

Writer's Block

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February Something, 2004

Happy Groundhog's Day!

FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND all you other poor souls who find yourselves fortunate enough to be on my email list: happy Groundhog's day! Yes, this may seem like an unusual time to be sending out one of those corny "holiday update" letters, but one must not discount the effect of procrastination, either.

First things first: I hope this new (well, relatively new) year finds you and yours peaceful and content! The older I get (and believe me, lately the years seem to be blowing by like, uh, so many summer fields), the more convinced I become that peace with oneself is both the ultimate goal and the ultimate reward we can seek as humans. The path toward it is bounded on one side by joy and the other by sorrow, and unlike with most journeys, the more we wander between these boundaries, the more quickly we reach our destination. May your road to peace be wide and well-wandered in 2004 and beyond.

It's been a while since I've communicated with many of you, and while I can't offer much of an excuse, I'd love to hear from you; please, especially if it's been a while, get in touch (contact info appears at the merciful end of this thing) and let me know what's new!

Ah! L'Amour!

YES FOLKS, THE rumors are true: 2003 saw yours truly go tumbling, careening, sailing headlong into love. I met Stacy Muszynski in February, and after several months of exploring her depth and beauty, discovering the complexity behind her quietly contemplative exterior, and learning to spell her name, came to realize that she ranks right up there on my Maslow's pyramid with air and water.

Stacy does PR for [WDET](#) (Detroit Public Radio), but is a writer at heart and will be pursuing an MFA in creative writing starting in the Fall of 2004 at some as-yet-undetermined, but extremely lucky, school.

Her writing is brilliant and beautiful, and I am certain that she will one day win the Nobel Prize for literature. In fact I am hard at work trying to convince her that we might as well start spending the prize money now, preferably on a new sports car. (For me.)

I've included a recent photo of us because, hell, that's what you do in Groundhog Day letters, isn't it?

The Business

AS YOU MAY know, in June 2002 I co-founded [Morningstar Consulting Group](#) with my friend Joe Morrow. I had worked with Joe at DiamondCluster International, the firm I joined after receiving my MBA from UT Austin in 1999. In early 2003 another friend and ex-DCI colleague, John Strelecky, joined us.

Morningstar has done relatively well delivering eBusiness strategy projects to Fortune 500 clients, but Joe, John, and I decided this spring to refocus on what we call [Business Philosophy](#): basically, applying concepts from philosophy to corporate strategy and leadership development. As you can imagine, this is a tough sell, but it's something we're all very passionate about and we've made some significant progress, such as a strategic partnership with LA-based Quantum Leadership Solutions, the firm that operationalizes the work of leadership guru [Peter Koestenbaum](#). See [www.ms cgi.net](#) for more info.

The Projects

IN ADDITION TO showering constant affection on Stacy and helping to build out the business, I've found time for a few other projects this past year:

Publications: Getting *something* published *somewhere* was an explicit goal of mine for 2003, and I managed to accomplish it with both business and personal writing:



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- **Business:** my article "[On becoming a great leader](#)" appeared in the August 2003 issue of *detroit* magazine. "Business ethics: How to build real values into your business" appeared in the *detroit*'s December issue (and is available at <http://mscgi.net/ideas.html>; the magazine is not putting this issue online).
- **Personal:** three of my poems were included in the collection (*off the mic*): *The Ann Arbor Poetry Slam Anthology*. You can buy a copy and check out other Wordsmith Press titles [here](#).

The Arts: My good friend Matthew Davis, a Detroit-area artist, was in the news for his [Belle Isle stone sculptures](#) this summer, which the city first commended him for, then tore down. I gave Matt a hand with marketing and creating www.mldavis.com, and in the process became so disgusted with the city that I started the group APLAUDD: Art for Public Life And Urban Development in Detroit (www.aplaudd.org).

I also started the Ann Arbor Poet's Forum (to subscribe, send a blank email to AAPoetsForum-subscribe@topica.com), which is just a mailing list now, but which I hope will grow into a larger online "virtual workshop" community.

The Family: I'm in the process of building out www.cavasin.net, at which I hope to create an online community for all Cavasins worldwide. If you find yourself a member of (or related to a member of) this clan, please send me family photos, facts, etc. and/or ideas of what you'd like to see on the site.

Soon I hope to also build out www.vincecavasin.com, which will be reserved for more personal rants and ravings, of which, as you probably know, I am full.

The Travel

I DID NOT manage to travel as much in 2003 as in 2002, but having Stacy with me made the trips more fun (yes, yes, this is what love does to a man...):

Ontario Wine Root: On 2003's first sunny spring day, Stac and I packed up the midlifecrisismobile, put the top down, and took off for the [Ontario Wine Route](#) (that's pronounced "root" for those of you who don't speak Canadian). After stopping for a couple socialist-government-metered samples, we headed to Pt. Pelee National Park to improvise a

picnic, skip stones, and sigh at each other in the setting sun. If you like wine and live near SW Ontario, I highly recommend the wineries there—they produce some really good, reasonably priced, and even unique wines. Of course the [park](#) is amazing too.

Texas Road Trip: In late May I traded in the midlifecrisismobile (aka the '98 Mercedes SLK—my beloved, selfless provider of stress relief, bank account depletion, and license points for a couple years) for a Jeep Liberty that has so far turned out to be more practical, less costly, and almost as fun. Stac and I decided to "break" it in by taking a road trip to Texas, via (cue *Deliverance* music) Arkansas' [Ouachita National Forest](#) and its trails. Despite a few "challenges" (U-turns are difficult on surprise-dead-end 4WD trails, as are flat tires and dead batteries, and also, we suggest never taking a "quick hike" on an unknown trail when it's raining and you don't have a compass), it was a lot of fun, and we highly recommend the park—it's truly an undiscovered gem.

When we managed to get out of Arkansas, we visited some friends in Austin, hit [Enchanted Rock State Park](#) (also highly recommended), made a couple stops along the [Texas Wine Trail](#)—where the wineries are as good and underrated as the Ontario Root, the sample quantities not quite so regulated, and the scenery even more splendid—and closed out the tour with an evening visiting friends in Dallas.

Northern Michigan: During the big blackout in mid-August we headed up to the Traverse City area, where we celebrated Stacy's birthday with a weekend in a rental [cabin](#) on the Rapid River, hung out with friends Clif & Vickie, ate awesome food at Lulu's restaurant (where Clif is a chef), and swam in the indescribably beautiful Torch Lake.

Southeastern Michigan: This is worth mentioning in case any of you in SE Michigan are looking for a convenient and very cool weekend getaway. In July Stac and I rented a "rustic cabin" at [Bald Mountain State Park](#), which is near Clarkston, about an hour northwest of Detroit. We were pleasantly surprised by the beauty and seclusion of the place. While the cabin seems like it was built for scout troops (it sleeps 20+), it's in a great location on a small lake surrounded by woods, and it's only about \$50/night.

Enough!

BREVITY WAS NEVER my strong suit, and here I've gone to three pages on what was supposed to be a two-page letter. But, for you lucky few (or those of you who have way too much time on your hands) who are still with me, I have a special prize! My contact info!

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Okay, maybe that wasn't such a treat. Tell you what, how about some reading recommendations? Maybe one of these will make your commitment to this tome worthwhile. In no particular order:

Siddhartha, by Herman Hesse: one of the most beautiful works of fiction ever written, and the most brilliant description of the concept of equanimity I've ever seen. Plus, you can read it in an afternoon.

100 Selected Poems, by e.e. cummings: if you don't get poetry, read this book, and you will.

20 Love Poems and a Song of Despair, by Pablo Neruda: if you don't get poetry, but you do get love, this book will bridge the gap.

Jesus' Son, by Denis Johnson: the greatest collection of short stories written in the '90's, and perhaps ever. The movie is also one of the most brilliant adaptations of a book to film I've ever seen.

The Monk and the Riddle, by Randy Komisar: a nicely written parable about doing what you love. Could be a little more subtle, but well worth the read.

The Concept of Dread, by Søren Kierkegaard: just kidding. Don't read this. Really.

The Plague, by Albert Camus: no kidding—if you want a very palatable and thought-provoking dose of existentialism administered through a literarily amazing tale, read this. But be committed; ol' Al takes about half the book to get warmed up.

Anna Karenina, by Leo Tolstoy: in my opinion, one of the greatest, most accessible books written in the

19th century. It's a commitment, but, on the bright side, only about half as long as *War and Peace*.

Built to Last, by Jim Collins: the book that started me thinking that all my theories on business philosophy weren't so crazy after all. To get a flavor for it, visit <http://www.jimcollins.com/lab/buildingVision/> and www.jimcollins.com in general, or email me for a summary article.

Leadership: The Inner Side of Greatness, by Peter Koestenbaum: the book that firmly convinced me that business philosophy was worth pursuing. For me, Peter defines the word "sage."

The Third Wave, by Alvin Toffler: an amazingly prescient distillation of the major "waves" of change that have swept over society throughout its history, their effects, and what we can expect in the future.

The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence, by Ray Kurzweil: what will happen when computers become sentient? I personally think Kurzweil is an optimist.

Fugitive Pieces, by Anne Michaels: an amazing novel based on the real life of a man who, as a boy, escaped the Nazis and was raised in secrecy by an old man on a rocky and isolated Greek island.

The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World, by Avi Shlaim: if you don't agree with me about Israel after reading this book, let's just agree to disagree, okay?

Guns, Germs, and Steel, by Jared Diamond: an incredibly coherent (and difficult to put down) explanation of how human societies evolved.

"Do You Have the Will to Lead?" Fast Company article by Polly Labarre and Peter Koestenbaum: the most succinct examination of leadership greatness ever written. If you consider yourself a leader in any capacity, read this. Now.

"The Age of Social Transformation" and *"Beyond the Information Revolution,"* Atlantic Monthly articles by Peter Drucker: two amazing and invaluable articles on the factors influencing the massive societal change we currently find ourselves in, and some very compelling ideas about how this change will play out.

That's all for this here update, folks. Peace and love to all of you.

-Vince