

What
Happened
On
JUNE 21ST
2018

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HAPPENING

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ESSAY DAILY
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MELISSA MESKU

Twenty June Twenty-Firsts

I have been cataloging my days, off and on but mostly on, for over twenty years. Today is as good a day as any to revisit them, these cryptic notes, these echoes from past selves.

On this day in 1998, a fragment of a quote from Kafka—something to the effect that he'd rather have a page of good writing than a day of beauty. I remember thinking, man, I love you and I love writing, but you could not be more wrong. You are as wrong as the day is long—and it's the solstice.

On this day in 1999, I started summer school at community college, my first day of what we sardonically called “the thirteenth grade.” I had recently stolen the Suede album *Head Music* and decided on the drive to school that henceforth, if I ever had a song in my head that I didn't like, I would consciously switch to the first track, “Electricity.” Somehow this actually stuck; I listened to “Electricity” in my head earlier this week.

On this day in 2000, I was reading *A Language Older Than Words*. It felt monumental at the time—exceedingly significant—devastating—even life-changing. As it turns out, it was. Twenty years later this book and the author's other twenty books still break me and build me back up. I still have this one on my shelf. I think I even paid for it.

On this day in 2001, I had heard there was a total solar eclipse going on, maybe in Africa, and it pained me that I was twenty and still stuck in my hometown. Two months to go...

On this day in 2002, while walking from Ashby to the Berkeley campus, I thought about Kant—“one is

conscious of oneself only as one appears to oneself.” I thought of the absurdity of identifying with one's own face when one's own face is something we can't naturally see. I became possessed by an intense curiosity about the era before mirrors and glass, and wondered how people self-identified before reflective technologies. By the time I got to work, my cynicism kicked in; people probably crowded around ponds and cisterns of water, preening.

On this day in 2003, I studied Hungarian while my roommate was out, went to a meeting about the housing co-op we were starting, and then packed up to go to Sacramento for a direct action and a protest march. I remember hiding my studies because it felt immoral, shameful, to spend time learning esoteric things while the world was what it was, and was at war again. I consoled myself with the idea that, if I made myself effective enough in fighting the system, I'd eventually have plenty of time in prison to fritter away studying agglutinative languages.

On this day in 2004, I arrived back to Seattle after a seventeen hour Greyhound bus ride from Oakland. It was an emergency trip—the pay phone calls during this phase of my polyamorous relationship were getting too expensive. I had ridden down from Olympia with the Rad Dyke Plumber, but for all the times I went up and down ‘Hometown Interstate 5,’ getting a ride back with a stranger from Craigslist failed me only this once.

On this day in 2005, after visiting Timm in Sweden, I was listening to Kent on my Discman and looking for apartments in Ballard, in Seattle, so we could move in together and have a quiet little Scandinavian life.

On this day in 2006, since moving back from Eastern Europe, I still had no job, but that didn't stop the mo-

torcycle dealership from giving me a full line of credit. I'm the proud owner of a 125cc scooter which I cannot stop riding. Five days in, I haven't yet left the Seattle city limits but I've already racked up 200 miles. It takes five afternoons at different cafes to finish *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk.

On this day in 2007, I was reading Lisa's copy of *White Noise*, and my still-favorite beat up copy of *Ramble Right* by Amber Gayle.

On this day in 2008, I was in Austin. Wasting time, really, trying to beat the heat at a dodgy hostel. It was either that, or continue to drive around which I'd already done for months, or go back to Fort Worth where this hedge fund manager I met a few weeks ago had a fancy hotel room I could join him in. But I knew I'd be in Fort Worth for the next year anyway, for work—my first real teaching job. This is my last chance to be free, I thought, trying to muster the energy to care.

On this day in 2009, I was living in my car again, somewhere in New Mexico or Arizona, but I didn't write anything down.

On this day in 2010, I was living in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, with the guy I'd met in Fort Worth, Texas. I didn't write anything down.

On this day in 2011, I was in self-imposed exile from myself, which is to say I was in LA and didn't write anything down.

On this day in 2012, I may have been in NYC, Seattle, LA or NorCal—not sure, and does it matter? I was in the trenches too long. PTSD. Nothing I wanted to remember; nothing was written down.

On this day in 2013, I worked from home in the apartment I just moved into, the one I'm in right now. I know this only from emails I sent; nothing personal was written down.

On this day in 2014, and 2015, and 2016, and 2017, I worked from home, or from a coworking space, or from Berkli Parc, the Lower East Side Cafe near me that is no longer there anymore. I don't know whether it was a Tuesday or a Sunday on any of these dates, and it doesn't matter because I did the same thing every day: work. Sure, in those years, I traveled some. Here and there. Spain and Italy and Ireland; all the Western states. But not on these dates. Because I only tend to document days

that are novel, and working every day maybe can be but emphatically isn't. They were good days though. They all are now. Now all I want to do is work because there are other things I'm trying to accomplish—it used to be hard to focus because there was too much fun to be had and too much rabble rousing to do—also because my focus was on every problem in the wide world and not on my own life—I was always grateful and mission-oriented but I was never happy or at peace—travel is a drug—novelty is a drug—novelty isn't so appealing now because it distracts me from my mission—on the outside my life looks boring but I've never felt so capable, even more capable than I felt all those years yelling in crowds and hurling my body against the state and flinging my life to the far corners of the earth. I work now because I finally can. But nothing was written down. There are two reasons to not document: you can't, or you can't be bothered. At least this was the latter.

On this day, today, June 21, 2018, nothing much happened. I could chronicle it, but it's minutiae. I've already said too much and painted in too broad of strokes to go switching to pointillism now. But I'll try: no dots, just dashes—I took the B train at Grand Street and had my cowboy breakfast on the walk from Bryant Park to Times Square—I worked through lunch teaching myself VueJS in preparation for the rewrite of our codebase—I listened to the *Invisibilia* podcast and posted a letter to Sonya on the way home—the Melania jacket thing really drove me mad, madder than I usually get, so I banged out an article on it—I “researched” this piece you're reading by turning my book of days to June 21 where I can plainly see the last twenty years of today at a glance (cheating, I know) and I was super butt hurt that I hadn't written anything at all on June 21 for the last ten years—Geoff Dyer, upon reading through one of his old journals, wrote, “How funny, to end up being one's own biographer, to have to resort to the kind of research required by writing someone else's life,” but for me, it doesn't feel like someone else's life, it feels like mine, mine, mine, no matter how different I am or how butt hurt my sixteen year old self would feel about me now, these old selves are my riches, my greatest wealth—I feel so pregnant with riches that I'm not interested in acquiring any more—now I think Kafka was right about the page—Kristin sent me a picture of her

fresh baby and I felt grateful that I don't have one—I sat down to eat a steak salad my boyfriend made for me and we watched a documentary about a man who most likely killed both his wives and then an old episode of *Big Mouth* because it's hilarious—and at 11:30pm I put my feet up on the trash can in the kitchen and drank two Bitburger tall boys and we chain smoked and talked shit and laughed and played *Clash Royale* until my phone died and we went to bed.

Writing this, I just realized that, like Gary Shteyngart said yesterday about his new piece in the *New Yorker*, that I, too, managed to combine the unlikely worlds of hedge funds and Greyhound bus travel. Of Sweden and the Southwest, of novelty and drudgery, activism and angst. Days of beauty and of barely caring. This kind of thing happens when you look at your life in cross-sections. Incongruous bits of this and that. Jarring changes in setting and mood. Bizarre twists in plot, radical character arcs. The way they clash is deeply compelling. The hidden symmetries and accidental harmonies build and break like waves. And a bottle you once flung at the sea comes back to you bearing a message. There is one reason to document: to honor your life. You throw the bottle to sea, trusting you will hear its message one day. When it comes back it will sound familiar, but distant, like an echo or a shell pressed to the ear.

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