

this thought sent me spiraling. i felt
 nauseous. i was overcome by a sudden,
 persistent need to reconcile what i've done
 with my life against all i might do.
 against all that maybe my parents hoped i'd
 do. my mind was racing. had i made a huge
 mistake? is it too late to go back to school
 again? can i even afford to? does mid-career
 even mean the same thing for an artist? i was
 trying rapidly, clumsily, to find a quick fix, to
 smoothie this over, to make it okay. it was like
 being a child again, a leftover impulse of
 trying to keep my cousin from crying after i'd
 accidentally hit him with a wiffle bat, afraid that
 i would be in trouble if anyone found out. but
 i already know i'm in trouble and the way out
 is ambiguous at best.

i started to think about my dad again. it
 was calming. he was good under fire. i
 thought about what he would do.
 he would sit down beside me and nudge
 me with his elbow. he would lovingly remind
 me that the light ahead will only turn one
 shade of green.



that light's only gonna turn one shade of green

my dad had this phrase – “that light’s
 only gonna turn one shade of green”. he used
 to mutter it to himself in traffic when he was
 stuck behind daydreamers idling in the
 intersection.

i held my dad’s hand when he died. it was
 almost a decade ago now. i can still hear his
 last words – “help me (help me, help me)” –
 punctuated by choking. he died of an infection
 as his cancer-weakened immune system let
 down its guard.

since his death, i’ve spent a lot of time
 thinking about the things that he said in our
 lives together. part of it is solace, for sure.
 more of it, i think, is the hope that maybe
 there are lessons i can still learn from him
 if i can just think hard enough.

i don’t know where he got this phrase.
 did he come up with it? he was good with
 words. he did word puzzles every day.
 maybe he saw it on tv. i never really thought
 much about this particular phrase until a few
 years ago, but i’ve been thinking a lot about
 green lights since.

an engineer is a responsible, stable career
 path. one that comes with a retirement plan.
 a far cry from where i am now - with no real
 plans to speak of. i did a quick google search
 which turned up a result stating that a large
 number of people change careers around the
 age of 39 at mid-career. *mid-career*. google
 suggests mid-career as a range between 35
 and 45 years old. at 35 with two degrees, a
 full-time part-time lifestyle, multiple hours of
 extracurricular, unpaid labor weekly and little
 to no institutional recognition, i have reached
 mid-career.

when my dad was sick, my parents
 could no longer afford their house. rather
 than deal with the bedroom i had left there,
 i put all of my old belongings into bags to
 be thrown away. just before the pandemic,
 my sister revealed that she had held onto
 the bags of my old things, had saved them
 for the last eight years. she said she
 thought i might miss them.

i spent time revisiting my old things,
 taking stock of what was worth holding
 onto and what i could stand to part with
 (again). it was mostly artwork, newspaper
 clippings, paperwork and photographs.
 much of it i remembered with a level of
 excitement i didn’t expect. there were other
 things, important things, i had somehow
 completely forgotten – like a tweengage
 aspiration to attend stanford and become
 an engineer.