How to Live

"I don't know how to live."
– Sharon Olds

Eat lots of steak and salmon and Thai curry and mu shu pork and fresh green beans and baked potatoes and fresh strawberries with vanilla ice cream. Kick-box three days a week. Stay strong and lean. Go fly-fishing every chance you get, with friends who'll teach you secrets of the stream. Play guitar in a rock band. Read Dostoyevsky, Whitman, Kafka, Shakespeare, Twain. Collect Uncle Scrooge comics. See Peckinpah's Straw Dogs, and everything Monty Python made. Love freely. Treat ex-partners as kindly as you can. Wish them as well as you're able. Snorkel with moray eels and yellow tangs. Watch spinner dolphins earn their name as your panga slams over glittering seas. Try not to lie; it sours the soul. But being a patsy sours it too. If you cause a car wreck, and aren't hurt, but someone is, apologize silently. Learn from your mistake. Walk gratefully away. Let your insurance handle it. Never drive drunk. Don't be a drunk, or any kind of "aholic." It's bad English, and bad news. Don't berate yourself. If you lose a game or prize you've earned, remember the winners history forgets. Remember them if you do win. Enjoy success. Have kids if you want and can afford them, but don't make them your reason-to-be. Spare them that misery. Take them to the beach. Mail order sea monkeys once in your life. Give someone the full-on ass-kicking he (or she) has earned. Keep a box turtle in good heath for twenty years. If you get sick, don't thrive on suffering. There's nothing noble about pain. Die if you need to, the best way you can. (You define best.)

Go to church if it helps you. Grow tomatoes to put store-bought in perspective. Listen to Elvis and Bach. Unless you're tone deaf, own Perlman's "Meditation from Thais." Don't look for hidden meanings in a cardinal's song. Don't think TV characters talk to you; that's crazy.


Charles Harper Webb, from Amplified Dog