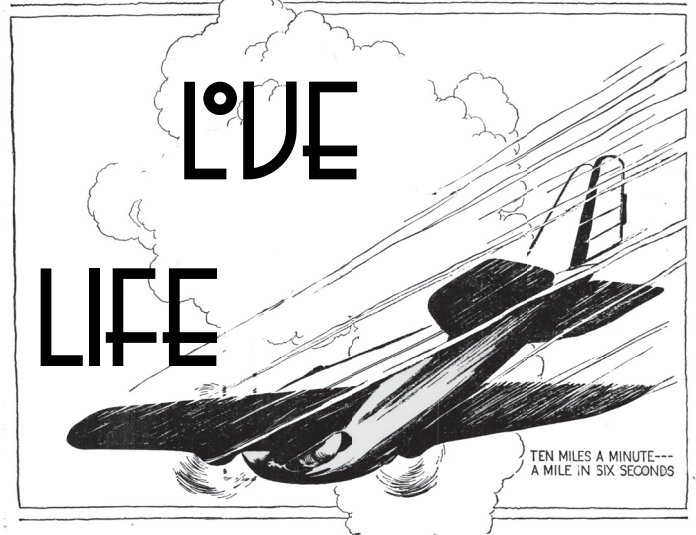


Unless Some New and Unusual Type  
of Wing Is Invented, 600 Miles  
an Hour Will Be the Limit of  
Speed in the Air.

CL°UDS



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listen to the music at:  
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It's funny to come back to this because when I think of my time with him, I am bombarded with memories of when I let the worst of me emerge: my short-tempered impatience, my controlling tendencies, my hopelessness, and my despair that I might never find my way to being complete. When I am in those spots, I am at my worst—like, literally the worst.

But then, I never knew I could feel loved even in those moments. And, not despite those imperfect pieces, but because of how they complete the thing that is me. That's the thing I have found about getting older. I keep finding myself in these moments where I think: "oh. So this was all okay all along?"

It's just like those clouds, isn't it? Spending all that time and energy to get a better view of them only to realize I already had the best view of them all along.

## Clouds Love Life

### ***Clouds***

The funny thing about the memory of my first plane ride is that I don't remember where I was going. I remember the conversations with my friends about how you can push a button any time you want snacks, a Coke, a blanket, a pillow, anything. I remember going shopping with my mom to get activities to do on the plane and her reminder that we should be sure to have gum to help our ears pop. I remember the eagerness to crack open the books, puzzles, games, and gum we saved for the trip. But I have

no recollection of our destination or what we did when we got there. For me, it was all about the plane ride and the unfathomable fact that we would be looking down at the clouds.

That's another thing I remember. Looking up at the clouds and trying to comprehend the idea that I would soon be flying over them. What would it look like? What if it's raining? Will we be above the rain? I badgered my mom with all those questions, and she answered most of them. I had a funny way of thinking about things as a kid. I remember asking my mom which sock was supposed to go on which foot. Unsatisfied with her explanation that it didn't matter and that either sock could go on either foot, I kept hounding her for more intel.

"Yeah, but if it did matter, which one would go on the left?"

the world, fully assembled, and reconnect?  
And with whom?

For years, I was trying to find out who I was, and in doing so, I had to embrace each piece with pedal-to-the-floor intensity, leaving the other pieces of myself behind for the time being. But now, as I type, re-read, and edit, I realize it's time to zoom in. Are there some places where I am showing up as myself? Fallible and complete?

The obvious answer shows up for me on most Sundays, sitting on the couch with my boyfriend Nolan. We watch trash tv, eat snacks, and just sit together. Being ourselves. Maybe I should only speak for myself here, so — I sit there with my love. Being myself.

Being myself.

I have to identify each of these false beliefs, and then I have to find a way to replace those "or's" with "and's." Somehow, I still want to hang on. It just seems so boring to let it rest, you know? To just let everything be as it is and let it go.

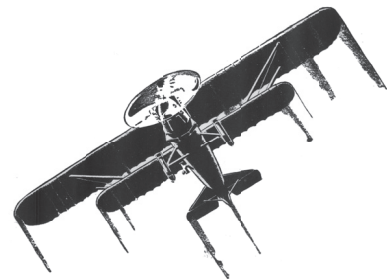
Over the last few years, I have learned to shoot down some of these beliefs at the cost of a friendship or two. It has been disappointing to realize that my desperation to be liked kept people around. People began to disappear When I stood my ground about what did and didn't work for me. Oh, there's another false dichotomy for assassination:

You can be who you are or you can have friends.

So, even though I have found myself at this transitional place, looking around at these valid pieces of myself, I am unsure how to connect them all together. How do I return to

This was well before I got my head around which was right and which was left anyway. So, even if I had discovered the secret of which sock was intended for which foot, it's unlikely that I would have been able to match the "correct" sock to its matching foot, anyway.

Sometimes, it turns out, living a dream is not as exciting as dreaming the dream. This was my experience with clouds. At least, I assume so because I have a much more vivid memory of imagining what it would be like to be above them than I remember the sensation of looking out the window and seeing them. It seemed a lot cooler in my mind than it turned out to be.



## **Love**

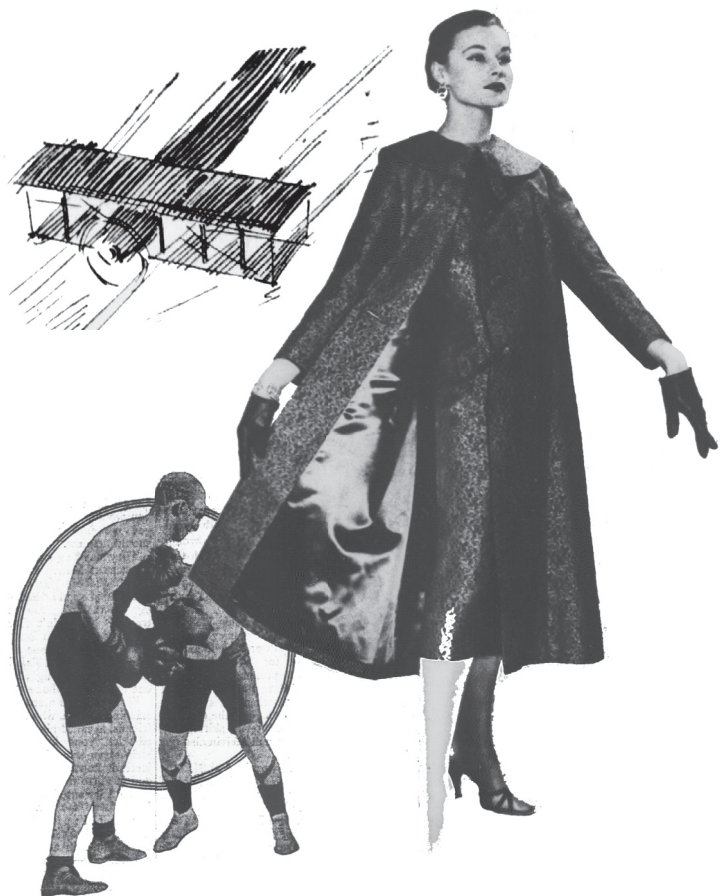
There's a certain amount of identity-forming that didn't happen for us gay kids in the 1980s. Though, maybe it's better if I speak for myself here:

There's a certain amount of identity-forming that didn't happen for this gay kid in the 1980s. There was a lot less acceptance for gay people back then, especially in Southern Baptist and football-centered Tyler, Texas, which was the unfortunate location of my sexual development. I directed most of that energy toward the black and white TV in my bedroom. I watched pro wrestling late at night with the volume turned way down; the sweaty, muscular wrestlers in trunks aroused me. That black and white cathode ray tube held my attention even on particularly randy Saturday mornings when I hoped for a cameo from Tito, the resident shirtless lifeguard at Pee Wee's Playhouse.

## **Life**

In my 50s, I have come to a place of acceptance with who I am, but have not quite figured out how to show up in the world as that person. It's been a bit like collecting the list of false beliefs I hold about life and putting them to rest. A paradox assassination station, if you will:

- You can be an artist or you can be financially secure.
- You can be a teacher or you can be a musician.
- You can be gay or you can be a man.
- You can be a vegan or you can be accepted.
- You can be you or you can be loved.



From the very first appearance of my attraction to men, I knew that this was something that I needed to keep to myself at all costs. Even if I dared to recognize my preoccupation with my High School best friend as a crush, I wouldn't have been able to act on it. I knew only one gay kid at my High School, and I was one of the few who knew he was gay, and we all knew that we needed to keep his secret. It just wasn't safe.

My approach to this latent queerness was a denial so large that it didn't require conscious energy to exist. I simply detached from that part of myself and didn't let it become a part of my awareness. Somehow, I was able to justify my spunk bank of bodybuilding magazines with a desire to look like those guys — not like I was gay or anything. To this day, I don't see how I convinced myself that I was celebrating my heterosexual admiration for these greased-up speedo-clad men by jerking off to their photos, but I sure managed to believe it at the time.

It wasn't for a couple years after high school that I finally figured out how to connect with the fact that I was gay. I began running with a group of new waver kids while flunking out of my first year at the University of Houston. We went to clubs and concerts together, and I met more and more gay people who made me feel more and more accepted. The thing I didn't get, though, was the how of this whole thing. Most straight people my age already had many years of practice with dating. This detachment was further complicated by the fact that as I advanced closer to my twenties, I realized that I wasn't the type of person to follow a typical career path. I didn't know there was any grey area between college education and living in a van by the river. I felt like a ghost. A fake.

In the early 90s, I met an incredibly handsome guy named Stoney, who worked at a nearby futon shop. I would regularly go into the shop just to look around and then go home and proclaim my massive crush on this

Over time, things settled in, and I found that just like I had my own unique identity, so did my relationship. Releasing expectations often clears the way for something much more beautiful than we imagine. Who knew I would find rapture in watching reality TV, drinking seltzers, and eating hummus? But it's also flying to Iceland, taking off my shirt, and not worrying about being abandoned for my aging frame.

It's not just the trust, though that's a significant part of it. It's the moments when my darkness slips out. When I become the person I am but never wanted to be. I never knew it would be okay to be fallible. To be a "bad with money" person. To be a fucked up teeth person. To be, frankly, an unreasonable asshole sometimes. When my shit slips out, and his does too, that love that keeps on existing was something I never expected. Sometimes, it is so hard to believe that I ignore it's even there.



Well, a great deal has happened in the quarter century since then. I ultimately did develop a personality of my own. Embraced being an artist, an activist, a friend, a teacher, a neighbor - but all with an arms-length mentality. I never really learned how to allow closeness as a person with an identity, if that makes any sense. Because it took shutting out romantic partnership to allow my personhood to shine, I didn't think I could exist as myself and have a relationship.

What appears to be happening now, though, is that I am finding more of my authentic self within the bounds of a relationship. It's fucking weird. When I first started dating my beloved, that core of anxiety and fear of being ghosted was re-energized to the extreme. Sleepless nights, freakouts about innocuous texts.. You know the usual things you might expect from a man in his 50s who never learned how to have a romantic relationship. I was not the only one with issues to work out, but I'm just considering myself here.

guy. My roommate Angy finally talked me into going into the shop and giving him my phone number. He took it. He called.

Now, Stoney was incredibly handsome. I think I mentioned that. And by being so handsome, my brand of self-loathing convinced me that I didn't deserve a guy like this, and I had better be really good (whatever that means) to keep his interest. But the weird thing is that this inevitably caused me to turn off. I was waiting to figure out exactly what kind of guy he wanted before I could be, well, anyone. After a few years of being "the detached one" in my dating career, this was also my first introduction to my anxious attachment relationship style.

I was living a sort of in-between existence. My self-esteem wouldn't let me discover my own personality. That personality would have likely been defined by my work as a musician, which I, of course, suppressed out

of fear of being broke, which I was anyway because I couldn't find the momentum to do anything else. This ouroboros of self-defeat left me walking around like a ghost, too afraid to engage with any but my closest friends.

Ironically, this ghost-like state was the reason Stoney gave when he ultimately ghosted me. He didn't say it to me directly, but I would call and call and leave messages with his roommate and he just never called me back. I think his roommate finally got tired of me calling all the time and finally told me that Stoney didn't like me anymore because I was "boring."

Todd ghosted me, too, and so did a whole slew of others. Perhaps the combination of anxious attachment and fearful lack of personality was simultaneously too much and not enough. Maybe. They really could have called, though.

As we know, these things become patterns, and with each romantic connection, I found myself more and more anxious and more and more prone to an attraction to those with a penchant for ghosting. At some point, I found myself longing to find an identity while somehow giving up on the idea of finding love. I remember the exact moment I decided to just cut the shit and turn it off - it's such a strange thing to remember. I was walking up the stairs to my garage apartment in Houston, feeling obsessed with some guy or other. I was arriving home from my morning college classes, feeling dazed and exhausted by rumination about my phantom love interest du jour, and, of course, beaten to a pulp by the relentless Texas heat. I opened the door, greeted my cat, Kitty, and thought: "that's it." I may have even said it out loud (kind of like the first airplane memory, I can't be sure). I don't know what it was about that day, but it really was "it."