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Jonathan Rotenberg

ME...MY GRANDMA...LOS ANGELES...STEVE JOBS...& 2012

I want to let all my Facebook friends & subscribers know that I have decided to stay in Los Angeles through the end of June 2012. (For those of you who have asked, I haven't made any decisions beyond 6/12 about my "base of operations.")

I came to Los Angeles exactly 9 weeks ago on a one-way plane ticket. I moved here to be with my 97-year-old grandmother for the final chapter of her life. My grandmother passed away 6 weeks later. While I had no idea when I arrived how long I would stay in LA, I've now had some time to reflect on this question and my work here.

There is something remarkable about California that I can't seem to find the right words to describe. California has always been—for better or worse—known as a place where fundamentally new ideas and trends are born that capture the imaginations of the rest of the world. I've traveled to this state more than 100 times over the past 40 years, but I never knew as a visitor what I have begun to experience here recently. The only way I can describe it is that the whole state is like a giant, gentle, alive, beautiful womb that gives birth to creativity. Creativity is in the air everywhere. I have never met so many fascinating, one-of-a-kind original creative people in my life.

In the same way that I find it hard describe the magnificent maternal, life-giving quality of this state, it is hard to put into words how significant both my grandmother and Steve Jobs feel to me in shaping who I am becoming in the second half of my life. It is also hard to describe the significance I feel that Steve Jobs passed away on October 5th and my grandmother was diagnosed as "terminally ill" on October 7th.

On October 6, I wrote an essay on my Facebook page about a warm June day in Boston 30 years ago when I first met Steve Jobs. Superficially, Steve is the man who—on that June day—introduced me to meditation and Buddhism (which changed my life profoundly); the man who, a month later, flew me to California for the most magical trip of my life; and who, a year later, did something unbelievably crazy and impulsive that put me on the front page of The Wall Street Journal. If you haven't read the essay, check it out: <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150362194264889&set=a.141032289888.101845.703419888&type=1>. I use the word "superficial" to describe these mind-boggling events because Steve helped me in ways far deeper to learn about who I really am and how I can best be of service in this life. For reasons I'll explain later, I have thought for many years of Steve as my Patron Saint.

I am spending the next six months in Los Angeles writing a new book about

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Steve Jobs. I believe Steve has been one of the most misunderstood people in modern history. Almost everyone—including his close friends and official biographer—have struggled to make sense out of Steve. The more people study his life, the more inscrutable he seems to become. Sort of like a modern Harry Houdini. People wonder: Was there a method to what he did? Or did he just get lucky?

One of the main reasons why I believe Steve is so hard to understand—or relate to personally—is because he operated so deeply at the intersection of two seemingly contradictory worlds: the modern Western business world and the ancient Eastern Wisdom traditions.

From the time any of us in the West learns to talk, we are conditioned to believe that there is one—and only one—way to learn. We learn in the West by ACQUISITION or ADDITION. For example, we acquire new skills to learn how to drive a car, do a job or play an instrument. When we see something new and unfamiliar, we understand it by ADDING on it. We add on our ideas, assumptions, analogies, filters, frameworks and beliefs to try make sense out of our world.

The ancient Eastern Wisdom traditions—which informed virtually every major decision that Steve made in his life and every strategic business success Apple has ever had—is based on an entirely OPPOSITE model of learning. Eastern Wisdom traditions are based on learning through SUBTRACTION or RENUNCIATION. The vast realm of ideas, concepts, and beliefs that we so treasure in the West (and the particular subset that each of us carries inside our head) can become the greatest impediments between us and the empirical reality of our present-moment experience. Because of our deep Western conditioning, our senses take in far less information than they are capable of (like wearing dirty eyeglasses); we can't distinguish between empirical reality and our "internal stories" about that reality (like always having a loud iPod blasting in one ear); and we become increasingly disconnected from the natural world and the vast the wisdom that is available to us in each moment.

At a simple level, the problem with so much of what has been written about Steve Jobs is that it starts with the Western paradigm of ADDITION. People try to force preexisting ideas, theories and frameworks onto Steve and convince themselves that now they understand why he was successful. This usually doesn't work because the authors lack deep empathy for Steve as human being and don't understand his personal spiritual journey.

Steve lived by a key teaching of the Buddha: "Don't believe something because it is conventionally accepted or because experts say it is so. Investigate it for yourself." Steve was always SUBTRACTING away the very concepts and ideas that experts proffer. Instead of their concepts, he would focus his attention deeply on the raw reality in front of him and the connections that struck him as important. Through clear seeing and discernment, Steve managed to stay 10- to 20-years ahead of everyone in virtually everything he did.

If you've ever bought an Apple product, there is—by design—a sacred moment in the "unwrapping experience." It may happen when you first open the box or it may be contained inside in its own box, like a jewel of wisdom. At that moment, against a stark white background, the words "Designed by Apple in California" appear.


I believe that California—and its mysterious, generative, maternal qualities—was very sacred to Steve. I have no doubt whatsoever that I'm in the right place to write a very special book in honor of the brilliant, wise, passionate, life-loving man who continues to inspire me everyday. I think my brilliant, wise, passionate, life-loving grandmother would have approved.


Over the coming weeks, I'll be sharing more about the book.

Stay tuned! — in Santa Monica, CA.

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January 3, 2012 at 8:44am · Like

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 **George Woods Baker** Wonderful stuff.
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 **Ellen Petry Leanse** On behalf of the State of California: bienvenidos, y bien hecho!
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 **Alex Rosenberg** Pretty building, fun elevator music on the ride up, but the food is almost quality.



...me up, but the food is airport quality....

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Sue Klawans Really appreciate the insights. Great idea to write a book.

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Tod Loofbourrow Very cool, Jonathan...


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Tim Fitzgerald I wish you well!

January 4, 2012 at 12:18am · [Like](#)



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