Dear friends,

I write to you with honesty. As the last year departed and a new year arrived, many things have changed. If my writing feels distant, it's because I am.

Donna is still with me, but I can't ride her anymore. Last night, some people tried to steal her from outside a grocery store. I found her upside-down. They damaged the lock and the frame, but they weren't successful in taking her. I wonder how hard they tried. How much violence did it take to break her carbon frame, to impose so much force on something so light and gentle? I'm happy to have her with me, but now she'll hang on my wall, only living in nostalgia of the past: how fast and beautifully she rode, and how she supported me for the last two years, through short rides and long rides, taking me to work and to see the people I loved, through the beautiful hills and skies of Marin.

There's not much to share about loss. Words can package feelings in a box, but what box is large enough to hold all that is Donna? I remember when we lost Hunter. I wrote a letter titled *Hunter - Letter to New Parents*, and I still think it's the best thing I've written. It was objective. It described the tricks he knew, how often we fed him, how he socialized with humans and other dogs, how much exercise he needed, and the toys he liked. It read like a manual: nothing poetic, nothing fancy, no attempt to make the reader feel what we were feeling. Only resignation felt appropriate.

The thing about bikes and dogs is that they never hurt you. It's not like when you lose a partner, where you say and do things that hurt each other. The complexity makes it difficult to grieve, obscuring the simplicity of what has happened: that something you love is no more. I miss you M. I'm sorry for it all.

I've been reflecting on the complexity of words. I used to argue that writing was different from journaling. Journaling was done for the self, and writing for the other. It required a different level of quality and thoughtfulness. To not recognize the difference felt selfish. To put raw processing of emotion out in the world felt inconsiderate. But I'm tired of the blandness of writing; of arguments, persuasion, editing, and ego-inflation. Everyone wants to convince

others of what they believe. Why are we so obsessed with our thoughts? Please share with me your journaling. Share with me your feelings, and I'll share with you mine.

I want to think of writing as *meditation*. When we meditate, we say we are meditating not just for ourselves, but for the suffering of all beings: the interconnected whole. If I share my honest thoughts with you, maybe you will feel the feelings behind my words. Sharing will heal me, and receiving will heal you. As we heal, everything will fall into place.

I want to share stories with people. I want to listen to people's stories. *The Moth* has been a great place to do that, and every month, at their live events, I listen to personal stories from a diversity of people. Last month, I shared a story to more than a hundred people. It was exhilarating. People laughed a lot. After the show, more than ten people came up to me and thanked me. Some of them pushed through crowds to find me, some of them touched their hearts and said it, all of them smiled. These are my people: open-minded and free-spirited, tiptoeing between life's rules to find opportunities for love. They felt the optimism and light-heartedness in my story, and I felt it in them, when they found me after. I hope we continue to find each other in these ways.

Warmly,
Abizar