

Preplanning

B: It's not every day one receives a mailer from a mortuary service seeking one's business. "Preplanning." They said.

A: Sick bastards.

B: Was also wondering how preplanning was different than planning.

A: Preplanning is the planning we do before the planning. Preplanning should not be confused with planning proper. Planning proper uses a whole different aspect of the human brain and mind. And yes, the brain and mind are different, too. Just like the goat and the orange, or the candy and the girder, or the planning and the preplanning. In college, I majored in planning, thinking I would be a planning consultant, but I ended up being friends with a lot of people who were taking preplanning is how I know all this stuff.

B: This clears up much. Thank you. One further question, if I may trouble you. Is there postplanning as well?

A: There is a field called postplanning studies (which is something like preplanning, just with less pre- about it, if that makes sense), but many consider the field as "emerging." Still, the better graduate schools offer coursework in postplanning, but the best you could do is get a degree in planning (or, for that matter, preplanning) with a concentration in postplanning studies, though some employers do wonder about how quote-unquote committed the postplanning studies students are to the field of planning (or, for that matter,

preplanning). It's still early is the point with postplanning. Not that it isn't too early to plan. Or preplan.

B: So, if I'm hearing you right, there is an opportunity for pre-post-planning studies as well? To fill in that period when one is thinking about postplanning studies?

A: It has been suggested in some quarters, yes.

B: I'm sorry to bother you further, over such seemingly niggling issues, but I wanted to ask another question. Among planners—pre-, regular, pre-post, and post—are there rivalries? That is, is there some sense that the other fields are ponderous, almost duplicating the material? Is there a firm hierarchy generally acknowledged in the literature of the field? There is a literature, yes? Peer-reviewed?

A: It's no bother, believe me. I enjoy answering your questions about the planning field (as well as, of course, the preplanning field). You are correct to suppose there is some intramural jockeying and squabbling between the various practitioners. Most of it is good-natured. Occasionally you see reports of blood and its being drawn, but those are really special cases, far from the rule. Still, is this a surprise? Are there not squabbles in other areas, particularly areas of emergent knowledge? What about people who keep goats and people who make TV sets? That is a rhetorical question. To turn back to planning, the root of the conflict concerns preplanners and their growing insistence that they are somehow (don't ask me how) qualified by their coursework (???) in preplanning to take on all the tasks of a fully accredited planner. The problem is quite rampant.

B: It sounds like you harbor some antipathy for the preplanners. It would seem—and I am basing this on no real evidence—that the preplanners may take the mount as the First Cause, as it were, the Original Movers, in other words. That is to say, that without the preplanners, the others would not follow. Am I right to suppose

this, that there is an intrinsic atavistic quarrel at the heart of it? And, yet, one would also think the postplanners would have the information already, and that they would take the flag and wave it for their own peers. I wasn't aware, either, about the accrediting process, but, just now in thinking it over, I thought: Well, of course! There must be standards. How can anything be planned without standards?

A: My uncle was a preplanner.

B: Did he come by it honestly? Or was it something he took up? I mean to say, was the preplanning apparent before you actually saw notice of it?

A: I would really prefer it if we not talk about my uncle.

B: My uncle was never much of a planner. He fell into things. The day would start and he'd be in it. He couldn't extricate from this condition, like everyone can't, of course. But, so, anyway, we'd just drift along beyond this, almost in a proxy-planner sense.

A: I know this tender admission about your uncle is supposed to elicit from me something similar, but I really would rather not get into this area.

B: My uncle ate with his bare hands, even when he had forks near his plate.

A: That's highly irregular for an adult of the species, as you and your family no doubt noted. But couldn't it have been part of his plan all along, to eat that way? One shouldn't interpret departures from convention as lack of any plan. It's like a professor of mine once asked me—a professor of preplanning, by the way—he said, "Do I look like a goatherd to you?" And the fact was, when he put it that way, he didn't look at all like a goatherd, but I had nonetheless been

thinking of him that way. Which must have been why I showed up at his office leading several healthy goats on rope leashes.

B: I wonder if goats plan on being goats, or if the goatherd plans it either. Where does it start, really? I try to think of it. The changes. Does one slowly come to the decision, around twelve years old, one day, and think first of his life before and how it contained maybe no goats and then, with just a thought, his life will be filled with goats, by just thinking of them? Readjusting his view of himself, to goating? I mean, goatherding?

A: I suppose one just knows, like how one knows when one is in love, or like how the judge knows that the book is obscene. Goats know, too, of course. As Montaigne writes:

It is ordinary around where I live to see village women, when they cannot feed their children from their breasts, call goats to their aid; and I have at this moment two lackeys who never sucked woman's milk for more than a week. These goats are promptly trained to come and suckle these little children; they recognize their voices when they call out, and come running.

B: Montaigne seems like a classic preplanner type. I bet he could teach, even. The point being, however, that if you are of the human type, though sustained by goat milk and the interspecies warmth of goat breast, does one attribute one's development, one's mental acuity or sluggishness, or the sluggishness of acuity, to the goat or the other mother? Should there actually be this division among species, though I hear that we have dominion?

A: Of course, Montaigne is a preplanner! The planners try to claim him for their side, but the preplanner claim remains stronger. Even I admit that. Take, for example, Montaigne's thoughts on fooling the goat (or for that matter, the suckling child). Here's where he really flashes his preplanner colors:

If any other than their nursing is presented to them [them being the goats of course], they refuse it; and the child does the same with another goat. I saw one the other day whose goat they took away because his father had only borrowed her from a neighbor of his; he never could take to the other that they presented to him, and doubtless died of hunger.

B: So goats know. They know by either planning to know or by knowing to plan on which kid it is that takes suck. Too, it seems the suckler is a knower, which seems to nearly bring up a kind of pre-planning planner, a pre-preplanner. Yes, in fact, I think I am going to insist on this point. What is knowing instinctively but the unknown planning before the preplanning? Ergo sum: pre-preplanning.

A: As you know, I was a suckling child. My goat was named Henry. The origin of her name is a long, largely pointless story which we will not get into at this time. All you need to know is that my uncle, the preplanner, raced goats, largely in upper Maryland but sometimes in lower Delaware, provided the purse was large enough to justify the travel expense. There used to be a motel outside Dagsboro—and still may be—that would accommodate the goats. It was near the track, but the nightly rate was not cheap. Anyway, Henry was my uncle's prize nanny goat, too old to run great distances but still with plenty of nursing years left in her. She was, however, not always kind to me. Sometimes she denied me suck. Sometimes she pretended I was some other child. The charades and the feints and counterfeits could get quite baroque. When Henry passed on of what my uncle said were natural causes, I became close to the other racers. I developed friendships, I guess you could say. So I have seen the intelligence of the goat firsthand. I can testify to the animal's cunning. I have known goats to tear open a seventy-five-pound bag of feed, empty it into their mouths and, without swallowing any more than they need for sustenance, transfer that feed from the bag to various ingenious safe places, where they can get to it later. No dumb horses are these.

B: I have no goat stories to speak of, remarkably enough. How is it that a man can get to my age and not have one or dozens? Are goat stories dwindling? In my job there are ways to aggregate this information, to see certain components over time, with different variables. You can pick and choose, and see trends, trends that you may not have known existed previously. You may have had hunches, but who doesn't? Hunches are like garbage in a field—this garbage will blow into other fields soon enough. And then what do you have? Hunch garbage—hunchage—without any real reference to the original field. So, you just have to dispense with it and get the aggregator to tell you what to think. This is helpful to me personally, even in matters of love. You could probably work out a report on the variables involved in why your goat Henry refused you his nipples.

A: Henry was a gray-bearded she-goat named after my father. My uncle, of course, being the one who named all the beasts. That was his idea of a joke, I guess.

B: The blowing through the field, the garbage . . . goats . . . hunches . . . even hunches in jokes . . . that one would plan for goat jokes, feeling something among the other that there is receptivity to this humor, it strikes me that this could all be categorized. Even the failure to categorize could be categorized. The categorizer is something like an accessory to the planner. Or maybe the Ur-planner, the one who sees the little movements of the planning, all of the planners, as part of a system they cannot describe. But this leaves me wondering who could categorize the categorizer? And the goat, the dead goat Henry, who is a female, still present, though dead, active in a way. A floating goat.

A: My father, too, is dead. In the mid- to late-60s, when competitive goat racing was at the peak of its popularity in the United States, my father and uncle worked closely together. They were a perfect team: brothers, preplanner and planner. Father trained the goats and cared for them. He slept in their stalls when they were ill and served as

midwife to the birth of over four hundred kid goats during his tenure. My uncle wrote the checks. He also had this scheme whereby he was paying a fellow in Switzerland, a real shadowy figure, to harvest and flash-freeze extract from the pituitary gland of the alpine ibex. My father took shipment of these packages, delivered by a rotating cast of international couriers. During the run-up to big races, Father injected untraceable amounts of the secret serum into my uncle's racers. For a while, the plan worked great; the goats were winning, and my uncle took home the Breeders' Cup for four years running, an unheard of level of domination in the topsy-turvy world of competitive goat racing. But then the goats started to win by too great a margin. They became too fast. My uncle had those goats running flat-out, like fucking greyhounds. It was nuts. Father told him he needed to ease up on the extract, maybe lose a few races, even, just to affect the appearance of competitiveness, but my uncle, he didn't like to lose. Anyway, long story somewhat shorter, the Association of Racing Goat Breeders took an interest, and not long after, my uncle was speaking to all the major goat-racing journalists about how he was quote-unquote cooperating fully with the investigation into my father's activities, which he, of course, knew absolutely nothing about. Well, Father was banned for life from racing and then kicked out of my uncle's compound. Only time I ever saw him was when he'd meet me and my mom at restaurants which had in common their proximity to a turnpike. He favored those hybrid joints that are like a combination Pizza Inn/Burger King. He always had some gift for me, too, like a T-shirt with something on it that made no sense and was too big anyway. When I was nine, he died. He was staying in a motel outside of Dover, Delaware. He'd paid for two weeks in advance and then barricaded himself in the room. When check-out time came and went, the cleaning lady, who was also the manager and owner, pushed her way in. The coroner said he'd been dead for a while.

B: It's called Sierran Views, the name on the mailer, and so it must be the idea that the dead would be looking at mountains, though their eyes would be missing. It was once mentioned to me that scratchy

lenses were placed under the lids of the deceased to keep them from popping open at inconvenient times, like wakes, to keep that staring hidden away. What is it that frightens us so much about staring, even the staring of a corpse? Maybe it's that sense that we may be looking into a final mirror, the last look, in the eyes, the way we'll be. I wonder, too, whether goats are given bells in heaven. I mean, what point could a bell serve up there? Unless there's a second heaven. A place dreamed of when one is already in heaven, a better place to be, a better heaven. The bells on the dead goat necks may ring in the one heaven toward the thoughts of the second, the hopes of such, the hopes of goats in heaven.

A: At my father's funeral, they lay him in a wooden coffin, with the top off, and the people came to look at him, at the body, and my mother brought a bible and stuck it in with him, and when I told her how I never had seen him read once, she told me just to hush, and I overheard two men talking, and one of the men asked did the other get a chance to see the body, like it was something, and the other said, They did a good job, I thought, and the first one said, Real good job, considering, and the second one said he had thought that as well. They put screws in the top of the coffin, in holes they had already made, and it was the job of all of us who knew my father to put the screws into the coffin, and I tried to do my part, but it was hard to turn the screwdriver, and my uncle took from me the tool and said, Let me help you with that, little buddy. After all that business, the body was put down into the hole, and we went to my uncle's house, and the grown-ups stood around in one room, and my cousins and I were in another, and one cousin was saying why they put the screws in the top was to keep out the grave robbers, some of whom look for valuables and others of whom will steal the organ meat right out of the hole if they can. He had seen a program on television, he said, and another cousin said that was wrong, that the screws were there to keep the body in because some bodies don't want to be buried, and if they get out, they walk the earth for a long time, looking.