

There **HAS** to be more to life than diplomas, cars, and kids.

Sukhmani Sidhu, Class of 2015

*There's a saltwater film on the jar of your ashes / I threw them to sea but a gust blew them backwards
And the sting in my eyes that you then inflicted / Was par for the course / Just as when you were living*

*It's no stretch to say you were not quite a father / But a donor of seeds to a poor single mother
That would raise us alone*

We never saw the money / That went down your throat through the hole in your belly

*Thirteen years old in the suburbs of Denver / Standing in line for Thanksgiving dinner / At the Catholic church
The servers wore crosses / To shield from the sufferance plaguing the others*

*Styrofoam plates, cafeteria tables / Charity reeks of cheap wine and pity
And I'm thinking of you*

I do every year

When we count all our blessings / And wonder what we're doing here

...And Just 'Cause He's Gone...

*You're a disgrace to the concept of family
The priest won't divulge that fact in his homily
And I'll stand up and scream if the mourning remain quiet
You can deck out a lie in a suit / But I won't buy it*

*I won't join in the procession that's speaking their piece
Using five-dollar words while praising his integrity*

And just 'cause he's gone

It doesn't change the fact

He was a b-----d in life

Thus a b-----d in death

Ben Gibbard (Death Cab for Cutie), "Styrofoam Plates"

1. Leaf by Leaf, Page by Page, Throw This Book Away

What would people say at your funeral?

Would they tell the truth? (Do they even know the truth about the person you are?)

Would you want them to?

Even if you're in Myth/Sci-Fi, you've probably heard me wax rhapsodic about *Beowulf*, and how much I love teaching it. It's a wonderful story, big-hearted, bold, and beautiful in a way that most stories can't muster anymore.

If you've read this in my SFHP section, or are a Myth kid who trusts my judgment re: poetry post-*Inferno* and just feel like reading something fantastic, it's easy to see that *Beowulf* is a great big collection of my favorite things. It discusses subjects as varied as the reasons we live, love, and fight, the joys and agonies of holding power, the proper role of revenge, the weird crises that result when one realizes that he's reached his peak, and – last, but certainly not least – the oddly human compulsion to treasure the past, to hold onto memories more desperately than possessions, to define ourselves in terms of where we've been and what we've done far more readily than in terms of where we want to go.

In short, it's awesome.

Anyway, during my first year, which I mainly spent desperately improvising and struggling to keep my head above water, I stumbled upon what I thought was a unbelievable stroke of luck: Robert Zemeckis (director of, among other films, *Forrest Gump*, *Cast Away*, and *Flight*), along with a whole slew of investors, had decided to invest many years and \$150 million in a 3D, fully-motion-capture-animated film version of *Beowulf* – which many people considered a unfilmable poem. (They had good reason to harbor doubts: Others had tried before, and failed miserably.) As it so happened, Zemeckis and Co. planned to release the film that fall.

A film of *Beowulf*! And if you think I was excited, imagine how my students felt: instead of reading the poem, some figured they could just watch the movie. It was a coup for everyone, and my kids were really excited about the unit.

But then the following happened:

- a) It took a couple of weeks, but when the first Searchers got into the poem, they *really* fell in love with it;
- b) The movie hit theaters, and it turned out...well, differently from the book;
- c) Other than the kids who went in hoping to see hyper-violence (of which there was plenty) and/or Angelina Jolie's body (who was eight months pregnant at the time, so the viewers who drooled were doing so over a collection of pixels), every single one of my students **loathed** the movie – mostly because they were horrified by the changes Zemeckis and the screenwriter, Neil Gaiman (of *Sandman* fame), had made.

I went to see the film with a fairly open mind. I love both books and movies, so I'm not a purist: while I appreciate film adaptations that preserve the best aspects of their literary sources, I

understand that there's no reason for a movie to exactly replicate the original text. After all, if I want the story to follow that familiar path, I can always read the book again.

Still, the movie takes an almost perverse delight out of messing up everything – changing not just relationships and timelines, but the very characters and themes I loved (and continue to love). The film's title was a cruel joke, the final straw; why even call it *Beowulf* if it's not going to be based on the story at all?

Afterward, I waffled between disappointment, dislike, and grudging appreciation. On the one hand, it's a very pretty movie. If you don't mind the dead-eye uncanny-valley thing that freaks so many motion-capture viewers out – something that wasn't really solved until *Avatar's* release four years later – the movie's completely immersive, and there were a few exhilarating sequences that actually would have been unfilmable had someone other than Zemeckis (an experienced motion-capture artist) directed it. Moreover, the film displayed a lot of guts by altering the poem so completely; the first people who'd want to see a movie of the poem are also the original's most passionate defenders (to put it lightly), and are therefore the most likely to be infuriated if anything's been altered.

At the same time, I felt a little cheated. It was a golden opportunity to present a story that (as my original Searchers proved) still has plenty of resonance for a modern audience but that's critically underappreciated because of the perceived difficulty in reading a long, old poem (see also: *The Inferno*, or *The Divine Comedy* itself). Yet the filmmakers did their best to avoid presenting that story, a decision that, on its face, seemed to backfire: while the poem remains popular, the movie was not a financial success. (The studio lost more than half of what it invested in the film.) As anyone with a basic understanding of Hollywood economics knows, this wasn't just any flop, either; now that Zemeckis had made such a high-profile attempt, and failed despite having a bunch of resources at his disposal that other filmmakers would never have, nobody else was going to try making a *Beowulf* movie. Investors would be better off setting their money on fire.

No, for better or worse, Zemeckis's vision, his version of *Beowulf*, was all I was ever going to get...and his vision happened to completely diverge with anything resembling a fair, accurate reading of the poem.

Then I realized that that was the point.

2. It Feels Like I'm Trying to Hold Smoke

It's important to remember that accidents happen in art. Sometimes a painter slaps some paint on a canvas only to discover that their original idea is inferior to something they saw in the details. Sometimes a teenager moving a pencil over paper produces an image that's even more beautiful than the one he/she held in his/her head. Sometimes an author surprises himself with the ending he composes.

More often than not, however, art is an intentional product – the sum of thousands of carefully-considered creative decisions. This is particularly true in film, where you're balancing the needs, whims, and desires of dozens to hundreds of professionals over the course of several months

– even years. Whatever “sneaks” onto the screen has actually been approved by, or at least passed by, scores of people on its way to your eyes and ears.

And when you’re talking about doing something as blatantly controversial as Zemeckis and Gaiman decided to do – i.e., mess with an unquestioned classic that’s one of the foundations modern literature’s built upon – I should have instantly realized that something was up. See, Zemeckis and Gaiman aren’t incompetent. They can read the poem just as easily, thoroughly, and accurately as I can. They know what it’s about; their scripting choices aren’t the result of two educated adults massively misinterpreting a text we teach to teenagers.

Instead, the scriptwriters decided to avoid adapting the book they said they were adapting; they wrote a movie that advanced a message, and the changes I mentioned were made in order to drive home that specific message – even though it’s a message that people who have never read the book probably can’t notice, and even though it’s a message that people who have read the book may miss because they’re too furious, offended, or disappointed to notice.

I certainly didn’t notice until about a week later. I don’t stop thinking about things easily – I know this comes as a tremendous surprise to you – so *Beowulf* haunted my thoughts for about a week before I finally got the message. It’s most clearly stated in a moment that’s really easy to miss because it seems so mundane.

Those of you who have seen the movie (my condolences) may remember a seemingly irrelevant scene that takes place just after the narrative has jumped forward fifty years. Since Hygelac never appears in the film, we don’t see Geatland. Instead, Beowulf watches as Hrothgar confesses that he’s cheated on Wealhtheow with Grendma, fathering the monster who’s plagued his hall, before leaping out a window to his death – leaving Beowulf to marry Wealhtheow, lead the Danes, and also fall prey to Grendma’s temptations, producing a shapeshifting hybrid creature who takes the form of the dragon that lays siege to Denmark. (I know.)

Before the jump, Beowulf is blonde, young, and ripped, not to mention frequently, frequently naked. Then he becomes king of the people, the camera blinks...and we jump.

When we see Beowulf again, he looks significantly older, wearier, and tired; fifty long years of struggle and guilt have weighed heavily on him. (He *does* continue to compulsively shed clothing; some habits die hard, even for octogenarians.) He yearns to be out fighting instead of pulling back from battle, but he’s seemingly too old to continue fighting as he once did. In something of a reflection of its aged leader, Beowulf’s nation is crumbling around him, with enemies advancing on its borders as weakness, corruption, and cowardice hobble or take hold of many citizens.

As we recognize this, we see Beowulf ride up to the aftermath of a battle – a skirmish, really – where one member of the enemy force lies, still living, on the ground. When the fallen fighter rises and challenges him, Beowulf dismounts his horse and returns the challenge with an almost palpable violence, daring the other man – screaming at him, really – to strike him dead. There is an intensity to Ray Winstone’s performance here that is just magnificent – the self-loathing and exhaustion that constantly occupy his thoughts bleed through every syllable, although he doesn’t let it show in his words – and the fighter surrenders, crumbling in the face of his forceful advance. Instead of killing him, Beowulf tells his men to give his opponent a trinket and send him on his way; as he bitterly puts it, the man “has a story to tell now.”

This scene is easy to ignore, because it's almost anti-climactic. *What? No battle? No death? What is this nonsense?*

Yet my thoughts kept returning to this scene, and I grew convinced that this scene defines what the entire movie is about.

Zemeckis and Gaiman decided to make a film about the differences between the substance of who we are and the ways in which we are perceived or remembered. The film destroys the poem because, according to the filmmakers, *the poem never describes what actually happened*. The film purports to do just that, to set the record straight.

Zemeckis asks his reader-viewers: *You finished this poem and think Beowulf is noble? Are you sure? Or are you simply taking the author's word for it?*

The filmed events are very different from the poem, and the filmmakers seem to be arguing that these differences exist because history is written by those who gain the power to write it, and those with power often like to remember the rosy details – and omit the darker ones.

When we read *Beowulf*, we're reading a story about a hero who doesn't seem to have flaws. He's strong, brave, intelligent – the man even lives for nearly a century!

As he's written in legend, story, and song, Beowulf is impossibly noble, virtually unkillable – just about perfect. He is the figure we write about, not the one we meet in our everyday lives...for we live in an age where even our heroes must have flaws. He seems larger-than-life in death, in our fiction.

And that, the film states, is because he was decidedly less than that during his lifetime.

3. If I Gave Everything, Would You Still Listen to Me?

What does this have to do with Ben Gibbard's father? What does this have to do with *The Inferno*? What does this have to do with us?

Well, "Styrofoam Plates" and *Beowulf* are concerned with how we choose to remember those we've lost – whether we remember them accurately, or whether we lie to ourselves and remember the dead the way we want to. Do we deck out our lies in suits? Do we speak kindly of the dead, tell stories of their goodness and virtue, because those stories are true – or because the telling is respectful, is indeed what is expected of us?

We've always written about heroes in specific ways that reflect the age that produced them. *Beowulf* is the byproduct of an age of superheroes – not caped crusaders, but men who seemed endowed with impossibly elevated abilities. To write about that hero any differently would be the equivalent of standing up at someone's funeral and reminding everyone of his very human flaws and frailties. It might be the truth, but is that the right time and place for such honesty? Is that what people want to hear?

Ben Gibbard's attitude towards his father may seem spiteful, but it's genuine; there's something to be said for truthfulness and accuracy.

On the other hand, *Beowulf* may indeed be exactly what Zemeckis and Gaiman argue it is: a lie wrapped in a legend. It just so happens that the lie turns out to be a better story – and a more popular, accepted one – than the “truthful” filmed version.

Now look at *The Inferno*. It’s almost impossible to remember, as we go along, what I taught you at the very beginning of the book: *Dante is not in Hell*. The entire book is an allegory for searching one’s soul and confronting the beautiful and horrifying things we trap within ourselves. It isn’t just a story: it’s the confession of a man who can look back at his life, see the horrible things that have happened to him, and trace the wreckage back to himself.

Some of you have already figured out – deduced, really – that Dante *is*, for the most part, the sinners we see. The Opportunists, the Lustful, the Gluttons, the Wrathful, the Sullen, even the Prodigal – can you match them with the things you know Dante did?

Do you remember his banishment of his brother-in-law and best friend in a politically expedient – one might even say opportunistic – move? (We can credibly call that Opportunism.)

The love he harbored for Beatrice long after he married another woman? (We can call that Lust.)

The way he accumulated vast reserves of knowledge and power at an accelerated rate, heedless of the long-term consequences, even overdosing on human reason? (Perhaps Gluttony...)

The raw hatred he harbored towards Argenti, Boniface, and the others (you’ll see more) who wronged him in life? (...Definitely Wrath, although he does his best to justify his outrage.)

The grief he’d internalized after losing his parents, friends, wife, children, and old way of life, only to prolong his suffering by keeping to himself and refusing to return to Florence? (Sullenness – even considering that he didn’t receive and reject the invitation to return to his city until after *The Inferno* had been published.)

The way he allowed everything he’d garnered in his life to go to waste? (Prodigality.)

Then we reach circles of heresy, violence, and fraud...and, if we continue down this interpretive path, we can confront some troubling questions. Is Dante including this specific type of heresy because it’s one that, in the dark of night after Beatrice’s death, it’s the kind of thought he indulged in? Did Dante contemplate self-annihilation after being exiled from the city he loved – virtually the only thing that, up to that point, he hadn’t abandoned and hadn’t abandoned him?

The Inferno isn’t fascinating because of its allusions, its linguistic mastery, or its impressive length. Those things are fascinating in and of themselves, but they aren’t the reason I’m teaching you this. It’s fascinating because it’s a snapshot of a man doing exactly what his childhood mentor had told him to do – taking a stab at immortality – and refusing to pull any punches.

It’s a stark, unflinching portrayal of a lost, furious, brilliant, conflicted, faithful, and lonely man who has nothing left to lose. He’s deconstructing himself as thoroughly as Zemeckis takes down *Beowulf* and Gibbard takes down his father.

Zemeckis argues that we don’t remember *Beowulf* – that he left nothing behind but lies.

Gibbard doesn’t want his father to have the privilege of leaving his lies behind.

And Dante?

Dante is Ciacco with a conscience. He wants you to remember him, even if it's negative, as long as it's true...

...because, if you don't, he won't be leaving anything behind.

4. Remember Me for Me

I spent a lot of time on the road last December – about 4,000 miles, all told. A good chunk of that was spent driving alone to Portland, OR in order to make it to the 2014 edition of Nike Cross Nationals, the capstone to the cross country season.

Before I continue, understand that I like driving. I inherited this from my father, I think, who's always had an appetite for the road I found difficult to understand as a kid. (*Why are we driving to Canada?* he wondered while carsick for the third consecutive day) But I adopted it while looking for colleges my senior year, on the road trip I mentioned all the way back in *Floating Down the River*.

We piled into my mother's periwinkle-blue minivan; my father lent my mother his car, re-teaching her how to drive a stick shift before we left. I brought too few clothes and too much music – all the burned CD-Rs of pirated mp3s I could manage in 2003 – as well as a mountain of apathy about my future that I acquired after being unceremoniously dumped by the girl I thought was perfect and hoped I'd marry someday. (Big, dumb dreams at 18, apparently.)

So there we were, my newly-single self and my divorcee father, setting out on the open road, a cut-and-paste premise for a male-bonding movie. We covered a lot of ground that trip, including one marathon day where I drove 930 miles from Tacoma, WA to Kettleman City, CA while barely stopping to eat, let alone rest, as my father drifted in and out of sleep in the passenger seat beside me.

And that day – the whole day – is one of my fondest memories: excellent conversation time with my dad (something we hadn't had enough of) while he was awake, and time to listen to those CD-Rs while he slept. I still remember the music I stuffed into that CD wallet: Beck's mournful *Sea Change*, still the best reeling-from-breakup album ever; Coldplay's *A Rush of Blood to the Head*, which is surprisingly perfect for the open road; Papa Roach's *lovehatetragedy*, because I loved very specific corners of that era's terrible-radio-rock spectrum [yes to Papa Roach's second major-label album that nobody liked, no to their first one that everyone did] and the first song still makes me drive inadvisably fast; Third Eye Blind, The Strokes, Incubus, Taking Back Sunday, Jimmy Eat World, Switchfoot, Dashboard Confessional, The Juliana Theory, Nada Surf, Foo Fighters, New Found Glory, and Guster, the band whose song was the first I ever stole with Napster. I drove along stretches of I-5 I'd never seen, driving faster than I'd ever driven, feeling ever-so-slightly that things were going to get better. And they did.

I've embarked on dozens of hundred-mile drives since then. Music is my constant co-pilot, my only permanent passenger. Oh, the songs change – mostly. The Juliana Theory became Death Cab for Cutie, became Anberlin, became Arcade Fire, became Mae, became Lovedrug, became Motion City Soundtrack, became Bon Iver, became The National, became From Indian Lakes and The Wonder Years and Tokyo Police Club. My tastes moved forward (The xx, M83, The Naked and

Famous) and backward (Braid, Jawbreaker, The Promise Ring, Christie Front Drive), always expanding, always searching for more, always played loud. (*lovehatetragedy* still gets played at 85mph on I-5 more often than it should.) But music, and the open road, are always there. I think I get a little stir-crazy if too much time passes between trips; when people try to discourage me from driving, I don't really know how to explain to them that it's not really *driving* for me.

So when I drove to Portland, I drove to go coach; I drove to go run. But I drove because I needed to drive. I needed to be alone, listening to music, for a couple of thousand miles. I drove through fog so thick the other cars were going 25 in a 70mph zone; through rain pounding the Sierra Mountains from ground level, the clouds brushing across the asphalt and rolling over trucks like waves; through Oregon valleys bursting with that particular shade of green that only appears after the first rain in months.

And I listened.

Something about listening to music alone makes it hit harder.

I was driving through the upper reaches of the Californian state, passing Yreka and heading for the border, looking askance at the signs declaring that I'd reached the independent breakaway state of Jefferson, when The Hotelier's "Your Deep Rest" came on. (Say it fast and the double meaning's more obvious.) The Hotelier don't play a style of music that's necessarily fun to listen to; they don't have tracks that fit easily on mixtapes. What they do have, however, are lyrics worth listening to. No matter how fond I am of quoting from songs, I'm the first to admit that most lyricists can't really write. Their words can't stand apart from the notes. Chris Holden is a welcome exception; the whole *Home, Like Noplace is There* album could work as poetry if it didn't work so well as music. And "Your Deep Rest" is a standout. It's devastating. I started crying at the end of it.

Holden writes about struggling to come to terms with a friend's suicide – difficult subject matter, to be sure. But part of the reason it's difficult is because it's tempting for writers to go in one of two directions: to either fixate on the awful, graphic details of death, or to sanctify / make more noble the departed. I hate both. Both seem fake, atrociously so. Nobody writing those things seems to actually know what they're talking about.

I do not have enough experience with death, nor with suicide, to fill a book.

I do have more experience with both than I wish I had, or than I would wish on anybody.

And Holden writes like someone who could say the same. Nobody wants to believe they'd be reluctant to attend their friend's funeral. *How disrespectful!* you might think. But here's the thing: It's really hard to go to services for someone you love. It's really hard to be alive when some of those you care about aren't. It's really hard to hold on to your good memories of them when you hurt every time you think of them, when your joy gets polluted by agony every time you try to seek some solace in it.

It is one thing to understand that things will get better. In *The Futile Pursuit of Happiness*, Daniel Gilbert loses someone, and he can say (quite logically) to himself that he won't feel so awful forever. The tunnel through Mashu in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* has a light at the end. But even that

knowledge is sort of awful: to feel better, of course, means that your memory won't be as real, because the emotion you feel in the moment will fade.

What Holden sings about is the struggle to hold on. And it's that tension between holding on and letting go that defines everything – whether you flip the coin or pocket the opportunity.

In “Your Deep Rest,” it defines whether you stay alive.

In American politics, it defines whether you choose to be progressive or conservative.

That tension exists when Beowulf looks at the throne – or when Macbeth looks at it; when Dante approaches the Gate; when Siddhartha stares down his father.

Do you cling to the ship heading for the Axiom?

Do you stow away aboard the Overlord ship without saying goodbye to the people you love?

Do you drag around your company of a hundred knights, or give up what you want to spend your days taking care of your fading father?

Do you aim for the job in architecture or stay in the sub-Hallmark offices that threaten to define you?

Do you become a writer or a physicist?

Do you sacrifice your self-respect to win a war?

Do you fly your home to Paradise Falls? Do you leave it there, along with every reminder of the woman you spent a lifetime not just loving, but adoring?

Can you be strong enough to choose to stay?

Can you be strong enough to choose to let go?

Can you be strong enough to know how to choose which is right?

I told you once: *The way to love anything is to realize it may be lost.*

Holden's friend leaves a note. He, or she, writes: *Remember me for me.*

My father is a brilliant, eccentric, stubborn, generous, temperamental, principled, loving mass of contradictions. He can't control which of those qualities will persist longest in my memories; all I know is that these memories of him, the ones I love, are the ones I'll lose – that someday it will hurt to remember him, and that someday it won't, and that when it doesn't hurt anymore I will truly have lost him. The same goes for my mother, my aunt, my grandparents, my sisters, my partner, my friends.

I know them, I remember them, and someday I won't. I'll just have facsimiles of memories, pictures with the punches pulled.

My father can't control how I remember him. If he could, he probably wouldn't choose the moments I've listed. But they're who he is.

And it's that simple plea in “Your Deep Rest” that hits me hardest: *Remember me for me.*

I want to remember what my father leaves behind because it's what he spent a lifetime making, building, forming. I want to remember how good it felt when he'd carry me to my bed. I want to remember him falling asleep while trying to read me bedtime stories after finishing an exhausting day at work, trying to read when he really should've been resting. I want to remember shifting gears in his car for him when he shattered his right arm in a workplace accident. I want to remember who he was before he suffered a head injury in an attack, an injury I've been told changed his personality. I want to remember being afraid of him when I was little. I want to remember beating him in bowling for the first time. I want to remember his wedding toasts. I want to remember how he cradled the stray kitten we found in our alley and how it burrowed into his chest. I want to remember how he and my oldest sister used to talk about each other when they were estranged and not speaking for years, before they rebuilt part of the bridge they'd burned. I want to remember how he laughs too loudly and too abruptly sometimes – something Joyce tells me I do now. I want to remember the expression on his face when he looked at the glaciers at the end of that long drive to Canada. I want to remember how bad he was at golf. I want to remember staying up late with him to watch movies I was probably too young for – *Casablanca*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Blues Brothers*. I want to remember forgetting he was supposed to visit me here and waking up the next morning to realize he'd slept outside in his car. I want to remember his tiny mother (my Nana) reaching up to hug him. I want to remember calling him on the worst night of my life, talking for two and a half hours when I usually hate spending more than a minute on the phone.

I love these memories. I don't want to lose them. I don't want to forget.

So I write them down.

Sukhmani Sidhu was right: there is more to life than diplomas, cars, and kids. There is so, so much more.

We don't have an infinite amount of time to chase all of it, to win it, to appreciate it.

But for God's sake, don't go gently.

Go get some stories to tell.

This is the last real blog. It's almost the end, children of mine.

I hope you remember this class fondly. I hope you're proud of what you've accomplished.

Remember.

Grief.

Debts.

Secrets.

Pride.

Wealth.

Possessions.

Hope.

Home.

Rage.

Children.

Regret.

Memories.

Stories.

Lessons.

Love.

What will you leave behind?

-
- + Are you everything you want to be to everyone you want? Have you ever been less – failed someone outright? Have you ever been more?
 - + Do you build different faces for different places, different sides for different situations, and different people for different people?
 - + Should you feel sad when someone dies? Should we feel sad when Beowulf falls? Should we be happy that he's going out before the Geats crumble, and that he dies a warrior's death – or does that make it more painful?
 - + How do you deal with loss? How do you grieve? Is your grief a sign of your strength, or of your weakness? Is it honorable? Is it self-indulgent? Do you think about "missed opportunities" and feel guilty? Are you grateful for the opportunities you seized, for the good memories?
 - + Have your feelings of loss been difficult to analyze? Are you afraid to examine the ways you react when you're emotionally wounded, or do you enjoy studying those types of feelings? (Can we even use "grief" as a label to describe our reactions to loss, considering that people react in such varied ways? Is the blanket accurate, or inaccurate?)
 - + Are Zemeckis and Gaiman correct? Do we tend to remember figures from our pasts more favorably than they deserve? Do victors write history? Do we rewrite our memories out of respect? If we misremember someone, are we killing them again?
 - + Let's say you could choose to remember your friends and family in a specific way - but only one way. Would you prefer to hold idyllic memories of them, or accurate ones? (Remember, the only person who holds these memories is you - and only you can benefit from or be harmed by them.)
 - + How would you like people to remember you – at your best, or as you are? How would you like your friends to remember you? How would you like your family to remember you? Do you think they'd respect your wishes – in other words, do you think they'd choose to remember you the way you chose here? Will history remember you more favorably or negatively than you deserve?
 - + Finally, are you afraid to lose the ones you love, or are you more afraid they'll lose you? Is the nun from another Death Cab for Cutie song ("I Will Follow You Into the Dark") correct – is fear at the heart of love, and is love at the heart of your fears? Does love give you the strength to overcome these fears - or does it leave you vulnerable? (If it does, is this vulnerability a "bad thing"?)

Blog Title and Opening Lyrics: "Styrofoam Plates," Death Cab for Cutie, *The Photo Album*

1. "Smoke," Ben Folds Five, *Whatever and Ever Amen*
 2. "Gasoline," Brand New, *Daisy*
 3. "No Love," The Get Up Kids, *Four Minute Mile*
 4. "Your Deep Rest," The Hotelier, *Home, Like Noplace is There*
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