



jcannonbooks

Because everybody  
needs an editor . . .

and a newsletter

## And we're back . . .

Did you miss me? I didn't think so.

I have been busier than usual rearranging words and annoying writers, so for the first time since starting this monthly blog and newsletter more than a year ago, I blew deadline in October. I apologize if that caused you anxiety and hardship. Well, no, I don't. Give me a minute and I'll summon an appropriate response drawn from my youth in and around Chicago. Ah, here it is: *Dis is free, so whyncha shuddup aboudit*. That's harsh even with the regional expletives redacted, I suppose, but welcome back.

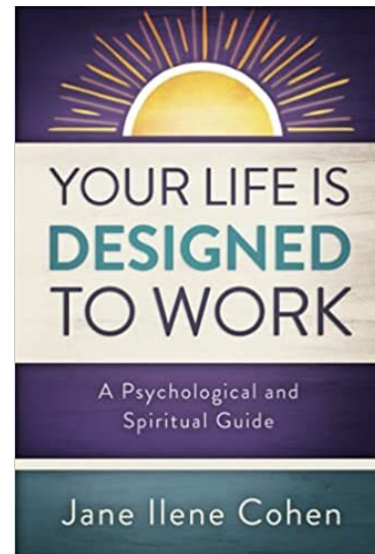
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## Author news

Ever think that day-to-day living shouldn't be so hard? Then I've got a book for you. *Your Life is Designed to Work* offers readers spirited self-help and fearless personal narrative from Jane Cohen, a San Diego counselor. It was published recently on Amazon, [and this handy link takes you to more information about it](#). Jane's work "guides you to an in-depth understanding and experience

of the positive way life actually works,” as Amazon says. Jcannonbooks provided editing.

Congratulations, Jane.



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## Travels with Johnny



*Older and newer around San Jose State University.*

Johnny traveled again.

Not far, risky, or unusual, but I did get on an airplane for the first time since a day in March 2020. That was when blog subscriber, screenplay guru, and urbane raconteur John M. and I caught some of the last planes out of Las Vegas before the virus shut the place down for about ten minutes. This month's trip was to San Jose, California, about 450 miles. My wife and I needed another visit with our dear infant grandson (and his parents, who are just as dear).

This occasional feature is focused on places of literary significance, as befits a newsletter about words. Surely you remember the rollicking pieces I produced about the Salinas birthplace of John Steinbeck, Jack London's Wolf House in Sonoma County, and the La Jolla place where Raymond Chandler lived. The best I can do for this report is to say that I visited the campus of San Jose State University, the alma mater of at least four subscribers to this newsletter. That includes Ray T., a lifer newspaper colleague, now sprung, and the only subscriber to notice I didn't publish last month. As we strolled the campus and gazed at the graceful Victorian homes that surround it, I became confused about how this university, known to have produced celebrated novelist Amy Tan, also could have given a degree to Ray. Some things are mysteries. But after graduation, Ray found that the characters and incongruities of newspapering made it almost as much fun as college, and he worked at nearly every one of California's big metro dailies back when it had big metro dailies. He is now California journalism's *éminence grise*, a French term that means something or other and that I have always wanted to write. Now that I have, I hope I spelled it correctly. My French doesn't extend much beyond pinot and noir.

But I do have travel insight for you. My lifelong devotion to saving a buck and skinflintery played a role in our decision to stay at a hotel in a part of San Jose I would not recommend to tourists. But the price was right, it was a respectable national chain, and it advertised an airport shuttle, so there you go. Our son, daughter-in-law, and extraordinarily cute grandson live in a dignified and gracious part of San Jose, but bedrooms that have become a nursery and a work-from-home office were good reasons for the visiting grandparents to sleep elsewhere. Airbnb offered no nearby acceptable options (see skinflintery, above), thus leading to my choice of a nonrefundable rate at this hotel several miles away and close to the airport. So I'll get to the point already: When the prominent businesses near a hotel are a smog check station and a hubcap resale shop, the hotel is not likely to be comfortable. In our case, neither did it have the included breakfast or airport shuttle it advertised, nor even coffee in the lobby. But some patrons staying a few doors down from us arrived at their room drunk and loud at 2:45 a.m., and the only two restaurants we saw within a half-mile radius looked like you would have to shoot your way out, so it had that going for it.

The other instructive part of these travels occurred on the flight home. I saw about a dozen container ships anchored in the Pacific off the SoCal coast, a result of the supply-chain problem that has chunky-jammed the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and San Diego. The ships, stacked high with containers full of whatever you ordered six months ago, wait for an open berth and for enough truckers to whittle down the mountain range of containers piled around

the harbors. The plane was still pretty high then, but I could just make out a deckhand sitting topside on one of the ships. Seemed like he was lounging on a chair from Ikea. Is that the one you're waiting for?

Talk to you next month. If I feel like it.



*Looks like the definition of literature has changed since I was last on a plane.*

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## Nothing to see here

*To read the following blog post on my blog, [Take My Word for It](#), click this link.*

We owe so much to trends in crime novels, noir, and thrillers.

Just think of a world without hardboiled private investigators.

Without trench coats.

Without smoky sax solos in movie versions of great detective novels.

Without ruthless drug kingpins and vats of acid for body disposal.

Without half-filled bottles of Jameson.

Hardly a place worth living in, is it?

Some of you are aware or sick of my peculiar fascination with Lee Child and his creation, Jack Reacher, but here we are talking about trends. In the past, I have

remarked in wonder at the number of times a particular sentence turns up in this freakishly formulaic series, usually set off as its own paragraph:

Reacher said nothing.

If you have read the Reacher books, you can't help but see that three-word sentence. Again and again.

All this time, I thought Child was a trendsetter. I figured his decision to have Reacher utter nary a syllable was perhaps an effort to make the series more than a scree field of tough-guy tropes. Maybe Reacher's singular focus on how best to incapacitate or dismember an opponent on the streets of Small Town America rather than say anything was strategic. The hero so sure of his moral compass that he doesn't have to explain it to you. Show, don't tell. We want our broken noses and dislocated shoulders, and we do not need to be derailed by whatever Reacher says.

Some readers say this is brilliant.

Some say it is economical storytelling.

Some said nothing.

It turns out Lee Child is following a trend, not setting one. Reacher said nothing has roots that are almost sixty years old and probably older, which I would know if I were better read.

I have realized this through the intercession of blog subscriber Mike B., who months ago suggested that I read the crime series that chronicles the fictional life of Martin Beck, a Swedish cop. Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö wrote the series, which includes Mike's favorite crime novel, *The Laughing Policeman*. I decided to start at the beginning because, well, that's the way I am, and recently finished *Roseanna*, the first in the series.

And there it was. On page thirty-six of the Second Vintage Crime/Black Lizard Edition, Vintage Books, 2008 (although the book was originally published in 1963):

Martin Beck said nothing.

How could I have missed this for so long? Martin Beck said nothing appears several more times in *Roseanna*. And by the way, the main character in the book is always referred to as Martin Beck. Not Martin, not Beck, but Martin Beck. It's odd, but I've read stranger things.

Is it possible that mystery writers glommed onto the main-character-said-nothing technique in many books for many years, in a fit of ongoing word infatuation that predates Reacher? Who started it? Does it have a more powerful grip on writers than the adjectives incredible, amazing, and iconic? I cannot answer. I can only be grateful to Mike, especially as Thanksgiving approaches.

By the way, *Roseanna* is notable in ways besides Martin Beck's decision to say nothing. Martin Beck's daily struggle to face the bleak core of his job as a homicide cop is woven into the pages. The book also contains the following conversation between Martin Beck and one of his fellow Swedish detectives. The other cop begins the exchange regarding a ship of interest to police, and Martin Beck responds.

**“First they had to stop at Hävringe for three hours because of heavy fog and then a steam pipe in the motor had broken . . . ”**

**“Engine.”** (*Martin Beck speaking – Ed.*)

**“What did you say?”**

**“In the engine. Not the motor.”**

A petulant Martin Beck points out the difference in meaning between engine and motor? Good God, the man could be an editor.

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**Kind regards,  
jcannonbooks**

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