HAPPY NEW YEAR!
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It's January. Winter is half over, with the hardest half ahead - a slow climb to spring. I am always happy when we turn the corner on the year. I know the sun is strengthening; each day will be brighter than the last. I wander around here in the house, finding things to do, doing nothing, waiting for spring, light, warmth, and being outside once again.

If my mandala here in Big Rapids was not so perfect, I would move somewhere south where I could walk outside all year round. But things are as they are. I don't take to air conditioning, so the idea of being south but trapped inside with cold air won't work for me.

No place could be more beautiful than Michigan in the warm months. The beaches in the Leelanau Peninsula are lovelier than any on either the east or the west coasts, and I have been up and down both. The air here is clean and the streams run clear all the way to the bottom. It is not too rainy and only sometimes too dry. It seems that this is the place for me to be.

Or at other times I think that we should perhaps move to a larger city, perhaps back to Ann Arbor. Big Rapids is small and not very cosmopolitan. People are too conservative here for my taste, but they don't bother anyone either. There is not a lot of ambient culture. In fact, the lack of culture here is punctuated only by whatever one-night talent the town can import.

When I visit Ann Arbor from time to time and am around folks with a background like myself, I find that nothing is added. Walking through a Whole Foods store is like seeing a couple hundred copies of myself walking around. You can't salt the salt. Someone just like me I don't need to see so much. I have that covered. Maybe when I was young, it helped to cling together, but now difference is better.

When I temporarily moved back to Ann Arbor some years ago to sell one of my companies I couldn't wait to return to being just like I was there when I was younger. After all, I was back! But I soon found that you can't go home again, not because Ann Arbor changed, but because I did. When we moved back there I did my best to make a lot of splash and activity for a short while (like a kid in a bathtub), but soon found that when I stopped, so did it. The silence was deafening. I was like a ghost haunting the town, unseen.
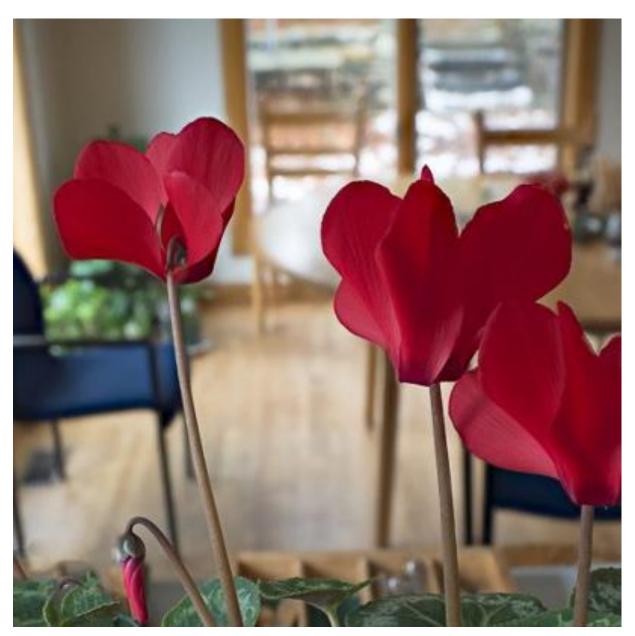
It was then that I finally realized that Ann Arbor no longer needed me. It was doing just fine without me. In fact I was superfluous and thereby free to leave, and I did. My feelings were initially hurt and my self-image disturbed. In fact I felt bad about leaving Ann Arbor and moving back to Big Rapids where our home, etc. was still waiting for us. We did not sell it. It seemed to me a shame and waste to give up all the culture and progress of Ann Arbor and go back to relatively little culture, back to the past. It was as if somehow I was excluded from the paradise that had been the Ann Arbor in my youth. Sadly, I resigned myself to returning to this past; we moved back home.

But something unexpected happened once I was in Big Rapids again. Realizing that Ann Arbor did not need me anymore (while initially disappointing) was also somehow freeing. What seemed at first sad turned to happiness. Before, I had always quietly (and not so quietly) grumbled about this little town in the middle of Michigan in which we found ourselves somehow

stuck. Now I was struck by the sheer space of the little place, the freshness of the air, the crystal water – the expanse in which to relax. And there was the freedom.

Since I was not really needed in Ann Arbor, I was free to go and do whatever I wanted for the rest of my life with a clean conscience. No obligations. Ann Arbor was no longer a memory that haunted me. I embraced Big Rapids for the first time and called it home, this after almost 30 years of living here. And here we stay.

So there you have it, another little piece of my life story told in this very early morning of the first day of the year 2011. I wait for spring.

Michael