

From the Journal of Oscar Edward Johnson

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We Strangers

You like and respect a man,
But all you get to know of him
Are three small hairs on his head.

People are a solemn mystery,
A tangle of dark impulses
and mixed motives.

Men are forever strangers to one another.
No one ever comes to really know anyone.

We are strangers in the arms of our mother.

Caught in the insoluble prison of being.
we escape it never.

No matter what arms may clasp us,
what mouths may kiss us,
what hearts may warm us.
Never, never, never, never.

Which of us has known his brother,
has looked into his father's heart?

We are forever a stranger and alone,
Forever strangers to one another.

The strangeness and loneliness
of our little adventure
on this earth,
Leaves us with a sharp ache of regret.

Oh, the waste of loss.

Our Inarticulation

We are inarticulate strangers,
amusing clowns.
We are poverty stricken in symbols.
We have no words to work with.

Even Christ
Didn't have the vocabulary
to put into words
What He knew was true.

He was compelled to define principle:
In value analogies,
In pictures drawn from
The Old Book,
The agriculture and industry about him.
He was frustrated by incomprehension.

We have plenty of words for bitter invective and scorn.
But none for love.

It only takes a word to describe a bastard.
It takes a small speech to describe:

Gentile humility
Exquisite kindness
Soft intelligence
A warm heart.

We stalk as a stranger
and guard our secret life.
We are a phantom
withdrawn closely into our heart.
We are full of pride and tenderness,
but must give a cuff instead of a caress.

We walk alone in darkness
and no one sees us.
We keep all we know
in jealous secret,
We have deep affections
we can never show.

We are always aprowl
to find some entrance into life,
some secret, undiscovered door
that might admit us to life and fellowship.

Our Secrecy

Unspeakable things lie buried and known
but unconfessed
in us.

Festered sores,
Hungers,
Desires,
Crawling appetites.

Unfathomable things,
Remote,
Intangible.

We keep many things
In fearful secret,
Knowing revelation
would be punished
with ridicule.

We brood over the dark world of our desire
with grief,
fear,
shame.

We are to ourselves a monster,
Caged in from confession by fear.

Everyone carries around with him
a sinister bundle of horrors,
mementos of disastrous occasions.

They are real
Even if nobody can see them
(not even one's self)

Inner turmoil.

Our Deception

We live in fear of discovery.

We build up defenses
of swagger and pretense.

We build up barriers
 of pretense and evasion
For the world's dull eyes.

We nurse our sores in privacy.

Our outward appearance is an apparatus
 of concealment
 of escape.

An acceptable counterfeit
 projected mechanically before the world.
It protects us from intrusion.

No honest answers.
Deliberate self-deception.
Folly sense.

“What you don’t know doesn’t hurt you.”
Is that ever a lie.
It is the biggest lie of all.
It’s what you don’t know
 that GETS you.

Because of our secret hearts,
We walk lonely passages,
Withered and pale at heart.

Our Sickness

We get nothing out of life.
We are a failure.
We are never any good at anything.

What’s it all about?
Is it a big joke?
Or are we dreaming all this?

We have never done much for anybody
Or given much that cost anything.
We haven’t much to give.
We are seeking,
 forlorn,
 unimportant.

Life becomes a pageantry of cheap loves,
 dull conscience
 waste,
 confusion.

We are caught in a net of futility.

We are restless trivial shades in human form.
 No sense of moral direction.

 No feeling of life's purpose.

We are people who wear grimace
 Instead of expressions.

We know no happiness,
 Not even consciousness.

We are nobodies in nowhere,
No one knows us.
No one is concerned for us.

Life is a fabulous nightmare.
All hope,
Belief, Confidence Is surrendered to the lewd torture
 of demons masked in human flesh.
The earth is an unspeakable
 incommunicable prison.
We forever remain prison pent.

O waste of loss
 On this most weary unbright cinder
 This most energetic,
 driving,
 competitive world.
 This dusty world.
 This reeking earth.

There is no happy land, no end to hunger.

At times
We are sick
With the thought
Of the weary distance before us.
Heartsick with weary horror.
Black with terror.

Alone, sick, and a stranger.

The lights are fluttering low.
I lift my pack
And leave my friend
And go.
I look not left or right.
In all that endless road I tread
There is nothing but the night.

Death is like a lovely and tender woman
Friend and lover, comes to free us, heal us,
And save us from the torture of life.

Our Hope

The man who regards his life
and that of his fellow creatures
As meaningless
is not only merely unhappy,
But hardly fit for life.

We seek the lost lane to Heaven
With blind steps.
We grope in our exile.

Men
do not escape from life
because life is dull.
Life
escapes from men
because men are dull.

We never live
up to the full potential
of any hour.

Life is a rich banquet.

NOW,
HOW WHERE WHEN WHY?

Don't Give Advice Don't Take Advice

Don't have ready-made notions
Of the kind of person
You expect someone to be.

Permit people:
Freedom of thought
Feeling
Action.

“Vice” and “Holiness” are
Opinions,
Arbitrary ideas,
Prejudices They are INDIVIDUAL.

EACH SEPARATE person
Has different understanding and attitudes
Has different instincts and compulsions
Has different situation,

Which govern his behavior,
Which requires individual modification of rules.

There are all manners of
And all manners of reasons for
“CRIMES.”

Some of which are right and reasonable.

Don't:
Judge
Criticize
Diagnose
Prescribe
Meddle
Pontificate
Lay down laws
Sympathize

Don't be a
Mentor and Monitor of morality.
A self-appointed Spokesman for God.
A Spotless Custodian of Morality.
A Self-appointed Deputy of Jesus.

An Absolute Authority on Conduct and Inner Personal Life.
An Unyielding, Unpardonning, Prejudiced, Vindictive, Unforgiving,
Goddamn Bigot.

Leave the final judgment to God Almighty.

Learn the meaning of
the mote and the beam.

Don't mind other people's business.

Don't try to teach anybody a damn thing.

Judge nobody.

Avoid the old trap
of being wrong.

Most men are mistaken
in their appraisal
of their thoughts and deeds.

NO

Admonitory Tidbits
Inspirational Gems.

Tell anyone who asks for advice to go elsewhere.
You can do more harm than good.
It's really none of your business.
You're too damn old.

Don't Be Intimate . . . Do Not Confide

Guard against becoming too involved with people.
Against knowing their inner secrets.

Don't listen to anyone's confidences.

Get out of earache range.

Enjoy friendship,
But to not exchange confidences of any sort.

No wise person has friends that are too intimate.

Don't confess.

It sounds too much like bragging.

It makes you a heel as well as a sinner.

It can develop into catastrophic results.

Consumes idols levels gods.

Blazing loyalties end in disillusionment.

Life does not live up to hope.

Gold becomes dim.

An exultant world can turn hag in a moment.

Confession can make a person detestable.

And you can hate him,
And he, both you and himself
For what you have made him.

Confession can be more detestable than the act confessed.

People who tell "all" about themselves
Find reason to dislike you
For knowing too much about them.

A man can feel truly, but write and speak false,
Can be pompous and foolish,
And writhe over it when recalling it later.

It makes his heart sink.

He can become self-betrayed in such ways, with no one to blame but himself.

Impersonal Love

Love requires

No explaining

No denying
No forgiving
No forgetting

Forgive
Is a word
That has no meaning
Towards a loved person.

Accept a person “as is”
Inner self and mistakes
Included.

Find Yourself

Examine yourself (not your brother) in the light of truth.

Revert to a study of yourself alone.

Try to know yourself.

Do not accept general applied dogma.

Current accepted values

Second-hand faiths.

Find your own. Seek. Seek. Seek.

If a man does not look for love and beauty,
He will never find it,
Though it be all about him.

Your discovery of life and the world is a process of finding out
Thru trial and error,
Fantasy and illusion,
Falsehood and foolishness,
Thru being mistaken and wrong,
Being an idiot and egotistical,
Thru aspiring and being hopeful,
Believing and being confused.

Find your individual answers.

All valuable achievements
Material,
Spiritual,
Moral,
Have been brought about by creative *individuals*.

No leaf hangs for you in the forest,
No stone upon the hills.
You shall find no door in any city.

In the city of yourself,
In the continent of your soul,
Find the forgotten language,
The lost world,
the open door,
the strange music.
You are your world.

Be Intimate

Our lack of knowledge of people,
Our lack of communication,
Is the big trouble with the world.

We must open our hearts or perish.
There is a kind of intellectual smog abroad in the land.
We are peasants bent on extinction.

The last final wisdom the earth can give is:
“We must try to love one another.”

It stands, awful, above the dusty racket of our lives.
A terrible and beautiful sentence,
Often remembered at the end, too late.

We are not concerned about people we do not know.

In order to be concerned,
We must be intimate,
Must know another's problems and troubles,
Another's limitations and mistakes,

And Accept Help with Patience Understanding.

We are not self-sufficient.
We cannot go it alone.
We have suffered and will suffer again.
We all struggle.
We need help and must help others,
The lonely,
The lost,
The anguishing
With fellowship and generosity.
We must be concerned,
Really care,
Be really bothered by others.

We must love each other An invulnerable heart is a dead heart.
Our greatest human fault is
We show no love
We love ... not others ... but ourselves.

The knowledge that he matters
Deeply
Earnestly
To someone else,
Can affect a miraculous change in one's life.

This wonderful fact has an immediate effect.
It brings a sense of inner security,
A self belief.

A man believes in himself
Because someone else believes in him.

Minor grievances and annoyances become
(in their proper place)
Trivialities.

It gives him
a purpose to life.
A target
At which
His energies can be aimed.

Share Life

Much of life is an adventure in apprenticeship.

We are the sum of all the moments of our lives.
We are part of all that we have ever met.
We are part of all that we have touched and that has touched us.
Each experience is part of the fabric of our lives.
Every line of everything we have read has influenced us to some extent.
Every life we touch has influenced us. And we it.
Our lives are inextricably mixed and woven with each other.

We are not self-sufficient.
Our life is based on the labors of others,
Both living and dead.
The whole of our actions and desires
Is bound up with the existence of other human beings.

Our discovery of the world and of life is a process of finding out:
Thru being loved and loving.
We love because we have been loved.
Thru being comforted and comforting.
We comfort because we have been comforted.
Thru being forgiven and forgiving.
We forgive because we have been forgiven.

The individual, if left alone from birth,
Would remain primitive and beastlike
To an inconceivable degree.

An individual is what he is,
Not by virtue of his individuality,
But by his experience with others.
They direct
His material and spiritual existence
From the cradle to the grave.

We must share what we have experienced.
Must use the understanding that comes with personal experience,
And be concerned.

For example:
Those in pain are self-centered.
Their only concern is their pain.
Everything else is shut out.

Suffering can only be understood with compassion
If one has suffered.

Show your concern.

Really care.
Be really bothered.
And share.

Forgiveness – Mitigation

Criminal actions originate in the drive of instincts.
They are checked in a person of normal emotional development.
A person of normal emotional development
Shows emotional feelings of consideration
Out of fear,
Out of affection.

We are responsible for all we do.
There is blame.

But do not blame right away . . . Everyone is entitled to a defense.

When one's behavior is abnormal
There are causes,
There are pressures
Outside and inside,
And the individual needs to help to overcome these pressures.

When people do what they do,
And no one saw it coming,
Then maybe,
All of them are partly to blame.

Some people should not be held to the same degree of responsibility
As other people.
If someone's behavior is abnormal
An earnest attempt should be made to treat him as
An individual who needs help.
If a person is guilty of something
Considerations should be given to:
Conditions that led to the crime,
The background of the criminal,
The pressures on him.
The secrets of 10,000 years.

(situations cause inside and outside pressures which affect his behavior)

The extent of his responsibility,
His ability to judge between right and wrong

And his ability to resist the wrong and do the right.
His mental condition,
Which can seriously interfere with
His understanding,
His free will.

We must mitigate (temper, make less severe) his actions.
The human personality and mind mitigates rules and laws.
His mental condition also mitigates rules and laws.

All conditions *should be* listened to in mitigation.
It is your *duty* to listen in mitigation.
You *cannot refuse* to listen in mitigation.
You *must* hear his testimony in mitigation.

You must give a human being the consideration of humanity.

We think we understand so much.
We don't see anything.
Even in those we love.

We must hear the excuse.
We must hear the explanation.
We must listen to the reassurance.
AND WE MUST DESPERATELY TRY TO UNDERSTAND.

We must reflect on the guilt in our self.
We must reflect on the capacity in our self
For doing the same thing.
We are not so stupidly superior.

Mitigation is a plea for compassion.
A tempering of justice with mercy.
The not closing the door of hope.
The saving from a disgrace that never ends.
The saving of a life worth saving.

If the crime was not that serious,
If the person was not that responsible,
Mitigate.

Defend . . . Do not prosecute . . . Do not persecute.
Do not be so interested in fixing blame
As you are in relieving a person from blame.

You are not wise enough to fix it.
It can only be done by one who knows:
The inmost thoughts of the person,
The appraisal of every influence that moves him,
The civilization in which he lives,
The society which made him,
His whole past life,
His diseases and accidents,
His schooling,
His environment,
His character,
The entire history of his antecedents.
The secrets of 10,000 years.

Use reason . . . Judgment . . . Understanding.

Note: On an emotional basis, forgiving is nearly impossible.

It requires intellectual tempering, intellectual mitigation.
It requires an understanding of psychology.

Have mercy.
Mercy is the highest attribute of mankind.

Love and Happiness

Our own happiness is wholly dependent
Upon the smiles
Upon the well being
Of others.

There are many
(even some who remain unknown)
Whose destinies are bound to ours.

Every life we touch influences us . . . and we it.

Our lives are inextricably mixed and woven with each others.

We must exist for other people.
Give instead of get.
Realize our first duty is to others.

Love.

The true value of a human being is determined
By the measure he has obtained liberation from self.

An estimate of a man
Depends entirely upon his social qualities.

A man's value depends
How far his feelings, thoughts, and actions
Are directed toward the promoting the good of his fellows.

The best loved are those who contribute most.

Be written in the Book of Love.
Do not care about the Book Above.
Let your name be written or erased
As They will.
So you be written in the Book of Love.

The Stinker

He taints all he touches.
He stinks.
All he touches stinks.

He brings fear,
Shame,
Loathing
Wherever he goes.

His kisses are fouler than his curses.

His whines are nastier than his threats.

The Bully

Big in voice,
Violent in threat,
Withered and pale at heart.

A tyrant of strength.
The weak are who he sees as being his legitimate prey.

When beaten by wits or justice,
He asserts the righteousness of his cause
By physical violence.

Swaggerer,
Jostler,
Loud asserter,
Pretender.

Ugly and revolting.

The Sweetheart

Demure,
Shy,
Timid.

Sensitive,
Industrious,
Thorough.

No Fire.
No Denial.

Responds
Dutifully.

Beneath his placidity
He is explosive and violent
And capable of furtive cat cruelty.

The Hail Fellow

He has a horror of all loneliness.

He has no secret place,
Nothing withheld,
Nothing guarded.

Above all else
He wants to be esteemed,
And liked.

He wants praise.

He hungers for gratitude,
Affection,
Esteem.

He builds a reputation
Of being big-hearted.

He is a darling, a dear,
A fine person.

He is an intensely likeable person.
He has a deep genuine kindness and tenderness.

He puts on a good face
Before the world.

He is well liked and
Has many friends.

He is profuse in thanks,
Extravagant in praise,
Expert in ingratiating.

He is full of heartiness & and devotion.

He exhausts himself
In the service of others.

He needs to give more than is returned.

He is stimulated by
The clamor of people and talk.

He needs movement,
Extension,
Excitement . . . in Life.

He is a person who
Must always be doing something.

He is apt to brandish past indulgences over those who accept.
He gives gifts with self-congratulatory implications.
He can affect: affection, grief, pity, good will, modesty.
He resents competition for goodness ... He is impressed by money.

He is a social hypocrite: keeps his ill-temper, nervousness, irritability at home.
He has all the hypocrisy, sentimentality, and dishonest pretense of a child.
He expects heavy slathering of praise.
He always feels his efforts are unappreciated.
He is severely conventional ... childishly innocent.
All of his virtues come from a need to dominate.
He hates what does not yield.
He hates secrecy ... any air of mystery ... any reticence ... worldliness.

The Loner

For contentment, this man must have a place to be alone
For his private thoughts,
For thinking,
A place to work, or think, or hide,
To do whatever he wants without interruption,
Without distraction.

This man prefers exile within himself,
He does not choose to have anyone intrude.
No one exploits him altogether.

He is a lone traveler.
He never belongs to his country,
To his home,
To his friends,
Even his immediate family,
With his whole heart.

He is never happier than when he is alone.
His loneliness is delightful,
A drunken freedom,
A buoyancy.

He has a pronounced lack of need
For direct contact with other human beings,
For human communities.

He can be happy,
Full of joy,
Greet everyone with gusto,
Have a great affection and tenderness for the world,
Have a close feeling of brotherhood,
And have not one close friend.

It's all he wants,
All he'll always want.
He could not stand anything else.
He grows tired of anyone and everyone.

He keeps his sense of distance.
He has a need for solitude which increases with the years.

He is not intimidated by ridicule . . . not deceived by twaddle.

He is sharply aware (without regret) of the limits of mutual understanding.

He loses the concern of others (others are not concerned for him).

He is independent of the opinions,
The habits,
The judgments
Of his fellows.

He answers pretensions with contempt.
He answers reproof with scorn.

He considers responsibility and duty an obligation, a sentence.

Every move he makes is an effort to escape it.
He prefers his own prison . . . not someone else's.
He considers he has done no great crime
And it is unjust he should do such penance.

He'll find a way out alone.
When no one is looking . . . he'll be gone.

The Great

He is one of the world's great obscure men.

A humble, kind, intelligent man.
A large sandy craggy cliff of a man.
A man composed of whalebone and piano wire.

He possesses a sense of wonder and soaring innocence.

He has courage,
Resourcefulness,

Loyalty,
Generosity,
Self-sacrifice,

He is gentle.
He has a warm face,
Soft eyes,
Exquisite kindness.

He is a lucky mortal.

He has rare and precious human talents.
A capacity for participation and joy.
The ability to draw vast pleasure and enjoyment
From small occasions and simple things.

He brings with him the great gusto for living,
Of exultant excitement,
Of victorious good humor.

Children await his return with a kind of exhilaration.

He lives thru the cinders of the consuming years.

He consumes the dust,
He revives dead faiths,
He touches blind eyes with light,
He nests houseless souls.

He remains.

He is a great masculine flower of courage and honor.
A tough man full of bounce.

He has an amused sparkle in his eyes,
Endless curiosity,
Endless cheer giving.

He is wise thru compassion . . . wise thru perspective.

He is a person to whom things happen.
He causes occurrence of interesting things.
He has a nose for interesting places.

He is observant and honest with himself.
He sees himself and other people clearly.

Sees facts behind rationalization.
The true motive of emotional conflicts.
He knows human fallibility.

He knows every time he lies.
He knows when he acts from false values.

He has immense understanding of other people.
He has a huge range of imagination.
No vanity.
No fear.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness of shortcomings doesn't mean denying they exist.

On the contrary . . .

It means facing shortcomings honestly and realistically.

A frequent error is to pretend there is nothing to forgive,
an error which merely suppresses resentment.

It means experiencing again and again the hurt.
It means forcing again and again the shame.
It returns hurt for hurt.

Revenge. The flag of weakness.

Injury begets injury.
And revenge runs its course
of mutual destruction.

Forgiveness does not undo what has already been done.
It accepts what has been done and goes on from there.

Unless you forgive – you cannot love.
Without love – life has no meaning.

Through forgiveness we gain the freedom to learn from experience.

Forgiveness is not a form of charity. It benefits both ways.

It is as beneficial to forgive
as it is to be forgiven.

Forgiving and accepting forgiveness:
The prime characteristic of a happy, creative personality.

It illuminates every moment of living.
It brings out the best in you.
It is a power.

And. The readier you are to forgive,
the less you are called on to forgive.