

## How to Live

"I don't know how to live."

—Sharon Olds

Eat lots of steak and salmon and Thai curry and mu shu  
pork and fresh green beans and baked potatoes  
and fresh strawberries with vanilla ice cream.  
Kick-box three days a week. Stay strong and lean.  
Go fly-fishing every chance you get, with friends

who'll teach you secrets of the stream. Play guitar  
in a rock band. Read Dostoyevsky, Whitman, Kafka,  
Shakespeare, Twain. Collect Uncle Scrooge comics.  
See Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs*, and everything Monty Python made.  
Love freely. Treat ex-partners as kindly

as you can. Wish them as well as you're able.  
Snorkel with moray eels and yellow tangs. Watch  
spinner dolphins earn their name as your *panga* slam-  
bams over glittering seas. Try not to lie; it sours  
the soul. But being a patsy sours it too. If you cause

a car wreck, and aren't hurt, but someone is, apologize  
silently. Learn from your mistake. Walk gratefully  
away. Let your insurance handle it. Never drive drunk.  
Don't be a drunk, or any kind of "aholic." It's bad  
English, and bad news. Don't berate yourself. If you lose

a game or prize you've earned, remember the winners  
history forgets. Remember them if you *do* win. Enjoy  
success. Have kids if you want and can afford them,  
but don't make them your reason-to-be. Spare them that  
misery. Take them to the beach. Mail order sea

monkeys once in your life. Give someone the full-on  
ass-kicking he (or she) has earned. Keep a box turtle  
in good health for twenty years. If you get sick, don't thrive  
on suffering. There's nothing noble about pain. Die  
if you need to, the best way you can. (You define *best*.)

Go to church if it helps you. Grow tomatoes to put *store-*  
*bought* in perspective. Listen to Elvis and Bach. Unless  
you're tone deaf, own Perlman's "Meditation from Thais."  
Don't look for hidden meanings in a cardinal's song.  
Don't think TV characters talk to you; that's crazy.

Don't be too sane. Work hard. Loaf easily. Have good  
friends, and be good to them. Be immoderate  
in moderation. Spend little time anesthetized. Dive  
the Great Barrier Reef. Don't touch the coral. Watch  
for sea snakes. Smile for the camera. Don't say "Cheese."

Charles Harper Webb, from *Amplified Dog*