especially prairie grasses.

I have always been partial to the tall grasses like Big and Little Bluestem.

[iPhone photo by me.]

EMAIL

“Wake Up, Wake Up, Friend Owl.”

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

June 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5bb00539-68dc-430a-afc0-5f25ec35cbec_796x604.jpeg

I am an entrepreneur, with many ‘entrepreneurial’ startups under my belt.

We all know that it ‘takes all kinds’ and there are ‘Different strokes for different folks.’

I know what it’s like to be ridiculed for being different when ‘difference’ first appears.

I was made fun of when I chose not to go to college, and when I chose not to even finish high school. They would say “See you at the carwash, Erlewine.”

And I was made fun of when some of the leading music critics said, with a sneer in their voice, “There is this one guy out in a tiny town in Michigan who calls his site “All-Music.com.” Yet, that little company eventually had these same writers writing for us, as we introduced a whole new approach to music criticism, which was:

Not to buy music because a few music critics tell you too, and not to compare music artists one to another (like Bob Dylan to Barry Manilow), but to treat each musician as his or her own world and just point out which was that musician’s best work and worst work. Don’t compare apples to Oranges because there is no point to it.

We then did the same thing to film and music (AllMovie.com), video games (AllGame.guide), and rock n’ roll concert posters (ClassicPosters.com). I could go on, with Astrology, and a few others.

I saw the same reaction with the advent of digital cameras, and even to various photo techniques, in particular (in my experience) with what is called ‘focus stacking’. They said it was cheating. Today “Focus Stacking” is totally accepted and often featured.

Anyway, I recount all this to certify that I have at least some entrepreneurial experiences, a number of enterprise-level websites, not to mention experience with scaling and bringing businesses to market.

I want to communicate here about our kneejerk reaction to what’s new and that it might help to be a little patient with the ‘new’ until we see what it

portends, what it means, and what it brings with itself for us. And not to forget that some innovations won't be denied. AI is one of them.

Once again, with photography I was ridiculed for daring to stack photos to obtain a photo that is in focus from front to back. And the years passed and today it is not only accepted but often featured. On the home front, my family and I also were criticized for never babysitting our kids, having home births, and home schooling. Same story, different time.

Again, rinse and repeat.

And as mentioned in an earlier blog, at the advent of home computers, the advent of the Internet, and most recently AI, it is the same group of folks who come out and tell us 'The Sky is Falling'. I don't intend to be mean, but as Thumper said to Owl, in the movie Bambi:

"Wake Up, Wake Up, Friend Owl."

EMAIL

The Sluiceway

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2f9756ad-917b-45e1-b5f3-89d21eea664a_1024x1024.jpeg

I am ever more cleanly trapped in old age, or should I say ‘clearly’ trapped. Either way, my wiggle room is very little, and it grows less. The beauty of it is that I can see the problem and not manage to avoid ignoring it. I alone have to do something about this. That lack of flex is a blessing, not a curse.

I cannot forget or ignore the Michelangelo poem that goes something like this:

“What if a little bird should escape death for many a long year, only to suffer an even crueler death.”

Michelangelo was not mainly a poet, but he did not mince words.

The time for and need for addressing our problems is past due, now long over, yet so much still needs to get done, and by me.

Putting off the obvious is not a clever move on my part, and I should know better. And I do, somewhere in there. So, it is purposeful ignorance, the worst kind, that is at hand. I try to slip past what there is no room for and end up trying to hoist on my own petard. That can never work.

I’ve got to stop embroidering on the possible, extending short-term pleasures against my long-term odds. We all know what our long-term odds are. To pad those odds and imagine we get away with something, is not just foolish, but plain stupid.

The weak link in the physical chain, at least in my family? That would be me.

So... no salt, very little sugar, even less cheese, and plenty of organic vegetables. Beans. Salad (avocado). Oh yes, some salmon.

Could be worse or couldn’t be better.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Food Train: Snacking

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/94e4a8c0-9e01-4cdc-af5f-bbb13c0a2e4e_1024x1024.jpeg

It's taken me years to get enough of my own 'agenda' removed or cancelled to find myself at the tip of the spear once again. Even if I get there, what's that good for?

For one, there is nowhere to go, because you are already there, so that's not an issue. In fact, there is nowhere else to go and, for that matter, nothing in particular to do. So, what then?

Well, we have nothing to do and not much to say. I've been busy getting the agenda in me wrong out.

Rule number one: You can't trick the system, because you can't outwit yourself. You are not smarter than you are and thinking it does not make it so.

As for me, I am tired of shortchanging myself. It does not take long to drift from purity of life intent into some compromise or another. Before I know it, I find myself embroidering my most solemn vows with exceptions. Best to do nothing.

In the onrush of time, we most easily lose what drives us and tend to fall into bargaining with our own purity. How's that?

For example, every blue moon, I renew and turn over a new leaf. I know it is new because it is pure, fresh, and I believe in it. Yet, it is usually only a matter of days (or weeks) until I find myself cheating on even my most sacred food vows, perhaps just a little, but I'm nickel and diming myself in the bargain.

We are not willing to wait for 'purity' to tell by longevity. Instead, we have to have a little more of this or that right now. Who will notice? And pretty soon we are selling to ourselves our own future, little by little, and bit by bit. Before I know it, I have a circus going or at least a cheap bazaar.

In other words, my thumb is back on the scale. I am eating two cookies instead of one, two slices of cheese, etc. The pure path which would get me where I want (and need) to go is soon crowded with exceptions and the pile up itself becomes the accent, with the purity at a discount. My cluttered (and compromised) life has returned; it's back again.

We mean well, but we did not do well.

No matter how strict I am I about snacking, for example, before I know it, I've opened up another vein in my food train and am bleeding out purity from the excess.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

I'm Almost a Mason, NOT

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/26d843a9-283d-47d0-9fd0-f73c65dbc8d6_2023x1510.jpeg

I'm not a mason, but nevertheless I'm the fixer around here. In fact, my family calls me "Handy Mike," when they want something done. This morning, I put my mason hat on and weighed in on one of our large cement decks that needs repairing. I have been working on replacing bricks that have fallen out, and so on.

It got hot a lot sooner than I imagined and it is 86 degrees out right now. I was trying to finish off some deep cracks using about 10 lbs. of dry mortar. I mixed up some mortar and loaded it into what looked like a confectionery bag, the kind you decorate cakes with, but much larger.

I had to mix two batches, use two vinyl bags, and work quickly, and managed to get that part of the job done and I was soaked with sweat from head to foot. I had to go take a shower and then drive out to our local Lowes and figure out some mortar-calk or concrete patch filler.

I am limping through this work and I can see that mortar work is for pros, not a handyman. LOL.

As the heat sinks in I slink back into the house and hole up. No more cement work for me today, although still some to be done.

I promised myself that I would not spend my summer on a garden, but get out around the state more. The only serious problem is this smoke from Canada coming into Michigan some days is so dense that you can't breathe properly outside and have to wear a mask. Had not planned on that at all. Bummer.

We did purchase a couple of decent air filters and purifiers on Amazon to fight the smoke, which I link here. I notice that the price has gone up since we purchased ours, so shop around. These work well.

Coway Airmega AP-1512HH(W) True HEPA Purifier with Air Quality Monitoring

We can set these air filters on 'ECO' and they will stand watch for any smell, dust, or whatever occurs. Last night, in the middle of the night, one of these turned its light from Blue to Red, powered up, and gobbled up the 'smell',

shut down, and the Blue light came back on. This took about 15 minutes. A vigilant smell sniffer.

Other than that, this work has been my day. I need to rest and do nothing the rest of the day, physically speaking. Despite myself, I am working on the front garden and seem to have it weeded and mulched, although I will see what comes up through the mulch in a few days.

I might search for an old movie I like as, for some reason, I am tired of the more modern movies that have shown up on Netflix of late, not to mention the ones not in English. Interested in foreign movies, yes, having to squint to read subtitles, not so much.

[iPhone photo of some of the cement work.]

EMAIL

2025 Summer Solstice

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 19, 2025

2025 SUMMER SOLSTICE

June 20, 2025 10:42 PM EDT marks the Summer Solstice, the “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” so to speak. As astrological events go, the Summer Solstice is my favorite, the longest day of the year, marking the turn of the year, the beginning of time’s march toward winter, and the dying of the light.

I also include the heliocentric chart for the moment of the Summer Solstice, what I call the ‘Dharma Chart.’ As you can see, not only are the planets rather evenly distributed, but we have the very rare Grand Cross between Earth/Mercury-Mars/Jupiter, and Saturn Neptune. That’s six planets! And also, a quite accurate Grand Trine Kite configuration between Uranus/Saturn-Neptune/Pluto/Mercury-Mars, another six planets.

And these two archetypal patterns are aligned with one another, the ‘Kite’ suggesting great vision (seeing the forest AND the trees), and the ‘Grand Cross’ (all-powerful getting things done. Both ‘See’ and ‘Do’. Certainly a turning point.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Falling to Rest

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7ec1f0a0-fe5b-4bd9-86ee-b15fed704258_1024x1024.jpeg

Talking about 'resting', coming to rest, in this case the effortless sense of falling to rest, falling into rest.

Well, eventually, each one of us will come to rest. How we come to rest may differ. In Taoism, rest aligns with 'wu wei' (non-action or effortless action), where one achieves harmony by flowing with the natural order rather than resisting it. Sounds natural, and is, but for many of us hard to learn.

Intuition, often described as a "gut feeling" or non-rational knowing, arises from the subconscious integration of experience, sensory cues, and pattern recognition.

As mentioned, in Taoist Intuition restful non-action (wu wei) allows one to align with the Tao (the natural way), fostering intuitive decision-making that feels effortless and "right." This is akin to what I mean here as "falling to rest," where our surrender to the moment unlocks deeper knowing. In other words, our heart's intuition perceives truths beyond logic.

And it's not as simple as relief from labor. To be still. There is no doubt that we eventually surrender to rest. Learning to fail successfully is an art.

In other words, 'rest' is not merely the absence of activity but an active state of restoration. Neuroscientifically, rest (especially during sleep) allows the brain to consolidate memories, process emotions, and clear metabolic waste via the lymphatic system.

To rest, repose, and cease from motion, a state of inactivity, relief from labor, or even sleep. This includes 'nothing', also stopping, pausing, or lying down. To be still, to come to rest or pause.

We don't equate rest with inactivity.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Story Telling

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/561e9c34-27e1-436d-ba48-355a627a43f8_1024x1024.jpeg

How important is context, telling a story, or having a story?

We can do it with words and also by sharing a photograph, but how about AI graphics? To me, all of the above work. I do believe that a picture is worth 1,000 words, as the old saying goes. Creating our own image instead of searching out an image to photograph or license makes plain sense. We should not be surprised to see ever more AI graphic images coming down the pike. I have been working with AI graphics since they were first introduced commercially around July of 2022 on the Discord server and Midjourney AI.

I have been writing daily blogs on Facebook since June of 2007, and I like to include some kind of visual tell with each article. Almost anything will do, so I tried whatever I had around, including a lot of my own nature photos. I also scoured hundreds of thousands of commercial images looking for something that was (even dimly) related to the topic at hand. I would license these photos for use. Looking for appropriate photos took a lot of my time.

So, of course, when AI graphics came along, as crude as they at first were, I was right in line to sign up. These simple graphics at first were very, very crude, and hardly worth using, hands would have six fingers, bodies 3 legs and things like that. However, the improvement rate for AI graphics was exponential. Every month or two saw great improvement and today AI 'photos' are rivaling camera photos. Soon we will be unable to distinguish photos from AI graphics. Apparently, we forget that our visual images are themselves mental representations.

And today, with a little skill, I can prompt AI graphics to produce something I can use with my articles, although I have to admit the AI Graphic Engine is a bit of an idiot-savant. It often cannot or will not follow simple direction. The word 'prompt' is totally apt for how AI images are invoked.

Contrast this with word-fiends like ChatGPT and Grok, and there is no comparison. However, Midjourney AI just introduced a video generator that allows one to create a five-second video that you prompt and eventually we will be able to piece those short videos together to make a movie on our own.

So, the AI revolution marches on day and night into the future.

AI NEVER SLEEPS

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Cement and Other Work

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 22, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/80166398-4888-4005-a189-b766e6b7ca25_6048x8064.jpeg

Well, I have finally finished my cement work, at least this round of it. I have learned a lot, mostly that masonry work is a skilled trade, and my masonry skills are very limited. LOL.

And, working with cement is an easy way to work up a sweat, in my case I end up soaking wet. It's hard work.

Next project is an in-depth culling of all the excess equipment in our dharma center's basement. We have literally tons of stuff that while usable are hogging all the space. We are going to divest ourselves of it and give it away to whoever comes to collect it."

The theory, our theory, is that if we give away something that is usable, we will just have to buy it again should the need arise.

So, no rest for the wicked as they say. While the temperature is in the 90s over the next few days, I'm going into the cool basement and marking everything that must go. And then I will hire a kid who needs summer work to carry this out of the basement and onto our screen-in front porch where it awaits pickup. In addition we are hiring a handyman to fix the jobs I should not be doing. I keep doing them, but I pay the price and my poor back just can't do it anymore.

And we are fighting the Canada smoke that makes it hard to breathe around here and cuts into our trips here and there.

So, that's the news fit to print.

EMAIL

Heat Wave

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e0d3d905-f5ac-4483-bdae-0d1fd72e21b8_1024x1024.jpeg

Yesterday was very hot; today it will be in the 90s and still humid. I'm opening up all the windows and letting the air blow in, already soaking wet from taking out a huge mass of cardboard boxes that have accumulated for months, cutting them up, carrying them out. I thought I was moving very slowly, but when I was done, I could see in the mirror that I was soaking wet.

We don't get this much heat here in northwest Michigan, especially in the very cold spring of this year. And to quote a favorite movie "...And it's hot too!"

Working around heat, as I get older, is much harder than it was when I was young. If heat bakes my insides for a couple of days, the effect is cumulative. It builds up. And for an older person, this produces a not-healthy effect. I have to remain cool.

Something that helps is taking some electrolyte caps, which makes sure I am getting very important salts into my system; otherwise drinking water on water does not work.

Already, I've scaled back my work plans for today as I take note of my garden work and trash work so far and it is not even 8 AM. I was ready to dive into another project, but at this point I had better take it easy for a while and see how I feel, which right now is weak.

I have gone into the basement next door where it is cool and there is an endless amount of work to do. It did not take long to strain my back, and I'm back out into the heat. Almost 90 degrees by now, and not yet Noon.

Right now, it is 1 AM in the morning and it still is hot in my small office. Heading into the third and last of the three very hot days. Starting tomorrow (Tuesday) it will be cooler.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Just a Dream, Just a Dream

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 24, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/17f89984-7afe-42b1-9019-7ce5e18590fb_1024x1024.jpeg

[Here is a little personal tornado that sprung up this morning, tore through our day, and then vanished like a Will-o'-the wisp.]

Well, the hunt for house raised its tempting head again in the last week.

It's been about six years since we started looking to relocate. Has it messed with our head, Yes, for sure.

It is a dreamworld or a world of house dreams in which we swim. And in the world, certainly there are signs and signals. We see them, sense them, and interpret them as best we can.

This current possible home was a plethora of signs and also a vibe. Margaret and I both sensed it, however, as usual it was sold before we could even visit, and we then drove up for a visit anyway, just to see it where it was. We followed its course when it came under contract, yet I found myself telling the realtor that if, for some unknown reason, the home returned to the market, quite rare indeed, would he let us know.

And sure, some ten days or so later, in the evening when we were taking in a series on cable, the phone rang. It was the realtor telling us (I almost hung up thinking it was a robot call, which is about all we get), that the house was apparently defaulting and possible coming back on the market.

Of course, we had moved on quite a bit, having put it aside, brought greater focus back to our own home, and had even launched into motion on cleaning out from our basement as if we were moving, getting rid of stuff as if we were going elsewhere. That was, well, unusual.

So here we sit, waiting for a phone call to say if the home is or is not on the market. And if it is, we are prepared to drive the quite-long way back up north to near Lake Michigan and a small town where we hear a new sense of community has been forming for many years.

Needless to say, all this has thrown a monkey wrench into the mix and kind of scrambled up our brains at the same time.

I had given up my recurrent dream of finding my way back into the Ann Arbor scene and visiting where I came from. Yet, as they say, you can never go home again. I believe that as I have discovered that Ann Arbor, which has meant so much to me for all these years, was getting almost impossible to drive across. And in the meantime, all the kind of folks I like and hang out with, artists, cooks, shop owners, and so on cannot afford to live in Ann Arbor anymore and are being driven out by rising costs of homes and rentals of any kind. Sad.

And then there is the sense I get as I attempt to fit or refit back into the Ann Arbor scene that there is, as they say, no room in the Inn. It would be very awkward to attempt to fit myself back into what remains of the Ann Arbor I remember, what I most know, and love. I have made a few sorry passes in attempts to pass again for what I once did not only pass for but fit into like a hand in a glove.

Instead, should this northwest Michigan town, and a house located at the base of the Leelanau Peninsula, become available and back on the market, we are a mind of just going for it, living there.

Margaret has wanted to move up there...for...ever.

Me, not so much, but then I don't really care where I live as long it has some sense of moving forward, progressing. Clearly, that would be very difficult to do in Ann Arbor. Moving up north, where there is a nascent community in progress, I could fit in pretty well. Not sure what I would have to offer, but probably more of what I offer living here, which is mostly online.

There is something fresh and crisp about those things on the rise, forming, and coming together. Even though by age I am on the decline, inside I am still about 25 years old. I guess I would rather decline on the rise than the opposite.

If we move, we are leaving behind a well-historied compound. I don't much like become or remaining as a curator or custodian of my own history, when I could surf in waters anew.

NEWSFLASH!

We just got a call from our realtor telling us that at the last moment the bank came through for the previous offer. We are not getting it. Bummer!

We are back to square one, bubble popped, looking at ourselves in the mirror. LOL.

Strangely with all this, we are OK. Simultaneously with this opportunity we found the insight and energy to descend in the center's basement and began

culling tons of stuff we don't need, and did not need, clearing the way to a great reduction as to what we needed but never realized. We are realizing it now. So, that's my latest house story, one that sprang out of the cosmos, picked us up like the tornado that grabbed Dorothy in the 'Wizard of Oz' and set us back down where we started from.

C'est la vie.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Rinse and Repeat

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e5f781ad-4741-4b39-baf4-ebeb7dfccfd0_1024x1024.jpeg

Reorientation, what's that?

Apparently, that's for the cosmos to know, and for me to find out. I feel it's going on now, yet like some vast ocean liner trying to turn around or an astronaut trying to rotate, I only see change gradually, except once in a while when events implode.

Am I too old to change? Apparently not, but it's more earthshaking than I remember change. The problem with personal change is that we, ourselves, are what is changing, so we lose our North Star, for most of us our 'Self', at least for a time.

As they say, "It's all good," and I'm sure it is and it's only when I, the fiducial, is what is changing, that I lose my reference point. I get turned around, because I am turning around or turning over.

So, none of us are too old to change. In fact, age is perhaps the one unavoidable change.

Nothing much we can do about it because it's all on automatic, the process of age and change. We are shuffled along toward the end of the Time's conveyor belt, at least as far as we are concerned.

Rinse and repeat.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Prayer Flags

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 26, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7a075162-b76d-44c7-82af-ebec03169ae8_1024x1024.jpeg

Forced distancing, meaning, without meaning to, finding myself taking a backseat or losing interest in the whole enchilada, not following up on what I usually follow up on.

I was struck, many years ago by the Arthur Penn movie “Mickey One,” a kind of study in paranoia where the main actor, a stand-up comedian, was told by the local mafia that the choice in life was between the “Crush Out” and the “Fade Out.”

I get that, and right now it’s more tending toward the “Fade Out,” but kind of my own choice, or do we have no choice but to fade out?

Of course, I bustle forward on my day-to-day itinerary, while at the same time declining, declining not only in years left but in choosing to re-up my subscription to ‘Life’.

And it’s not so obvious, but more a case of my telling myself “Not this” or “Not that.” The ‘space’ in time becomes more attractive than the time in time, if that makes sense.

“Time lapse” is what I am talking about, the lapse of time, letting it go, meaning letting it go on, as if I could stop it.

The architect of time is not so much longer “Me, Myself, and I,” but rather something beyond me, beyond my ken, or care.

Perhaps I don’t care as much as I used to or, at least, not the same way that I used to. I worked hard to inch up to the window of the future and peek through, until I kind of fell into and through that window, into what?

Perhaps, gazing into a clear blue sky at nothing at all.

It’s not like one of those old ‘test patterns’ that came on late-night TV along with a single tone, yet it ‘IS’ like I know there is no more programming that interests me. And yet, it’s all good.

What am I to think of that? Well, 'not to worry' is my first thought, because this is a de facto state of affairs, something obviously quite natural that I am egging on as much as also discovering.

For me this is as much a string of Tibetan prayer flags gently blowing in the winds of time, as anything else. Years ago, I wrote this poem.

MY POEMS

Poems,

A home for my thoughts,

Dear thoughts,

The very best of me,

All that's precious and kind,

Now sealed in words,

Like insects in amber:

Prayer flags endlessly waving,

In the gentle chalice of the mind.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Imagine What I Don't Know

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 27, 2025

"Imagining what I don't know,

And I don't know,

I imagine what I don't know.

"I know what I imagine is what I don't know,

And what I know is not what I imagined.

That much I know.

"I can only imagine what I don't know."

In the dharma literature, by an order of magnitude, there is more extant writing than for any other 'religion or spiritual discipline. When it comes to writing we have our bases covered.

Intellectually, conceptually, there is everything laid out where we can understand it. If only understanding was enough. It's not, at least as far as I know. Not even near.

As helpful as writing intends, most of us are fed up with thinking and thinking about. For all it is about, dharma or otherwise, it's gotten us this far and no farther.

A sea of or at least a swimming pool of concepts, of which there is no end to. And no beginning, either. And for all that, we have the result, right up to the present moment. Does it help?

Perhaps, sometimes, yet also sometimes or even most times, not so much.

What do all these endless words mean or point to?

They can't point beyond because beyond what? There is no 'what' to point beyond. That is just duality talking. So, all points end here, in this present moment, and beyond (aside from) this present moment there is but the past and the future.

Beyond is a distance too far to fathom. We can perhaps imagine beyond, yet what is it that we imagine?

Beyond the here and now, what is beyond? We can only imagine what that is and it obviously is nothing and found nowhere.

And so, we really are out here in space, on the trailing edge of a distant arm of a spiral galaxy. As for searching for intelligent life, all we have to do is look in a mirror. We are the spacemen or spacewomen and are already way out there.

The 'real' becomes unreal as our friends and companions pass on, until the unreal is more a part of us than the real. We become more and more the fabric of the past, a photo in a high-school year book, only I never graduated from high school. LOL.+

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

May Erlewine and Pack Lundholm

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 28, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/efc77f6c-25db-465b-8927-4845f143abfa_2048x1622.jpeg

As evening approached, Margaret and I headed out of town to the west and Fremont, Michigan, where my daughter May Erlewine was performing at the Dogwood Center for the Performing artist with Packy Lundholm, an incredible guitar player from Nashville. Together they were unforgettable, and I have heard May, of course, many hundreds of times.

May and Packy are on at tour. Tonight (Saturday June 28, 2025) they play at the Interlochen Center for the Arts with Joshua Davis, SOLD OUT, and Sunday at the "Smiling Acres Music Festival," where they close the show.

I can remember when May began to write and sing songs. As a dad I was proud of my daughter, as I am of all my kids, but it did not take long until I was swept beyond being just a proud father.

As a music critic, it dawned on me that May was a great and natural songwriter. It blew my mind, and her potent words began to register and sink in. Last night she introduced a new song, "Lemonade," which stunned me with its beauty and relevance, and I predict perhaps everyone will soon hear.

[iPhone snapshot from last night of May Erlewine and Packy Lundholm.]

EMAIL

Interlochen Show: Joshua Davis and May Erlewine

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

June 29, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d770000b-ece8-454d-88ec-0aa7f25b06c2_508x617.jpeg

Interlochen Show: Joshua Davis and May Erlewine

By Michael Erlewine

As someone who seldom goes anywhere, yesterday evening found Margaret and I traveling again, this time up to the Traverse City area, to the Interlochen Center for the Arts, where a very special concert with my daughter May Erlewine and musician Joshua Davis were holding a double concert.

May and Josh have been close friends for many years and have played together often, Josh recording on some of May's albums and Josh's wife Anne being May's close friend. Josh is also one of my favorite guitar players and songwriters, having played with the legendary band "Steppin' In It" for many years.

Josh teaches music and songwriting at Interlochen and this concert was held at Interlochen's large Corson Auditorium, which holds about a thousand people, sold out long before the concert.

We drove up the slow way, on the highway M-37, a long stretch with very little traffic, taking in rural Michigan. May was kind enough to give us seats front row center, so we were right there and could see the show.

Of course, the show was wonderful, consisting of two back-to-back sets, May with the incredible Nashville guitarist Packy Lundholm, including a guest appearance by Joshua Davis, followed by a set by Josh Davis with May appearing with him.

Of course, May and Packy were just great, and we had just seen them the night before. Josh Davis was accompanied by violinist and composer Brad Phillips, and the set was a real duo. Phillips is one of our favorite musicians just as Davis is the same, and the two of them were so fine, trading solos, and raising the vibe higher and higher.

Josua Davis sang many songs that we have loved for years, and the audience was loving it. And Phillips was outstanding as well. The whole concert was

such a treat and for an encore both groups came back on the stage and did the Carol King song “You’ve Got a Friend,” as done by James Taylor.

We hung around afterward and didn’t get home until 1 AM, carefully threading the Michigan back roads and highways at night watching for deer, which are a hazard here.

[The lovely poster was done by Michigan artist Brad Kik.]

EMAIL

Music Tour Trifecta

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

June 30, 2025

MUSIC TOUR TRIFECTA

This completes the trifecta, the third day in a row that Margaret and I travel to and take in a concert by our daughter May Erlewine and her accompanist, guitar legend Packy Lundholm.

This time I am also functioning as a 'rogue' photographer at the wonderful 'Smiling Acres Music Festival' held in Trufant, Michigan. Although I did not get home until after 1 AM the night before, I was out on the grounds of the festival around 8:30 AM and did not get home until around 7:30 PM this evening, on a 91-degree day.

May Erlewine with guitarist Packy Lundholm closed the show with a 4 PM 90-minute set. I was photographing at the side of the stage in full sunlight with a 'Panama Hat' on to dodge the sun. I had to keep my hand on the top my camera, which was mounted on a sturdy tripod to keep the heat from the camera. The tripod was burning hot.

The 'Smiling Acres Music Festival' is one of the smaller festivals, and folks are flocking to it because there is space, time, and the lack of busyness that seems to constipate the larger festivals today, A very pleasant place to be, even in the heat.

Well, that completes the short tour of our daughter May, that Margaret and I have been able to follow and show up at. Of course, May goes on and Packy, who is now on a flight back to Nashville will return soon.

It's always difficult to leave a tour like this and go back home, but we are older and a such a tour moves forward at a fairly fast pace. We are just grateful to have taken in what we can and are getting ready to pick up activities around home where we left off. More nature walks and short drives are in order and cleaning out one of our basements.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

"Birdie, Birdie, Birdie"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 4, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ab8f2a18-2606-4612-bb8c-8297613d14d8_1024x1024.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/66189302-99b1-4317-8bbe-dc5fc443be4c_2048x1429.jpeg

That song would be the American Robin. In the early morning, around 6 AM, Margaret and I walk what we call "The Four Elements," being four large hills in our local cemetery located about 1/3 of a mile from our home.

Walking those hills gives our hearts a workout, pushing the heartbeat to the limits our cardiologists say we should go. And it's fun to use the free Merlin Bird App on our iPhones to see what birds are with us as we walk.

Yesterday was our 54 th wedding anniversary.

The highlight of our bird watch, rare birds, were a nesting pair of Merlin Falcons, who get upset every time we walk by. They scream and yell and fly overhead, both of them. Here is the list of birds we heard on our morning walk.

Merlin Falcon

Hairy Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Indigo Bunting

Red-Shouldered Hawk

European Starling

Tufted Titmouse

Northern Cardinal

Chimney Swift

American Crow

Blue Jay

Common Grackle

Black-Capped Chickadee

Northern House Wren

American Robin

We also had a bit of a mini family gathering when my niece Meredith Erlewine, her husband Peter, and their daughter Kate spent the night on their way to the Michigan's UP for trail bike riding. My brother Phillip and his wife Carla also were here. A good time was had by all.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me. Photo by me of our outdoor dining table.]

EMAIL

Sign Reader: Nature's Mudras

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5e7ea719-c998-449a-bc06-f8a22c853361_1024x1024.jpeg

I love the concept of the mudra, that we shall know by the signs the nature of our own mind. Of course, over the years I have learned a lot of the Tibetan mudras through dharma- practice, some of which make intuitive sense to me and some not so much. They are lovely and significant. And I am not saying that the Tibetan mudras are not natural. I imagine they are too.

However, I am more naturally familiar (and have been since a child) with the natural signs that exist all around me. I don't know if I am reading them right but, read them I do and I take these natural-mudras seriously to heart. I follow these various external signs for the most part as best I can.

The world is alive with directionality. Everything means something or points somewhere. There are far more pointers than destinations, "destinations" being what is pointed at. In other words, our eyes are bigger than our stomachs. There is even a case, at least philosophically, that there are no destinations and that the means (the way we travel) is the only meaningful destination. In other words, we travel to "travel well," but I digress.

Following an individual sign (or mudra) in modern life, at least for me, is often difficult, because there are too many. Rather I look for groups or schools of signs that like schools-of-fish can individually appear as random but also can suddenly all point in the same direction. Maybe that defines a school, when several signs point out the same thing or in the same direction. That is clearest for me, when a given sign is emphasized by being a multiple.

Mostly, it is THIS type of directionality, when individual signs school, that I can pick up on and perhaps learn from or at least follow them out or along for a way. If throughout my day, the same kind of sign keeps popping up or groups of them appear as flags, I slow down and consider whatever they appear to be pointing at or out to me.

Several signs all pointing in the same direction tend to flag me down and catch my attention.

Of course, this can approach what is probably wild-geese- chase proportions (too many signs) and sometimes I just have to turn my signing-radar off or at

least the volume down. How sensitive I am to subtle signs varies, but I believe I am more sensitive than the average bear in this because I have practiced it since a child when looking for natural life like insects and frogs. And as far as emotions, my intuition is like reading braille; I have been reading the signs of the times since I was a young kid. I can't always see clearly, but I can feel my way along using my natural sensitivities.

There seems to be a whole other world in which seeing is not the sense we use, but rather feeling is. We feel or intuit our way along like a blind person might feel their way along a corridor. We could almost call it a "second sight," another very useful way to negotiate time and this world.

Is this what psychics do? I have no idea, since I have never thought of myself as a psychic or able to see the future other than logically, like the old 'bones' song goes where "The head bone is connected to the neck bone," and so on. Nevertheless, I have come to depend on what I call "second sight," my ability to intuit or sense directionality or trends.

And I try to cultivate this sensitivity too. Like the old movies where the safe-cracker lightly sand their finger-pads to feel the tumblers click, I do my best to keep my mind open and not just my eyes. This approach helps me to make decisions that are so deep-down that I can't just think them out logically. However, if I am patient, wait, and let the answers arise naturally from within myself, and then perhaps wait some more, the right signs or answer will surface and be readable by me. I then trust and follow or at least be aware of that.

Yes, I know some of the Asian mudras and find they are elegant and meaningful, but on a day-to-day basis I am more skilled at reading my own mind and thus feeling farther into the future than I otherwise could.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Humpty-Dumpty

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ef5b1481-d089-44e2-8756-dedbc047501_759x960.jpeg

Now we have to talk about Humpty-Dumpty, familiar to us all. “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;

All the king's horses and all the king's men Couldn't put Humpty together again.”

No one's immune from change and there is sudden change at that. It's like on my elliptical machine, when there is no resistance; life just turns the intensity level up. It's a sure cure for getting too glib. Like the ancient mariner, we wrench the helm from fate and try to find safe passage through the narrows. Perhaps if we relaxed this would all be done for us naturally. LOL.

The Self is a very precarious fabrication, certainly a house of cards. The Buddhists endlessly articulate that there is no permanently existent Self. They don't say there is no Self, because of course there is. What they do say is that there is no eternal Self or soul, no unchanging existent that is called “Me, myself, and I.” As we say, the only constant is change.

The self is basically the sum-total of all our attachments and fixations, positively, negatively, or neutral. Or, as I like to say to myself, my attachments are the glue that holds the Self together.

And the crash and burn of the Self is as near as the hour's heartbreak, a death in the family, or a crushing blow. The Self is easily devastated, all those attachments broken and detached, and our coherency is wiped clean in a nanosecond. The self is an assemblage that easily shatters into a million pieces. And once shattered, it takes hours, days, months, or in some cases years to recover. This is true.

And while we struggle to stabilize the Self, it does not occur to us that perhaps the most valuable experience is with our Self blasted to smithereens, blown wide open, with no cover and total vulnerability. Yes, the Self re-animates itself, pulling itself back together from the undead until we feel secure, but by that point we are no longer sensitive to the quick and are snug in our

cryogenic sleep as we usually are. How often do we break out of the Self and are free?

And what does freedom hold for us?

EMAIL

The Pendulum

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Once again, I've come up with nothing, nada, with no sand running through the hourglass of the present moment in terms of an urge to write.

This happens and it is a cycle and cyclic, coming up empty, with nothing to say and no interest in saying it.

A lot of attention lately has been given to health concerns and fixing those. And while I love philosophy or more exactly phenomenology, everything turns over or flips. When the pendulum swings, there is movement except very briefly when the pendulum reaches the extreme end points of its swing. I seem to be there now, at one of those ends.

I used to get rather or even quite upset when the pendulum swing reaches its stations, but now, not so much. I don't try to fight the inevitable as I once did.

And the 'inevitable' now is when the well runs dry and there is no water in it. There is no water in the well at present, so I must be at one of those turnaround points where all motion stops as everything reverses itself.

There is nothing to do but wait for it all to start up again.

Meanwhile, some kidney stones, two stones too large to eliminate, but apparently one smaller one took weeks to pass and it was very painful.

[Graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Moving in Place

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Instead of staying home, events conspired to send us to the northern tip of Michigan, just west of Mackinaw City and the Mackinac Bridge. We went up to hear our daughter May Erlewine and her guitarist Packy Lundholm play Saturday afternoon at the Blissfest Music Festival some 191 miles from where we live. That indeed sounds lucky, but what we did not know is that fierce rainstorms were predicted and actually took place.

We stayed in a little Airbnb just north of Harbor Springs. And yes, it rained from the middle of the night until dawn, and in the early morning we drove 17 miles north, taking rain soaked roads almost near flooding, but passable.

And then, once at the festival we had to be confined to our car, for the most part, for some time. The rain continued strong and to make that worse, we were in thunderstorms and lighting. What this meant was that all of the many tents, very large tents, smaller tents and all of the tents of food vendors and other vendors were unsafe. So, all of those who could crowded into what few wooden buildings there were, and they were few.

Crowded together was hot, humid, packed in a box. We had to wear masks, but soon left there for the shelter of our car. And walking in the now deepening mud meant trying to find the edge of the mud where there was a little grass and walking there. Basically, it was mud.

Eventually and finally, the thunderstorm passed to stage 3 and we were allowed expand into the large tents again. Of course I got saturated enough to get soaked, at least from the waist down. I did have waterproof a jacket the helped, but not always and not so much.

And so, eventually, there was no rain and things turned into almost a normal day, however subject to bands of rain that appeared suddenly, poured down, and were gone in ten minutes later.

My daughter May's set was at 4:15, when she and her accompanist guitarist Packy Lundholm played. The huge tent was jampacked and the overflow stretched out all sides into the grassy areas.

I was lucky enough to be given a chair at the edge of stage-back, where I could do some photographing. The set was wonderful and greatly received by the huge audience. It was magical, no doubt. However, I want to share something else that took place later as evening came on.

As it turned out, after May's set, came a set by another Michigan singer/songwriter Lindsay Lou, and after that a set by more friends "The Mammals," and finally another dear friend "Luke Winslow King w/Roberto Luti" was setting up. What that meant for us was that the evening not only stretched into the twilight, but recurring bands of rain drove more and more musicians we know into a small barn at the edge of the large tent, and then still other performers we know showed up, until the small space was packed tight.

Now, by that time I had been on my feet since around 7 AM or so and properly tired, but driven on by all the folks I knew, all of us packed into every inch of that barn and with equipment moving into and through the space because that was the avenue that any of act performing in the large tent had to come through, each require space, setup time, and the like.

And all of the above, being tired, packed in, and too often having to stand rather than sit, conspired to project me into the following state of mind.

All of these musicians, and often members of their family, came from not only recent times, but stretched back some 15 to 20 years. And suddenly here we all were, to the right of me, the left, and every other direction. They were like portals in time through which I peered, they smiled, waved, tried to say hello and me to them. It became almost surreal.

It was very much like a waking dream, musical fireflies flicking in the light of the barn, while all of the time the river of instruments for various acts flowed through to the main stage, and then back when that act was over, while the next act was setting up all around us.

What did it mean for me? It was indeed like a cacophony of sound, punctuated with connecting with people I have know for decades right there, yet at a distance because of the crowded place and the intervening bodies of others between whomever I was trying to acknowledge or they me.

Yet, all this was strangely comforting, a sense of confirmation of my place and part withing this hive of music people. Also, some musicians I did not know as

well as I might, yet a sense of peace and community with them also. We were without a doubt all part of one tribe, folks who perhaps only see one another at various music festivals or concerts.

The sense for me was, although not frequently together or with some, seldom together at all, we were one family or clan, nevertheless. And I felt an equal part of that whole tribe. Something within me came to rest because of that sense of togetherness.

We did some other interesting bits of travel which I will try to detail as I am able.

[Photos by me of May Erlewine and Packy Lundholm.]

EMAIL

It's All Good!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 22, 2025

The insight here is that the mundane and ordinary are also sacred and that nothing is that different, and positing the difference itself is at best meaningless, a miss-take. The Zen Buddhists point this out. Or, as we say, "It's all good."

As for me, I keep ending up with the inside turning itself inside-out, and it is said that such inversion nurtures the soil of life. Either way, I keep finding myself leveling off on a vast level plain where everything is equal, the same. Everything ends up here. It's all one.

And where is here? Here is where we are this moment.

"Don't differentiate" is the theme. Don't bother with that. Walk it back without effort if you can or just let it lapse on its own. Get beyond the great divide of duality and dividing. It's what all dharma practice points to. One taste.

There is no difference out there worth remembering. Take everything to the path, good, bad, and indifferent.

And it's not about loving the mundane or common for its own sake. That would be just another mistake. It's about not taking notes at all, not keeping track. Voyeurism. Duality. Don't be the great divider. Let that go. Give up on that because it's divisive, just another bad habit.

In other words, we have to bend it the other way for it to come out straight. As the Bible says, "Straight is the gate and narrow the way." And deification is still deification. The same with reification.

The end of the special is the common, the ordinary. It's all special or it's all common. Today the uncommon is also quite common, perhaps all too common. It's all the same.

Ultimately, there is no difference, no place to go, no way to get there, and no one is going.

To recap, what do we do when we are no longer special? Are we free to go (and to where) when we have picked the special out of us?

For that matter, what's special got to do with it? It's not a badge of honor, but just something else to do something about, to not focus on.

What's special about commonness? Specialness is not common, which is why it is special. When special becomes common, everything and everyone is special, and commonness itself also becomes special. The dualistic in us fears immersion.

That's the state of the world today, everything and everyone is special, leaving no room for what we have in common, our commonness. As mentioned, commonness becomes special, looked up to, and to be longed for.

Asleep, awake, by night or day, specialness has become common and commonness special. That's how turned around we are. The thirst for special has become common, and commonness very special. To be unadorned, not pointed out, is a freedom now quite rare.

Everything is flipped on its head. Go figure!

It's All Good.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Turn of the Screw

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Life is always upping the ante on me, raising the bar. I just get kind of comfortable delivering to myself my own thoughts, sensing I'm on the right course, and a bit of chaos comes along, upsets the appplecart, and scrambles the parameters all over again. And after the smoke clears and the fallout falls out, I find a new set of parameters in place, and they are always more strict, yet somehow also very authentic.

The turn of the screw.

I cannot disagree with the new requirements of this change and although they are more unforgiving, at the same time, they also are more integral. And integral is an offer I can't refuse; I am always game for the authentic. What is authentic?

If I can adjust and get used to the new rules, the raising of the bar, I come out of it a better kind of me, and that's a good thing.

The cost is some kind of re-tooling on my part, being more realistic, more true, and exploring the rules of the new 'me', so to speak.

Yet, when it all calms down and becomes normal again, I find that I am good to go, better than I was, more actually present, so who can complain?

I'm going through one of those times now, in the middle of all the current chaos in the world, the wars, the politics, the Covid, and on and on. It's disorienting by definition, of course.

This amounts to realizing the uselessness, the ineffectualness, of my current view and state of mind; just by seeing 'that' is enough to pop the balloon I have been in, and shrink me down to a more efficient Self-size-, if you follow me.

Of course, this is a comedown, a deflation, from being more puffed up, a reevaluation, and requires a back-to-the-drawing-board session. The teardown is painful, yet there is nothing to regret because it has been exposed by me as 'not authentic'. And even I agree that is not good, and so,

with no argument, I find myself rebuilding my house of cards, once again, hopefully on a more firm foundation.

There you have it, pretty well expressed, so there should be little doubt what I am talking about here.

This is the power of a realization.

Nothing more need be said. Once realized, reorganization follows automatically. No actual choice because with realization WE are the realizer. It doesn't get better or more direct than that. A realization, dharma or otherwise, is a direct experience. A realization is a taste of non-duality, and this gives us an idea of what non-dual meditation is all about. That.

So, color me caught in my own vice grip. I've been served, and by me. I have no choice but to follow through. Does this make any sense to you?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"American Graffiti" Incarnate

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 27, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cf7e1b3b-793b-4d0d-93e2-45c5a87281a1_1686x1222.jpeg

One of my FB friends and also a friend from Ann Arbor Pioneer High School back in the late 1950s, Eddie Ebach, who was and is a car enthusiast commented recently "I still meet daily with my car buddies, but a good portion of our conversation has vacillated from cars to health issues." Thanks Eddie.

That says a lot about the reality of aging, how it looms on the horizon and gradually takes over our attention. These years, for those of us who are elders, indeed, it is health issues.

Ann Arbor townies back in the late 1950s knew where to spend their weekend nights and often weekday afternoons too. It was just a short ride (2 miles) from the new Ann Arbor High School (built on Stadium Boulevard and Main in 1954) to the first Ann Arbor McDonalds drive-in at 2310 W. Stadium. This was when McDonalds was posting to its sign less than 100,000 burgers sold nationally or thereabouts. Today it is more like 250 billion.

On Friday and Saturday nights, carloads of teenagers (boys in one car, girls in another) would endlessly circle between Everett's Drive-In (2280 W. Stadium) and the A&W Drive-In (2405 W. Stadium), only a block or two apart, and then every third pass or so we would sweep down to McDonalds and back, to do it all over again. That's what we did.

All the hot cars, low to the ground, with their deep-voiced mufflers, would growl through the drive-ins, going around again and again all the way until all the drive-ins closed.

It was the movie "American Graffiti" in real life.

At the A&W Drive-In, cute carhops would shuttle back and forth hanging their trays of ice-cold root beer, Fries, Onion-Rings, and Coney dogs off your windows. We would park next to our friends and carry on or jump out and move around the parking lot, getting in or leaning-on the cars of those we knew.

Or if you were lucky enough to have a steady girl you would circle around showing her off, but that was less common. Most of us didn't have anyone, which is why we were there in the first place.

And on some nights, we would exit the drive-ins almost enmasse and convoy out Liberty Street to Zeeb Road where we would race the fastest cars against one another for a quarter mile. Dozens of cars would be parked along the road. My friend Doug (Fontaine) Brown would get his dad's Studebaker Golden Hawk and that thing could do 150 mph. Eddie Ebah, if I remember, had a white 1960 Pontiac Bonneville convertible or something like that.

And if you were cool, perhaps you were part of a hotrod club. I was trying to be cool. I belonged to a car club called "The Tachs." I no longer know where my metal plate is that once dangled from my rear bumper of my 1951 Ford Victoria Coupe, with a dark green body and a cream top. I include some photos of that model.

As mentioned, this was exactly the reality of the movie "American Graffiti.

EMAIL

The Monarch of Butterflies

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e38ae965-788d-46e1-99de-7c24a99c090d_2048x1825.jpeg

Our garden this year is prime for the Monarch butterfly because we have a large amount of Milkweed growing all over. Here is a Monarch chrysalis that is hanging by our side door. I saw the Monarch caterpillar hanging there and two hours or so later, there was this chrysalis, probably the most beautiful of all such examples, and I have seen a lot of butterflies in my life. I used to study them.

And the chrysalis lives up to the name 'monarch'. Just look at it.

Elegant indeed.

[Photos by me. The Monarch chrysalis on the left, the caterpillar top right, and the Monarch butterfly on the bottom right.]

EMAIL

Nothing Is Something

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/97a85f7f-f62f-469d-b0b5-c7967ecb94ca_1024x1024.jpeg

[This short blog is not just use ‘high’ language, but to say as clearly as possible what can be helpful, useful if taken in.]

I’m talking about thinking and thought at the expense of feelings and felt, about little actual experience lived, and not getting down into the body and feeling it out.

Whole societies and perhaps civilizations have died out, from the top down, by ignoring their own roots and diversity.

Mistaking ideas and concepts for actual living instead of a life lived and felt. In today’s modern world, a satisfied life is seldom known, and actual experience is not even an agenda much less on the menu.

In other words, we think ourselves to death. As for a life, it’s just incomplete, not ever real, a hologram that the wind blows through, in and out both ends.

‘Understanding’ is not experience, and ‘experience’ is not realization. So, start where you are, but where are you? Search that out. Carpe diem!

Just because there is no “Soul,” no permanent existence that spans lifetimes, does not mean that nothing is not something.

The mind that is empty is also viscous and not empty like an empty jar. It’s empty of something, not empty of nothing. And just because something is nothing does not mean that nothing is not something. Knowing nothing is something.

Mahasiddhas know this.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

For Back Pain, A Solution

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

July 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/82b1e716-ef95-489e-b10e-576a2cec37ec_1024x1024.jpeg

As some of you may know, I have been struggling with serious back pain since the spring of 2025 and before. That coupled with a TIA has kept me busy shuttling in and out of the hospital and doctors' offices for what seem like endless tests.

If I detail this whole problem, it will take a small book, so I will confine myself to what's come out of all this. Well, it took a couple of CT-Scans to find out that I have two kidney stones, both too large to be passed out of my body, so there they sit accumulating, trapped as they are in my right kidney. They don't appear to be obstructing anything. However, some smaller stones or something seems to be causing my pain, or so I thought.

Overall, my kidneys appear to be functioning well, and this after about every kind of test out there. So, what's the problem? What's causing the pain?

Well, I'm still waiting for an appointment to have all of these tests explained to me. It's hard to get any doctor appointments in these times. Meanwhile, ChatGPT and GROK have explained in very adequate detail what my results contain. I just feed my results into GROK and out comes understandable details.

While I am waiting for doctors, I believe (I think) that I have figured out for myself what my overall problem is, which I will explain here. These days we have to be our own doctor, almost.

In a word, my problem is 'dehydration', and for me this goes back a long way. As an entrepreneur, I have been creating and running businesses since 1972, over 50 years. And all of them have had me running them, and apparently all that time I have not been drinking enough water. I never thought about it much. Too busy.

However, I kind of figured this out for myself while waiting these many weeks for my doctor appointments. Some don't come up until October. Anyway, I have long noticed that sometimes when I pee, either only little comes out or it is dark yellow and even orange. Not a good sign except to drink more liquid, in my case water. I don't drink anything else except on occasion some juice.

As it turns out, although drinking less liquids was OK when I was younger, with age it is not. And so, lately I made it a point of drinking much more water, including having a YETI bottle with a sip-straw. The straw is much wider than average. Because of that, I can sip more water in a moment and that extra quantity makes hydrating much easier.

The YETI 'Rambler' is what I am using, 25 or 35 ounce size. Anyway, the upshot is that by constantly sipping and thus always hydrating, most of my back pain vanished. The doctors may have something to say about it, whenever I can reach them, yet I cannot imagine what it would be. My pain is gone!

Dehydration occurs when our body loses more fluids than it takes in, leading to concentrated urine (like the yellow-to-orange color I described) and reduced urine output. This isn't just about thirst—it can strain multiple systems in the body, including those that can manifest as back pain. For example:

- **Impact on Spinal Discs and Joints :** Our spinal discs act like cushions between vertebrae and are made up of about 70-80% water. When dehydrated, these discs lose fluid, becoming thinner, less flexible, and more prone to compression. This can cause stiffness, inflammation, or pain in the lower back, as the discs struggle to absorb shock during daily activities. Chronic dehydration over time can accelerate disc degeneration, which might not have been symptomatic earlier in life but could become noticeable now.

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- **Muscle Cramps and Weakness :** Dehydration disrupts electrolyte balance (like sodium and potassium), leading to muscle cramps, spasms, or general weakness. In the lower back, this can feel like persistent pain, especially on one side if it's affecting muscles around the kidneys or spine. Older adults are more susceptible because muscle mass naturally decreases with age, and dehydration exacerbates this. I have some electrolyte capsules that work very well: "Salt-Stick Electrolyte Caps." Runners use them, taking them every mile or so. I just take them when I feel myself slipping into a dehydration cycle.

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- **Kidney-Related Effects :** Our kidneys filter waste and regulate fluids, but dehydration makes them work harder. This can cause "kidney pain," which is often felt in the lower back (flank area) on the affected side—in my case, the right side where my stones are. Even if tests show normal kidney function overall, mild or chronic dehydration can irritate the kidneys without causing full-blown damage. Dehydration is a known risk factor for kidney stones

(which form from concentrated urine), and while your doctor says the stones aren't problematic, ongoing low hydration could have been aggravating the area subtly. In severe cases, repeated dehydration can contribute to urinary tract infections or temporary kidney strain, both of which might radiate as back pain.

I mentioned being "kind of dehydrated for decades," which aligns with many people's habits (busy lifestyles leading to infrequent drinking). However, as we age, the body becomes less resilient to dehydration for several reasons:

- **Reduced Thirst Sensation** : Older adults often don't feel thirsty as strongly, so dehydration can sneak up without obvious warnings.

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- **Declining Kidney Efficiency** : Kidney function naturally decreases with age (even if tests show "normal" for your age group), making it harder to concentrate urine or retain fluids. This means what was tolerable in our younger years might now tip into symptomatic territory, like pain or concentrated urine.

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- **Overall Vulnerability** : At 84, factors like medications, reduced mobility, or even subtle changes in metabolism can amplify dehydration's effects. Studies show that elderly individuals are at higher risk for dehydration-related issues, including musculoskeletal pain, kidney problems, and even falls due to weakness.

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In short, it seems that my body might have "reached a point" where it can't compensate as well, turning a long-term habit into a painful issue.

Absolutely—this is one of the strongest pieces of evidence in favor of my diagnosis. By sipping water regularly (every 15 minutes from a thermos), I've addressed the root cause directly:

- Rehydrating restores fluid to spinal discs, muscles, and joints, reducing inflammation and improving cushioning.

-

- It dilutes urine, easing kidney strain and potentially preventing further stone issues.

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- Many people report quick relief from dehydration-related back pain once they boost water intake, as it replenishes electrolytes and supports overall tissue health.

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My experience matches reports where proper hydration alleviates symptoms like mine, often within days or weeks. For me it was days, like the next day. It's been about a week since I started hydrating incrementally and I have no more back or flank pain. Amazing!

General guidelines suggest about 8-10 cups (64-80 ounces) daily for men my age, and sipping throughout the day is ideal to avoid overwhelming my bladder.

So, there you have it, my diagnosis and the solution, which also is a solution -- Water. Probably more than you want to know, but I try to blog on what is happening to me, and this has been a major pain for many months.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Fading of the Light

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ee5adf8d-7c88-40a6-8b1d-f8fdab4adf43_1024x1024.jpeg

It is already past Summer Solstice, so for me ‘Summer’ is turning into a race to Autumn. I can feel it. The light is already starting to fall. Along with this, our plans for this summer are being cut back because we have too much going on.

We’ve got weddings, parties, family to see, and what-not. This is not to mention that our favorite pastime is driving Michigan’s backroads and enjoying the foliage and view. We sure want to do that.

And two things have slowed us down, one is the fires and smoke from Canada, the air index that prevents us from going outside, and the other, dual health problems with both Margaret and myself. That’s taken a lot of time, hospital, tests, and endless doctor appointments, etc.

Even so, it’s all good because with us even a little ‘getting-out’ is a lot. We struggle against the coming of winter and the many months indoors, plus in winter, with guests, we will have to wear Covid masks, while in the warm months we all sit outside with one another.

So that’s about the size of it for this summer, what’s happening externally.

INTERNAL

Internally is another story and more subtle. It reminds me of gently tearing out a perforated coupon from a very thin paper brochure, an almost noiseless and vaguely enjoyable detachment from, well, whatever I’m attached to. Or this reminds me of the Neil Young album “Rust Never Sleeps,” as I almost subconsciously gradually tear myself away from the past, my old loves and habits.

And all this internal processing goes on without my saying so, or perhaps I said so many years and dharma practices ago. Either way, it is happening, and I am just barely aware of it. It will take some time and distance before it becomes obvious enough to me that I react by making some adjustment or offering here a clear observation.

Even so, eventually, nothing is ever lost. Time moves on, and major events are nestled in all of the more subtle ones, like candy in a box.

As my readers know, I can tune into this more subtle life and riff on it, which I am doing here, but just for a moment. However, of late I am for the most part just surfing the outer events and letting what's underneath it all roil on as it will.

Whether this internal change is Atlantis rising or just mist in the fog of the mind floated on these warm summer nights, I can't say. It is a blessing that summer comes at all.

Here is a tune from 1993 by my friend James McCarty, the drummer for the Yardbirds, who came out in the early 90s with an incredible album, "Out of the Dark." Here is a pre-release video that expresses the inexpressible.

James McCarty "Out of the Dark"

And here is the whole album of "Out of the Dark," for those who can or want to remember the feeling of the 1960s:

James McCarty "Out of the Dark"

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Helping You Help Me

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ed5138f9-1fc6-4638-a6ff-566ec182ed2c_1024x1024.jpeg

[Sorry, this is a bit of a rant.]

As we get older, it is easy to get more conservative, perhaps not politically, but certainly in every other way. I spend a lot of my time these days struggling to keep things as they are, aligned and in line, an attempt to preserve the status quo, which obviously is a fool's errand. It's like trying to get fish to school or herding ducks. This is why the conservative view is constantly changing and not static. Keeping things the way they are just cannot hold. As they say, "Change is the only constant."

My cellphone, Apple Watch, computers, various websites, etc. are in constant turmoil, with each unwanted event requiring me to be on the phone sometime for hours or on occasion a couple days, trying to sort out the account names, passwords, permissions, usernames, contracts, plan duration, and what-not. And this goes on almost constantly. I don't remember having to do this when I was younger, spend this kind of time waiting on hold for hours at a time, endlessly.

And I especially don't like companies who sell me stuff and then farm out support to a foreign country with operators that barely speak English and know only how to offer support line-by-line from a computer prompter. Too often I cannot understand what they are saying and end up demanding to speak to their superiors until I find someone that I can actually understand and (even more rare) who understands the problem.

As for my bedside manner, I've tried everything: correcting them, complaining, haranguing, resigning myself to them, being as kind as possible, making friends, etc. Nothing works every time. Being kind and working with them is the best solution, helping them help me.

And let's not forget, then there is receiving a purchase that I have to return, and trying to put the item back into the original packaging it came in. It's like putting toothpaste back in a tube. It is almost impossible, like trying to herd ducks.

End of rant.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Zachary and Sarah Ray Celebration

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1ed635fc-c4b7-4595-848e-9fc401c330ba_1887x2048.jpeg

Yesterday Margaret and I drove slowly by backroads across the state to the shore of Lake Michigan for the formal celebration (and recommittal) of the marriage of Zachary and Sarah Ray, and event bringing the extended families of both partners together for an evening of togetherness, complete with food, dancing, and the works – a real celebration. .

I married these two at the final Harvest Gathering in 2024, but back then it was totally impromptu and in front of a large audience. Yesterday was an opportunity for a recommittal with both families present. We had a great time and stayed, of course, until after dark, finding our way home across the state, getting home around midnight.

Zachary is part of our family and we have known him for many years.

Congratulations Zachary and Sarah!

[Photo by me.]

The Heart of the Matter

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/69a30c64-67a2-4cee-a5ee-eedd891c8ea1_1024x1024.jpeg

It's like the swing of the pendulum, how my moods and outlook change like the weather. I chalk it up to Samsara. I am happy writing blogs like these one day, and the next everything I am writing and thinking seems stale. I am used to this, so the self-critical moments are not a time to panic, but rather a time to be aware, to take stock, see what's behind the staleness, and perhaps what could be emerging through it. At least, that's the idea. After all, what is staleness?

For me, those self-reflective times are when I am beside myself, and I feel separated from my own present moment by some distance, certainly some kind of duality is present. Does it mean I am not being distracted or entertained as I usually am? Perhaps. Whatever the case, I am not satisfied with things as they are with me but find myself shunt off to the side, somehow taking a critical stance, caught up in and aware of an obvious duality between the entertained me and the critical me. Is this to be avoided, and how? Or is this a door to the future that just opened?

The main difference is that I am not caught up or satisfied as I apparently was just days ago. Yet, nothing much has changed. The air-index is still bad, finding something I want and can eat remains a problem, and right on down the line. The only real difference is that I'm not going along side-by-side with my Self, approving and supporting, but instead find myself disassociated by some edge or gap and in a critical mode. Whatever is the case, I'm no longer in the groove but somehow have popped out and feel naked from the exposure. Suddenly, I am on the outside looking in at my Self, the 'Me, Myself, and I'.

What caused this? As mentioned, is the bad air-index putting me off center? Am I no longer entertained? Certainly, there is almost nothing I feel like watching on the streaming media. And yet writing and my complete forward trajectory seem dated. I'm somehow missing the point, whatever that is.

And the 'point' seems to be those normal times when there is no gap in the present moment between what I am experiencing and my take on it, when the two are tandem and on the same page. The two were one, united, and now there is a gap between reality and my view of myself from somewhere

off to the side, slightly out of joint, misplaced, or is it perhaps that a doorway is ajar. I'm beside myself instead of with myself.

It's better for my peace of mind if the two are one and fitting like a glove, rather than having any room for criticism, especially when at those times I'm very much my own critic. Which is authentic?

How did I manage to fall out of synch and get disjointed, un-enjoined?

Is it better if I just go back to bed and sleep some more, cast myself again into the river of Lethe and go with the flow until I come back up united and in one piece?

When I went to bed the night before, I was not beside myself or edgy. I was on a roll. My self and my critic were united. I liked myself. And yet I wake up disparate, separated into two halves, me and the critic of me. Now for some evaluation.

It's a real dilemma, whether it is better for me to just keep humming along as if I'm going somewhere or take this recurring division into two parts as a sign of its necessity and do something with it.

It's not like I have any choice. If I've lost my groove, it's not like I can just snap myself back into non-divergence. Instead, I have to start over getting myself back together and back in a groove.

The big question and the one that won't go away: is life in a groove, when I'm fully entertained, a good life, or is it just me whistling in the dark? Or is life divergent, where I am at loose ends with myself, a crack in Samsara, painful, but perhaps an opportunity to get more in touch with myself? Which is it? Both.

There is a certain shock value when I wake up and find myself being critical of myself. That divergence or duality obviously has to be merged until I am once again united and in a groove. Or is this oscillation back and forth between duality and non-duality itself the basic process of life without which life is not possible.

My intuition and guess are that the oscillation, altering back and forth between unity and divergence, is the truth and the natural process of life. It's like a giant heart beating, opening and closing, opening and closing, pumping me forward through time. Any thoughts?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Shore of a Great Lake

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/150b7f18-ecef-4b93-ba45-e0e0b3b1e651_1536x2048.jpeg

A couple days ago, we travelled early in the day to the shore of Lake Michigan, one of the Great Lakes which surround us here. The Great Lakes contain some 21% of all the fresh water in the world and about 80% of all the fresh water in North America.

We did a little trekking along the shoreline that vanished far to the right and left of us, mostly walked by Margaret. And then for about five hours we did nothing but sit and look out at the lake. I include a few photos of what we saw.

There is something about the Great Lakes that, like the ocean, are an end in themselves, just there to be soaked up by our vision while we are sitting there, empty of everything else.

There was a nice breeze which kept us from getting overheated as we walked there in the sand or sat in our car with windows open (breeze blowing) staring out at the lake at the tall sailboats and other craft.

And there really were not all that many thoughts about anything at all. No need for thinking. The hours just slipped by, the small waves sparkled in the sunlight, the seagulls cried, and somewhere from deep inside I felt a sigh.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

I think it's Lemonade

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

August 10, 2025

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1731211154426443>

"And It's Hot Too!"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 12, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5ea42195-f7fd-4a48-b817-2c6c9228f67c_2048x1367.jpeg

It's three-o'clock in the morning and I am, as usual, awake. It was over 90 degrees out yesterday and it's 75-degrees outside now and in my little office it is still 87-degrees with humidity at 63%, which I am measuring with a meat thermometer. We have no air-conditioning and don't often need it. We use fans for cooling.

What do days of 90-degree weather do to a body? My inside body temperature accumulates heat over time, like after several days of high temperatures and the heat has to be brought down. I do this by drinking plenty of water with ice cubes in it and taking electrolyte capsules. Still after several days of 90-degree weather the internal heat builds up and my body does not like it.

I know that it will end all too soon, and that it will grow cold out here in Northern Michigan, and these heat-filled days will be missed.

I am in the habit of monitoring this present moment, which always is right there and is known to me these days from the heat inside out. I'm a walking laboratory, and I carry it with me everywhere.

What do I think and what am I thinking? I would say I am not thinking all that much. Part of me is kind of disembodied, floating around, taking all this in, and sending out feelers that seem to me like summer heat-lightning at a distance.

My office fan here is at higher speed and loud, bathing me in a rush of warm air that is almost cooling. Almost.

Going back to sleep as an escape that is always open to me and I am thinking about it. Remaining awake offers a surreal sense of space and time, as if I am suspended like a living thermometer in space.

The exigencies of all this current reality hammer at me incessantly, much like rain on a tin roof, and I can't hear because of the din of sound that is not even there. Heat accumulating.

Should I wander out to the kitchen to see if there is something I can eat that is not too awkward and will set me to sleep. Or should I lay down on the couch here and sleep if I can and with no attempt to find food. Anyway, I can't think of any food that would be appropriate at this time of night. I should probably just fold up my tent, hit the couch, and see if I can sleep.

And by that sleep, put off all this nothing-much until later, like after the break of day.

However, before I do that, I probably need to take some steps to cool off my insides. I put some ice cubes, concord grape juice, and a can of LeCroix pure water in a Yeti Rambler Thermos and am drinking that. Also, I ate some light food. Next, I will try to sleep some more.

Still not thinking of much of anything. Sleep? I'm looking at that and probably will soon lie down here on my office couch. The weather report says another 90-degree day coming up and more later. Aside from the wear and tear on my body, I love hot weather.

I'm back and it is now later that afternoon and the temperature is in the 90s. Aside from that it just is all-around hot, and the air is so thick you could cut it with a knife. It's hard to breathe. I can't get cool enough. I just ate a third of a pint of sorbet, while usually I only have a teaspoon or so. There is something about sweets and very hot weather. My system seems to absorb sweets in the heat which otherwise can make me ill. Right now, the sweets do not phase me.

And so much for tonight. It's time I tune out.

[Photo by me of a sunrise.]

EMAIL

Then and Now

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 12, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/092aeb79-298f-4779-a084-e4c5b5a0f643_1024x1024.jpeg

Just words, yet words that reach me nevertheless and penetrate. Then is ‘then’, where I came from and ‘Now’ seems to be the door to where I’m going.

No doubt that as an aging person, part of me wants to get into the past out of which I came and relive the memories of how it was back then. That’s pretty natural, I believe.

The ‘Now’ (this present moment) is more troublesome because it has to be negotiated on the spot and in the present. As I age, there are so many deflating minor events not to mention a continuing awareness of how my body is letting me down, that it is difficult not to jump to the conclusion that, well, this is the conclusion of life, because it is.

As the great economist Kenneth Boulding told me in a time we spent together, reading each other our poems.

“Michael, we have to learn to fail successfully,” he said.

Well yes, even back then, when I was just a young man, I got his point and have never forgotten those words or what they mean to me. “We have to learn to fail successfully.” We do, and I’m living proof of someone who is trying to do just that.

However, “Trying” is the right word because it is very ‘trying’ to fail successfully while all around me events conspire to point otherwise, causing me to jump to the logical conclusion of simply exiting this world, and forget about successfully.

And it doesn’t kind of sneak up on you as much as it feels like a highway or thruway over which a torrent of untoward events is rushing forward like water overpouring a dam. It’s all I do to handle that.

Please don’t confusion an observation with a complaint. This is an observation.

I am caught up in endless scheduling of doctor visits, pill consumption, caretaking, and not getting away with what I used to be able to get away with. I am forced to downscale everything.

Anyway, it is increasingly difficult not to be drawn into the river of events that beckon me yonder, toward where less is not just more, but less is all there is.

What I am trying to say here is that I am gradually being overwhelmed with trying to control the stream of flags, cautions, and full stops that pour over the horizon and onto the plain of my existence, things I have to note and take into account. And I am not naturally an accountant.

It's not a case of as the poet Dylan Thomas said:

"Do not go gentle into that good night,

Old age should burn and rave at close of day;

Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

Well sure, I read those words decades and decades ago, and I certainly took in the message. Yet, that's just what I am trying not to do.

How much better are those words of Kenneth Boulding, that we can learn to fail successfully. Of course, that's what I intend or want to do, not just to cooperate and go quietly, but rather to succeed and go successfully.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Story of Erlewine Plants

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 13, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5ff52675-6ef2-4e93-8b93-db400c0a0ae3_389x389.jpeg

There is no doubt I love flowers and green plants, just look at what I photograph. Did I ever tell you about when I went into the green plant business and ended up managing greenhouses in Florida with 19,000 Square feet of glass? Well, that happened. I will try to make this brief, yet I am seldom brief.

I met my wife-to-be Margaret in March of 1971. We were together from the first day we met and were married about three months later on July 3rd. Being impulsive romantically, I ended up proposing to Margaret in the alley behind the Fifth Forum Theater in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We were coming out the back door after watching a movie. I wonder what that movie was? I am sure Margaret will remember. I don't stand on ceremony.

I act a lot on intuition and insight and have learned to do what my mind tells me to do more and more of the time. Anyway, never paying much attention to persons or place, that was the instant when I was moved to ask Margaret to marry me. I had no plan, no ring, no magic place or atmospherics, just that moment in the night in the alley. It was perfect!

She said yes and here we are almost 55 years later. But that's not the story I am trying to tell here. Margaret and I lived at 114 N. Division in Ann Arbor Michigan, in what was called at the time the "Prime Mover House," because that was the name of my band, and most of the members used to live there.

Anyway, I had one room and a second very narrow entry-way room that was crammed with books from floor to ceiling, and so on. For some reason, around that time I began to collect potted plants. Before even I knew it, every inch of window space, every little bit of light, was crammed with shelves of plants. Plants were everywhere. And I was studying them. I don't know why, except that I like plants. They breathe.

This was a sign of something, but what? Well, the “what” was an abandoned broken-down greenhouse in Evart, a town in northern Michigan. For some crazy reason I wanted to have that greenhouse, so after what amounts to a lifetime in Ann Arbor, I resolved to leave Ann Arbor and move 180 miles up north, restore, and run that greenhouse complex.

Of course I had no money. So, I decided to sell everything I owned, a vast amount of books and an enormous number of records, about 40 feet of vinyl. Margaret told me later that she wanted to stay in Ann Arbor and enjoy the little mandala I had created there, but I did not know that at the time.

And so, Margaret and I left Ann Arbor, just moved out, and found ourselves in a tiny dark apartment in Evart, Michigan that was part of the greenhouses. And it was all run-down. None of the three greenhouses were working and they were attached to a little store, above which was the tiny apartment where we lived. I mean tiny.

And it was a wee bit spooky at night. There were lots of long dark hallways, abandoned stuff, and, of course, the boiler room, the scariest place of all. The boiler room in the basement contained a huge boiler that was the size of the front of a locomotive, and it produced steam enough to power all the greenhouses and whatever else was attached.

Well, this boiler had a life of its own. I kind of had to sneak up on it to even get nearby. And there it was, with its flashes of flickering flames in the dark, hissing and moaning like some great beast. And I had to treat it nice, turning on this valve just so, letting water in of a certain amount and, most of all, watching the pressure indicators to make sure that damn thing didn’t blow up.

Obviously, since winter was coming on, this huge beast was the heart of the greenhouse experience. It was already autumn when we took possession of the greenhouses, so it was a desperate race to close them up so they could be heated. There were broken glass panes everywhere and the putty had all gone out of the wood, so there I was, from morning to night, high in the rafters putting and replacing glass, working against time to seal the place.

And Margaret, brave soul that she is, was right in there helping. I remember one day coming into one of the greenhouses and there she was on a ladder, reaching up and struggling to clean the glass as suds and water rolled back down her arms, soaking her completely. There were tears running down her cheeks, but Margaret was hell-bent to get that glass clean. And that is kind of how it was.

In the end, we only got one of the greenhouses closed in and running. Winter was already there, and I found myself on the road every day with a truck full of little tropical plants wholesaling them to flower shops across the state. I had sprayed the inside of my van with foam to keep the plants warm and on the sides of the white van, in dark green paint, it read "Erlewine Plants."

This story is already too long, so I will skip the part for now about where we lost everything and I ended up being hired to run large greenhouses in Apopka, Florida, the tropical-plant center of the state. That is a whole other story, but I will leave this topic with one tale from up north. It is about that beast of a boiler.

One day I was on the road with my plants, probably ninety miles from our greenhouses when I received a call from Margaret to the effect that she had forgotten to turn off the water to the steam boiler and it had overflowed and now the basement boiler room was knee deep in water and who knows what the boiler was doing. Help! I got back home, driving as fast as I could drive and with the help of a local friend we waded into that dark hole.

With boilers and steam pipes, typically the wrenches needed were like 4-feet long and took two men to turn them. They weighed a lot. I will never forget struggling through that water and looking that fierce boiler in the eye. There were little red flames of fire flashing from its face. I had no idea if it was about to die or blow up. That's how much I knew about boilers, and this boiler was bigger than a car. We stabilized it.

And as if scrambling the greenhouses before winter was not enough, our two English Bull Terriers managed to get together (they are unstoppable) and suddenly we had a whole litter of puppies. It was cold out and the tiny apartment we lived in that was part of the greenhouses complex happened to be the only warm place. We raised those puppies in our kitchen. Please don't ask me for details. You wouldn't like them.

The greenhouses were hard work and the business end of things was all downhill. We produced a great product, but as it turned out the little flower shops across the state were afraid to give us the business and thumb their noses at the big conglomerates. And they were right!

We did not last long with no customers. I don't know if any of you have ever spent real time in a working greenhouse, especially in winter. It is warm, tropically moist, and filled with bright light and wonderful plants. Just going into it in the morning was a treat.

If only time could stop and I could stay among the plants in that tropical spell. But no, time moves on and, as our money ran out and no business appeared,

that happy place was doomed. About our only escape was driving that old van to my parent's house, some 30 miles away, for dinner every once in a while. There Margaret and I would be, a six-pack of the cheapest beer on the engine mount of the truck between us, popping those cans (I am ashamed to say), and driving into the sunset, happy to see my mom and pop. Those are real memories. And the greenhouses were real experience!

Also quite real, and more sobering were the times that infestations of whiteflies and other plant bugs caused us to have to bomb the entire greenhouse with poison gas. It was a little more complicated than that, because our apartment was part of the greenhouses and, with paper-thin walls, there was no guarantee that the very deadly gas would not just creep in and kill us as well as the bugs.

So, there we are again, driving into the sunset (probably with a beer in hand), but with two adult dogs and a complete litter of puppies along with us. God bless my mom for being so receptive! She allowed the whole bunch of us, puppies and all, to stay over until that deadly gas was inert. And she even fed us, like she always did!

The demise of the greenhouse project involved selling off all my stock to the big-plant boys, and eventually accepting a job from one of them managing, of all things, greenhouses. The only problem was that the job was in the greenhouse-capitol of the U.S., Apopka, Florida. So off we went to Florida, Margaret and myself, our two dogs, and what was left of the puppies, plus all our worldly belongings in a 1966 Dodge van.

We detoured through Nashville to drop off one of the puppies and then straight to Apopka. How different it was to be where it was warm, to walk through greenhouse after greenhouse (19,000 sq. ft. of glass) and see volunteer plants under the benches competing with their for-sale cousins in the beds above.

Florida is all about plants. I loved it, and knew all about soil mixes, and how to grow these little seedlings. But there was, as too often is the case, trouble in paradise. For one, there was the moldy house/cottage we had to live in. There is so much humidity in Florida that the inside walls of our home had mold, and the shower/bath and refrigerator were green scum beyond belief. I had to work the plants, so I am afraid this left my dear Margaret struggling to clean (with not enough help from me) that impossible-to-clean house, and she was a trooper. It took her a week of scrubbing just to get the mold out.

There was not even a window in the bathroom, so you can guess what that was like. It did have a large screened-in porch off the back that was like sitting

near the edge of a jungle. It probably was. About our only escape there was a little Italian restaurant down the road that let you bring in your own beer in a brown paper bag and drink it while you enjoyed their food. We would steal off there every once in a while, but not really that often. Too busy.

And they had a drive-in theater. I bet some of you younger folk reading this may have never even been to one. This one had all the trimmings. It was like a warm summer evening every night in Florida, and the drive-in was all grass like a carpet. We would bring whatever we wanted to drink and watch movies into the wee hours. Of course, we maybe had time for this once or twice. Again: too much work.

Meanwhile, back at the plant-ranch, things were not good. Oh yes, the plants grew great, and I loved the smell and feel of large greenhouses. How wonderful! But in such a fertile environment the plant bugs had total encouragement and just went wild. They could never be eradicated; even management of them was touch and go. And it took poison, of course, to even do that.

And the particular poison it took was Parathion, a very deadly poison that is cumulative, which means that every exposure to it adds up until one day you just keel over. Well, I knew how to manage that. What I could not manage was the Mexican workers who refused to understand that Parathion kills. They only too readily handled it and let the deadly white dust wedge itself in their belts, against their skin, and so on. No amount of explaining seemed to help.

And the management up north cared not a whit, no matter how many times I pointed out the danger. Simply put, they did not give a crap what happened to the workers. Well, I did and soon gave management an ultimatum. They either had to change the policy and educate the workers or I quit.

Well, it turns out I had to quit and before we knew it, Margaret, myself, our two dogs (and what was left of our puppies, plus all our stuff) were in the van again and heading back to Michigan in the dead of winter. We slowly drove back up through Georgia and the Southern states back to Michigan and Ann Arbor, the whole lot of us, including, as mentioned, our two dogs and what remained of the puppies.

We had nowhere to go. I had left my home of seven years and someone else was living in my rooms. I had given up my job at Circle Metaphysical Bookstore. I was kind of limping back to a home we did not have. Thank goodness that my old friend Jay Walker had an attic room that was free and that is where the whole lot of us landed, puppies and all. I don't need to tell

you what corralling a bunch of puppies and two adult dogs, plus ourselves, in one room was like. It was like what you think it was like. And it lasted until spring.

Oh well. That was the end of the plant business, but as it turned out, I was headed toward becoming a full-time astrologer once I found out that Margaret was pregnant. We were going to have a baby! But that is another story.

Today, some 50 years later, I am, as mentioned taking photos of tropical plants I favor. I include a photo here of our Night Blooming Cereus. This plant has had about ten or so blooms (each about a foot long) in the last week or so.

[Photo of the Night-blooming Cereus from the same plant by me, and other photos, most fading snapshots.]

EMAIL

Astrological Readings with Michael Erlewine

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/82d49ed9-cad2-48d6-80b2-bb050a31322a_1920x1499.jpeg

That's a photo of me working behind the counter in my blue corduroy Levi truckers' jacket at Circle Books Metaphysical bookshop in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This store was founded in 1968 by my brother Stephen Erlewine and his friend John Sullivan. I helped to design and build out the store with redwood, which was widely available back then.

I eventually did the astrological charts of for the shop, taught astrology at nights in the second room, and did astrological readings. I have been too busy to do astrological reading in these last years, but I made my living for many years doing just that.

However, I've decided that I like doing readings and I'm going to do at least 'some' readings again. For years I have been getting requests and I have been turning them down, but I'm ready to do at least a few sit-down readings for a while.

I will be doing them on Zoom and they last 1-1/2 to 2 hours. As you know I am a bit of a completist, I also record the whole session in video and send you two files, video-audio and also just audio.

For years I did these readings fulltime, and I have only gotten more knowledgeable, having worked in astrology now for over 60 years. I like talking with folks and showing them their charts.

In a current reading I look at both the Karma Chart (traditional geocentric natal) and the Dharma Chart (heliocentric chart of your tribe), plus Local Space (locality) and other charts as needed. Copies of these charts are sent to you.

I am on EST (Eastern Standard Time) and will do readings from, let's say, 10 AM to 3 PM, perhaps one a day, if I can.

If you are interested in having a reading with me, send me an email at Michael@Erlewine.net with a subject heading of "READINGS."

I will respond with a more complete description and full details. And then we will set up a time for a Zoom call. I do charge for this and it is not inexpensive, \$210 for two hours.

I am skilled at vocational questions, like what are you naturally good at, also skilled at looking at partners and couples, and as part of the fee, you can also include birth information on a partner as well. Also, relocation, Saturn Cycles, and the like.

If you want an astrological reading and session with me while I am able, just send me an email with the heading "READINGS" and I will respond with all the details.

[Photo of a younger me working behind the counter (in my blue corduroy Levi truckers' jacket) at Circle Books Metaphysical bookshop in Ann Arbor, Michigan.]

EMAIL

Illustration, Not Fine Art

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 19, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5a582560-b500-4d6b-8182-66cc992b0872_1024x1024.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7811dfab-a514-4c30-a682-3ae088a420dc_2048x1871.jpeg

I have long experience with tarot cards and their decks, although IMO all divination methods are just that, divination methods, and we each get to choose the one that fits our vibe best. I have created many sets of I-Ching decks, playing cards, Tibetan cards, Tibetan Sixty Year cards, wisdom cards, and many sets of astrology whole-chart patterns, seasonal cards, Vedic, Sabian Symbols, and others.

In the process, I have designed over 15,000 individual tarot-like cards, mostly everything related to astrology. And I did this through a series of years when I needed the routine of creating these various decks of cards. It was good for my 'soul'. I did not have the time or skills to do ornate cards, but instead I had to use various clip art in as artistic a way as I could.

I have been in love with graphics for as long as I can remember. I have been writing daily blogs here on Facebook since 2007 and illustrating them. And while illustration is an art, I don't consider illustrations 'fine art.' When AI graphics appeared some year ago, I immediately saw it as a way to illustrate my blogs and articles. There was a flurry of folks who took to Midjourney AI Graphics, mostly talking about fulfilling the artist in themselves and planning on being a great artist.

As mentioned, I never felt that way. I was just happy to have a way to make my own illustrations and stop licensing them from various vendors. It was not that licensing was so expensive as it was that for a given article, I could seldom find an illustration that had anything close to the vibe of the article I was writing. And I looked through many hundreds of thousands of images over the years, trying to find images to illustrate my blogs and essays. This was before AI graphics.

With AI graphics I soon learned to prompt AI illustrations that came quite close to properly assisting or reflecting what I was writing about. Meanwhile,

most of the original AI graphic ‘artist’ users, after maybe half a year, realized that what they were doing was not ‘fine art’, got bored, and dropped away. Most of their images were overly detailed pieces that soon became tiring, even to their creators.

Meanwhile, I just wanted some simple, not too offensive, illustrations for my articles. Over the years I have probably written 6500 articles by now, or so, and depend on graphics to illustrate them. So far I have created some 14395 AI images and gotten pretty good at it, at least for my purposes. It’s illustration, not art.

And as mentioned, I’ve not been looking for ‘art’ in my images, just something to illustrate, however obliquely, my blogs and articles. I can do that now and no longer license images, except on occasion, when I can’t get AI’s attention.

Midjourney AI graphics is like an idiot savant, often creating lovely images with real feeling, but also very stubborn, unable to listen or respond to my prompts no matter how I phrase it. Early Midjourney images of people used to have like 6-7 fingers on a hand and even 3 or more legs or arms. It took a good year before those kind of artifacts got corrected and went away.

Today Midjourney nature images are reaching the quality of digital cameras from Nikon, Canon, and Hasselblad. Soon we will be unable to tell digital camera images apart from AI images. Even though I label all images I use in my blogs as:

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Yet, many-to-most readers think these are standard nature photographs.

I have not tried it, but Midjourney now has the ability to make short videos that can be strung together to create actual videos or even movies. I don’t need that, so I have not experimented.

Also, on the AI front, I have learned how to use ChatGPT, and several other AI chatbots, eventually settled on Grok, which IMO is far more useful for my work, even though it is a brainchild of Elon Musk. I’m afraid I just have to hold my nose and use that product because it is so good.

And recently, when I had some health problems and the wait time to see doctors stretched out to be months, Grok AI helped me diagnose and treat my issues promptly and accurately.

I am not saying the AI chatbots are always accurate, they are not. When I asked about my own early relationship hitchhiking with Bob Dylan, ChatGPT came up with all kinds of stories about our relationship that are pure fiction,

so it is best to stick to the straight and narrow, what is considered science rather than dip into blue-sky fictional stories.

Do I see a strong future for AI? That's an understatement of epic proportions. AI is changing our lives forever. My only wish is that the AI designers design the AI bots to be like a mother to the human race and above all to take care of and protect humans, animals, and the environment.

[a few of the sets of graphic cards I have created, plus a AI graphic I created for an Amish family with a fruit farm that lives not far from here and have no way to do this.]

EMAIL

Let's NOT Make a Deal

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 26, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8df9560b-75db-4426-ab59-451aa36b9cab_1024x1024.jpeg

I doubt that we can make a deal with life, much less with other people or loved ones, one that is not subject to change, and that's because change (as they say) is the only constant. Contracts and 'deals' are the province of lawyers, which most of us are not.

Such 'deals' are only invoked when there is no inherent trust between those involved. I suggest that we all work on the trust part of the equation and not depend on deals made or understandings agreed upon. Why? Because I find that because of the nature of change, we cannot but alter and change with time; we all do.

Instead, to my understanding, the thing to emphasize is trust, trust in ourselves and trust in others, especially those we know and work with in life. Build trust.

"The Art of the Deal" is a book by Donald Trump, which should tell us something right there. Again, we are not lawyers, and there is seemingly no end to legal contracts, if you have ever had a prickly one, and I have. And even if refined, such 'deals' are essentially just threats to make us behave in a certain way.

This also holds true for friendships and especially for marriages, IMO. Work toward mutual trust rather than good deals or agreed upon arrangements. I know that marriage is said to be a contract, yet I question that. If we are responsible for one another, we most of all have to find mutual trust. No number of agreements or 'deals' will ever work as well.

If you have a problem with me, just tell me. I don't suggest a lot of discussion, because discussion too easily falls into 'He said, she said' or 'let's make a deal' and understanding can typically spiral down into argument and mistrust. Just tell your partner what the problem is and trust that they will respond accordingly. Don't argue is my suggestion.

And give them time to consider and respond. Build trust for mutual security and not make agreements or deals. Above all, as I have mentioned, learn to trust one another.

I don't find too much discussion helpful. Most discussion ends up as arguments and often they spiral down into dealmaking or worse. Again: deals are for lawyers.

Say your piece and allow your partner to think about it and give them a chance to rectify it or do the right thing. Same goes for our view of their response. Give it time and consideration.

In the end, we are responsible for the welfare of others, especially our loved ones, and naturally want to do the right thing, and the same for them to us.

This is why it is so important to have a basis of mutual trust and NOT try to make a deal or agreement that is subject to change. True responsibility does not lend itself to deal making.

Both men and woman are victims of deal-making, and women in particular have historically been subject to this. IMO, nothing good comes from lawyering human relationships. Mutual trust is the key.

This is just my opinion, yet I have studied this in my own way, as well as prayed and sought spiritual insight. And one thing I have learned is that in general, women in this country (and the world) have had a tough and unfair go of it. Many have had to do what they can to survive, having to go along with what men allow them, and make do with situations no one would ever have chosen. We can and need to do something about this.

It's up to those of us who understand this historical situation to protect and care for those (women and men) who need our care, as well as for all other human and sentient beings.

So, NO DEAL.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Liberation Through Seeing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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The Earth moves every once in a while, and I'm speaking of my own personal life, and this affects me. Those of you who read my blogs know by now that I am a great believer in what the Tibetans call 'Thongdrel', liberation through seeing. And chief among my liberators is photography, and I started on that before many of you were born, back in 1956 when I was 14 years old.

My father, who was a skilled photographer, did not let me use his twin-lens Rolliflex with its little folding Fresnel anti-glare coated viewfinder that unfolded and you looked down at it, however he did loan me his Kodak Retina 2a folding slide camera to use on a 2000 mile trip across the United states with a dip into Mexico and travel across Canasa from Vancouver to Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

I was traveling on two old school buses filled with kids my age (I was 14) and a few older camp counselors. We slept outside and cooked our own food, and I fell in love with photography. In fact, I loved it so much that I spent all my extra-spending money on more color slide film.

And when I returned and we developed all those rolls of film, my dad was blown away with how good my photos were. I don't remember any other event that I did that pleased him more. That was my start with images.

Of course, time marched on I and I worked in the darkroom and eventually had a little photography renaissance when digital cameras came out. And I had almost all of them, one by one, eventually purchasing the Nikon D1X for something like five-thousand dollars for a 5.3 megapixel camera.

And it went on from there, all the time with the latest camera release, and lenses in particular fascinated me. I specialized in close-up and macro lenses that were what is called 'APO' (apochromatic). Eventually I had hundreds of them. And I also got into the heavy and bulky View cameras, and still use them... sometimes. I have many very expensive large-format lenses. My Nikon system is extensive.

Anyway, some years ago, I fooled around with Medium Format photography, first with the Mamiya RZ67 and a complement of heavy and bulky lenses. And

when Hasselblad came out with the mirrorless X1D-50C and I had to try that out. Hasselblad was for me the top of the line and mostly only used by fashion and fine-art photographers. I had been in awe of it.

However, for my use, the X1D was not quite ready for prime time, and I soon fell back into Nikon and eventually sold my X1D. I doubled down on my Nikons, which were also by then mirrorless and I especially liked the “S” series of great lenses.

Well in time, along came Hasselblad’s third release which was the Hasselblad X2D 100C, with a 100 megapixel sensor, a built-in 1 TB SSD, and a lot of other features, but most of all I was in love with the “Hasselblad Color Solution” and the Medium Format size of the images.

I loved the Hasselblad color since my X1D camera, but the X2D had many more features that I needed, but still not perfect. Yet, I have used it for years now, warts and all, I make it work for me. I love it.

Then, on August 26, 2025, Hasselblad released the Hasselblad X2D Mark II. I knew this release was eventually coming, but I thought it would be... eventually. And then it suddenly was announced, and it had some mind-blowing new features. I had always assumed that what I had with the X2D was good enough for me, but I should have remembered that I am a camera buff, and things change.

I don’t want to bore you with all the enhancements, but I should mention at least a few. For one, the X2D II now has continuous focus, so that the camera’s subject tracking will hunt out the eyes of humans, animals, or cars and follow a moving form. And something new to digital cameras, along with the regular methods of focus, Hasselblad now includes what is called Lidar technology. I should explain. DJI, perhaps the largest producer of drones, is the majority holder of Hasselblad. And they have taken their incredible laser technology, which is used in self-driving cars and other breakthrough science and placed it into the Hasselblad X2D Mark II. So, effectively it can pretty much see in the dark.

At the same time, they have increased their 5-axis 10-stop IBIS stabilization so that for many uses we can put aside our tripods and take tack-sharp photos handheld even at a timelapse of more than a second. Unheard of! And while I am not counting on that, if I can shoot some or much of the time handheld that would very much benefit my aging body from dragging a tripod everywhere.

Anyway, my plan to ignore any X2D upgrade went out the window and suddenly I felt that with all my dedication to photography I deserved to get

my hands on a copy of the Hasselblad X2D Mark II. Yet, where am I going to get that money?

Well, I am retired and live on a fixed income, and any money I spend for camera gear I have to pay back by selling camera stuff I already have. And I have already sold most of what I have left to sell, so...

One thing I can still do is astrology readings. These many years I have never charged for any of my books and I do a lot of short readings for my family or folks in trouble, at no charge. Yet, I used to support myself and my family for around ten years as an astrologer, and I am pretty well known.

So, I hung out my shingle and at least for a short time I will do some readings to raise some money for this new camera. My wife and I had a pow-wow and out of that came this idea, for a short time, to once again do some astrology readings. I knew I had to be first in line when the new camera was announced because if there were any Hasselblad X2D Mark II to ship, they would be few.

And so, at 8:00 AM EDT I was online with B&H to see the announcement of the Hasselblad X2d Mark II and sure enough, it came up and to my surprise they actually had some in stock and all the pre-release facts seem to be true, including an ISO of 50 and a price of \$7399.00.

Of course, I immediately added a copy to the cart and went to pay. However, when I got to the cart, it said nothing was in it, nothing had been added. Of course, I tried again and again and still nothing. I was in panic mode because I knew there would only be some few available and then we would perhaps wait months. Some said the wait would be a year! And here I was wasting precious time because of a screwup with their software. I had a thought.

I quickly went to Adorama, another major New York camera store, and found one there and bought it at once, and it was being overnighted to arrive here next day. How wonderful was that.

I did have problems with my credit card because it refused to accept that large an amount even though I am cleared for that amount. I then spent a good 15 minutes or more on the phone with Citibank, jumping through loops and finally to the fraud division until finally they passed it.

And back on Adorama it even took several tries until Adorama stopped declining my card.

I am retired and on a fixed income, so I must do a balancing act to borrow from my own savings enough to get this camera. And I am retired, so I am unretiring enough to do some counseling to pay for this camera and not upset my savings or my wife. Done.

I am busy doing readings once again, and after a little getting used to it, I am glad to meet some of my Facebook friends and spend some time with it. I may do more than a few, especially when winter sets in and there are long snowy days.

[Photo by me with the new Hasselblad X2D Mark II of a jar of honey as a gift from a dear friend.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Vetting the Hasselblad X2D Mark II

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

August 31, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5a0a19c4-4afa-4f33-a0ee-696bc46a6c70_2048x1536.jpeg

I have to say a few words about my new camera, the Hasselblad X2D Mark II and in particular about how the XCD series of lenses fit in. I know this is technical, so perhaps for the very few. I am tired of photography forums where this new camera is causing a commotion.

If I want to use the continuous focus on the Hasselblad X2D II, that restricts us to the new lenses because only their motors are fast enough to support it. And if we want closeup shots tracking insects, etc. that limits us to the XCD 28mm (8.7 inches but poor MTF), XCD 25mm (9.8 inches and OK MTF), 38mm (11.8 inches, rearward focus), and the XCD 20mm-35mm (12 inches, and good MTF).

For me that means the XCD 20mm-35mm is perhaps my best bet, although it is a bit heavy.

The only closeup or macro lens in the XCD lenses is the aging but excellent XCD 120mm f/3.5 with a minimum focus distance of 16.9 inches, not exactly close. It does not go to 1:1, but only to 1:2 magnification. And we have to use extension to reach that, something like 60mm and that may well throw the quality of the image off. The aging Hasselblad macro lens, the XCD 120mm f/3.5, only goes to 1:2 magnification.

And the features of the new Hasselblad X2D II, in particular the continuous focus, drive a wedge between the old and the new XCD lenses. Now there are two trains running, one includes the new lenses with powerful motors to manage the tracking and continuous focus and all those older XCD lenses that cannot power those new lenses and cannot do continuous focus.

This situation finds me using the new lenses handheld and taking off my L-Bracket and putting it aside, although most of the older lenses can be used handheld as well, just not for tracking subjects. Of course, using the smaller, lighter weight lenses without having the L-bracket on feels much lighter in the hand than I am used to, so I like that. My RSS L-bracket weighs enough to notice. I'm taking it off, meaning no tripod.

At the same time, dragging all the lenses around, old and new, itself is revealing. It shows me how very, very good some of those lenses are. Although old, heavy, and clunky, lenses like the XCD 80mm f/1.9, the fastest of all the Hasselblad lenses, is a work of art and produces just lovely photos. It's the same with the XCD 120mm f/3.5 Macro lens which also produces gorgeous images, as does the XCD 65mm f/2.8 lens. However, these have older motors in them

And while the older lenses can be used on a tripod or off, the newer XCD lenses with fast motors can be used handheld to track flying insects and birds. It's too early for me to say how facile the new Lidar laser system assists in the process, but the ability to shoot in the dark is something I have never seen before. I'm going to have to get used to these breakthrough features.

Going out shooting the large Datura (Moonflower) blossoms in the early light with the older XCD 80mm f/1.9 and the newer XCD 28mm f/4 was a lesson in itself. Both lenses produce great images, but the 80mm blows the 28mm out of the water in terms of quality, even though it is heavy, clunky, and is happier on a tripod, at least for me. It also works handheld reasonable well, but that is too heavy for me.

And so, a very skilled Hasselblad user told me he is retiring those older lenses and switching to the newer lenses for most of his work, very much what I would like to do if I could. It makes perfect sense, and sends me examining the qualities, especially the MTF graphs to see how they look.

MTF (Modulation Transfer Function) graphs in photography illustrate a lens's ability to resolve fine details by plotting contrast (modulation) against spatial frequency, showing how well the lens transfers image details from the subject to the sensor. It pays to learn to read MTF graphs.

And if I sort the lenses I have by their MTF graphs, the older lenses win hands down as to quality for the most part, and some of the new tribe of lenses are a bit of a mess, when it comes to MTF. Or perhaps it is just the copies I have, yet I have examined very carefully and the MTF of lenses like the XCD 30mm F/3.5 are almost perfect (but slow and clunky), while the new XCD 28mm are not clunky, but not as good quality images when it comes to clarity. Of course, they all work fine. I just don't want to leave the older ones with their better MTF behind.

At the same time, despite the older lens's superior MTF scans, they are much harder to use, heavier and slow, so I can understand why many photographers are putting them on the shelf. And if truth be told, I would like to retire the

clunkers and depend more on the new set of lenses, although some will never be good for landscape or very fine work.

So of course, I am looking carefully through the new set of lenses for those very few lenses that actually are the most useful for my work. And while I read the splurge of articles and watch videos on the new Hasselblad X2D Mark II, I see the majority of photographers switching to the new lenses, even though many of them have bad rearward focus shifts and field curvature, not to mention too much astigmatism.

My belief is that most of the folks not distinguishing the MTF scans are street photographers, where fine quality is defined differently from closeup photography or still-life. It seems that convenience strikes again, compared to the pain of weight, slowness, and better MTFs.

Of course I get it. At 84 years I too celebrate small, lightweight lenses, lenses that you can put in your pocket or messenger bag. I would love to leave my tripod at home and will see if and how that can be done.

Going outside with two of the heavier XCD lenses, the XCD 120 f/3.5 which weighs 2.5 lbs. and the XCD 80 f/1.9 which weighs 2.3 lbs. and shooting them handheld, the XCD 120 won't hunt and I could get no usable handheld shots. It needs the tripod.

The XCD 80mm f/1.9 on the other hand, almost the same weight, was fairly usable handheld, but much better on a tripod. Since it is of a later vintage, it all seems to come down to the age and power of the lens motors. The XCD 80mm works somewhat handheld, but not with continuous focus. The XCD 120 needs the tripod and perhaps would be happiest in the studio or eventually sitting on the shelf.

Of course I see why photographers are migrating to the new lenses, finest image quality of not. Perhaps we are redefining lens 'quality' to include ease of use and weight, not just as I have grown up with, the final image quality is all that counts, not matter how much we suffer.

My conclusion is that I have to re-double my effort to examine the MTF charts of the XCD lenses, especially the "V" series. I already know that the XCD 75mm MTF is good, and the XCD 28mm MTF is probably not so good, except for use as a walk-around lens. Photographer Lloyd Chambers found ALL of the XCD 'V' lenses not suitable for landscape work, because of significant rearward focus shifts and field curvature, not to mention too much astigmatism which leaves it is up to us to determine how good the "V" XCD series are for city and other work. They seem to do OK. People like them a lot.

Anyway, I am loving the new Hasselblad X2D Mark II, and find it a much more usable camera for my work.

[Photo taken with the Hasselblad X2D II and the XCD 80mm lens.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

Beside Myself

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7a549f14-ef61-43c1-b0ee-ad60d5b36dd7_1024x1024.jpeg

Right now, nothing feels just right and everything seems up for grabs. The Hasselblad X2D II explosion has not settled down to a single line or projection. The fallout is still falling out.

And yes, it is here again, the overwhelming urge to write or express what I feel in writing. The subject really does not matter because there is not, nor can there be any point to it all.

The awareness that makes up the nature of the mind is unborn, meaning it had no beginning and will have no end. It just is, and in that “Is” we are and have always been.

I cannot count on satisfying this itch or if so, not for long. And this is because change is the only constant, and things change, and are changing.

Once again, I am beside myself.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Chasing the Wild Tchoupitoulas

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 4, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/16a748a2-7730-4bcf-86e4-689ef4ed5de6_1489x2048.jpeg

Getting at the roots only goes so far, yet it is farther than a White boy in 1950 knew. And oddly enough for many of us back then, IMO, this ‘farther’ was not to be found in White music but rather in Black music, at least for me.

I hate to embrace a cliché and say that the fate and history of Black Americans are the source of the life vitamins that I (and perhaps many) need, but they were. These great blues musicians were the fathers and mothers of my soul and I sought them out to absorb what I did not know but could only wonder after.

I had started out in the folk revival of the late 1950s and early Sixties, hitchhiking and traveling with people like Bob Dylan and we were all doing our best to revive White folk music, with perhaps a sprinkle of country-blues from Black artists.

And to my shock, there came a time when I discovered that Black music needed no revival because it was alive, well, and playing on the other side of town behind a racial curtain. That for me was an earth-shaking discovery, a life changer. What I thought was in the past and needed reviving still lived. That was what I wanted to play, study, and preserve.

As it turned out, it was me who needed some revival and not the Black blues musicians and their music that I subsequently witnessed on trips to Chicago’s South and West Side in the mid-1960s.

And for me this all came to a head at the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the late summer of 1969. I was not only present at that festival, my brother Dan and I (plus all five Erlewine brothers and father) ended up being responsible for food and drink for all the performers at the festival.

We actually operated out of my dad’s station wagon backstage at the three-day festival (August 1-3). And in the process, I morphed from being a player and student of blues music into an interviewer and documenter of Black blues and jazz and eventually this expanded to include all recorded music when I founded the All-Music Guide (AllMusic.com). However, let me back up a bit.

That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 changed my life. I was 29 at the time and that event became one of the most important in my life, a pivoting point, where I turned from whatever I was doing at the time, more toward what I became and still am today, an archivist of popular culture. As they say, “Who Woulda’ Thunk it?” Not me.

If there is one of those times where we feel like we are living in our own dream, for me that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival was that. Imagine.

Suddenly, in one place, were almost all of the heroes of my life at least for the recent years, the great blues players, assembled in one place, with all their sidemen and many with their entire family because it was a shortish drive from Chicago to Ann Arbor.

Not only was the general public (read: mostly White people) introduced all at once to most of the great living black blues players, but equally (and perhaps more important), those scores of blues players, their sidemen, and families were assembled together in what turned out to be a kind of celebration among themselves.

Previously, perhaps in Chicago a couple or a few blues players might get together at one venue, but here there were hundreds of players, if you count them, the sidemen, and their families together for the first time... ever.

So, as the public was overcome by this profound blues music perhaps for the first time with that many blues players present, there was somewhat of a celebration and reunion going on with the blues players themselves.

It was epic and cosmic, IMO. And there I was, not one of the university-folks who planned the festival, but an on-the-ground townie who knew some of the Black players and ended up in charge of artist “hospitality,” which means providing all these players and their families with food and drink, and “drink” was all about alcohol in those days. My family and I were very popular serving these folks.

I was there with my brother Dan, who was equally interested in all this, and also our other three brothers, Stephen, Phillip, and Tom, plus our father. We served the booze out of my dad’s station wagon and my dad spent most of the time hanging out and drinking with folks like Roosevelt Sykes, Big Mama Thornton, and some of the other blues greats.

As for my relations with my dad, I seldom had connected all that much with him about whatever I loved, but we connected that weekend through introducing him to all these players. It was, so to speak, a bit of the divine, a

taste of heaven on Earth as far as I was concerned. That time remains embedded in my memory.

There is so much I could tell you and probably should, especially to those few of you who are transported by the music and life wisdom of these great Black blues players. What I can do here is show you some of the photos that came out of that event, many by the great photographer Stanley Livingston. Livingston and I published an award-winning book on all this some years later.

And hidden within that event, like a seed, was my future as an archivist of popular culture. I never saw it coming, but I was always into organizing and documenting what I most loved, and I loved the blues and those players!

After that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, came the second blues festival in 1970, which was more of the wonderful same. And then, after the University stopped sponsoring the festival, there was a year of no festival (1971), and then the festival was reinstated by music promotor Peter Andrews (who brought a lot of music to Ann Arbor) and poet and blues-expert John Sinclair, with the “Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals,” which were held in 1972, 1973, and an unsuccessful festival held in Canada in 1974.

Andrews and Sinclair expanded the venue to not only include blues, but also jazz and Rhythm & Blues, with performers like Ray Charles and Miles Davis. Years later the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz festivals resumed and I was on the festival board for some of those years.

I was also on-site for the first two of those blues and jazz festivals, again handling hospitality and doing even more interviews, this time with audio and video. I eventually became the official historian for the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival.

Well, the long and the short of it is that from those seminal blues festivals, both the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals and the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals that followed, I became aware of how precious and fragile that time was. And I came out of those festivals with an intense desire to protect and preserve America’s musical heritage.

This manifested some years later with my founding the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), which today is the largest collection of music data on the planet, millions of pieces of information all organized. Of course, I did this assisted by an incredible team, that eventually numbered (before I sold it) 150 full-time staff, and over 500-700 freelance writers, all working together on one project.

And later, with my company, AMG, we founded the All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com), which is one of the two largest film databases, and the All-Game Guide, which game-guide was eventually abandoned after I sold and left the company.

I also founded the first major Concert Music Poster site called, “Classic Posters (ClassicPosters.com), which is still going today, and other collections, etc. I went on to interview scores of rock poster artists, some rock players, wrote some 326 books and booklets on concert posters, and so forth.

I have been busy these last years divesting all of these archives so they are not swept into the past and out of memory anytime soon. These include:

My Rock Concert Poster data has been donated to: University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library and the Haight Street Art Center (non-profit) in San Francisco.

My collection of music CDs is now at the Michigan State University, some 800,000 CDs.

My collection of astrological books, magazines, and so forth are now part of the permanent collection of the University of Illinois, one of the largest ever assembled.

A large collection of Tibetan Buddhist teachings, thousands of tapes, are at the KTD Monastery in upstate New York.

Plus, a collection of some 500 pen & ink line drawings by Bhutanese monk and artist Sange Wangchuk who lived with us for some years are now a permanent part of the Ruben Museum of Oriental Art in NYC. Wangchuk later became the Minister of Culture for Bhutan.

And there you have it, a quick overview of the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969. As for my own band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, here is what we sounded like:

And last but not least, the following is a partial list of the blues artists and music-industry personnel that attended the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. Most were on the program either as featured artists or as sidemen but quite a few just came to Ann Arbor to be with their fellow performers and to hang out.

Stan Abernathy (trumpet) Otis Rush Band, Dave Alexander (vocals piano), Luther Allison (guitar vocals) & the Blue Nebulae, Willie Anderson (harmonica), Carey Bell (harmonica), Fred Below (drums), Big Joe Turner (vocals), Bobby Blue Bland (vocals), Juke Boy Bonner (harmonica vocals),

Cassell Burrow , Leroy Campbell (bass), Clifton Chenier (accordion), James Cotton (harmonica), Pee Wee Crayton (guitar vocals), Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup (guitar vocals), Jimmy 'Fast Fingers' Dawkins (guitar vocals), Doctor Ross (harmonica vocals guitar), Sleepy John Estes (guitar vocals), Lowell Fulson (guitar vocals), Paul Garon (blues writer), Ernest Gatewood (bass) Otis Rush Band, Buddy Guy (guitar vocals), Phillip Guy (guitar) Buddy Guy Band, Ted Harvey (drums) Hound Dog Taylor Band, John Lee Hooker (guitar vocals), Howlin' Wolf (guitar vocals harmonica), J.B.Hutto & the Hawks (guitar vocals), Bruce Iglaur (Aligator Records), John Jackson (guitar vocals banjo), Calvin Jones (bass) Howlin' Wolf Band, Albert King (guitar vocals), B.B.King (guitar vocals), Freddy King (guitar vocals), Bob Koester (Delmark Records), Sam Lay (drums vocals), Hopkins Lightnin' (guitar vocals), Manse Lipscomb (guitar vocals), Little Joe Blue (guitar vocals), Robert Jr. Lockwood Junior (guitar vocals), Lazy Bill Lucas (piano), Magic Sam (guitar vocals), Jim Marshall (photos), Mississippi Fred McDowell (guitar vocals), John Meggs (tenor sax) Otis Rush Band, Little Brother Montgomery (piano vocals), Muddy Waters (guitar vocals), Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica vocals), Louis Myers (lead guitar harmonica), Paul Oliver (blues writer), Jim Oneil (Living Blues Magazine), Tom Osterman , Papa Lightfoot (harmonica vocals), Junior Parker (harmonica vocals), Brewer Phillips (lead guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band, A.C.Reed (sax), Jimmy Reed Jr. (vocals guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band, Bob Reidy (piano vocals), Freddy Roulette (guitar steel guitar), Otis Rush (guitar vocals), Roosevelt Shaw (drums), Johnnie Shines (guitar vocals), Harmonica George Smith (harmonic vocals), Son House (guitar vocals), Victoria Spivey (vocals), Chris Strachwitz (label owner), Hubert Sumlin (guitar vocals), Sunnyland Slim (piano), Roosevelt Sykes (piano vocals), Eddie Taylor (guitar vocals), Hound Dog Taylor (guitar vocals), Big Mama Thorton (vocals), Jeff Todd Titon (guitar) Lazy Bill Lucas Blues Band, Johnny Twist , Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (vocals sax), T-Bone Walker (guitar vocals), Sippie Wallace (vocals), Dick Waterman (manager), Junior Wells (vocals harmonica), Big Joe Williams (vocals), Robert Pete Williams (guitar vocals), Johnny Winter (guitar vocals), Little Johnny Woods (harmonica), Johnny Young (guitar vocals mandolin), Mighty Joe Young (guitar vocals), Abernathy (trumpet) Otis Rush Band, Dave Alexander (vocals piano), Luther Allison (guitar vocals) & the Blue Nebulae, Willie Anderson (harmonica), Carey Bell (harmonica), Fred Below (drums), Big Joe Turner (vocals), Bobby Blue Bland (vocals), Juke Boy Bonner (harmonica vocals), Cassell Burrow , Leroy Campbell (bass), Clifton Chenier (accordion), James Cotton (harmonica), Pee Wee Crayton (guitar vocals), Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup (guitar vocals), Jimmy 'Fast Fingers' Dawkins (guitar vocals), Doctor Ross (harmonica vocals guitar), Sleepy John Estes (guitar vocals), Lowell Fulson (guitar vocals), Paul Garon (blues writer), Ernest Gatewood

(bass) Otis Rush Band, Buddy Guy (guitar vocals), Phillip Guy (guitar) Buddy Guy Band, Ted Harvey (drums) Hound Dog Taylor Band, John Lee Hooker (guitar vocals), Howlin' Wolf (guitar vocals harmonica), J.B.Hutto & the Hawks (guitar vocals), Bruce Iglaur (Alligator Records), John Jackson (guitar vocals banjo), Calvin Jones (bass) Howlin' Wolf Band, Albert King (guitar vocals), B.B.King (guitar vocals), Freddy King (guitar vocals), Bob Koester (Delmark Records), Sam Lay (drums vocals), Hopkins Lightnin' (guitar vocals), Manse Lipscomb (guitar vocals), Little Joe Blue (guitar vocals), Robert Jr. Lockwood Junior (guitar vocals), Lazy Bill Lucas (piano), Magic Sam (guitar vocals), Jim Marshall (photos), Mississippi Fred McDowell (guitar vocals), John Meggs (tenor sax) Otis Rush Band, Little Brother Montgomery (piano vocals), Muddy Waters (guitar vocals), Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica vocals), Louis Myers (lead guitar harmonica), Paul Oliver (blues writer), Jim Oneil (Living Blues Magazine), Tom Osterman , Papa Lightfoot (harmonica vocals), Junior Parker (harmonica vocals), Brewer Phillips (lead guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band, A.C.Reed (sax), Jimmy Reed Jr. (vocals guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band, Bob Reidy (piano vocals), Freddy Roulette (guitar steel guitar), Otis Rush (guitar vocals), Roosevelt Shaw (drums), Johnnie Shines (guitar vocals), Harmonica George Smith (harmonic vocals), Son House (guitar vocals), Victoria Spivey (vocals), Chris Strachwitz (label owner), Hubert Sumlin (guitar vocals), Sunnyland Slim (piano), Roosevelt Sykes (piano vocals), Eddie Taylor (guitar vocals), Hound Dog Taylor (guitar vocals), Big Mama Thornton (vocals), Jeff Todd Titon (guitar) Lazy Bill Lucas Blues Band, Johnny Twist , Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (vocals sax), T-Bone Walker (guitar vocals), Sippie Wallace (vocals), Dick Waterman (manager), Junior Wells (vocals harmonica), Big Joe Williams (vocals), Robert Pete Williams (guitar vocals), Johnny Winter (guitar vocals), Little Johnny Woods (harmonica), Johnny Young (guitar vocals mandolin), Mighty Joe Young (guitar vocals),

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"Tangled Up In Bblue"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/15a8c9a4-14db-44af-b502-b4cdc6f3ef5f_1024x1024.jpeg

"Getting' through,

Tangled up in blue."

A juggling act, organizing the past in my own mind and setting it straight. It seems like I have covered a bit of ground in this life I have lived. A lot of water has gone over the dam.

It hurts when I realize that those of you who are young now will never know and could not even guess what it was like back in the 1950s and 1960s. You have no memory to refer to it and that time could never be put into words. Has it always been like this, that life changes faster than we can recall and the gist or sense of how it was cannot be passed on, not even a little?

There was no modern how-it-is-today back then. I, who can remember, would not know where to start in even describing what is gone and now missing. Change is cruel like that, because what is changing is, well, not just everything around us, but WE are changing and no longer are what we once were. Perhaps it is a kindness of fate to force us to change from what we were until we agree to forget what we find so hard or painful to remember. Just forget it all.

Here is the song my daughter May wrote that caused me to write the above words.

May Erlewine, the song "Waterfall" and the line "Close your eyes and forget it all, just when you think you know the way the water rolls, waterfall."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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"All Hat and No Cattle"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/080a0525-5619-4426-b8f7-aec918635899_1024x1024.jpeg

Not really a thought, but bliss and lack of distraction is the pointer rather than thinking. Feeling. We have to experience, feel life.

We feel our way along.

"What goes up must come down,' meaning that experiencing rather than 'thinking' is the point here. Don't get stuck up in the clouds.

All of us tend to 'think' before we feel when it is probably better to feel and experience, and then see what thoughts arise. Like the old blues song lyric:

"Take your fingers off it. Don't you dare touch it because you know it don't belong to you."

Or as the dharma masters put it: "Don't alter the present moment."

Unfortunately, I often can hear in other's voices that they are tripping the conceptual ceiling and that what they say is not grounded in actual experience, much less realization. They are just reading from their understanding like we would read a book. In short, they don't yet know what they are talking about.

It's not often helpful to point this out to a conceptualizer, unless you can help precipitate the experience that goes with their understanding. It's hard to talk someone down from their ivory tower, when they don't realize that this is all thought and no experience.

I wonder if whole civilizations have died out through lack of actual experience, preferring to live in the mind rather than in the world of experience. Living from the top down rather than from the bottom up is difficult to impossible. We need our roots.

It reminds me of the old saying about city cowboys, that they are "all hat and no cattle."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Cold Spark

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0eb660ce-1322-4dec-9eb7-994610c329cc_1024x1024.jpeg

We have learned to use what we call our ‘mind’ and it can think up all kinds of ideas and ways to do things. As mentioned, we call it ‘our’ mind, but it is just ‘The Mind’ itself that we have learned to use, our limited experience with it.

And aside from the mind being handy, we don’t know the mind all that well, which is exactly what meditation is about, becoming more familiar with the nature of our mind as something other than a one-trick pony, a thinking device.

In fact, it’s just the other way around. The mind is not the thinking end of things; ‘WE’, ourselves are the thinking end of the mind, being what we so conveniently call our Self or persona. The “Self” itself is little more than a fraying bundle of attachments, none of which by definition are properly grounded in reality.

In fact, this is just what learning to meditate teaches us, that what we call “We” is the exception rather than the rule. In other words, we are the odd-man out (or woman), the nether end of the mind itself.

This is true, and such that an eventual realization does give us pause to reflect rather than just blindly march on toward oblivion. Such a fragile thing life is, “Much Ado About Nothing” as Shakespeare put it.

And so, in the meantime, we cluster or gather around what we might call the campfire of the Self, when in reality it is like this rather dark poem I wrote years ago about our Self or personality.

Sorry about the darkness, but welcome to the realization.

Phoenix

Personality,

Bright beauty of the night,

That terrible crystal,

Burning in the darkness,

At the very edge of time.

Watching,

In rapt fascination,

Fires,

Impossible to ignore,

Forever frozen,

On the face of age.

It is a dark light,

Indeed,

Funeral pyres,

Signifying nothing,

But impermanence.

This is a fire,

That does not warm.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Space Without Distance, Time Without End

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

September 10, 2025

The Rain of Words

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3ca7735c-f133-40e3-9648-c53584b0939e_1024x1024.jpeg

It no longer matters so much just what I write. Of course, I have themes or subjects and try to stick to them, but the reality is that I write on all kinds of topics, although mostly on dharma.

What does matter is how I fit my words together, not unlike a jigsaw puzzle, as the clash of consonants and moan of vowels stir something deep within us into the temperature of experience which gives readers something to reflect on or be moved by.

All sense experience we have, by definition, is authentic, genuine, something that we can realize and become aware of. Experience gives us something to go on, a starter or mother from which realization can arise.

And from that point of first realization, it is then up to us to turn the wheel of our own dharma and take it from there, and we can.

Do I love music? Of course. Does 'Seeing' graphically liberate? Yes, it can. Yet, for me the working of words is what best precipitates experience, like the rain of wisdom from the mind itself or the unraveling of a veil.

Wisdom soaks and becomes the ground we walk on, step by step, the path we tread, and the sign of the guru.

If it can be said right, it's done, as this poem explains.

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.

I thank my Facebook friends for the opportunity to write here. Otherwise, this might not be written. Much appreciated.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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"They Paved Paradise"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 15, 2025

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[My daughter lotis and her husband Dana Even spent the day here and we had a great time. We talked way into the evening. Dana, in this photo, was outside grilling.]

By Michael Erlewine

Oh Me, oh My! Something within is urging me to turn my insides out, like the ring of a torus. As to what can be said about what this means, nothing more than the obvious -- more graphic than not, it would seem. Life too can be graphic. I don't know where this urge comes from or where it is going, other than somewhere down the road. Meanwhile...

My mom told me that in kindergarten or First Grade I wandered from the schoolyard and was found standing at the edge of a large hole in the ground watching the bulldozers and excavators move earth.

They are paving our street this morning, and for many blocks down the way. I saw them coming to work when it was barely light out.

Walking together up the center of our street, coming from the north, a group of ten or more workers, carrying coffee in one hand and their lunchbox in the other, laughing and smiling. They were dressed in dirty tar-stained clothes with bright phosphorescent green and orange vests. It was like going back to the 1950s from where I came, workers, those folks who actually take care of our streets and towns. Thank God they exist!

For me, what I saw was like a walk in the past, an incredible amount of work about to happen and they will be done by 2 PM, or so I was told, and they were here, as mentioned before dawn. I could hear their voices ringing down the street from far away.

I know what it takes to run a company of hundreds of employees, and I can only imagine the coordination required to bring all these workers, the stream of massive trucks, all sizes of steam rollers, and the like together. What it takes!

I grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, when the Ringling Bros. and Barnam and Bailey Circus came to town on a long train, with upwards of 50 elephants who marched from the train station out of town to the fairgrounds, head-to-tail, and they proceeded to put up all the tents. I am told that in 1929 they used to have 90 elephants, including ten Asian bulls. As a kid, I was spellbound by all this. Transported.

This morning, I got a shot of the same, only mostly in the crew of workers laying down a new road in front of my house. Meanwhile my daughter and her husband arrived, and we had a most wonderful time.

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The Edge of Beyond

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Where is the differential, the difference that differentiates? What if I can't feel any difference? Or perhaps a cruder way of saying this is "Nothing makes any difference anymore."

Can we be aware of no difference? What if there is no difference for us to sense or feel, and no one to do the feeling? I'm asking, what then?

And this is not just some abstract construct to understand. Real immersion is full immersion, hook, line, and sinker, as my dad used to say. We are 'all in' and by definition 'We' are not even there anymore.

If we lean over and slide beyond the edge, we can no longer find or feel the edge, because we have lost our ability to know our way by measure. We have reached a level plain or what is called "Same Taste."

For me, it's getting more difficult and easier at the same time. How to explain that?

It's getting more important to not touch the walls of time, when touching creates friction that slows us down, which friction is the cause of Samsara, at least in this analogy.

As to 'easier', if I don't create karmic friction, my spiritual life gets easier. There are two reasons, and going deeper into the difficulty may be helpful.

I realize that reification, exaggeration, puffing things up (which most of us do) is what creates and maintains Samsara, and it's me doing it. And it's not as simple as just not referencing the Self and if we do, we are creating yet another layer of patina to obscure our inner clarity. We pile it on ourselves.

It's more about not leaving the body for extended times, and by that indulging in out-of-the-body states of mind, dualistic conceptualization not grounded in common sense experience. I need to get down to Earth and remain there.

Promising myself more "Pie in the Sky when I Die" and other forms of expectation and hope for the future also are just obscuring habits that lead in circles to nowhere.

The same goes for preoccupation with the past, what is over and done with, also just another obscuration to deepen.

Yet, the main issue that to me is the red flag I mentioned above is my getting on a roll that, while not exactly a rant, amounts to the same thing, my getting lost within.

Even if it's just my main interest at the moment, it is a distraction, but a distraction from what? A distraction from being undistracted.

We reach a point where whatever direction we face is the way to go. That is when the process of life becomes the goal.

I am reminded of the admonition of C.L. Ingalls:

"If wisdom's ways you wisely speak,

Five things observe with care:

To whom you speak

Of whom you speak,

And how, when, and where."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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A Bowl Full of Hornworms Anyone?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 18, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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I just saw one hornworm eating my *Datura*, a plant which is poisonous and a hallucinogen, a big fat caterpillar. And a half hour later, as I looked more carefully, they were all over the place.

I know, most of you are horrified by them at sight, much less touching one, but my acquaintance with hornworms goes back to when I was a child. I have been a naturalist since I was about six years old, back in Lancaster, PA where I was born. For a little kid, hornworms were a big deal.

I used to beg my parents to drive me out to a place in Lancaster, a frozen food locker where people stored a side of beef, etc. For me it was the fifty-foot bed of petunia flowers out front that got my attention. Every early evening those petunias drew Sphinx Moths, the large hummingbird sized moths that hovered and drank the nectar from the petunias. I just had to try to catch them with my butterfly net.

And just out back of our house, at the edge of our property were a field of tobacco plants, and on those tobacco plants the large hornworm caterpillars ate the tobacco leaves and I studied them there.

Well, today they were eating my *Datura* plants and not just a little, but eating them down to the bone, so to speak. And soon I was out there pulling the large caterpillars off the underside of my *Datura* plants and throwing them in a bowl. They are hard to detach and took two hands, and I had to wear gloves because the leaves of the *Datura* are also very poisonous. I would not kill them, but I took them outside of town where I hoped they would find something to eat. It would not be other *Datura* (Moonflower) plants because they don't grow around here.

I am not too worried because my *Datura* plants are at the end of their season and have few flowers left. After the first heavy frost, I will be digging them up, putting them in a tub of vermiculite and storing them in the basement until

next spring. Their chance of wintering outside, at least this winter, even if they are covered with mulch, is small. It is being said that this winter will be a cold one.

[Photos by me.]

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The Hiepe W28S Lightweight Tripod

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 20, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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I've been using tripods since 1956 when I used one with my little Kodak Retina IIa folding Rangefinder camera.

I have a whole closet full of tripods, and there are no crappy ones (or few) there. I have Gitzos that can hold a bowling ball or a Burzynski ball head. And I have several little ones like the Gitzo QT 1545 T that are about as light as I can go to support my Nikons, Hasselblads, and Cambo view cameras.

And then I stumbled on an advertisement add for the HEIPI W28S, a lightweight (3 lbs) carbon fiber tripod that folds up tight like a pocket knife. I studied the literature with care and found myself nodding yes to all the features, but of course I had to see the thing in person and it was only \$429, which is inexpensive compared to all my RSS tripods. I ordered it.

When it arrived, I was delighted to see that it was even better than I imagined. I couldn't be happier and set about to test every part of it. It all checked out.

And before I knew it, I had it outside in the garden taking photos with my Hasselblad. Fully extended it seemed light as a feather, and I was overtired from dragging my Series-3 RSS tripods with the Arca-Swiss Cube1 geared head on it all these years.

And it was stable enough for the light work I do, and I still have all those heavier carbon-fiber RRS and Gitzo tripods if I need them. Otherwise, they can stay in the studio and work there.

And the most controversial feature of the HEIPI W28S is that it has a small three-leg tripod that acts like a central column and is amazingly steady. I hate center columns and never use them, not ever. I have a whole tub of columns in the closet that I never used.

Yet this tiny, three-legged column works powerfully and I find myself using all the time instead of endlessly extending and retracting the tripod legs. I keep those legs extended so the tripod will fit in the back of my car, but extend the 3-leg column more and more of the time. And, as mentioned, that tiny 3-legged column, with a twist of the hand pops right out and can be used on the tabletop or ground and still have all the Arca-Swiss clamp with it. I have used

it a couple of times, and have no complaint. Amazing, a column that actually works.

And the Ball Head on the top of the tripod is larger than you would expect for this sized tripod and really is a pleasure to use. And best of all for me, the various clamps and twists are exactly perfect for my hands, and it is like I had the HEIPI W28S for many years.

I know tripods, and yes, they can be beautiful, but equally they are a necessary evil for me to haul around, so much that I have to think twice about whether I should use it to this or that shot.

And I know that the new Hasselblad X2D2 is so flexible that it can be used handheld even at very low shutter speeds, and I also do that. I have carefully tested the very best handheld shots with the X2D2 against taking the same shot on a tripod.

And unfortunately for me I am so old-fashioned (and also just old) that I can see the little bit of difference between handholding with the new X2D2 and putting it on a tripod. So, when I can, I still want that tripod for all still life, yet thanks to the HEIPI W28S it is not a chore. I am enjoying it and lifting the tripod with camera attached around the gardens is fun.

And it folds up small and tight taking up almost no space in the car. No, I won't always use it because handheld with the X2D2 is amazing in itself, yet as mentioned, I always, always, always want that last bit of sharpness if I can get it. The HEIPI W28S is a blessing to me. And I am not being paid or given anything free for this review. I actually love the product and use it all the time.

I write this because there must be others like me looking for a light yet feature-rich carbon-fiber tripod with an Arca-Swiss clamp that is so easy to use but safe. Solid.

Here is the site and plenty of photos that show the features. When I received the tripod, I was surprised how well and thoughtfully made it was. I could not do a better design myself, and actually using it did not take but a moment and it felt like I have been working it for years.

The three-legged central column is a brilliant design and solid as a rock. I use it all the time and it saves me extending and retracking the three main legs.

HEIPI W28S Tripod

https://heipivision.com/products/heipi-3-in-1-travel-tripod-w28s?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21681803202&gbraid=0AAAAA-

B6i_n60RaqvSBtCBGEsShnT3Y-Y&gclid=Cj0KCQjw_rPGBhCbARIsABjq9cfhF-U-5OMMuNxEnv4IGis4dyNpS28Aullt_Mx1b6raSJ1qGolxkWYaAqK6EALw_wcB

[Photo of the Asian pears by me.]

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Farm Aid: "On the Road Again"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

September 21, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0687a412-0b0d-4994-bfe1-835d58e9bf8a_584x782.jpeg

On Friday I got my shot for Covid and also another for the seasonal flu, so it's not too unusual for me to spend a day or two not feeling up to par after vaccinations. And today, Saturday, was one of those off days. I didn't feel much like doing anything at all, so after trying to write didn't take, I cast around for something to watch on streaming TV.

Lucky for me, today was Farm Aid, the 40 th year, over almost 15 hours of music and information about the state of farming and farms in America. I settled in to watch what I could of that.

The short FARM AID videos were repeated endlessly and after a time or two of the videos I just skipped over those and watched the music acts.

What I liked is that each of the 20 or so music acts were ample. Rather than a song or two, we got a full set of songs, enough to really catch up on where the musicians were at and what they were capable of right now. It was all live.

Well, as a professional music critic, you don't want to know my scoop on these twenty acts (no one loves a critic), so I will just skip to what I thought was great music or close to it.

Of course, I listened to all the acts as best I could, because, as mentioned, Farm Aid is all live music.

The most inspiring act for me, by far, was "Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats." They just blew the top off everyone else. I just loved them, such powerful and in-your-face music. Where has this group been all my life!

Other acts that I got into were Jesse Welles, who carries on the tradition of political songwriting, and especially our Michigan home-grown Billy Strings. I have seen Strings at the summer festivals here in Michigan but had not heard enough of his work to grasp what he was about. Here is a very serious and dedicated young man performing bluegrass music, but my impression is that bluegrass was more what genre he was using rather than who and what he was. A serious dude.

Another ear-catcher was Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds (Matthew's lead guitarist). They offered a mesmerizing musical workout that was spellbinding, as they sought to break open the moment in time, and almost did that. When Matthew's former violinist Boyd Tinsley sat in with Matthews and Reynolds, he shook up the group and almost broke through Matthews 'shyness'. It was fun to watch.

Not much to say about John Mellencamp and "Neil Young and the Chrome Hearts." Neil Young kind of jammed around and finally closed with an entire song "Old Man Look at My Life," which of course was a hit.

As for the short set from Bob Dylan, what I joke that was. I was looking forward to seeing Dylan, since in 1961 I hitchhiked with him and helped him put on shows in Ann Arbor, so of course I wanted to see how he was faring and looked. I should have known better.

His set was completely dark, no light to speak of. They removed all the rogue or roaming cameras, so you never could really see his face or him much at all. And on top of that he was wearing a hoodie. And yes, through the mumbling I could make out some words and recognized some of the Dylan songs I knew, but you could never see his face or see him singing like all the other acts that day provided.

When he finished, he stood up and kind of came forward a bit, almost staggering, turned and faded into the darkness. A real disappointment, but then I should have expected nothing more.

And the final act was Willie Nelson & Family, which was pure Nelson at his best. Nelson is 92 years old but withstood an entire day of Farm Aid interviews and roundtables until around 12:02 EDT when he performed.

Willie Nelson was everything he always is, incredible, direct, musical, and in charge. What a great songwriter and performer. It was worth staying up to 1:49 to see his whole act.

Now for some sleep.

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Lacuna

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 13, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b7a44e6b-3e17-49f3-8e01-74610631cc1e_1024x1024.jpeg

For me personally, Time seems to be on vacation, to be standing still for I'm not sure how long just now, some days perhaps. I am in a kind of stability or stasis crisis and holding pat. Very little movement or urgency for change, outward or internally. I am drawing blanks.

For the time being.

Rinse, and Repeat

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/766225ab-7625-477d-a1a4-d22557f05b33_1024x1024.jpeg

I don't want to fall into the habit of writing daily horoscopes or commenting on the current astronomy with astrology, what the astronomy means, yet here I am.

That being said, what has changed since yesterday, astrologically speaking? Well, overall, perhaps some, but then again not much.

The same static differential, the lack of a sense of drive or change persists today and grows even stronger. There is no urgency to budge. Yet things feel stable.

However, there are differences It would seem (it would appear) that we are today more sensitive and even waxing a bit psychological, yet in truth we are more independent and alone than we were yesterday, on our own.

As for me, I am still not moved to write anything more than this, which is unusual. Not dharma, photography, music, etc. Just these astrological musings.

I am trying to keep my head down, go with the flow, relax, and not to be moved by the immobility that I feel I am embedded in.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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“The Music Goes Round and Around, and it Comes Out Here.”

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ced9bc0c-54e4-4542-899b-011bf2cd148c_1024x1024.jpeg

I’m indoors, if only because winter is coming. Windows are closed and storm windows coming out of the basement. What do I want to do all winter? Well, photography for one, now that I can’t go outside much, I feel like photographing. Go figure.

I’ve been checking out all my indoor photography lights and their modifiers. I’d like to do some careful documenting of our home and our dharma center next door.

There was hail here yesterday, and the rain came down, the wind began to blow. And so, I am readying my small photography studio inside.

Each year I can’t seem to capture spring. I’m not fast enough. Spring is like the finale at the fireworks. Everything blooms faster than I can celebrate or photograph, and before I know it the summer solstice is over, and the tick-tock of autumn begins to toll. Because of all of that, these winter months are so important to get ready for, not that I ever can.

As mentioned, I’m assembling my indoor lighting, cleaning up my little photo studio, now looking out my windows instead of in. I’m glad I planted some prairie grass in the yard, the Big Bluestem and Little Bluestem, because all the flowers are gone but the tall grass is still there, ready to rise above the snow, so we have something to see as the wind blows.

I’d like to believe I’m that flexible, but there is no real choice. The seasons dictate my reactions. I just react. I am reacting now from inside the house.

And as usual, the first thing I do with a project is make sure I have all the tools I need, and I enjoy searching online for this or that and ordering it up. Sometimes getting ready is better than the doing of something. I have a long history of getting ready, waiting. I can wait. I often have to.

I imagine and imagine and imagine how it should, would, or could be. I picture it, again and again, often while I am waiting for whatever equipment I need to arrive.

In my life, when I come up short of results, I seldom give up and just go away, because I want to make something matter and come into existence. Instead, I double down and put more love and care into it. That's my plan with photography for this winter, with more attention and greater care in the lighting and composition.

What I am trying to get at is the magic of the internal, my going deeper instead of going broader and pulling back. And by deeper, I mean total immersion is always my non-meditation of choice. I have to lose myself in what I am doing. That's when I am intuitive and creative.

"The music goes round and around, and it comes out here."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Lack-A-Wanna

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 25, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/77f8f974-be29-4a77-81a0-49ef3a1e635a_1024x1024.jpeg

Astrologically speaking, we are still in a continued time of “Lack a Wanna,” not feeling the usual drive or sense of urgency to act or do anything. Of course, we can rest in the stasis, in the spinning gyroscope that does not lean this way or that.

I don’t know what more to say. It is pretty simple, this lack of urgency that is usually there, the angst that drives us to do this, that, and the other thing. Right now, that drive and urgency is just not there, replaced with this plane of equilibrium that leaves us static.

We miss our usual busyness with distractions.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Mostly The Same

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 26, 2025

The urgency for action these days, at least for me, is minimal.

Urgency Returns

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 28, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/04d9af6f-5e25-4891-a551-83dc054934f1_1700x2200.jpeg

Right now, the astronomy of the planets around their center the Sun forms a rough Heptagram – seven pointed star.

The astronomy of it is what the astrology attempts to interpret. Finally, astronomically, the planets in relation to the Sun, which have until now been more or less evenly spread, have started to move out of those heptagram configurations, if only temporarily.

I continue to monitor what's recently going on in the heavens astronomically, and attempt to describe it as it affects us culturally -- astrologically. The recent lack of urgency or need to take action in these last weeks is at last beginning to morph. It's easing up from 'easing up', or more correctly, we begin to feel some urgency or angst once again, the need to change and get things done.

As always, it's about 'time', as we round the corner of the recent equilibrium or stasis into more urgency and awareness as to what is going on, not unlike the ancient legend of Atlantis arising. God knows, it has taken it's time to be urgent until now, like an extended solar flare does when rising from the surface of the sun to become a CME (Coronal Mass Ejection).

Finally, we are beginning to have enough awareness as to what's going on for me to grasp or begin to get a handle on it and find some words, and although it has been a long look at nothing, the one thing it does seem to highlight (at least for me) is that we currently are on a slow learning curve about all of this more than anything else. In other words, there is a view forming. We just don't have it yet but can already feel or sense it in the winds of change.

Indeed, this current time of late has been quite special and even rare, yet without the ability on our part to reflect and become more aware of just how that is, it falls a bit short of being satisfying. Some satisfaction may be starting to come.

That should tell me something right there, yet as mentioned, putting my finger on changes that don't change is, as they say, a bit of an oxymoron.

As Saturn moves to bring focus to its conjunction with Neptune heliocentrically, we notice the Trines (120-degrees) and Sextiles (60-degrees)

combine to form what is called a “Mystic Rectangle,” a major pattern or archetype bringing with it psychological meaning (sensitivity) and awareness.

I don’t tend to write daily ‘horoscopes’ as you know, yet I do this today because of this long spell of inaction, the lack of urgency (I call it the Lack a ‘Wanna) and desire to do much of anything affects us all. As this inactivity begins to morph and change, even momentarily, a sense of urgency will once again arise and drive us on in our life, this way or that way.

[Heliocentric chart of the planets around the Sun.]

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School Days

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 30, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5e817cc8-6ea0-4a2e-8fbb-26818580a30e_1356x932.jpeg

I can remember when I was about 14 years old and, in the 6th-8 th grades, at St. Francis Catholic School out on Stadium Boulevard in Ann Arbor, Michigan. There were perhaps 12 kids in my grade, and we were in the same room with another grade in the school. I was there through the 8 th grade, and I believe we were the first class ever to graduate from St. Francis.

Mostly, my small class had each other to socialize with and I can remember Friday nights when some of us were at the home of one or another student, usually down in the basement listening to 45s on those little RCA Victor 45 players, where you could stack a pack of 45s on that big spindle and dance. We had to keep our eyes peeled on the basement stairs to see if any parent was coming down to check on us, because we were dancing too close and getting too intimate, but not really. What did we know?

Back then most of the boys in my class were already smoking. My first cigarette was Chesterfields, about as harsh as any brand. I still remember walking into town from 2815 Washtenaw, out near where Whole Foods is now, a long walk, miles. There I was with a coat too light for the weather, in the brisk air of winter walking the streets of Ann Arbor, trying to get to one of my friend's houses. The smell of my cigarette smoke in the cold winter air was bracing.

And during lunch hours at St. Francis, we boys would go across the street, back in the thicket swamps to smoke cigarettes. And of course, the Dominican nuns with their long robes and white habits would come after us in the thickets. They never caught us. We could see their white habits moving through bushes from far away and slip off deeper into the brush.

The one story from my Catholic school days that sticks with me I will share with you here.

Even back then I was the little naturalist, loving every animal I could see. People, not so much back then. And I had studied fossils and dinosaurs from top to bottom. Anyway, that day the nun who was teaching us announced there never were any dinosaurs or something like that.

Well, of course I raised my hand and set her straight. She shut me down flat. I got up, left the room, walked up the long hill (about one block) to the rectory where the Father Kennedy lived, knocked on the door, and explained to father how Sister Rapheal was mistaken.

Father Kennedy walked with me down to the school, and into the classroom, and explained to the whole class that there indeed were dinosaurs. I'm afraid that did not endear me to the nun. I was the same student who put a frog in one of the girls' desks in our schoolroom.

[Photo of our class, arrow points to me.]

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Winter Closing In

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 2, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/32518a4c-4756-4dca-9d85-fbcacca28cd_2048x1189.jpeg

Busy lately, physically moving things around. Winter is coming, time to put away outdoor things, clean up the gardens, gather bulbs for wintering, and ten other things.

Also, we continue to get rid of stuff from the deep basement of our dharma center. We have filled a 10-foot table with things to take to “Habitat for Humanity” and moved it to our cars.

The hardest thing yesterday was a 7-foot oak table from storage that weighs probably 250 pounds that we are giving to our daughter Anne to help her start a matting and framing business in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Anne is a talented fine-artist and already makes her own wooden frames. To move this table top, took a special truck and about five people moving it. I also broke up a huge pile of cardboard boxes and got them to recycle.

Also, some friends of ours arrived for a two-week stay, yesterday. They have sold their home and are itinerant travelers and are getting off the road to have a visit with us. We are glad to see them. They are staying in our dharma center next door.

Anyway, that’s what was on the agenda yesterday.

[Photo of getting the tabletop into the truck, and of the two large legs that support it. I was busy putting on the 3-inch casters so it could roll around.]

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"A Complete Unknown"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 4, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/01dd27ad-8d7b-4b4d-8ae8-2cb19c6f8ab0_2898x2049.jpeg

I have put off watching the movie about Bob Dylan, "A Complete Unknown," not so much because I did not want to see it, but because I felt I would not like it. Why should I worry about a movie?

I probably shouldn't, and the reason I did was because I was very much present and there back in the day. The movie starts out with Dylan in 1961, which was exactly the year I travelled with Dylan, hitchhiking with him and hanging around with him in places like 'Gerdes Folk City' in New York. I knew him from traveling with him and I also knew him from his trips to and through Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I spent time with him and helped him to put on a concert there, which I will detail below.

However, for the sake of my four kids and all of you too young to have been there, I feel I must say something about how the folk music scene back in 1961 was all about. IMO, the movie was a hack job.

I knew that it would be hard to capture what it was like back then, but the movie was way off track and certainly did not hit the nail on the head. I was shocked and saddened by what a sloppy job they did, even though everyone seems to have liked it. I just want you to know a little more about how it actually was back then.

The only person that was done properly in the movie was Pete Seeger, played by Edward Norton, whose acting was very much how Seeger actually was. I'm sorry, Timothée Chalamet, who played Dylan, either did not grasp the nature of Bob Dylan, or those who produced the show missed Dylan's character big time.

Dylan in person was not only intelligent, brilliant, he was very self-motivated and confident. He didn't mope around and hang his head. He knew where he was going and what he wanted to do. I will say more about his nature below.

And Joan Baez, who I did not know as well, but spent some time with her sitting around, just the two of us in the MUG (Michigan Union Grill) as the University of Michigan. Joan was slighter of figure and more refined than

Monica Barbaro. She actually was very dignified, even proper, and somewhat reserved.

I will not spend time talking about the music, as the songs by Dylan and Baez in the film were nothing close to the originals. They would have done themselves a favor if they just lip-synched to the original recordings. Instead, the music was sloppy, missing the cadence, the flow of the words, etc. Sad.

The whole film seemed to me like a budget production, something thrown together, with little thought.

Also, the Newport set of Dylan with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band was the worst butchering of the music in the whole movie. How could they fail to present the power and effect of the Butterfield band, especially of Michael Bloomfield. That's a band I spent a lot of time with.

And when my band, the Prime Movers Blues Band travelled to San Francisco in 1967 for the "Summer of Love." Bloomfield took care of us, even found us a place to stay and practice (Sausalito Heliport), and arranged us to substitute for his band "The Electric Flag" at the Fillmore Auditorium, where we opened for "Cream."

I just had to communicate that "A Complete Unknown," while probably interesting (at best) was not carefully researched, and worst of all did not capture the excitement and flavor of those times, when folk-music revival of the late 1950s turned into folks like Dylan writing their own songs instead of singing the traditional tunes. Here are some additional writings about those times for those interested.

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:

Joan Baez: "Diamonds and Rust"

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 worked to restore and protect (revive) whatever went before us.

It would only be a few years back then 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. Lederman 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 or ebony 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 into 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 on 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 their 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.

Anyway, I am saddened that the movie "A Complete Unknown" was, IMO, so far off the mark to how I remember those days.

[A photo in the public domain.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Folk Music Revival in Ann Arbor

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 5, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/13b89b25-eaae-447c-a02c-db9ee2112126_1177x2048.jpeg

By Michael Erlewine

[I received some requests to detail the history of folk music in Ann Arbor. I have cobbled together some writing I have done in the past so please bear with me if there is some repetition.]

In 1957 freshmen students Al Young and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Young went on to become the Poet Laureate of California. The Folklore Society was a natural interface between the University folk and the townies – music. As a high-school dropout, I had no trouble integrating and being accepted in the folk circles. No questions were asked. We were all just ‘folk’ and it was a culturally rich scene.

And Michigan was not the only campus with a folklore society. Folk music was popping up on campuses all over the nation and we were interconnected by what came to be called the folk circuit, a constant stream of folk enthusiasts that traveled from campus to campus playing and sharing folk music. The circuit went from Cambridge to New York City to Ann Arbor to Chicago to Madison to Berkeley and back again. We were hitchhiking or piled into old cars and drove the route.

Musicians like Bob Dylan would hitchhike into town, hang out, play a gig or two, and be on down the road. And well-known folk singers came. Folk singers like Ramblin’ Jack Elliot and groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were regular visitors to Ann Arbor and this was before anyone was famous. They didn’t stay in fancy motels, but with us. They stayed in our houses, sleeping on a couch or in the spare bedroom. We all hung out together and played music or sat in the Michigan Union and drank coffee all day. Whatever music and culture they brought with them really had a chance to sink in. They shared themselves and their time with us. They were just like us.

Ann Arbor had its own players. The president of the Folklore Society was Howie Abrams and we sported folk musicians like Marc Silber, Al Young, Dave Portman, Peter Griffith, and Perry Lederman. There was also an important

lady named “Bugs,” who was part of the university, and I think her name was Marie Joynt.

And the society put on festivals and events. For example, the folklore society raised money to bring Odetta to Ann Arbor where she gave her first college performance. And a young Bob Dylan gave an early performance as part of a small folk-music festival in Ann Arbor put on by the U-M Folklore Society.

I can remember sitting in the Michigan Union with a very nervous Bob Dylan, drinking coffee and smoking, while we waited for the review of Dylan’s performance the night before to come out in the Michigan Daily, the student newspaper. It was something like 10:30 AM when the review surfaced and it was positive.

With that good news Dylan proceeded to hitchhike out of town. And when Odetta sang at the Newport Folk Festival in 1960, Al Young, Perry Lederman, and Marc Silber hitchhiked there to see her. And there was also a subtle change taking place.

Folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s was part of what is called the “Folk Revival,” and those of us who were part of it were very much aware of the need to protect and revive our musical heritage.

Dylan and Baez were not writing their own tunes back then but rather reviving and interpreting songs that harkened from other generations. What made you a good ‘folk singer’ then was the ability to authentically reproduce or reenact a particular song. The keywords were “authentic” and “revive.” Folk singers went to great lengths to locate and reproduce the most authentic versions of a song.

Writing our own songs came years later. We were busy rescuing this part of our cultural heritage from oblivion. Folk music at that time was mostly White folk music with maybe a peppering of Black country-blues artists or a virtuoso Black singer like Odetta. They were the exception, but they were treated like the rule: revive them too and be authentic. When we heard the country blues, we wanted to revive and sing them as authentically as we could, Ebonics and all.

So, it was somewhat confusing when we eventually found out that the blues not only didn’t need our reviving, but were alive and well, playing at a bar just downtown where they were perhaps separated by a racial curtain.

We didn’t go there because... well, just because. Another insidious form of racism.

But in fact, blues, especially city blues, was very much alive, very seminal, and very, very available. In the early and mid-1960s, young White Americans began the trek to the other side of the tracks, took the trip downtown, and eventually the journey to Chicago and other places where electric blues were being played.

Ann Arbor played a very significant role in introducing White America to city blues. The original two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970 were landmark events and the three succeeding Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festivals just opened it all up to a wider audience.

There is more on this general topic in my book “Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals,” which was picked as one of the top 20 books published in Michigan that year. You will find it here:

http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1321295671&sr=1-1

And of course there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first. The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival.

The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger.

During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000 people. The Newport festival is still considered to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years.

The folk scene in the early '60s was very active and organized enough to have a well-established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking.

By the early 1960s folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time

that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener's experience and enjoyment of the tune.

"Sing Out! Magazine" was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective-heritage. It should be remembered that the folk music revival emerged toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what we felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and thirsting for authenticity, something a little more real.

It is a simple fact that most of us looked upon the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their shadow and the counterculture hippie revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already emerging.

The Folk Scene

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we didn't know it then.

The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961.

And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals were mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and as a sidelight at that.

For example, one could hear Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker.

It is hard for me to imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed. Dylan's album "Highway 61 Revisited" was released in August of 1965, including the hit

single "Like a Rolling Stone."

The Folk Revival – Looking for Roots

This folk music revival in the late 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future.

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included.

The goal then was to do them well, make them live again, i.e. to revive them. Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not their own songwriting creativity that was being featured.

Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for the present, much less for the future. They were too busy trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it is called a folk revival.

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country.

If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times and also hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. In 1961, I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my friend Perry Lederman, who then was already a legendary guitar instrumentalist.

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann

Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars, and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there.

We met mostly in houses or apartments, and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union, the place called M.U.G, the Michigan Union Grill. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way, hitchhiking out of town.

For the most part, as mentioned, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artist's originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later.

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in New York. Gerde's was 'the' happening place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the "Blues Project." Dylan was obviously jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn't. It boggled his mind. I didn't know then that my traveling companion was "The" Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say that we needed to hear.

Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were 'wanna-be Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old!

The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like "Freight Train" (Cotton) and "San Francisco Bay Blues" (Fuller). To folk

enthusiasts like me, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, this just sounded like really good folk music – ‘really’ good. Back then we didn’t know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music.

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There were no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric-folk music was an oxymoron.

Being Part of the Scene

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived – learned, played, shared - kept alive.

It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had no idea that modern electric blues music was not only ‘not-dead’ but was playing ‘live’ most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few Blacks in it (other than a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present.

Please don’t get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music.

This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage

high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms. And quite a scene it was.

I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu

jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall.

We didn't rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

Searching for Roots

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly White folk musicians like me were suddenly exposed to modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished.

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – alive, well, and incredibly potent.

What we had assumed must always be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, was very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we heard lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it.

Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made a connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us, and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, folk music that lived in the present! And this music revived us and not vice versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s, as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks were already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city blues was, to younger blacks at

that time, old people's music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace. Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues.

My band played in a black bar (Clint's Club) for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar (Derby Bar), where all the younger blacks hung out and where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was music from an older generation, music for old people.

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future.

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

"The blacks are more interested in the 'jumpy' stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am."

As pointed out, in the early 1960s, folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music.

That first "Rolling Stones" album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like Jimmy Reed's "Honest I Do," "Willie Dixon's "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "I'm a King Bee," plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas.

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins,

songs like “Under the Boardwalk.” It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, “Time Is on My Side.” In 1965, the album “Rolling stones, Now!” had the Dixon-Wolf classic “Little Red Rooster.”

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, the album “Out of Our Heads” had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, “December’s Children.” It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular that first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the White audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before White America ever heard of them.

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it’s when my own band, the Prime Movers, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle.

In fact, the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally kicked ass.

The Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record. This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal through all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway.

Their message was that white players could overcome their fear of playing black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues. We were emboldened to try.

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation.

Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older generation of Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the late 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still

reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered. They needed the money and appreciated the recognition.

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late '60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all kinds – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was Michael Bloomfield and the tune “East-West” on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over 13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed. One time in Chicago, my brother Dan Erlewine and I with a reel-to-reel tape machine, sat behind a semi-transparent black curtain while the Butterfield band on stage played an early version of East-West before it appeared on an album. Our recording was released on a CD some years later.

That brings us up to the late 1960s. I should go on just a little farther and explain how I became cemented in the blues scene and eventually turned into an archivist of popular music and culture.

When the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival was being put together by the University of Michigan students, I was not a student (although I was admitted to the U-M without even a high school diploma, tried it, and found it as boring as any other school, for me and dropped out).

I was a man about town in Ann Arbor, and my band members and I had been to Chicago and knew many of the players and, of course, the music. So, my brother Dan Erlewine and I ended up hosting all the performers, being in charge of feeding them, and what turned out to be more important, providing them with drinks. We were in a tent behind the stage, working out of the back of my father's Ford station wagon.

And the thing about it was that many of these performers had turned up in Ann Arbor as much as a week before the festival, and were being put up in West Quad dormitories and in rooms at the Michigan League. Dan and I ended up tending to them.

I remember going up to the room at legendary Arthur “Big Boy Crudup, who wrote Elvis Presley's first song. We just knocked on the door. And this huge man appeared, with us standing there. Dan just opened his vest and revealed a bottle of Jack Daniels. Crudup just said, “Come on in boys!” and we stayed up on into the night.

At those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals I began to interview, first with a tape recorder, and later with video, literally hundreds of performers, their band members, and even some of their families. And this continued on in the

1972 and 1973, with the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals, where we kept hosting the performers and bands, and I to interview. I became an archivist of popular culture because of that.

We did the same with Big Mama Thonton, stayed up all night, and with many other performers. We were in heaven and even now looking back, that was a major turning point in my life. I was seldom as there as I was then. I could go on, but that would be even longer. You get the idea.

For those who would like to read more, just go to this site (SpirtGrooves.net), select Free e-Books, and then Music, and there is a lot to look over.

[Some photographs by Stanley Livingstone.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL

The Paul Butterfield Blues Band

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 6, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/dd3c109a-d646-4bf8-b849-ad9401372490_1808x1799.jpeg

Here I will share with you something about the history of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, which very much influenced me and our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band. First, I will say something about my personal relationship with the Butterfield band, get it out of the way, and then go on with a general history of that band.

As for me personally, our band, the Prime Mover's Blues Band, spent a lot of time hanging out with and around the Butterfield band. We went to hear them every chance we could, including driving all the way to Chicago just to hear them play. Butterfield was friendly enough, but always a little cool.

I remember sitting outside in our band's van smoking some pot with Butterfield, just the two of us, and he explained that he was so good just because he was left-handed. He said left-handed people were always better than right-handed people (like me). He was probably pulling my leg, but you couldn't always tell with Butterfield. He not only was left-handed, but played the harp upside-down and backward. That, indeed, would be very hard to imitate. LOL.

I can remember one time in Chicago, my brother Dan Erlewine (our lead guitar player) and I were sitting behind a flimsy black semi-transparent curtain in front of which the Butterfield Band was playing the landmark tune East-West before it was on an album. We had an old reel-to-reel tape recorder, and we were, as mentioned, recording an early version of the Butterfield band's tune East-West. This recording was later released on an album of East-West live recordings by Mark Naftalin.

Our go-to guy in the band was Michael Bloomfield, sometimes Mark Naftalin, because they were very friendly. I am told that Butterfield said the "Prime Movers Blues Band" was the second-best white blues band in the country, of course, emphasizing second-best. The Butterfield Band was by far the best. We loved those guys. They killed it.

In 1967, the Prime Movers (five of us) drove out to San Francisco for the "Summer of Love," and were taken in by Michael Bloomfield. We had about

zero money, and played at an outdoor rib place for meals. We ate a lot of ribs that summer.

Michael Bloomfield found us a place where we could stay, the Sausalito Heliport, and even asked us to substitute for his band, "The Electric Flag," when they couldn't make a gig. We opened for Cream in one of their few concerts at the Fillmore Auditorium on August 29, 1967.

Although the Butterfield band's albums, especially those first two, are incredible, nothing they recorded EVER sounded as good as hearing them in person. They killed it.

We saw them as often as we could, and both bands played at the Living End in Detroit. I include a poster from that venue.

The History

Butterfield grew up in Chicago's Hyde Park, and according to his brother Peter:

"There was a lot of music around. Hyde Park, a place unique in Chicago because it was an island in the Southside ghetto, and a bastion of liberal politics.

"When we grew up there was a crime problem -- mostly due to scattered groups of Puerto Ricans and poor white trash -- but no one made a connection to the black community as a source of crime. We grew up about half a block from something called the International Houses and you would see people from all over the world in the immediate area. "

Butterfield was culturally sophisticated. His father was a well-known attorney in the Hyde Park area, and his mother was an artist -- a painter. Butterfield took music lessons (flute) from an early age and by the time he reached high school, was studying with the first-chair flautist of the Chicago Symphony. He was exposed to both classical music and jazz from an early age. Butterfield ran track in high school and was offered a running scholarship to Brown University, which he had to refuse after a serious knee injury.

From that point onward, Butterfield turned toward the music scene around him. He began learning the guitar and harmonica.

He met the singer Nick Gravanites and started hanging around outside of the Chicago blues clubs, listening. He and Gravanites began to play together at various campuses -- Ann Arbor, University of Wisconsin, and the University of Chicago.

His parents sent him off to the University of Illinois, but he would put in a short academic week, return home early (but not check in) and instead play and hang out at the blues clubs. Soon, he was doing this six or seven days a week with no school at all. When this was discovered by his parents, he then dropped out of college and turned to music full-time.

Butterfield practiced long hours by himself -- just playing all the time. His brother Peter writes:

“He listened to records, and he went places, but he also spent an awful lot of time, by himself, playing. He’d play outdoors. There’s a place called “The Point” in Hyde Park, a promontory of land that sticks out into Lake Michigan, and I can remember him out there for hours playing. He was just playing all the time ... It was a very solitary effort. It was all internal, like he had a particular sound he wanted to get, and he just worked to get it.”

In the meantime, Elvin Bishop had come from Oklahoma to the University of Illinois on a scholarship and had discovered the various blues venues for himself. Elvin remembers:

“One day I was walking around the neighborhood and I saw a guy sitting on a porch drinking a quart of beer -- white people that were interested in blues were very few and far between at that time. But this guy was singing some blues and singing it good. It was Butterfield. We gravitated together real quick and started playing parties around the neighborhood, you know, just acoustic. He was playing more guitar than harp when I first met him. But in about six months, he became serious about the harp. And he seemed to get about as good as he ever got in that six months. He was just a natural genius. And this was in 1960 or 1961.”

Butterfield and Bishop began going down to the clubs, sitting in, and playing with all the great black blues players -- then in their prime. Players like Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Howlin’ Wolf, Junior Wells, Little Walter, and especially, Muddy Waters. They often were the only Whites there, but were soon accepted because of their sincerity, their sheer ability, and the protection of players like Muddy Waters, who befriended them.

An important event in the history of introducing blues to white America came in 1963 when Big John’s, a club located on Chicago’s White North Side invited Butterfield to bring his band there and play on a regular basis. He said “sure,” and Butterfield and Bishop set about putting such a band together.

They pulled Jerome Arnold (bass) and Sam Lay (drums) from Howlin’ Wolf’s band (with whom they had worked for the past six years!), by offering them more money. Butterfield and Bishop (the core team), Arnold, and Lay were all

about the same age, and these four became the Butterfield Blues Band. They had been around for a long time and knew the Chicago blues scene and its repertoire cold. This new racially-mixed band opened at Big John's, was very successful, and made a first great step to opening up the blues scene to white America.

When the new group thought about making an album, they looked around for a lead guitarist. Michael Bloomfield, who was known to Butterfield from his appearances at Big Johns, joined the band early in 1965. Bloomfield, somewhat cool at first to Butterfield's commanding manner, warmed to the group as Butterfield warmed to his guitar playing.

It took a while for Bloomfield to fit in, but by the Summer of that year, the band was cookin'. Mark Naftalin, another music student, joined the band as the first album was being recorded, in fact while they were actually in the studio creating that first album on Electra.

He sat in (playing the Hammond Organ for the first time!) and noodled around with one of his own tunes, "Thank You Mr. Poobah." Butterfield liked the sound. They recorded that tune with Naftalin that very day along with eight of the 11 other tracks on their first album. After the recording session, Paul invited Naftalin to join the band and go on the road with them. These six, then, became the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

The first two Butterfield Blues albums are essential from a historical perspective. While East-West, the second album, with its Eastern influence and extended solos set the tone for psychedelic rockers, it was that incredible first album that put the music scene on alert to what was coming.

Although it has been perhaps over-emphasized in recent years, it is important to point out that the release of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band on Electra in 1965 had a huge effect on the white music culture of the time. Used to hearing blues covered by groups like the Rolling Stones, that first album had an enormous impact on young (and primarily White) rock players.

Here is no deferential imitation of black music by whites, but a racially-mixed hard-driving blues album that, in a word, rocked. It was a signal to white players to stop making respectful tributes to black music and just play it. In a flash the image of blues as old-time music was gone. Modern Chicago style urban blues was out of the closet and introduced to mainstream White audiences, who loved it.

Perhaps the next major event in the Butterfield band came when drummer Sam Lay became ill, late in 1965. Jazz drummer Billy Davenport was called in and soon became a permanent member of the group. Davenport was to

become a key element in the development of the second Butterfield Blues Band album, *East/West*. In particular, the extended solo of the same name.

Fueled by Bloomfield's infatuation with Eastern music and Indian ragas at the time and aided by Davenport's jazz-driven sophistication on drums, their arose in the group a new music form that was to greatly effect rock music -- the extended solo. There is little question that here is the root of psychedelic (acid) rock -- a genuine fusion between East and West.

Those first two albums served as a wakeup call to an entire generation of White would-be blues musicians. Speaking as one who was on the scene, that first Butterfield album stopped us in our tracks and we were never the same afterward. It changed our lives.

The third album (released in 1967), "*The Butterfield Blues Band; The Resurrection of Pigboy Crabshaw*" is the last album that preserves any of the pure blues direction of the original group. By this time, Bloomfield had left to create his own group, "*The Electric Flag*" and, with the addition of a horn section, the band is drifting more toward an R&B. sound. Mark Naftalin left the group soon after this album and the Butterfield band took on other forms.

Aside from these first three albums, later Butterfield material somehow misses the mark from a blues perspective. He never lost his ferocity or integrity, but the synergy of that first group was special. There has been some discussion in the literature about the personal transformation of Butterfield as his various bands developed. It is said that he went from being a self-centered band leader (shouting orders to his crew a' la Howlin' Wolf or Muddy Waters) to a more democratic style of leadership, providing his group with musical freedom (like Muddy Waters). For what it's worth, it is clear that the best music is in those first two (maybe three) albums. Subsequent albums, although also interesting, have not gotten as much attention then or now from reviewers.

When I knew Butterfield (during the first three albums), he was always intense, somewhat remote, and even, on occasion, downright unfriendly. Although not much interested in other people, he was a compelling musician and a great harp player.

Michael Bloomfield and Mark Naftalin, 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. Naftalin continues to this day to support blues projects and festivals in the San Francisco Bay area.

After Bloomfield and Naftalin left the group, Butterfield more and more spun off on his own. The next two albums, *In 'My Own Dream'* (1968) and *'Keep on*

Moving' (1969) moved still farther away from the blues roots until in 1972, Butterfield dissolved the group, forming the group 'Better Days'. This new group recorded two albums, 'Paul Butterfield's Better Days' and 'It All Comes Back.'

After that, Butterfield faded into the general rock scene, with an occasional appearance here and there, as in the documentary "The Last Waltz" (1976) -- a farewell concert from The Band. The albums 'Put It in Your Ear' (1976) and 'North/South' (1981) were attempts to make a comeback, but both failed. Paul Butterfield died of a drug-related heart failure in 1987.

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 -- only Big Walter Horton has a better sense of note selection. IMO.

The effect of the Butterfield Blues Band on aspiring White blues musicians was enormous and the impact of the band on live audiences was stunning.

Butterfield the performer was always intense, serious, and definitive -- no doubt about this guy. Blues purists sometimes like to quibble about Butterfield's voice and singing style, but the moment he picked up a harmonica, that was it. He is one of the finest harp players (period).

Butterfield and the six members of the original Paul Butterfield Blues Band made a huge contribution to modern music, turning a whole generation of white music lovers onto the blues as something other than a quaint piece of music history. The musical repercussions of the second Butterfield album, *East/West* continue to echo through the music scene even today!

I would like to thank Blues Access magazine for permission to use the quotes by Peter Butterfield and Elvin Bishop from the excellent article by Tom Ellis.

[Here are a few graphics, including a poster from the 'Living End' in Detroit, where both the Butterfield Blues Band and our own 'Prime Movers Blues Band' played.]

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Vising My Self

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 7, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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[Enough detailed posts for now. Time for me to walk out to the very edge of nothing and look out at the vast expanse of emptiness. Please forgive this nothingness.]

What good are these ephemeral musings? I'm sure I don't know well enough, yet for me they describe a state of mind, if only with the flickering moment of a lightning bug.

Primary experiences, past and present, real and imagined, mixing in the moment. Various levels of reality, like swirls of colored paint, life as abstract art.

Not guided meditation, but rather unguided momentary surges as insight, blobs of reality, side by side like spilled paint, mixing.

Not looked for, but pop-ups that intrude, capturing my attention for a moment, only to then recede away. It is a bit like an acid trip, but way too familiar to surprise or shock. A mixed bag, of course, something more to wade through than to study or stop for.

Trying to get where? Nowhere I know or care to go or get to but going anyway in that general direction. We can't stop time but perhaps in the present moment, through a portal of complete immersion, we see beyond our memories.

Moving the hands. Drifting them this way and then that through the air. Endless mudras signifying I know not what, other than, as mentioned, this process of mixing itself is revealed.

I'm not going anywhere because I am already here. Yet, what does all this signify, where do I point toward? It seems I point in circles, around and around, up and down, here and there, and back. Confined to dancing in the present moment.

As mentioned, there is nowhere to go but right here and we are already there. So, a bit of chaos exhibiting itself for whom? I'm doing the looking.

A circular cycle of breathing of light, pointing at itself, and signifying nothing. Nothing is also significant.

Every once in a while, when I get to this point, there is no turning back and no going forward, because I have arrived, but where? Of course, at and in the here and the now, but just where is that? That's the rub, because that is nowhere, and yet it is as much a place as anywhere else.

Am I bobbing for the apples of life? I don't feel that way. In fact, this feels more familiar than anywhere else. And there is not anywhere else. Walking across a flexible room that has no dimensions. Once present, there finally is nowhere else. How did that happen?

You see, this confection that we call our Self is itself a construct that we made from our own attachments, like a collage. My attachments are the glue that holds the Self together, yet they contain nothing new and are not going anywhere. They are empty of anything, including permanent existence. Whispering winds in my ears.

I find myself on a virtual plane that is extinct because it never lived. This, IMO, is a conundrum, a mind boggler, that finds me but an echo of something never said or heard. Do I like being alone with my Self? Not so much. Parmenides said "Being alone is." He got that right because it's empty, alone, and not the me I know. My Self is just not my kind of people.

Yet, I still find myself here and looking out at nothing at all. I don't go back, because there is no such thing. I just look away or ignore. There is never anyone here other than me, myself, and I, and that, as mentioned, is empty of any permanent existence, something I made up from my mistakes. I hate to ring that bell.

It's certainly not crowded here. Why do I keep showing up? I don't come, because I am and always have been already here. The Self has no future and no substance. Take away the attachments and nothing at all is left, a dummy mistaken too often taken for the ventriloquist, and giving orders.

I'm not complaining, just explaining, this speaking to no one about nothing. And being on the edge of nothing is really something.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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The Quality of Time

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Those of us who have ever played with time know that the quality of time is far more important than the quantity of it. Just a little bit of real or quality-time experience can light up a lot of life. And the inner eternal sense that can be found in our intense moments provides a real clue as to what time is all about. I am reminded of part of a poem I wrote years ago...

“The hour’s heartbreak conceals the whole of what we have not hated.”

To a great degree, time is a social convention lived by the majority — a consensus. We don’t always remain within that convention, but in odd moments, days, and hours of our lives, we may wander into more unusual (altered) states of mind and time.

Eternity does not somehow exist at the end of history or linear time. Eternity exists now, deep within (or without) time. Time does not itself extend to some end. Individuals extend time and we endure for that length. We last until then. We go between time, stretch time, make time. We extend ourselves. In moments of great vision, we leap between the seconds (beyond time) to the day of creation itself and come full cycle. We each have and develop our own sense of time, and sometimes what we see can be quite unconventional. This is particularly true for the shamanic among us.

THE RUSH OF TIME

Over the course of life, our sense of time changes. In the rush of linear time, it can become impossible for us to slow the flow of events. Time then seems like a freight train hurtling through the present, carrying us toward we know not where, we know not why. There is no rest when things get tight. We are having a “bad” time and hang on for dear life.

We also know moments and days when the rush and clatter subsides and is not the main focus. The freight train slows down, and we can smell the flowers once again. The gentle roll and swell of events now flow by like a great lazy river. On those days, there is no place we have to get to as important as the way we are feeling at the moment, the way we are going. This is a “good” time.

Many of you reading this column will have had minutes, hours, days, and perhaps years of your lives when you were thrust beyond that general consensus into a time zone where you knew that you were on your own, having a good or a bad time. Those of us with a tendency for the shamanic view, will spend a considerable amount of time beyond what we could agree is conventional time. The task is to reintegrate our experience, so that it can benefit both ourselves and society.

If you made it back from those moments and glimpses beyond the normal and were able to put what you saw to good use, then you have had what are called “moments of vision.” This is pure shamanism. If you got trapped out there or were (for some reason) unable to integrate what you experienced out there with your everyday life, then you are said to be experiencing some kind of mental problem. All of us have had both experiences, to one degree or another.

TIME CURVES

As pointed out, time does not just extend on forever in a linear progression, although that is one definition of time. Time (like space) curves, wrapping us in its cycles.

There is also eternity to consider. Eternity, as all wise men have been telling us forever, is “now here” (some spell it “nowhere” or “erehwon”) with us. Eternity is the salvation of time. In fact, we go between the seconds of the “now” to have these eternal moments, not down the road to reach them at some far end.

We can reach within the crush of sequenced time to touch eternity and slow time down to nothing. Time is tempered by eternity. Time slows down in the really full moments. It just stretches, that’s all, and we go between those clock-ticking seconds into a dimension that is, somehow, timeless — beyond time. I don’t know why or how it works this way, but I have experienced it many times.

As any musician knows who works with time, laying down each beat and measure, the moment opens just like a flower to expose its timeless quality. I mean eternity can be found only within time. Time stops or slows, and we bloom in the moment, having all or enough. The seconds stretch, and although the metronome ticks away, there is more and more quality, more eternity between each tick, until we have all the time in the world. That’s all the time there is. We ‘have’ time and not vice versa.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Life Initiations: Shamanism

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

November 8, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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[Some of you have requested more ‘esoteric astrology’ teachings, and I am game to put something together here. Before we get into the thick of the esoterica, it is important to understand ‘shamans’ and their role in astrology, so please read through this as a prelude. Shamans, of course, exist in many disciplines, so you don’t have to be an astrologer to read this.]

[Some of you have requested more ‘esoteric astrology’ teachings, and I am game to put something together here. Before we get into the thick of the esoterica, it is important to understand ‘shamans’ and their role in astrology, so please read through this as a prelude. Shamans, of course, exist in many disciplines, so you don’t have to be an astrologer to read this.]

This article is about the shamanic tradition within modern astrology and modern life, what we could call Shamanic Astrology, and astro-shamanism is nothing new.

Astrologers have been performing a shamanic function in society for centuries, and they continue to do so today. Astrology, and the astrologer’s role as shaman or guide, is becoming increasingly more important in modern society. Not all astrologers are shamans, in fact not many, but many do utilize some of the shamanic techniques.

Shamanic astrology is not often openly discussed, and is generally considered, as already mentioned, a part of what has been called “esoteric astrology,” the inner or more secret aspects of astrological knowledge, because it has to do with the ecstatic tradition, what is commonly called out-of-the-body experience. That tradition is what we will be presenting here.

Before we describe the process of astrological shamanism, let’s review what a shaman or shamanka (female shaman) is in the literature of the world. Here we will use the better-known term “shaman” to represent both male and female shamans, so as not to have to repeat both terms endlessly.

The word origin of Shaman (SHAY-men), from the Siberian Tungus language, means one who “knows,” one who has attained some degree of spiritual

realization, awareness, in particular awareness of the other worlds, the next life stage or planes.

TRADITIONAL AND CORE SHAMANISM

We should distinguish here between what is called traditional shamanism and the popular-today derivative called “Core Shamanism.” Traditional shamanism is a vocation that chooses you (there is no choice), while core shamanism is an avocation, a form of shamanism which anyone can choose to study and learn to use.

Core Shamanism is, in a word, a sanitized form of traditional shamanism, stripped of most of the dangers and risks, something that almost anyone can sign up for, study, and eventually practice.

Both forms of shamanism exist in the world today, so it is meaningless to say that traditional shamanism is the only one to be used, and the other simply an imitation, although there is some truth to that assertion. Here we are focusing on the parts of shamanism that make sense in modern astrology. Any counseling astrologer, almost by definition, is probably using one or more shamanic techniques, with or without the mind-altering experiences of the traditional shaman. These techniques are what we will study here.

That being said, I have found it much more useful to first understand the nature of traditional or classic shamanism, and take what we can from that, then to try and take from “Core Shamanism,” which is already an extract. In other words, we can each make our own core shamanism by absorbing, as much as possible those parts of traditional shamanism that make “sense” to us, that fit our personal experience. That is the approach being followed here.

THE SHAMANS SPIRITUAL CRISIS

The traditional shaman does not choose to be a shaman. Shamanism of this kind is the result of a series of psychological visions or experiences, whose very nature estranges (at least for a time) one from conventional society and the normal way of seeing things. The shaman is somehow, against their will, thrust outside of how everyone else sees life, into a space and view that is markedly altered and mostly non-communicable with the society around them.

The shaman, usually through a personal psychological or spiritual crisis, has become aware of the inner sequence of life processes typically hidden from society by their very obviousness, processes that are thus somehow “self-secret.” This propensity can come about through having a near-death or life-changing experience, mind-altering drugs, or somehow becoming

psychologically separated for a time from conventional societal consciousness.

NOT THE SAME AS A VISION QUEST

The shamanic experience has some similarities to the Native American vision quest, but, unlike the vision quest, which is generally voluntary, the shaman's own internal psychological chemistry thrusts the future shaman beyond convention and into an altered state of consciousness, until such time as he or she can manage (often through what is sometimes a life/death mental struggle) to find a balance, stabilize, and return to normal society.

The shaman cannot communicate what he or she sees to others, because society is not able or prepared to understand it. Society in general (by the very definition of conventional) has not had the experience needed in order to understand the shaman's view. The shaman by virtue of their unorthodox experience is just "out there" by his or herself.

Unlike organized religions, shamans act alone and are "self-chosen," rather than appointed, in that the intensity of the shaman's own internal experiences separates them temporarily or permanently from the other members of their society. They are outsiders not by choice, but by the nature of their own inner experience and awareness, permitted to see and experience realms of the psyche the average person does not.

Typically, a shaman may take years to stabilize the vision or mental experiences that they are thrust into, often struggling against mental imbalance and even madness. The shaman can be discriminated from a madman because he or she learns to control and understand what has been experienced. He or she masters those altered states of mind and rejoins society, but with a permanently altered view. The shaman always exists in conjunction with and in contradistinction to his or her society. They are the original outriders, literally defining the edge of conventional time and mentality.

A ONE-WAY STREET

It is generally agreed that once a shaman, one is a shaman for life. They can't 'un see' or 'un experience'. There is no going back and, no matter what other career or work the shaman may undertake, the function of shaman always takes precedence and is their heart function within the society.

In other words, and to repeat, shamanism is not an avocation, something one chooses. We do not choose to become a shaman, but the very intensity of our own inner experiences determines a vocation as a shaman, and to what

degree we are a shaman. Although in some societies, shamanic powers can be inherited or run in a family, it appears to be more a product of sharing a similar mind-set and training, with the parents initiating the children. However, as pointed out, most shamans are “called” or chosen by their own internal experiences and awareness. They come to know what others do not know and cannot know. And this change in view is permanent. They cannot forget what they have seen, and it is this knowledge of altered states that makes them valuable to society.

All societies have shamans or their equivalent because shamanism is something that happens to one, rather than something that can just be learned or passed on. In any society, there are always a few members whose personal inner experiences are such as to separate them, at least for a time, from the group. Knowledge gained from this separation then gives the shaman an alternative view of life that makes them of use to the community. They alone understand other members of the community who become estranged for one reason or another and the shaman’s experience allows them to communicate with those souls who fall through the cracks. It is pretty much axiomatic that the shaman can only help others in those areas where he or she has personally had a similar experience.

SHAMANS ARE NOT PRIESTS OR MINISTERS

As pointed out, shamans acquire special knowledge or abilities through their own life-changing experiences, and they are distinct from the rest of their society by the very intensity of these spiritual experiences. In this sense, they are more akin to the mystic. “The shaman,” as author Mircea Eliade puts it, “is the great specialist in the human soul; he or she alone ‘sees’ it, for he or she alone knows of its ‘form’ and its destiny.” The shaman knows the story or journey of the soul. In a very real sense, the shaman wakes in these realms, while society sleeps. They are the watchmen and protectors of the community soul.

Shamans are to be discriminated from priests or ministers, and other members of organized religion, those who work cooperatively with one another to inform and shepherd the entire society. For the most part, shamans are independent, solitary, depending only on their own internal experience or revelation, and they don’t work with or attempt to convert all the members of their community. Instead, they assist the stragglers in a community, those who, for one reason or another, have fallen out of the conventional mindset and are somehow temporarily spiritually estranged.

Shamans acknowledge other shamans, but seldom group or come together. You would not expect to see a shaman conference, at least of the traditional

variety. They are loners, and their knowledge is personal to themselves; it serves to separate them from their particular group or society. The idea of a shaman convention is pretty much an oxymoron.

SOCIETIES AND BROTHERHOODS

Shamans also differ from secret societies or esoteric brotherhoods, in that they typically are not part of any lineage or organized group and, as mentioned, do not attempt to shepherd or initiate the entire society, but instead, only initiate those like themselves, those who have the propensity to sustain ecstatic (out-of-the-body) experiences, that is: those who find themselves in an altered state of mind. In other words, shamans guide and inform particular members of their society who are in spiritual flux — those who have somehow fallen through the societal cracks.

As mentioned, there is no attempt on the part of the shaman to convert the larger community to their vision, a vision which in the shaman's view is a calling, an exceptional state of mind. Shamans are psychic healers and stand watch over society to protect the integrity of the human psyche. They are the shepherds of the human soul through time.

THE SHAMAN IS NOT A DOCTOR

Although many shamans are also healers of physical ailments, medicine men or women, this function is distinct from their role as a shaman, at least in this material. The shaman is primarily a doctor of the soul, not of the body, and administers to the psychological and spiritual realms, rather than to physical symptoms. The Medicine Man is very much a vocation on its own.

Although the shaman may also use various medicines and can be a healer or doctor of the physical body, they are primarily a healer of the soul, a master of ecstatic (out-of-the-body) experiences. The Shaman works on the psychological and subconscious level, seeking out the soul of an individual in distress, identifying with them, and directing them away from their current struggle or mental suffering to the next level or stage: the so-called afterlife.

He or she is an intermediary between the visible and the invisible (or not yet visible) worlds.

The work of the shaman does not pertain so much to our physical death, at the end of life, but to the many smaller deaths we each die in life, climacteric events (rites of passage) in life that find us dying to one phase of life and struggling or not-yet-born into the next phase. One seeks out a shaman because one is temporarily lost, and the shaman somehow can see both the

realm in which we are leaving and the new phase which we are about to enter.

Sound familiar? It should, because the public seeks out astrologers for very similar reasons.

SHAMANISM IN ASTROLOGY

In this material, we are not going to try to pursue shamanism as it relates to personal totems, power animals, or any the more exotic practices that we might read about in books like those of Carlos Castaneda, and other worthy writers, although these are, of course, very legitimate interests. We are not going to skin animals, dig (or take) herbs, draw magic circles, and all of the many rituals that you might find in a book on traditional shamanism.

Here we are looking at shamanism within the tradition of astrology itself, in particular the role of the modern astrologer as a ferryman or guide to the inner states of the mind and life.

In this sense, most astrologers perform (at least to some degree) this function of the shaman, that of the ferryman from one phase to another. Because of this fact, the counseling astrologer may find shamanic astrology of particular interest.

The shaman helps others to accept their changes or deaths on one level and obtain rebirth and develop familiarity on other and new levels. It is said that the shaman restores the road between earth and heaven, a road that has been temporarily lost or has become unclear or uncertain.

Another way to say this is that the shaman knows the way from one state of being or chakra to the next state and is able to guide or prepare the initiate for that journey. The shaman often guides the would-be-initiate from an unstable or dangerous state of mind to stability and future productivity.

In the esoteric literature, the shaman traditionally escorts the souls of the dead away from their corpses and dying places, and on into the next world. The shaman is capable of entering and holding an altered state of consciousness, at will, and can act as an intermediary between the known world of the would-be initiate, and the supra-natural or “next” world.

The shaman does not have to enter an altered state, as in somehow going there. His or her experiences are forever fresh in their mind, and they react spontaneously to the psychological distress signals coming from any person they encounter. It is automatic and does not require any ritual or preparation. It just happens. A shaman can appear to those in need at one moment, point

out the way, and be transparent or invisible the next, as if nothing ever took place.

By knowing both worlds, the shaman is able to predict or control the future of the would-be initiate, who does not yet know their way around these future worlds. This is a fancy way of saying the shaman can converse or reach one who is lost in an unconventional state of mind, make contact, and guide that person out of their situation to higher ground, so to speak.

DEAD AND ALIVE

The shaman is said to be dead in the land of the living, but alive in the spiritual worlds, and therefore knows the future for those living now, who must one day make the same transformation (or death) that the shaman has already taken. The shaman has, in some sense, gone to the next plane or world before other members of their society, and can reveal that world to those who themselves are about to cross over to it, or who are crossing now. The shaman is, therefore, above all, a guide to these other worlds. The shaman has a certain power over time, actually possessing the ability to “make time,” and to penetrate between the seconds of clock time to touch on the timeless or eternity — the space beyond or within time.

To repeat: the shaman is one who has themselves already gone beyond, who has crossed over into the next world or level and has returned with knowledge of these adjacent or other worlds. He or she can then instruct or prepare others for their forthcoming initiation into these other worlds.

Above all, shamans mediate between the world of the living and the dead, between one phase or level (chakra), and the next one. Those with a propensity for shamanism often apprentice themselves to an accomplished shaman, through the process of mentoring and initiation. The shaman is an initiate and thus an initiator. This, then, has been a brief introduction to the traditional nature of the shaman. Sound a little familiar? It should, because most counseling astrologers practice some shamanic techniques.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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EMAIL

Space Weather

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 9, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ee531b2e-7906-4a7a-a9b2-8ae1b60f8022_2048x2048.jpeg

Over the last week, intense solar activity has returned, with a number of X1 rated flares taking place, and some sending CMEs directly at Earth.

At 2:35 AM EST and X1.79 solar flare on Nov 9, 2025

Scientists seem to assume that explosions on the Sun, solar flares and CME (Corona Mass Ejections), high-energy flux, only affect our power grids, geomagnetically induce currents (GIC) flow through long conductors, and blackouts. Solar panels and various electronics can be damaged by high-energy protons. That's just the outer physical effects. The internal effects are very present and recently being studied increasingly.

Science has been shy about examining how intense solar flares affect people like all of us. In the last 20 years science has begun studying effects of intense solar activity on life. Here is how a flare goes down.

SOLAR FLARE TIMING

Flare happens: 8 minutes later: X-ray burst.

Radio blackouts start instantly.

1–3 days later: CME arrives at 2–3 million mph.

Magnetosphere rings like a bell: G5 geomagnetic storm.

Next 6–48 hours: maximum damage to grids & satellites.

Some research results as to how solar flares affect us personally are beginning to be available:

Strong geomagnetic storms increase psychiatric ward admission by 10-23%, especially bipolar mania and depression episodes occurring 24-48 hours after solar storm peak. (Frontiers of Psychiatry)

This was 36% rise in major depression relapses on high geomagnetic disturbance days. (Nature Scientific Reports)

Another study from suicide rates 1.5-2X higher 1-2 days after geomagnetic storms in men aged 35-65 (Journal of Psychiatric Research)

Heart-rate variability (HRV) drops 15-30% during solar storms, causing increased anxiety, irritability (Bioelectromagnetics)

Hospital anxiety/depression scores rise 12-18% within 72 hours of G3-storms (British Journal of Psychiatry)

Yes, strong solar flares do affect human psychology — the data is now too consistent across continents and decades to dismiss. The May 2024 superstorm (strongest in 20 years) was essentially a global natural experiment that confirmed everything researchers had been seeing for 30 years.

It saw a 40% spike in Reddit r/bipolar mania posts (Stanford NLP analysis), New York psychiatric ER visits up 28% (NYC Health data), 112% increase in UK NHS 111 mental-health calls (NHS England May 2024 report)

And so, hold on to your hats and enjoy the ride as various CMEs come crashing in or side swipe Earth.

I have written a lot here on the Sun. Here is one free e-Book to get you started.

www.startypes.com/pdf/e-books/sun_storms%20FIN7.pdf.pdf

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Go With the Flow

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 10, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f23a2780-8c84-4f9f-bda1-50b4c9df3999_1024x1024.jpeg

Well, winter in western Michigan is closing in. The frost has come and is here. It's 17 degrees above zero tonight. I managed to get the storm windows up in the four doors of our house and the two main doors in our center. Yesterday I drained and struggled with two of our three 100-foot hoses to get them in a coil and down the basement. I used large zip ties for the beasts.

I put a bunch of Datura (Jimson Weed) roots, plus some Dahlia bulbs, into a box of vermiculite and stored them in a cool place. Things like that.

I also dusted off, and washed down, the Herman-Miller 10-ft table in our dharma center in preparation for coating the wood surface with "Renaissance," a micro-crystalline wax polish after it is all dry. What else?

Of course, I'm all the time fiddling with photography as some of you know. As to what's going on in my mind, other than food and health issues, let's take a look.

Well, I have been carefully watching the return of very strong (X rated) solar flares, that have appeared in a row, extruding concurrent CMEs (Corona Mass Ejection) that are impacting the Earth direction or close to it. One particular large sunspot has torqued and is full of tension. Who knows how that is impacting us personally. I can feel it.

I posted some days ago some of the etheric musings I wander through when I walk out to the edge of consciousness and rest in that. It is almost nonsense (non sense), but not quite. I "trip the light fantastic" as the old saying goes.

And for those curious about my dharma practice, I have reached a sort of plateau — vast, flat, and trackless — a point of no return. I can't go back or return from whence I came, and I'm at the surface and treading water. Here we are again talking about the ephemeral, will-o-the-wisp, going on.

My musing is nothing more than an attempt to put into words what cannot be said in words, but even so, might engender an insight or two.

These 'ennui-like' words are not meant to confuse or misguide but are the natural result of states of mind that are ongoing and by me not yet resolved.

They are not some kind of Limbo, but rather natural formlessness that sticks to me like glue and that I have to work through at my own pace. Do I like it?

Well, pretty much. It contains a clarity that does not dim, yet also a sense of being stretched ever so thin and getting thinner. It's like the birth sac I used to see when raising puppies, something the mother dog bites through and stomachs. Mother Nature is still chewing on it; I'm trying to cooperate.

I also have most everything I need except a chance for this endless attenuation, this expansion and extension of my very being to reach a point of evaporation and disappear. It's something so very sticky that it's difficult to just let go. Every state of mind has some cleanup required.

At my age, I'm doing my best to cooperate with the forces of nature, keep my head down, work with my instincts, and gut-feel my way along. Going with the flow.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Solar Cybernetics

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 11, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0aa82f33-df37-48f1-ae87-ea818f0bc8f7_1024x1024.jpeg

In the history of the Sun's effect on Earth, scientists have concentrated on the material damage and effects intense solar activity, like solar flares, coronal Mass Ejections (CME), and related phenomena have on the planet Earth.

And bringing up the rear, only much later, say in the last 20 years or so, attention has been paid to how such solar phenomena affect our emotions and inner lives. It took a long time to get around to what all this intense solar activity does to us personally, much less spiritually.

What's even more fascinating to consider, perhaps a common mistake, is to assume everything is only about cause and effect, as in, this causes that, and so on. For instance, that the solar flare sends out a CME and it hits Earth, this predilection for causality being the only agency.

We might consider that all of us here on Earth can look at the Moon at the same time, at least those on one side of Earth. Or that the Sun shines its light equally to everyone on Earth. It occurs to me that we are missing something here.

Is everything just material, physical? Is there not some inner and spiritual connection that we all share at once? Is all this not part of an immense whole that we are ignoring?

What if all these linear or causal events and connections are just the bones or skeleton of something even more meaningful to us, far richer in content, a single whole cosmos that contains everything and the whole thing lives and breathes together as one -- the universe.

And this spirit we find in ourselves (and treasure) locally, huddled here are Earth, is not local at all, but the very cosmic breath and consciousness itself living and speaking through our bodies and minds.

What if the eyes we see with are the cosmos looking at itself through our bodies? And what if our constant search for intelligent life in the universe finally discovers that we ourselves are the intelligent life we have looked for. And the cosmos is just knowing itself through us, and most amazing of all, is us, meaning we know ourselves, and there are not two cosmic

consciousnesses, ours here on Earth and another in the Cosmos, but just one single Cosmic consciousness. We are already out there in space in the cosmos realizing ourselves and not just some lonely outpost in our galaxy.

In other words, instead of our consciousness and 'spirit' being a lonely cry from a distant part of an outer spiral arm of the Milky Way Galaxy, we are and have been just normal 'common' intelligence discovering itself (ourselves) again and again through the bodies we create.

And our sun and solar system is just a node in an intelligent system that can be mapped by light rays, infrared rays, X-rays, gamma rays, and gravitational waves.

I first learned this concept from a book by astrologer/climatologist Theodore Landscheidt called "Cosmic Cybernetics," the single most influential book on astrology I have even encountered. Landscheidt was also a supreme court justice of Germany.

Landscheidt and I became friends. I sent him his first home computer in 1978, because he had no access to one in Germany and Landscheidt came to visit me at our center. We both were aware of the Sun and heliocentric astrology. Landscheidt passed away in 2004.

We know that the Sun controls life here on earth through its light, warmth, solar wind, and who knows what else. What I have been trying to get across to readers for a while is that any system, from a single cell to the solar system, to the Milky Way galaxy, must somehow circulate enough information within itself so that it knows how to remain coherent, whole, and not collapse and disintegrate. The study of how systems control themselves, and they all must not collapse, is called cybernetics. Cybernetics has to do with how an organism or system regulates itself, in other words, how all coherent systems change themselves just enough to remain the same and thus continue to persist.

In the case of Earth, the Sun is the great regulator of our lives and feeds us change, not only in daily increments via sunshine, solar wind, etc., but also in large chunks via intense solar flares and CME events. We all seem used to the gradual cybernetic impact of the Sun shining each day, but can get disturbed by high-energy cybernetics, the effects of change caused by extreme solar influx, like flares, etc. And the flares just keep on coming in their 11-year sunspot cycle.

We each know and learn about change by just living life and we can see the effects of change in the outer world, but for most of us, inner, emotional, and spiritual change is a much murkier affair. Unless we are experienced

meditators, familiar with how the mind works, and can learn to get a handle on absorbing the large amounts of change a solar flare can bring, we essentially remain in the dark about this. Most of us really don't know that much about what is going on deep within our mind. The stronger changes that accompany intense solar events can be hard to take in all at once. It takes time to absorb sudden or solar influx changes and to make the inner and outer adjustments they can dictate. There is also the shock factor of sudden change to our system. We are used to getting solar information fed to us in daily trickles as the sun shines each day. Massive solar events like solar flares and CMEs deliver solar information not in a graduated stream but in large quantum leaps -- chunks. Remember that solar information contains instructions for change, including some form of local-cybernetic input that regulates our life. When we get a mass of change all at once, we can have trouble taking it in at one gulp and adjusting to it. Sudden large increments of solar change are by definition not gradual and may even force us to leapfrog a more graduated path, plunging us forward teleologically (completing a sequence), or as I like to put it: big change turns the wheel of our karma significantly enough to wake us up from the normal intravenous drip of change by sunlight. When sudden solar-influx change impacts us, it can be disturbing, and we may not know just what to make of it. In our attempt to assimilate this change overload, certain anomalies may appear that disturb the pretty-picture of a self we have going for us, and subject us to still further confusion. In other words, aside from bringing creativity, solar flares and CME events can be disturbing times, often filled with confusion and wonder, at least at their onset. My point in writing this blog is to point out that all systems require some form of regulation. We regulate to stay the same, i.e. not too hot, not too cold, etc. This appears also to be true in our spiritual and psychological growth as well. We grow within certain boundaries, and somewhere within us is a control system that regulates our inner change. It does not matter to me whether scientists have yet put their finger on it. We can learn to know for ourselves how this works if we will just take a look and become aware of this solar inundation.

See the 'Solar Ham' amateur radio station each day.

<https://solarham.com/>

If the information as to how we change somehow comes from higher-order structures, like the Earth, the Sun, the Galaxy, etc., 'AND' if solar flare events result in change at the quantum level, like leaps forward instead of gradual change, then it makes sense for us to begin to develop an awareness of such sudden changes when they occur (like intense solar flares) and learn how to best make use of them.

What if things are just like they already are, experienced as a local event, but perhaps we are not just local, but also in some way or sense universal. When the Sun speaks, we not only listen as with words coming in our ear, but we experience everything universally as well, and at once. We just lack the awareness needed to make use of this.

We are not only the victim of our circumstances, but also their agency as well, the mutual creator of our own circumstances. We are not only what is created, but also the creator. There are not only two, but the two are inevitably also one and the same.

Are spiritual journeys simple transmigrations from a masochistic sense of being dragged through life by higher consciousness to becoming one with and identifying with the cosmic consciousness? We are it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Astrology of Today

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 13, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/1e21f12d-5063-4e3a-ada0-d49f2db88e2c_1024x1024.jpeg

I'm not taking this current rash of Solar flares and their CMEs lying down, so to speak, which some do. Many just must go and lie down.

The flares, for now, are over, but their corresponding CMEs are still coming in, the faster ones catching up to and compiling with previous CMEs to make the total effect have more impact.

It is all energy, and IMO it is a matter of how much energy can we take in and absorb without reacting abnormally.

The only thing abnormal for me about this flux of CMEs, etc., is the sense of my being the fat in the frying pan. I've been running around like crazy, putting out fires, problems that have popped up, one after the other until I am moving all the time trying to stomp them out. Busy, busy, busy.

That sense of disturbance pretty much describes my last few days. Of course, many astrologers are blaming it on Mercury going retrograde on November 9 th through the 19 th . Just to cover my bases, let's review what this particular retrograde might suggest.

Mercury in Sagittarius was just conjunction Mars in Sagittarius when it went retrograde, and by going retrograde, now it is backing off from that conjunction. Let us take a moment to understand what happens when a planet goes retrograde, in this case Mercury.

In the case of the inner planets (Mercury and Venus) we measure how far AHEAD of the Sun Mercury is, because that distance ahead of the Sun that how far Sun will move, meaning in the Sun's future in the Zodiac. From this point forward Mercury will be retrograding back, closer and closer to the Sun.

So, we could say that right now anything to do with Mercury (mental, communications, electronics, etc.) is anticipatory,

an extrapolation, expectations, perhaps dim foresight, even guesses. However, from November 9 th to November 19 th , that anticipatory sense will be shrinking and becoming clearer and clearer as to what we can expect.

For reasons too complex to detail here, a lot of pressure during this time is put on the planet Jupiter. Keep in mind that the word for Jupiter in ancient Sanskrit was 'Guru', so that should give you a thought or two.

I would say that currently our guidance system or 'steady path' into the future (Jupiter) is challenged or confused and this same kind of pressure is impressing itself on the public mind, as well.

This public sense will tone down in about a day... or so.

Therefore, right now we are running ahead of ourselves as far as any too much expectation and anticipation, but that about to be relieved of that soon. It will be clearer.

Again, for me this has amounted to jumping through endless hoops, mental entanglements, and hyperactive days that deserve a rest soon, I hope.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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X-Class Solar Flare

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 14, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6a439e2e-bf82-441c-9dfe-dae3c4f77643_1087x831.jpeg

Another huge X4-Class solar flare occurred starting at 3:30 AM EST. I was up, doing some house work. Here is the report from Solar Ham.

SOLARHAM.COM

“AR 4274 still has some gas left in the tank. An X4.0 solar flare was just detected at 08:30 UTC (Nov 14). A type II radio emission with an estimated velocity of 1525 km/s was recorded leading up to this flare.

“A longer duration mid level M-Flare was in progress around 4274 at the time which then led to the more rapid X4 event. A westerly directed CME appears to be emerging now, although further dimming is evident following the X4 peak.

“Despite the region is no longer directly facing Earth, it is possible that if a CME is produced, it could still be partially Earth directed. More updates to follow.

“Minor Radiation Storm: This latest event has pushed proton levels streaming past Earth back above the minor (S1) radiation storm threshold.”

[Photo from SolarHam.com]

I am having some email problems and CANNOT send out emails for the last week. Working on it, but it is a Microsoft problem, so if you have not heard from me that's the reason. For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject “READINGS.”

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Mercury Retrograde, or What?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 15, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/10e64284-b8ad-4871-8b12-4a87ccac9254_1024x1024.jpeg

Here is a story still fresh in the air. It just happened and culminated a few hours ago, so I might as well write it down and let's contemplate it together, puzzle it out.

It came upon me unnoticed. I was sending out emails, tending to business, and never knew that those emails never arrived. At first it was spotty, but it came on like an avalanche and before I knew it, it was out of control beyond my ability to stop it. I never saw it coming.

As it was explained to me, somehow, in some way, my personal email address was picked up and perhaps used by some huge company to send out perhaps millions of emails, so much that Microsoft reset my Microsoft Outlook so any email I sent out never arrived.

I had no idea this was happening, but after some time any email I sent out started to come back with a note that read like this:

"Delivery has failed to these recipients or groups:

"Your message wasn't delivered because the recipient's email provider rejected it."

From then on, at least I was aware of a problem, yet I had no way to reach my clients, those to whom I sent and email. Now way.

Unless I had the client's Facebook name, in which case I could send them a note by FB Messenger, there was nothing I could do.

Of course, I spent hours on the phone to the email provider, in this case 'Godaddy.com'. And each time they said that they had to turn it over to Microsoft and that it would take 24-72 hours to resolve and the best I could do was to be patient until some switch somewhere was reset and I could once again send out emails.

Well, this whole scenario happened three times, the calls, waiting in a queue, and finally being told to wait 24-72 hours.

And then, not only could I not send any emails out, I could no longer received emails coming in. My 'inbox' which usually is flooded every hour or so, just stopped dead.

And all this time I struggled to stay in touch with a whole group of people who wanted to have an astrology reading with me, which I was doing for a short time, something I have not done for decades, except for family and close friends.

As for me, I am so efficient at multitasking, and keeping everything clear and orderly, I was going nuts. And all of this culminated with this rash of very strong X-Class solar flares and their resulting CMEs.

I had to do something, so for the nth time I dialed my provider, yet they would not let talk to an agent because they had instituted a new protocol for vetting customers that required they send a text (not a voice message).

Well, as it turns out I was with this provider for so many years, that the only phone numbers they had for me were two landlines, that cannot receive text messages.

So, there I was, trying to get past an ever more irritated young man who could not even access my case number until I was vetted. They had no access to my history, and they did not have my mobile phone number AND would not even let me give it to them, because it was not on file. Talk about a Catch-22.

This went on and on, round and round, until he told me I have to go through a whole vetting process of entering my driver's license and all kinds of other information, after which I would have wait up to another 10 days for any response.

Of course, I went up to his supervisor and no amount of pleading did any good. I finally told them thanks but no thanks, and hung up. I did begin to go through the length process of driver's license, etc. THEN..

About 15 minutes later, my emails ask me for my password, and moments later a flood of emails that had been waiting for delivery got delivered.

And so, to all my Facebook friends that may have been trying reach me and wondering where on earth I had been, can now reach me. Thank you for your patience. I wish I had more of that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Warming Our Toes

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 16, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/18edf130-5c77-49a6-9902-c5786d251152_1024x1024.jpeg

One thing I am serious about is moving inside. Not that I have given up on going outside for a walk or a hike, and I am determined to get the proper winter clothes to face the brutal cold here in west Michigan when it comes around January.

I have boots, wool beanies and a full-face balaclava. In fact, I have a closet full of winter clothes that each year I intend to use during the coldest spells but eventually prefer to stay inside instead. LOL.

I have a zippered cashmere sweater that is about as warm as it gets, also a 'Western-Engineering' down jacket/hoody, and all different kinds of gloves and the "Hot-to-Go" reusable heat packs that you can put in boiling water and they pop back into shape for repeated use. And of course, a wool scarf, and even snow goggles. And Canadian 'Jack Boots', plus boxes of other winter boots. The Canadians know about winter boots.

Why all this? Well, it is better to get outside in the winter where there are fresh air and sunlight. Even with all of that, when it gets 14 below zero here, it's going to be very hard to be too enthusiastic about stepping outside. Yet, anything short of that, given a little courage, I should be able to handle.

Meanwhile, on the inside I am preparing my small photo studio for a long winter use. I've created as much space as I can, cleared the floors and vacuumed them. My plan is to take my time in setting up shots, more time than I am used to, concentrating not only on composition but on lighting.

Why do this? Just because I like to photograph. I've been doing photography since 1956 and taking closeup photos was also the birthing ground for my first experience of Insight Meditation (Vipassana). Unforgettable.

Whether we like it or not, so much of our life turns into rituals that we do every day or every few days. And photography, especially studio photography, lends itself to that, procedures or rituals.

And so, we are sealing off the house with storm windows and doors. Of course, we are watching the thermometer, mostly from inside. It's not too

cold so far, but winter promises to come soon Let me know how you prepare for winter and what you find to be the warmest clothes.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Let the Music Play..."

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 17, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/963b6d10-58b3-41b6-8f2a-73ae0ab88caq_1024x1024.jpeg

Every now and then, I sense or feel some 'Aha!' or insight floating just beyond my reach. I don't quite get it, yet, but it's almost tangible.

Anyway, I'm close to a realization that has been dawning on me for some time yet has not fully dawned. Of course I can't put it into words at this time, but I want to talk about the feeling, anyway.

It's that our dependence and fixation on cause and effect, linear causation, any kind of timeline, is not the only story. It's just what we happen to be used to or fixated on. This causes that, and then that causes another thing, etc., kind of like the old song, the knee bone is connected to the leg bone, is connected to the ankle bone, and so on.

I feel there is something else going on beyond linear causation. It's more like when the Sun shines it shines on all of us simultaneously and at once.

It's that an instantaneous and constant link exists between the universe, yet just out of the swing of time and causation.

I feel we are connected to our spiritual essence or source all the time and equally. It just is, and it's always online, and as mentioned, still timeless at that.

No, I can't walk through walls or defy gravity, yet I do feel I am connected somehow beyond the reach of time. Just like we say, eternity can be found just in time, meaning it's there always, because it is beyond time. The Tibetans say that it is 'unborn', meaning there never was a time when it was not and never a time when it will not be. It is outside of time.

And so, if it is there, then only our lack of awareness prevents us from seeing and resting in it, or so say the sacred texts.

In other words, we are interconnected and already part of something beyond the limits of time.

For some reason, I am reminded of the above by this incredible song by "The Drifters"

The Drifters, "Let the Music Play"

Let the music play just a little longer Just a little longer Let me hold her in my arms Let me thrill to all her charms A little longer Make the music play just a little slower Just a little slower Let me hear her tender sighs Let me look into her eyes A little longer Make the music play (Make the music play) Keep this magic going Keep those trumpets blowing All through the night Don't ever skip a beat, for She may slip away, and if we were parted I'd be broken hearted Till she's in my arms to stay Forever and a day Please let the music play

Till she's in my arms to stay Forever and a day Please let the music play Woah yeah, please let the music play, yeah, yeah Please let the music play, mmm Woah yeah, please let the music play Woah yeah, please let the music play

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Winterizing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 23, 2025

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/45c5081d-34ca-4667-9d12-d6a982cdbadc_2048x1676.jpeg

Well, as we who live up north well know, Summer has folded up, and Autumn is right behind it, which leaves Winter advancing, and Spring distant as of now.

All of the Summer I did not use it enough, and I now regret that, yet it seems to always be true. We don't celebrate enough, what we have right now, but in hindsight we do.

For me, Winter is an inside event and for a long time. Of course, I write my daily blog or essay, worry about food, weight, and am kind of withdrawn into my photography studio, which is just a small room up a narrow winding staircase to an upper floor.

I am prepared and starting to get into photographing what can be photographed indoors, mostly flowers, plants and whatever else that is around.

For a short time I am actually doing astrology readings once again, something I have not done for decades except for family or folks in trouble. And I charging for it because I need to get a new camera that is expensive. We have gathered what warm winter clothes we an and intend to keep walking in the woods, etc. in the bitter cold for as long as we can.

[Photo by me.]

For a limited time, I am doing a few Zoom astrology readings. If interested, please email me with the subject "READINGS."

EMAIL