



Welcome to Ginger, a weekly newsletter by me, Justin Maiman. Go [here](#) to catch up on last week's stories, including a collection of musical miracles in 1958, plus the story of 14-year-old radio DJ Stella Prince.

This week I'm thinking a lot about the connection between fear, excitement, and inspiration.

So here's a story with everything I like: mountains, the Catskills, the potential for calamity and drama, hiking, the film "Gerry," and the legend of Rip Van Winkle.

Before we go all in, everyone has to watch "Gerry." I thought maybe that's all I'd write this week. Just give everyone an assignment, a simple one: watch "Gerry." I planned to link to all the places you can watch it. But you can't. It's not streaming anywhere. (Isn't that a terrible problem in this digital world we should get together and address?)

So if you have the time, close your email, track down a copy of "Gerry" — you can borrow ours — and watch it. And then come back! Remember pausing a good thing only drives up your overall happiness for said thing. (I talked about this [here](#) in Ginger #007.) Everything from here on out is going to assume you saw "Gerry" or don't care to and don't mind some spoilers.

"Gerry" is a wild ride of a movie. It's the first of director Gus Van Sant's "Death Trilogy," so as you can imagine, some death occurs. Both characters are called Gerry. The synopsis: one Gerry kills the other Gerry, but only after a long tortuous time wandering in the desert, a desert in which they are hopelessly lost. Or at least it seems so. I'm no movie critic, but I'll say that it made me scared and sad and full of awe for the story and the performances by Matt Damon and Casey Affleck. And there's a 13-minute "stretch of seeming immobility" that's so much like an optical illusion that N shows a clip to her students. Apparently, the movie and script is based on a story Van Sant once heard. Again, it's a depressing journey but beautifully done.

Why am I thinking about "Gerry" this week?

My friend Sam and I just hiked to the top of Mount Greylock — the tallest mountain in all of Massachusetts at 3,491 feet. For people out west, yes, I know, that's not so tall. But on a clear day, you can see for 90 miles from the top, they say.

We, however, did not have a clear day. The weather was mild and drizzly as we started, and around 55 degrees.

Here's a photo I took near the trailhead before we started.



Desolate, sure. But there was no snow and it felt pretty spring-ish. And Sam and I had already done a winter hike in December in snowy conditions with ease. But about halfway up, most of the Hopper Trail we were on revealed itself to be covered in ice. Just totally iced up. thanks to an earlier runoff. Sam had ice cleats and put them on. I didn't, so I stuck to the sides of the trail when I could or just got off the trail completely and hiked in the snow and trees. It was a bit squirrely for a stretch, but we pushed on. I had a stick that helped me poke around a bit looking for traction. There was a moment in my mind in which I wondered if I were crazy to keep going, but it passed.

At the top it was just 34 degrees. Here's a photo of Bascom Lodge up there:



It's popular with hikers and especially tourists in the summer because you can drive up to it on a nicely paved road. As you can see, when we arrived, the lodge looked more like a miniature version of the Overlook Hotel from "The Shining." I just looked it up online: the lodge doesn't even open until May 18th! Anyway, we ate our lunch under an overhang to avoid the rain. We were wet, but the worst was behind us if we could figure out a way down that didn't include the long stretches of ice, which would just be icy slides to the bottom. We decided to take the road as much as possible. That saved us from a rough descent.

We never saw another person that day on the trail. People knew better, it seemed. It ended up taking us about 5 hours to get up and down. Later that night, I texted Sam to thank him for planning the day and marveled that a good hike has a perfect mix of terror and potential calamity. That's true, though maybe a bit dramatic for last week's hike. But maybe not. That same day, two hikers in California were in the midst of a [five-day nightmare](#) in the San Gabriel Mountains after one of them slipped on ice and fell 100 feet. They were rescued eventually, surviving for days on a few energy bars.

I remember another hike years ago in the Catskills that felt harrowing, for about ten minutes. That doesn't sound long, but it was a strange ten minutes in my head. It's all about a lack of

control, I think. N and I were with some friends, at the end of a very easy hike (really a walk) on a trail we'd been on dozens of times. Then we got "lost" in the woods. Dusk had arrived pretty quickly. It was a crepuscular moment in a setting of forest pines. And I somehow led us right off the path. And we just kept walking, bushwhacking really, and it took a few minutes for me to realize we weren't on the trail anymore. We had no gear of any sort. This was supposed to be a post-lunch jaunt. So no headlamp or flashlight. And it was hard to see. I was instantly panicked, inside my head. My heart rate kicked up. My neck felt warm. No one else knew anything was off or awry.

And I didn't want to alert anyone before I knew for sure we were doomed. N and I were hosting. These people were our guests — trusting us in the woods. I couldn't walk them off a cliff before they'd gotten to spend one full night in our house. All of this was swirling in my brain as I picked a general westerly direction to get us out. Like everything was normal. About five minutes later we emerged onto the road, right near the parking lot. I was elated but couldn't tell anyone else why.

According to the science built around the study of fear, my reaction makes sense. Here's a nugget from [a smart piece](#) I found on Smithsonian.com:

"When we are able to recognize what is and isn't a real threat, relabel an experience and enjoy the thrill of that moment, we are ultimately at a place where we feel in control. That perception of control is vital to how we experience and respond to fear. When we overcome the initial "fight or flight" rush, we are often left feeling satisfied, reassured of our safety and more confident in our ability to confront the things that initially scared us."

I can relate. The loss of, and then regaining of, control can be quite inspiring.

Which brings me to Rip Van Winkle. Washington Irving's story from 1819 is about a man who falls asleep for twenty years in the Catskills and then wakes up to find everything much different. It's about that, sure. (Rip sleeps right through the American Revolution!) It's also about how terrible his wife is, which is a strange and terrible theme itself. (The term "henpecked" is used repeatedly.) In fact, Rip's quite happy when he returns twenty years later to find she's gone. But the underlying theme to the story is all about the deep fear people have always had of mountains, especially the Catskills range that rises from the west over the Hudson River in New York. According to one of the early legends handed down by Dutch settlers, the Catskills were created by the devil and the valleys were made by his tail. For hundreds and probably thousands of years, humans avoided the mountains, especially after dark.

It's interesting to me that the mountains keep calling out to me. There's something about the sheer physical presence of them, along with their natural scorn for, and obliviousness of, humans. From my teens on, I've wandered into them and hiked up them, and while I've changed dramatically, they haven't. They are a challenge I can't seem to top, or give up.

More things that are exciting me this week

- [Relive](#) the 1980s music scene with the doc “The Minneapolis Sound”
- Trio Bald Eagle Cam: [Watch live](#) as three eaglets grow up near the Mississippi River
- Every Hass avocado [can be traced back](#) to one “mother” tree in California
- The scientific [versus](#) the miraculous

This week in goats



Meet Avocado. She lives in Texas on [Blue Heron Farm](#).

Have a stimulating week. jm