

The United States Of Ammunition

by Peter Erich

I write before I leave the house. I walk the dog, of course. I make scrambled eggs. ESPN plays in the background. The dog watches the neighbors leave for work. I shower. I put on a podcast. I get dressed. But before I leave for work. I stop and I write. It's usually a sentence or two.

On my way to work, I listen to WNYC. This morning they are talking about the funeral arrangements for the people who were murdered in Pittsburgh. Rachel Martin spoke gently as she said, "The brothers' wooden coffins sat head-to-head at the front of the temple as family remembered them as social, thoughtful men who were deeply involved in their congregation."

How to make a reduction:

- Select the attributes and achievements you wish to reduce.
- Discard excess milestones before beginning.
- Boil the individual's life down to a sentence.

It's not NPR's fault. It's not Rachel Martin fault. It's not the writer's fault. This is just how it is now. There is too much news that needs to be squeezed into each segment. Even I, the writer of these meaningless words, feel I am reductive. We move on. We need to move on. We walk over the bodies. We know the problems and ignore them. And what can I control anyway?

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I get to work, sit at my desk, and engage in perfectly nice conversations. Barb is dieting and having apple slices as a snack before lunch. Chris is working on the incentives for this month's sale. Jeff is concerned about staffing and excited for his basketball game tonight. I tell him how he could probably take me off the dribble, but I would out rebound him. I have that kind of lower body strength. We make jokes. We laugh. We bond. Everything is good. I go to the break room make toast.

How to Make Toast:

- Get a slice of bread.
- Place bread in the toaster.
- Push the lever to lower the toast.
- Check your phone while waiting for the toast to pop up out of the toaster.

I check the NPR news app. The story about the shooting in Pittsburg has already been pushed off the homepage. There is an article about yellow fever in the 14th century, a potential ceasefire in Yemen, players protesting the national anthem, a plane crash, a helicopter crash, a bombing, a bankruptcy, a flood, a fire, a food shortage, and the booming prosthetic limb industry. My toast is ready. I split an avocado with Desiree and place it on my toast. I add salt and pepper.

I sit quietly. I feel powerless - the powerlessness is emptiness and the void is heavy and it rests in the pit of my stomach.

Desiree takes out her iPhone X and shows me photos of her new home. I push away my helplessness and fill it with things like - What kind of flooring are you using in your Basement and are you going to make a separate space for the laundry room and how old is your hot water heater and that sounds nice and I like that idea and that will look great and a big screen TV would be nice. Desiree's mother calls. I look at a poster on the wall.

Signs The Earth is Choking:

- The inability to maintain a consistent temperature
- Difficulty breathing
- Quaking, which may be weak or forceful
- Water turning dirty green
- Land that is flushed and then turns grey
- If the earth is choking and can't speak for itself the American Red Cross recommends that the people of Earth speak up on behalf of the Earth.

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I get home at 6:30. The dog greets me by bringing his favorite toy to the door. It is a rubber boot that squeaks. I kneel down and put my love for him into my hands and massage behind his ears. He leans into my hands and looks up at me. This is his favorite spot. He follows me as I walk to the kitchen table to throw away those few lines I wrote this morning.

I didn't know what would happen today. Would I be the shot? The bombed? The crashed? The drowned? The Starved? The burned? The forgotten line in a news story? So each morning I write my own epitaph. A few lines so I can be remembered as something more than a coffin in room. Today it read,

“As I died I remembered all the people who told me they loved me. And I remembered their voices and played them on repeat as I bled out. I am the love I received and I saved it as a blanket to put over me in a moment like this. I hope that no one will read these words, but I will write them again tomorrow - just in case.”

