

All of these Things Will Happen

A Graduation Address for the Class of 2012 New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy

Ken Corbett 

When Jo Lang called to extend this invitation, my mind turned first toward how it is a wonderful invitation indeed. I have been fortunate to speak in a variety of psychoanalytic settings, but this invitation comes with particular meaning in that it comes from students as they celebrate the culmination of many years of study and hard, humbling work. So, I thank you sincerely for the honor.

But immediately my mind then went to the following thought: wait a minute, I am too young! I laughed as I linked that thought with the feeling of sudden age that I experience *each* time, *every* time I watch gray hair fall to the floor as the barber buzzes. I laughed again when I considered that only in this profession could a fifty-something feel too young. Then I thought, hey, it is the 50th anniversary, so maybe I am part of the theme. Or I figured, well, Martin Bergman must have said no, or perhaps you are waiting to invite him back next year when he will be 100. I figured as well that Phil Bromberg must be out of town at a Grand Man conference, and that Adrienne Harris had likely stormed the gates to be there too.

So here you are, stuck with me. What could I possibly have to say beyond annoying you yet further with my narcissistic nattering about arthritis, jowls, and gout? So I immediately turned to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Tony Kushner, and David Foster Wallace, who are known for their famous commencement addresses (among other things). Big mistake. Not only did I feel green as in young, but as in envy. I implore you to read them. You must read Emerson as he addressed the Harvard class of 1837, and made his case for the necessity of scholarship and contemplation: "Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty." You must read Foster Wallace as he addressed the Kenyon College class of 2005, and leaned into his exquisite [attunement](#) to the interstitial to point out that freedom is found not in the big moments but in the between moments of caring for others: "That is real

freedom. That is being educated, and understanding how to think. The alternative is unconsciousness, the default setting, the rat race, the constant gnawing sense of having had, and lost, some *infinite* thing." You must read Kushner as he took the Vassar class of 2002 on a wild romp, delighting at every turn in calling Bush the devil, lapsing into Yiddish, and imploring the graduates to look inward, toward "the ideology you have inherited and I hope transformed by living, and which with your psyche is the prism through which your self or soul is refracted, the light and air baffle, which your flame or the smoke from your smouldering traverses to reach the exterior world."

Oy. And that is the extent of the Yiddish I know into which I might lapse. Then Jonathan Alpert came along with his petty, ill-conceived, and ill-published *New York Times* op-ed attack on *psychoanalysis*, and made my day. I thought, yes! I can take him down. I can make mincemeat of him. We can make a pie and have him for dessert. With some reflection, though, I understood that was not my job. Besides, others have already ably done just that. No, my job was to block his cheap shot. He is likely not the first hater you have faced, nor will he be the last.

But tonight I get to be your big brother and dole out some advice. I do so because Alpert does not know what it takes to sit where you sit. He does not know how our fingers bleed as we tailor tiny stitches. He does not know what it means to hold a life as it comes undone, to work toward reformulating a life, toward reintegration and repair. He does not know your courage, and because he does not know your courage, he does not know your fear. He thinks that his brash braying, his goals, his *action* will undo the *grief* that comes with the territory human.

A bipolar patient will leave for Buenos Aires on vacation and never return, the new moon will float like a rib at the edge of night, your nephew will end up in rehab for the second time, and your next patient is in the waiting room. There will be days and days when you feel that the best you have done has been blank and suspicious, stars supernova like diamond broaches in a queen's black safe, your mother will call, her best friend has died, and your next patient is in the waiting room. An adolescent will cut herself and call you from a street corner, the great globe spins, lava pours from shelf to shelf, your best friend will date a guy who smells of cigarettes and too much money, and your next patient is in the waiting room. With a gush of *doubt*, half of your hours will suddenly be unfilled, elk are chased by wildfires, antlers pink with flame, your father-in-law will get lost on his way home from the grocery store, and your next patient is in the waiting room.

All of these things will happen.

I am telling you because Jonathan Alpert cannot; like Rousseau, he is too proud and self-sufficient. From his coach's bench he cannot see, as you can see, the subtle and excessively enigmatic human. He cannot feel the ego's crumbling skeleton, weakened by its crushing brutality. He cannot meet the ego's hand as it reaches for the delicate rapture of **recognition** and repair.

A young father can now take his developmentally disabled son to the park, the moon, that baby's rib, hangs now between Jupiter and Venus, your nephew graduates from college, and your next patient is in the waiting room. A child draws the Little Mermaid and you swimming along a shoreline, he hands you the picture, and in a sidelong glance you know that together you have completed your work, the rogue wisteria vine unfurls outside your window, the one your neighbor tried to kill, and the **paradox** of its droopy, lazy, grapey lavender and its fierce will to live carry you through a sleepy afternoon, your daughter gives birth to twin girls, and your next patient is in the waiting room. A middle-aged man arrives with his cello and plays a Bach sonata, you have been waiting for this **moment** for seven years, the tide comes in, working its graphite magic around the long abandoned pilings, your beloved friend has her hip replaced and you walk together across her apartment, she fears she might fall, instead you fall into laughter, and in that crevice of enigmatic transfer you lapse into an imitation of two elderly aunts, the laughter takes you over as it will, as it must, and your next patient is in the waiting room.

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I am telling you so that you will know to take care of yourself. Keep Advil, stamps, and a bar of good chocolate in your desk drawer. Keep strong coffee, peppermint tea, and a bottle of good scotch in the kitchenette. Oh, and cashews. I might not be standing here if it weren't for cashews. Keep your physical therapist, your trusted consultants, and a friend who is sure to make you laugh on speed dial. Keep a voodoo doll handy for those times when United Health Care puts you on hold for, like, forever. Spend too much money on lingerie. Take a walk around the block. Kiss the sky. Vote. Play the piano. Buy flowers. Don't do the dishes, and have sex on a Wednesday night. Cancel the afternoon and go to your daughter's fifth-grade play. When your patient cancels, read Elizabeth Bishop instead of Betty Joseph. Stretch.

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I am telling you so that you will know to take care of one another. Form study groups, even if you just sit around and gossip. Call each other in the middle of the day. Teach, supervise, write, and then get out and dance. Contest the ways in which psychoanalytic practice has a creeping creepy way of shrinking the human. Read Proust together. Make stronger coffee, and read Lacan. Bring out the scotch and tackle Beckett. Buy your suitemate's favorite cookies. Start a new journal. Lay claim to your generation's voice. Teach us. Go to yoga. Audit classes. Send a young colleague a full-fee patient. Help Lew. Worship Shelley. Sit Shiva. Host baby showers. March. Present cases to one another, and revel in the widening [reverie](#).

The gray will come sure enough. Time's arrow pierces us all. Lucky we, we know how to attend to wounds. Protect what you know, [fight](#) for what you know. Be loud if need be. But most of all, seek to preserve how we know that there is undivided being between us. Hold tight to that [potential space](#) not only in your consulting room, not only as the great globe spins, but also with us, your welcoming community. Hold tight this night's widening happiness. It is much deserved. Congratulations.



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