

TRUST FALLS

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The neutrality of this article is disputed.

You can't even trust a sandwich [*sand-wich, san-*]. Or a pillow to stay cool against your cheek. Or reruns of *Major Dad*. Or words on a page, especially the first few. Or your memory to remember you've forgotten something.

That is to say: Walk as if you might at any moment fall. The sidewalk? Not always on your side. Forget driving. Do you know how many parts a car has? At least 14 [*citation needed*], each of which could fail at any time, or all at once. Planes are out. That's just air underneath them, and that's nothing at all. Which leaves what? Crawling, like the house is on fire and you're feeling for a hot doorknob?

Rolling could work, as in stop, drop, and. Though if down hills, **velocity** is an issue: too easy to lose control, get leaves in one's hair, enjoy oneself for a second before, of course, BLAM-O. Impact. Interaction with hard surfaces. Something broken.

Etymology

Insurance is no insurance these days. You'll void your own warranty doing things like: 1. Leaving the house, a. unarmed, or b. armed. Policies specify payout for loss of *two* limbs, not just one, and detail every permutation to avoid confusion:

two arms,
or two legs,
or one arm and one leg,
or one leg and one eye,
or one eye and one arm,

but not an ear, not something as replaceable as a **foot** or a heart. They have pig parts for those now. Does the same thing. Lasts longer.

Geography

So rolling is an option, but only with some sort of self-enclosed bubble contraption, which quickly becomes cost-prohibitive. Don't try bubble wrap. The sound is only fun at first.

History

Speaking of fun-at-first, or late-at-night-when-why-the-hell-not, why not just send an e-mail? Those are dangerous in other ways. Who knows what they'll think when they read it, as every word quickly decays into an artifact to be tagged and interpreted. We're all each other's anthropologists that way, un-apologists, assessing strange creatures' strange behaviors all wrong, making religious rituals and **shrunkn heads** out of what's implied by a few quick typos.

Think of the Internet as a giant **United Nations** where everyone's invited, even your idiot brother-in-law. No one understands each other, but you're all sitting behind desks with your fingers on triggers, nuclear codes memorized: FWD, REPLY ALL. We know we shouldn't. Silent treaties entreat: Don't press it! But we're too shift-eyed to fall for that trick. We all know what we might do.

As it turns out, e-mail is even more dangerous than walking, where at least you are in only one place at once.

Demographics

But beware of becoming ubiquitous! You'll stop being noticed. You'll become landscape. Nobody even paints that anymore. Seen it. Right outside. It might as well be television.

That doesn't mean it's O.K. to leave a paper trail. **Trails** quickly become steep and are never very well signed. If you're like anyone else, and plenty of us are all the time, you'll end up with pages strewn across the floor, then you'll try to call that mess a novel, don't think you won't. I've seen it happen to better folks than you.

Let's not even talk about **paper cuts**.

Economy

What's left, word of mouth? You're not serious. We all played telephone as kids or tried to use one as an adult. Phones have become too smart for us. Now they do it all for you, including misinterpret everything, which isn't any use if it isn't done the old-fashioned way, new and different each time.

Anyway, the price of string is going up dramatically. Tin cans are

aluminum now. Everything garbled is gold. No one cares about **quality** anymore. All a road sign will tell you about a town is population and **elevation**, and one of those or both is usually wrong. Things move.

Transportation

They keep saying it's about time for another big one like '06, about time for the ground to shake until all us tiddlywinks scatter. Any time in the next 10,000 years, boys—the **seismologists** have set their watches, which all have tiny beeping alarms. Their spouses try to get them to wear something classy or get a smart phone, but no.

Forget getting reception (or a receipt) after the earthquake. Money will just be paper. The trains won't run on time, even though they never did, and there will be no newspaper to read on them, because everyone knows newspapers are **already dead**, like all print media—you know, because of the paper cuts.

Government and Politics

And, anyway, forget the big one. The ground is always moving, and even when it's not it's not what it used to be, or not what it used to be called. Did you know they can just change the names of things? They do it all the time, redraw the lines that run off into forever however they like, like how **California** used to be twice as long and belong to Mexico, or to Spain before Mexico was a word that meant anything and before all the places were named for people who turned out to be real jerks.

Even Argentina had a go at California, flying his pale blue flag over **Monterey Bay** for six days in 18—something—something, then probably going around telling everyone else she was **easy**, or a **tease**, or both, because these days even things that are mutually exclusive can be true at the same time. And before that, she was an island, *terra incognita*, or that's what they let themselves believe. Everyone's beautiful while still an **unknowable** island.

Now landmarks are like other marks, scars. The land from here to down-Mexico-way is the same blank land, until we graffiti over it to forget. Land doesn't, just like you don't forget the horrible name you were called. It metastasizes into the Tropic of Unutterable, its syllables seismic.

Call it history so it doesn't hurt so much, just a matter of MadLibs™, a blinking cursor following delete. Keep in mind when renaming: Removal hurts as much as being branded in the first place,

as much as bearing the marks of a first place. When renaming: Let the boundaries slip like straps, pack all your souvenirs in boxes, leave him the toaster because he always put bread with butter already on it in it anyway and the thing is burnt to hell, pretend it never happened.

Cities, Towns, Counties

The post office, for what it's worth, has a handy **change-of-address** card you can fill out—with your hands if you've still got them, haven't tried to cash them in for the insurance because you haven't heard yet they don't count as limbs. File the form and just like that, BLAM-O: Your address-is-changed. Your location-is-changed. You-are-changed. Solid ground has moved, for once in your favor, found a new neighborhood and tried to learn again how to make **friends**.

But the post office, as you know, can't be counted on. Those halcyon **Pony Express** days are over, back when people used words like *halcyon* (which is also the name of a town in California). The good ol' post office will keep sending mail to your ex, and of course he'll use this as an ex-cuse to send you an e-mail or twelve, make you retrieve post-retreat. Really, his messages will be about something else. Every message is.

You'll have to get in the car. Even though you've been warned. You'll have to go outside, it's true. This isn't **New York City** where people can get anything and everything delivered—and besides, have you heard the statistics on home invasion? [*citation needed*] You can scarcely afford *not* to leave the house.

One way or another, you'll run into him. [*See IMPACT, INTERACTION WITH HARD SURFACES*] Unlike history, you can't just pretend it didn't happen, can't just find a new flag to stick in the hole you already dug yourself.

Landmarks

Eventually, you'll have to go home again, even though it won't be there anymore. [*See previous discussion of SOLID GROUND, MYTHS ABOUT; see every clichéd retort filed under GOING HOME AGAIN, YOU CAN'T*] All that will be left are the arguments you had, the reactions triggered in the **vacuum** which is space, time.

[Apart from space-time, we have everything figured out. For the calculable most-part, things just work. It's that incalculable extra that worms its way into the cracks—the unanticipated force of a trickle sneaking through the dam. Water might not look like much, it might as well be air, but even air exerts invisible

force on you. Right where you are it surrounds you. Before you know it you can't breathe. Before you know it you drown in too much of a good thing—or really in the way a good thing always goes. A good thing always goes. Part of how it works is that it goes. Forgiven, forgotten say “for,” but for what, for good? For good pretends to mean permanence, but what is good that hasn't left, or won't?]

You'll do it anyway. What else is there? Nothing good is ever on TV, even when you pencil into your schedule *watch television, at least an hour or more, be a good “American.”* There's no way to get around getting around.

So go—stand up for yourself already. When standing, remember the odds of bumping your head. Try not to worry about the risks increased by the use of preventive measures: that helmet rash, your cut-off circulation. When sitting, too, check to see (first!) if there's a chair beneath you, that it has at least four legs, all connected, mostly perpendicular to the floor (wherever that might be).

However you decide to go, go knowing every time might be the last, and if you're being told it's not, that's just a little lie to make you feel good, and if you're *not* being told it's not, that just means s/he doesn't even care enough to make you feel good.

Or doesn't believe in solid ground, like you don't.

Or doesn't believe in pretending, like you still do.

None of this can be filled out on a form like the kind they have at the post office, or charted on a graph which can be flipped upside down and not just if it's on one of those chalkboards that spins—these attempts at solid ground are just as shaky. All the arrows point like they're on street corners being twirled in dizzy circles.

See Also

The **Platonic ideal** of the planet beneath you—once you think about it long enough, you realize how absurd it sounds.

We're pretty sure the world is round. We'd like to keep saying it's made up of atoms, swirling in a solar system, floating in a sea of relativity. Facts are, for the moment, true. Or we'll agree to pretend to be convinced they are, until something else suits us better.

For example: The basic ratio of a good Manhattan is 4-to-1 [*where 1 = oneself*]. But when facts become untrue enough that we won't lie about them anymore, it's the same burn as that concoction caught at the base of your throat before you swallow it, and the only solution to that is more. You swallow it.

Which brings me to my point about the sandwich.

My very own **mother**, who has many qualities even in an era when no one cares about quality anymore, makes the best BLT in the world's recorded histories. I've watched her make them with my very own eyes, so it would stand to reason I—or anyone—should be able to duplicate the experiment to satisfactory result:

Miracle Whip™ [*don't pretend to act disgusted*] on whole wheat toast cut [*this is very important!*] on the diagonal, pepper-coated tomato layered *between* [*so the toast doesn't get soggy*] a single sheet of lettuce [*two if you're on a health kick*] and, of course, microwaved bacon [*a paper towel underneath sops up the grease so you know it's healthy*].

Still—and I defy you to tell me why—a sandwich will taste different if someone else makes it.

This is a verifiable fact, and it also happens to be true. This is an example proving the theory of relativity, which it should be said is only a **theory**. Even relativity is relative, depending.

And if a sandwich can taste different just because someone else makes it—

[*Try to prove it. Can proving it even help? It doesn't hurt any less to be proven right (usually more) when you'd rather be wrong.*]

And if a sandwich can taste different just because no one's there to make it for you—

[*Because they moved away, because you're impossible to live with, because you'd hoped for a instant that truth wasn't true.*]

And if you can't even trust a sandwich—

[!]

How then can you trust anything as complex as **solid ground** (which we should really stop calling that)—or words, or meaning (which “doesn't even mean anything anymore”), or people who love you, or being alive—to do anything like what it claims to do, what it promises you with **sweet nothings** whispered in your ear or doesn't promise but should? How can you trust anything to **Just Stay Put** (when even a place won't stay in one place)?

Notes and Ephemera

You remember those exercises they made you do at camp, the ones where you'd climb up on some chair—or, worse, a ladder—and everyone else would weave their arms into a soft, platonic surface for you to land on, and you'd be told you had to turn your back and lean, keep leaning, keep leaning, to count on those strange arms to mediate the shrinking space between you and the hard ground, which will

always seem more real than those arms could, even as it shakes.

Sources have since revised their thinking: “Although commonly used, some believe the exercise should be avoided due to the risk of physical and psychological injury.”

Make sure to apply this caveat to everything. [*citation needed*]

References

Trust Falls could just as well be the name of a waterfall somewhere, a cataract (which can also mean not seeing). It could mean anything at all, and it'd still be that stupid thing you could never do.

It could mean, eventually, after time and again of being right™ when you want to be wrong, or something like vice versa when you give that a try for a change, eventually, trust, too, succumbs to gravity (though some physicist now says even gravity might not be true [*unverifiable source*]). Trust faceplants. Trust falls and can't get up. Its bones are brittle or it just doesn't have the energy anymore.

Even if you can't trust trust (or a sandwich) (or anything else), you can still trust falling. Or, at least, you can choose to. Falling hurts. Falling hangs like a question mark and usually means landing, often on something much harder than you'd like. There are injuries. Falling **scars**.

But sometimes—not always, or even often, but some inexplicable times in the suspended instant that is falling—there are hands [*not yours, because despite your best efforts they can't be: your own won't work for this*] making perfect sandwiches, finding warmth against the small of your back, creating caughtness from thin air like words on a page.

These appendages are valuable no matter how insurance policies can't protect them, no matter how whatever they hold will in a moment—or sooner—slip through those fingers, water through cracks in the dam. [*Part of how it works is that it goes.*] Nonfiction was not designed to accommodate such shifts. But we can. We decide again that scars are worth the chance they won't appear.

It's probably the worst way ever invented to get around. But you'll get there, one way or another. Maybe you are there.

You just have to lean, keep leaning, keep leaning. □