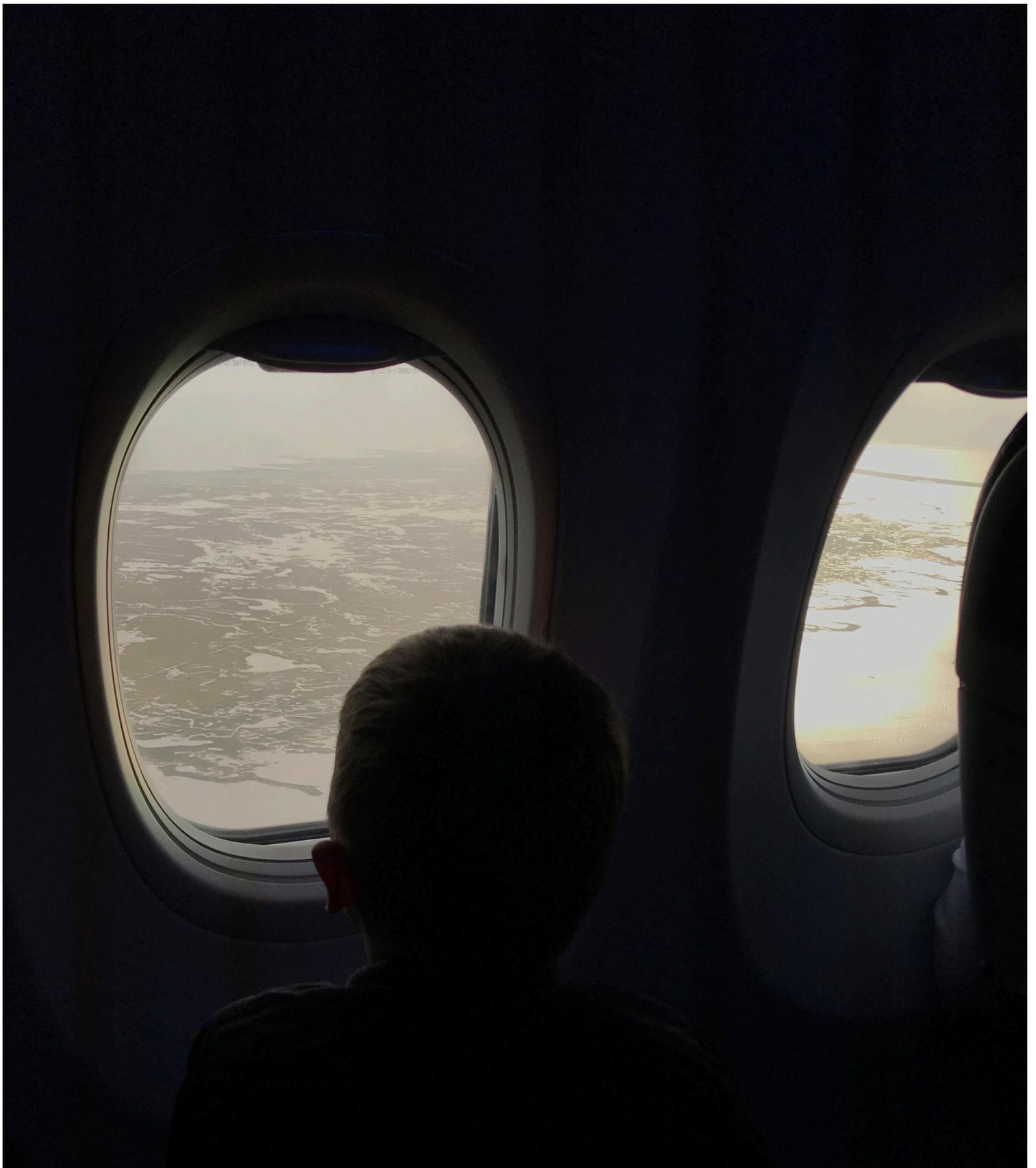


THINK
CLEARLY

Annual Report 2020

The year 2020	4
Existential wardrobe crisis	9
Red shoes	16
Memories of magic	23
I want to see	25
Dead end	28
Finding a third way	37
Moving stuff	40
Grieving	
New York City	44
What's next	49



Noah looks out of the window during the approach into Copenhagen Airport on the morning of February 1st.

"We have rented a house, booked the flight, hired movers and I've accepted a job offer at Implement Consulting Group where I will continue working with leadership development. But how it will all play out, I don't yet know. That will be the content for my 2020 report." That's how I ended the opening chapter of "Why we are leaving NYC" in my 2019 Annual Report. And here we are.

The year 2020

There's nothing I could write to try to characterize 2020 in general, that isn't unspecific, void of meaning, obvious and trite. Any reference to global events just supposes that my experience of those will resemble yours. Maybe they do. Maybe they don't. How will we ever know? Every year I'm reflecting on the year past, but also on the process and purpose of writing and sharing my experiences. Why write this at all? What could a description of my experiences in 2020 yield?

Rather than try to summarize and generalize, I will again do what I usually do in my annual report, which is to tell stories that start with something very specific and tangible. Furthermore I've made it a principle to write mostly about things that have a lot of energy for me. Situations that fueled me through the year. As I've been writing, I've been able to tap back into that energy and relive the situation. My hope is that when you read these stories, even if the topic isn't exactly your own passion, you will feel my energy and be lifted by it.

This year's report is a lot longer than usual. I've had a lot to say and the words just kept flowing. As usual, however, just read whatever draws you in and don't worry about the chronology. If you spend 10 minutes or 10 seconds, don't worry about whatever you didn't read.

With love
Mathias
— Chairman of my life



**Read whatever makes
you curious, draws you
in and lifts your energy.
Leave the rest.**



Being closer to nature was one of the things I was missing the most during our time in New York. And now nature is right next to us. I'm grateful that can be outdoors in sand and mud and wind and rain and sun. That we get to make fires and come home with the smell of smoke in our clothes and hair.



**An invitation
to climb**



Uma heading into the unknown

Existential wardrobe crisis

I'm looking at my clothes and wondering what to wear. It's a normal day. Not a specific day. It's more like a mashup of many normal days that have blurred together in my human memory. It's around the end of August and I've accepted that I'm in a 'life crisis'. Not just a crisis of my work or career. Having been laid off due to Covid seems like a minor element. Everything in my life has been turned upside down to a degree where I'm not sure what foot to stand on. And yet the days go on. There are kids who need breakfast in the morning. I've tried therapy and I liked it. I'm not too worried about being in a life-crisis. I've told people about it and it doesn't feel strange. It was much more uncomfortable before I had a name for it. When I just felt sad and confused a lot. Now I have a handle on it. I can point to it. I'm confident that I'll come out on the other side.

What's bothering me on this someday in August isn't the life crisis. What's bothering me on this day is my wardrobe crisis: I don't know what to wear. That's terrifying. Who am I?

Back in 2007 I co-wrote an article for the student magazine titled 'Fashion Crisis Emergencies'. The article was satirical in tone, while still insisting that this phenomenon is a real pain, and offering advice on what to do in those situations. But this trip down memory lane, albeit fun and embarrassing, couldn't help me. Because it's not just a fashion emergency today. I have a sense that there's a bigger problem. How did it come this far?

In 2010 I gave an inspiration talk about myself and my approach to life (thinking about that talk also feels a bit embarrassing, but I take that as a sign that I've actually evolved, so I'm trying not to be too harsh on myself) and in that talk I summed up the criteria for my wardrobe: everything just has to be "black and expensive". And in the past decade my wardrobe has only evolved minimally within that framework.

The way I see it, people go through phases of different styles. By that I mean other people. I'm somehow exempt from this logic, because I've arrived at the final destination. "Black and expensive" is going to be my wardrobe for the rest of my friggin' life. I've invested so much

money in special pieces, it's as if I've locked myself in and thrown away the key. That's why the situation is a problem now. Because for some reason it isn't working for me anymore. Maybe I've changed. Maybe it's because my circumstances have changed. I'm in a different country. In a different city. I'm not in New York anymore. I don't know. But it doesn't feel great. I feel so deeply attached to a particular style, an idea, a philosophy—not to mention the actual garments that fill my closet. I feel like I need to be able to rely on my wardrobe right now, when I'm in crisis. It's been such a constant in my life for so long, and now that everything else seems to be changing, why can't this just remain? I feel betrayed. I guess I'll have to come to terms with the fact that my final wardrobe turned out to be just a phase. And a phase that has come to an end. It's time to start the dual process of acquiring new things and getting rid of the old. And so I did. That was in September.

Selling old pieces felt really scary. But once someone bought it and I shipped it off to Canada or Spain or wherever the buyer was, it felt cathartic. It felt like the right thing to do. Buying new was both easier and harder. There were many ideas I wanted to try out, but I also felt guilty for spending the money and worried about wasting money on the wrong things because I didn't have a clear vision of where I was headed next. I just knew that "black and expensive" was over. I found myself drawn to more colorful things. And yet I didn't want to completely abandon everything of my past. It wasn't going to be a total make-over.

What finally solved it for me, was letting go of the need for such a clear and finite concept like I'd had previously where the answer was known and all uncertainty removed. Instead I adopted a more flexible and playful attitude. I just wanted to try things. Feel impulses. Sometimes act. Sometimes just feel them. I started looking for cheap and lightweight ways to test things. I wanted color so I bought 10 pairs of socks in different bright colors. I've also started noticing more general characteristics that I enjoy in clothing. For example I like things that feel a bit rigid, structured and heavy. But it doesn't all make sense. It doesn't need to make sense. It doesn't all need to be summed up. It doesn't all need to fit together. And I'm not obligated to maintain or live up to any kind of standard.

I still take clothing very seriously. I still believe that what we wear influences us much more than most people are willing to admit. It influences our sense of self and the ways in which other people relate

to us. That's also why my life crisis and a style crisis were connected. But what's most important is that because clothing is tangible and social, it means that it's something we can literally work with to get out of a fixed mindset, and become more fluid while we are going through a crisis. Instead of trying to solve my life crisis first through therapy, I believe it's worth flipping it around: why not begin with the wardrobe instead of therapy? To be clear, I'm not talking about retail therapy—the fact that spending money gives you a rush of pleasurable hormones. No, this isn't a quick fix. And it doesn't need to be expensive. Certainly it can be cheaper than weekly conversations with a therapist. What I'm talking about is that we can begin wearing different things, and begin seeing ourselves differently, and experience how others see us differently. We can invite that playful energy into our life crisis directly. And when we do, we loosen up old patterns. We may not know where we are headed and where we will end up. But becoming more flexible is helpful. That was at least my experience. After taking my wardrobe seriously again for a few months, letting go of the old and fixed, and becoming more playful and flexible, I really felt different. In late November, around the time where my clothes made sense to me again, I noticed that my life crisis had passed too.



We keep doing variations on this photo because it's such an accurate metaphor for life.

Copenhagen in the winter





Nighttime in Ørestad, our neighborhood.



**Exploring her
own boundaries**

Red shoes

It's 6am and my alarm goes off. Normally I snooze, or I decide to postpone the morning shower until later in the day, just to win some extra time in the warm bed. Especially now that it's late fall, cold and dark outside. But this isn't a normal morning. I've been up well past midnight the day before, and yet I just get out of bed without effort, put on a tshirt and head downstairs, all the way down into the basement.

I'm working on a project that requires a lot of effort and energy, and yet it seems that it gives back even more energy than I put in. I'm making a pair of red shoes. Not that I've learned how to make a pair of shoes, even though that would be pretty cool too. No, I'm simply taking an old pair of caramel brown wingtip brogue oxfords that I haven't worn in 10 years, and I'm painting them red. And this morning I'm down in the basement at 6am because I will give them one more thin layer of red paint. You see, in order to get a good result, the paint must be applied in thin layers and allowed at least four hours to dry until the next layer.

I've learned that lesson the hard way. The first time around I had painted the shoes quickly with a thick brush, smearing a thick layer of paint. I was rushing it. I couldn't even be bothered to clean the shoes properly first. But they looked stunning when I was done and putting them on for the first time was such an unforgettable rush. My body said to me: I want to wear these shoes every day. This was a rare moment of utmost clarity that I experienced this year. I didn't know why this was so important to me. Why it seemed to matter more than anything else. I've experienced shoes that I liked many times before, but I've never had a full body impulse telling me that it was imperative that I wear red shoes every day.

Sadly, and as you would expect, the thick layer of paint that I had applied hastily to a pair of half-dirty old shoes did not last so well. Already the second day (when I wore the shoes to a meeting with a potential new client) the paint started cracking and falling off, revealing the caramel brown leather underneath. I'm all for deconstruction and items that reveal a bit about how they've been made, but this just didn't look great, and it would only get worse.

I knew I needed red shoes in my life, so I decided that I wanted to make it right and color them properly. I wanted to color them with a different technique where instead of painting on top of the leather surface you let the pigment soak into the leather, and then if needed, add a bit of paint on top.

However, while the paint had started cracking, much of the paint, perhaps as much as 95% of the surface, had actually managed to stick pretty well to the shoe. This would have to come off before I could dye the shoes correctly so I spent more than four hours with a sharp knife and sanding paper, working to scratch and peel the paint completely off.

So I had learned my lesson: don't rush it with the paint. Clean properly first and apply in thin layers that are allowed to dry. That's what I was doing so patiently in my basement that morning at 6am before my kids would wake up and the day would officially begin. Still not sure why these red shoes were so important, just feeling it so deeply that I could get out of bed without effort.

And maybe you're thinking that this is such a good lesson in life too. Right? Don't rush things. Prepare properly. Figure out the correct way to do something before you just jump in. Otherwise you'll spend four hours with a sharp knife and sandpaper undoing your own mistakes, when you could have just done it right from the beginning. Conventional, cool and rational wisdom would always read the story that way.

I can sympathize with that interpretation. I agree that in hindsight the first haphazard paint attempt and the grueling four hours of scratching off the paint look like a giant waste of effort. The problem is that you don't have hindsight before you do something. The crucial thing in this story is that before I put on those shoes the first time, I didn't know if I really wanted red shoes or if I just thought I wanted them. It was merely a hunch. A curious interest. I could have spent time, money and effort making the red shoes the right way, only to discover that I didn't care that much after all. In that case doing it "right" would actually have been equally wasteful. By making that first version of the red shoes so quickly, I was able to very clearly validate that my longing for a pair of red shoes was a deep desire. When facing uncertainty in general (not just when it comes to validating a desire for shoes of a particular

color), we can't rely on the clarity of hindsight—what we often think of as 'expertise' which is really just a summary of past hindsights from supposedly similar situations. When facing real uncertainty there will always be the risk of wasted effort, either from things done too poorly which must then be fixed, or from things done too well, only to be discarded because it was built on an assumption that turned out to be false.

But it gets even more interesting when we stop merely counting the wasted effort in hours. Because for me that experience of wearing the shoes those first few days, unlocked such an enormous amount of energy. I was so motivated that I became laser focused. It didn't matter how many hours it took, because those hours, sitting hunched over on a concrete floor, were pure joy, for reasons I can't explain. If I hadn't done that first paint job quickly and been able to try the shoes on, I may never have had the energy to do it at all.

That's what matters most to me. The flow of energy. I still don't fully know why these shoes are so important. And it really doesn't matter either. But energy matters. And these shoes matter because they now represent this approach to life and to work, which doesn't try to be rational and avoid waste. This approach, my approach, which is about throwing myself into it with gusto, making mistakes, learning things and unlocking the energy that propels me forward.

We bike
everywhere



Beach life





Me and Juno on the beach.



Juno's style

Memories of magic

My brother told me about a memory from our childhood where I had built a box out of LEGO with some sort of functional locking mechanism. My brother is seven years younger than me, and this contraption had impressed him so much—it was like magic, because he couldn't figure out how it worked—and thus it has been imprinted into his memory. I like this story a lot, and I am keen to create similar moments with my own children where they can encounter things that are far enough beyond their expectations and comprehension that they could also be experienced as magical.

This year I rebuilt a version of the box that my brother remembered, but instead of a simple sliding lock (as I had back then), I built it with a functional combination lock. To unlock you must turn a certain number of degrees clockwise, then another amount counter clockwise, before finally turning a little bit clockwise again. It's delightfully intricate and it was fun to build. Although I think it's perhaps so mechanically obscure that my kids—who are growing up in a world where iPads are normal—don't really see what the fuzz is about. Oh well.



I want to see

I'm walking down the street. I'm heading somewhere. There are people around me, walking, biking. I watch out for cars. And yet it's like I barely notice my surroundings. I'm so caught up in my own thoughts, which on this day are endless loops of worries about the future. Things I really ought to be doing. Things I really should have done a long time ago. Things I can't do anything about right now. They just keep going around and around. I don't like living this way. I want to use my senses. I want to see my surroundings and pay attention instead of being so consumed with my inner experience.

And then I had an impulse. I wanted to restart a practice that was a big part of my life from 2007 to 2010, where I would take photos of people in the street who had a cool outfit. Thus I began. I stopped people in the street and asked them if I could take their picture.

It feels completely different this time, compared with ten years ago. Back then I was often frustrated if I couldn't find someone that seemed good enough and worthy of showing. I felt that I would be judged if I lowered the bar for what good style was. But I also wanted to show new photos often. I wanted to keep my audience engaged. And so I was caught in between those two. Furthermore, I would sometimes see people but then not have the courage in the moment to stop them and ask. I'd get mad at myself.

Now it's flipped around completely. I'm only taking the photos for myself, even if I still post them online. But I don't care what anyone else thinks of them. And I don't get mad at myself when I don't have the courage to ask someone. On the contrary, I celebrate the sense of disappointment I feel whenever I see someone I really want to ask, but just can't get myself to do it. I celebrate it because the impulse of wanting is such a great feeling, even without the reward of acting on it. I've spent several years of my life working as a commercial photographer, and I've kept a stockpile of photo equipment, but for the past ten years I've not had a genuine desire to take a photo of anything other than little everyday memories of my kids. All the equipment was just there to remind me of my missing desire to shoot. It almost seemed to make it worse. By holding on to it, I remained in that professional

mindset where it was less about what I wanted to shoot and more about what the client wanted me to shoot. That's why it means so much to me that I now feel that impulse again. That desire to actually capture something. And it had nothing to do with equipment. I'm shooting street fashion with my old iPhone 7 now, and it's exactly what I want to shoot with. I don't want to haul around a DSLR anymore. And with this I was finally ready to let go of it. I started selling my cameras and within a few weeks everything except one old camera was gone. This in itself was a huge relief.

But most of all, it's not even about the photos anymore. It's about seeing. It's about paying attention to the people around me instead of being in my own thoughts. So long as I look around and see.



Classic danish architecture. Axelborg.

Dead end

The first time I came across a photo of a 'dead end' coat made by the Milan-based menswear designer Carol Christian Poell, I thought it was interesting. Instead of a straight seam on the back of the coat, there were two seams that each curved in opposite directions and somehow missed each other. It was subtle. Not like a big flashy designer logo or like the avant garde silhouette with layers and scarves and asymmetrical cuts. The kind of stuff that I would normally wear. The kind of look that people surely notice.

Disregarding that seam detail the coat looked pretty normal. Most people would never even notice. I liked that thought. The chance of wearing something that had such a subtle but interesting and unique detail hidden in plain sight.

Then I started wondering how the coat was actually made. How was it possible to make the two seams not meet? That's when my mind exploded. I realized that it wasn't just the most visible seams on the back that were 'dead ends'. It was virtually all the seams, except where the sleeves meet the shoulder. This meant that if someone were to cut open all the stitches, then most of the fabric would still be in one piece with some elaborate incisions all around. I couldn't believe it. I kept zooming in to see if I was imagining something. Was it for real? Had someone really had this wacky idea of a 'dead end' seam and then gone to such great lengths to invent an entirely new way of making a garment where the fabric is left in one piece? This was back in 2011. I saved the photo on my Pinterest.

As the years went by I couldn't let go of this idea. I found myself often returning to it, and fortunately for me, the designer also seemed to enjoy the concept, because there were many more items made from the same principle. A pair of jeans. Blazers. Button down shirts. All relatively ordinary looking, but with those subtly disturbing seams and all that intricate work folded and hidden so innocently. I'd show the photos to others and tell them about it. I don't think most people cared that much. I don't think most people even understood why it's such a big deal. But I can't get over it, and I find myself writing about it here.



DEAD-END METAPHOR

As it turned out, this year I hit a dead end in my life.

It wasn't obvious to me. I felt under pressure and was exhausted, but I didn't know what to make of it until I was chatting with an old friend. Somehow the conversation fell on religion and christianity. I told her that I believe spirituality is important and I told her that I loved some of the biblical stories. I mentioned the parable of the prodigal son as a particular favorite. She responded "you are the prodigal son". This bothered me. I like that story of a father and two sons. One son gets his inheritance in advance and goes off and spends it all recklessly while the other son stays and helps the father. When the first son returns, the father is happy to see him, which in turn makes the other son resentful. I have always seen myself through the eyes of the son that stays and who is resentful. After becoming a parent I've also related to the story through the eyes of the father who is happy that his son comes home. I want to read this story for my own kids—not because I want them to go off and do a bunch of stupid things—of course not. But one thing that is worse than your child doing stupid things, is a kid who is afraid to come home because of what they've done. I want my kids to know that no matter how stupid they've acted, I will always be happy to have them come home.

But what did my friend mean when she said I was the reckless one? I felt provoked by this. I'm trying to be responsible. A reliable parent. A breadwinner. A loyal husband. What's so damn reckless about that? I asked her what she meant.

Fortunately she took the time to explain herself, because what she wrote hit me like no other message I've received this year. She wrote that I'm the reckless son because I've abandoned God. While I believe in spirituality as an experience and enjoy the stories, I'm fundamentally trying to live from my own strength. I've made up my own hodgepodge of beliefs. In my world I'm the greatest, and I'm trying to carry it all. But this is exhausting. That's why it's reckless. The alternative, she said,

would be to come back to God, the forgiving father in the story, and if I did, I would not have to carry it all alone. I would have something in my life that is so much bigger and stronger than myself. I was the son who had asked for the inheritance in advance and gone off on my own.

It didn't all make sense to me. But it still struck a nerve. It was true what she had said about seeing the universe with myself in the center, judging things from my own experience, and trying to live entirely from my own strength. It was certainly true that this is exhausting.

I've been religious in my childhood and youth. Going to church. Praying. Believing in God. I didn't know if I could really believe in God again, or what that might look like or how that might work out. But there was something alluring in what my friend had written about the presence of something bigger than me, and I decided to explore.

I reached out to my aunt who is one of the most religious people I know. I had always found her seemingly unwavering belief in God and the extreme confidence in her religious practice to be a bit over the top and almost comical. I told her this—surely she must have felt it anyway, so better to be honest—but I also told her that I could finally begin to respect it. In a moment of personal crisis I could see that she had God in her life, and I could feel myself drawn in that direction: I wanted to resume my own religious practice. But I didn't quite know how. She helped me in many ways, but the best thing she did was she offered to introduce me to someone I could have conversations with about this—a man who didn't live too far from me.

It felt like an outstretched arm. A welcoming invitation. I accepted and reached out to Leif, the man my aunt had referred me to, and we agreed to meet. I biked over to his house, wondering what kind of person I would meet. Would he condemn me for my sins? Would he talk about the importance of daily prayer? Would he try to convince me of anything? I really had no idea. Leif turned out to be a very friendly man who listened to my story. He wasn't pushing anything onto me. On the contrary he spoke about his own doubts. And he cautioned me to remain critical of everything I read and heard. Trying to have 'blind faith' would only come back to haunt me later, he said. Much better to critically examine, discuss and argue until it makes sense, even if that's a very long time. He told me about the many variations in religious culture and sub-culture and offered guidance in finding a sub-culture

that might fit me. I had always seen it as an all-or-nothing proposition—either you go to church or you don't. I learned that we are all trying to find our path in faith, and I would need to find mine.

I decided to try my local church, located a convenient 5 minute walk down the street from where we live now. It's not a majestic old building. It's a small church, temporarily located in the ground floor of an apartment building—a space that wasn't built to be a church. But it turned out to be a wonderful place to come. The local pastor Rikke, an actor turned priest, does a marvelous job. I really enjoy coming to the church every other week or so, and having a moment for myself, in a space where I'm not expected to perform anything. I'm just there to receive.

So where am I now, in relation to my faith? This feels like the beginning of something. But I also think that a few pieces have started falling into place. These are some of the questions I've been wondering about.

Is there a God? I don't know. If I did, there wouldn't really be a need to believe.

I know I'm doubtful that there isn't a God. And in that doubt there's enough of an opening that I can believe.

What is God? I think God is like an idea. And I don't mean that as 'just a figment of your imagination' or as if he isn't real. I think some ideas are much more real than all those illusive things we usually refer to as 'the real world'. God is a very big idea that has evolved in expression over time, been co-opted for bad things, but that still has a kernel of truth that seems to hold steady.

What is it that I believe in then? I believe that God is pretty much the definition of perfect love. It's an elaborate description, for sure, as the stories unfold over a thousand pages in the bible alone. And while the Bible is finite, our interpretation is ongoing, because human life is complicated and full of internal contradictions. It's not simple. It's interesting. Part of what I believe is also that this grand idea of God, which is so much bigger than me, is a very useful thing to remember and to place myself in relationship to, because it gives me a much better perspective on life.

What is 'sin' and what does it mean when someone is a 'sinner'?

The word sin has always made me uncomfortable. Imagine being judged by others and called 'a sinner'—how awful is that. But Leif offered me a completely different view of it. The way I see it now, is that there's something so big and so good and so absolutely perfect, that we call God (or 'love' if you don't like calling it God). I don't have to believe in him or anything else. It's a choice I get to make. If I dare to believe in something so grand and perfect then I must also look at myself: am I able to live up to this perfect standard? Am I able to act with such perfect love at all times? No, I'm certainly not. I have enough self-awareness to see that I am not always able to live up to the ideal of love that I want to believe in. To be a sinner is merely who combines a belief in something absolutely good with self-awareness that I can't live by it all the time.

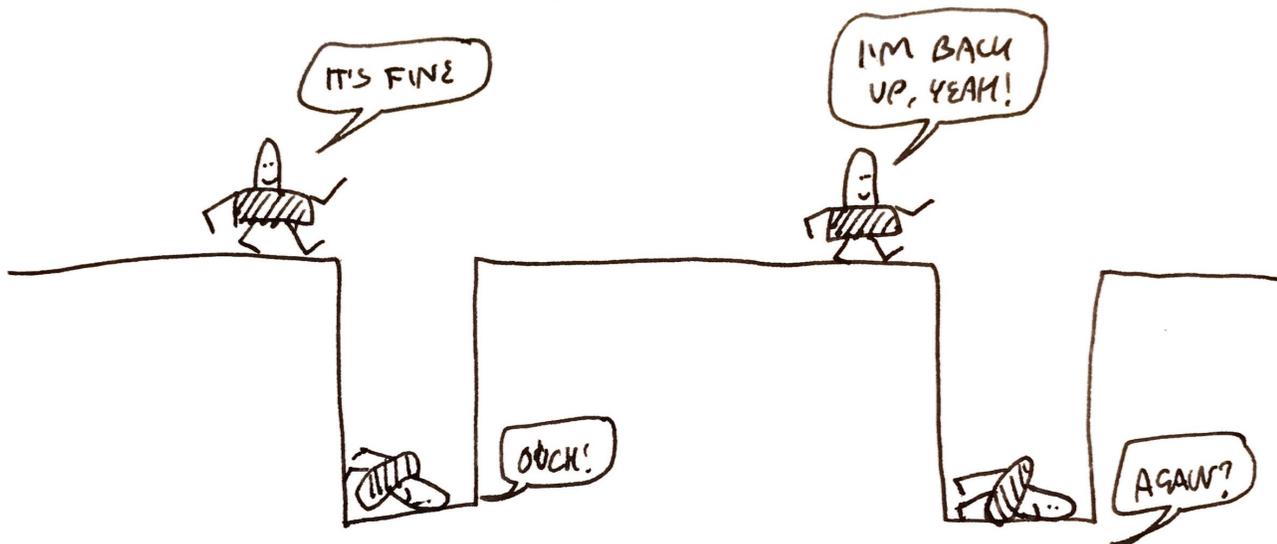
What's the alternative to this perspective? I could also believe that there are only degrees of imperfection. I could believe that all love is flawed in some way, and that there's nothing more. Nothing absolute. Then I'd not be a sinner. I'm just flawed like everyone, because there's nothing more, and nothing to do about it. The other extreme option is to believe that there is an absolute "good" and believe that I'm absolutely good and just myself.

Neither of these options appeal to me. I much prefer to be a sinner then. Why? Because it's not someone else judging me. It's just me realizing that I am not as perfect as what I am willing to believe in. And here comes the best part: if I can realize that, then I can ask for forgiveness, which happens to be one of the most important elements of perfect love, at least the way I read the Bible. When I can recognize my own sin (the gap between what I believe and how I am able to act), it's actually a shortcut back to love, by way of forgiveness. God, as described in the Bible, promises to always forgive. All I need to do is ask. But I have to ask. Which means I have to recognize it and admit it. I won't be forgiven if I can not realize what I've done wrong. I'm not sure I can explain it. But the result for me is that I learn to forgive myself for my mistakes, without ever lowering my standards for the kind of love I want to practice in the world. And by continually practicing forgiveness, I am lighter and much more able to practice forgiveness with others.

Does God exist because we believe? Or do we believe because he exists? Honestly, I don't really care. Both options work for me. I find that these questions are much less important than religious practice. Instead of thinking about metaphysical questions, hoping to find clear solutions and simple answers to the most complicated problems of

humanity, I'm finding that it's better to focus on the practice and the rituals. Going to church is a practice. Prayer is a practice. Asking for forgiveness is a practice. It's an action that is repeated and becomes like a habit. A good habit.

I don't have all the answers. I'm seeking. And it's a humbling practice. Not just for me but also for the priest and for Leif. It goes on and on. Just like the fabric in the 'dead end' coat. When shifting focus from the seams to the fabric, what appears like a dead end when looking only at the seam, is a continuation in the fabric. Without the stiches, the fabric of the coat is still in one piece. Without the certainty of knowing, or having all the answers, there's the possibility of believing. The possibility of forgiveness. The possibility of love. It's all in one piece.





Kirken i Ørestad, my local church



Our street.



Uma dreaming about new toys.

Finding a third way

What have I learned this year? What are the most powerful insights that have surfaced?

I've learned something about my own boundaries. I used to believe that my own boundaries were just like limitations in my own imagination. Naturally there was no point in respecting any boundary when I could be curious about what could be on the other side. I kept pushing myself beyond. And surely some boundaries are in fact just imaginary and can be bent and broken. But there are other boundaries which can't just be wished away. And I've not really paid much attention to these, but I'm learning. I'm learning to notice the difference between them. I was proud to be in a group meeting with 12 people I had only recently met, and noticing that halfway through I was done. I couldn't focus anymore. I noticed it, I made a decision and I excused myself from the rest of the meeting.

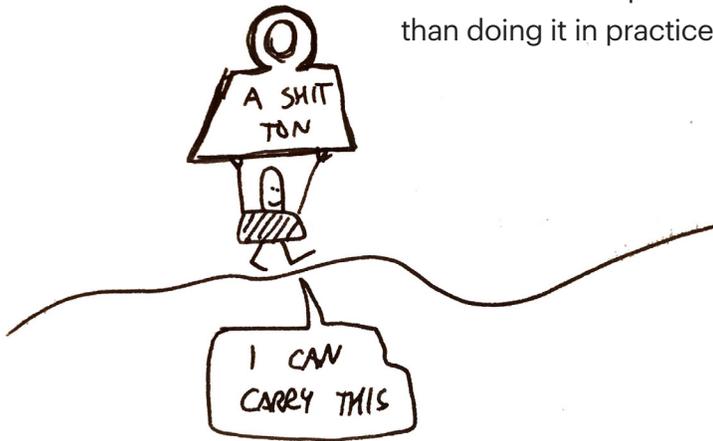
I've learned that the best way to live from a place of generosity actually requires that I am willing to admit to my pettiness. Instead of wishing it away, I try to accept that I also have a petty side of me, and while I can stretch it and bend it, it still has boundaries. If I try to push my generosity beyond that boundary it's no longer real generosity. I become resentful and bitter.

I've learned that I am able to act with much more courage when I'm actually willing to admit to myself what I'm afraid of. When I respect myself for being afraid I can prepare for the situation instead of just hoping that it will somehow work out on its own. When I'm well prepared I can act with courage even while I'm afraid.

Finally, as I've been going through life and I've felt the burdens of responsibility, I've sometimes wanted to explain my sorrows to others in order to elicit sympathy. See how hard it is for me. At other times I've been trying to diminish the burden and pretend that it's nothing special. Everyone carries a burden, right? But doing this for too long has caused whiplash because I've started becoming unkind to myself on days where the burden does in fact feel quite heavy. I'm learning to look for a place to stand in the middle. A third way, where I don't need to

pretend that it's nothing, but also don't need to indulge in it or compare it to others or try to elicit sympathy. Just recognize that it feels heavy. That it's justifiable and real. And ask myself: now what? Will I carry this? Just one more minute?

What all of these learnings have in common is that they are all about recognizing both sides of something, but not reducing the world to a choice between the two opposites. It's not either-or. Not courage or fear. Not respecting boundaries or transgressing. Not generosity or pettiness. It's holding both and then finding that way in between. Acting with courage while being afraid and accepting the fear. Holding the burden of responsibility and feeling the weight. Writing this is easier than doing it in practice.





Mathias time means time where I get to decide how I spend it. Work is something I do during Mathias time.

Moving stuff

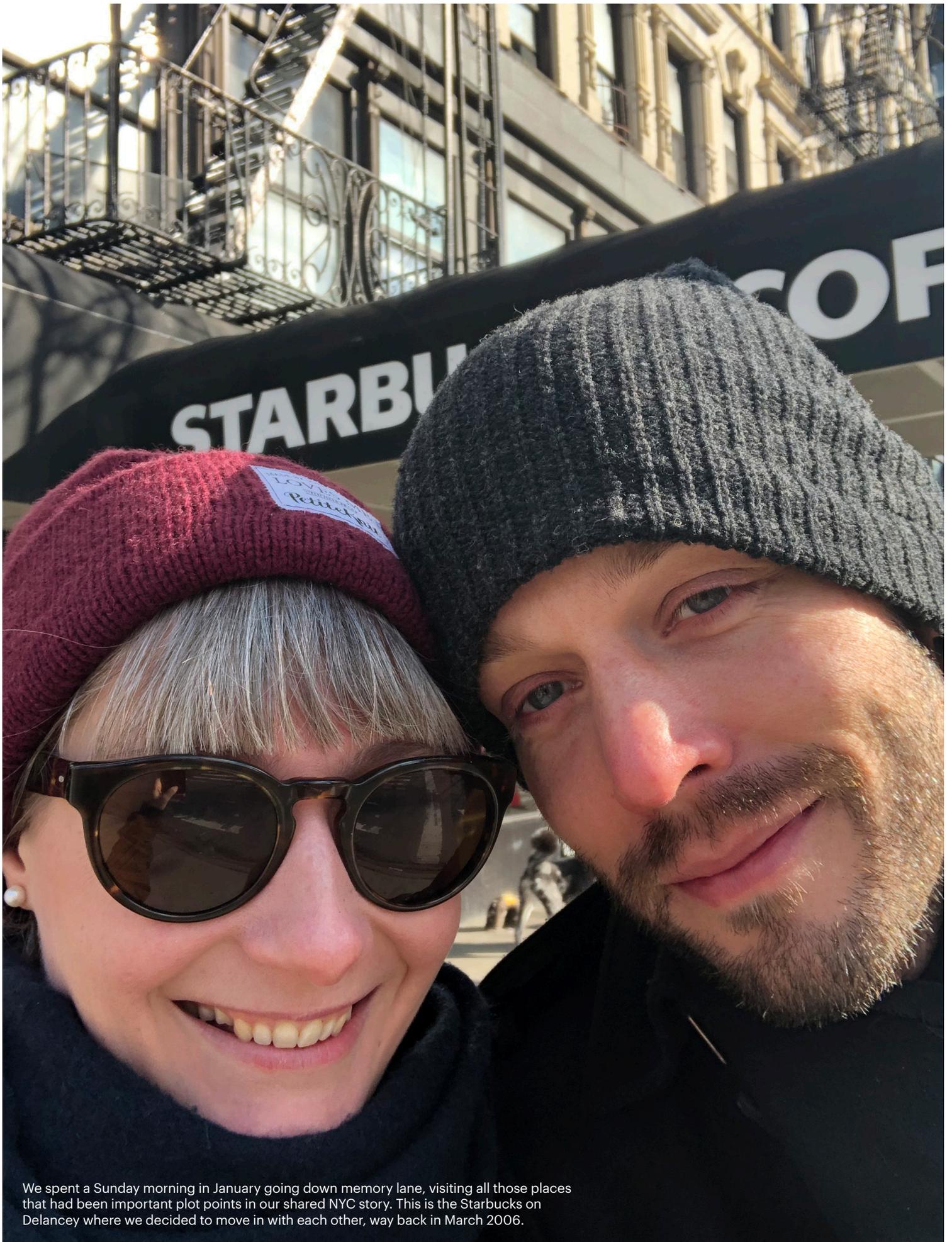
Moving your family from one continent to another involves a lot of feelings. Excitement about what's to come. Sadness about leaving relationships behind. Confusion and uncertainty. Hope and trust. Outright grief. Often all mixed up. Moving from one continent to another also involves a lot of things. Actual physical things. Clothes, furniture, toys, towels, lamps, bicycles, things you've never really used, and things you use all the time. And it all needs to be packed and transported or alternatively sold, given away or thrown in the trash. You become keenly aware of how much stuff you have. I honestly thought we were living a relatively minimalist life in a small two-bedroom Brooklyn apartment. Months of selling, discarding and packing stuff shattered this belief.

When moving stuff across oceans there are a few different ways you can do it. Either you travel with it on an airplane or it goes into a container, gets loaded onto a ship and sailed across the ocean. If you're sailing stuff you can either have a whole container for yourself or you can pack your stuff on pallets which can then get packed along with other pallets into shared containers. Depending on how high you can stack the stuff on your pallets, they would cost us \$800-1000 door to door. Our own container would start at around \$5000. The moving company explained that unless we could fit our stuff on three pallets we would most likely be better off with our own container. Most of what you are paying for, however, is not the sailing of the container. Actually sailing the container is only about 20% of the total cost. What you pay for is the crew that comes to your home on moving day and in a whirlwind of tape and cardboard boxes will pack up everything, carry it into a van and take it to a local warehouse. In the warehouse they'll measure it by volume and then pack it into the container. Then fill out all the paperwork and get it ready for shipment.

I think this is all deeply fascinating. All the steps involved in taking what was once our home in Brooklyn, packing it into boxes and moving it into our future life. When we left Denmark back in 2011 and moved to New York we only brought with us as much stuff as we could fit in seven suitcases as checked luggage. Each suitcase was close to the maximum allowed weight of 23kg so I would guess we brought close to 140kg of stuff. Nine years later we shipped 16m³ of stuff. I don't know the weight of it, because that seemingly only matters for things that travel by air, but being confronted with all our belongings has forced me to reckon with it in a new way.



Lower East Side, New York



We spent a Sunday morning in January going down memory lane, visiting all those places that had been important plot points in our shared NYC story. This is the Starbucks on Delancey where we decided to move in with each other, way back in March 2006.



Our final evening in NYC with skyline views from the hotel window. Looking at this photo still makes my heart burn.

Grieving New York City

It's clear to me that our decision to leave NYC after nine years has been the right one. However, I'm still grieving. The life we built there is my biggest accomplishment by far. And while we can of course come back another time—and maybe we will—the life we had there is over for now. I'm also learning that our life away has taught me a lot of important lessons, the cost of which is a certain loneliness. It feels strange to have earned something valuable and then feel rather alone in having it. I'm trying to accept that this is the burden that we each carry alone: that only we can know exactly what it's like to be us, with everything we have seen and heard and learned. I can share it and explain it and write about it. But in the end I must learn to stand with it alone and be ok in that loneliness.

Here's a poem I wrote about the city:

Dear NYC

I have a confession to make

During this pandemic, when I heard about people leaving the city and shops being boarded up, and my own life was in disarray, I had a thought: might this be the end of NYC?

I'm so sorry, dear New York!

I'm sorry I doubted you

Even for a fraction of a second

How could I even think that a global pandemic might kill you?

How could I?

Because I know what NYC means

I know that the most expensive thing I have ever acquired in my whole life was the right to utter these four words "I live in NYC"

Earning the right to say that out loud and to write it in important places has cost me more money, more sweat, more tears and more pain than anything else

And it was worth it

Even though I've given up that right for now

Even though I only get to say those words in past tense

I lived in NYC

Still worth it

Why?

Because you're the most amazing collection of the most amazing
people with the most amazing dreams and the heart, smarts and guts
to go after them

"Half of y'all won't make it" says Jay Z

Hell, I think he's way too optimistic

But that's not the point

The point is being in it

Part of it

Tasting it

Smelling it

Sweating in it

Letting it run you over like a Mack Truck

Letting it lift you up like a wave

Crush you against the rocks

Send you flying towards the moon

Make you give it your all and more

I will need some time to recover

That's ok

I thank you for it

You tested me and showed me what I was made of

I'm not done with you, dear New York

I'm already planning to come back some day

I'm sorry I doubted you

I should have known better

I'm still sorry

One day I'll come back

One day I will again take a lazy cab from JFK and get high on the sheer
view of Manhattan as we drive across the Williamsburg Bridge



**Before I left SYPartners
I taught a handful of
coworkers to make
sourdough rye bread
using the toaster oven in
the office.**

ACE HOTEL NEW YORK

EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT

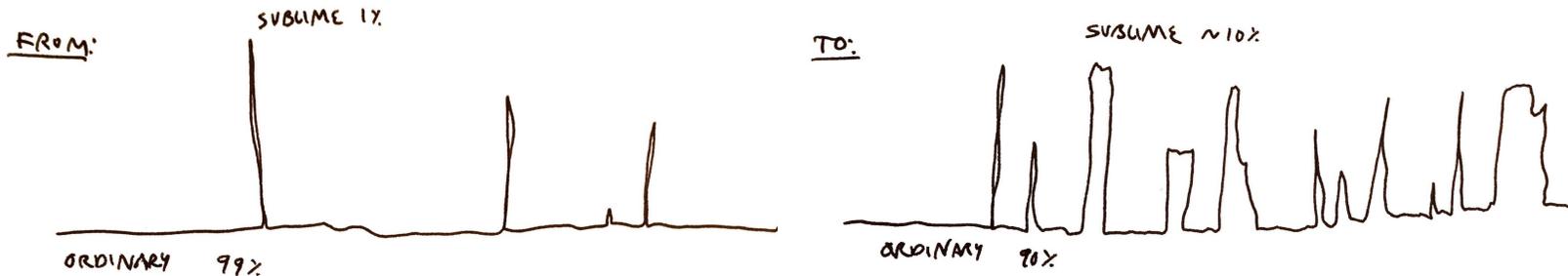
By the end of 2019 I wrote this intention:

“In 2020 I want to invest significant energy in deepening some of my closest relationships in Copenhagen, meet a lot of new people, build a new home for our family, rebuild our daily and weekly routines with intent and explore the nature near our home.”

That has somehow held remarkably true for all of this year. So what do I want 2021 to be?

What's next?

There's one big thing I want to pursue in the year ahead: For the past six and a half years I've worked mostly as an employee of different companies. I've had brief stints of crazy (and unsustainable) freelancing and hustling in between jobs, but it was never a long term plan. I kept coming back to the predictable salary, the social status that comes with a good job and, perhaps most importantly, the reliable construct of employment as a way of separating my home life and my professional life. I've learned a lot. I've gotten to practice a lot of skills that have rounded me more. But I've also not been using my real superpowers as much as I want to. I've likened it to being a samurai who's paddling a canoe: there's nothing wrong with paddling, but there are many more people who can paddle than there are samurai who can wield a katana.



Now I feel ready to once again create and hold my own structure. I'm ready to use the katana more often. I'm not sure what form it will take. I've been working a lot with my good friend Mette and we have formed an amazing partnership. What's beautiful about the way we work is that we have a pretty clear and shared vision of where we are headed, and some strong principles around openness and transparency, but we are completely flexible in the path we are walking. This allows us both to find ways of integrating our work and home life differently.

As part of this process I am also committed to learn how to engage more fully with the mundane tasks. No matter how often I will wield the katana in moments of sublime expression, there'll always be paddling to do in between. Preparation. Writing. Communicating. Admin. And instead of looking down on it, dreading it or wishing it away, I want to become good at doing it with real care and intent. Not rushing it and trying to get it over with. Taking it seriously as something just as important as everything else.



Feeling handsome. See you in 2021.

**Thank you for being part
of my life.**



Annual Report 2020 by Mathias Jakobsen is
licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License.

Published by
Think Clearly v/ Mathias Jakobsen
Robert Jacobsens Vej 26C
2300 Copenhagen S
Denmark

www.thnklrly.com

m@thnklrly.com
+45 22212355