

August 4, 2018: The State of the Jack: Way too long in gestation, this mix has seen tectonic mood shifts. I first imagined the mix a year ago, in a moment of revelry, thinking largely of myself. But the final version came into focus two months ago on Memorial Day, thinking less about myself than others. Mary had just been diagnosed with an ascending aortal aneurysm, but the actual surgery had neither been scheduled nor performed. I spent the weekend alone, worrying and recalling past Memorial Days, some lonely and others full of family and friends, but mainly thinking of the lonely ones. The cover image of the “Memorial Day Massacre” popped into my head, ostensibly as a reminder of bad Memorial Days.

But when I came back to the image this month, after the successful surgery and six weeks into Mary’s recovery, I laughed (at myself) to see a subconscious wish fulfillment in it. I saw an image of a man trying to protect a loved one from danger. Quite a way from my waking view that everything is my fault. After the surgery on June 28, Mary spent seven days in the hospital, coming home on July 4th. As fortune would have it, my niece Sarah’s wedding took place three days later in Savannah. Fran and Sally took care of Mary so that Tom, Polly, and I could attend the wedding. This was just the initial expression of the love and devotion all four of our children have shown for their mother, each of them stepping up to help. Mary did not spend a minute alone for the first six weeks after surgery. Her recovery continues to proceed well.

Hence the two sides of this mix, the surgery and the wedding, invoking my favorite themes of gratitude, resilience, and the ability to find joy in the teeth of life’s pain. As difficult as the summer has been, the concern and commitment that Sally, Tom, Fran, and Polly have shown to Mary (and to me) has been a beautiful endorsement and validation of Mary’s skill and indefatigableness as a parent. The wedding, too, recalled the many joys (and some of the demons) associated with family. The state of the Jack is simply the wrong question. I am the sum of the people in my life, starting with parents and siblings and extending outward.

Back in Brookville in late July, I spent a lovely evening with Mary, Tom, Sally, and her son (our grandson) Lincoln. Something Lincoln said, or rather his joyful effort at communication, made me think of the broad reach of family and particularly of my paternal Great Uncle John and my maternal Grandpa Walter (left and right, respectively, on back cover). I knew those sturdy progenitors and now I know the lovely Lincoln, linking them across the decades. I thought how much they would have liked to join the conversation, to know Lincoln and Lincoln’s mom and Lincoln’s uncle and aunts and all the rest. John and Walter, perhaps the most important people in my parents’ lives, were also huge, if not fully known, presences and models in my own life. But on one point, I must differ with my Uncle John who always said that blood is thicker than water.



I think that is Mary’s view too. Yet to say blood is thicker than water is to deny love; families start with love not with blood. So I am thinking here more inclusively about family, including Rachel who has been rock solid and supportive through the whole process.

The front image is Robert White’s painting, *Memorial Day Massacre Republic Steel Strike, South Chicago, 1937*.

White studied under John Sloan of the Ashcan school and served as a regional director of the Federal Arts Program

in Chicago during the New Deal. The painting depicts a dreadful moment of the “Little Steel Strike” for union recognition in the smaller steel corporations (U.S. Steel had signed a union contract in March of that year). Hundreds of protestors gathered at Sam’s Place, headquarters of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. When the strikers began to cross a field to picket in front of the Republic Steel plant, Chicago police blocked their way. When the protesters refused to turn around, the police opened fire, killing ten and injuring dozens more, including some permanently crippled from blows from clubs. Asked to denounce the violence, President Roosevelt responded by saying that the “majority of people are saying just one thing, ‘A plague on both your houses.’” The union lost that strike, after thousands of arrests, three hundred injured, and eighteen dead. But the organizing continued and, in 1942, the little steel companies, including Republic Steel, finally recognized the United Steel Workers.



Ecstasy: 1. Seasons (waiting on you); Future Islands: what did you expect? I’ve been obsessing over this song, and the live performance of it on Letterman, for months now. This mix is admittedly a bit heavy on Future Islands, but the many events of these twelve months were punctuated by the concert under the Roebling Bridge that Tom and Polly and Chris took me to. A beautiful weekend, conducive to an ecstatic, grateful relation to the universe. And “seasons change” is

appropriate to the months and mood changes when this mix has been in the works. **Side One: The Surgery** 2. Mistaken for Strangers – The National: I am impulsively up and dancing whenever this comes on. The lyrics capture something of my disorientation of these past months of political reaction, professional setbacks, and personal struggle; too much, too fast, too bad. 3. Lust for Life – Girls: Continues the theme of disorientation. But, yes, I just want a pizza and a bottle of wine (whine?) 4. Driveway to Driveway: Superchuck: Driveway to driveway is the way I think of my life sometimes, living in one household but visiting another on a regular basis and now, with the surgery and recovery, the back and forth more frequent. Talk about disorienting. 5. Candles – Future Islands: Painfully beautiful. I like that he sings “let me take it away” rather than something like “take it for you”; more realistic about our capacity for sacrifice. A companion piece, perhaps, to the cover image. 6. Snowstorm – Galaxie 500: I do fear it’s coming (it is here); but in a reverse of the Twilight Zone episode where the kid wakes up from a dream about the world burning up only to find the earth careening out of orbit toward a cold, snowy end. **Side Two: The Wedding:** 7. 1940 – Amplify Remix – The Submarines: I’ve been listening to this for a long time. “Now’s the time to be alive/To stay awake and be with me a while.” So affirmative, can’t waste the gift. Love the pounding in the middle (who is at the door?). But more recently the opening line struck me as illuminating at least some of the difficult aspects of family: “Something’s wrong when you regret/Things that haven’t happened yet.” 8. Unsatisfied – The Replacements: Can’t resign, retire, give up, become fatalistic; can’t waste the gift. 9. Havana – Camila Cabello, Young Thug: Almost took this one off; it’s everywhere now, even on a car

commercial. But I've had it for months, before the hucksters; found it on Obama's playlist posted on Spotify. Another good dance tune (played at wedding; John Jacob had heard it in Havana). 10. The beauty of the Road – Future Islands: Care and treasure the people around you. 11. Carry the Zero – Built to Spill; it's about faking, all of us faking, and how that makes everything fragile; what's THAT doing on the side about family? (Thanks for this one Randy.) **Gratitude:** 12. Song for our Grandfathers – Future Islands: companion song to the back of the cover.