

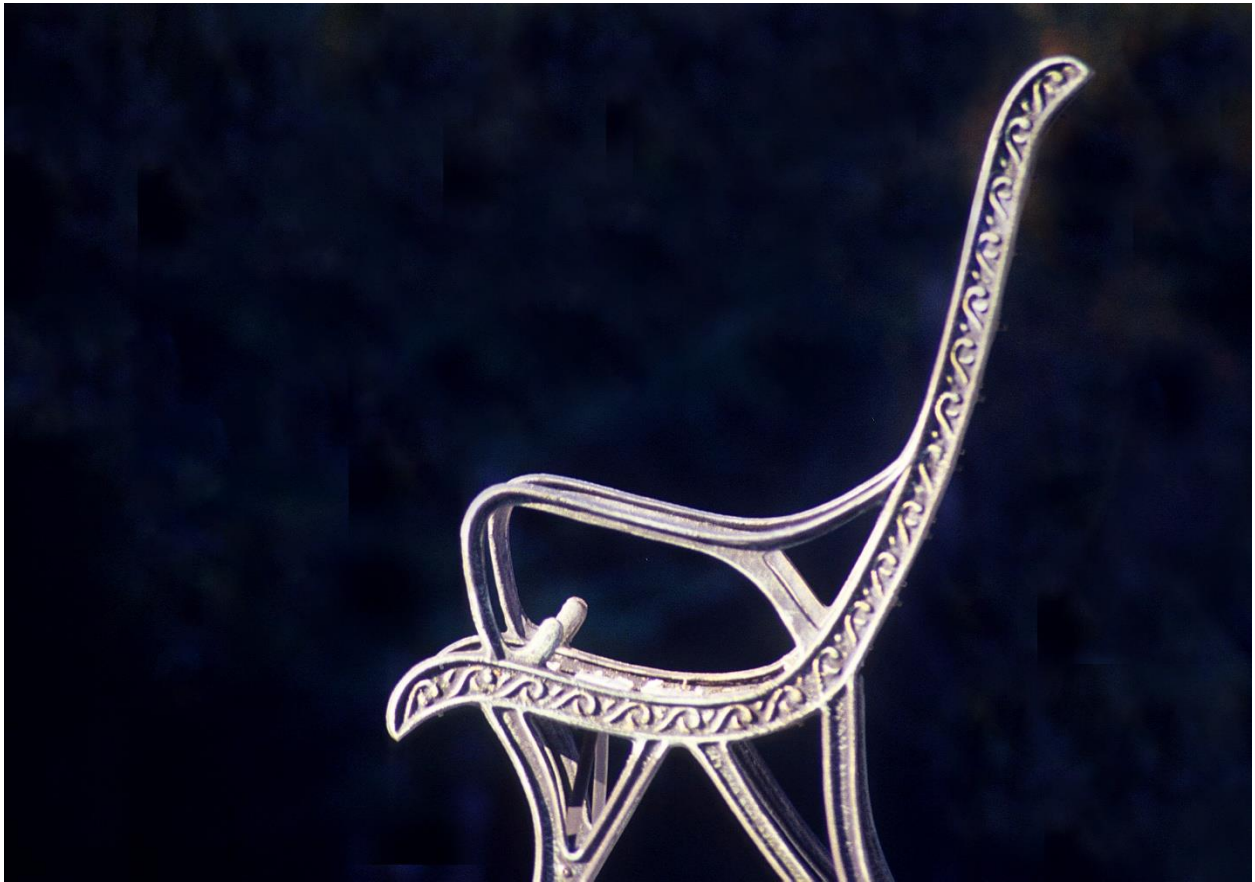
# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #46*

*January 2026*

from

**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



*Frigid January morning, my back deck*

Not being a great fan of the Canadian winter, as many of you know, this is the time of year that I long to be in New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, or southern Argentina. I remember fondly the many consecutive years that I purchased an around-the-world air ticket (good price if you make the requisite three stops.) I always began with a short teaching stop in Vancouver, continued on to New Zealand for a two-week solo motorcycle trip around South Island and/or teaching workshops in various spots with Sally Mason, then continuing on to South Africa to soak up summer and to lead two-week wilderness camping trips. Anyway, this year I have other fish to fry and will both complain about and celebrate what winter has to offer.

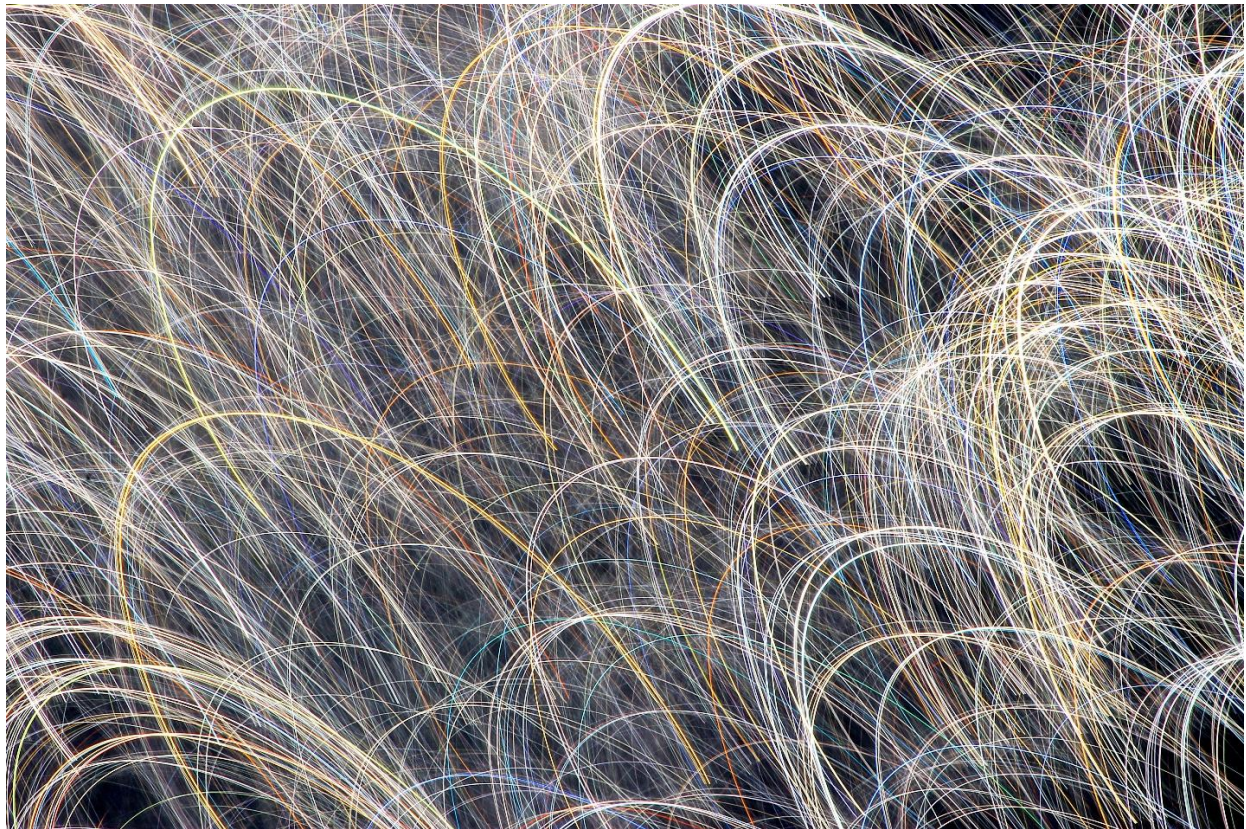
Here are a couple of celebratory visual offerings (frosted window panes.)



**You'll notice that there is very little colour contrast in the two preceding images, just hints of burnished gold among the blues. However, there's an abundance of tonal contrasts, ranging all the way from very light blues to quite dark ones. The colour contrast is so slight that the compositions depend entirely on tonal contrasts.**

**I always feel that to keep your thinking about visual design clear it's important to keep your language clean. For example, tones are degrees of brightness or light values and NEVER refer to colours. There is no such thing as a bluish or golden tone, as gold and blue are not tones; they are hues or colours. Neither is there a warm or cool tone; warm and cold also refer to hues. The extreme tones are white on the lightest end of the scale, black on the darkest. We sometimes call black and white colours, which they really aren't.**

**Now, after that side trip let's head back to winter, a time when those of you who love intentional camera movement (ICM) can totally abandon reality on a day when ice or snow is sparkling in the sunshine. Here's an ICM photograph of the back-lighted branches of a crab-apple tree coated with ice after a night of freezing rain.**



**However, making purely documentary images is an equally worthwhile winter pursuit, especially when you are making images entirely for yourself. One thing I've noticed is that the deeper the snow, the more likely I am to observe carefully what's near my house and the many ways the weather has altered its appearance. Another is that overcast winter days have as much to offer visually as sunny ones.**



*Part of the field below my front deck on an overcast January day*

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**When I was a child winter was my favourite season. The reason, of course, was the winter sports instantly available to a country child – tobogganing on hills both safe and too dangerous to contemplate, skating on ponds in the fields or, better still, on the thick ice of the St. John River, which flowed by our house. I never had hockey skates, because there were too few children in the community to form one team, let alone two. However, the long blades of my speed skates coupled with a bit of a breeze enabled me to glide effortlessly for kilometres up or down the river and to explore tributary streams that were inaccessible during the other seasons, except by tramping through the forest.**

**Beginning on the morning of my eighth birthday and continuing every day until I left for university ten years later, my father called me at five o'clock to work in the barns – feeding the large flock of hens, several pigs, the two work horses, and the dairy herd (no automation in those days) and doing the many associated tasks, such as gathering pails of eggs, separating the cream from the milk (we sold the cream to the dairy and fed the milk to the pigs,) and cleaning the cow stables.**

**Two and a half hours later I had a huge bowl of oatmeal porridge for breakfast and set out for school, walking my first year a kilometre and a half in all weather to a one-room school with a total enrolment of four, then catching “the van” to another one-room school for the next seven years. As the roads were often not ploughed in the winter, frequently the van was a bobsled with a big wooden box on it containing wooden benches and buffalo robes.**

**This one-room school had eight grades, which I loved, and for the seven years I attended I had the distinct honour of always standing at the top and bottom of my class, as I**

was the only student in my grade. More important, however, were the snow forts we built and the snowball wars we fought. Our teacher walked home for lunch; we were never supervised and nobody ever suggested it should be otherwise.

Every January Canada Post delivered the Dominion Seed House catalogue to our mailbox. I commandeered the catalogue as often as I could and took to the barn haylofts, where I buried myself in the warmth and studied the descriptions of all the flowers, deciding after weeks of careful consideration what I would order for my little garden of annuals that stretched out beside our dining room windows. (It was about 10 by 30 feet or just over three by nine metres.) The seeds would arrive in February, but of course I couldn't plant them until May, which ratcheted up my anticipation even more.

These many decades later most of my memories of winter are happy ones. However, I had a recurring dream in those days that told of another, unacknowledged reality. I would be about to board an airplane for the first time when, just as I started to climb the stairs, my mother would open the farm house door and call to me to get a load of firewood for the kitchen stove and the plane would leave without me. It was always winter in my dream.

The dream ended when I left for university.

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*I showed this photo once before, but here I am (extreme right) in grade one. The two tallest children were with us for just a few weeks, otherwise we were only four pupils. Our eighteen-year-old teacher is in the middle. She was scared to death of the mice in the school, which we all thought was strange.*

## The BIRDS KNOW



There are many stands or single bushes of highbush cranberries (above) and hawthorns on Shampers Bluff whose red fruit provide a late autumn or winter feast for both migratory and resident birds. Northern cardinals, cedar waxwings, robins, purple finches, and ruffed grouse are among them. These birds depend on the fruit for both nutrition (vitamins, antioxidants, fats and natural sugars) and hydration, and they save the most nutritious fruit for last, i.e. when winter is most demanding.

In winter, with most of their usual vegetarian food sources buried by snow, the ruffed grouse changes its diet, moving to buds, twigs and catkins. By far the most sought-after winter foods for grouse are the sugar and protein-rich flower buds of trembling aspen. Grouse also consume the buds and catkins of big-toothed aspens, birches, alder, willow, hazelnut, and ironwood. However, five years ago when ruffed grouse discovered my 600 azaleas, they took to the flower buds like a kid takes to ice cream, decimating the next season's bloom.

After a winter of failing to stem the onslaught, I said to myself, "There has to be an electronic solution" and, sure enough, an Oregon company, Bird Gard, provides it. After researching all the birds that prey on ruffed grouse, I sent the list to Bird Gard, who recorded their calls and cries on a file that slips into a small speaker device. Now, every eight minutes or so from November to April, the electronic birds swoop noisily through my garden and the ruffed grouse dine at another restaurant.

## BOOKS



This is my “book nook” and I’ve already been reading a lot here this winter. It helps that I don’t have a television and keep my cell phone in my car where it’s available when I need it, but otherwise doesn’t interfere with my life. Since these temptations don’t exist, I settle down with a cup of tea or coffee or a glass of wine and pass many winter evenings quite productively, at least in my view.

I’ve never read some of the books on my shelves, which doesn’t mean I never will, but others I go back to again and again, perhaps for just a few pages to retrieve information or refresh my memory of certain details, and every now and then I will reread a book from start to finish, which is what I’m doing right now.

The book is Anthony Stevens’ *PRIVATE MYTHS: Dreams and Dreaming*, which I first read in Lebanon in 2003. It was supposed to be warm on the Mediterranean in February, but it was freezing, including in my room. So I went to bed with this book and, basically, didn’t get up for a week. Dipping into it from time to time in the years since, I’ve stuck green or yellow “Post Its” on several pages, but I’ve long wondered whether or not, if I were to reread the entire book, it would rivet my attention as it did the first time.

It has, but in a different way. My first read was one of discovery, especially the section on the biology of dreaming; when and why mammals first began to dream. I’d long wondered why in the course of evolution we’d been given not only two eyes, two ears, ten fingers, ten

toes, and memory, but also the capacity to dream, as nature never develops and then retains something that is useless to an organism. Well, Stevens provided the answer, carefully explaining a problem that nature faced in the evolution of mammals and how dreaming and dreams solved it. This was more than sufficient to keep me in bed for the next 250 pages.

Reading the entire book for the second time, so many years after the first, is partly about retrieval of information I hadn't remembered, but more about solidifying what I have. Anthony Stevens, one of the world's most eminent psychiatrists and analysts (who died in 2023 at the age of 90,) made a substantial contribution to my life by opening widely for me a door that had remained partly shut.

Not everybody will find PRIVATE MYTHS as exciting or as meaningful as I. Some will find it difficult reading or of no personal interest. However, I write about this book because it is a good personal example of why settling down with a good book can be far more valuable than whiling away hours on social media or switching channels on a television set.

On my Kindle, which I use mostly when I'm travelling, I have books by my favourite mystery writer, Donna Leon, (great for airports and long plane trips) but also books I regard as highly valuable and will reread in whole or in part, such as Matthew Walker's WHY WE SLEEP: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams, which was another eye opener for me.

However, whether I'm using my Kindle or settled into my book nook, I find that alternating reading with short brisk walks on my treadmill provides me with the mental and physical stimuli that I need when it's so miserably cold outdoors that nothing moves except the wind and the snow it's blowing.

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Winter encourages me to take on one project that I would never dream of tackling in spring, summer, or fall – editing my beyond-enormous, pre-digital photographic library. In other words, my slides. I try to do a tough edit of at least one country or region every year, selecting no more than 10% of the slides for scanning as digital files.

This year my hope is to go through all my slides of the high Arctic, both Canada and Greenland, which span the years from 1970 to 2015 and then to create a fictional photographic journey, "Out of the Northwest Passage" in which I travel all the way from Ulukhaktok (formerly Holman) in the west to Sanannguavik (or Alexandria Fjord) in the east, then across Davis Strait to Qaanaaq in Greenland, the world's most northerly community, and down Greenland's west coast to Kangerlussuaq. I say a "fictional" journey, because I've made the trip from east to west and west to east (or parts of it) several times, but want to show the images as one continuous trip.

My first trip was by air to the western Arctic as part of the small press party accompanying then Governor-General Roland Mitchner and his wife Norah on their visit to small communities all the way from Old Crow in Yukon to the far north communities of Tuktoyaktuk and Ulukhaktok in the Northwest Territories. My second trip was a ten-day camping trip on the shore of the huge fjord, Sanannguavik, when the sun never set and yellow poppies were blooming at the edge of glaciers. After those trips, I was a resource person on several of Adventure Canada's cruises in the high Arctic.

I've been to Antarctica twice, but given the choice, I'd far rather make another trip to the Arctic – or create one with my photographs.

## WHY?



I made this January photograph in Argentina many years ago when I asked a bus driver if he would stop briefly. The red, white, and blue landscape is among the most unusual I've ever seen, but it was more than that. The red sorrel blooming in the foreground, indicative of heavy grazing by sheep, simply stopped and the white sand began. Even when I was standing on the site it seemed to make no sense. Why does this landscape exist?

Although there has to be a perfectly good reason, these many years later the scene retains its mystery and its symbolic value for me.

I think that my experience is a common one. Everybody seems to have unanswered, probably never-to-be-answered WHY questions for which a scene, a picture, a piece of music, or some other symbol triggers a sense of mystery. What would life be like without them?

Every now and then it's important to stop the bus.

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**"The unknown is the realm where all possibilities exist."**

*Deepak Chopra*

**"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science."**

*Albert Einstein.*

As I mentioned at the beginning of my letter, I'm staying home this winter. However, you can safely bet I'll be thinking now and then about the many years that I spent much of February and all of March in Namaqualand, where I led a two-week wilderness camping tour, the first week tenting near this Atlantic coast beach.



My photographer friends Charles Needle and John Hogg and their spouses joined me for two weeks during the Namaqualand wildflower season in 2024. Charles, who has been teaching photography for years in gardens in North America and Europe, has announced that he will be facilitating a workshop there in late August 2026. (More information [here](#).)

The wildflower bloom in Namaqualand is one of the natural wonders of the world, which is why I taught workshops there for more than 20 years during the flower season and am delighted that Charles is offering this opportunity.

If you are interested, you can [pre-register here](#) for my complimentary ZOOM presentation on "The Flora and Ecology of Namaqualand" I will be delivering on January 8. This is the same program I presented last August to the national congress of the Photographic Society of South Africa.

## About AI

*David Laxer (excerpt from a longer article)*

AI, in its own way, reminds me of Viagra. Not in the obvious sense, but in what both expose about human intent.

Viagra only works when the desire is already present. It doesn't invent longing, or curiosity, or connection. It won't help someone who doesn't like intimacy suddenly discover a passion for it. It won't restore the emotional fabric that was never woven in the first place. It simply amplifies whatever intent is already alive in the person taking it.

If there is none, nothing happens.

If there is a spark, it strengthens it.

But it never manufactures the spark

AI feels remarkably similar.

If you come to it with clarity—an idea, a point of view, a question you genuinely want to explore—it can take you somewhere meaningful. It can stretch your thinking, sharpen your language, and help you articulate what was waiting beneath the surface.

But if you come to it empty-handed, hoping it will tell you what you mean, or who you are, or what you should think... you get something strangely lifeless. Words that look real but feel hollow. Sentences that perform the shape of meaning without any of the substance.

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**“Technology alone is not enough. It's technology married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our hearts sing.”** *Steve Jobs*

**“The question of whether a computer can think is no more interesting than the question of whether a submarine can swim.”** *Edsger W. Dijkstra*

**“The greatest threat facing humanity is not technology, but the way we use it.”**  
*Yuval Noah Harari*

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**(Some unrelated gems)**

**“Whatever you're meant to do, do it now. The conditions are always impossible.”** *Doris Lessing*

**“A lot of contemplation happens in bathtubs.”**  
*Sarah McLachlan*

## TWENTY- SIX and Counting

The last week of January will mark the 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my two liver transplants, the beginning of my six-week induced coma and long recovery to full health. I can't possibly overstate my gratitude to everybody who contributed to my being alive and well today.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!



**Gelukkige Nuwe Jaar!**

**Bonne et heureuse année!**

**Happy New Year!**

**FREEMAN**

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