

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Hi, faith here. I'm popping in to let you know that this episode of Chronicles is a bit longer than the others, so there will be a longer commercial break, break intro. There are gonna be some more commercials before the show starts. If you want to hear this episode as well as all episodes of Chronicles and a Pollan add free and before the general Public become a patron. Visit patreon.com/observerpicks. That's PIX to find out more. If the ads don't bother you, but you still want to toss a coin or two our way, you can find all the ways to do that by visiting observerpictures.com and clicking support us. That's also where you'll find transcripts for every episode. Okay, let's get to those ads so we can get to the show. We appreciate your support and thank you so much for listening.

David ([00:54](#)):

Hey, Danny, I know I get that you can't understand me. I guess I'm kind of hoping that just hearing my voice will be enough, that it'll mean something to you. There's no way you can really understand what this means. There's too many big concepts that I cannot explain to you. You're just too small to really get what's going on here and this, okay,

Narrator ([01:31](#)):

David, last name, unknown age, unknown personal message.

David ([01:38](#)):

I feel like I owe you an explanation. How, how could I let this happen after your mom died? I promised I'd take care of you. You are going to be taken care of. I've made arrangements. You know, Janet, okay? You probably don't exactly know her, but <laugh>, you don't scream when she holds you. So I've, I've taken that as a good sign. We don't have a lot of options left anymore. The black plague killed one in three people, so does a VSI used to find that so hard to imagine, like, you know how it's hard to imagine really huge numbers. Someone says the word billion and you know what they mean, but you don't, not really. You just can't get your head around it. This is kind of like that. My street, this neighborhood, it's a ghost town, literally. I guess it's quiet. I'm not sure whether the quiet bothers you as much as it bothers me. I feel like my thoughts get louder, the quieter it is, and right now they're, you're going to be okay. You're not showing any of the symptoms. Thank God. And once they cleared you for infection, you're going to go and stay with Janet. She'll look after you. She'll be a good mom. I don't know her as well as I'd like to, and I guess now I never will, but I trust her. I mean, she volunteered in the first place and she didn't have to.

([03:30](#)):

It's not like it's easy these days to do that kind of thing. Not with everyone paranoid about how the virus spreads. This is my fault, you know,

([03:45](#)):

I was too stubborn. I've always been too damn stubborn and, and obsessed with the past. Not like the good old days of bigotry and back to back recessions, but, you know, neighborhood, community, human connection, that tactile way people used to exist with real paper books and textiles. Even radio feels more physical somehow than a digital calm and movies back then. They, they've got this, this materiality to them, this fuzz and globe. It was the finest technology of the 21st century, but that's basically a zero trope in comparison to what we've got these days where you can walk on board the alien spaceship from the sterilized comfort of your living room. But I love old sci-fi, seeing what they got right and what they got wrong, all that stuff from centuries back. It was really trying to say something, you know, trying to reflect on where we've been and where we were going, trying to warn us about something like this. Hmm. There's this one film, our Robot. It's set in this technological dystopia full of mindless, or as it turns out,

not so mindless automata, which take on the tasks of daily life. There's a moment in it where the lead actor talks about real books and libraries about how you need that, about how it's part of what makes us human. Somehow.

[\(05:27\)](#):

I was wrong, obviously. Obviously I was wrong, but I don't think I was wrong to be wrong. I do think there's a difference between surviving and living. I do think that people aren't thinking seriously about the sacrifices that we're making and the consequences it's gonna have for us socially, psychologically, culturally, we are a pack animal. You know, we're supposed to work together in screens, holograms, and video calls, and not a real substitute for physical companionship. Yes, I didn't stop working when I should have, but I didn't stop getting clients either. I'm a tailor. You don't know what a tailor is. My dad taught me his mom was a seamstress and her mother and her mother before her. It's what we do. We find ways to make people feel more comfortable in themselves. We fix that suit for the job interview. We make the alterations for the wedding dress wedding. We help someone's mom get your outfit for prom just right.

[\(06:42\)](#):

I like my job. I love my job. There's something meditative about needle and thread. There's not much of my job left that requires hand sewing anymore. Most of it's done by machine, and that's a different kind of soothing. I have this old, beautiful singer sergeant from my great, great great grandmother. I don't use it for professional jobs, but sometimes for fun. It's nice to get her ready and sit there in the sunlight coming through the window. Imagining I'm living hundreds of years ago, and all that you and I have to worry about is how much snow will get come. Winter.

[\(07:27\)](#):

The tailorings a very personal job these days. You can get clients who just email you their measurements and requirements and negotiate it all by digital correspondence. Maybe you get a phone call if you're lucky, but people make mistakes. Even those AI make mistakes. There's human decisions, human errors that they miss. Half a millimeter here means yes, it's not the exact size, but it's gonna give them room to move. There are considerations that the AI just isn't programmed to think about because presumably nobody asked to tailor. Why would they ask a tailor? Right? We are redundant. It's, uh, it's about trust. It's about that moment when someone actually comes into my shop and tells me they need something that fits them, that feels comfortable, that's appropriate for the occasion. When they let me take their measurements, they're trusting me to get that close. It's like no matter how much you might scream when a stranger gets close to you, you can fall asleep in my arms because you know I will never hurt you. These people, they trust me with their bodies, with their shapes, with making something that's going to make them feel safe and brave and beautiful. That matters. I really think that matters.

[\(09:00\)](#):

Four funerals and a wedding. Those are my last five jobs, which is kind of funny. If you're familiar with a very old sort of terrible film. Most of my jobs were funerals these last two years, these days, they won't even let you have the body there. Just an empty box and a holographic picture of the person you used to wrap your life around, like an old tree, right at hollow on the inside. I, I know it's hard to imagine, but even that mattered to people. It matters so much. Even some paper tissue imitation of a real ceremony, it's better than nothing. So they came to me and they wanted to look their best because if the heart of the occasion was missing, they could at least make sure that everything else was perfect. It's about respect. It's about honoring their memory. It's about trying, really trying to make an effort for them. There's a sense of obligation or, or duty or love. I think it's love. When people would come to me, they'd be so nervous, so anxious about finding something right for the occasion, and I'd make them something that made them feel safe and strong enough to endure this.

[\(10:36\)](#):

And then there were the weddings, every single one of them with this spark of defiance in the face of what is increasingly becoming empty and desperate reality. And I get people from 19 to 90 coming through the door, insisting that I make them look more beautiful than anyone ever has been. Because damn it, if it's the only guests that get to be there are the spouse and the efficient, then they are gonna make it an occasion to remember as if silk and satin and chiffon can overwhelm that anxiety, sweep it away like so much dust, and leave something sparkling and new and hopeful in its place. So I kept working and then it became illegal and I kept working because sometimes something being legal doesn't mean it's right. Sometimes you, you have to bend or even break the rules so that you can live with yourself. Sometimes you have to take the risks so you can sleep at night and know that even if your life is gonna be a lot shorter than you think it would be, you spent it doing something, really doing something for other people. Now, I worried about you. Of course I did. I made the front hall into kind of airlock. I'd basically give myself an astronaut shower every day. There's more bottles of sanitizer on my shoe rack than actual shoes. I rubbed my skin raw with it until it stung when I went to bed.

[\(12:08\)](#):

But it was worth it because it meant that I could hold you without feeling that, that awful leap of terror, that that hesitation, that moment when your heart skips a beat, every time you reach out to touch anyone, because you don't know if this is gonna be the moment, this handshake, this hug, this kiss is gonna be the one that ends it. They say they're working on some kind of treatment. They've been saying that for six months. I have between 24 and 84 hours to live. I had that 42 hours. I think I'm getting the 80. I, uh, I did call qf. All the facilities are full. There's just a waiting list and the woman on the phone, well, I had a choice. I could die in a football stadium listening to the people around me dying too. Or I could die here in my bed. I can, uh, I can hear you in the next room. I'd set up my tablet. So I've got this, this live video of you, but it's, uh, it's not the same. I really just wish I could hold you, that I could feel the warmth and weight of you and remind myself that you'll still be here even when I'm gone

[\(14:07\)](#):

And there's something beautiful about that. But I want you to live and this damn virus doesn't care about my sentiments. You, you're going to be okay. Janet's going to look after you.

[\(14:32\)](#):

You...

[\(14:35\)](#):

You changed my life. You know, I hadn't seen you or your mom in years when she called. She couldn't bring you here herself. She was too sick for that. So you arrived on my doorstep, like the most gift. You just spent a lot of your time staring at me, not making a noise. So I started talking to you when I worked, sketch out a pattern, and I talked you through it. Even though I knew that me talking about inches and feet was pretty meaningless to you. Eventually you started to relax. You weren't so uncomfortable when I held you, you started to trust me. I can't describe how that felt. I think I hadn't realized how lonely I'd become, you know, after they instituted the new rules. I live alone and yes, my job is very social, but even though I still had clients, it was a lot less than before. Everyone was too scared. I could go weeks without ever interacting with another person. Sometimes you don't realize how bad something is until it goes away, and suddenly you're reminded that life doesn't have to be like this, that that aching hole in your chest wasn't always there. That you can laugh and be warm and playful,

[\(16:17\)](#):

That you don't have to feel so alone. I get how absurd this sounds, given the context, but I, I really think you saved my life. Thank you for that. I don't know how much longer I can keep talking. I wanna tell you so much, and I know I don't have the time to tell you all of it. It isn't fair. I don't want to leave you alone, but you're going to be okay. And whatever happens wherever I go next, I promise you, I am never going to stop loving you. You are always going to be so loved, even when you can't see me anymore, even when

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it feels like I'm gone, even if there is no heaven and I just turn into dust and mulch some Adam of me, some particle in the air will find you and love you because I don't think that love this strong can die in any meaningful way. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I got sick. I'm sorry I took the risk when I shouldn't have. I wish I could show you why. I wish I could show you the photos and the letters and the videos, every wedding and every funeral and every prom that some kid did in the living room and have a suit and half a skirt, because that's what felt like them.

[\(18:24\)](#):

I wish I could tell you it was worth it, but I don't think anything would be worth leaving you alone. I guess I just thought I had more time. I've said my peace. I said, wish I could say more.

Narrator [\(19:00\)](#):

This episode of Chronicles was written and directed by Ella Watts, featuring the voice of Edward Selvey IV. Produced by Faith McQuinn, editing by Faith McQuinn, sound mixed by Joshua Suhy. Credits by Matthew Boudreau. Theme music by Alice in Winter.

[\(19:17\)](#):

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