

Darrel Frost

**Portfolio of
Writing**

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Feature Article

This was a recent article I published on Medium.com, tying together a number of ideas relating to social media, modern art, and memory.

First of all, whatever your age or orientation, go see Pixar's new movie, *Inside Out*. If you need more reason than "it's Pixar," try this: it's a sophisticated, hilarious, brilliant, warm, beautiful, and perfectly paced film that – finally – stars a girl who is not a princess.

While nominally about the emotions in a young girl's head, the movie is also fundamentally about memories – how they stay with us, how they influence us, and how our feelings about them change.

One of my favorite scenes was one in which we learn that memories sometimes have to be cleared out for others to survive. I won't say more about it, so as not to spoil a truly beautiful sequence, but it helped me remind me of a fundamental truth about our lives: not every memory has equal value.

That might seem self-evident, but you wouldn't know it by looking at all the ways we track our lives. All of our apps and social networks aren't really built to support a life of change and variance. And if that's the case, maybe it's worth considering how these digital tools might be taking something away from us – and how the very act of remembering, left in our own hands, might bring unexpected rewards.

1: Recording

One of the differences between previous generations and our modern world is that, increasingly, our lives are tracked and recorded. Emails, photos, texts, calendars – they never really go away. More than their perpetuity, though, is their pervasiveness: we record everything. What you ate last night, whom you saw, where you went. Between the accounts you have on (for instance) OpenTable, Uber, Instagram, Fandango, and Yelp, you could replicate a huge portion of your life to an astonishing degree of accuracy. And that's not even relying on your credit card statements or the history on your Google Maps searches, both of which contain an unprecedented level of detail about your life.

Well, not really unprecedented, at least not completely. One of the 20th century's great conceptual artists, On Kawara, made a career out of measuring and recording his life. The Guggenheim curated a blockbuster retrospective of his work earlier this spring, and seeing all of these pieces together for the first time added an immense power to them.

His date paintings, for instance, in which he painted the date of whatever day he worked on the canvas: when you see one of these paintings, it's intriguing, but when you see hundreds of them all together, the sheer regularity of it astounds. Each painting is no

more or less than a marker of the day that he painted it: their very existence records his primary tasks on those given days. And he did this for more than 3,000 days over 30+ years.

Similarly impressive is his piece *I Got Up*, which encompasses about 1,500 postcards that he mailed to friends, once per day over several years, with nothing on the card other than the words "I got up" and the time that he arose that day. He also has maps recording his walking paths day after day, lists of people he met day after day...

Until the last few years, there is probably no human in history whose life has been so meticulously recorded. Which is amazing, but still I had one glaring problem with it all: after two hours absorbing thousands of details about On Kawara's life, I still had no idea who he was.

I tend to think that scale absolves art – meaning that we don't usually judge incredibly large or incredibly small works solely on their merits; their size requires a different (and usually more forgiving) rubric. In the case of On Kawara's work, the scale *is* the art. There's nothing there except the vast scope of his efforts. In these pages and postcards, we see the structure of his life, but it's strangely vacant. We can piece together the movement, but can't see the thing that moves.

On Kawara's work required enormous effort on his part (and on the part of his wife, it should be mentioned, who assisted him throughout life, albeit mostly in shadow). Recording things about our lives, though, is so easy. We do so much of it under the guise of "sharing" – our most unexamined and most celebrated modern virtue – and the remainder is done automatically, or at least by inference: even if we don't write "went to work" on a sheet of paper, we can tell quite easily that we were there by looking in our email archives.

More impactful, I think, is how present our recordings are. So much of our past is kept in front of our eyes by apps and sites that use the paradigm of a stream or timeline. They are built to facilitate a backwards glance as easily as a forward step.

I'm not saying that this is inherently bad, of course. This sense of longitudinal consistency can boost fitness or help us kick a bad habit, and all of us have, at some point, found the warmth that comes from stumbling on a years-old post and remembering a good moment. (The popularity of apps like TimeHop seem evidence enough of our love for this "accidental" discovery.)

Just like On Kawara's life work, though, I think these data outline our lives without describing us. These discrete memories, however well recorded, don't tell us anything about ourselves.

Maybe that's because they aren't actually memories – they're reminders.

2. Remembering

People who study these things (i.e. scientists) have understood for decades that memories are not fixed. The human brain is notoriously poor at objective recollection, influenced not just in how we perceive something at the time it's "recorded," but how we perceive the memory when we try to recall it.

This malleability might scare some, but it's actually vital to our own development. We constantly and naturally (and often subconsciously) adapt memories to help build and define our own sense of self. We tell certain stories about our past, we highlight certain details of an event, all to help craft the narrative we wish to tell about ourselves.

This is how we're able, for instance, to take an embarrassing or sad memory and make it instructive instead of depressing. (Any article or graduation speech about the blessings of failure is doing exactly this: taking a "bad" memory and imbuing it with inspirational meaning.) We don't just adapt, of course – we elevate certain memories above others, granting them importance in our lives out of proportion to their objective reality. A first kiss might be seconds long, but it might be the turning point of your life. A flubbed presentation might have been one of hundreds you've given, but you might remember it more than any other. Some of this is done subconsciously, but in the past few decades, psychologists have begun to recognize the power we have to control this narrative.

The psychologist and author Marybaird Carlsen, building on ideas developed by Harvard's Bob Kegan, summed this up poetically: "No one can hand us a ready-made meaning; nor is something meaningful until it has been born within ourselves and woven into the tapestries of ourselves."

Funny thing about emails and tweets and Facebook posts, though: they resist meaning. Twitter has no idea if one tweet is more meaningful to you than another, and no way to display it differently if it is. These posts also don't change – they're fixed in a database somewhere (data integrity notwithstanding) – and as a result, they don't allow us to change. Seeing these digital reminders in front of us constantly prevents us from triaging memories, the natural sorting and discarding and adapting and appropriating that we need to evolve.

It's not just our own sense of self that needs to change, of course. What about others' perceptions of us?

Every business publication has printed a story of a job applicant who was passed over because the employer found an embarrassing photo online. I've heard repeated stories from friends of mine who have decided to stop dating someone based on something found in a Google search. And which of us hasn't said "thank god there isn't evidence of the stuff I did in middle school/high school/college"?

We change, whether it's the result of conscious effort or the natural process of learning and maturing. But the digital artifacts of our history are omnipresent, unchanging, and unforgiving. Not only do

we ossify in our own eyes, we remain frozen in others' eyes. It's like always having your parents around, and they're always bringing out that one photo of you naked in the bathtub. We can't move on, we can't grow up.

I'd like to believe that seeing our beginnings would only inspire others to celebrate how far we've come – the delta of our lives, not the darkness.

Right now, though, that just seems naively optimistic.

3. Living

It's worth clarifying that I'm not encouraging you to delete your Facebook account or erase every email in your archive. I'm not suggesting that the only way to move forward in this life is by scrubbing the Internet of every mention about you (as if that were even possible).

I do wonder, though, if we might benefit from some distance. Distance from our earlier lives, distance from yesterday and last year and the previous decade. I wonder what would happen if we relied more on ourselves to make the connections between our memories, instead of letting a well ordered list do the heavy lifting.

Everything happens in context. (Even flying is only impressive in the context of gravity.) Sometimes, though, that context has a broader horizon than we realize: an event that seems innocuous after one year might take on tremendous meaning after five. Context requires distance that we don't seem to get with the constant accessibility of an unchanging past.

I'm also hoping that we find a way to grant others some flexibility. We can disagree, we can dislike another's actions, and we should call people out on destructive behavior. But as the records of our lives become more detailed and more accessible, I hope we can see them as an outline and not the full picture.

In a sense, I'm making a case to forget what is worth forgetting, to take back the power of telling our own stories – and, just as importantly, to let others be the author of theirs

Website Copy

M. Frederick Interiors, a New York-based interior design firm, asked me to simplify their vast menu of services into a digestible, elegant statement about their work.

For more than 15 years, M. Frederick Interiors has designed spaces for clients around the world that are expressive, elegant, and enjoyable. With impeccable service and a professional process, we ensure not just the residence or office of your dreams, but an inspiring journey along the way.

WE START WITH YOU

Whether a farm renovation in Pennsylvania's Bucks County or a high-rise penthouse in St. Petersburg, Russia, the spaces we design are unique because they originate from you: your ideas, passions, and personality. Your home might be traditional, contemporary, or somewhere in between, but when we are finished, it will absolutely be yours. Our international team of professionals, led by Matthew Frederick, works closely with you from initial planning and construction through final installation. Our firm stands out not just for the quality of our work, but the quality of our process.

DETAILS AND DESIGN

Elegance comes from impeccable details: how tight the fabric is pulled on a pleat, how distressed the gilding is on a custom cabinet, how a watercolor is paired with a Chuck Close. Our obsession with details extends even to the design and construction of bespoke furnishings, allowing us to create pieces and fabrics that are tailored to you and your home.

ELEGANT LIVING

We believe that your space should inspire people with its elegance, while also allowing you to live your life. With a mix of custom and curated pieces of the most enduring quality, we will help you find the best version of your home – one that, like you, comes through the rigors of daily life looking refined and resplendent.

THE WORLD IS YOURS

With offices in New York City, New Jersey, Los Angeles, and Russia, our team is cosmopolitan in both scope and style. We draw inspiration from every corner of the globe, and we partner with talented and trusted artisans around the world to create truly custom fabrics, furnishings, lighting, and accessories.

SPECIALTY SERVICES

In addition to our interior design and custom furnishing services, we offer the following specialty services:

- **Art Curation**
Whether you are just starting to explore the art world or are looking to refine your existing prized collection, whether you embrace oils or video installations, we offer a wide range of consulting services to ensure you have a collection that is not just impressive, but embodies your style. This includes everything from appraisal to restoration, auction strategy to storage and rotation management.
- **Project Management**
For both domestic and international projects, we can help oversee renovation or construction. This includes budget planning and tracking, sub-contractor evaluation, lighting and architectural design, and more – anything you might need to ensure the highest quality execution of your project.
- **Kitchen Design**
The look of your kitchen must work seamlessly with its function. We design and manufacture custom cabinetry for you to our proprietary specifications, using the highest quality hardware and tailoring the style and operation to your every need.

Head of School Letter

I wrote most of the head of school letters that introduced each issue of *The Blue Doors*, the Nightingale-Bamford School's biannual magazine for families and alumnae. This specific letter was the first from a new head of school.

A certain amount of newness is understandable – expected, even – in a setting where every year we have an influx of new girls and watch returning students grow ever upward. Our faculty and staff, too, tirelessly examine the curriculum and tailor their classroom presentations to fit each student – and in many cases, to reflect events beyond the blue doors.

We are in the midst of a few more changes than usual, though. Kitty Gordan – who, for 43 years now, has done as much as anyone to shape the academic life of this school – will be retiring at the end of this school year. In December, we purchased a townhouse at 30 East 92nd Street, and we will be expanding our schoolhouse over the coming years, transforming the space in which we learn and live. More abstract, but no less important, we are in the midst of our decennial accreditation with the New York State Association of Independent Schools. This two-year process involves an intense study by our own faculty, staff, and parents, looking at how well we live out our mission and detailing areas we believe can improve. It will be our work in the coming years to combine what we know with what we are learning in this self-study in order to map out the future of Nightingale-Bamford. Change is indeed afoot.

As a teacher of history, I think we have much to learn from the periods of development that we have gone through in the last 92 years. You can see some of these in the gallery of pictures hanging behind my desk: changes in uniforms, athletic teams, books we read in our classrooms... Through a stunning black-and-white photograph of a music class in the old auditorium – in which the silhouette of a piano evokes Arnold Newman's famous portrait of Igor Stravinsky – you can even see how our space has changed.

Yet when I peruse this gallery – a mix of old and new, with words of former headmistresses mingling with visions of contemporary life – the lesson I glean is this: we have succeeded not only because we have changed, but because in times of change we have not forgotten the things that matter. The excitement over learning, the hands held between friends, the confidence on the faces of our graduating seniors. In essence, we have succeeded because our work has changed but our mission has not.

With our purpose steady and our hopes flying ahead, it is an exhilarating time to be at Nightingale. Let's see what comes next.

Magazine Profile

One of the short profiles I wrote for *The Blue Doors*, the Nightingale-Bamford School's magazine, celebrating a recent publishing success of one of our sixth-graders.

The day we meet is Solveig's birthday, and school is out of session for parent-teacher conferences. She turns twelve today, though is self-possessed, relaxed in her out-of-school clothes, and very comfortable with words—an unsurprising trait given that we're talking this morning because she has just had her first book published. Our conversation reveals that she played a beautiful Cinderella in the Class VI production of Sondheim's *Into the Woods* the week previous. A newly minted twelve year old and already she owns an impressive resume.

The book in question is *Conversations with Poppi about God: An Eight-Year Old and Her Theologian Grandfather Trade Questions*, a transcription of talks Solveig (pronounced SOL-vay) held over a six-month period with her grandfather, noted scholar Robert W. Jenson. Her grandfather loves to debate, though from reading the book and talking with Solveig, I get the impression he enjoys the engagement as much as finding agreement. To illustrate: they once spent several hours on a science question involving mechanical levers, an answer for which could have been found online in just a few minutes (ultimately, it was; and Solveig was right). The morning after a particularly long night spent discussing "something about the universe," Solveig's grandmother suggested turning some of their conversations into a book.

Few in the house seemed to take the idea seriously, but her grandmother persisted and set up a tape recorder for future sessions. Her sedulous transcription of these talks appears mostly unedited in the final binding, though a few holes (Solveig, in her spinning chair, sometimes spun away from the microphone) were filled in after the fact.

Almost four years after these conversations took place, Solveig remembers most of them. "A few of my opinions have changed, but mostly I've just learned more," she says, alluding to some of her grandfather's guidance ("the talks answered a lot of my questions") and her affinity for Sunday school.

It's not just religion that interests her, of course. Several times within our conversation, she brings up math, science, and history, indicating they might influence her future choice of career. Music is also highlighted, especially her desire to become a choral conductor someday (fostered, perhaps, by her participation in the renowned Young People's Chorus of New York City). In fact, when I jokingly suggest that there seems to be little outside her sphere of interest, she replies evenly, "Yes, I've never met anything that didn't interest me, as long as it's fast-paced." But the idea of becoming a writer elicits the largest smile from this blithe sixth-grader.

It's certainly in her genes. Her father, Lucky, writes for television and mother Kari is a successful children's book author. In Kindergarten, Lucky helped Solveig write a mystery that took place at Nightingale, and even before then Kari had written words to picture books that Solveig had illustrated. More recently, Solveig has completed a novel entitled *Gentleman of the Choir*, about a young orphan who discovers a brother she never knew she had.

As we talk, Solveig has no word yet on when this latest book might be published, but then again, she has plenty of other things to get excited about. It is, after all, still her birthday.

Identity Statement

For a new piece at Nightingale-Bamford, we wanted a powerful statement of identity that would speak as much to the internal audience as the external audience.

Nightingale is the place where your daughter can become the best version of herself.

We know the power of one mind and one heart, as well as many minds and many hearts, to effect change: change a person, change a climate, change a prejudice, change the future.

This is the place for meetings of minds, for opposing positions, for academic strength and creative exploration, for well formed arguments and strong voices.

This is the place that welcomes questioning discoveries and challenging opinions, reveling in the conclusions and contradictions, honoring the extraordinary power of girls and young women.

This is the place where we rise to meet your daughter's heart and mind, where the support from her teachers is surpassed only by the support from her peers, where our commitment is to guiding the limitless energy and originality of her ideas into the fullest realization of her success.

This is Nightingale-Bamford.

Marketing Copy

A new facial and cosmetic surgery office in Seattle hired me to develop marketing collateral for outreach in the region; I conceived, wrote, and designed these pieces. The palette evokes the office's Northwest design: raw wood and pale green.

Less painful
than waxing.

Longer lasting
than highlights.

Easier than a
blow-out.

The next step
in your beauty
regimen is here.



Treatments are safe and effective way to remove wrinkles around your eyes and forehead. Best of all, a fifteen-minute treatment two or three times per year is all it takes to maintain results.

Schedule an appointment now to talk with Dr. Matthew Epstein about the best treatment program for you.

Use this card to get

50%
off treatment of one area
(forehead, frown lines, or eyes)

For more information, visit
greenlakefacialsurgery.com/botox
or call 206-641-7212

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Green Lake Oral + Facial Surgery is located at 7900 E Green Lake Drive North, Suite 302.

Our office, both welcoming and comfortable, is located in the heart of Green Lake, with easy access to both I-5 and Highway 99. Free and guaranteed parking is available to all patients.

We make
your patients
smile.



Referring your patients to Green Lake Oral + Facial Surgery guarantees they will receive the best in surgical care — and an unparalleled, hands-on approach to treatment and follow-up.

Our focus on warmth and communication ensures that your patients will love their treatment *and* their care.

And who knows? With clear updates sent to your office after every patient visit, you might end up with a smile, too.



The End
