

Cogito, Ergo Sum...

by Robert Watkins

God interrupted, "Sorry Ulysses, you'll have to go now; I hear them reading your interment prayer. You will be in My thoughts, and that will be sufficient. Good-bye...'

And with that Ulysses heard the first shovel full of dirt hit the lid of his casket. Rev. Hart was reading, "From the Book of Ecclesiastics, chapter 1, verse 7, *'The Sun rises and the Sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the South and turns to the North, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea and yet the sea is never full. To the place where streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome more than one can say. The eye never has its fill of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.'*"

Then, when the last of the mourners left, Ulysses reflected on his life and received his last revelation; life was just a river of thoughts and death merely a waterfall; after the fall the river ran on. In death there was but a calmer, less turbulent, stream of consciousness. In the beginning there was the Word. And living, so it turned out, was only a word- a word for the coalescence of thought in matter- a word for learning. I think therefore I am. And dying was also a word- a word for forgetting. Out of Chaos our minds were created, and to chaos they all shall return.

When you were born, and light poured for the first time into your blind eyes, and a doctor held you upside down by your feet, and slapped you on your legs; when your whole body jerked, and the air first rushed into your lungs- and shocked you, and you screamed- if you had failed to learn, right then- when the air rushed out of your lungs, and you screamed, and the air rushed into your lungs, and you screamed- had you failed to learn, right then, to breathe- the doctor would *not* have filled out a certificate of live birth. Had you failed to learn, you would not be living.

And so you had begun a process: the process of living. And soon after, when you had calmed down and stopped screaming, and continued to breathe, and breathed 20 or 30 times a minute; when you had breathed 20,000 times, and the Sun rose and the Sun set, and hurried back again to where it rises; right then- when your breathing had become automatic, and you slept and you continued to

breathe, and you no longer even thought about it- right then- when breathing became so familiar that you forgot all about it- that's when you began to die.

The process of living and the process of dying begin and end at about the same times. I think therefore I am. And when I cease to think, what then? When that last conscious thought drains out of my head, where do I go then? Back to the sea?

There is so much to learn- and so much to remember. My daughter, Nicole, had a stuffed clown named Kiko. I bought it for her before she was even born. I have not yet forgotten Kiko. Kiko had a red and yellow jumpsuit with big blue buttons and a green cone shaped hat. When my daughter was 3 mos. old, she was examined by a neurologist at Walter Reed Army Hospital and the doctor told me that her head wasn't growing. He also mentioned that this situation wasn't good, and that he wanted to run some more tests.

I didn't know what to think; everything about my daughter seemed so normal to me. I'd cover Kiko's eyes with his hands, put him real close to Nicole's face, and then throw open his hands and say, 'Peek-a-boo'. And she'd smile and get all bright eyed. So we shuffled my Nicole, bright eyes glinting, back and forth between home and whatever hospital or clinic could run a test that might tell us what was wrong and what it meant. But none of the doctors knew anything for sure, except that her head still wasn't growing, and that was bad.

Then a neurologist told us how bad. He said we should consider putting Nicole in a 'home'; she would always be a baby- even when she was 68 yrs. old. She would never learn and live like a real person. She might never crawl, or walk, or talk. And if she did manage to do those things, she would, in all probability, never be able to use a toilet, or cook an egg, or read.

We put Kiko away in a closet when Nicole was about 6 mos. old.

Descartes misunderstood; 'I think' is not a proof that 'I am'; it's the reason I am.

Like everyone else, I've forgotten that I ever wore dirty diapers and sucked my dinners through a nipple; and, although it is evident in the wide smile of every toddler, I certainly don't remember the joy I must have felt when I first walked. I can't remember anything about my

childhood before I was five. And ironically, the first thing I do remember is a book, a collection of words: The How & Why Book of Dinosaurs.

I'm sure I'm dying; to me the evidence is indisputable. I can't clearly remember a single face from my first years of school, or even what games we played, or what the books looked like, or the desks, or the chairs...

I don't have a single memory of any birthday I had as a child (although I'm sure I must have had some). I remember that I learned my address- 835 John St.; but that's all. I really wish I could remember what made me happy back then, or what I wanted to be when I grew up; for some reason it seems like that should have been a lot more important than my address.

The year I wrote these words, I turned 34. For my birthday I got a Deluxe Edition Scrabble Board. My eyes lit up when I opened it; I love words. Words are so much fun, and so important. Unfortunately, I think I may be one of the few people who understand the power of words or have meditated on why the Bible says, 'In the beginning there was the Word'.

Actually, in the oldest surviving version of the Book of John, chapter 1, verse 1, it does not say, 'the Word'; it says '*Logos*'. *Logos* is the Greek word for 'word', and it is akin to the word logic-thought, thoughts, and thinking.

When I was 25, I was transferred from Washington, DC to Hawaii. I packed up my family and moved. I still didn't know what to think about Nicole and the fact that her head wasn't growing; everything about her still seemed normal to me. Even the doctors were perplexed. When Nicole was 6 mos. old she learned to crawl, and at 8 mos. she started babbling; she stood-up in her crib at 10 mos., and walked at 12 mos. At 14 mos., she started talking, and by the time we got settled in our new house in Hawaii, Nicole was 16 mos. old, and she had learned the words for the things that were important to her: Mama, Da-da, booooby...

Nicole was sitting in her crib when I unpacked the box that Kiko was in. I took him out, and Nicole said, "KIKO!".

A year earlier, when we had put Kiko away, Nicole could not say so much as a single syllable. I was floored; I was astonished. I could not believe that for all those many, speechless,

Kikoles months, the word, 'Kiko', was floating around in her mind. But it had been, and that word came out just as clear as a bell, "KIKO! ". That's when I knew she would be all right. After that I never listened to another thing the doctors said.

And when you read this sentence, you will see that the Greeks were right about words. The words in this sentence are not ink, nor groups of shapes, nor sounds echoing in your head. The WORDS in this sentence ARE the THOUGHTS you are having when you read them. Words are the components of rational thoughts— Logos: logic, thought, thoughts, or thinking.

And it happens to everyone. You learn that things have names, and then you learn to talk. And you learn that when you say and do things, that makes other people say and do things. You learn to run and jump and throw your arms into the air and fall down and hug and kiss and skip and sing and dance. And then you go to school. And you learn to count and read and write. And you learn that there is a whole world outside of you, with trees and birds and mountains and oceans and fish and people in other lands. And this is what it means to be alive.

But at the same time, you also begin to forget. You forget that there was a time when you were a helpless baby; and you forget that there was a time when your mind completely mixed fantasy and reality; and that the world is a dangerous place. You forget the nursery rhymes, and the lullabies, and the games you loved; or that mud feels good between your toes. And then you forget that numbers aren't real and that television is a mystery. Eventually you start to forget the people you knew, and the places you went, and how much they meant to you, and how much you loved them. Of course, such a process can't go on forever; the time will come when there isn't anything left to forget- and then you're dead.

It seems I have let a number of years roll by unmarked. Anyway, whoever that kid was in kindergarten who had my name, I think he's dead now. I sure don't remember anything about him.

This year I decided to throw a birthday party for myself. I was hoping it would be something I'd be able to remember later on in life. It was a lot of fun. When I opened my presents, a girl friend of mine told a story about visiting her 68 yr. old father in a nursing home and playing Scrabble with him. She said,

"So I'm sitting there playing Scrabble with my father and he says, C, L, I, T; clit, hmm, I know that's a word; C, L, I, T— C, L, I, T; I know that's a word, I just can't remember what it is.' And I'm thinking, 'Please Dad, don't remember; you'd be so embarrassed you'd die' ."

Well, when I don't remember that C, L, I, T, is a word, do me a favor; just put me in a box, drop me in the ground, and throw a shovel full of dirt in on top.

In Ecclesiastics, Chapter 1, verses 2-6, it says, "*Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. What does a man gain from all his labor which he toils at under the Sun? Generations come and generations go, and only the World remains forever.*"

Ulysses understood the task before him and began his voyage into the unknown. He stocked his casks on the banks of Lethe, and pressed on. He felt no want of maps nor stars to steer by; he knew no guides could help. He just let the rudder drift, and without even the feeling of passing time, he wandered the dimensionless void. Little by little he forgot. Eventually he even forgot the feel of the wind and the smell of the sea.

And still he wandered, alone, except for the company of his dying memories. The great sea-faring archer insensible at the prow slept in dreamless sleep as his ship rocked hypnotically against the all conquering void, and one by one the flickering stars went out forever. Until, at last, but a single memory remained. Then, as this last thought was about to trickle out of his mind, Ulysses turned his attention to it, to inspected it, and to see what this last precious thought might be. He took it out gently, to fondle it, and he heard a familiar voice saying, "You will be in **M**y thoughts and that will be sufficient."

And Ulysses learned something.