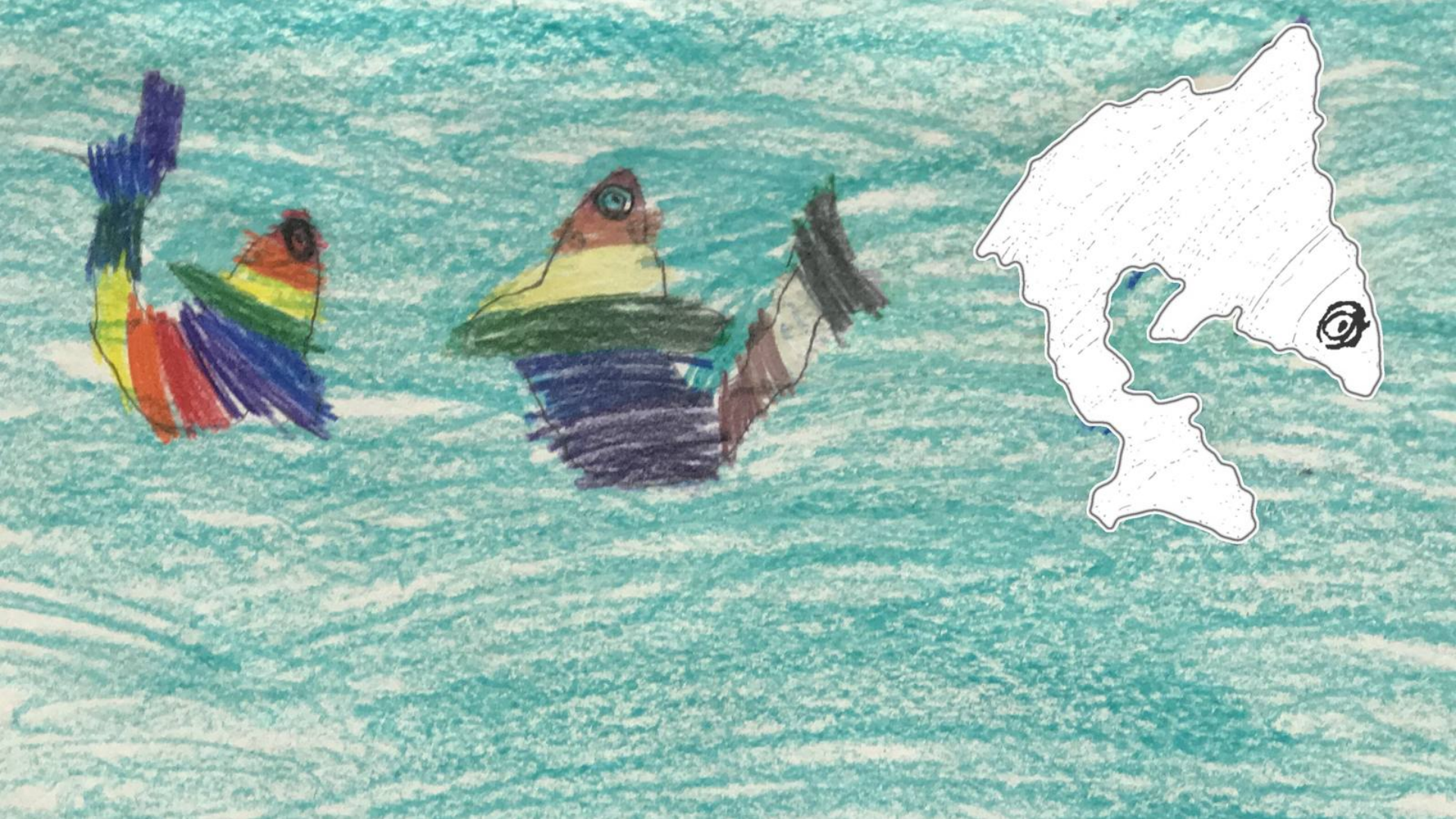




AN AUTHENTICITY SPECTRUM CERTIFICATE

The Southwest Teardown

This document shows how authentic - how human - this article is: where it falls within the Authenticity Spectrum. It captures the end-to-end thinking and workflow behind it, the real editorial calls made along the way. It is not about punctuation or grammar. It's about where the human was leading, and where AI was leading.

20 integral editorial calls · the top 10, in full, with the reasoning behind them - the “Why” - at the end

THE DEFINITIONS



Authentic

Created by humans. The ideas, the thoughts, the ethos - all human in origin.



Authentic Adjacent

Generated within well-defined guardrails - expanding, restructuring, editing. The core thought stays intact.



Non-Authentic Derivative

Completely generated by AI, with no human touches.

THE TIMELINE

● 8/22	The spark	8/22 The spark. Taking off from Memphis in the middle of a thunderstorm and eventually leveling out above the storm.
● 8/22	First rough draft	8/22 First rough draft. Raw missive typed on a MacBook Air, mid-flight between Memphis and Denver. Unedited.
● 8/25	Concept & editorial direction	8/25 Concept & editorial direction. Discussion and alignment on the purpose of this article and why now. Updates made to the editorial calendar and kanban board.
● 8/27	Scaffolding & structure	8/27 Scaffolding & structure. Preamble written to explain the format and reason for the piece. Fleshing out of rough draft to first full draft - all the right sentiment but real work needed.
● 8/27–8/29	The rounds	8/27–8/29 The rounds. Full line-by-line review and rewrites across multiple sessions - twenty real editorial exchanges with real rationale to capture lineage (the Why).
● 8/30	Sprint to final	8/30 Sprint to final. Fit, finish, and polish. Header image, title, companion post, and hashtags finalized. Preview created and confirmed.
● 9/2	Launch	9/2 Launch. Wednesday, per the usual publish-day convention.

THE EVOLUTION

Not a before-and-after snapshot - three real milestones: a rough missive, Claude's scaffolding-and-structure pass, and the locked final. Same three fish, three tiers, throughout.



Stage 1 - the rough missive, 8/22 (1,861 words)

100% Authentic / 0% Authentic Adjacent / 0% Non-Authentic Derivative, by definition. No AI involved yet.



Stage 2 - scaffolding & structure, 8/27, pre-line-by-line

0% Authentic / 100% Authentic Adjacent / 0% Non-Authentic Derivative, by paragraph. Every paragraph traces to real content already in the raw missive.



Stage 3 - locked final

99.2% Authentic / 0.8% Authentic Adjacent / 0% Non-Authentic Derivative, by keystrokes. Every paragraph received at least one substantive override.

By keystrokes: 11 of 12 paragraphs are full rewrites or restorations in Josh's own words. The one exception - 8 words in the "she just did her job" paragraph - is Claude's original sentence, kept rather than rewritten.

A note on methodology.

The percentages here measure Stage 3 by keystrokes: whose literal words appear in the final piece. That's a defensible standard, but not the only one. A fair counter-argument: even a sentence Claude never literally wrote can still be a reaction to something Claude put in front of the author first. Meaning a "fully human-authored" final score may understate Claude's role in shaping the piece, even after every word has changed hands back to the author.

This certificate doesn't resolve that question. It discloses the standard it used, so the reader can weigh the number accordingly. This is why both the raw missive (the spark), the polished piece, and the editorial process behind it are all disclosed. Not just this score.

Future certificates - and this one - may be revisited as the framework's methodology develops.

THE TEN OVERRIDES

1 The storm opener

AI DRAFT

“A storm hit Memphis the night I flew home... Windshear, sheets of rain coming in sideways, the tarmac looking like open water.” Tight, literary.

OVERRIDE

Fuller, plainer, closer to the raw excerpt's own rhythm - restores “I was cooked” verbatim.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“I love the fiction book opening here - it was a dark and stormy night ;-). But I think we need to change it. Beyond the fiction-book feel, it was about setting the full scene - describing why I was in that particular situation, launching one kid and needing to launch the other to keep my commitment. Not just the wrong register - it wasn't what I'd say or how I'd write. I start with the situation and expand into how that situation leads to the destination, or theme.”

2 The milestone stakes

AI DRAFT

“A missed connection that night didn't just cost me a few hours. It ate into the only window I had to get both of my kids where they needed to be.” Accurate, general.

OVERRIDE

The actual routing - 7AM SJC to Nashville to Detroit, a rental booked to East Lansing, hotel reservations already made - closing on “I would have, in my eyes, failed to keep my end of the bargain.”

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“The why is to explain the urgency as to why I needed to be home that night. The tight turnaround was the anxiety leading to me, as a father, potentially disappointing my daughter during one of her biggest life milestones. Costing a few hours didn't give the butterfly effect of the gate agent #5 the impact it truly deserved.”

THE TEN OVERRIDES

3 She just did her job

AI DRAFT

“She wasn't solving that problem. She didn't even know it existed. She just did her job like it mattered.”

OVERRIDE

Kept the closing line, rewrote the setup to restore “Gate 5” from the raw excerpt.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“I love the last sentence. But not feeling the beginning. I wasn't feeling it because it failed to paint the picture of how her very human act of listening and working with me caused the butterfly effect of getting me home that night. She may not have known about my situation, but I, as a customer, mattered regardless of my story. That's why I loved the last sentence but felt it needed the proper setup.”

4 Punch it, Chewy

AI DRAFT

Compressed the pilot's honest ATC explanation and the “Punch it, Chewy” moment into two tight sentences each, no backstory.

OVERRIDE

Restored the pilot's real explanation after an earlier pass dropped it unasked. Expanded the “Punch it, Chewy” ritual to explain why it exists - it calms Chloe down. Kept a deliberately doubled “is” as speech cadence, not a typo.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“Punch it, Chewy is pretty integral to the overall story, and it paid off in spades at the end. But even at this point, it's really about the emotional connection of that part of flying, my daughter, and a calming mechanism. It's a pretty pivotal time in my family's life. That's not something you can compress in two sentences if you want the reader to feel what you're feeling.”

THE TEN OVERRIDES

5 The reorder, tested before the cut

AI DRAFT

A quiet reflective paragraph on the pilot, the gate agent, and the flight attendants, sitting right after the Punch it, Chewy rewrite.

OVERRIDE

Requested moving the flying-memory paragraph earlier, closer to this spot, rather than cutting the reflective paragraph outright.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“After rewriting the punch it chewy paragraph, the reflection on the pilot, gate agent, and flight attendants didn't really flow nor add much to the story. I'd already covered them earlier. That was the original re-order ask, since I'm so averse to deleting during this phase. So I wanted to see how the flow worked vs. making the removal call.”

6 The flying-memory paragraph, cut

AI DRAFT

The flying-memory paragraph, now repositioned closer to Punch it, Chewy per the reorder above.

OVERRIDE

Cut entirely rather than kept in its new position.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“That then brought the flying memory paragraph closer to the punch it chewy content. Although it's a great memory and one that may read well with the readers, it didn't really help the story, at all. So that was the decision to remove that one.”

THE TEN OVERRIDES

7 The AI elephant, named

AI DRAFT

The reflective paragraph on the pilot, gate agent, and flight attendants remained in place, still not flowing.

OVERRIDE

Replaced entirely with a direct address to the skeptical reader - “before you all come after me with pitchforks... I have the time-lapse to prove it.”

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“The third call was to specifically call out the AI elephant in the room. There's all kinds of memes out there on how such an such experience taught me about B2B lead generation. Although funny, this was a genuine spark that led me to actually think about Southwest's current brand trajectory and my current body of work on AI, Brand, and Optimization. It genuinely fit into many principles I've practiced throughout my career (the whole toxic revenue framework).”

8 The line he almost let go

AI DRAFT

Claude's own pass from rough draft to full draft had already cut Southwest's own line from the raw excerpt (“Southwest was THE friendly skies regardless of trademarks or copy rights”) - a cut Josh never asked for.

OVERRIDE

Restored, reworded: “Regardless of slogans and trademarks, they were the real friendly skies” - reclaiming United's own decades-old tagline and handing it to Southwest, one paragraph after admitting his own United status.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“Been going back and forth on this, but I do feel like you cut a really good line.” He noticed it missing during the line-by-line and first assumed Claude had a valid reason for the cut - before deciding it was too good a line to leave out. He confirmed the wordplay, reclaiming United's own tagline for Southwest, was intentional, given his own past United status.

THE TEN OVERRIDES

9 The question that got its friction back

AI DRAFT

“I’m against getting it at the expense of the reason a company exists in the first place.” Smooth, general.

OVERRIDE

“The existential ‘why do we exist’ of a company” - names the real stakes directly instead of smoothing past them.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“I feel like your effort to optimize and streamline cut some good content that does actual work here too. What Southwest is going through is indeed an existential crisis. For all the quirkiness of what Southwest used to be, it was the thing that attracted so many of us to it. When you remove all that, it's a true identity crisis.”

10 The line that predicted its own pushback

SETUP

Josh had just written: “I’ve been upfront the whole time. So today, I’m opening the kimono. You get to see the full monty. AI told me not to say that, but I’m here to prove a point.”

AI RESPONSE

“To be clear, I never actually told you not to say it... ‘opening the kimono’ has a real history of getting called out as a phrase, some read it as exoticizing... I’m not suggesting you cut it. Just want you going into publish knowing that’s a plausible comment.”

OVERRIDE

None needed. The line stays exactly as written.

WHY, IN JOSH'S WORDS

“I wrote it knowing Claude would flag it - that was the whole point. You pushed back due to PR-risk as well as telling me you never actually pushed back. That was the irony of why I wrote it in the first place. You also suggested it was too jargony - reality is, I am a walking jargon, I’ve been in the industry for a long time. So yes, it was a real-time demonstration of AI trying to optimize out what makes me, me.”

THE RAW SPARK

Raw material — typed mid-flight, 8/22/2026, unedited

"I'll spare you the drama, but I'm on the flight back home after Jackson's senior year drop off. Long story short, there was a big thunderstorm with crazy looking windshear (I saw it from the terminal in Memphis) that delayed my flight home to San Jose. The announced it would be an hour or so delay and that I'd miss my flight in Denver to SJC. Tons of lightning and loud thunder. Sheets of rain coming in sideways. I took some video of it and it looked like waves of water on the tarmac because the wind was whipping and the rain was coming down so hard. I was not confident I'd make it home tonight. Announcements on the intercom - flights delayed, these connecting flights you may mis, blah blah blah. I got up and headed to the customer service counter. A very nice girl/lady (I'm at the age where I don't know what I'm supposed to call them now) helped me out. Agreed I'd miss my connection in Denver to SJC. She started looking at other flights the next day. I asked about SFO - maybe my wife or daughter would drive to come get me. They may be mad about the drive, but I'd make it home tonight! She looked and agreed - it would get me home. Not even knowing my situation or story, she agreed and even booked me a better seat than what I had. My faith in Southwest grew a little more that moment. Not only was she just seem like an actual human and interested in getting me home, she seemed like a great person. I didn't get her name, but I know Memphis is a small airport and she was working the desk by gate 5. Bless you for starting something special. As I mentioned, she didn't know my story at all. I had just finished driving cross country from Los Gatos to Oxford Mississippi to take my son to his senior year at Ole Miss, but I had to get home in time to turnaround and get on a flight with my wife and daughter to take her to her Freshman year at Michigan State. Imagine if I'd not been able to get a connecting flight. And I didn't get home until later Sunday evening. Our flights to Detroit were already booked. 7:00 AM from SJC to, ironically, Nashville, then to Detroit. To then pick up a rental to drive to East Lansing. She had no idea that what she was doing was helping me connect two very real milestones in my life (and Jack and Chloe's lives!). I didn't really realize any connection, until later. So I have my new boarding pass from Denver to SFO. I've been texting the family to keep them updated. I was even chatting with Gemini saying that there's no way I get home tonight. Based on my experience flying in weather AND weather in Denver, I was cooked chat. Interestingly enough, gemini was being way more positive than I. He (or she or they, I've no clue) was telling me - hey, you'll make it! The grounding in memphis is temporary but the new flight to SFO was plenty of cushion - you'll be fine. Oh yea of little faith. It/they/he/she was right. Just as I had texted that I had serious doubts (and ordered a beer), there was an announcement that there was a very small window where we could board and take off. If everyone was efficient, we'd just get on and take off in time. As we boarded, on the jetway, there was rumbling. It actually felt like I was in an old school Geo Storm that had 15" vegas blasting 90's rap. My chest was rattling from the booming thunder. No way we are taking off, I thought. My cynical mind went straight to the fact that the crew gets paid as soon as the door of the aircraft closes. They wanted to get paid. So hurry them on, close the doors, and clock that check. I was completely wrong. I'm not sure if it was divine intervention or the fact that this crew wanted to get us where we NEEDED to be or that they had empathy, regardless of our situation. Or a combination of all three (streams converge and cause supernatural things - good or bad).

THE RAW SPARK

Either way, we boarded. The pilot made his curosry announcement. But this announcement was different. He mentioned that this wasn't really an issue with the weather in Memphis. Crazy because it seemed liek a mini hurricane outthere. But it was with Dennver - bad weather, lots of delays. ATC metering flights in and out. But we made it. He taxied and I have to say, this felt different. One thing I love to do when I fly, in particular with my daughter, is after you make that turn from the taxi to "the runway", there's the quite and then the revving of the engines. It's an amazing feeling, especially if you love flying (as I do). But very scary if you don't and are afraid of loud sounds (as chloe was when she was little). So to break the ice, I'd alwasY look at chloe and say "PUNCH IT CHEWY!". I got really good at timing it perfectly to when the pilot would rev the engines and we'd speed off down the runway and get air. Whether I fly with her or not, I always do that now. Maybe it's about making me feel close to the family when I'm traveling alone. Maybe it's to calm my own nerves. Maybe it's because I want to be as handsome as Han Solo. Either way, this pilot PUNCHED IT. I've flown out of burbank and that's supposed to be an experience. But this. This was an experience. My boy PUNCHED it like I've never experienced on a plane. We were airborne before we actually reached the terminal where we boarded. And in Memphis, that's not very long. So we literally launch in the sky. It's not too bad, some sun patches where there storm has blow through - the past. And then we hit turbulence and nothing but gray - for a long time (the present). We ultimately got above all the mess - it was at least 30 minutes or more - until we hit sunlight and above the weather. So that got me thinking. And here's where everyone will say "AI SLOP BRO!", but in reality, this is all me. Yes I'm in at a very emotional and pivotal time in my life. I just launched two kids into the world for crying out loud. I deserve this LOL. But any rate, I couldn't help but think about that pilot. That gate agent. The flight attendants getting everyone in their seats as quick as possible. They may not be launching kids into the world like Elizabeth an I. But they have their own stuff happening. And they clearly want to make sure we are happy. They love what they do (maybe; I didn't ask, but with what Southwest is going through, they have to). So the AI slop you are all looking for, and here it comes, is how does that equate to marketing, brand, and overall Southwest sentiment? Let me start by saying that the REAL first time I remember flying was on a Piedmont Airlines flight from Fayetteville, NC to LAX. Now I may have it wrong (it was a LONG time ago), so it may have been technically Eastern Airlines operated by Piedmont, but that's my first real memory of the magic of plane travel. It was either the summer before 5th grade I think. And we were making our first "real" vacation to visit family in Carpinteria CA. I say "real" because vacation is when you step on a plan. Sounds petty, but that's how I saw it as a kid. Yeah, we'd pile in the car and drive 10 hours to see my mom's side of the family in Pittsburgh. And heck yeah, we had fun. Kennywood, Pirates games, walking to the local convenience store to buy candy. Swimming at Rusty's. It was great. But you drove; it wasn't a plane ride. So as a 4th, about to be 5th grader, this was VACATION. And that's where my love of flying came from. And not only flying, but flying with regional airlines. It hits different. I've flown and had status with United. Nothing like getting that upgrade and flying in "the egg" as my wife and son refer to it (Polaris when it first hit the market). But it's just a bit different flying on a point to point network.

THE RAW SPARK

You have opportunities to meet new people. Opportunities to see airports you'd not ordinarily see. Opportunities to be in the moment, vs stress about being at the destination. Each has it's pros and cons. So even as I had status, when I needed to get to a national destination, I always looked for a southwest flight first. I enjoyed the fact that it had lots of lights from SJC to LAX or LAS. It was almost like getting a shuttle, but in the good ways. They always seemed a more laid back - no fees, no bag charges, and they spoke to you like a human. Making jokes and making sure you were comfortable. I can't even count how many free drinks I've received just because I've smiled, said please and thank you. Maybe the flight was short. I like to think it was because they know. Southwest was THE friendly skies regardless of trademarks or copy rights. Put good in, get good out. The BRAND of Southwest stood for something. And they stood by that for YEARS. Until the optimization wagon showed up. Don't get me wrong, I've invested in quite a few companies. Whether through ESPP or my eTrade brokerage or my 401k fund or my IRAs. And yes, I want my ROI. But do you want that ROI if it comes at the risk of the brand. The ethos. The existential "why do we exist"? Southwest was first and foremost about the traveler. Then the employees. Investors were tertiary. And it worked. Until Optimization Prime came along in the form of an activist investor. Well other airlines are knocking it out of the park with tiered classes. Other airlines are charging for bags. Other airlines charge for choosing your seat. Well last time I checked, unless you were a global services or diamond platinum, did it really matter? I still fly southwest. I still root for the underdog. I still hope they'll make it out of the turbulent skies and head for that beautiful sun above the storm. As I write this enroute to Denver (and hopefully home), I couldn't have done it without the people at Southwest that wanted to make a difference. Will the investors see it that way? I've said before, garbage in, garbage out. Short term gain at the expense of long term vision. I believe they'll come back to the core of who they were. A human brand. That hired humans. That cared about humans. Revenue is great. But at what expense."



CERTIFIED AUTHENTIC

Joshua Ramirez

Author, The Authenticity Spectrum

The Southwest Teardown · Edition 4, The Authenticity Spectrum · Certificate No. 004 · Issued 9/1/2026