



TWENTY YEARS

OF WORK THAT MATTERS

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of work that matters

This is a story that begins with a simple ambition: to do work that was interesting. Work that responded to a moment, that hadn't been done before, and that felt genuinely alive. That ambition hasn't gone away, but what's changed is the purpose that grew around it.

The pursuit for interesting work has taken Portable across two decades of entirely different contexts. A film festival built before the platforms existed. Digital tools for government before that was a recognised discipline. A subscription box that bet on physical culture at the height of the digital moment. A family violence service redesigned from the inside. A platform changing how separated couples navigate the law. The contexts kept changing, but the commitment to doing something that matters stayed.

What started as curiosity, a restless interest in doing something new and worth doing, found its purpose along the way. The work became more deliberate, more consequential, more attentive to the problems that most needed solving. What follows is that story, told through the people and moments that shaped it.

2002-2009

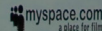


Finding the idea, catching the moment

*Curiosity, community roots,
and the early internet*

www.portablefilmfestival.com

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Before Portable was the company it is today, it was two people determined to build something real. Simon Goodrich and Andrew Apostola found each other at SYN FM in Melbourne's early 2000s community radio scene.

“If you took initiative, you could make change really easily. And we were excited by that.”
- Simon

Alongside writing funding proposals and winning them, they were doing community organising work: ethnic broadcasting, youth media, mental health engagement, disability programs.



Deep in communities, figuring out what people needed and finding ways to connect them and give them a voice. Work that, in a different form, looks a lot like what Portable does today.

Melbourne's creative scene was genuinely alive with radio, music, events and people getting new ventures off the ground. The internet had a similar energy, opening up in a way that felt genuinely new: shifting from something you consumed to something you could shape, participate in, and build on.

“We were very much building on our cultural interests rather than things that were purely business..”
- Simon

There were no established experts, which meant anyone could jump in and make something.

2002

Simon and Andrew begin working together at SYN FM in Melbourne's community radio scene.

2004

Simon and Andrew self-initiate a report on young people in community broadcasting, road-tripping through Victoria, NSW, and South Australia to interview staff at 35 stations.

2005

Their first business together: “Make It Happen,” a venture with two teachers, Eden and Colin Thompson. The name turns out to be a preview of their whole career.

Andrew moves to Tasmania to deliver work for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, exploring whether the SYN model could be replicated elsewhere.

You've got the whole film festival in your hand

In October 2005, Andrew was in San Francisco for the launch of the video iPod. He called Simon. That conversation became the seed of Portable Film Festival, a bet that short-form video content on portable devices was about to matter. It was speculative and a little naive, and it turned out to be well-timed. The idea took shape with a teaser campaign called Six Cities — six short films made by friends in New York, Montreal, Tokyo, London, Vancouver, and Melbourne.

After months of developing the concept with a loose network of friends and collaborators, the festival launched in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide in 2006, landing in The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age and written about around the world.

Short film, tiny screen, the new projection for movies, reports Cynthia Karna.

The International Portable Film Festival is showing on an iPod near you. Andrew Apontia, 27, and Simon Goodrich, 25, are Melbourne filmmakers and the directors of a small-format video festival capturing the world's first film festival to explore the art of portable filmmaking and viewing.

"This is the perfect format for new ideas and new directions in film," says Mr Apontia, who envisions the festival will take in all mobile video devices such as the iPod, X2 phones, Sony's PSP game system and the iPod hard-disk PC.

Six Cities, a collection of short films from young filmmakers in Tokyo, New York, Montreal, London, Melbourne and Vancouver reflecting their perspective of their city, is the

first in a series of cinema themes concentrated by the festival.

The festival is broadcast through a videocast — like a podcast, but for video — so there are no cinemas and no queues. The films are downloaded automatically using freely-tradable tools known as webcams that stream video when new content is available — and they shared over email, Facebook or any other peer-to-peer technology.

"Videocasting is more convenient than streaming video as films are received directly on your device rather than going through a link on a website," Mr Apontia says. "You can choose the films you want to watch, and watch them anywhere, anytime — during your lunch break or on a train."

"Some people are busy and watching longer hours and they'd like to see a film festival but it's not possible. People are already used to watching DVDs on notebooks that is the next step."

Filmfestival submitting films

are asked to be concise that people will be watching them on a small format, often under tight conditions such as on the move and in bright sunlight. Filmmakers are familiar with the changes needed to make their moving-image videocast cinema format to TV, and now they have made their films look good on an even smaller format.

"It's not just about reducing cell content for small devices," Mr Apontia says. "People have to think differently. Maria Monoyrakis, a video producer and festival coordinator, says content is important. He used big, wide images in his film and focused on making the characters fill the screen.

"Using a digital camera makes it easier as you can use the viewfinder to see if what you're shooting looks good on a small format."

Mr Goodrich says he now seems to know how to condense the small medium. "I really think we have a greater success



Andrew Apontia, organizer of the International Portable Film Festival.

PHOTO: GUY WILKINSON

▶ Continued NEXT 29

The festival grew fast. Films came in from more than 50 countries, with simultaneous screenings and parties held around the globe, including, memorably, in a village in Mongolia. Apple took notice. MySpace and Triple J came on as partners. It expanded to Singapore. David Lynch publicly dismissed the whole idea ("A film on a mobile device? Go fuck yourself" were his exact words), and his contempt, unintentionally, validated exactly what Portable was doing.

2006

Portable is born. The Portable Film Festival is announced and the business name is formally registered.

First office: 365 Little Bourke St, Melbourne a small space that felt like, and probably was, a telephone exchange.

Apple, from Cupertino, takes an interest in what Portable is doing with the festival. MySpace signs on as global media partner. Triple J signs on as national media partner.

The first Portable Film Festival launches in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide. Entries come in from over 50 countries.

The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age both do pieces on the Portable Film Festival launch.

The growth of social networking sites Facebook and MySpace, chatrooms and blogs, as well as new online media such as films made on iPods and mobiles reflect the changing way young people engage with each other and the world around them, says Andrew Apostola.

Apostola – whose company Portable Content is collaborating with the Student Youth Network (syn.org.au) project – is keenly aware of the debate around whether new technologies enhance or undermine young people's mental health. In his opinion, it's about managing the risks. "Put in place your checks," he says, "and provide a platform that's safe to use."

While students 'self-moderate' online when they know there's an audience, says Apostola, the syn.org.au network is also formally moderated by teachers. "We want to take the liability away from parents and children and give it to schools."

The "democratised story-telling" of media making, uploading content and networking online can support mental health and wellbeing, says Apostola. "It can be a life-transforming experience."

And then the requests started coming in.

"People liked what we were doing and they were asking, can you help us with this? And the answer, because we make it happen, was usually yes."

– Simon

That's how Portable's first institutional work began. VicHealth approached them to explore how digital tools could reach young people. It was the first time the organisation had ever commissioned anything in the digital space, and it planted an important seed: that what Portable was building had real value beyond culture and events.

By 2010, YouTube had emerged as the dominant platform for video and social media was beginning to reshape the internet. The festival had done what it could. It had built a network, a reputation, and an early proof of concept for an organisation that could spot a moment and meet it.



2007

VicHealth commission Portable to build digital tools for young people the first digital project VicHealth had ever funded. A three-year agreement follows.

Five separate trips to Red Bull's Sydney offices trying to get them as a partner. No dice.

2009

Andrew's first SXSW, beginning an ongoing tradition.

Swappler is conceived: a platform for swapping clothes. Film Victoria grant secured to build it — their first investment in digital.



2010-2015

Searching for identity

Expansion, experimentation, and the challenge of doing too many things



The festival became Portable.tv. Andrew moved to New York. A Sydney office opened. Swappler — a platform for swapping clothes that grew out of a chance observation at an industry meetup — evolved into Portable Shops, an ecommerce platform for fashion brands, operating from shared offices alongside some of New York’s most interesting emerging companies.



www.portable.tv

The internet between 2010 and 2015 was itself searching for a business model. Was the future in content? Ecommerce? Platforms? Curation? Nobody really knew, and Portable was running experiments alongside everyone else.

“You didn’t know whether you’re an agency, or whether you’re a media platform, or whether you’re an ecommerce provider. We didn’t really know what we were so we kept experimenting.”
- Andrew

2010

Andrew moves to New York to expand Swappler after early success in Australia. Portable now operates across Melbourne, Sydney, and New York simultaneously.

After four years and one final roll of the dice in New York, the Portable Film Festival stops and transitions into Portable.tv

Swappler pivots to become Portable Shops, an ecommerce platform for independent fashion brands. Andrew moves into shared offices with Refinery29, Rowan & Co, and briefly, Tumblr.

Portable.tv launches with a full-time editor, generating content at the intersection of culture, fashion, and the internet.



Back in Australia, healthdirect — a major government platform digitising health services under the Gillard government — had become a significant and steady client for the agency arm of Portable. The team grew, delivery improved and it started to feel like a real company. It was also commercially real with large clients in Australia and the United States.

Svsubscription launched — a curated quarterly box that, at its creative peak, sat alongside some of the most considered and beautifully executed work happening anywhere at the time (it was featured in the New York Times, Time Magazine and the Wall Street Journal). The Curators Conference ran in both Melbourne and New York. A book, Taking Back Retail, was written and published.



2012

healthdirect becomes Portable's largest client – a multi-year engagement building digital health services including My Aged Care and the National Health Services Directory, under the Gillard government.

Svsubscription launches: a curated quarterly subscription box. Each new release is anticipated. Later described as “the creative peak” of the New York era.

2013

Curators Conference at the Lincoln Centre in New York and the Fitzroy Town Hall, Melbourne. Speakers include Gia Coppola, Scott Belsky, Susie Bubble, Debbie Millman

Portable grows to around 20 people across multiple offices, runs retreats, and flies the team to SXSW.



2014

The iconic Portable Film Festival poster of 2007 was selected to be added to National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra.

Simon meets Kerry Walker, is introduced to the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, and Portable begins work on an online Family Violence Intervention Order system.

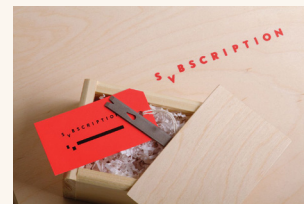


But the question of what Portable actually was kept pressing.

“We knew we wanted to be doing good work. We didn’t think it was making boxes for dudes in the Hamptons at \$600 a pop. Nor being a mildly uninterested Drupal development house.”

– Simon

Something had to give.



2015

Poets.org: a significant project for one of America’s major literary organisations. A standout from the New York years.

Portable.tv winds down. Saying goodbye to content generation and editorial for the first time.

Svsubscription is sold. Andrew packs up the New York office.



2015-2019

Choosing who we are

*A reset, a mission, and the start
of something more deliberate*

In September 2015, Andrew came back to Australia. Svbscription was sold. Portable.tv was closing. The business was lean and the partnership was strained.

“I look back with fondness now, but it was really, really hard. You felt the tide going out, not coming in.”
- Andrew

What followed was a deliberate choice: to keep going, and to rebuild around something that felt more meaningful. That meant returning to the instincts that had always been there: community, participation, technology, design and impact.

It also meant letting go of clients that didn't fit, including well-known commercial brands (like Porsche), even when it hurt financially.



Malcolm Turnbull had just become PM and there was real appetite for design-led thinking in government. Portable's background in community organising and digital work added up to something the public sector was beginning to need and a trip to Canberra that started as exploratory came back with three contracts.

2015

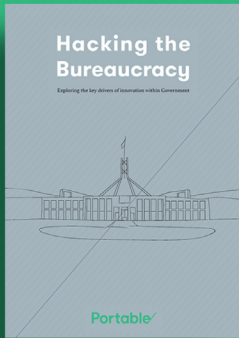
Andrew returns to Australia the day Malcolm Turnbull becomes Prime Minister.

Simon works with Ray Labone and D2B Consulting who introduces the team to human-centred design. A significant shift in how Portable thinks and works. A designer joins what had previously been an almost entirely technical team.

2016

Portable becomes a B Corp.

Newly, an Aged Care Start Up Portable is a founder in, sells to Novita Healthcare.

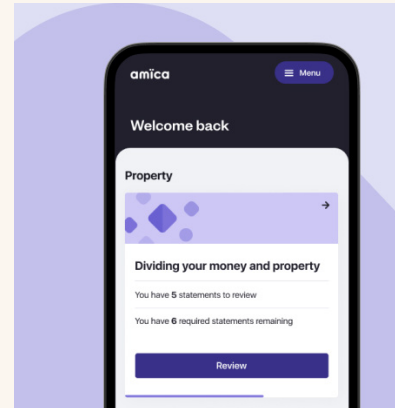


It was also a filter for the kinds of people who were interested in being part of something with that kind of purpose. Human-centred design became a core practice, shifting Portable from being purely a technology supplier to a genuine partner in solving hard problems.

And alongside that came an equally significant shift in how the whole organisation thought about itself: “Prior to 2016, the agency was never the real focus, it was a means to creating a culturally significant product,” says Andrew. “In 2016 we said, let’s make the agency the product.” All of the accumulated experience — years in community work, government, media, design — went into building the agency itself as something worth investing in.



The mission was articulated for the first time in a way that stuck: to seek out areas of social need and policy failure and make transformational change using research, design and technology. It wasn’t just a statement. It was a filter for clients, for work, for the kind of organisation Portable wanted to be.



2017

Portable’s work on the online Family Violence Intervention Order is cited in the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Portable publishes Hacking the Bureaucracy — widely read in government circles and helps open significant new relationships.

Portable moves into the Easey Street studio in Collingwood.

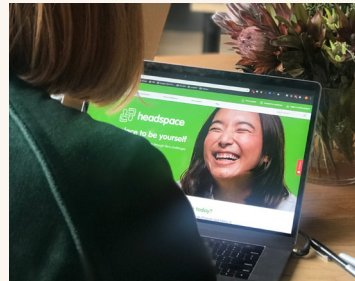
Portable commences R&D into dispute resolution — starting with wages, then car crashes, then family separation. The seeds of amica.



The work that followed started to support that theory. What began as a small request from the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (“help us redesign our website”) became something far more significant when a more strategic approach to the problem surfaced a bigger opportunity: digitising the Family Violence Intervention Order process itself. For people seeking protection, the existing system meant police stations, courtrooms, paperwork, and the very real risk of encountering their perpetrator.

Moving that process online didn’t just improve an experience — it removed a point of re-traumatisation from one of the

most vulnerable moments in a person’s life. The work was cited in the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. It was a signal, to the sector and to Portable, that digitising complex legal processes could have far-reaching human impact.



A growing team started to rally around a shared sense of direction, and the sheer volume of work that followed started to show the potential of what was to come.

“Most agencies run on the premise that the prize work is the highly commercial clients, which you then add a couple of pro-bono clients to balance it out. We asked the question, could you run an agency where the majority of the work is for purpose?”

- Andrew



2018

YourCase — an early attempt to build a product for people navigating the legal system — is co-designed with Nicole Lee. An important proof of concept.

“How Feminists Do Agile” — a public event that captures something important about how Portable was starting to think and work differently.

Portable wins the headspace account. An eight-year relationship begins.

Portable wins the tender to deliver the Family Law Online Dispute Resolution Service, soon amica — Australia’s first online dispute resolution platform for separating couples.

The work very quickly got more interesting, more complex and more consequential. In the space of a year, new people were joining weekly and each person who arrived could attest to joining a project that was of national or international significance. Impact areas were created in mental health, justice, education and even death, which opened the door for experimentation, collaboration and the type of risk typically ascribed to start-ups. This energy attracted like-minded organisations in government and the not for profit sector.



Amica grew from the same instinct. Portable had been running proactive R&D into online dispute resolution — exploring how mediation and tribunal processes could be redesigned to create better access to justice — when the Legal Services Commission saw an application for separating couples. In those early days, that partnership became amica, Australia's first online dispute resolution platform for separating couples.



2019

Portable's death and ageing R&D practice, led by Sarah Kaur, produces *The Future of Death and Ageing* — a report that builds a significant community, leads to multiple digital products, and is still widely read.

Portable's design team travels to Papua New Guinea, conducting research and co-design with students and educators to better integrate technology and pedagogy.

A leadership retreat in Brisbane coincides with tough feedback and conversations that shape the next few years of growth.

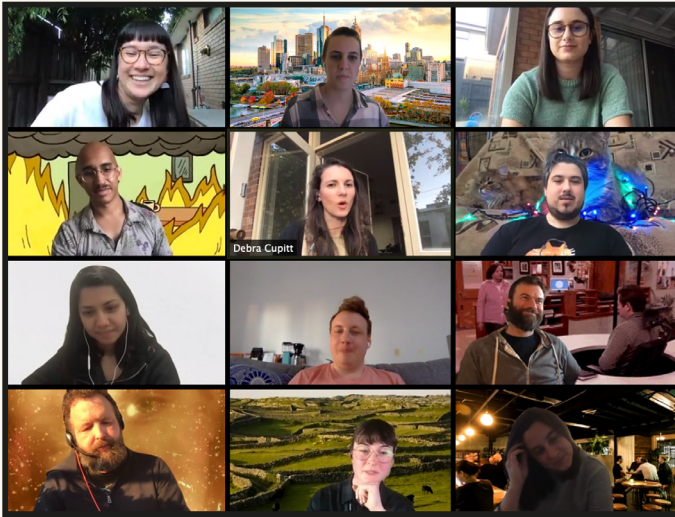
After a period of significant strain, Portable makes a renewed investment in people and culture, starting with leadership.



2020-2026

**People and purpose
at scale: a model
for the world**

*Doubling down on the mission and
building an agency worth believing in*



The question now was how to build an organisation that could sustain what Portable had become consistently, at scale.

That ambition had a name: the Impossible Agency. An agency that doubles down on purposeful work and doesn't replicate the extractive model most agencies run on. That is psychologically safe, mission-focused, and financially sustainable, all at once. One that was building a moat around a timeless need.



“If we’re solving the right type of problems, using human- centred design and innovative technology, we’d always be able to work in areas that mattered.”
 – Simon

2020

COVID hits. Projects close overnight. Portable goes remote a week before lockdown. Portable adapts fast. Within two weeks of lockdown, Portable hosts a webinar on remote user research. Over 2,000 people attend.

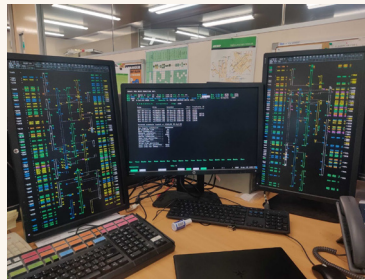
Led by head of P&C, Kathryn Foster, Portable spends a day with the entire team of 50+ people co-designing our shared values and behaviours that we still use to this day.

Portable acquires *inoutput*, reuniting with former Portable employee Chris Rickard.

Lately is conceived out of Portable's end-of-life R&D work and developed into Precious Time with North West Melbourne PHN.

A leadership team was created and given the time to mature and grow. Investment in people and culture moved from aspiration to practice. Simon and Andrew remained the catalysts, but Portable was growing into something that ran on the collective energy of its whole team. People brought their own instincts, expertise, and ambition to the mission.

The Portable that emerged in this era was shaped by a team that genuinely cared: about the work, about each other, and about doing things differently. A culture built on psychological



safety, feedback, and a real willingness to try things, fail, reflect, and improve. Low on ego, high on trust. The kind of place where people stayed not because they had to, but because they wanted to be part of what was being built — and who they were building it with.

2022

Portable's work with Yarra Trams — supporting and enhancing the AVMS system — reaches a significant milestone, with the first major operational change delivered.

Portable sets up its first Advisory Board.



Ask anyone who has worked at Portable during this era what they value most about it, and the answer is almost always the same: the people.

Leadership had also continued to

experiment with delivery models and figured out a way to blend social impact work with real civic tech and innovation. It wasn't always elegant, but this commitment and trial and error resulted in the creation of truly novel products. amica grew to become an internationally recognised platform for divorce and separation. Lately, which grew out of R&D into digital products to support the dying experience, was launched by a Primary Health Network. Experiments into wage underpayments transformed into federal funding for Sweep, an assistant for workers and employers.

2024

Hear Me Out launches Australia's first AI-powered complaints platform.

Portable's Good Design Award-winning forced adoption work with the Department of Social Services and PUR: meaningful, consequential work at the centre of a national reckoning.



A long-running partnership with headspace. Forced adoption education with the Department of Social Services. The data backbone that runs Melbourne's tram network. Hear Me Out, Australia's first AI-powered complaints platform. And countless reports, presentations and events that have led the global conversation

around technology and design for positive social outcomes. Each example is a different kind of proof that the mission was more than a statement. And when COVID hit, the team didn't wait. A remote user research webinar, hosted within two weeks of the first lockdown, drew over 2,000 attendees. Meeting the moment, as always.

Growth in this era also took a new form. Rather than hiring alone, Portable began bringing entire teams on board — people and organisations who shared the same values and wanted to do the same kind of work. inoutput came first, bringing on board a new technical team. Code for Australia followed, deepening the focus on civic technology. In 2024, Portable and NGNY formed Buledya, our joint venture into Indigenous participation and representation. Saxall joined in 2025, bringing a storytelling and content capability that echoed something of Portable's early era, back to storytelling on screen.



And in 2026, Midnyte City expanded Portable's technical services and client reach. Each one a different capability, the same basic premise: find talented people doing good work, and grow together.

2025

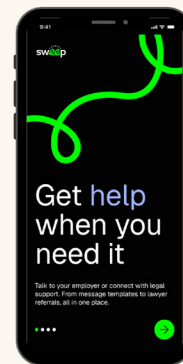
amica wins for purpose and impact at the International Anthem Awards.

Buledya is formed, Portable's joint venture with NGNY and John Saulo to tackle Indigenous social impact work.

Code for Australia join the Portable team, bolstering the focus on civic tech.

Portable presents at the Stanford Legal Design Lab AI Conference. amica becomes Civily and starts rolling out across courts in Massachusetts, Los Angeles and Alaska.

The instinct to build didn't go quiet either. amica keeps evolving. Sweep is growing. The R&D practice keeps pushing. Twenty years in, the curiosity that launched a film festival is still very much present — just better resourced, more deliberately directed, and held by a lot more people than when it started.



The Impossible Agency is a work in progress. But the most important work always is. Portable has spent twenty years building toward a simple idea: that technology and design, done with genuine care and purpose, can change the systems that shape people's lives. That idea matters more now than when it started. The tools are new again, the problems are still real, and the question is the same one it's always been. Twenty years in, it remains the only work worth doing.



2026

Saxall joins the Portable team, bringing storytelling focus back into the organisation, and echoing the early film festival and content era.

Midnyte City join the Portable team, expanding its technical services and client base.

Portable launches Sweep, an AI-powered platform tackling wage theft.

Portable turns 20.

Our wholehearted gratitude



To the Portable team, past and present

Every version of Portable has been built by people who brought their skills, but so much more. You brought judgement, craft, and a willingness to try things before there was a template for them. You brought courage to give hard feedback when it was easier not to, and the commitment to hold the work to a standard everyone recognised but couldn't quite name. You brought support, encouragement and celebration to a community of people who really cared about what they were putting out in the world. Twenty years of that, across a lot of people and a lot of iterations, matters more than we can easily say. Thank you.

To our clients

Every project in this story starts with a person inside an organisation who believed something could be better, who made the case for an approach without a precedent, and took a risk on partners who didn't always look like the obvious choice. You created the conditions for everything that followed and your collaboration made the work stronger. The vision and courage to make change from inside is where it all starts.

To our partners and collaborators

Collaboration over competition has always been in our nature. The best work in this story happened because the right people arrived with deep knowledge of a sector, a problem, or a community, and their own commitment to doing something that mattered. Specialists and subject matter experts who saw the same thing we did and wanted to build it together. Thank you for everything you contributed.

To the people at the centre of the work

Every piece of work that actually changed something did so because real people let us in. Research participants who described what it felt like to navigate a legal process, a health system, a moment of grief or crisis. Co-design contributors who gave their time so that the next person in their situation would have a better experience than they did. People who trusted us with things they hadn't necessarily planned to share. The gap between what a system thinks people experience and what people actually experience is where the real work lives. You closed that gap. Everything that followed traces back to your generosity.

To our friends and families

Some of you were there from the very beginning. Others came into our lives when this work was already part of our identity. You've shared in every version of it, from the late nights, the uncertain years, the moments of breakthrough and the long stretches between them. When the purpose is this clear, the work tends to come home. That hasn't always made for easy company. But for many of us, you became the purpose behind everything else. Thank you.

