

AMERICAN WAY

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LIVING THE DREAM

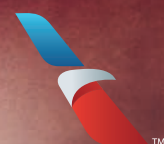
Blake Lively has a new movie, a new baby and a new outlook on life

GRAND ADVENTURE

One man travels the Grand Canyon with a bug in his ear (literally)

HOOPS, PARIS STYLE

Take to the court in the City of Light





EDITOR'S NOTE

By Adam Pitluk

THIS TRAIN IS NEVER GOING BACK

PLEASE DO ME A FAVOR AND, in advance, excuse the stream-of-consciousness nature of this column. It's an experiment of sorts that was inspired by one of the greatest stream-of-consciousness thinkers of the last five decades. And it goes a little something like this:

Back in October, I was driving to work on the same stretch of road that I've driven for the past six years. Only these days, what was once a 20-minute commute is now an hour without batting an eye. Seizing on the extra radio time, I was listening to *The Howard Stern Show*, just like I've been doing since my first commute to work in 1999; just like I've been doing since my early-morning high-school commute almost 25 years ago.

Stern was interviewing Neil Young, who is, in my opinion, the single greatest songwriter of all time. To hear the world's greatest celebrity interviewer — a position I've held for these 25 years of Stern listening, long before the world discovered his mainstream appeal on *America's Got Talent* — interviewing the world's greatest songwriter is akin to having a lunar eclipse happening in a vortex while waving at a passing comet. On Christmas. It was a moment not to be missed.

Midway through the interview, Stern asked Young about his songwriting process and, more specifically, how he continues to churn out melodic tunes with consequential lyrics after all these years.

"Do you spend hours a day sitting in a room alone somewhere waiting for

inspiration?" Stern asked. "When Neil Young is creating, how does it happen?"

"Whatever I'm doing, if I have an idea, I stop doing what I'm doing and I do that. If I thought of something right now — which I'm not — if something came to me, the guitar is right there; I'd just play it a little bit," Young replied. "The idea is to do it.

"That's why I like to record things right away. ... I don't want to think. I just want to do it."

Think about that for a minute. I don't care if you're a musician or a writer or a banker or a barber. If you're doing a job, it was your choice to make. The bedeviling part about work is that too much repetition makes us stale. Finding what works and sticking with it may ensure job security, but each day, that job has a little less luster. Not to get too stream-of-conscious-y, but consider the parallel between your career and your body.

When you were younger, your body



Neil Young

MICHAEL TRAN/GETTY IMAGES

was an instrument of success. The harder you worked at it, the more sculpted it became. When you injured it, you rested it, and it forgave you for the extra strain. Time passed, and that same instrument of success began to go out of tune, first ever so slightly. But then your attempts to dunk were a little more below-the-rim. And then one day, your body just looked at the hoop and said, "Eh, let's do an outside jump shot instead." Time came when you ceased playing altogether.

I'm speaking from experience.

Since I've been harboring these melancholic feelings spurred by time's cruel anatomical elapse, I've been trying to figure out new ways to shape my body while sharpening my mind. That's when my new life coaches, Howard Stern and Neil Young, inadvertently explained to my hour-each-way-commuting over-soul how to correct my condition and grow stronger. For although my body went from being made out of steel to resembling a Stay Puft Marshmallow, I'm taking Young's advice and applying it to my career. The body will come later.

Getting in the groove to write is the hardest part about writing. I imagine the starting point of any profession is the most intimidating. What's the first chord to play? The first account to open? The first hair to cut? Do we not all find inspiration at the most inopportune times, only to wait for the moment to strike again, usually during another inopportune time? With this column — and, dare I say, future columns and stories — when I feel something brewing in my head, I'm going to stop what I'm doing and write. It may come out a little coarse at first, and it might not make sense in the beginning. But it'll be recorded and ready to be worked on, and it'll capture the moment that compelled its creation. After all, Neil Young wrote three of his best songs, "Down By the River," "Cowgirl in the Sand" and "Cinnamon Girl" in one day when he was sick with a fever. Maybe it was the fever that caused the creativity, maybe he was bored while laid up, but he felt the music from within.

"Aren't you afraid when you carry a song around in your head that you're going to forget it?" Stern asked.

"There's a danger there," Young replied, "and you've got to keep playing it. And that's why I like to record things right away so that I get it before I start thinking."

And that, dear friends, is the greener side of the leaf I've just turned over. Whenever I feel the flow — on a plane, at the dinner table, watching TV or on my hourlong commute — I'm going to grab my notebook, put down my fork, turn off the tube, pull my car over, and write. The raw product might not make sense, as Young described to Stern, but in time, it just might.

"Do you get worried about reviews and people who judge your music?" Stern inquired.

"No," was Young's automatic reply. "It's kind of interesting. I wouldn't worry about it. It's them. They're the ones who are talking, not me."

And we're the ones who are listening. For it's as Neil Young once crooned: "I know in time we'll meet again/We come and go that way, my friend/It's part of me and part of you."

I'll always be a part of you.



Adam Pitluk
Editor

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