



Review of Twenty-Two

Greetings,

I don't know exactly on what date you'll receive this message, but I'm beginning to compose it on January 4.

I rose at 3 am this morning and spent a few hours finishing a thorough review of my journal for 2022. That's 139 single spaced, handwritten pages, from which I noticed fifty-eight significant events or developments, that I then summarized roughly into themes, some of which I would like to share with you, below.

In so doing, I'm following the examples of great men I've admired like Benjamin Franklin and Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the world wide Boy Scout movement. Both were very disciplined and methodical diarists, innovative creative men who made the world a better place. In some small way, I aspire to emulate them.

Themes I noticed

First of all, there's the problem of **Inanity**, the Russia-Ukraine war being Exhibit A. The thing I'd like you to notice about this is how Russia is, first of all, clearly in the wrong; but also how it's a lumbering behemoth with antiquated tools and techniques; an entity that clings to its own warped view of the past, then tries to force it on others, even to the point of committing fratricide.

By contrast, we have Ukraine which embraces technology and innovation; not only do Ukrainians know how to use modern systems the way they were designed to be used; they're so familiar with them that they know how to improve upon them and adapt them to their own purposes by, for example, streamlining payroll processes to front line troops, or modifying drones to use printer hardware to deliver ordnance surgically to key targets. In so doing, they've been running circles around the plodding, stodgy Russians, and delivering an experience to them that has been compared to a wood chipper or meat grinder.

The Russian position is inane. This much is obvious to the civilized world. However in my review of last year, I noticed many other inanities that are much closer to home, that are perhaps less obvious to some.

My question to you would be, with whom are you more similar: the Russians, or the Ukrainians?

- What is your attitude about things like modernization and technology?
- Are you an early or late adopter?
- How teachable are you?
- How eager are you to learn new things and improve? How do you **feel** about learning new things? Any hostility in there? I'd unpack that.
- Or perhaps you think you're fine, and that there is no room for improvement in your life and in your living and working habits, and others are the ones who should do all the changing, by force if necessary?

The same analogy could be made about the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and Hong Kong or Taiwan.

Dostoevsky wrote famously that the line between good and evil runs through every human heart. I believe that there's a tension running through all of us like the one that runs between Russia and Ukraine right now. One part of us wants to cling to the past and both fear and fight the future, like Putin's romanticized view of "Rus" when Ukraine and Russia were once the same people. Another part of us yearns for improvement which is, of course, positive change.

The rub in The Human Condition is that everybody wants improvement, and nobody wants change, notwithstanding the obvious fact that improvement is positive change. Even the most progressive progressives have their habits and their favorite ways of doing things.

One way this pertains directly to me is, as you may recall from my 2022 New Year message, I've been doing some application development on the QuickBase platform. The apps are awesome, but they're new. People's reactions to them remind me of [the old Life cereal commercial](#) in which brothers ask each other, "I'm not gonna try it. Are you gonna try it? Hey, let's get Mikey! He won't like it, he hates everything!" Mikey tries it, and he likes it, then the brothers decide to give it a try, too.

A real sticking point is time keeping. Everybody agrees that yes, time is our most valuable non-renewable resource and that no, I do not want to track it in detail like I would track anything else that I value. People are profoundly ambivalent about time keeping, and my current challenge is in figuring out how to surmount this ambivalence so that they can use and benefit from the applications that I've been developing.

To be blunt, I think a lot of people don't want to be honest with others or with themselves about how they spend their time. To this I can only reply that love rejoices in the truth, and that the truth will set you free.

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A **second** theme that I noticed from my review of 2022 was the theme of **getting my own house in order**. In January 2019 I wrote [this review of Jordan Peterson's book 12 Rules for Life](#), and I've been mulling them ever since. His sixth rule is, "Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world." I mulled that over in the back of my mind for a couple of years, then began acting on it last year by working closely with my aging father to put our affairs in order.

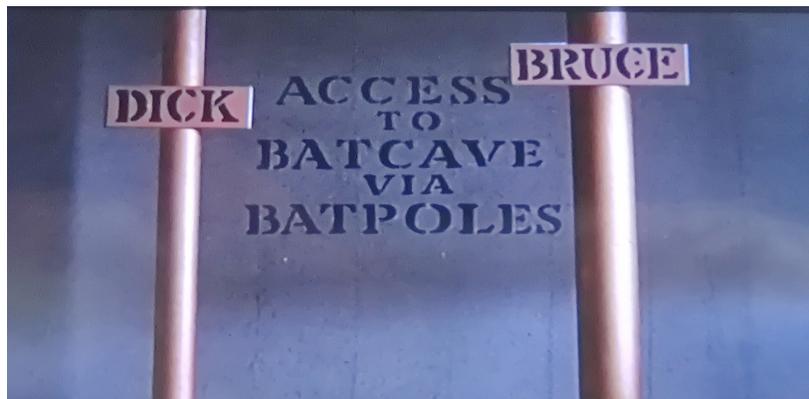
Let me tell you, it was tough because it required having end-of-life discussions with people who'd rather not think about it. It also required learning about legal forms I'd never heard of, and working around unhelpful lawyers, learning about [the parable of the Snipe and the Clam or "Fisherman's Profit"](#) in the process. But we got it done, and we're all breathing a huge sigh of relief with lighter hearts.

In this last respect my 2021 reading of Niall Ferguson's ponderous tome [The World's Bankers](#) about the Rothschild family turned out to be greatly beneficial, insofar as a huge lesson from that book was how *the Rothschilds made family unity their number one priority*. They didn't let anyone get between them.

In my experience lawyers tried to sow division and doubt in the family where there was none, thereby stirring up conflict and generating billable hours for themselves. In the end we downloaded a form from Rocketlawyer.com, notarized and recorded it ourselves. Total cost, < \$500.

Now, I have postponed all other ambitions until further notice, and am focused on the [One Thing](#) of putting my house in order. Consequently my credit score is in the 800s, I'm free of debt, and on the grow, walking my talk of accumulating your life's savings and being awesome.

In physical terms I'm spending much of my free time at what I affectionately call "Stately Freeberg Manor" (after ["Stately Wayne Manor"](#) from the 1960s Batman series), reclaiming an empty view lot from blackberries (thanks much to a herd of goats I hired in late September for four days) and transforming a messy cluttered basement into a proper Bat Cave (or Man Cave, if you like).



*Considering adding Batpoles as a final touch to the Batcave . . . .*

The house needs a lot of attention (it's a fourth generation legacy home, built in 1914) and I'm taking the work one step at a time. On the inside I'm focused on converting one bedroom into a home-away-from-home for my newlywed son and his wife in what I call "Operation Newlywed Suite." So far we have new down linens on hand that I scored from Macy's in a sweet Black Friday deal; and as soon as the room is cleared, cleaned, painted, and otherwise exorcized, I'm putting new furnishings in it for them.

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A **third** theme would be **QuickBase developments**. In 2022 I added **three key features** that have turned out to be real hits and without which, in retrospect, I feel like I could not live:

1. **A Year-Over-Year (YOY) revenue graph** that imports invoice transactions from QuickBooks Online (QBO), enabling viewers to see all of their revenues at a glance in monthly and annual trends, and filter them in whatever way they break it down in QBO. The YOY arrangement aligns the months of different years nicely so you can see how, for example, December of 2022 compares with December 2021, 2020, 2019, etc. Clients love it. For one thing it helps them see how they weathered the pandemic.
2. **A Notes tab in Client records** that lists all notes taken in a way that is easy to filter, search, and share in printer-friendly PDF format. Now I don't scribble notes on hardcopy any more. They all go in the app. No more wondering or searching, flipping pages or searching files or folders. It's all at my fingertips. These have helped make Zoom meetings much more productive because I share the notes to recap the meeting (versus a clunky video recording) and set crisp and prompt agendas for follow up.
3. **A Links tab in Client records** where I curate all the links that pertain to a particular client - all the online resources I have to use to get stuff done for them, all neatly arranged alphabetically. Huge time saver and weight off my mind.
4. **Empty Email In Box**. This is a kind of bonus from a feature I created earlier than 2022, but as a consequence of it, on September 30 I achieved Zero In-Box, and have kept it at Zero since. This is because QuickBase automatically files and saves my emails for me in their own Contact records. So the way I handle my Gmail now is, I either Archive or Delete. No folders to manage, no searching, no keeping-just-in-case, no Inbox Anxiety. Imagine the relief! It's wonderful.

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**Theme Four: Medical.** So they cured me of colon cancer in 2021, gutted me like a fish in May and I took six months for the incision to close completely.

Thank God.

Seriously.

One of the things they did during that surgery was remove my bladder, which the tumor had invaded, so now I pee differently than everybody else, and this new way, because of its imperfections, can stress my kidneys. The left one became so stressed that to relieve swelling, in May of 2022 they performed a Nephrostomy in which a surgical tube goes straight into my left kidney through a wound that never heals on my left side, and drains into a leg bag.

In subsequent months there were complications as my medical team and I learned to live with and manage this new detail in my daily routine. First the tube was unnecessarily long, so we shortened it. That was a huge improvement. Then there was infection that clogged it and sent me into the emergency room a couple of times to be treated for shock.

But thanks to a terrific local wound care nurse (Cindi), we kept plugging away and trying different things, and eventually she found a new product that she uses underneath my bandage that solves the infection problem. Now the wound is as fine as is possible for a wound that never heals, and things are flowing as they should. No more ER visits or shock.

Meanwhile I've been consulting with my surgeon and urologist, and we're currently exploring the possibility of a surgery in 2023 that could eliminate the Nephrostomy, and one or two other complications as well.

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**Theme Five: I bought a new car!!!** I still have the beloved Batmobile (red 1986 Pontiac Fiero SE with 350,000+ miles and a second engine) and it's running like a champ; and to the fleet, in July I added . . . (drum roll please) . . . The Minionmobile!



***Snickers proudly displaying the Minionmobile with canoe in tow last summer***

Okay, go ahead and laugh. It's a 2002 Chrysler PT Cruiser that I found with only 58,000 miles on it that I bought for \$6,000 on Autotrader.com. I jokingly call it my Twenty Year Old New Car.

(Hey, I'm an Economist. Do you think I'm going to blow tens of thousands of dollars on an asset that depreciates?)

Of course not! I'm going get creative!)

Since I bought it one issue cropped up, an intermittent no-crank problem that Rairdon's Chrysler just solved for me, it turned out to be fried wiring from the battery to the starter caused by corrosion at the battery terminals. By way of preventive maintenance I've also replaced a few other things, so now it's in new running condition, and I love it.

Ironically, it's easier to find parts for my 1986 Pontiac than for my 2002 Chrysler because the Pontiac is a special interest car, while the Chrysler company has changed hands so many times since 2002 that the integrity of their parts supply system has been compromised. So if I have difficulty getting parts for the car, the problem is more about corporate structure and transition than about the car itself.

Anyway it wasn't a lot of money and it really looks, feels, handles, and even smells like a new car, so I'll enjoy it as long as it lasts which, if my history of car ownership is any indication, may be at least twenty years, part availability permitting.

Oh and did I mention, the sound system is so old, yet so well preserved, it plays cassette tapes? So I get to play all my old tunes including recordings of my mom's voice and my son's when he was just learning to talk, as well as all my favorite old evocative mix tapes.

As you can see below, I'm adorning it to be kid-friendly in a Minion motif, augmented by my dad's spirit animal, Mr. Toad the motor maniac. Tally ho!



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Sixth and Final Theme of 2022: Independent Joy. Over the years, one by one, institutions that I cherished and relied upon for my own sense of identity, purpose, and meaning, have been ravaged.

The Boy Scouts isn't for boys any more and has gone bankrupt. They're suffering their own identity crisis.

The Orthodox Church took a huge hit insofar as both Russia and Ukraine profess Orthodoxy, yet they're at war with each other. And in my own archdiocese, the one with which I had affiliated for the past couple of decades, a scandal came to light in September that really rattled me and has prompted me to question everything, and shed new light on old problems.

Cancer reminded me that life, time, and energy are finite, and that I had better be very careful how I use them.

In response, I've learned to simplify and narrow my focus inside boundaries that are within my control.

These institutions taught me to be selfless. Under their influence, the question of what gives me joy or what I want never occurred to me. I learned to be a tool, a simp, a chump, a pawn, and a sucker.

Now, I'm daring to ask those questions. What do I want? What gives me joy?

They're new questions, and I'm not used to asking them.

The most joyful moment in 2022 occurred before Christmas during a deep freeze. Ever the dutiful eldest son, I had hiked to the top of Sehome Hill at midnight in the snow to check on the outside faucets at Stately Freeberg Manner, thaw them with a hair dryer, and remove the garden hoses that I had forgotten to remove previously, hopefully to prevent plumbing damage. My mission was successful.

Then, as an afterthought, I said to myself, what the heck? And I grabbed my old childhood sled and a kind of bicycle looking thing with skis instead of wheels on it that we call the "Snow Bob" from The Batcave, and I rode the Snow Bob back downhill to the Minionmobile instead of walking.

It was probably a two minute ride. At midnight, all by myself, a 59 year old cancer survivor reliving a childhood pleasure.

Well, those were the most joyful two minutes of the whole year. In the exhilaration of that ride and the memories it invoked, I forgot about everything and just enjoyed myself.

Selfish?

Maybe.

Right or wrong, I've given myself permission to ask those questions now. What do I want? What gives me joy?

I don't suppose the inquiry will cause me to become an unbridled hedonist any time soon. But you may see me smiling a little more, and seeming more relaxed.

Wishing you a wonderful 2023 and beyond,

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