SUMMER ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

1. Read the short essay titled “On Impact” by Stephen King. Copies are available at rbrhs.org or via this link to The New Yorker: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2000/06/19/on-impact
2. Read the commencement speech given by Steve Jobs at Stanford University in 2005. Copies of the speech are available at rbrhs.org or via this link: https://news.stanford.edu/2005/06/14/jobs-061505/
3. Read Carmen Maria Machado’s very short essay titled “The Anxiety That Binds” from The New York Times. Copies of the essay are available at rbrhs.org or via this link: https://nyti.ms/2GSFuvD
4. Write a ½ - 1 page response for each essay.
5. Write a one - two page memoir.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

1. Size 12 Times New Roman Font
2. One inch margins
3. Create TWO Docs for this assignment. Doc One: Responses + Doc Two: Memoir

ASSIGNMENT #1 - Responses to the Essays

1. For each of the nonfiction pieces of writing, develop a ½-1 page response.
2. Each reader response should contain the following:
   a. A brief summary of the essay in your own words.
   b. A detailed description of your opinion of the essay that cites specific portions of the text.
   c. An explanation of the author’s message to his or her audience.
3. Please incorporate the three items above into a well-written response for EACH ESSAY. Make your Doc well-organized by indicating the essayist that corresponds to each response.

ASSIGNMENT #2 - Writing a Memoir

After reading each of the essays and writing down your responses, craft a one - two page personal essay of your own. You do not have to divulge your deepest, darkest secrets. But you should write about a meaningful experience from one particular spot in time. You may use this writing as a springboard for writing your College Essay, the first writing assignment of your senior year, so give it a concerted effort.

Suggestions for Writing: If you feel like this task is beyond you, try to address one of the following writing prompts.

1. Write about your favorite food. This may sound juvenile, but think about the experiences we have with food, family, friends, etc. Writing about that soft-serve ice cream cone that fell on the hot pavement the summer you turned five might be a worthwhile endeavor.
2. Look out a window and find something that reminds you of your grade school years.
3. Ask your parents or guardians about THEIR fondest memories involving you. Then write about that from your perspective.
4. Think of an influential person in your life and discuss that person’s impact on your life.
5. Stole a base? Got an A? Found Waldo? Write about an event that made you proud of yourself.

A Note About Technology

If you use Google Drive/Google Docs, you may access your work nearly anywhere using Google Apps.

If you do not have access to a computer, if your WiFi is down, or if you spend your summer vacation in Antarctica to escape the heat, email your teacher to find a solution. Wait, email won’t work in these scenarios. Try this: Visit the school Monday-Thursday, visit your local library, go to a public place with free WiFi, or handwrite your assignments and type them up when school starts.
On Impact
FROM THE NEW YORKER

When my wife and I are at our summer house in western Maine, I walk four miles every day unless it’s pouring down rain. Three miles of this walk are on dirt roads that wind through the woods; a mile of it is on Route 5, a two-lane blacktop highway that runs between Bethel and Fryeburg.

The third week in June of 1999 was an extraordinarily happy one for my wife and for me; our three kids, now grown and scattered across the country, were visiting, and it was the first time in nearly six months that we’d all been under the same roof. As an extra bonus, our first grandchild was in the house, three months old and happily jerking at a helium balloon tied to his foot.

On June 19, I took our younger son to the Portland Jetport, where he caught a flight back to New York. I drove home, had a brief nap, and then set out on my usual walk. We were planning to go en famille to see a movie in nearby North Conway that evening, and I had just enough time to go for my walk before packing everybody up for the trip.

I set out around four o’clock in the afternoon, as well as I can remember. Just before reaching the main road (in western Maine, any road with a white line running down the middle of it is a main road), I stepped into the woods and urinated. Two months would pass before I was able to take another leak standing up.

When I reached the highway, I turned north, walking on the gravel shoulder, against traffic. One car passed me, also headed north. About three-quarters of a mile farther along, I was told later, the woman driving that car noticed a light blue Dodge van heading south. The van was looping from one side of the road to the other, barely under the driver’s control. When she was safely past the wandering van, the woman turned to her passenger and said, “That was Stephen King walking back there. I sure hope that van doesn’t hit him.”

Most of the sight lines along the mile-long stretch of Route 5 that I walk are good, but there is one place, a short steep hill, where a pedestrian heading north can see very little of what might be coming his way. I was three-quarters of the way up this hill when the van came over the crest. It wasn’t on the road; it was on the shoulder. My shoulder. I had perhaps three-quarters of a second to register this. It was just time enough to think, My God, I’m going to be hit by a school bus, and to start to turn to my left. Then there is a break in my memory. On the other side of it, I’m on the ground, looking at the back of the van, which is now pulled off the road and tilted to one side. This image is clear and sharp, more like a snapshot than like a memory. There is dust around the van’s tail-lights. The license plate and the back windows are dirty. I register these things with no thought of myself or of my condition. I’m simply not thinking.

There’s another short break in my memory here, and then I am very carefully wiping palms full of blood out of my eyes with my left hand. When I can see clearly, I look around and notice a man sitting on a nearby rock. He has a cane resting in his lap. This is Bryan Smith, the forty-two-year-old man who hit me. Smith has got quite the driving record; he has racked up nearly a dozen vehicle-related offenses. He wasn’t watching the road at the moment that our lives collided because his Rottweiler had jumped from the very rear of his van onto the back seat, where there was an Igloo cooler with some meat stored in it. The Rottweiler’s name was Bullet. (Smith had another Rottweiler at home; that one was named Pistol.) Bullet started to nose at the lid of the cooler. Smith turned around and tried to push him away. He was still looking at Bullet and pushing his head away from the cooler when he came over the top of the knoll, still looking and pushing when he struck me. Smith told friends later that he thought he’d hit “a small deer” until he noticed my bloody spectacles lying on the front seat of his van. They were knocked from my face when I tried to get out of Smith’s way. The frames were bent and twisted, but the lenses were unbroken. They are the lenses I’m wearing now, as I write.
Smith sees that I’m awake and tells me that help is on the way. He speaks calmly, even cheerily. His look, as he sits on the rock with his cane across his lap, is one of pleasant commiseration: Ain’t the two of us just had the shittest luck? it says. He and Bullet had left the campground where they were staying, he later tells an investigator, because he wanted “some of those Marzes bars they have up to the store.” When I hear this detail some weeks later, it occurs to me that I have nearly been killed by a character out of one of my own novels. It’s almost funny.

Help is on the way, I think, and that’s probably good, because I’ve been in a hell of an accident. I’m lying in the ditch and there’s blood all over my face and my right leg hurts. I look down and see something I don’t like: my lap appears to be on sideways, as if my whole lower body had been wrench half a turn to the right. I look back up at the man with the cane and say, “Please tell me it’s just dislocated.”

“Nah,” he says. Like his face, his voice is cheery, only mildly interested. He could be watching all this on TV while he noshes on one of those Marzes bars. “It’s broken in five, I’d say, maybe six places.”

“I’m sorry,” I tell him — God knows why — and then I’m gone again for a little while. It isn’t like blacking out; it’s more as if the film of memory had been spliced here and there.

When I come back this time, an orange and white van is idling at the side of the road with its flashers going. An emergency medical technician — Paul Fillebrown is his name — is kneeling beside me. He’s doing something. Cutting off my jeans, I think, although that might have come later.

I ask him if I can have a cigarette. He laughs and says, “Not hardly.” I ask him if I’m going to die. He tells me no, I’m not going to die, but I need to go to the hospital, and fast. Which one would I prefer, the one in Norway–South Paris or the one in Bridgton? I tell him I want to go to Bridgton, to Northern Cumberland Memorial Hospital, because my youngest child — the one I just took to the airport — was born there twenty-two years ago. I ask again if I’m going to die, and he tells me again that I’m not. Then he asks me whether I can wiggle the toes of my right foot. I wiggle them, thinking of an old rhyme my mother used to recite: “This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed home.” I should have stayed home, I think; going for a walk today was a bad idea. Then I remember that sometimes when people are paralyzed they think they’re moving but really aren’t.

“My toes, did they move?” I ask Paul Fillebrown. He says that they did, a good, healthy wiggle. “Do you swear to God?” I ask him, and I think he does. I’m starting to pass out again. Fillebrown asks me, very slowly and loudly, leaning down over my face, if my wife is at the big house on the lake. I can’t remember. I can’t remember where any of my family is, but I’m able to give him the telephone numbers both of our big house and of the cottage on the far side of the lake, where my daughter sometimes stays. Hell, I could give him my Social Security number if he asked. I’ve got all my numbers. It’s everything else that’s gone.

Other people are arriving now. Somewhere, a radio is crackling out police calls. I’m lifted onto a stretcher. It hurts, and I scream. Then I’m put into the back of the EMT truck, and the police calls are closer. The doors shut and someone up front says, “You want to really hammer it.”

Paul Fillebrown sits down beside me. He has a pair of clippers, and he tells me that he’s going to have to cut the ring off the third finger of my right hand — it’s a wedding ring my wife gave me in 1983, twelve years after we were actually married. I try to tell Fillebrown that I wear it on my right hand because the real wedding ring is still on the ring finger of my left — the original twirling set cost me fifteen dollars and ninety-five cents at Day’s Jewelers in Bangor, and I bought it a year and a half after I’d first met my wife, in the summer of 1969. I was working at the University of Maine library at the time. I had a great set of muttonchop sideburns, and I was staying just off campus, at Ed Price’s Rooms (seven bucks a week, one change of sheets included). Men had landed on the moon, and I had landed on the dean’s list. Miracles and wonders abounded. One afternoon, a bunch of us library guys had lunch on the grass behind the university bookstore. Sitting between Paolo Silva and Eddie Marsh was a trim girl with a raucous laugh, red-tinted hair, and the prettiest legs I had ever seen. She was carrying a copy of Soul on Ice. I hadn’t run across her in the library, and I didn’t believe that a college student could produce such a wonderful, unafraid laugh. Also, heavy reading or no heavy reading, she swore like a millworker. Her name was Tabitha.
Spruce. We were married in 1971. We’re still married, and she has never let me forget that the first time I met her I thought she was Eddie Marsh’s townie girlfriend. In fact, we came from similar working-class backgrounds; we both ate meat; we were both political Democrats with typical Yankee suspicions of life outside New England. And the combination has worked. Our marriage has outlasted all of the world’s leaders except Castro.

Some garbled version of the ring story comes out, probably nothing that Paul Fillebrown can actually understand, but he keeps nodding and smiling as he cuts that second, more expensive wedding ring off my swollen right hand. By the time I call Fillebrown to thank him, some two months later, I know that he probably saved my life by administering the correct on-scene medical aid and then getting me to a hospital, at a speed of roughly ninety miles an hour, over patched and bumpy back roads.

Fillebrown suggests that perhaps someone else was watching out for me. “I’ve been doing this for twenty years,” he tells me over the phone, “and when I saw the way you were lying in the ditch, plus the extent of the impact injuries, I didn’t think you’d make it to the hospital. You’re a lucky camper to still be with the program.”

The extent of the impact injuries is such that the doctors at Northern Cumberland Hospital decide they cannot treat me there. Someone summons a LifeFlight helicopter to take me to Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston. At this point, Tabby, my older son, and my daughter arrive. The kids are allowed a brief visit; Tabby is allowed to stay longer. The doctors have assured her that I’m banged up but I’ll make it. The lower half of my body has been covered. She isn’t allowed to see the interesting way that my lap has shifted around to the right, but she is allowed to wash the blood off my face and pick some of the glass out of my hair.

There’s a long gash in my scalp, the result of my collision with Bryan Smith’s windshield. This impact came at a point less than two inches from the steel driver’s-side support post. Had I struck that, I would have been killed or rendered permanently comatose. Instead, I was thrown over the van and fourteen feet into the air. If I had landed on the rocks jutting out of the ground beyond the shoulder of Route 5, I would also likely have been killed or permanently paralyzed, but I landed just shy of them. “You must have pivoted to the left just a little at the last second,” I am told later by the doctor who takes over my case. “If you hadn’t, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

The LifeFlight helicopter arrives in the parking lot, and I am wheeled out to it. The clatter of the helicopter’s rotors is loud. Someone shouts into my ear, “Ever been in a helicopter before, Stephen?” The speaker sounds jolly, excited for me. I try to say yes, I’ve been in a helicopter before — twice, in fact — but I can’t. It’s suddenly very tough to breathe. They load me into the helicopter. I can see one brilliant wedge of blue sky as we lift off, not a cloud in it. There are more radio voices. This is my afternoon for hearing voices, it seems. Meanwhile, it’s getting even harder to breathe. I gesture at someone, or try to, and a face bends upside down into my field of vision.

“Feel like I’m drowning,” I whisper.

Somebody checks something, and someone else says, “His lung has collapsed.”

There’s a rattle of paper as something is unwrapped, and then the second person speaks into my ear, loudly so as to be heard over the rotors: “We’re going to put a chest tube in you, Stephen. You’ll feel some pain, a little pinch. Hold on.”

It’s been my experience that if a medical person tells you that you’re going to feel a little pinch he’s really going to hurt you. This time, it isn’t as bad as I expected, perhaps because I’m full of painkillers, perhaps because I’m on the verge of passing out again. It’s like being thumped on the right side of my chest by someone holding a sharp short object. Then there’s an alarming whistle, as if I’d sprung a leak. In fact, I suppose I have. A moment later, the soft in-and-out of normal respiration, which I’ve listened to my whole life (mostly without being aware of it, thank God), has been replaced by an unpleasant shloop-shloop-shloop sound. The air I’m taking in is very cold, but it’s air, at least, and I keep breathing it. I don’t want to die, and, as I lie in the helicopter looking out at the bright summer sky, I realize that I am actually lying in death’s doorway. Someone is going to pull me one way or the other pretty soon; it’s mostly out of my hands. All I can do is lie there and listen to my thin, leaky breathing: shloop-shloop-shloop.

Ten minutes later, we set down on the concrete landing pad of the Central Maine Medical Center. To me, it feels as if we’re at the bottom of a concrete well. The blue sky is blotted out, and the
whap-whap-whap of the helicopter rotors becomes magnified and echoey, like the clapping of giant hands.

Still breathing in great leaky gulps, I am lifted out of the helicopter. Someone bums the stretcher, and I scream. "Sorry, sorry, you're O.K., Stephen," someone says—when you're badly hurt, everyone calls you by your first name.

"Tell Tabby I love her very much," I say as I am first lifted and then wheeled very fast down some sort of descending walkway. I suddenly feel like crying.

"You can tell her that yourself," the someone says. We go through a door. There is air conditioning, and lights flow past overhead. Doctors are paged over loudspeakers. It occurs to me, in a muddled sort of way, that just an hour ago I was taking a walk and planning to pick some berries in a field that overlooks Lake Kezar. I wasn't going to pick for long, though; I'd have to be home by five-thirty because we were going to see The General's Daughter, starring John Travolta. Travolta played the bad guy in the movie version of Carrie, my first novel, a long time ago.

"When?" I ask. "When can I tell her?"

"Soon," the voice says, and then I pass out again. This time, it's no splice but a great big whack taken out of the memory film; there are a few flashes, confused glimpses of faces and operating rooms and looming X-ray machinery; there are delusions and hallucinations, fed by the morphine and Dilaudid dripping into me; there are echoing voices and hands that reach down to paint my dry lips with swabs that taste of peppermint. Mostly, though, there is darkness.

Bryan Smith's estimate of my injuries turned out to be conservative. My lower leg was broken in at least nine places. The orthopedic surgeon who put me together again, the formidable David Brown, said that the region below my right knee had been reduced to "so many marbles in a sock." The extent of those lower-leg injuries necessitated two deep incisions—they're called medial and lateral fasciotomies—to release the pressure caused by my exploded tibia and also to allow blood to flow back into my lower leg. If I hadn't had the fasciotomies (or if they had been delayed), it probably would have been necessary to amputate my leg. My right knee was split almost directly down the middle, and I suffered an acetabular fracture of the right hip—a serious derailment, in other words—and an open femoral intertrochanteric fracture in the same area. My spine was chipped in eight places. Four ribs were broken. My right collarbone held, but the flesh above it had been stripped raw. The laceration in my scalp took almost thirty stitches.

Yeah, on the whole I'd say Bryan Smith was a tad conservative.

Mr. Smith's driving behavior in this case was eventually examined by a grand jury, which indicted him on two counts: driving to endanger (pretty serious) and aggravated assault (very serious, the kind of thing that means jail time). After due consideration, the district attorney responsible for prosecuting such cases in my corner of the world allowed Smith to plead out to the lesser charge of driving to endanger. He received six months of county jail time (sentence suspended) and a year's suspension of his right to drive. He was also placed on probation for a year, with restrictions on other motor vehicles, such as snowmobiles and ATVs. Bryan Smith could conceivably be back on the road in the fall or winter of 2001.

David Brown put my leg back together in five marathon surgical procedures that left me thin, weak, and nearly at the end of my endurance. They also left me with at least a fighting chance to walk again. A large steel and carbon-fiber apparatus called an external fixator was clamped to my leg. Eight large steel pegs called Schanz pins ran through the fixator and into the bones above and below my knee. Five smaller steel rods radiated out from the knee. These looked sort of like a child's drawing of sunrays. The knee itself was locked in place. Three times a day, nurses unwrapped the smaller pins and the much larger Schanz pins and swabbed the holes with hydrogen peroxide. I've never had my leg dipped in kerosene and then lit on fire, but if that ever happens I'm sure it will feel quite a bit like daily pin care.

I entered the hospital on June 19. Around the thirtieth, I got up for the first time, staggering three steps to a commode, where I sat with my hospital Johnny in my lap and my head down, trying not to weep and failing. I told myself that I had been lucky, incredibly lucky, and usually that worked, because it was true. Sometimes it didn't work, that's all—and then I cried.

A day or two after those initial steps, I started physical therapy.
During my first session, I managed ten steps in a downstairs corridor, lurching along with the help of a walker. One other patient was learning to walk again at the same time as me, a wispy eighty-year-old woman named Alice, who was recovering from a stroke. We cheered each other on when we had enough breath to do so. On our third day in the hall, I told Alice that her slip was showing.

"Your ass is showing, sonny boy," she wheezed, and kept going.

By July 4, I was able to sit up in a wheelchair long enough to go out to the loading dock behind the hospital and watch the fireworks. It was a fiercely hot night, the streets filled with people eating snacks, drinking beer and soda, watching the sky. Tabby stood next to me, holding my hand, as the sky lit up red and green, blue and yellow. She was staying in a condo apartment across the street from the hospital, and each morning she brought me poached eggs and tea. I could use the nourishment, it seemed. In 1997, I weighed 216 pounds. On the day that I was released from Central Maine Medical Center, I weighed 165.

I came home to Bangor on July 9, after a hospital stay of three weeks, and began a daily-rehabilitation program that included stretching, bending, and crutch-walking. I tried to keep my courage and my spirits up. On August 4, I went back to C.M.M.C. for another operation. When I woke up this time, the Schanz pins in my upper thigh were gone. Dr. Brown pronounced my recovery "on course" and sent me home for more rehab and physical therapy. (Those of us undergoing P.T. know that the letters actually stand for Pain and Torture.) And in the midst of all this something else happened.

On July 24, five weeks after Bryan Smith hit me with his Dodge van, I began to write again.

I didn't want to go back to work I was in a lot of pain, unable to bend my right knee. I couldn't imagine sitting behind a desk for long, even in a wheelchair. Because of my cataclysmically smashed hip, sitting was torture after forty minutes or so, impossible after an hour and a quarter. How was I supposed to write when the most pressing thing in my world was how long until the next dose of Percocet?

Yet, at the same time, I felt that I was all out of choices. I had been in terrible situations before, and writing had helped me get over them — had helped me to forget myself, at least for a little while. Perhaps it would help me again. It seemed ridiculous to think it might be so, given the level of my pain and physical incapacitation, but there was that voice in the back of my mind, patient and implacable, telling me that, in the words of the Chambers Brothers, the "time has come today." It was possible for me to disobey that voice but very difficult not to believe it.

In the end, it was Tabby who cast the deciding vote, as she so often has at crucial moments. The former Tabitha Spruce is the person in my life who's most likely to say that I'm working too hard, that it's time to slow down, but she also knows that sometimes it's the work that bails me out. For me, there have been times when the act of writing has been an act of faith, a spit in the eye of despair. Writing is not life, but I think that sometimes it can be a way back to life. When I told Tabby on that July morning that I thought I'd better go back to work, I expected a lecture. Instead, she asked me where I wanted to set up. I told her I didn't know, hadn't even thought about it.

For years after we were married, I had dreamed of having the sort of massive oak-slab desk that would dominate a room — no more child's desk in a trailer closet, no more cramped kneehole in a rented house. In 1981, I had found that desk and placed it in a spacious, skylighted study in a converted stable loft at the rear of our new house. For six years, I had sat behind that desk either drunk or wrecked out of my mind, like a ship's captain in charge of a voyage to nowhere. Then, a year or two after I sobered up, I got rid of it and put in a living-room suite where it had been. In the early nineties, before my kids had moved on to their own lives, they sometimes came up there in the evening to watch a basketball game or a movie and eat a pizza. They usually left a boxful of crusts behind, but I didn't care. I got another desk — handmade, beautiful, and half the size of my original T. rex — and I put it at the farthest end of the office, in a corner under the eave. Now, in my wheelchair, I had no way to get to it.

Tabby thought about it for a moment and then said, "I can rig a table for you in the back hall, outside the pantry. There are plenty of outlets — you can have your Mac, the little printer, and a fan." The fan was a must — it had been a terrifically hot summer, and on the day I went back to work the temperature outside was ninety-five. It wasn't much cooler in the back hall.

Tabby spent a couple of hours putting things together, and that
afternoon she rolled me out through the kitchen and down the newly installed wheelchair ramp into the back hall. She had made me a wonderful little nest there: laptop and printer connected side by side, table lamp, manuscript (with my notes from the month before placed neatly on top), pens, and reference materials. On the corner of the desk was a framed picture of our younger son, which she had taken earlier that summer.

"Is it all right?" she asked.

"It's gorgeous," I said.

She got me positioned at the table, kissed me on the temple, and then left me there to find out if I had anything left to say. It turned out I did, a little. That first session lasted an hour and forty minutes, by far the longest period I'd spent upright since being struck by Smith's van. When it was over, I was dripping with sweat and almost too exhausted to sit up straight in my wheelchair. The pain in my hip was just short of apocalyptic. And the first five hundred words were uniquely terrifying — it was as if I'd never written anything before in my life. I stepped from one word to the next like a very old man finding his way across a stream on a zigzag line of wet stones.

Tabby brought me a Pepsi — cold and sweet and good — and as I drank it I looked around and had to laugh despite the pain. I'd written Carrie and Salem's Lot in the laundry room of a rented trailer. The back hall of our house resembled it enough to make me feel as if I'd come full circle.

There was no miraculous breakthrough that afternoon, unless it was the ordinary miracle that comes with any attempt to create something. All I know is that the words started coming a little faster after a while, then a little faster still. My hip still hurt, my back still hurt, my leg, too, but those hurts began to seem a little farther away. I'd got going; there was that much. After that, things could only get better.

Things have continued to get better. I've had two more operations on my leg since that first sweltering afternoon in the back hall. I've also had a fairly serious bout of infection, and I still take roughly a hundred pills a day, but the external fixator is now gone and I continue to write. On some days, that writing is a pretty grim slog. On others — more and more of them, as my mind reaccustoms itself to its old routine — I feel that buzz of happiness, that sense of having found the right words and put them in a line. It's like lifting off in an airplane: you're on the ground, on the ground, on the ground... and then you're up, riding on a cushion of air and the prince of all you survey. I still don't have much strength — I can do a little less than half of what I used to be able to do in a day — but I have enough. Writing did not save my life, but it is doing what it has always done: it makes my life a brighter and more pleasant place.
I am honored to be with you today at your commencement from one of the finest universities in the world. I never graduated from college. Truth be told, this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation. Today I want to tell you three stories from my life. That's it. No big deal. Just three stories.

The first story is about connecting the dots.

I dropped out of Reed College after the first 6 months, but then stayed around as a drop-in for another 18 months or so before I really quit. So why did I drop out?

It started before I was born. My biological mother was a young, unwed college graduate student, and she decided to put me up for adoption. She felt very strongly that I should be adopted by college graduates, so everything was all set for me to be adopted at birth by a lawyer and his wife. Except that when I popped out they decided at the last minute that they really wanted a girl. So my parents, who were on a waiting list, got a call in the middle of the night asking: “We have an unexpected baby boy; do you want him?” They said: “Of course.” My biological mother later found out that my mother had never graduated from college and that my father had never graduated from high school. She refused to sign the final adoption papers. She only relented a few months later when my parents promised that I would someday go to college.

And 17 years later I did go to college. But I naively chose a college that was almost as expensive as Stanford, and all of my working-class parents’ savings were being spent on my college tuition. After six months, I couldn’t see the value in it. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life and no idea how college was going to help me figure it out. And here I was spending all of the money my parents had saved their entire life. So I decided to drop out and trust that it would all work out OK. It was pretty scary at the time, but looking back it was one of the best decisions I ever made. The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn't interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked interesting.

It wasn't all romantic. I didn't have a dorm room, so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms, I returned Coke bottles for the 5¢ deposits to buy food with, and I would walk the 7 miles across town every Sunday night to get one good meal a week at the Hare Krishna temple. I loved it. And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on. Let me give you one example:
Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed. Because I had dropped out and didn't have to take the normal classes, I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about serif and sans serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can't capture, and I found it fascinating.

None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But 10 years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography. If I had never dropped in on that single course in college, the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them. If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class, and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backward 10 years later.

Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

My second story is about love and loss.

I was lucky — I found what I loved to do early in life. Woz and I started Apple in my parents' garage when I was 20. We worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a $2 billion company with over 4,000 employees. We had just released our finest creation — the Macintosh — a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? Well, as Apple grew we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our Board of Directors sided with him. So at 30 I was out. And very publicly out. What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating.

I really didn't know what to do for a few months. I felt that I had let the previous generation of entrepreneurs down — that I had dropped the baton as it was being passed to me. I met with David Packard and Bob Noyce and tried to apologize for screwing up so badly. I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the valley. But something slowly began to dawn on me — I still loved what I did. The turn of events at Apple had not changed that one bit. I had been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over.

I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

During the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife. Pixar went on to create the world's first computer animated feature film, Toy Story, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world. In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance. And Laurene and I have a wonderful family together.
I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it. Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.

My third story is about death.

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: “If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.” It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?” And whenever the answer has been “No” for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure — these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7:30 in the morning, and it clearly showed a tumor on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable, and that I should expect to live no longer than three to six months. My doctor advised me to go home and get my affairs in order, which is doctor's code for prepare to die. It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It means to say your goodbyes.

I lived with that diagnosis all day. Later that evening I had a biopsy, where they stuck an endoscope down my throat, through my stomach and into my intestines, put a needle into my pancreas and got a few cells from the tumor. I was sedated, but my wife, who was there, told me that when they viewed the cells under a microscope the doctors started crying because it turned out to be a very rare form of pancreatic cancer that is curable with surgery. I had the surgery and I'm fine now.

This was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more decades. Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful but purely intellectual concept:

No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It is Life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true.
Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

When I was young, there was an amazing publication called *The Whole Earth Catalog*, which was one of the bibles of my generation. It was created by a fellow named Stewart Brand not far from here in Menlo Park, and he brought it to life with his poetic touch. This was in the late 1960s, before personal computers and desktop publishing, so it was all made with typewriters, scissors and Polaroid cameras. It was sort of like Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along: It was idealistic, and overflowing with neat tools and great notions.

Stewart and his team put out several issues of *The Whole Earth Catalog*, and then when it had run its course, they put out a final issue. It was the mid-1970s, and I was your age. On the back cover of their final issue was a photograph of an early morning country road, the kind you might find yourself hitchhiking on if you were so adventurous. Beneath it were the words: “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.” It was their farewell message as they signed off. Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish. And I have always wished that for myself. And now, as you graduate to begin anew, I wish that for you.

Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.

Thank you all very much.
My dad used to say, “You should marry someone who’s the opposite of you,” which I suppose meant not pathologically anxious and not a writer. But Val, my wife, is both.

I was born fretting. I bit my nails and chewed off the skin around them, sucked on my hair, jiggled my legs, tapped my fingers, picked at my scalp. I was a straight-up narc; an obsessive rule follower, always the kid hanging behind saying, “You guys, we’re going to get in trouble!” I was prone to out-of-body-style panic attacks that frightened my teachers and classmates. Like Val, I was an oldest child, performative and bossy, certain I could control the world by thinking about it enough and following an obscure set of rules that changed constantly.

My dad’s advice wasn’t bad, necessarily, but premature. I didn’t start dating until I was well into my 20s, when I moved to California and met a series of men I considered my opposite: computer programmers, scientists. Men who did body hacking and rode motorcycles and owned guns and were nonchalant about germs and infection and injury.

One of them, an astrophysicist, told me, apropos of nothing, that the world's helium supply was running low. “I’m sorry?” I squeaked over my glass of wine. “There’s a finite supply of helium? And we’re almost out?” There was something so final, so vaguely apocalyptic about it. That night, as he slept next to me, I lay awake in the darkness, wondering what other slowly advancing catastrophes I didn't know about.

The dynamic of these relationships was always clear. My boyfriends and lovers got to be smart, calm, rational, reasonable, and I got to be not those things.

By the time I met Val, I was deep into my habits: acute hypochondria, perseverating in private, both unwilling to articulate my worst anxieties to anyone and perfectly willing to entertain all of them. We met at a time of mutual vulnerability, both of us unknowingly dating the same woman who seemed to take great pleasure in exploiting our trust and undermining our sanity.

When we came together a few years after that — both free of her, road tripping across the Southwest, kissing sweetly on a friend’s fold-out couch in New Mexico — the philosophy that had governed my entire relationship history evaporated. How could it not? Val was lovely, funny, brilliant — the tenderest, kindest person I’d ever met.

When Val is anxious, she wears it on her face; she needs to talk about it, she cries. As for me, my adrenaline skyrockets and I begin to imagine the many ways death can come to me (liver cancer, aneurysm, stray bullet). Eventually, I shut down mentally and physically, as though the terrible outcomes are predators that can only see me if I move.

We are terrified of mostly opposite things. I am anxious about: insects, germs, disease and mortal injury and death, messy rooms, being late, not honoring my commitments. She is anxious about: rodents, money, her writing, her job, social interactions, conflict, people secretly hating her. There is some overlap between our fears: not being believed, being believed to be crazy, being crazy, the fear that one of us is 10 seconds from leaving the other.
Because of our mutual ex-girlfriend, the process of learning to trust each other was slow and deliberate. “You don’t need to keep me accountable of your whereabouts 24 hours a day,” Val would say to me after I came home late wielding evidence of the train slowdown that had caused my delay, frantic that she’d think I was cheating on her. “If I was angry, I’d tell you,” I’d promise her when she worried that I was squirreling away my rage until it exploded.

The first apartment we rented in Philadelphia abutted a restaurant’s back alley and was blessed with cockroaches and mice. The roaches agitated me; I hated their spindly legs and their constantly probing antennae, the way they darted and the sheer quantity and speed of them. Val became an expert at recognizing my whimper and dashing into the room with her sneaker aloft. But she was pathologically terrified of mice, who were fewer in number but larger and harder to kill and bolder the longer we lived there. She feared they’d run over her feet, and more than once dashed to a chair like a woman in an old cartoon lifting her skirts in terror. I became the de facto exterminator, chasing, catching and disposing of their bodies.

When we began wedding planning, we also performed our anxiety on opposite schedules: When picking a venue and buying our dresses, she fretted while I achieved absolute, meditative calm; when the date neared, she seemed suddenly relaxed. “Whatever happens at the end of the day, we’ll be married!” she reminded me as I sat hunched over a table in my pajamas, three days unshowered, hot-gluing centerpieces and nursing burns on my fingers and yelling about “Kitchen Nightmares” (“This show is entirely about toxic masculinity, and also if I ever suggest we open a restaurant please just divorce me”).

Back when we first moved in together, I worked a terrible retail job; when I got my first check, I stared at it with utter disbelief. I’d been on my feet for two weeks straight, commuting an hour each way. I was exhausted and barely functioning, and the check barely covered my student loans, much less rent or food or anything else. When she got home from work, I was staring at the wall in our bedroom. “I am useless,” I told her. “Look at this paycheck. I can’t make my half of the rent. I can’t do anything. I’m the absolute worst. Why are you dating me? I’m such a child.”

She covered me in a blanket, rubbed the inside of my wrist, brought me seltzer. “I believe in you,” she said. “I believe in your writing. You are more than your paycheck at this moment. I’m in this for a long haul, and if you are too, then we will make this work.”

I’d be in denial if I didn’t acknowledge the joke of our situation, the simultaneous stereotypes of the emotionally volatile artists and the continuously processing lesbians. But we’ve turned these heightened emotional states into engines for our writing and our marriage, a shorthand for the kind of give-and-take that makes relationships work.

We do a lot of sort-of-joking-but-not-really talking about the end times. Blame it on climate change (her anxiety), too many post-apocalyptic movies and video games (mine), and a healthy dose of terror about nuclear annihilation and antibiotic-resistant pathogens (both of ours).

Val laments: “I’m useless, I can’t hunt animals or anything. I have no practical skills of any kind. If the world goes to hell, I’d be dead weight.”

“You wouldn’t be able to be a vegetarian anymore,” I say.

“I know! I’d eat meat. But I can’t start a fire or build a shelter or ——”

“I’m here. I’ll teach you what I know.”
There probably won't be Zoloft after civilization crumbles. And if the post-apocalyptic cockroaches are the size of mice — or larger! — then what will we do? Learn to throw knives with uncanny accuracy? Run? Until the waters rise, the government collapses and society falls apart, we do what we need to: deep breathing, weekly therapy and the hard, slow work of love.

Carmen Maria Machado's debut short story collection, “Her Body and Other Parties,” was a finalist for the National Book Award for Fiction.