

Okay, borrowed. That's the tricky one. And passion. For something borrowed. You're going to have to forgive me, because I'm going to stretch what you might have thought of as "borrowed" in order to work this one out.

Actually, it's really easy, you see. For one thing, as you get to be a little older, you'll find that all that you're doing, you're doing on borrowed time. And when you think of how precious that is, you can start to feel really passionate about it. I do.

When you're a kid, you really don't grasp mortality at all. You really do believe that you are immortal. Even as you grow older, for most of us, the real signs of mortality take a long time to show up, or at least to the point where we acknowledge them. When I spent five days on a cot in the hallway of a provincial Italian hospital in Reggio di Calabria back in September of 2016 after suffering a number of grand mal seizures, I had a lot of time to do just that. You can be sure I realized how lucky I was to be around to think about it at all, and how every day that we can enjoy all that life has to offer us is another gift that we are borrowing for just the time that we are around to enjoy and experience it.

That's the view from 20,000 feet. When you get down to ground level, it's not hard to see how this translates to all that we do from one day to the next. For me, as a kid, my

brother and I would sit at our nana's feet as she set up shop in our kitchen when she would come to visit for a week or two and watch everything she did to make the magic that we would eat every night. From her, the real gift wasn't the meals that she created and cooked, it was the love of cooking and baking that she passed on to both me and my brother. In my mind, that's not something that I have, something that expires when I'm no longer around to work with it. It's knowledge and expertise and tradition that I'm borrowing, that I've been using all my adult life and that I've made a conscious effort to pass on to our kids by having them sit at my feet from the time they could walk and talk and be actively involved in making the quickbreads and the pie crusts and the fillings when I'm baking something.

Make no mistake, baking pies is a passion. Making pumpkin breads to bring to the kids when we visited them in college was a passion. And knowing that they actually like to do these things themselves and do their own baking and cooking, using the same techniques and tricks that I learned from my grandmother, that means that I've put what I borrowed to good use, and that makes me feel all the better for it.

I feel so passionate about every cherished book, or photograph, or phonograph album, or article of clothing, or

baking dish, or vase, or family bible, or piece of furniture, or framed print that now finds a place in our home but before that had a place in my parents' home, or Annie's parents' home, or in the homes of one of their parents. I've never felt that I owned any of these treasures. I've always felt that I was just privileged to be able to borrow and know and enjoy and see them for awhile, and then offer our kids the opportunity to borrow and enjoy them in the same way.

In our barn you can find an old jacket hanging from a coat hook that is just a rag, at this point, really, with holes through the sleeves and cuffs and a collar that is shredded. I haven't worn it in decades, but it remains in place. It's one that my dad used to wear probably about the time I was born, and I can't bring myself to let go of it, or of any of the children's books that he read more than a hundred years ago that I myself read when I was just a kid. I'm getting to the point where it's time for me to let someone else borrow these, and they're all packed up and ready for another generation to experience the same magic in the presence of the same ghosts that were looking over my shoulder when I was reading them.

So, to me, it's easy to experience passion for that which I have borrowed, because what is life after all but a transitory opportunity to borrow and do the best that you

can with the gifts that others have presented to you, so that hopefully you in turn can pass along those gifts to those who will follow in your wake, because these are truly the gifts that keep on giving.