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Final Word **Craig Wilson**

Final Word: See if you missed anything, besides the roses

By **Craig Wilson**, USA TODAY

I don't know Brian Peterson. Didn't even know he existed until the other day. Then, as I was browsing through the hundreds of books sent to USA TODAY every month, his new book fell into my hands. Literally. Call it fate, something I believe in more and more with each passing year.

I began reading *The Smile at the Heart of Things: Essays and Life Stories* (Tell Me Press, \$28.95) as I stood in the book room, then returned to my desk and read for the rest of the afternoon. (Don't tell the boss.)

I now love Brian Peterson, despite the fact he appears to have a wife he adores.

Peterson, a seasoned photographer, is a senior curator at the [James A. Michener Art Museum](#) in [Doylestown](#), Pa. Bruce Katsiff, the museum's director, says those who know Peterson respond to "his genuine decency and interest in the lives of others."



By Alejandro Gonzalez, USA TODAY

I did, and, as I said, I don't know the guy. (He has not paid me to say this, although if he wants to send something, he knows where I am.)

Peterson reflects on art and artists, on creativity and where it comes from, and along the way he bares his soul, sharing tales about his sister's death, his childhood home, his dog Sparky, and how [Walt Whitman](#) gave him "nourishment" once as he waited at a bus station years ago.

Luminous essays all, but one, less than three pages long, stands out. It's called "Strange Gifts."

In it Peterson talks about the approaching deaths of two men — one a guard at the museum where he works; the other a neighbor.

"Death was a gift for both of them — a strange and terrible gift that woke them up and opened their eyes to the reality of the world they were leaving," writes Peterson, who admits their deaths were a gift to him, too.

What he learned from them both — to pay more attention to the world around you — is an age-old lesson few of us ever learn.

We are all in a hurry. We don't even see the roses, let alone stop to smell them. We travel to the far reaches of the Earth but rarely see what's there. We sing "Slow down, you move too fast," but we don't hear the message.

"When I'm brushing my teeth at night and staring at my aging face in the mirror," Peterson writes, "sometimes I ask myself, 'Well, how did I do today? Did I miss anything?'"

Not bad questions to ask ourselves as we head not only into a new year, but a new decade. And just in case you're rushing to get to an early New Year's celebration, I'll repeat them.

How did I do today?

Did I miss anything?

Happy New Year.

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