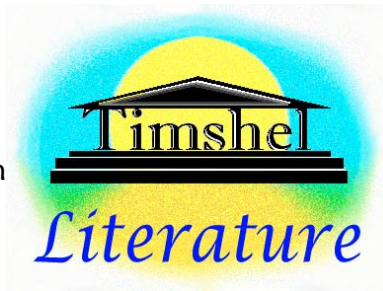


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Just Thinking, 06/30/03:

Waking Up to Dreams of an Ordinary Life

by Justin Katz

Summer has come like coffee reheated too long in the microwave: late, desperately desired, and scalding. My favorite time of year, spring-into-summer, was entirely absent. Instead, winter shifted into what felt like recapitulated autumn (only wetter), which lasted through the dregs of my wife's extended school year.

If memory serves, the school years of my own youth ended with plenty of time for the speed of freedom to be reached before June exploded into July on the fourth. My wife's current break has thrown her in the midst of the summer months, with July rushing on like a first-mile marker. In this one week, as it seems, a whole month of summer has slipped away.

Nonetheless, the marked shift into a new phase, with fresh imperatives and schedules, is a refreshing breeze that has returned to my life this year. Since graduating college, I've come to loathe — perhaps *fear* would be more accurate — the season of spring-into-summer. Each time I noted the first wind that soothed rather than chilled, I grew more anxious that my days would go on as they had under leaves and under snow. The summers brought less change, just as each passing season brought less promise.

So, the notable contrast between this summer and the rest of the year is welcome, but I've no time to visit with the feeling upon its arrival. There is much to be done in an abnormally short

season. Last summer began early, after a very mild winter. With the extra time that I had in each week, the months blended together, the first six months of 2002 being the season of publishing *the Redwood Review*. Much of that summer was passed with distribution of the book, almost like sightseeing.

This year, *the Redwood Review* will arrive at my step much later. Money was harder to come by; my Tuesdays of teaching made time short. My marches around the region handing out the books may seem more like sweaty August double-practices for soccer than a tourist's jaunt in July, as it seemed last year. The first edition carried the promise of a journey: not knowing what one might find or whom one might meet along the way. With the sophomore edition, I'm of a more realistic mood: gazing toward my future endeavors of trying to turn creativity into a career, I see that I've got a tough season ahead of me — and very little chance of winning the golden cup.

In some ways, this summer requires me to make very adult decisions for the first time. In retrospect, the half-dozen or so years just lived saw the fading of my youth. Our culture might call it the fading of dreams, the relinquishment of the quest to live “an extraordinary life.” Perhaps it is more true to call it the onset of reality. I don't know to what extent the clichés of the culture apply to my situation. Sometimes the reaction to such activities as publishing, almost single-handedly, a literary review leaves me feeling as if every other twenty-something must be similarly engaged.

If that is true, then I know only of the half that is not. The half that I know are all busily following their career paths, making money currently beyond my reach for tasks that are not far removed from those that they performed fresh out of college. Yet, they are buying houses — building futures.

The bare trees to come will find me seeking to structure a life in which a family can thrive. The first step must be to clear out the accumulated debts of premature adulthood. Laying down a foundation with some degree of stability comes after that. An extraordinary life can be fully

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appreciated only by a person who has an ordinary life to which to add the extra. But if the dreams, and the striving that they inspire, are to remain — which they must — I have work to do before I can seek even an ordinary life.

So, while it may be the case that this overheated summer is a necessary draft to wake me for the obligatory labor of the rest of my life, it also presents a moment to jot down the dreams with which I awoke. Perhaps spare moments will present themselves during the day to flesh them out into stories and to draw from them inspiration.