

Say It Once

April 1982

I find myself very ordinary these days. Just sitting around remembering. I used to be this way. That way. Here's an old picture of me... Is that me? Ashamed. Ashamed of the way I used to talk. Reading old letters, poems. Ugh. But what is it exactly that makes me squirm. The self-consciousness. Mind-preening.

Not always. There were break-throughs every four months. Or was it years? Eventually I thought I had become spontaneous but within artful modalities I had discovered from within. Or some I obviously copied. One problem was that a lot of my friends were doing the same thing but we would lose track of our inner visions, stop talking about *why* we had adopted such and such a life, stop looking at it together, and just be living it.

If you are willing to live the life of a working person in the USA, you must have ways of keeping the spark lit. Or a few years later you won't even remember why you got into these traces in the first place. The kakistocracy is doing everything their minds are capable of to put you to sleep. So of course they're not awake.

The way we use medicine for example. At some point most people have an amazing experience getting High. You're vaulted into a new, much more vivid awareness. You realize there's another way to be, a whole galaxy of mental and physical miracles possible. But you also usually have some fear that you will be found out and excommunicated. Some times it happens: you get busted or fired or diagnosed.

Being high you might really have had an adequate competence in the natural duties of life or in communication with other people. As long as no one objected to you sitting on a park bench for three hours with your eyes blazing. As long as people grinned when they saw you talking to birds and automobiles. As long as your friends appreciated it when you blurted out the truth of what was going on Right Now Here in this room between us.

But the trouble was that if you crossed over into someone's doubt or judgment vibes, you suddenly couldn't remember how to tie your shoes. You gave the bus driver a walnut and couldn't understand what your father was talking about. And then it would start to seem that the drug was like they said, a poison or a big mistake...and you would get scared. You would then probably have as bad an experience as you had previously had a good one. But even then it might be fascinating.

You'd see it dimly, as a being apart and unaffected, watching it as a play soon to be over. And later when people traded stories of amazing Highs, you might actually tell the Bad Trip because it was so compelling and imaginative. But the fear of being found out and the retelling help over the years to create a veneer. Pretty soon you use weed like others use beer,

just to get loose and feel good. After all, you're thirty-some years old, you've got endless work to do, you find it less and less possible to act foolishly around your peers.

So we tell stories and override the wave of euphoric magic that is welling up inside. Way down there you know how to fix that leak. How to just lurch forward talking, or doing practical duties, and making a hundred subtle signals that you are "steady" and "normal", so that your acquaintances or store clerks or parents will respond in kind. Hitting the refrains in the choir so no one notices you don't know the verses.

Sometimes that chitchat takes on a preternatural power, and it seems that heavy truths are animating it. People look at each other with conspiratorial affirmation as they talk about a car. And indeed they are affirming *something*. But the stream of vision is not being allowed to go its *own* way. It is being hurled down a tunnel and of course sometimes we find magical drawings in there but mostly it's just 'fuck you tom griswold'. But there *are* those memories, no matter how many layers of sleep you roll over them. Memories of having been High and not having had the slightest preconception what to do with It. If you were with someone & they also had no preconception. And you felt godlike as you began to create time and weave a strange wonder out of a day.

Sometimes the memory comes back and you want someone else to have this experience. And you repeat the outward circumstances. How many times does this work? Not many. Yet it may have the fragrance of the real thing...and groupings of people live in such fragrances. A church after the saints have been dead a few centuries. Then too there's the subtle relationship with the medicine itself. If you are trying to get the great time back without remembering the essence of what created it, and you are duplicating the program but that doesn't work...then it occurs to you to get stronger drugs. Or to use them a lot more often. This might work initially... until you're doing the cover-up on the new level.

Many people say from that point that it's the medicine's fault, and they quit violently, and take up Tai-chi and organic groceries. 'I'm going to do it the natural way.' But it doesn't take long, does it? Pretty soon there are big conforming networks of people who are competing with each other in natural holiness, and are just repeating a Form. If you were really High around them they'd be uncomfortable.

Sex too. You have an incredible night in which neither of you had any ideas and for hours you were like birds wheeling in unison. In the course of it you found yourselves hollering in Athabaskan. Or doing a hammocky balinese whale yoga. But later on, you're starting right in with Hollering...and then you plan to switch to the Whale Yoga after about fifteen minutes. And your 'ordinary mind' is up there chattering away and you forgot you were in helpless love with this person. Then it drops down to polite questions and eventually to misunderstandings and death. Of course, it's hard *not* to want to repeat that whale yoga. This gets tricky. Because even ecstasy is just a word, a thing imagined as repeatable, bounded & known. And the mind will start working on it like a baked potato, buttering it up, putting in the chives, try a little parmesan cheese...maybe with a good stout tilsit and daisies and Drambuie and set afire with rubbing sticks.

At about this point I have an uncontrollable urge to stop and look back at the beginning to see what in hell my subject is and then try to see a way to wrap it up and stick its tail in its mouth. I did that a lot in poems for a while. I used to enjoy it, the neat packages and bong! of the refraining. At one point I experienced Forms like these as Given. I mean they just made themselves and I was the scribe or secretary. Sometimes it's like that. But soon I was tinkering with it, thinking an ABA' was like Persian tapestry, it was an analog of the way consciousness 'really' is. Waking, dreaming, illumined waking. Then I started getting cute with them. I would take the first lines, the 'A', and repeat them exactly reversed in the closing stanza, the 'A prime'. Or do some other trick; and these tricks too had parabolic meaning for me and increasingly I could not see *acutely* in a forest of cuteness.

So as I write this I am resisting the impulse to wrap it up; but at the same time I don't want to say I will NOT return to the opening motif. Sometimes it happens that way. *You will not presume to know the Way in this myriadensity. You will do your best to Keep Up.*

Can we just say it once and agree that even this saying is dangerous idling? That you trust me as yourself and I don't have to make demonstrations of Form to keep us in tune? That even this bag of bones we strut around in is just a kind of ballad, a canoe, a still-life movie...something that does and doesn't have a clever ending, is and totally isn't vastly important. What if I drop the groceries? What if I do a one-and-a-half gainer stuff shot? I want to be one of those people who just keeps going. Way off behind me are the skins and pearls I have lived through. I can't repeat them. Some, I wish I could....some I'm damned glad I can't. What we do is impossible to speak in words, even what we love about words.... is what we yearn to be with when we write you a poem, when we read your poem. Now if I go any further it will be just exactly what I'm warning against. In fact I might not see you here again until I've completed my Penance.

*Postscript Nov. 2021:
Glad to see you again!
Well, I made it. But those Pen ants are slowwww.*

...catch you next time.