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**Published:** 2010

**Categorie(s):**

**Tag(s):** "adult fiction" surreal narrative americana beat e

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Dedicated to: Everyone.

# Chapter 1

It all starts in blackest of darkness. Just pure undiluted void existing all around me. I was having the best sleep of my life. The type of sleep where you truly are dead to the world, spaceless and timeless. A rug on Valium. Then I started hearing sound and voices close by making me start to wake from this pool of oil. Voices carried on and on and on saying the most detached dreamlike things like: "Yeah we need an ambulance" and "Don't move!". Another step forward... why was I sleeping on the asphalt floor of a skatepark?

I turned over onto my back at the bottom of the jump box in an unfocused haze to see two English Bobbies standing over me. What was real what, was not real? They mumbled something which I could not comprehend. After a few blinks they seemed to not be there anymore. Judging from the pain in my hand and the pain in my shoulder and the pain in my foot, this was now real and something had gone wrong. After a length of time which I could never gauge two lady paramedics arrived with an ambulance. Since I had a head injury they wanted to take me to the local ER to get checked out. I could remember that no matter how badly hurt I was, I still found the paramedics cute.

"So, which hospital are you taking me to?" I asked.

"Wexham." She replied

"Where is that?"

"It's in Slough"

"Christ, can't we go to another hospital? Please?"

My head felt like it had been in several non-stop epic Anime battles after I had been sitting there for what seemed like aeon's. With no other method I could think of I kept biting my lip to stay awake as I kept nodding off. The Doctor came over to assess me and asked me to move this and move that and "how does that feel?". Almost like some chorus in a disco song. He wrote some things down and sent me off to the x-ray ward. He gave me directions on how to get there which is just the thing for a person who just hit their head and could not even remember how many ears they had. On the floor were large green Incredible Hulk decals in the

shape of his foot leading the way. Luckily for me they actually lead to the x-ray ward and not the psycho ward. While I sat there waiting my turn this really cute girl walked in with someone who could have been a parent. She kept staring at me. I was so out of it I thought she was checking me out but was probably more interested in the road map of blood down my face. I was that guy, the one that is worse off than you when you go to the hospital. My turn arrived and got blasted with enough x-rays to give the Duracell Bunny cancer.

"Now dear.." The Radiologist said "there was a problem with the x-ray on your jaw and I can't tell which side it was taken from. Which side of your mouth do you have your fillings on so we can judge by that."

"I have fillings?"

On my way back to the Doctor I somehow managed to get lost despite the giant green Hulk feet stuck to the floor. I walked into a ward of people that were a lot older and sicker than I ever hope to be. Some hospital staff and a nurse standing in the corner of the room stopped mid conversation to yell at me: "You are in the wrong place! Go back!". I slowly turned around and bid them "Good morning" since it was night and just to fuck with them.

The sickness part of my concussion kicked in. Every sore body part from my crash got worse as I had to get up to move to the bathroom. Vomit was knocking on the door and my mouth was awash with spit. I got the thought in my head like I always do that I did not want to be throwing up at that particular moment. Then I faced it and knew it was something that would be over in no time. My head was in a gray vibrating haze as I got on my knees and faced the toilet. My body seized up in pre throw up stage fright, then my mouth involuntarily opened as wide as my jaw would allow it, human mechanics reaching full realization. My throat burned and my eyes watered as what little I had in my stomach came out. My brain felt like it was drowning in super glue. I looked down at the Picasso I had just created swimming in the toilet and saw blood amongst the other content. My hand went up to my nose and came away with some blood on it. After a serious blow to the head I knew this could be hemorrhaging inside my head. I froze. My back arched up and I puked again. Eyes watering, mouth hanging open I stared down into the toilet and prepared to black out and die. In my murkiness I thought about my end and realized that it made perfect sense and timing. My friend Rich who was on his way to my apartment to keep an eye on me would find me face down in the toilet in my pj's. I had escaped death

once before years ago in a near fatal car accident but I knew I could not get out of this one. I was cornered in the bathroom. The fear I expected was not there. Still bent over I closed my eyes and just said “fuck it, I’ve had a good life”. After waiting to black out, the dizziness subsided and the murky head water thinned out. I actually began to feel better. My thoughts were no longer electric rattles down a rusty pipe but rather like when you surface from being under water and sight and sound return to their defaults. I stood up slowly, body still aching and washed my face. My reflection showed dark rings under blood shot eyes as well as the cuts padded by swollen flesh. As I lay back down in bed I had to move all my sore parts fuel injecting me with 16 valve pain. Staring at the roof, dead still as to go for dullness and not sharpness I couldn’t believe I had just lived through that moment.

Shannon came over after Rich left because I needed someone to keep an eye on me the whole night. I barely remember Rich being there. Shannon stayed the night being my homebrew nurse and said “holy shit” when she saw me in daylight the next morning. My shoulder was covered in grazes, my left ear was cut as was my nose and parts of my face. A huge black eye had come to stay with me as well as my right hand hurting like a teenagers cell phone bill. My head was a lot clearer but I still had a headache running around inside there rattling the windows and knocking on the doors.

Getting dressed dictated working with circus troupe balance. I took my time testing out the limits to which I could move before it hurt. New calibrations. My left arm was still too sore to live on its own so I kept the sling on and wore my jacket just like the one armed man. The eye and face looked bad so I wore dark sunglasses to stop people staring at me while I stared at them. My friend Rick came over to help me carry groceries and get my bike back. If they gave me any pain medication I don’t recall ever taking it, or does the medication take you? We walked slowly along the road while he told me how destroyed I looked. My memory was patchy and I went over the events of the day of the crash to try to do a power on self test. We found my bike stowed away in a closet at the leisure center next to the park. I was amazed and relieved that it had not been stolen as well as not seemingly having sustained much damage in the crash I don’t recall ever having.

General consensus varied depending on who I asked how long I was

unconscious for. It ranged from five seconds to two minutes. The longer the out time the worse the concussion is so I took the average of their estimates. Most importantly I thanked the person that called the ambulance for me. I had taken that week off work to do some road tripping but instead spent most of it eating yogurt and drinking milkshakes because of my pounding jaw. As I walked out of the cinema I saw someone I didn't want to see three rows in front of me with his goon friends. He didn't like me because his girlfriend had given me her number. He was a dick and I didn't know they were even dating when she handed the digits over to me. Arm still in a sling and looking like one of Mike Tysons girlfriends I didn't want to give him the chance to take me on in my weakened state. I deliberately spaced out the time between my steps walking out and stuck to the shadows of the theater avoiding him. Time. Time to leave England.

## Chapter 2

I did not know what to expect moving to America. Hopefully it was everything Kerouac and then some. Was the neon lit cartoon animal reality I had seen on TV that far detached from the actual thing? I was more inclined to believe it had a bug riddled underbelly shown exactly in David Lynch's Blue Velvet. Later on I would find this to be true facing the fake sincerity of some Californians. I was always asked how I was doing by people with a cheesy grin with no actual recourse expected. Nobody cared how you were doing especially the burn out working at the grocery store counter. Oceanside's, tattoo parlors next to train stations, motorbikes, pancakes, cults, silicon, silicone, large fast cars and freakishly sunny weather.

The plane was full of souls and I was cutting it close to take off. Pretty much everything I had was on my back or in the belly of the plane. The rest were a collection of CD's which had been shipped a week prior. My single serving friend next to me on the flight was a petite dark haired girl not that much older than me but would never admit it. I wore shorts while she wished someone like me would act grown up and broken like her. She had taken up all the foot room with her bag no doubt filled with senseless papers and a new laptop which she probably never quite figured out how to use. My backpack was too large for the overhead container and the cow had taken up all our foot space. For 11 hours my bag sat wedged under my seat.

"You are supposed to get on the plane earlier." she said.

"What?"

"You got here too late and if you had gotten here earlier you would have been able to sort out your bag." she added.

Air travel bitches.

"Well pretty much everything I have of value is in this bag and I was late

because I was saying goodbye to everyone I know." I retorted with what was hopefully a scary look on my face. She mumbled something to herself and I started to hope that I got real sick on the flight and puke all over her after my freeze dried compacted desert. A new sentence to write about the flight for me and the ultimate nightmare for her and the board members meeting she was probably on the way to.

Its never really sleep while traveling on a plane. You get the pleasure of nodding off for a few minutes until the captain banks the plane like a drunk teenager in his Dads car or your travel mate jabs you in the ribs. The ultimate awakening is when you are finally sound asleep and the retard next to you turns the cabin light on which is facing directly into your eyes. Its like the hand of god shining down a drainpipe. It is space time white noise torture in a tube and kids are allowed. My neck got sore. My mouth got dry. The babies whine got louder. My seat got smaller.

The food arrives. The food leaves. A baby cries. A baby sleeps. I watch the in flight movie but they watch me back as I try not count the hours of flying. 11 hours in total, its an experience wanting sleeping pills with a Vodka chaser. The mental asylum is being stationary for so long and having the back of your seat constantly kicked.

The cabin lights blinked on in random order. Miss Petite next to me was awake as well and a lot more talkative since I hadn't bumped her or tried to hit on her the whole flight. The captain came over the loud speakers and mentioned something about a delayed connecting flight which she just happened to be going onto. She told me she was in London on business and was on her way back to Canada. I told her I was moving to San Francisco.

"Who are you going to stay with?" she questioned.

"My company has a rental apartment that I am going to use until I can find a place to live."

"You don't have any friends here?"

"I don't know anybody in America..." and with that I had her mind in overdrive and she went quiet. She was trying to figure me out. Get her head around why people did things like that. She worked for AOL. I was willing to bet she also had a six foot boyfriend who cheated on her, one of those small yapping dogs at home and a Feng Shui book on her living

room table. As attractive as she was my mind was elsewhere and I was hoping the bed I found myself in that night was comfortable. I felt calm and not panicky at all. The reason being is that for a while I would not have to wake up to the same surroundings, see the same people every day, walk the same route to work, eat the same brand breakfast cereal, see the same dead faces of commuters on my route, hear the same accents day in day out, try be nice to the same dickhead, round and round the hamster wheel. The only thing that could go wrong at that stage was that my other bag could be in downtown Beirut - but it wasn't. Miss dark haired cutie was like a rat down a drainpipe as soon as the doors opened to get to her next flight. Outside the window it was dark and the hue of the lights in San Francisco seemed a little different than in Europe. I peered around for more of my new home but could not make out much. I was in no hurry to go anywhere. The meter on my life had been set back to 00000000 miles and everything for a few months would be a new experience.

The line to immigration. Cameras every few feet on the ceiling. Drug sniffer dogs. Customs officials. X-ray machines. Non-English speakers stuck somewhere in the limbo from airplane to taxi cab. The immigration officer was a lot friendlier to deal with than the haggard burnout's at Heathrow. Nonetheless he had been working that job too long and probably dreamed of taking finger prints in his sleep each night. He asked me odd questions as if I was going to break down and confess I was a terrorist. Then he asked for a form that I couldn't find in my bag. He let me through without seeing it and of course I found it the next day. As I escaped the paperwork section of the airport I made my way to the taxi's. Having being suckered in Paris once before by an illegal cab driver I was sure to only get into one at an assigned area. Nobody approached me. The air outside was warm and instantly made me 10 degrees more awake. I stood in the line and waited for my taxi.

As best I could tell my driver was Russian and much happier with life now that he was in America. I had to repeat where I needed to go a few times and he asked me for directions: „ÄúI have no idea man, you tell me,Äù I told him. He got out a map while I was looking for his GPS system. Somewhere from the glove box he pulled out a small flashlight and aimed it at the map. While he was looking it over he was reading the road names to himself softly. Since the map was all over his wheel and he was looking intently at it for long periods of time I know this was

how I was going to die. I get all the way to America and get killed 10 miles from the airport. On my tombstone they could have written „ÄúYellow Death,Äù. The cab would slowly drift out of the lane and he would suddenly focus back on the road veering it back into the right direction. The best idea was to look out the window and pay no attention to Racer X trying to kill us. My new complex was an endless myriad of identical looking apartments like an a state home for people with OCD. They made no sense at all. I walked in what seemed like an infinite loop trying to find the correct apartment number and sweating. Apartment numbering that just made no sense. I came all that way no problem and could not even find my own front door. Once I got inside I took a really long shower and scattered the contents of my bags all over the apartment. There was a second bedroom in the apartment which I closed the door to so the terrorists, Scientologists, the dark or the zombies could get me. I climbed into the giant double bed and fell asleep as all my friends back home were waking up.

# Chapter 3

It was getting dark but I was stuck in conversation with my friend Greg. My other friend, Cappy was with me as well visiting from England. We had just finished riding our BMX bikes in the cement park and were walking them back to my parked truck. We had no sense of urgency since none of us had any place to be and Greg's wife was not back from work yet. We started to walk slower as we got closer to my truck. In mid conversation my head turned and I noticed headlights driving into the parking lot. When more light was shed on the car I could see it was a police cruiser. I turned to Cappy and joked: "uh oh, we are going to jail homies." My smirk went south when the police cruiser swung in next to my truck and blocked me from reversing possibly ever reversing out. The cop parked her car in such a fashion as to indicate that we were at risk of flight and her parking was a sign of an offensive strategy. A lady officer of the law stepped out of the squad car and right away asked us for our ID's. I was confused at this point but knew better than to question the cops since you can end up with broken fingers a la nightstick or worse. We complied because we wanted to get rid of her. Give them any reason and the long arm of the law wont stop till its reaches the back of your teeth. Greg didn't have his ID on him and Cappy had his British drivers license. I showed the cop no fear as I battled to get my drivers license out. She had not told us to do anything but all 3 of us stood in place dumbfounded at what was happening and why we were being detained. As the female cop starts to run my ID a second squad car appears and also parks at a very odd angle.

A very self assured caveman stepped out of the second squad car. At this point my mind was reeling as to what was going on here and why cop #1 had called for backup from cop #2. Their jurisdiction was known for plenty of gun related violence, drugs and various gang related issues. The fact that they were making such a fuss over us meant something equivalent or worse. Mrs Uniform and no personality started asking me a myriad of questions : where have you been, how often do you come

here, why, who, when, wheres Waldo? Greg finally asked the million dollar question : "Look, I don't mean to sound out of line or anything , but whats the problem here?" His tone was just right but I was watching for the cuffs to come off the belt. The Darwinesque male cop turned to him and replied: "It is illegal to be in a Redwood City park after dark.."

I still was not showing any fear and I'm not sure that either of them liked that. After all, they had the guns and badges and deserve fear. Or respect. Or something. Cappy had just had a run in with some English Bobbys so was sure to keep dead quiet the whole time. Male cop had his flashlight out and started asking me stupid questions the whole time with it shining right into my face like a lab rat. My eyes were starting to hurt so I dodged the beam left and right like a very, very slow prizefighter. My best guess is that he thought I was high on something. All he had to do was ask for a urine sample to drug test and I would have obliged all over his car. Since Greg had no ID they were taking every detail a human could possibly remember from him.

With a smirk on her face the female cop turned to me and said "Should I give him a ticket as well ?". She tilted her head in Cappys direction. She was loving this. The gun and badge were all hers and now it was comedy hour, centre stage at officer Fuckheads mega funny super happy stand up routine. The gun was like her microphone.

"You can write him up as well," I replied "But I'm not sure how you are going to get the money from him to pay the fine when he is in England.,Äù.

She no longer thought she was funny. I started to get annoyed that these two dickheads now had us for close to 20 minutes while crimes were going on around the city. They told us the rules of the park are posted on boards all over and it clearly stated that the park is to be vacated after dark. While they had us there a friend of mine rode his bike past and greeted me. Male cop asked him where he was going and he replied that he was going home. They left him alone as he rode off. My confusion came back from holiday as we were trying to do the same thing before the comedian of the year had blocked me in. There was no point arguing thought because at this stage I still did not have neither a gun nor a badge. Now that it had my attention I turned around to see who else was in the park. An elderly couple to our right breezed along being old.

Behind us a young couple walked hand in hand through the centre of the park. I caught Greg's eye and he asked the cops 1 and 2 , with no disrespect , why all these other people were in the park but not getting tickets. Flashlight McGee answered with: "because we have you guys."

As my ticket was handed over to me I asked how much I was expected to pay and was told \$25. Two weeks later a court summons appeared in my mailbox telling me the fine is actually \$185 and that I had to appear in court. I had never been arrested nor broken any laws, paid all my tax, was nice to the elderly, had never been in trouble and now I had to pay a months worth of lunches and stand before a judge. Surely when the megatronic marketing machine cooked up "the land of the free" they meant we could roam said land freely even after dark?

I looped around and around various buildings trying to find the court I was supposed to be in. The site of metal detectors and guards behind plexiglass gave me every indication this was the place. There was no other markings to be found on the building so I walked in. My keys, wallet, papers and tonsils all went into a small box that was X rayed. Then I went through a metal detector. The signs just past X raysville said nothing about the small claims court I had to be in. I turned and asked a guard if he could give me directions. A haggard middle aged man who hated me with all his black heart but never knew me. When he spoke to me he never looked at me and the bitterness poured out of him like blood from a squashed tick.

"What does your paper say? Where do you have to be?" he asked knowing right away that I was lost but wanted to teach me a lesson.

"It says building 500, small claims court."

"And what building is this?" he was going all the way. "I don't know, there is no sign outside."

A deep breathe was drawn and he used one lazy arm to point while explaining I was in the wrong building and had to go next door. Of course he could have just pointed this out right from the start but then he would not be bitter would he. I called him a prick under my breath and hoped he worked that job till the day he died. I hoped a person like me walked in every single day until then and asked him the same question. He would keep pushing that rock but never quite ever reach the top of the hill.

They processed me like a paperclip and I sat outside the courtroom waiting to see what happened on the other side of that door. The longer I sat there the more people started to show up. We were all sitting in a squared off waiting room with wooden benches. There were 2 ladies sitting next to me and they were discussing why they were both there. They never thought to include me in their conversation because everything about me was foreign to them. I wasn't a housewife who watched lots of TV and was a secretive drunk. The younger of the two ladies was telling the older one of how she failed to appear at an initial court appointment because she forgot. On top of that she had an unpaid ticket and had failed to update her home address with the DMV after moving house. I thought she was done for. Some guard with a mustache and a green inked tattoo on his lower forearm was going to take her away right there in front of us.

They never searched us for weapons and let us all into the courtroom. It looked exactly like how they are depicted in the movies. While the other people attending bumbled to their seats I stealthed to a bench right at the back and sat in the corner. From there I could watch the people as well as the proceedings. My eyes scanned the room and finally settled on the bench in front of me where someone had etched the words "Fuck the Police". Sure enough a guard entered the courtroom and gave us the run down. He told us that we were not allowed to have our hands in our pockets when in front of the judge, no baseball caps, no talking and no attitudes. They loved this. The total crushing set of rules they put on you which were just staples of an even bigger illusion. What made this judge such a supreme being that I was not even allowed to have my hands in my pockets? Had this guy secretly assassinated Hitler or saved an orphanage? All these procedures and rules ended with the same result: you on your knees in front of a person wearing a black robe begging for your freedom. Under their thumb while rows of people gawk at your laundry list dragged out in public.

"All rise" monotoned the guard and we did because each and every one of us wanted to get the hell out of there.

A guy in his mid twenties got up in front of the judge and pleaded that he was a recovering drunk and drug abuser and he knows not what he does. Life had burnt this guy out and he was just an addiction with a

social security number. He would get in trouble, then clean up, then get in trouble again, then clean up again, then get in trouble again, then rinse, repeat and repent. His story went on and on. The judge listened. He probably had the same broke ass archetype in his court every second day. After he begged and pleaded with some whining thrown in he basically got away.

Person after person got up and did their song and dance for the Judge. The sanctity which he was afforded made me sick with us all being forced to bow before him with broken wings. We had to suffer for our own sins unless of course you were granted vindication down from the throne.

The middle aged woman next to me caught my attention. She was listening so intently to each persons 2 minutes of being humiliated in a room full of strangers that she kept leaning forward. Sometimes after someone had finished she would shake her head in disbelief. This lady was so detached from the world around her that she thought she was in a cheap reality TV show standing in judgement of these people.

They called me up and my turn to look like an idiot was up. I stood in front of the Judge having flashbacks of teachers in high school down to me. In my minds eye I was holding both my middle fingers up to his face and breaking his spirit by pointing out all the flaws which led up to me being in front of him like some criminal. He read out my charge while the guard who probably drank and beat his kids sat like a stone toad next to him.

"What do you plead?" he asked and I replied "Guilty" since that's what they wanted me to say and why they had me there. They just wanted to remind me that while I lived around electricity and the range of Cop cars I was not free. Afterwards I learnt that I was supposed to plead "no contest" which to me was equated to "guilty" but I guess I was the only person who passed High Skool English.

My fine was reduced to \$65 and I walked out hoping that every one of them had kiddie porn on their computers found by their wives. I wrote a cheque at the counter and paid them off to fund the repair of the potholes in my road (but they would not really). I paused outside the courthouse looking at the buildings, the flags, the monochromatic squad

cars, the ashy faces and wondered what they would do with me if I really did commit a crime.

## Chapter 4

Girls. Trouble. So I went online and responded to a singles ad I found. A few days went by and the person replied. It felt like I had won something. No doubt every girl who submits something to a singles site gets millions of Hugh Hefs responding so I liked my chances right away. My first impression was she was a decent person, light hearted and around the same age as me. She was Asian and I liked Asian girls and I was (and still am) white and she liked white guys. She was also drug free and not affiliated with any Californian death cults, liked long walks on the beach and was a Pisces. Her name was Wendy and I never got her last name. We ended up talking over the phone a few times. We could not meet up right away since she had just finished law school and was in the process of moving back to my area from Portland. We exchanged pictures and various details and it became apparent that was crazy over her two French bulldogs. Everyone is weird with pets in their own way. This is how people meet each other.

A few weeks later she had finished moving in all her stuff and we decided to meet up for dinner. She was a bit shorter in real life and cuter. The angles of the Internet work well to skew perspectives sometimes. We had Sushi and a long comfortable silence. Throughout the night I couldn't help but feel there was something I could not figure out about her. After dinner we walked around a strip mall and got some banana flavored milk from this Asian themed cafe. The girl behind the counter gave me a look to remind me that yellow and white don't mix.

She invited me over for dinner. I got directions and made sure I wore clean socks. After getting lost in a maze of seemingly endless Urbania I finally found her apartment. She looked happy to see me and was getting cuter each time I saw her. As we got to her door I could hear her two dogs barking in the apartment. I was a cat person but felt compelled to make the effort to be nice to whatever dogs I found behind that door. She opened the door to let me in. I stood in the doorway for less than a

second when one of the dogs bolted out the door like it was on crystal meth. Wendy ran out after the retard dog and left me standing in the doorway of a strange apartment. The only word I could think of was "awkward" after she was gone for a few minutes. I still stood in the doorway not feeling comfortable enough yet to make it across the invisible politeness barrier when you visit someones house for the first time. I looked at the other dog and noticed what an ugly little bastard it was. This dog looked like a goggle eyed bat with four legs, ears always standing upright. I looked around her apartment not really taking in too much. Just killing time until she came back with the other fugly dog and we could laugh about it. Then the dog made a move for the door real quick so I grabbed it by the neck. Nice try you little fucker. I closed the door and eyeballed the dog. It wanted it to be a sweet animal but it was just too stupid. Its head was like a cabbage with two black marbles stuck into it reflecting no signs of intelligence at all. If it had a peanut for a brain that would be boosting its IQ by 100 points.

I began to wonder if Wendy would ever come back with the other dog. It had been a while now. Scenarios played out in my mind about it getting run over while she was chasing it, to losing it in the dark forever. Dog death dinner date. The way she let those two mongrels take over the apartment I figured her for a pathetic dog fan right away. She finally returned and had her Retardweiller in her arms. Once I got a better look at it I saw that this dog had a lighter coat than the other one and was twice as ugly. It was so cross eyed I bet it had a permanent 180 panoramic view of the world.

"I don't know why he did that.," Wendy sighed as she put him down on the floor. The dog then stood there for a bit seemingly staring into some void in space. When it noticed I was there it started to bark at me. I wanted to feed it to a rabid Lion with tapeworm. I wanted to win the Superbowl by kicking it through the goal posts and come landing down smacking the president in the face, its bloated rat body filled with crumbled bones. These dogs were fucking retarded but she would never see that because she loved them so much.

Wendy and I walked to the store to get some dinner. She seemed a little more relaxed now that she didn't have to deal with her lunatic animals. We grabbed some very simple pizza and I spent the whole time thinking about how I could get rid of her dogs if we ever got serious. One of them

had fled after I simply opened a door so imagine if I really applied myself.

Since she had just moved in it took her some time to find the right pots and pans to cook the pizza. I poured myself some orange juice and we sat on her couch half watching what crap was on television and talking. Then the lighter dog walked over to me and started to screw my leg. Wendy apologized on the dogs behalf and I came up with seven new ways to get rid of the dogs right away.

When the pizza was done we took our shoes off and put our feet up. I playfully touched hers with mine but I got no feedback so withdrew. Again I got the sense there was something about her I could not figure out. We spoke about various things and like all worthwhile conversations we landed on the topic of Asian porn. She was an open person and willing to talk about it for two minutes without going "eeewww". She described some of the videos she had which sounded like they stopped just short of being snuff movies. This was odd. We spoke some more and she ended one of her sentences with "... when I'm not on my meds."

Here it was.

"Oh meds, yeah I'm bipolar," she told me nonchalantly. I stared at her waiting for more elaboration since she also mentioned that she "does weird things" when off the meds. I ran through the inventory of knives in my head that I had seen in the kitchen earlier. Turns out she had a bout of kleptomania and did some other things that were so bad she would not tell me what they were.

She eventually took care of herself and had so many mood swings she never knew if she felt like calling me or even emailing or buying \$20 000 worth of skincare products. I was glad because it meant that I didn't have to go through the trouble of changing my phone number.

## Chapter 5

My friend Endo and I went down South for the weekend to this comp in Atascadero. Middle California with fresh mornings and clean air. Littered with small towns you ever heard of when a quake hit. The space in between the hell below of LA and the heaven above of San Fran. When we got there it turned out that I knew the guy who ran the park. I had been running into him all over California for months. I always knew him as "Ted" but it turned out that was not his name. Some of the locals had screen printed shirts that read: "Kill Ted". Something only they could make sense of.

We met up with a fellow rider from Norcal along the way. We found out he banged Miss Teen USA once and later got thrown out of our hotel when six riders from Orange County crashed on his floor. The dozens of BMX bikes trailing into the room like ants to honey gave everyone away on the CCTV. Endo and I managed to keep our room even after the manager threatened to call the cops on us. Fresh from India and coming to terms with English, the USA and life in general, the manager was being a dick so I told him to call the cops. He never did. It was only myself and him in our room. The manager refunded our friend but charged him \$10 for using the soap in his room. Looking at each other we both saw destruction in each others eyes along with the fact that my credit card number was at the front desk. Endo pissed into the shampoo bottle in our room and sealed it back up again instead of filling out a comments form. The beds were tossed, every light was turned on and the heater was cranked up to 11. Fingers twitching and looking to see what else we could get away with to retaliate for the bogus \$10 charge. All the coffee, tea, sugar and chemical puke sweetener went bye bye down the toilet as the shower still ran with nobody in it. It was childlike retribution within the confines of consequence.

At the comp I recognized a guy I had read an interview with who had a first name for a last name. All the ramps were freshly hand built and

there was no shade. I skulked around taking photos. Afterwards this small group of good looking girls were handing out flyers for what looked like a pretty serious house party. Endo and I had a meeting and discussed the viability of us going and decided that there would be too many oddball tweakers attending.

Back home I got on my own bike after a few weeks off from a crashed ankle. Went to my local park but was hard to ride with all the drama going on. This lady was standing in the middle of the park holding an infant when a loose skateboard hit the back of her leg. She decided to confiscate the board and took a swing at the kid who owned it. The skaters all turned on her and took the board back. If you stand in the middle of a skate park, sooner or later something will hit you. Bad parenting has put us where we are today and the world needs less of it.

## Chapter 6

I was on the floor of the Idlewild skatepark to get a good shot and this kid asked me “why do you take photographs?”. I’m sure he wanted me to tell him that I was shooting for some awesome magazine or a cheque for a cool thousand but told him the reason why I did everything “fun”. Like most kids his little mind was trying to make sense of what I was doing. Who I was and could he get a story out of me to impress his punk little friends. Age would litter some pleasantries around his questions but he still had a ways to go.

Later that day I was getting some more photos for an interview with a guy and his gorgeous wife who ran an indoor skatepark together in Reno. We played around with some angles while he rode around in the parking lot and I pushed the button on the black thing in my hand. Minutes later some kids had seeped out of the park and were watching. A skinny brash kid told me his father was a photographer in his own blunt teenage way. Then he wanted me to give him my camera so he could climb up onto the roof of the warehouse and get a sick shot of the rider I was shooting.

## Chapter 7

Las Vegas is less fake than California in that they are up front that they want all your money. Not some of it or a portion of it, but your yet to be born grand kids college fund and the fillings in their teeth. People stupid enough to believe “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” deserve to live there forever. The air is stale and dry as you get out of the airplane and are greeted by slot machines before you see even one security guard. To strangle you even further there is cigarette smoke looming just about everywhere. The sun is constant and unrelenting as if it was part of the apocalypse. As the heat permeates the air it gives your body a sense of afternoon warmth that makes you want to stay awake. Slot playing weather. Nothing should be out there in the desert and nature tells us this by making the area dead and arid and expensive. The illusion of the whole place is strong enough to make most people fall for it but there is no magic or fantasy. Just walk one block off the strip and you find the cities OG form: cheap strip bars, tasteless sex shops, pimp wannabe’s and intergalactic junkies that washed up there. Sincerity is a tool for getting tips and the only thing for free there is bankruptcy.

I arrived at the airport on time and joined one of many queues. I needed to join queue 2 but was trapped with waist height guiding banners. A security guard or people usher had her back to me and I politely asked her where I could join queue 2. She half turned her head and mumbled “Just get in line”. She was really earning her \$7 an hour. Trapped in the maze with the gargoyles I threw 2 dice and found the second queue was actually right in front of me. I ducked under the people dividers since it was the closest distance between two points. “Excuse me!” the retard guard yelled as I ducked past her. I flipped her off and mumbled over my shoulder “You are a poor excuse”. The third or fourth line of people led me all the way out of the airport and into the parking lot. As I saw the end of the line I muttered “holy crap” and watched other people saying it as I joined the end. The row of people shuffled along like watching a bad movie with a girl you aren’t too sure about. As we all crawled along

I looked at the time. There was no way I was going to make my flight. I watched a lady take a full litre of water through the security check point and then found myself facing several runways. After I found the correct gates it became obvious that I had missed my flight. The lady at the counter let me know this and I let her know that I was on time but because of their long lines I was now late. They wanted to divert me all over the West coast so I had to be a snake charmer and convince them I needed to fly direct. It worked and I just had to wait an hour for the next flight. My bags and I waited in a chair while I listened to music and watched all the various people walking past me. I recognized several people from various lines and watched what gates they went to curious to see where they would be going. Different people all shapes and sizes all playing along to the soundtrack only I could hear in my headphones. There was a great book to be written if I could have stopped each and every person asking them where they are going and why. The boards flickered and it was my turn to fly so I got in yet another line. The Captain of our plane walked past the girl standing in front of me and spared her a glance. He looked again and then leaned over to her telling her to cover herself up. I could not see from behind her if she was perhaps not wearing a bra or had something "offensive" written on her shirt. She turned to me and said "I didn't know there was a dress code on an airplane".

The dirt comp was winding down and I was doing the math in my head to what time the final act was going on stage. The band was Static-X and I had never seen them before or had taken any music related photos yet in my burgeoning photographic career. I had provisioned: I got as many shots as I could during the day so I could miss the last few runs of the dirt comp. The Scenester kids had thinned out by this time so there was not much foot traffic as I made my way over the stage. We were allowed to take photos of the first three songs and were not allowed to use any flashes which was fair enough. After going through a small maze I found the front of the stage and a fence holding back rabid booze soaked kids waiting to get their rock on. Standing next to me waiting for the band to come onstage was a high school kid holding a camera. He couldn't have been a day over 17 and I was tempted to ask him which magazine he was covering the gig for. Most likely a fan of the band that blagged a media credential. People get stupid around these events and they lose sight that \$8 for a ticket is just that: its \$8. Not enough to bankrupt anyone or to complain about. A plastic bottle zinged its way past my head and I

turned to see which little brat threw it at me. I looked around and it could have been any of them. Then I felt a skateboard hit my leg as someone pushed it under the stage. I made sure to put myself between my camera and the night of the living mallrats. All of them started to scream at once as the band members took the stage. No longer mere consumers but hard rock gods they didnt even have to play a note to convey awesomness. There was a pause from everyone except security as their idols appeared one by one. The drums, bass, vocals and guitars came out all at once in a blast beat pushing the PA system into a nervous breakdown. Music turned into a physical force as the sound pushed itself out the monitors, pounding my chest. Was there anything better. I saw some flashes go off to my right and figured more high school kids had blagged media credentials. The head security guy turned around from the front-line of kids and yelled at us: "your shits over - you ain't ever doing this again - no more pictures". He could have pounded any one of those kids in a heartbeat yet they still used their flashes. After a few shots I turned around to get some crowd shots. The crowd had gone from stun to kill. A little mosh pit princess crowd surfing got pulled down and proceeded to punch one of the security guys in distaste. He was pushing 280 pounds and didn't seem to feel it at all. One kid was leaning against the fence drunk as a monkey. He had no idea where he was and his stupid gaze shifted like a large boat from side to side slowly, mouth hung open the whole time. Another kid came over the crowd and they pulled him back down. He went to dive back in from where we were standing. One of the security guys lent down and punched him with all his force on the back of his upper thigh just above his ass. The force buckled his legs under him giving the security guy a second to push him away and out of the frontline. I turned back around no longer wanting to know what was going on behind me. Our three songs were up and they threw us all out by announcing us to: "get the fuck out". The Cling-ons and Scenesters huddled as I exited stage left nodding their heads to the beat. As I got to the gate I saw the young pit princess who had punched the bouncer. Another guard had her face down in the ground with both her arms pinned behind her. A cop was walking up to her with a fresh pair of cuffs while she struggled a physically pointless struggle.

Ryan dropped me off at a block of offices before he had to turn onto the freeway and head back to Orange County. I thanked him and he went off on his three hour journey. Looking around I was not in a good place for a cab to pick me up so I walked up the street. Things started to look

worse and worse as I saw a \$1 sex shop and stopped walking when I reached The Pussycat Lounge with live nudes. An area where only a CEO or Catholic priest could survive. An area where I was least likely to bump into the girl of my dreams. An area where rock bottom lies just ahead. I waved down a cab which just drove right past me and I was left with my hand in the air hoping that nobody had seen me looking like a kook. I waved down a second cab and got the same reaction. Something was amiss since I didn't look like a glue huffer and it was a Saturday night. I paused. I assessed. Why not just call the phone number of a cab company? Get the number as a cab drives past. Each cab had a phone number in bold readable black but none of them had the local area code. This was as useful as a dead hooker with my fingerprints all over a gun beside her in Texas. A phone call later to a friend with Internet access and I had the first three digits of the area code.

## Chapter 8

A few years back I read an article about an aspiring writer going on a road trip in a bmx magazine. He questioned his career choice and was not sure in which direction his life was going. The fear of his unknown future kept coming back to him in those moments in life which aren't filled with noise and thoughts catch up to you. His road trip was filled with eventful events and characters too good for TV. The article was so real and full of the human experience: bonding with friends on a road trip, running from hillbillies, reflective moments and quirky things you come across On The Road. This article struck a chord and got me to start writing again. I found myself in the same position, hating my day job and filing all my rejected writings under "B" for Bukowski.

Ronnie was named after Ronnie James Dio. Joey listened to grunge and had fake front teeth from knocking them out on his bike. Endo was not called that because he did not endo. Ronnie and Endo were trying to make a go of being pro riders. Not because they held some idealistic bubble gum MTV view of bmx but because they loved it and knew what every person with a 9 to 5 job tries to forget every weekend: their jobs sucked. Compare the confined space of a cube, cardboard boring coworkers and fluorescent light bulbs sucking your soul out via your eyeballs to trying to land a trick.

Several hours behind schedule we finally left the Bay Area and made our way up North East to Reno. I had never been there before but the description of it being like a mini Vegas was enough for me to not want to get too excited. Only an hour into driving we stopped for food and to visit a local park there. I had ridden there before and almost jinxed the trip when I front wheel bonked a hip I shouldn't have. The hardest part of a trip is not breaking yourself off on the first stop but saving it for the very last ride. While we ate two of the crew walked across the street to the liquor store. They both came back holding brown paper bags and I started to do the math of dealing with 2 bikers boozed up in a rental car

for 3 hours. I opened one of the bags.

“You guys got bottled water from a liquor store?” I asked confused.  
“Dude, its not just water... its flavored water.”

Everyone was getting travel crazies so I pulled over to the side of the freeway. There was a snow covered field across from where I parked the car and the guys took to it like a fat kid in Willy Wonka’s factory. I put my wide angle lens on my camera and tried to remember what the book said about shooting in snow and glare. It was only a matter of time before Ronnie took his bike out the car and hit the snow.

Our hotel room could have been the set of any porno movie ever made. The tiny shower soap lasted about an hour and all the towels ended soaking up all the water off the bathroom floor. As room service dropped some fresh towels and soap off a large man with a cowboy hat was loading his luggage into the room across from ours. What sense could he have made of four guys with bmx bicycles in a hotel room in Reno. We tried not to think about what levels of depravity had been reached before we got there. Endo had been on one too many road trips. He grabbed the throw off my bed and set up on the floor by the window without a word. I fired up my laptop to see if I could get a free wireless connection. No such luck but I did find a Japanese exchange students iTunes library that was wide open to everyone. Hundreds of free Japanese pop songs. I found his e-mail address and sent him a message telling him to add more metal to his collection.

I parked the rental car and everyone had shaky hands for bmx so they ditched me before I could even get my bike out. A stolen airline blanket covered my bike because I wanted to earn my scratches and not get them inflicted by the other bikes in transit. The park in Reno was pretty new and life was kept alive inside by some heaters blowing hot air. A red-head leeches onto Joey. Her boyfriend told him that he “was strapped”. I always thought people and situations like this only existed in movies. A person so obvious that you question the reality of the situation. A small town mind clashing with the xenophobe. During the comp I had to deal with a camera man getting in my way all the time and some kid trying to run me over to vibe me out or something. I fired my flash off into his lens whenever I could and deleted all the photos of the rider with a bad attitude. All three of the crew went down during the comp and they

gave it their best. Endo called it a night when he went up the vert wall and hit the ceiling of the warehouse. Whatever prize money was won was gone the next day on gas and food.

I walked around a rest area in the mountains while the others took their chances with a public bathroom. The air was fresh and hung around the tree's in the middle of nowhere. Various people in transit and a hot blonde in red sweats who looked really bitchy. Amongst the parked cars was a weather beaten RV. In front of the RV was a Jerry Garcia, complete with a war veteran injured foot, harmonica, guitar and tip jar. What stories did he hold? Probably countless. The others slowly walked out of the bathroom, the smokers amongst us smoking. His audience was reduced to us four dirtbags and we were not really listening to him play. Then he started singing Snoop Dog lyrics over folk guitar. People walking past him heads swiveled when he ditched the mountains/lakes/birds and started laying down lines about "bangin bitches and drinkin 40's". Two diametrically opposed genres coming together in front of an RV getting \$5 from Ronnie's wallet.

Endo knew of this curved wallride on our way back which only took us ten minutes to find. Trickle of skaters were coming down the road from the nearby park. Two of them stopped and watched while I shot the guys riding the wall. After we were done we decided to go have a look at the park before we hit the road for the final leg of the trip back home. It was at the bottom of a hill and the skaters all looked tiny. It looked to be a bust so we just watched the park and admired the two gorgeous blondes hanging around in the parking lot. These were not your usual washed out park ho's but actually looked like they had taken a bath the night before with no traces of THC in their bloodstream.

When I returned the rental car I tried the Jedi mind trick so they didn't notice there were tire marks all over the back of their car and on the roof: "You don't need to see the interior"... "I-dont-need-to-see-the-interior". All the trash was hidden under the seats, some vent grills were removed during the trip and I didn't take out the insurance. Monday came by and I was back to square one in the office wanting to live the rest of my life on a road trip with friends. I didn't feel like working so I wrote this instead.

## Chapter 9

Reno, a poor mans Vegas. This is the place that the glue sniffer begs the other glue sniffers for spare change. Just outside of the city lies a solitary letter R on a hillside as if the rest wasn't worth even spelling out. People who had been kicked in the balls by life stood on street corners waving signs which advertised real estate showings or lumber yard sales. Life was not through with them yet and wanted them to carry their cross downtown for all to see. The layout of the city looked like they had started to build Vegas there, found an ancient evil burial ground and left town for further down South. Budget vacationers made their way to the city wanting to save that extra dollar for new tires on their tractor. The bars would ply them with alcohol and the smoke filled casinos would keep their pension plan for them.

This road trip to Reno was doomed from the start. A misjudgment on who I should invite. The individual personalities were lilies in calm water on a summer day and presenting no problems. Together with some others however was a formula for dynamite and a cure for someone ever wanting to go on another road trip.

We had made plans to meet up in a parking lot where they could leave their cars. I had rented a mini-van to fit everyone but no vehicle was large enough to house the trouble. Everyone was late to arrive. Two hours was added onto the journey by various people wanting to stop to smoke cigarettes or weed or whatever they had stolen from the hospital where they worked. While I drove the vents in the van were ripped off and bags of things were stashed. A bad feeling started to seep into my road trip happiness rainbow which I felt when on the road. It was a dark seeping shade of black strangling my sense of fun and enjoyment. The Lord of the Flies syndrome started when I did not want anyone to smoke in the car or do stupid things while I was driving. By my own fault I had drawn a line in the sand and made myself out to be the one trying to lay down rules. Like a wall to now be pushed simply because it was there.

All the drugs they were carrying were news to me and I started theorizing what would happen if we got stopped in Nevada. Would a Cop believe I knew nothing? Would a Cop hold me accountable because the car was in my name? Would I last ten minutes in a Nevada state jail taking the fall for some retards? My get-out-of-jail card was to ask for a blood test which show my system to be totally clean. I then made a deal to myself while looking at them in the rear view mirror that if I was stopped I would leave them all in jail and accept to be hated forever.

On what seemed like our twentieth stop we pulled over to a rest area at high elevation. Everyone piled out and skulked over to a bench where they started smoking whatever it was they had. At this point I was not doubting that in the following thirty minutes a sawn off shotgun would appear or a dead hooker alien. I walked around the rest area and found a manmade lake with fences all around it. The air felt clean and there was no city noise or distorted lights. As I looked around I realized that it was too late and I was in this trip to stay. This bad feeling swept over me then hung around like smoke in a small room. When I walked back to where they were sitting the Napoleon and the other pigs had been plotting against me. One of them playfully threw a stone at me in a passive aggressive manner. It was large enough to have sent me to hospital if it had struck the intended target of my head. I laughed like an idiot while I thought about beating one of them with the tire iron while the others watched on in terror. All but one had turned on me and because of that he was my best friend. As we left the rest area I started to sense they had something planned but it was too late. Without warning my passenger riding shotgun flung his door open and half jumped out the car. He was hanging onto the door but had his feet on the road surface skiing along. He slid along for a while and then got back in while they all cheered. I too could have joined in on the fun had he told me as well that he was going to try something stupid.

At the hotel we got separate rooms. One for me and the only person who was not intent on ruining my road trip and the rest in a room below us. The cigarette smoke filled air seized up my lungs as I walked in and clung to my skin until I could shower next. I unpacked everything except my toothpaste which I had left at home. Small things adding up to a bad time. I grabbed my camera and went off into downtown by myself with the others going to meet up with me later on. As I walked the streets at night I noticed all the magic and splendor of Reno was under renovation.

Two cops were practically strip searching someone on the corner as I made my way to the only landmark I knew: the neon Reno sign. As I was trying to take a decent photo this homeless crazy was sprouting off to people behind me about some guy called the "lord" and whatever other psychic car crash that was going on in his head. I got my shot and he stopped me when I turned around to leave. "Are you happy?" he asked me.

"Yes, I'm happy." I replied wanting the conversation to end before it began. He asked me again and I reassured him again. After all, I knew I was happy because I wasn't a homeless lunatic in Reno asking someone if they were happy.

The rest of the weekend we all made plans to meet places. Everyone else would agree and then not show up in some attempt to defy the only reasonable person.. No matter how content you are, sitting in a hotel room by yourself is all about rock bottom on the fun scale. Especially a hotel as trashy as the one we were in. The elevators were seemingly recovering from an addiction to methadone and always took 15 minutes to arrive. When we went down the stairs to circumvent the elevator that didn't elevate we found locked doors. Driving by myself in the van to go and pick everyone up I hit a red light. Someone who looked like a construction worker was in front of me in a large pick-up truck with a few scattered bumper stickers letting you know his stance on various issues. My Spidey sense went off as I noticed someone walk across the road trying to go forward and backward at the same time. Fighting the drugs and booze pirates in his system for control of the ship again. He staggered over to the truck in front of me and I locked all the doors faster than you can say "I hate Reno". The two men talked and I anticipated all out war with the guy in the street losing badly. Green means go and we rolled forward. The wayward pedestrian stood for a second and then walked in front of the van as I pulled off. Brakes were hit, "fuck!". He didn't seem to care at all and strolled on over through the lane next to me causing another car to stop abruptly.

The day we left I woke up with sunburn all over my back. Having not spent any time in the sun I went and did my best to look at my back in the mirror. A rash ran across my upper back from the STD soaked bed sheets that must have been washed in pesticide and goat urine. Both the rooms were on my credit card and when I checked out I saw an extra

\$100 added to the other room. The college student behind the counter told me this charge was for hotel damages the others had incurred. I fought with them until their head of security arrived and very reasonably told me he had six eye witnesses and was willing to go to court. When I got to the van and explained that I needed \$25 from each of them to cover the damages they all started shouting and acting crazy. Each of them feigned complete ignorance to the damages that were done. One of them took a container of food and threw it off the sixth storey parking lot where we were down onto the entrance of the hotel below. This was his adult solution of dealing with the situation. I knew then that we had to leave. Leave quickly and get home and lose all their phone numbers. Before we could even leave the city the passenger riding shotgun was reaching into the back screaming trying to kill the person behind me. No doubt his chemical numbed brain was not happy that it was not buzzing yet and was kicking up a fuss. The two Vicodin (which they all loved to call "Vyks") that he took kicked in ten minutes later and he wanted to open the door on the freeway to go play with the happy forest animals from space station 9. The insanity subsided until we hit traffic because of an accident. One of the passengers in the back was fresh out of drugs and had his head case girlfriend screaming at him on the phone because he was not home yet. She was a bunny boiler and he was hooked on her like air. The two of them would only be content when they were both destroyed and in ruins. His happy times were over and he started yelling at me to go faster in gridlocked traffic. Every car or trucker that we passed they leant out of the window trying to bum smokes like some type of advertisement refugees following the Marlboro way of life. The Bay Area approached closer and I was excited to go back to work the next day and be rid of them as one of them beat his head against the window. A diametrically opposed feeling to the end of every other vacation ever. As a couple drove past my co-pilots Vicodins and whatever else he had in his system were now completely spent. The driver looked at him as he drove past and this was enough to start him yelling and trying to start a fight as we queued up at a toll booth. I dropped them off in the parking lot where we had all met a few days earlier and even unpacked their stuff for them to get home quicker. None of them wanted to talk to me and some attempted a very half assed "thanks" for the trip. Some of them no doubt have a tale to tell about the total square they once went on a road trip with.

# Chapter 10

This morning when I went out to get the post I was attacked by ninjas. I had to kill three or four of them before they stopped coming in waves. Who knows where they came from. Hopefully the other residents don't expect me to clean up all the blood and their dead bodies.

In the post I received two green cards which was nice. There was also something in there which looked like a ransom note but I wasn't really paying attention. I had lunch again with East Bay Ray and some of the old Black Panthers. The waiter dropped my steak on the floor the first time around so they just wrapped it up and put it on the "send to mcdonalds" pile.

As soon as I got back in my car to drive home another ninja leapt out from the backseat and wrapped piano wire around my neck. So, I had to kill him. On the way home I won the lottery three times and a horse race. But this was not before I started a sentence with "but" and bought two new airplanes with pink lightning bolts painted on the side of them.

It was a quiet evening as I completed open heart surgery on a famous actor. Then I gave the closing arguments in the court case I had been involved with and won. There were some more ninjas waiting for me in the parking lot. I killed them. Tomorrow is going to be a pain in the ass as I have to try give that Pulitzer thing back but the panel refuses to believe I was not born in America.

# Chapter 11

"I was looking for a kid playing hookey from school. But now that I can see you closer I can see you are not a kid" said the female police officer to me. The hot female Police officer.

"I hope I don't look like a kid." I said playfully. She had really strong looking arms and a conviction executing her daily tasks that would make a coal miner blush. The park was empty except for the two of us and a few scattered people walking their dogs. Most people were holed up in their cubes at that time of day anyway. She asked were I was from and how did I like the States. The Public Relations side of my brain was working well. It was too difficult to read her name tag without making it look like I was staring at her boobs or at least trying to find for them under the Kevlar. The very slight look on her face gave me the impression she was making me talk because she was getting a kick out of my accent.

A few weeks later I was back at the same park with some friends. Someone mumbled something about "the five-O" and I saw Officer Brown walking towards us.

"Whats up guys?" she asked in the cool I-can-take-you-downtown-Leeroy-Brown Police officer voice.

"Are you looking for belligerent children again?" I asked trying to have some fun with her. She was game and just laughed back. My friend and her spoke about where they liked to surf. Officer Brown was also looking hotter that day somehow. Her dark hair was tied in a tight bun and her uniform was immaculate. No doubt she loved her job and everything that came with it.

I asked her about a local course I had heard about where citizens could train with the Police in all their various aspects. Further to that I had heard on the last day they took you to the shooting range and let you fire

off a few rounds.

"Here," she said making a motion for her gun as if to give it to me "I can save you time". I laughed and replied very dryly: "You probably should not give that to me, I had a lot of PCP for breakfast this morning."

It was obvious by her demeanor that she had not been a cop long enough to become a shell of a person. Sure enough she told us that she was in her second year on the force. I was sure that after she had been shot at a few times, taken many words of abuse and been screwed over by the justice system her demeanour would become more callous. After all that she might start asking herself "why?" each time she woke up to go to her job.

"So how do I go about doing one of those sit in's where you can spend a day with an officer in their squad car?" I asked because this was something that interested me. Seeing someone else's job first hand and not just any job, but an American Cop. You can only spend so long in there before you get cube sickness and live for anything new which deviates from the norm.

"Well you go down to the station, fill in a waiver and if there is an officer you had in mind ask for them." As she finished I got her full name tag. Her first initial was "R" and I ran through the list of names the letter could belong to.

"Where do live around here?" she asked me and my answer of "On Oak" got an "ooohhhh" out of her. My friends all laughed because I lived in a shitty neighborhood.

The local Police station was in a part of town that I had never been before. It occurred to me that it was the perfect place to carjack someone because there was nobody around and who would have the balls to try that outside a Police station. It would work because its crazy enough to. The officer behind the desk initially looked confused when I asked for the indemnity form to go along for the ride. She handed me a double sided form which asked all sorts of questions and a few lines for me to describe why it was that I wanted to go along with an officer of the law. I filled it in as "I am not American and this is a facet of life that interests me". My description probably made me out to sound like the

Unabomber. The form asked if I wanted to become a Cop - No. The form asked if I had a criminal record - No. The form did not ask me if I had a preference for any particular officer. I had the preference for the radness of Officer Brown. Not finding anywhere to fill in her name I added it on the line where it asked for a preferred date and time. Improvisation is nine tenths of the law. I handed the form back to the officer behind the desk and she said the staff Sergeant would call me to let me know.

Nobody ever called me back.

'Are you leaving already?'. It was Officer Brown questioning me as I was leaving the park a few days later. I smiled.

'Yeah, I have got stuff to take care off.' I replied when I just wanted to forgo any small talk and just get down to marrying her in Vegas. I told her that I filled in all the forms and nobody called me back.

"Are you free tomorrow?" she asked and even if I did have plans I was then available.

"Be there for 7:30 am."

I waited in my car outside the Police station while Officer Brown finished her morning briefing. It was serious now. I sat in my car playing Tetris until I saw her squad car pull around into the visitor parking lot. I greeted her but she seemed preoccupied with getting her car in order since each day they were given a new one. She told me to get in the car with her confident assertiveness. This was a strong person. Who needed a strong coffee.

She drove me into the compound in the back of the station which was littered with their civilian and squad cars. 15 minutes after work they were diffused and powerless driving a Honda, wearing jeans just like all the rest of us. She seemed excited that she had someone to ride along with her but you would have to be a microscope to see that. Inside the station there was an air of nothingness and it looked too modern. For someone who was being detained there it would perhaps look sterile and colourless. We walked into a room where a few cops were seated completing various tasks. None of them seemed to notice I was there which worried me because when or if they did, they might get startled.

Officer Brown dug up the form I needed to complete in order to legitimize my free roller-coaster ride. She looked at my birth date over my shoulder when I wasn't looking because I made a reference to my age later on that day and she never asked. She already knew. I got a tour of the rooms where they hold perps for questioning. These rooms troubled me with their dozens of cameras, thick doors and one way glass. As she opened one of the doors to show me inside I stopped her as I saw nothing to indicate that someone was inside or not. She said not to worry and that she was sure they were all empty. That whole area of the Police station emanated a Shining vibe so strong that Jack Torrance could finish three novels a week in there. Its pathological industrial finish and crushing certainty made me not want to be anywhere near it ever again.

About 30 minutes into my real life Police experience I noticed that my zipper had been down the whole time. I hoped she had not noticed thinking I was some type of sexual deviant traveling the country getting kicks by exposing himself to Police officers. I wondered how many of the Cops inside the station had noticed. There was no way anyone could have said anything anyway. We stopped by a coffee shop so she could get her fix. As we walked in together I started to wonder if people would look at me differently while I was walking around with a police officer. Since I didn't drink coffee I waited around the store looking around trying to kill time in my mind.

She got a call over the radio and explained that we were responding to a house alarm that was going off. I was told most of them were false alarms. We parked a few houses down the street as to not give it away that we were there in case it was an actual burglary. Since it was broad daylight on a relatively busy street I doubted the great train robbery was taking place in there. Brown armed herself with a large black flashlight and asked if I wanted to come with. I was game and there was no point in sitting in the squad car the whole time. We started walking down the road looking for the house. I asked for the house number which was an odd number making the house on the other side of the street. Being as attentive and sharp as she was I was surprised that she overlooked this. I secretly hoped it was because she thought I was totally hot, but probably not. The voice which I could not hear (the one in her earpiece) told her it was a false alarm so she stopped halfway and myself, her and the flashlight got back into the squad car.

The next call was an elderly lady that had called the Police Station and said that was the victim of scammers. We pulled up alongside her house and her garden was very well taken of. She was obviously someone with time on her hands. Brown got out and I elected to stay inside the car not wanting to intrude on this old dears privacy. Once she had spoken to the old lady she said something I didn't hear and motioned for me to come inside. I climbed out the car and left the doors unlocked and her window open. Officer Brown had told me to lock and close but this is what I had missed. The inside of her house was spotless and picture frames were everywhere. I sat down at her dining room table being dead quiet while Brown did her job. The old lady had received a random fax and had responded to it which in turn led to someone arriving at her doorstep. Although she described this person as not being too menacing it was obvious to me that they would have bled her account dry faster than a lawyer. She was a widower and I knew this because she made a point to mention it several times. I got the distinct feeling that she had put herself in this position on purpose to get some attention. In anticipation of our arrival she had put on her make-up and wore jewelry. It was sad that some douche bags trying to steal money from her would have been the highlight of her week. The old dear went into the other room to get the fax she was sent. I looked over at the Officer and we both smiled. Earlier she had mentioned that some calls were elderly people wasting their time. Brown scanned through the document reading through it carefully. I took it for what it was right away, a total scam since I had seen dozens of similar ones. Hundreds of shady people holed away all over the country in unmarked business parks sending out these faxes and scam letters looking for just one bite. If you send out a million scam letters and only 10 people reply that could equate to \$10 000 with a 1% success rate. The Widower sat across from me wringing her hands talking it over with Brown. She mentioned her dead husband again. The list grew longer when she mentioned her dead son as well. She stopped before she went through her list of dead pets. She knew all about mortality and loneliness. We all stood up from the table and the old lady remarked on how ferocious Brown looked. The two ladies got to talking about the photos on the mantel piece and before I knew it Brown was very slyly taking some time out of her day to make conversation but not in a way that was too obvious. I had always figured that being a Cop would make someone callous and to a certain extent dead to the world yet she was full of empathy and made that old ladies day. To look at all six feet of her and the never changing expression on her face you would never think to use the

word "empathy" when describing her. The truth about her was that she was a snugly teddy bear of a person but you would never see that from the outside.

We drove along the streets talking about various things. I was talking but she was talking and looking for things that cops need to notice. When I asked her about what the best pick up line someone had dealt her while in duty she had many to tell me about. One time she had someone stopped on the side of the road giving them a ticket when a second car drove past and pulled over. A guy got out, walked up to her and handed her a business card telling her she looked really hot and that he would buy her lunch. Another lady sent flowers for her to the station, one guy called her "dear" and someone even went there and used the "I-see-you-got-your-own-cuffs-there" line. We stopped at some traffic lights and she glanced over and said that the lady in the car next to us was checking me out. Chances are she was actually checking out Officer Brown and I wondered where I could get a Police uniform from.

No doubt each cop has their first call which makes them cross that point of no return. The point to where they wont make jokes about certain things anymore and have seen things daily that non-cops might only see once a lifetime. Browns first call which let her know exactly what job she was doing was a suicide call. As she told me about the experience it occurred to me that this was the stuff nightmares were made of for her. She had arrived to a small apartment, an unconscious girl, a boyfriend who had been doing some dumping and a linoleum kitchen floor awash with blood. Her wounds were deep and there were plenty of them Brown told me. Large pools of blood had coagulated on the kitchen floor which made them look like organs. Brown tried not to toss her cookies and slid around in the blood composing herself to take a statement from the boyfriend. An experience burned into her memory like a cigarette burn on public transport.

Two retards hung out outside a liquor store. They were retards because I'm sure they were gang bangers. One of them was standing in the middle of the street talking on a cell phone. To me it looked like he was about to do a hand off. We pulled over and Brown got out after feeding some codes into her radio which only a Cop would understand. Zeros and ones and crackheads. She started questioning them and her back up arrived. The two punks recited lines they had seen in gangster movies

about the Police hassling them and how it wasn't fair. As they sprouted out crap from their MTV riddled minds I read the sign above them which read "No Loitering" and one of them was on parole for dealing. They were searched but nothing was found on them. Obviously it was the luckiest day of their lives. One of them lent over and saw me in the squad car.

"Did you bust that dude as well?" he asked Brown.

# Chapter 12

Where do all these words come from? Is there an actual person behind this all or are there a thousand monkeys on a thousand type writers making random into post. I live inside my mind and have no idea where home is. It was seven years ago that I sold everything I had and started the journey and not the destination. I have lived in a hotel room. I have lived on a floor. I have lived on a lagoon. I have lived in the same place the whole time.

Leaning on the fourth wall, I look back on the old words and relive them, memories of the event long since dormant. Snapshots of my existence. Hopefully some complete strangers read all this as well and feel a little less strange. I write what I know and “no” is all that I hear from editors. Nothing easy in life is worth... even completing the sentence.

# Chapter 13

Walking through the Gas Light district in San Diego with this chapter starting off sounding like a Blues song. Stuck working at an event I had to get away from business suits and people who say “nice to meet you” with their mouths but “I wish I was dead” with their eyes. Not many people were walking on the sidewalk and some restaurants were partially filled. It was the middle of the week and most people were probably at home trying to finish that bird house for the yard. After getting a free map from a store I was aiming in the direction of some type of mall in the hopes of getting some new music or something ridiculously cool. There were more homeless people on the street than any other city I had been to. These homeless had a twist to them because you got the impression that they had partied with Timothy Leary several times and had their minds lawnmowed with hallucinogens.

I stood outside the building which was marked at being “shopping center/mall” yet it looked like neither. There was no chance I was going to ask any of the walking waste for directions and risk getting shanked with a heroin needle. I found a doorway and walked in. Walked in to what was a mall only MC Escher could navigate since it did not conform to the Ameri-mall blueprint. The whole building was a free flowing design with stairs that lead on and on with many levels not conforming to any shopping collective. I paid no attention to any shop and just walked around the building. It was free and I was low on imagination that day. Some shop levels looped around, some had designs on the walls and there was even a store that sold ultra mega zoid hella cool Japanese related paraphernalia.

On the way back to the hotel I found an old cinema. It was Americana all the way with the machine that rotates the weiners, popcorn and high ceilings. I bought my ticket and avoided the snacks. The foyer was much larger than it really needed to be and had a few staircases. The staircase which made the most logic to go up just led me to another concession

stand and an empty floor with no cinema. All the movies had started so there was nobody that I could follow into a theatre. Standing around like an idiot I went back to the foyer and looked around for a door leading to a screen and hoping that nobody had noticed me being an idiot.

On my way back to the hotel I passed a street dweller who I had seen earlier screaming at a cop. She was sitting next to her street homie on the sidewalk where she would probably sleep until she was ushered away. As I walked past them I heard her pause and say to her homeless homie :  
"Did you see that guys 3rd eye?"

# Chapter 14

As I ate my lunch I looked over at the couple to my left. They had a goggle eyed kid that was in a high chair but yet could swivel around like the Exorcist. Her two large teddy bear eyes would stare at me perhaps thinking of ways to which annoy me. When I looked over this time she was no longer in her chair. Her fat lazy mother was bent over causing her shirt to lift and show off a landslide of stretch marks. She was changing her babies diaper right there in the restaurant perhaps hoping that nobody would notice. Maybe she hoped that everybody's sense of smell would hold up for a minute as well. Kids shoot up schools because of this woman.

When I went to get dinner I started talking to Armando who works at the store. An immigrant from Mexico he taught himself English and holds down at least three jobs. He has a deep scar on the side of his head which never received stitches. Always talkative he pointed at the "health center" across the way and said : " You know this place, I heard they give you massage and you pay some more money and you get a (makes hand gesture and winks)". He told me I should go in and see what the deal is. Probably not a good idea since I'm allergic to Herpes. Los Hooligans went on to tell me about another public service where you phone up this pizza store and ask for "pizza caliente" and in return they ask "how many items?" = "what age girl?". What else could lie beneath the surface. Behind walls lots of events were occurring.

I had been in hospital to visit a friend. He impaled himself on a pair of handle bars and had to get the bar end surgically removed. I sat next to him as he lay lacking colour in his hospital bed and he told me about the fear. He said he sat there for the first two days not knowing if he was going to die or spend the rest of his life hooked up to a machine. He also spent those first two days with tears in his eyes. The healthcare bills worried me but I never mentioned them. When he removed the bars from inside himself urine came out as well as blood and then he knew he had

not spun three 7's in Vegas. Fear boxed him in at the hospital . There was no way to avoid being there for his ten days. Immobile in bed with hospital food and hurt strangers. When I got back to my car there was a parking ticket attached to my windshield in a green envelope. There was no way I cared how much it was.

# Chapter 15

I landed in Chicago and felt the humidity right away. The airport looked like any other but I kept hearing horror stories about people getting stuck there in between connecting flights. I half expected the ghost of William Burroughs to seep past me leaving a trail of ectoplasm behind him, looking for junk and ready to write dense paragraphs. The path to the trains led me to a long underground tunnel which had multicoloured lights running down the whole length of it. Inside the tunnel was like traveling through the inside of a giant electric silkworm.

Were people different there? It was still the same country but how had their life experience differed from that of a Californians? Everyone moved along with timed precision like they had already been through the airport a thousand times before. I met up with Lee and Roger. Roger was also visiting Chicago and we were going to stay with Lee and his parents.

Lee, Roger and myself got to the train station to get back to his house. My bags were getting heavier every minute and I needed to pee. We climbed up onto a platform and I managed to hit several people with my bag by mistake on the narrow stairs. As we got there we could make out yelling. The yelling didn't sound like the kind you wanted to be heading towards but Lee not having lived in America long wanted to see what was going on. The two walked off as I told their backs that was a bad idea. Since I had no idea where I was going I had to follow them. A guy and a girl emerged centre stage with the girl screaming that the guy tried to attack her. She was swinging at him and acting crazy. He was dodging her strikes like a movie jewel thief in a room full of lasers. It looked like she had something in her hand. They carried their brawl across the platform and I found myself pinned between them and a rail. My animal instincts kicked in and for fight or flight I only had the choice of fight. I was not interested in getting stabbed or being part of anyone else's underground lunacy. If it came down to it I was going to grab her arm by

the wrist if she swung at me, pin it behind her and break it. Its not a hard decision to make and I would expect to get my arm broken as well if I acted like she was. They both came past me and carried their conflict past and beyond myself. I walked over to Lee and told him I had seen enough wildlife.

The area where Lee's family was staying was known as "Boystown" due to its large population of gay guys and it bordered with "Girlstown" which was home to Chicago's lesbian population. A hot spot for non reproducing people. Lee was six foot something and got a lot of looks walking down the street. Being a homophobe he was not too happy about that.

We got to the Sears tower after our cabbie pretended to not know where he was going after driving a cab in Chicago for ten years. He was lucky he got any money from us. Regret is not throwing up on his seats to thank him for trying to rip us off. The Sears tower is a really tall building that tourists go and see. That's it. It also sways in the wind and you can see all across the city.

We came across a gathering of Italian sports cars. The fast red ones that hot girls drive and I will never own. People with an overinflated sense of importance got out of them under the illusion that they were better than the rest for having more zeros on a bank statement. Wait till they figure out they don't have a cent and its all just erasable zeros and ones on a computer. One of the cars had the personal plate which read "VAFANCULO" with a few letters missing so it could fit.

My plane just sat on the runway doing 0 mph. I dug in my bag for something that told time and found out we were running late. My idea was to get home before midnight so that I could be coherent for work the next day. There was no way I was taking another day of vacation to sleep. Life is short but vacation allowance is shorter. Trapped in a corporation with the repetition killing everything fun. Someone in the cockpit kept making announcements but I was listening to music and didn't care since any excuse equated to the same thing: we were late. All around me was a girls High Skool Soccer team. Two girls were sitting next to me until one of them was creeped out about me for some reason and reseated herself at the back of the plane. I hoped her team lost and her divorced parents were disappointed. If the plane crashed I was going

to suggest that we eat her first. Finally the plane took off and my music was interrupted. My game plan was to sleep on the plane in order to be *compus mentis* for work the next day. I put some soothing music on and got myself comfortable. I'm not sure if I had fallen asleep but I felt the plane jerk right away and hit my head against the window. I called the window a "fucker" with no sense of volume headphones still on. A crackle broke over the PA system and the ping and glow of the seat belts light came on. A few minutes into the plane going in and out of angel dust seizures in the air someone decided that he would start dying in the back. Just like a movie they asked if there was Doctor on board and I envisioned tracheotomy's with a ball point pen and a paperback book about the experience. Airline staff were running up and down the aisles being calmly frantic. They started to reseat people in order to give the person expiring three seats to lay across. Take notes, this is what it takes to get leg room. The spare seat next to me was filled by a goofy looking bastard whose leather jacket smelt vaguely of mothballs.

The plane continued to test our motion sickness thresholds and I watched the overhead compartments waiting for them to burst open any second with the entire girls Soccer team to start screaming. It never happened and I tried to get some sleep with my eyes feeling heavy. The jolting didn't help and neither did the goofball next to me who started to bump me with his elbow. He was the same size as me yet seemed to fill 1.5 seats. The only person who would have been allowed to nudge me while trying to sleep was Lucy Liu. He kept doing it. I wished ill upon him. He nudged me again. I shifted in my seat. I got nudged again. This time I shoved him back defending my personal space drooling on an airline pillow, leaning against the window. My fists were clenched and I was pretty sure that I wanted to put my elbow across his forehead knocking him straight out. Each time he would make contact I would try hit him back but I missed him like TV evangelists miss the point.

We landed at 2am. My mind was still at 1am. I wanted to dissect the nudger with rusty bolt cutters but took the high road. Airport police would have be waiting for me when we left the plane, hands still fresh with blood. Nobody was allowed to leave the plane until paramedics had given Mr Mile Low Club a look over and a wheelchair. They stuck tubes up his nose to feed him oxygen and wheeled him out with everyone staring at him. The airport was empty and I had never seen that before. No planes were landing, no noise or anyone driving funny looking

airport vehicles around. The lack of jet engine noise made it not feel like it was an airport. Like being at a bowling alley with no falling pins to back the fact that up that it was a bowling alley. Somewhere in the world a library was filled with noise and mayhem. We walked through empty terminal after empty terminal dragging our feet till we found our luggage. Too much space filled my head and scattered people spoke on cell phones around the luggage carousel.

# Chapter 16

Yes I was calling about the two bedroom apartment you had posted online. Yes. 4 pm tomorrow is good for me. OK. So I meet with the manager. OK, his name is George. I can just call him on the number listed here if I cant make it? OK, good. Yeah that all sounds good, I will see him tomorrow at 4. Thanks. Thanks for your time.

I arrived at the complex managers office at 4:02 and was greeted by a Walmart tracksuit that was wearing a small Latino man. For the most part the manager was bald on top but his mustache was keeping up with his hair quota. He introduced himself as "George" in an accent and had a limp handshake. George later explained that when he was asked by the immigrations officer just exactly how he was going to integrate himself into American society , his answer was to no longer be called "Hor-Hey" but "George". With the power invested in a word he was an American from then on.

The apartment complex was a wedding cake left in the sun making it look good from the outside but sour on the inside. It was one long continuous hallway dressed with the apartment doors was dimly lit and deathly still. The faint odors of several people cooking masked any traces of damp that were surely lurking. A decent looking exterior and decent asking price for the two bedroom apartment had got me there initially.

Inside the apartment was clean enough but I could see dirt and rust hiding under things and around corners. Although I never saw any I was sure Captain Cockroach and his 10 000 bastard children were somewhere in that apartment. If he was you would only see him the second night after you moved in as he dropped on your head as you were about to fall asleep. The kitchen and all its appliances looked older than me. The view from the sliding door windows was another apartment across the way. The carpet could have been washed with something to possibly remove bloodstains.

After I was done looking at the apartment we walked back around the complex so I could see it all. At the back was the Summer fun excitement happy swimming pool area which looked like it was the scene of a mass murder and was never cleaned up since. Deck chairs that had done 2 tours of Nam were scattered around the pool area. The water inside the swimming pool looked like many frogs had got lucky inside of it. I was told that the whole area was going to be cleaned up in time for the following summer. The only thing that would fix that whole area was good natural cleansing fire.

We sat down in his cramped office which was littered with various bits and pieces. I could see he meant well and tried hard at his job but didn't have much to work with. George handed me a form to fill in to apply to rent the apartment. This was amusing that I had to qualify to stay in a place that looked like the Manson family had their prom after party there. Looking over the form I noticed it was asking for way too much information. If I had filled the form in I was basically leaving myself wide open to all sorts of fraud and immediately started thinking if I had gotten my finger prints on anything in the complex. I pointed at various lines of the form to George and asked was all the info necessary. It all seemed a bit too much to give to simply rent an apartment. George assured me that they were 100% confidential and that just the other the Police had been looking for one of tenants but he gave them no information. I paused but he was oblivious that if he was a used car salesman he had just told me there was a dead hooker in the trunk. Not even wanting to hear anymore I thanked him for his time and said I would mail the form in.

# Chapter 17

Having only seen graduations on TV shows I was not sure what to expect but wore a shirt with a collar. My friend was a few years younger than the rest of us but we went along to show we were proud of him. We stood near the back of the ceremony talking softly when a seated woman turned around and asked us to be quiet. I did not understand since we were in a crowd of hundreds yet all she could hear was us. On the other hand she was probably jittery since her little darling about to graduate was probably going to get hooked on coke and become a lawyer.

I looked around at the various people who were in attendance: parents, teachers, students and for some reason a few people who dropped out of High School. Most of the parents sat on tiptoes waiting for their kids name to be read out, camera ready, gleaming with pride. Their kids had missed teenage pregnancies drug addiction, fatal car accidents and California death cults and made it out to the other side unscathed. Parents were stoked yo. There must have been in a lull in production across the state as millions of parents grabbed a clean suit or dress and skipped work that afternoon. Ready to hand their kids over to the world and perhaps pick those aspirations and dreams back up from before the pregnancy.

The names kept getting read out and the gown wearing student would walk up and receive what I guess was their diploma. Every seventh name of a student read out seemed too good to be true and I was waiting for a "Mike Hunt" to be read out. Some of the kids thought they were in a rap music video throwing hand signs and acting fearless. Only the ones who simply took their diploma and walked off the stage without a fuss would ever become something.

Then the worst part happened, one of them got up and delivered a still-born speech. He had titled it "Fireworks" which was supposed to be a metaphor for the young budding minds being unleashed into the world

ready to sparkle and dazzle. His poor use of metaphors made me want to get his sister pregnant and call the kid "Cornelius". The kid delved even deeper into his metaphor when he should have been heading towards the ending. It was cheesy. It was uninspired. I remixed my own version of his speech in my head as he spoke:

Fireworks. My fellow students I stand before you today delivering a graduation speech that you don't care about and the parents present hold no faith in my ability to deliver it being that they have been in a meeting with marketing all day.

Fireworks. We are all fireworks ready to go off like a drunken metaphor in a 3 am voicemail. Do we all have potential to go out there and light up the sky? Will the world stop reading its newspaper and turn its head to hear our bang? Must the sky bare itself to us as we illuminate its blank sheet? Do our lives hold the same validity as the warning written on the side of the box? No.

Over ten teenagers a year are killed by fireworks in the US. Most states ban the sale of any variety of them. A small percentage of them do not even take to their fuses and fail to ignite. Those that do ignite are often causes of eye loss and third degree burns.

The truth, my fellow students, is that we are doomed. For twelve years we have been told what to do from drawing our shoes in art class to learning of countries histories that we will never visit let alone be able to point out on a map. To all my fellow achievers all you have done is prove that you can retain anything given to you and repeat it verbatim on a piece of paper. None of us know anything outside of these bounds, never having been given the chance in twelve years to experience actual life. You are not better than everyone else here if you are top of the class. You are in fact the stupidest person here and will make a great asset to a corporation that makes expensive software which never works. Or weapons.

The truth is your life does not begin now that you can leave High Skool and start paying tax. The truth is that it began the day you were born. We have been herded through gate one and then we go to college and then we get a job and then we get married and then we buy a house and then we have 2.5 kids and then we die. I still do not know what the first amendment is all about because I was too busy being put in detention for

talking in class. In no way am I prepared for the thousands of uneducated people out there who will take my money from me any chance they can get.

A writer who was never famous and never wrote the quote didn't say "In avarnis domunis labore" which means nothing just like our "education". We are no longer told what to do now that we have graduated. So now I will sit in a state of arrested development until I receive further instruction.

So leave here today and start your real education as you unlearn everything that the teachers here have been taught to teach us.

# Chapter 18

Supercross is a sport that was started in America: a dirt track in a stadium with man made jumps. Having raced dirt bikes for a few years I was a bench racer. Not as mainstream as Nascar but generally gathering a crowd with a higher IQ and more teeth. The name of the stadium is not important because it changed every time some scum bag corporation felt like sucking up to the general public. Just like any event I had been to in America it was sold out and there were thousands of avid fans swarming around. Dressed in the fan uniform. The Dads would get their watered down beer and get the kids hot dogs that were probably made of slow race horses. You could also buy an event T-shirt for the same price as a small European two door car.

I went along with three couples and one 4 year old. The rain had been floating down most of the day which was just as well since we had the cheap seats at the back which were undercover. Long concrete arches with a short canopy kept us drier than the folks that had forked over a small fortune for their ringside seats. The track was chocolate soup by this stage with bikes zigging and zagging all over it. Millions of dollars of race bike was getting ruined each minute while dirt found bearing. People had made makeshift raincoats out of garbage bags like a horde of homeless.

The racing was underway yet my attention wained for a second when I saw a large group of people walking up the stairs towards the seats behind us. A few seconds later something made me turn around. The large group was led by an unevolved looking SuperCuts patron with some cheap tattoo's. Leader of the pack was having a heated conversation with a younger guy who had a bit too much booze in his bloodstream and brain. The guy sitting below me started screaming loud enough to make me jump: "Take it outside!". Him screaming did not help since it was about to be fight or flight. The two having a conversation then swung at each other. The couple next to me were down the stairs quicker than

seemed humanly possible. My decision was to stay exactly where I was and not abandon my other friends. More people above us threw themselves head first into the brawl and bodies started flailing over our heads. My friend next to me stood up and gave a rowdy drunk kid directly behind us a left hook to keep him away from his 4 year old. The yeller below us was screaming the whole time assaulting our ears while there was mayhem all around us. All our senses were electrified.

The brawl came to an end leaving bruised egos, stretched T-shirts and some bloody knuckles. As the thug leader of the gang standing on the stairs walked away the crowd was yelling at him and he challenged a few other people. Maybe he was raped by his father once too often while living in a trailer park and was terrified of the world, swinging at his fear trying to hit it in the jaw but never quite connecting. Since he was an overweight slob with a paperweight for a brain he was obliged to live up to it. The whole thing had started from a kid sitting behind us saying something to a friend of the Omega males while ordering a hotdog. Their honor was at stake. The honor of people who beat up kids and throw them on ladies using crutches in front of me.

The gang was now all gone but some of the guys behind us had just had their courage kick in and were ready to fight. The very same rowdy kid that had gotten a left hook got the buy-one-get-free as he got full of steam again. I walked off and looked for a cop or anyone with a tazer. Twenty minutes later a cop arrived and asked him to leave which was not achieved until he was in cuffs.

As we were leaving the stadium to catch the train home we saw a bearded homeless guy holding a sign which read "Family kidnapped by ninjas, need money for karate lessons".

# Chapter 19

I needed a car and a car salesman needed my money. From the start I knew it would be difficult. The salesman would try his best to confuse me and try sell me anything within his reach. Two days stubble, a T-shirt with a few small holes in it and filthy old sneakers. Beer coaster psychology would make him first look at my shoes to judge how much money I had. If I had looked at my shoes, I would have guessed “homeless”.

As I drove into the used car dealership one of their vampires headed right out the door towards me. I got worried because he came out the door a little too quickly like he could smell money in the air. He was dressed in a fake nice suit that wasn't nice at all and had the sincerity of a tire iron. Originally hailing from Iran he was one of the many basing his integration skills from infomercials he saw on a small old TV. He fell for my cheap disguise and mistook me for a poor student. That's why he was a car salesman and I was not.

I found the car I wanted but not the price I wanted. I found another car. The salesman was gauging me asking me cross referenced questions like I was a high school dropout taking the Mickey D's application test. He was more annoying than engaging like a good salesman should be. The price of my car was a bit high. I had the money but did not want to spend it all. Haggling started when I did what he did for a living. I lied. I lied some more. I told him I had much less than what he wanted and that I had just come from another dealership and they offered me a similar car for less. He needed my money how a compulsive gambler needs to find his monthly alimony.

I took the car for a test drive and obviously scared him with my driving by the way he was giving me step by step instructions. “I'm on PCP” was what I was dying to say to scar his memories and to have something to say when he got home and his wife asked him what was wrong: “I need to get out of the car sales business, “ he would hopefully say “and

get into something that's safer where I can still lie and treat people like they are retarded. Maybe join an advertising agency."

He had no office but shared floor space with another desk. His desk was sparse and had one of those business card holders as if a car salesman was actually important enough to have their name in print. He handed me a piece of paper which showed the track record of the car and current owner. The form read that the dealership had purchased the car at an auction and that it was originally purchased out of state. Who knows on what adventures it had been on and how many dead hookers were tossed into its trunk. Then he tried to get me to sign something and tried to make me feel like I was obliged to buy the car since I had test driven it as well as taken up my time. He got told that the law clearly states I was not obliged at all as if he did not already know. I low balled him with what I wanted him to know I had and salesman wondered off into the office behind me to "talk it over with my manager". There was no way he was making a big deal out of it because all I saw behind the door was a coffee machine. The coffee machine probably did run the show. No doubt after pacing around the empty office for a minute that was supposed to be the home to the great big boss, he reappeared. The price he came out with was still too high. I had the money. There was no breaking me. He said his boss would not be happy. I cared even less wanting to ruin the coffee machines day as well. Back he went into the empty office this time to talk with the "owner of the car".

He wasn't paying attention since I already knew the owner of the car was the dealership and pointed this out to him. I was sick of humoring the retarded kid trying to eat his ice cream but missing his mouth each time. "What are you talking about?" as I stood for effect. "That's all I have, stop trying to stall and either I take this car or get the other one from your competitor". The look on his face showed that he had just dropped the catch losing the team the game. He was beat.

## Chapter 20

I could have done with 400 million dollars so while I was filling my car up with gas I wondered into the store. It was a clutter of energy drinks and snacks that make you happy/fat. The lady behind the counter was training her son how to use the register and after the second attempt she realized what I wanted. Her boy fired out two California State lottery tickets and processed my purchase with enthusiasm. I wanted to go back to that store 10 years later and ask him if it was all worth it and was he living the dream.

I walked back to my car. As I turned around from putting the hose back into place someone appeared on the other side of my car. He was dressed OK but his shoes did not make sense and there was a battle going on in his eyes to conceal something within himself. His beard had a guest appearance from gray and he probably should have weighed a few pounds more. I don't recall what he first started saying since he appeared to already be halfway into a pre-visualized sentence at the beginning of a sentence. Crackhead or a derivative thereof.

"... and the thing wont take my visa and I got to get up to Sacramento in a hurry to go see my sister and the damn card machine man , wont take my card and if you could help me out that would be great and." he babbled. He was full of shit and his story was sitting right next to him. There was no credit card in his hand or car keys. Besides which if you looked into his eyes you could tell he was lying through his teeth. I opened my wallet and gave him the \$5 that was next to a \$20. The \$20 would have gone to him had he just told me why he really needed the money.

"Here you go." and he looked grateful enough. He caught my accent and asked me what country I was from with a buzz from getting what he wanted with a lame story. At this stage he would have let me marry him because I had given him some money. I told him what country and he

name dropped the only two cities that everybody ever knows and I was from neither. I wished him good luck to get rid of him. As he walked off he nodded his head and raised his hand in acknowledgment and called me a "true American".

I sat in my car and watched him as he walked across the street to where his car supposedly was. He did not reach for any car keys. Standing outside the gas station for a bit you could see he was trying to be invisible in his own mind. Time was being killed until I left so I did not see that his story was a sham. He walked forward then stopped no doubt making a decision in his head of what to do. The pedestrian crossing light turned green and he walked away from the gas station. Once across the street he walked into a Mcdonalds. I would rather he had spent the money on drugs.

# Chapter 21

For three years I had managed to avoid LA. David Bowie's song "I'm Afraid Of Americans" probably summed it up for me: "nobody needs anyone, they don't even just pretend". Nothing about that city appealed to me at all. I was set to cover the X Games for one day and bask in the easy-back-oven glow of the LA sky.

Four hours sleep and then my alarm went off. Head thick with the 4am haze I drove down to the airport and lost my phone along the way. Hours later that day when I needed to call a cab it would matter to me. Parked the car. Caught the bus to the terminal. Already checked in. Hurried up and waited for another delayed flight. Finding a free corner seat I sat down and gathered my thoughts. What was I doing with my life? Would anyone ever pay me? Do I have what it takes to pull it off? Was I a good enough writer and photographer? It was the fear and doubt that lurched out at you like a high on glue monster when one was tired. My thoughts slowly collected.

An airline worker wheeled in an elderly looking lady with two young kids. She was elderly but not that elderly. They sat down at the seats across from me and were well behaved for kids that young. She mumbled something to the little girl and then stood up and walked away with her. There was no stammer in her stride and I wondered what the wheelchair was all about. I also wondered about the young boy she had left just sitting there. She came back a few minutes later and I watched them wheel her into the plane when we boarded, because she was in a chair she went in first.

Which flight? What flight? The one where there was nothing to drink on-board? The flight where my seat was broken and kept tilting back? Was it the flight where I had to sit next to an idiot tech worker? It could have been any of them. I fell asleep and everything merged into one with no sound or sense of time or space. My sleep was in debt as it was.

The terminal was a few minutes away from anywhere where I could hail a cab or get to my destination. I looked around and saw a shuttle while a female voiced read out instructions over a loudspeaker. Of course it was LAX and you could not hear anything except kids crying, foreigners yelling and jet engines. I rolled the dice and decided to jump onto shuttle. If I was moving I was going somewhere as opposed to standing still trying to figure out what was going on. I won and found the exit to LAX. Walking along I found an empty cab and got in. The driver had a thick accent and was like so many friends weird foreign Grandfathers that I had met. What kind of person wakes up and decides that they want to move to America to drive a cab from LAX.

“Hey there, Home Depot Centre please.” I asked.

“Herm Dee Pot Sen Ter?” he replied. He had never heard of the place which I did not trust. It would not have been the first time a cab driver heard my accent and thought they would take the longest route humanly possible.

“You live in LA and you don’t know where the Home Depot Center is?” I got in his face. The excuses came and he asked me for an address. I pointed out it was the equivalent to catching a cab in San Francisco and not knowing where the Golden Gate Bridge was. He had never heard of the X Games either.

“Call dispatch and ask them for directions then.” I ordered him to which he replied “No, I can not do thees”. When I asked for the reason I never got an answer. The driver dialed someone he had on speed dial and I can only guess was asking someone for directions because I kept hearing the words “herm dee pot sen ter” over and over. By his third phone call I was starting to get really pissed off. We arrived at a strip mall which he said was my destination.

“I don’t need to buy a bloody refrigerator, I need to go to the X Games!” I told him. He seemed to get more and more confused and I told him to drive further down the road. Finding the exit to the parking lot was too much of a task for him yet I didn’t see him stop the meter. By that point I wanted to make the Manson family look like amateurs and wear his ears on a necklace.

“Just pull over to this gas station, let me out, you don’t know what the fuck you are doing.” I yelled. He got his cab fare and I got a weak apology to which I never responded to.

I stood at the gas station somewhere in LA. Somewhere in the maze on a corner. There was a sickly layer of smog over the city that did not want me to see the sun. People drove by going about their business while I wondered just how bad this day was going to get. Maybe it was from the pressure of the plane effecting me but the LA air seemed thick and dense. The city did not feel as busy as I thought it should have been. Roads like veins connected everything giving the city a dead slow pulse. SUV’s and coke habits drove past and still the denseness permeated the air perpetuated by the consuming doom smog over all our heads. If San Francisco was heaven , LA was not quite hell but more of a purgatory. For the drugged up runaways roped into filming porn LA no doubt was indeed hell. Along with them pushing the giant boulder up a hill that never seemed to peak were the shattered dreams of actors and actresses serving tables. All this went through my head in a second or two.

Time synced back up with me and reality washed back in. Two teenagers walked past me out of the gas station store with lanyards on which read “X”. They were on their way to the Home Depot Center with their Dad and his co-worker. The Dad offered me a ride right to where I needed to get to turning out to be something too good to be true or written about. “ You are with the media,” he said “ we love the media !”. As we drove along I told them about what had happened with the cab driver and we all laughed. I was laughing but thinking about ways which I could have buried his lifeless body.

I thanked the driver and everyone in the car as we parked. Kindness was not something that I had been expecting in LA unless some cult wanted me to sign up with them. The driver stopped me before I could go any further asking if I had time to see what his product was all about. I was already late but obliged him since it was the least I could do. The others all unpacked while the driver turned from a nice cheery guy into an infomercial automaton taking over every channel on your TV. Sub surface desperation fueled his circuits as he did his demo like those arms that build cars on assembly lines. His demo included what he called a “balance” test as he made me lose it by pushing down on my left

outstretched arm. I was made to only stand on one leg during this critical test of nonsense so there was no way I could keep my balance. Then he handed me a square piece of rubber with his company logo on the front and a circular hologram sticker like you get on a credit card. I was told to hold the piece of rubber (whatever it was supposed to be) in my right fist and we would go through the balance test again. The difference this time was that he only pushed down on my arm with 2 fingers as opposed to his whole hand. His fingers were applying pressure to my skin but I could tell there was no real force behind it. I kept my balance and he reached the climax of his the-banks-after-me sales pitch. There was nothing to do but but to pretend to be amazed about his little piece of rubber with the sticker on it. After he thought he had blown my mind came the break down of how this awesomely amazing miracle of radicalness took place. The little sticker he explained to me effected a persons biofield by harnessing the power of harmonic balance. It would resonate multiple frequencies causing unbendable cohesion in ones mind. It was truly amazing and a feat of science. For some reason I still preferred the little hologram on my credit card though because unlike his insane sticker it actually did something other than reflect light. I used up all the good PR smiles I had along with false amazement and steered the conversation towards me getting away from them. Away from them quickly. Away from what I knew LA consisted of.

The underpaid, under thought and overzealous staff in yellow jackets conspired against me and my chances of finding media registration. These syncopated beasts were somehow joined in unison by some invisible phsyic force to construct a rat and a maze. Each one gave me different directions on how to get to the media sign in office like some type of joke in bad taste. One of them grabbed my arm and spoke to me like a child who has lost his parents at a flea market. „ÄúNow Honey, are you listening, you go left then you go right, then you go right then you go left, are you listening, you cant go through there, oh you are media . „Äúshe babbled on while I could never ever explain to her how much more I could comprehend beyond taking a left or a right. 20 minutes later and the media office turned out to be just 10 feet in front of me the whole time. The sub terreanean smog was starting to slowly burn off by this stage and the heat of the sun was letting itself be known. My armpits were sweaty and I started to not want to be there. The door to the office was stuck so I stuck my head through the window to find it empty with the exception of a lady in front of a computer at the far end. She was

staring at the screen motionless as if it were a sub par circus monkey entertaining her. I called to get her attention and got no response. I called again even louder still with no response. Are you kidding me. As each minute went by I was missing out more of the event and chances to take photos. Strike 3 was loud as I called to get her attention. Her head swiveled slowly on its axis without the rest of her body moving and she fixed her stare at me. „ÄúI’m looking for someone who can give me my media credentials please ?,Äú I asked. She looked at me for a second and then turned her head back to the screen without saying a word. Somewhere else in the city George A. Romero was missing a key zombie from one of his scenes and I was getting nowhere. I turned around and called the fence behind the office a „Äúuseless fuck,Äú to which it responded by sitting there maintaining its cool being a fence. Luckily only a few minutes passed by when a young Asian guy walked up and opened the door asking if I was there for media sign in. All his expensive college courses had given him the skills and he was following it by the numbers. Hair gel , polo shirt , khaki shorts and the latest sneakers that were in fashion that hour stood in his way of ever experiencing spitting out your own blood in the X-ray waiting room. It was obvious that he knew nothing about any of the athletes or the sports that were going on around him. Mr Slick would not let me into the office so I had to deal with him through the window getting my media drive through. After he asked for my name the third time I knew the fence was about to be called something even worse. Not even after I dropped several names and showed him the email that read „Äúcleared for a media pass ,Äú from his boss was he going to give me a pass. This was out-of-the-box thinking messing with his neat ordered dinner plate center, fork left, knife right approach. I was waiting for the fake hollow „Äúsorry,Äú and then directions to the ticket office. His better judgement got the better of him and he called his boss who probably told him when he could make pee pee as well. A to Z printed me out a media pass and I snatched it and ran.

I followed the sound of the dirt bikes and found them midst practice. TV people were littered throughout the course. TV people were here, there and everywhere. The place was infested with them and I started to resent crawling into this cave to find them gnawing on each others leg bones in the dark. “How were they going to fuck with me today?”

Number 8 rode past below me and I recalled that I knew him. He had

come so far and was so much better than I ever was on a dirt bike. I wished that I could have been him for a day but not have his injuries. His scar count was way above mine and his wrists would probably stop working when he was in his early 40's. It was then that I realized that although it was not very bright the sun was starting to wail on LA. Building up momentum from Sammy Davis jnr to Cassius Clay in 3 rounds. It was then that I also recalled that I had left my trucker hat at home and I was about to get lobsterized.

Moto practice was near its end and I still had not taken 1 BMX photo which I was supposed to be there doing. Trickle of people started to roll into the venue but still not the amount that I was expecting. Goon security guards in their yellow shirts stood at their posts all having 2 looks at my media credential around my neck. I found a secret service elevator with the help of one of the riders Dad's that led me to the ground floor and the BMX course. As I walked from dark to the light of the course I realized I was new right in the nest of the TV people. Several of them turned around like automatons and stared at me. They were ignored because I could operate a camera as well but could string a sentence together. Every single one of them looked like a prick. The type of people that never really have any true friends and completely devoid of any imagination. I caught up with a few of the riders while they day dreamed about their next coke party.

Alongside the vert ramp was a tall scaffolding. It looked empty so I walked up it and no security guard stopped me. On the ramp were the skaters doing their thing. The guy who went on to win slid off his board and it shot into the crowd. As soon as it landed a punter with a cowboy hat and what looked like cut off sleeves grabbed it ran off with it. The skater stood at the bottom of the ramp not knowing quite what to do. The boys in yellow were quick to stop Tex and yanked the board from him. One less item made it to eBay that day.

The heat was getting to me. I was sluggish. Movement made sweat right away. Slow head. Sweaty hands. Damp socks. How did people survive in LA.

A guy who barely spoke English sold me a lemonade for \$4. I paid with a 5 but told him to keep the change. With lemonade at that price he obviously needed the money more than I did. On most days in my life it

could have been mediocre flavored water but right then it was liquid gold poured straight from the Holy Grail served by one of the riders hot girlfriend.

It was time to leave but I stopped as I heard a friend of mines name announced over the PA. He was about to take his second run in the vert finals. I double backed to the photog I had just said goodbye to and waited. My buddy dropped in, tried to land something crazy and a second later had a broken foot and ankle. It was time to leave LA.

On the way back to LAX I asked the cab driver how long he had been driving for. I got no answer in return and stared out the window at the maze outside of it.

## Chapter 22

There was no rain when I landed. Everyone drove under the speed limit. There was water surrounding everything. There was nobody on the streets at night. Seattle is very clean. There is no smog. There was a young girl smoking crack on the sidewalk at 9am.

I found an antique store next to one of the piers. The first thing that caught my eye was the rack filled with issues of Playboy from the 60's. Someone had kept them for that long. An investment. For sale for \$1 was a drawer full of old polaroid shots. Various views into complete strangers lives for a buck. Tin robots, model airplanes, old bikes, old Canon's and the smell of old wood. It was a warehouse of items and memories maybe triggered by scent. Before I got there I saw a crack deal go down on the sidewalk like orange juice at breakfast.

Later that evening I walked past the restaurant next to the foyer of my hotel. It stated the menu and times on the wall outside but I went in and asked anyway. My reason being was that the hostess was gorgeous. She was well dressed and looked like she showered several times a day. I drank in her hotness and as I began to ask her what time breakfast was this annoying little waitress came out of nowhere with a million answers to my 1 question. My chance to even hear the cute girl speak was stopped dead and the waitress looked at me smilingly with her hands folded in front of her. Maybe they were dating each other.

I checked out and the same woman who checked me in was there. To avoid her I got into the other queue because she was a bitch. Stuck on herself with layers of make-up on to cover up the reptilian scales. The kind of person that would make a guy think she likes them just to have power over them and then just turn her back on them. Stuck. I ended up in her queue in the end anyway and looked at her in disbelief that such a shitty person could exist.

## Chapter 23

I got back to the Fringe clothing stand and there was a bag a fortune cookies on the table. They were charging \$13 for lunch which was \$14 too expensive for me. Those people really wanted the kids paper with green ink on it.

“Is there ‘anything’ inside those fortune cookies?” I asked. They tasted fine and my fortune read: An interesting sports opportunity is in your near future. Turns out Animal Chin baked them himself (the guy from the cult skate film *The Search For Animal Chin*). Some of the cookies were a dark brown colour. Someone looked at them and said “did he make those with shit?”.

Anyone who introduces themselves to you as “Bulldog” is trouble. He said he was a record label owner which right away meant that he was not. His business card had the word “bulldog” on it 3 times. No doubt a name given to himself. He complained how photographers wanted to charge him a grand a day to shoot his bands where he could just do it with his cheap digital camera. Another complaint he had was that Jacoby from Papa Roach used to hang out but now he was all corporate and too cool for everyone. Later I found out he pocketed around \$40 000 from an event that never happened. Behind his 200 plus pounds and tatt’s I bet he still sucked his thumb in his sleep. Shadier than a palm tree in Long Beach.

FMX, Skate, Snowboarding and BMX right next to the piers in San Francisco. The girl from Spin magazine was really cute so I went over and asked if they were looking for any photographers. Her name was written in gold on her necklace and even after she told me it I forgot what it was 2 seconds later. It was probably a name like “Tiffany” or “Amber”. Later when I got home I read a copy of the magazine and hoped I never did any work for them. Watered down reading fit for hospital waiting rooms - I don’t care how hot she was. I recognized a rider from the Metal

Mulisha and got his attention after some TV outfit from LA was done with him. He seemed annoyed that I wanted to interview him but after he realized I was a Motohead he was OK. Guys that backflip 250 pound plus dirt bikes over 60 foot gaps are supposed to be crazy but he was as normal as the next guy.

During the BMX park competition my friend ejected off his bike from about 2 stories high. When he landed his knee popped out because he had just torn his MCL, PCL and ACL. 3 for 1 hospital bed jackpot. Everyone crowded around him with slowed down enthusiasm while the paramedics did their thing. The vibe took a swan dive at that stage as everyone remembered danger and consequence. Near the end of the comp the venue turned off the sound and electricity. Then the security goons they hired right out of rehab rolled onto the course and strong armed us all off. I looked around waiting for dissidence like a kid waits for Christmas. Nothing happened. No fire was started, no bikes were thrown and no punches were thrown along with them. Disheartening.

I found the vert ramp and one of the BMX riders I wanted to interview. The 3 ring circus running the media for the show had not given me any of the athlete's I had requested to be interviewed. As usual it was me versus the event and I had to find everyone myself. He was fine with an interview and then vanished from the face of the earth. Next time. We were in a group and these awe struck kids staring at the vert ramp asked if any of us "were pro" and could we sign their stuff. I said "sure, let me get my pen". Everyone around me thought it was amusing. What made it even funnier was that I can't even ride a vert ramp. Their little hearts broke when I told them I was a nobody however I did promise them I would get a "pro" rider to sign their stuff when they arrived.

When I walked around the side of the huge snow jump that took up a good deal of the baseball park security would not let me through. According to them I needed a different coloured media credential. My credential could get me into the vert ramp so I scaled the wobbly ladder and sat on the deck with a few other guys watching the snowboarders crash and go right into the steel safety barriers. Faces in the crowd beaming back towards the action. Below me what looked like to be a homeless person was chasing some skater kids and having fun with them. That homeless guy was the editor of Thrasher skate magazine and it was awesome how he would never fit in into any corporate meeting at the

publishers. His coarse Brocalness, homemade ink and street punk dress sense versus the suits. Nobody could ever accuse him of being a fake. Not without being trucked. I left with a group of friends and on our way back to the parking lot (which was a 20 minute walk away from the event) we found 2 bmx'ers eating in a decent looking restaurant. Everyone was hungry so we decided to get something to eat. We talked crap with the bmx'ers for a bit and when they left one of them shook my hand and I told him my first name. He then asked if I was first name last name and I said yes.

"Wait, how do you know my name ? " I asked.

"I have seen it on the Internet" he replied.

# Chapter 24

Its always the defining point in recollection where you stop and its clear. The one pause in time where the memory of the event or day is anchored. You stop and think what led up to you being there. Why where you there. What were you doing. I was pissing in the corner of a parking lot in downtown LA.

My phone's alarm sounded and the message it displayed was "go to LA but come back". 2 hours sleep on the clock. Time to get just sharp enough to drive to the long term parking lot. There would be little or no traffic so not much to bounce off of. On the bus to the terminal I was not sure if I had ever lived or might actually be another persons dream. Sound seemed to lag as tiredness roped itself around me. I sleepwalked my way through it all and got to my seat on the plane. There was no sign of the sun. The time on my phone could not have been correct because it only read 5:00. Was I really there. Did I exist? Did I existentialize?

Eric and Sean looped around LAX waiting for me to get out and meet them. Somehow I ended up at the complete wrong end of the airport. I was LAX'ed. "Yo Eric, yeah its me. Yeah somehow I ended up at ... Un-ited airlines. Its terminal 7."

A car with shot out rear windows drove past as I was shooting our first photos for the day. Inside the driver was listening to Dr Dre being a cliché all over the road. We moved further down the street. We were near the largest university in LA. A bay door opened quickly and spat a car out from a parking lot. Looked like the basement parking lot for expensive apartments. Quick metal gates to keep the dangerous poor out. Eric rode in to get a better run up so I could get my second shot of the day. The door closed quicker than anyone including the door itself would have expected. Eric was trapped inside this strange parking lot while I stood in the street thinking up stories of what to tell the people that exist on the other end of the 911 phonenumber when they arrived.

Camera still in my hand. Sean found an exit door. Eric used it.

Third shot in the shadow cast by the tall buildings on the street. Wells Fargo building. Private property. Eric wanted to ride this expensive looking marble ledge and then jump onto the pavement. He said the previous time he had done it his handlebars bent when he landed. Underpaid overworked foreigner trying to be a security guard. We wonder around the block being invisible and return a few minutes later in the hope that the security guard had cleared off. An unmarked cop drives past while I hold my camera clearly guilty. Tough looking cop slightly over his ideal body weight looks at me as he drives past but I could not hear what he was saying. I froze, he drove off. We tried get the shot again. Underpaid runs at Eric screaming trying to practically fall under his bike. Frustration lined his face as he did not want to even think about why people on BMX bikes would even want to be there. A man probably prematurely aged from dealing with skater kids.

We ate at Eric's favorite burger joint for lunch and I ordered the only thing I could eat: pancakes. Had been awake for practically well over 24 hours and I could no longer play chess. Nor could I hablo my Espanol. Not even for a "para aqui por favor". While we ate we talked about how the outside world just does not get what we do. The only way to live like one is to be one. No doubt the people glued to their TV's getting dumb with car commercials dismissively think its something for kids. Once I saw a guy try land a trick. He did not land it. He crashed hard. His chin was cut open deep and started pumping blood out. He lay on his back writhing around half in and out of consciousness. Moans came out of his mouth and he kept making a hand gesture for a telephone. His jaw was completely broken and he was trying to tell us to call 911. It was a bad experience but we all have a story to tell now. As we get older we gather memories which forms our personality and even our souls. We learn, we love, we regret, we win, we lose, we remember. Souls are memories. Memories make souls. People like us want super sized souls.

We stopped off at Eric's house so that he could have a shower. He shared an apartment with a few other people but they were all out. One of the other lodgers was his sister and he kept his door locked because she would borrow his money and never return it. I played with his dog and spoke with Sean about taking photos and life in general. As we left we saw one of his neighbors and Eric told us the story: "One night I get

home and there are all these cop cars in our road and they have the Police helicopter flying above their house. Turns out he was holding his family hostage with a Samurai sword for about 3 hours. Looks like he is back out on parole or something.”.

LA is like 1000 different kid giants put together a Lego set. Buildings across from each other make no sense and do not correspond in terms of design or aesthetics. It's a mad scientist real estate developers pet project. No angels have ever visited LA. Tags and gang logo's pave the way across the buildings for the smog to slowly sludge its way over. Too many different races litter the streets like the world collided and they spilled over the side just after the impact. The heat there is mayor. He always finds you in LA. No rays of sunshine but smog filtered beam trying to stir fry everyone. Vacant lots sit under the sun right next to houses and snuck in between buildings. Roads that never end and never begin all criss crossing over each other. Cab drivers hailing from places that have not yet even been discovered yet, but none of them born in LA.

I woke up laying across two LAX chairs perhaps designed by a Swedish lunatic who has never heard of form and function. Neck bent and legs half cramped. Where? What time was it? Annoying free range kids played with toy cars and crayons on the carpet next to me. Noise. Was there a flight that I just missed? Did I forget to pay for the parking and get stuck at the boom? Had I just done my first photo shoot in LA?

## Chapter 25

A motocross national brings all sorts of people out of the woodwork. The bulk of the moto crowd have matching scars to their tattoos as well as the blonde wife with implants. You don't even need to look to tell that their truck is lifted and as big as a Russian tank. Their kids are arrogant and grow into mannerless teenagers who think they are baby rock stars. People who take a dirt bike off a downhill double jump bigger than a house are different from the general intake.

I drove up to Sacramento to get some photos and meet up with a friend who runs his own clothing company. Shane had a good thing going and the right idea not wanting to become a millionaire. Despite this I was convinced that is exactly what he would become. His booth was set up along many others with a dirt path dividing them all. Every hour or so a water truck with a dog in the passenger seat would drive by spraying the road keeping the dust under control. I was hoping to get a media pass for a large motocross publication but they emailed me two days before the event and said they could not help me. Giving up is out of fashion so I emailed the organizers directly and was shutdown within four cold hours. I decided that nothing was going to stop me and went anyway. All I faced was rejection after rejection which made me want to be a writer and photographer even more. Everyone with a media pass would be shooting from the inside of the track which told me that my photos would very different to everyone else's. In the angles where I was stuck behind a fence I just shot through it in such a way as to add it to the photo all out of focus. You have to wallow at the bottom before you hit the top.

The track was dustier than dust and had elevation changes all over. In order to get to an area close enough to any bikes I had to walk up and down several hills. I needed to go to the bathroom really bad at this stage but wanted to wait until Shane and I got back to the hotel. Portable toilets are too easily tipped over and I did not want to see anyones name

written on the wall in their own feces (unless its me doing it of course). I stood outside the port-a-potty and looked left and right. The decision was made and I went in. It was a winning lottery ticket with a cute girls phone number scribbled on it for me: I picked the one clean pre-hillbilly taco toilet in the whole place. Nobody had smeared crap all over the walls yet or puked on the floor. Also absent was the nose breaking sucker punch of sewage that's been baking in the sun all day mixed with chemicals that stain everything midnight blue. As well as all this the lock on the door worked. Since it was not soiled yet, was I obliged to pee all over it before I left?

I escaped the UV rays trying to kill me and sat with Shane under the tent, people watching. We would look at each other and laugh as we pointed out bizarre looking people. Some guy who looked like he just slithered off a porno walked into the booth and asked for a card. He was wanting to shoot some sort of calendar. Skinny build with dark tan, greasy, stylish goatee, obligatory earrings and sunglasses. I wondered how many vats of KY jelly showed up on his credit card statements each month. This was the kind of guy that made you never want to have daughters. Another guy walked past with a demeanour about him like he was walking from the lounge to the kitchen to get a beer and got distracted by something along the way. He wore short denim cut off's with black lycra cycling shorts under them. The beer in his hand seemed to be part of his body and never seemingly took a sip. Shane and I got to talking about music and he told me the first concert he ever went to was a Slayer gig. A gig I had avoided my whole life knowing what true Slayer fans were capable of. He had gone when he was 13 years old. I told him about the time of how when I was wallowing in boarding school, holding way more contempt than Holden Caulfield ever could, I was given Slayers album South of Heaven on cassette. The music was eerie at first and coming from another place that I had never known musically before. Looking through the song names and taking in the lyrics it became obvious to me that they leaned towards a Satanic theme. At first I thought that if I listened to the music that I would automatically be killing goats in no time and talking in tongues. There was no denying the appeal of the music and I could not stop listing to the tape. I came to a compromise where I didn't care about anything other than the music as a whole. Besides which, the Devil has all the good music. On the way back to the hotel I played South Of Heaven as loud as the speakers would take.

I knew of a good sushi restaurant just outside of town which I found while covering a Freestyle Motocross event months prior. One of the waitresses there looked just like a friend of mine's wife. We used my GPS to get there and stopped by a new skatepark on the way. The park had lost its new Christmas present feel after someone had tagged up the bowls. The tags were just illiterate gibberish and failed attempts at being edgy. Having no artistic value at all they took something away from the newly built park and were a crime against cool.

The next day back under the cover of the tent and with only five hours sleep buzzing in my head Shane told me what happened to the guy working the booth across from us. He had stayed in the same hotel as us that night with the difference being that he found some crystal meth. The guy vanished for hours and then they eventually found him face down in the pool enclosure. Even after he got dragged into a cold shower he did not wake up. When he got to his stand the next morning he walked over to Shane and asked if he had any Vicodin he could sell him.

I stood against the fence guarding the spot I had found to shoot. From where I was standing I could get a decent shot of the crowd in the foreground and the background with the rider being in the centre of the frame. If I turned directly around I could get close up shots of a fast corner. The sun was definitely staring down at us hard and I had too much dirt up my nose already. Some kids were rocking on the fence I was leaning on giving me no place to lean against for some rest. Behind me some other kids tipped over a trash can and used it as a seat just trying to provoke a reaction from someone. Inane chatter bounced off the hills from the PA system. The two announcers buzzing out of the PA made inside jokes and just the surrounding hills listened. Looking over at the inside of the race track I saw various photographers walking around uninhibited by drunk moto fans or large crowds of people. They were in a limousine for this ride and I was in the back of a twenty year old Diesel U-Haul van with worn tires. Someone's girlfriend who thought she was way cuter than she really was yelled at the guy watering the track in-between races. She wanted him to spray her down because of the heat. Me and my camera equipment voted that this was a bad idea and hoped that somehow she was suddenly struck mute. She jumped up and down making juvenile comments to the guy with the hose until she got his attention. I wanted her to go on a double date with OJ Simpson and Mike Tyson. He arched the hose and sprayed water into

the air. Large drops spread out and came falling back down to us in the slow motion of my mind. The camera bag on my back would hopefully protect the equipment but I had my camera in my hand. I turned around and bent over as quickly as I could holding my camera close to my stomach. When I straightened back up I saw a few stray drops had landed on the camera and said "for fucks sake" louder than I should have. In a parallel universe I was strangling him with his own hose and she was being forced to take photos with no press pass having to deal with herself asking to be sprayed with water.

## Chapter 26

Paul was a hippie back when they roamed the earth in their first incarnation. Truly slowly relaxed out and ready to roll. Roll another one. He was a surfer. Almost born to surf he lived for it so much. His house consisted of the occasional old piece of furniture, surf magazines and Apple laptops. All the signs of new age intelligence were there. We sat in the back of his garden talking and killing time. I was waiting for a surf competition to start and I had promised his son I would take some photos of the surfers he sponsored. Less than a few beats of a bongo drum away was the Pacific Ocean with the city of Santa Cruz wrapped around it. An island from everything non-bodacious. Kids who mentally projected themselves as hippies still roamed the streets trying to get people to notice them without too obviously trying to get noticed. Tye died T's and iPod's hooked up to speakers in the streets.

The Californian sun was doing its thing, smiling and looking down on us with sunglasses while waves of orange juice flames danced off him. Over in some amphitheater on the beach front the California Raisins were covering an Eagles song and wearing their sunglasses in the shade. Two seagulls swayed in the sky above the sea discussing existentialism. Mickey drove with the top down highway 1 with Pluto, face outside the window, tongue out making sure his face dragged every molecule of wind he could. Inside coffee shops the next great novels were being written and the homeless surfed the Internet in the doorways of closed stores.

I could hear the white noise hiss of the beach from the garden. Sugar junkie bee's were starting to find my fruit juice their just one more fix. Paul told me a story about Texas. I knew how it would end. Him and some friends were road tripping around the country and tripping around the country. The mental picture I had already formed was lots of long hair, corduroy pants and an out of tune guitar. Driving through the Lone Tard State themselves and the fresh dose of THC were pulled over

by a cop. You know the end of this story. A small pocket knife Paul used to cut fruit was found in his possession and luckily for him he was nowhere near Dealey Plaza otherwise more might have been pinned on him as well. A night in jail. A day stolen. I wondered as he unravelled the story if the cop was terrified at what lay before him in the carefree Volkswagen van he pulled over. Letting that which truly did not matter slide eating fruit with long hair. It was American Gothic versus Guernica.

I watched Paul and my friend Shane's enthusiasm for surfing more than I watched the actual event. The sun baked announcer for the competition was using words that made no sense to me. There was cognizance that he was talking in English but nothing registered. Cali speak. The sport was their lives and vice versa.

I figured out a clever ending.

About the author: Hailing from a background in freelance journalism which he never studied, Lloyd Ramsay is also an Action sports photographer and wrote this section about himself. His first break in writing came in the form of winning an essay competition at skool. Presented to him by a countries vice president, the essay was a metaphor for suicide to piss off his teachers. His writing style is mainly influenced by the beat authors and music, basing his pentameter on a similar pattern structure.



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