

## ***I'm still here, still Dan — the Remix***

I'm still Dan

in the way Julianne Moore plays Lisa Genova's character Alice in *Still Alice* in the movie.

I still remember. Except for what I don't.

The way Helen is still Helen chewing her sandwich, as she asks "When are we going to eat?"

The way Pearl is still Pearl when she declares, "Yes I am!" when told that she is marvelous.

The way Vince is still Vince as he makes profound mud going around and around with his watercolor brush in the Memories in the Making program. Though they've all long since passed.

And before they passed, slowly, more or less artfully, they disappeared into themselves.

If that is what we call self.

I feel Terence McKenna is still Terence true to himself as he describes his thoughts concerning his impending death:

"I always thought death would come on the freeway in a few horrifying moments, so you'd have no time to sort it out. Having months and months to look at it and think about it and talk to people and hear what they have to say, it's a kind of blessing. It's certainly an opportunity to grow up and get a grip and sort it all out. Just being told by an unsmiling guy in a white coat that you're going to be dead in four months definitely turns on the lights. It makes life rich and poignant. When it first happened, and I got these diagnoses, I could see the light of eternity, à la William Blake, shining through every leaf. I mean, a bug walking across the ground moved me to tears."

Poetically Naomi Shihab Nye is still Naomi when I ask her to remind me, "Is the cheek still here, the one that Terence's tears dried on? " Is the river you speak of still here, the fish, the silence, the earth? The boot, the floor ... the whole *Famous* list, is it still here, "not because it did anything spectacular, but because it never forgot what it could do."

If, or rather when, I do forget what it is I can do, am I still here? Am I still here in the way my alcoholic father would "amount to something," as he would say, before cirrhosis of the liver took him too young, too soon and sent me head-long reeling into the trauma depths looking darkly through sadness, looking for the amount I was to live up to.

And after years and years of practice being present to the here & now, Naomi's *Right Now*, and to my full amount, in the same way that that fat squirrel fell to death from the Avocado tree, the way our precious cat was killed by the neighbor's dog for being too friendly, the way Suzie, who doesn't recognize her name walking past on the sidewalk blows me a kiss amounts to something. Amounts to something by the very fact, 'I am that I am' – we exist! ... we lived a life! Oh my, but did we ever live a life.

And after all those years and years of practice being present to the here & now, here I am, no practice required, needing only to lose my memory, to lose my mind. When I completely lose my mind, will I remember love?

I tell my adult niece, "And it's strange, I love you from a place and in a way I can't put into words.

I don't really know you in a practical sense – your favorite color, the first things you do when you wake up in the morning, even your most fervent desires. Yet still, I love you in a way that persistently makes me smile when I think of you, and am so happy you are in this world."

I reach out to two other nieces by email — smoke signals in a hurricane. They've moved on to new platforms. I console myself by telling myself in the way Alice must feel about what Lisa Genova says in her TED Talk, "keep living, you are more than what you can remember."

Life is an epic event, even as the days are fleeting.  
Then again, life is short and the days are long.  
It's that kind of paradox. Let's be honest with ourselves.  
We don't know squat about the afterlife.  
All the knowing we know of is in this one.  
You lose yourself when you sleep at night  
and wake anew to start again.  
Good practice.

All you know of is contained within you,  
forever lasting, in the timeless time outside of time. You're eternal in that way,  
in that *'it's all present in all the knowing I of know of'* loop. Yet in time  
you, like me, die and the world goes on without you.

So, yes, each next moment becomes all the more precious, doesn't it?  
I mean, me too, a bug walking across the ground can easily move me to tears.  
So delectably sweet this fleeting moment's visit. But then again,  
if we *are* being honest with ourselves, will you tell me, did you know me?  
If I'm only famous to my computer monitor and its unplugged, how do I know I'm still Dan?

Wouldn't it be sweet justice if I could pull off a Grandma Moses in my late years,  
or even posthumously, an Emily Dickinson, and find celebrity in my thoughts?  
Thoughts I no longer tend to. Would I still then be Dan, or even an immortal Dan?  
Will you cherish my memory, and if so, would I still then be here – shared with you.  
Or if no two can share the same space, will I too have more or less artfully vanished?

{Homage: Ram Dass (nee Richard Alpert) "*Still Here*"}

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**Right Now** by Naomi Shihab Nye

Today on the phone,  
first time in thirty years,  
my friend didn't know me.  
Who? Where do you live?  
Where did we meet?  
She's been slipping for a while.  
I wonder if that's how God feels  
about Israel right now.  
Who are you again?  
Did you really suffer?

**#Moment** by Dan Landrum

Suzie and Michael just ambled by. Suzie is deep into dementia.  
Trailing several paces behind her, Michael walks with a cane.  
I've learned not to say her name when I say hello to Suzie.  
It only confuses her.  
So I simply called out, "Hello!" and waved.  
She replied with a "Hello!" and wave of her own.

When Michael stepped up, I said "Hi" to him.  
As he mumbled a reply, Suzie, without missing a step,  
turned back once again and blew me a kiss.  
And I to her.



Orientation to MIM painting - Das Landrum, 2002 -"Sunrise"

For 5 years beginning in 2002. I provided art sessions 5 times a week for the Alzheimer's Association's *Memories in the Making* program.



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Helen 04/02/04

### **They call this disease The Long Goodbye.**

There are special 'bumper-car' wheelchairs made out of plastic plumbing pipe that the residents can be strapped into and still walk or sit without falling over. Helen was in one of these bumper-car chairs during our painting session last week. She was particularly antsy that day. Constantly had somewhere else she had to be. Every five minutes or so, she'd push the paints aside and start truckin' for the door. I'd see her movement in my peripheral vision, stop what I was doing and circle around the other way. I would greet Helen like a long lost friend who I hadn't seen in ages.

"Helen, Helen Bradbury is that you? How you doing, sweetheart?"

"How'd you know my name?"

"Oh, Helen, I come here every week to paint with you. You're a marvelous painter."

"I am?"

"Yes, you certainly are! Would you like to paint some right now?"

"Yah, sure, I guess. Got nothing better to do."

Then I'd take her hand and lead her back to the table she just left a few seconds ago.

"Look, Helen, here's a painting you did recently. It doesn't look quite finished, do you want to work on this one some more?"

"I did that?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well, my, that's pretty good."

Then she'd get engaged in the painting for another 5 minutes.  
Then we'd re-enact the script pretty much verbatim once again.

So you can see, from my vantage point it's more of a perpetual "Hello!"







Pearl 11/20/03

Pearl consistently is shrouded in a beatific light and a smiling countenance, but she quite actually doesn't remember what she's doing from one instance to the next...

When I first started painting with Pearl, her mind was so far adrift that unless I was constantly prodding her, she would simply sit and smile and not move the brush across the paper at all. Slowly, I believe, from the weekly ritual and familiarity, Pearl's watercolors have evolved. It's evident in the artifact of her paintings. There is a clarifying articulation of the marks and cohesiveness to the composition. I wouldn't call it progress, as where would it be progressing to? But it does speak of a greater presence of mind and it does appear something remembers!

In this particular art session, Pearl was as animated as I've ever seen her. For the first time she picked up rhythm. For some weeks I'd been pairing swooshing sounds with the movement of the brushstrokes. Yesterday Pearl started mimicking the sounds and making the corresponding movement. I tried dat dat dat daaa, indicating a dotted pattern and she joyfully made her firsts dots, adding a new element to her repertoire.

Pearl stayed present throughout the session. By the end, she even helped clean-up. Another first. Not out of reward, but out of the sheer delight of seeing Pearl so full of life, I blurted out, "Pearl, you are marvelous. I love you! You are such a precious being!"

Pearl ardently replied, "Yes, I am!"



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Yes, this work tends most often to be non-objective. What is there to represent where they live? Even those who do have significant training in the technical skills of art making, and most don't, tend to delight more in the immediate gratification of playing with the inherent properties of water, color and movement itself. The purest story of non-objective art resides in Vince. No longer bullied by the left brain hemisphere of logic and reason, he had for the most part lost the faculty of verbal language when I began painting with him. Vince appeared to still comprehend English, but when he went to express himself the words would elude him, then evaporate before he could get them out.

When Vince picked up a brush his focus was singular. In his first paintings he would go over and over the same organic shape, again and again making rich mixes of color, apparently fascinated by the subtle change in brush-stroke texture. After a few sessions, when Vince picked up a brush, a sparkle of excitement was evident in his eyes. He was clearly happy to see me, to have this opportunity to paint. As he began to paint, it was apparent that there was something of a marriage taking place between the depth of his inner world and the small bit of outer world before him over which he had dominion. These one hour art sessions may have been the only personal expression Vince would have to the outer world in the week. What aliveness was evident in that precious time! Though he may not have known which one green was, the serial artifacts are palpable evidence of the uninhibited spark of life glimmering through his profound, unique expression. Authentically profound in a way I have not seen in any other art.

After each session I would hold up the finished work for Vince to see. He would study it intently, at first with a quizzical look as if to say, "What's this?" Often he'd lean forward and begin to make a verbal comment, only to have the words disappear as he sat back shaking his head. He'd stare at the painting again and a soft smile of deep satisfaction would cross his face. Pleased, he'd look to me and the light in his eyes would sparkle.

Vince passed away in May of 2004.



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{REMEMBERING: odes to famous 'Naomis'}

**Famous** by Naomi Shihab Nye

The river is famous to the fish.

The loud voice is famous to silence,  
which knew it would inherit the earth  
before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds  
watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The idea you carry close to your bosom  
is famous to your bosom.

The boot is famous to the earth,  
more famous than the dress shoe,  
which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it  
and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men  
who smile while crossing streets,  
sticky children in grocery lines,  
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,  
or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,  
but because it never forgot what it could do.

*Naomi Shihab Nye, "Famous" from Words Under the Words: Selected Poems by Naomi Shihab Nye, copyright © 1995.*

**These two Naomis: a benign foray?** by Dan Landrum

I have to wonder *Right Now*  
if Naomi Shihab Nye knows Naomi Klein  
like best friends, like bosom buddies do.  
I hope so.

For all cruel superficial cultural differences aside,  
do they know the ferociously benign spirit they share?  
That super tugboat pushing the HMS Queen Elizabeth  
out to sea. (Or is it tugging back into safe harbor? )

I have to hope  
that these two Naomis have secret handshakes.  
Handshakes for all bridges bridging all those deep rugged divides.  
These same-named calm ones soaring above.  
I wonder, do they look down? Look down, together – a pair  
of Japanese dragon dual line kites slipping past  
all the past, all the rough winds of ignorance, hand-in-hand?

And if indeed *This Changes Everything* – this shift in the winds,  
does the *Art of Disappearing* disappear ecofascists? When  
you nod briefly and become a cabbage, will people  
never again be required to sacrifice their own  
interests to the "organic whole of nature"?

*{#B9-4A: 'Naomi' is an English name meaning "enjoyment, pleasure" in Hebrew and Arabic.  
Naomi is common in the Old Testament and also means "pleasant one," "above all," and "beauty."  
Naomi has separate Japanese origins as a unisex name meaning "straight and beautiful."}*

**POSTSCRIPT:**

You're as clear as a bell in my head, though  
you don't even know I exist. Unless  
you received my random letter inviting  
you into this conversation.

Oh my goodness, what  
a befuddling surprise that letter  
in your hands must have been. Who  
is this guy who thinks he knows me just  
because he's read my poetry?

You'll have to excuse me.  
Poetry is such an intimate form.  
Though outdoors I know you not at all,  
in here!, ...I feel ...I know you ...all too well.

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**UPDATES:**

{220517}

***These three Naomis: a benign foraging***  
*for conversation around sustainable agriculture in an effort to build economically and socially just communities*

I have to wonder if Naomi Shihab Nye and Naomi Klein  
know Naomi Starkman like best friends, like bosom buddies do.  
I hope so.

Founder and editor-in-chief of *Civil Eats* —  
a daily news source for critical thought about the American food system —  
*University of California Global Food Initiative 30 under 30,*  
Starkman, is an avid organic gardener, having worked on several farms.



I have to hope that these three Naomis have secret handshakes.  
Handshakes for foraging, searching for sustainably wild food resources,  
as it plays an important role in an animal's ability — an animal such as ours —  
to survive and reproduce in response to the ever changing environment  
where this animal lives, ...planet earth.

As a founding board member of the *Food & Environment Reporting Network*,  
and as the director of communications and policy at *Slow Food Nation*,  
what does this Naomi, Naomi Starkman bring to the table?

The Ethics of the "organic whole of nature"?  
I have to hope. I can only hope. In the nick of time.

<Then decide what to do with your time.>

{#NaomiStarkman @ <https://civileats.com/about/who-we-are/>}

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### **The Art of Disappearing**

When they say Don't I know you?  
say no.

When they invite you to the party  
remember what parties are like  
before answering.  
Someone telling you in a loud voice  
they once wrote a poem.  
Greasy sausage balls on a paper plate.  
Then reply.

If they say We should get together  
say why?

It's not that you don't love them anymore.  
You're trying to remember something  
too important to forget.  
Trees. The monastery bell at twilight.  
Tell them you have a new project.  
It will never be finished.

When someone recognizes you in a grocery store  
nod briefly and become a cabbage.  
When someone you haven't seen in ten years  
appears at the door,  
don't start singing him all your new songs.  
You will never catch up.

Walk around feeling like a leaf.  
Know you could tumble any second.  
*Then* decide what to do with your time.

*"The Art of Disappearing"* by Naomi Shihab Nye from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*. © The Eighth Mountain Press.

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**ALSO SEE:**

**Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World** by **Naomi Klein** on sale 09/12/2023

<https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374610326/doppelganger>

"Naomi Klein is a Canadian author known for her generally left-leaning political views and analysis. Klein is often confused with Naomi Wolf, an American author who originally rose to prominence as a notable third-wave feminist with generally center-left views. However, by the time of writing Wolf had become known for her right-wing political opinions, especially those related to the anti-vaccination movement and other conspiracy theories. The Washington Post's Laura Wagner described the two as both being "White Jewish women" who "published big-idea bestsellers in the '90s" (Wolf wrote *The Beauty Myth*, Klein *No Logo*), writing that the two had been casually confused for each other for several years prior to the publication of *Doppelganger*. The claim that Wolf and Klein were confused for each other was backed up by other commentators, including those in *New York*, *The New Yorker*, and *Wired*."

> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doppelganger\\_\(Klein\\_book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doppelganger_(Klein_book))

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