

An introduction to the Literary Works

Of Zachary Elmlad

Thanks for expressing an interest!

I hope you find what you're looking for.

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A series of intentionally arranged words

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Whatever Happens, Happens

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Preface

Objectively, what do we have to say for ourselves in this third millennium of the Common Era? Man has reached the Moon. You can watch T.V. on a cell phone. We have machines specifically made for toasting bread sliced by machines specifically made for slicing bread specifically baked for slicing. There is still poverty, there is still famine. There are still taxes. It's just a shame you can't E-Mail sliced bread to a starving nation from the Moon.

This book was not written for people that have trotted along merrily through existence loving every step and whim. This book was written for rational, thinking human beings that have struggled through the constant turmoil we call life. Turmoil here, I stress, has many faces. Be it the turmoil of working for a living, the turmoil of a fast paced technological society, the turmoil of a relationship, the turmoil of a hopeless romantic stuck in a world of ad campaigns and fast food, or the turmoil of waking up every day with the desire to drink heavily. For some, turmoil is simply *thinking*.

To a grammatical purist, this book will seem abstract and error ridden. To a linguist, the terms vulgar and irreverent will probably serve mighty importance in reviews. To an academic, the story will bring an ache to the frontal lobe. But to my friends the modern culture, this is written for you. What need have we for stuffy colleges with their forced curriculum when any information we seek is available without cost on the internet? College is for learning, not for paid parking spaces and recalcitrant activism. What

need have we for grammar when all manner of speech these days is intentionally misspelled in ad campaigns, or corrected with spell-check? Grammar is for people who need to be told what to do. What need have we for linguists with their noses stuck in nineteenth century literature, when we have a global economy embracing all manner of language and everyone writing in a blog for the world to see? Language is the most fluid and subjective concept that man knows and has ever known. How can you make a standardized language in a world with six billion people in it? Who decides what's obscene? The people who are offended, or the people who are scared of offending?

What I'm getting at here, is that people in the past have scrutinized every letter of every word that is pressed into a bound set of pages for you to ponder at, worrying about how many times someone says "Fuck," or whether the words are depicting a deliberate crime. We see these "anti-social" behaviors being attacked as irreverent or whatever politically correct term used by antiseptic journalists waiting for their off-camera bottle of mixed prescription medications and Vodka. This is not written for children. This is not an advice column. This story is about a person stuck in a world he was barely capable of understanding, launched into life without ever being told how terrifying it actually was to be stuck in a sea of stupid, blank faces that pass you by at the street corner afraid to look you in the eyes with some sort of dread that you might actually have a thought in your head.

If you don't like the word fuck, and you cannot accept that the fields of sex, drugs, boring jobs, sarcasm, and religious cynicism are viable literary subjects; I would suggest that you find your receipt, and pray the store will take this back, because I don't advise you to read any of this trash.

However, if you don't mind a bit of wit, some crazy situations, and a big dose of reality; read on, brother, for you will surely find something you like here.

This is a true story. That means it actually happened. Everyone you will read about is an actual person that I talked to and had these experiences with. Not many stories of this type are written anymore. In order to avoid problems in the future, I have eliminated all last names, but have left all first names the same. For the sake of avoiding possible problems with the giant corporation I was employed by, whenever you see the word "Work" capitalized, it's in reference to the actual place of work, and when it is lower cased, it's only a verb. There's a lot of changing between past and present tense. If you can't figure out what's going on, fuck you.

This is not an autobiography. I left a lot out. Nothing important to the story, but those memories are mine and you can't have them. I'm not trying to tell you my life story, that would be pretty boring, and look something like this: "I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I did a lot of shit, and now I'm older, still alive, and don't live in Grand Rapids." I'm just trying to show you *how* it happened. I am drawing parallels between what I experienced, and what I feel every person experiences in their own way. This is a story about growing up and learning about the world.

If you think you can handle it, turn the page. It's only someone else's life- give the voyeur inside you a treat and maybe you just might learn something. Then again, you probably won't- but at least give it a shot.

Part One

Becoming a man in the new millennium
(or at least how to put up a good front)

By Zach Elmlad

Chapter One - Genesis

"I'm eighteen, I've got to get away" - Alice Cooper

I find there's a beginning and an end to every story. Life is nothing but a bunch of stories. Some stories last longer than others, some stories don't last long at all. Some stories occur in series, some follow a genre. Some stories are sad, others happy. Some stories are never told, most of them come out eventually. Sometimes we forget stories. Sometimes we try to forget stories. Everyone gets the story a bit different, and everyone's stories are mixed together. There can even be stories within stories. I look at things like I look at history. Everything you know is part of what "we" know, and it's always up for a re-appraisal. Rethinking what actually happened. It's up for interpretation. As time passes by, things start to become a bit more clear. Pieces start to fit together. Everyone's stories start looking the same. Large groups of people, all over the world, with all sorts of stories to tell. Large groups of people, all over the world, ready to listen to them.

This is the beginning of my story about growing up. This is when I started writing that journal we all keep in the rarest trodden depths of our minds, the journal of life. This is when I woke up, eyes widened, and said "Oh shit! Here it comes!" Maybe I was ready, maybe I wasn't.

My story begins in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and it ends there, too. Just to let you know from the beginning, this story does not have a happy ending. Did you ever read the *Iliad*? You know, the one written by Homer? (As in Ancient Greece, not the Simpsons) Well, if you haven't, it's kind of set

smack dab in the middle of the Trojan War. A bunch of stuff has already happened, and a bunch of stuff has yet to happen. We just see a small snapshot of time, mostly about a guy named Achilles. His girlfriend gets taken away by his buddy, he gets pretty pissed about it. He sits at home and stewes about it for a while, then he chooses to meet his fate.

I am Achilles. This story will take you around the Earth and to the depths of humanity's plight. I am not really Achilles, because I don't have nearly the glory of our hero, but it's convenient to draw some parallels. I like to do that. This is my epic poem. Not to mention the obvious lack of dactylic hexameter, I've always found poetry to be a constrained and pretentious way of expressing yourself and your ideas. Meter and structure is only a limitation.

For a while there, I got really into Buddhism. I meditated every morning, after school, and every night. I worked out, I ate healthy. I knew my body. Every muscle, every artery, I could feel it all. I did tai chi and kung fu and I read every book about Zen cultivation I could get my mitts on. I wanted to be at peace, I wanted to grow up and become a man. I was alive, and I was totally in control. I knew where I was going to be at any minute of any given day, and it was great. I thought about taking a couple months off at a Buddhist monastery in Illinois or something, but decided against it because I thought my Catholic family would freak out. People used to say to me, "Once a Catholic, always a Catholic." I've never been a fan of absolute permanency either.

I just wanted to finish high school with good grades, take the ACT, graduate, make some money, go to college, keep making money, and start a music career. There was a lot of things I wanted to do. Most importantly, I wanted to get out of Kalamazoo.

I had just quit this punk band I had played in for most of High School, called at various points "Mexem", "Chapstick", "Kerplunk", and "Sex with a Kitten." The lead singer was a complete and total egomaniac, which I'm sure anyone who's been in a punk band could probably tell you as well. I have to point out, however, that I never did, do not, and never will associate myself with punk music, or the punk rock scene. Punk is for recalcitrant idiots. This must also be made clear. I've always taken music really seriously.

I went to school half an hour away, because I had randomly decided to switch schools two days into my junior year. I woke up at six thirty every morning. Then I was on the road by seven fifteen, in the parking lot by seven forty five, and in my seat by eight. I got out at two thirty, with precisely enough time to get home, munch a bit, and get to work. I'd get out at midnight, do my homework and watch TV till two, sleep and repeat the process. Saturday nights I would go out to a show, and Sunday I would sleep all day. Sunday was recovery day. Sit around. If I didn't go out Saturday, I would get up and record all Sunday.

School continued, and I was on top. I had my little art studio in the loft of the high school art room. I was doing giant 'neoclassical surrealist' oil paintings, as I called them, and I was attempting a full size statue made of polyurethane foam block that was six feet tall (which is still in my parent's garage, half complete.) I had my old friend's ex girlfriend modeling for me. I was a real artist. I was writing music, I was painting my paintings, I was working a steady job and I was set to start at KVCC, the local community college, in the fall. I got accepted, I registered for classes, snagged a scholarship to pay the way for two years and I was set. All I had to do was get good grades, snag another scholarship or two and graduate with a degree in Comparative Religion with a concentration in Buddhism and Asian religion. Then I would get a job studying in a museum.

Some major city. It didn't really matter where. Chicago, Detroit, New York, I didn't care. Somewhere far away from Kalamazoo, that's what I wanted. I wanted to see the world. I wanted to learn about religion, and experience life. I would take art classes on the side, and pursue that while concentrating on analyzing scripture in the back of some museum somewhere. That's what I wanted. I had my plan; I just had to get there.

The last day of high school, two weeks before graduation, there was a ceremony at the end of the day. It was one of the biggest events of the year. It was called "swing out." It was the final goodbye to the seniors, and their collective "thank god, it's over." After the ceremony, Ashley came running up to me. She jumped on me, wrapped her arms around my head, legs around my waist and said "I am going to miss you SO MUCH!" Ashley was that girl in your circle of high school friends that everybody always wanted and nobody ever got. The brunette bombshell with the soft white skin and glowing eyes that just screamed "look at me, I'm gonna fuck up your life!" I didn't really see those sorts of things back then. She was always sitting at the landing on the staircase to the glass ceiling above your relationship reach. Ashley had gone out with Vince, the lead singer in the band I had been in for three years or something. She was the girl of my dreams, as far as an eighteen year old kid can dream. She was also, as fate would have it, blessed with perfect Greek proportions, and had provided a perfect model for much of the work I was doing artistically. Sweet.

So there she was, with her legs wrapped around me like you'd see on a cartoon, feet crossed in the small of my back. Bringing her face closer to mine, but moving it ever so slightly to the left as if to signify I'm getting a whisper and not a kiss, she says softly, "You still owe me lunch." I hadn't forgotten.

So, we decided that soon we would get together for lunch when she had a spare day. We hung out a day or two, she visited me at work, and we hung out right before graduation. All the guys had planned on meeting up at my buddy Alex's place for a bonfire and a night of reflection. After the hoopla, and after all the family crap, I skipped town and went to Alex's house. We sat around a bonfire on second hand couches to be burned later, ate potato chips and picked at some melons hacked up with a machete.

Ashley showed up and was sitting on the couch in between me and my friend Brian. Next thing I know, she's all over me. I had always wanted it, but had never seen it coming. As if confirming the strange circumstances, a distant clap of thunder cued the rain that began to fall.

We moved the couch under a tarp, and there we were. Soaking wet, huddled together on this couch. Nothing good can come of this situation. She gets up, says she wants to go change her clothes, and grabs my arm. Apparently I am coming with her. We go out to my car, and she changes into a pair of my pants and a sweatshirt of mine that were in my trunk (by this time, I was pretty much living out of my car. I always had a laundry basket with clothes, a bunch of books, all my CDs, a guitar, a tent, a sleeping bag, pillow, all that crap. I was ready to go wherever the wind took me.) I changed into my "pajamas" (track pants and a hoodie.) And we went back to our couch. Brian got disgusted and disappeared into the woods. Drama. Ashley starts having a high school girl panic attack, so I go over to Brian's friend Mike and ask what the deal is. Mike says "You know Brian likes Ashley, right?" At this point I knew any hopes of ending this night with a sordid sex-capade were surely at a loss.

I didn't care. I had my plan, and I had my mission, and no one was gonna stop me. I lost a lot of friends that night by choosing to go with

Ashley, and I'll never get them back. I don't know if it's just because we've all gone our separate ways, or if it's because I got everyone's dream girl. It's irrelevant, as always, because everything got mucked up a bit later on- but it was great at the time. I had to make a choice, I made it, and that choice will stand with me through the test if time like all the others I've made.

As far as I could tell, I had won. I had completed Life: Phase one. It was over. I graduated from High School, I had just been promoted to Manager at Work, and I was getting ready to start real school in the fall. I had my girl, and I had all summer long to work, stay out late, and spend lots of money.

I started talking to my old buddy Jared online. I hadn't talked to him much in the last year. He was doing the college thing and drinking all the time. I used to get phone calls from him at four in the morning on a school night and he'd be squawking belligerently. I, eyes full of sleep, would moan into the telephone "Recall; friend, for a moment, that I am still in high school, and I have class in four hours after a half an hour drive! Fuck off!"

I invited him to my Graduation party, apologized profusely for blowing him off for months, and we decided we'd start hanging out. After watching movies with Ashley till her mom kicked me out, I would go over to Jared's house to complain about this chick and what a tease she was.

One particular evening, I took Ashley out to the middle of nowhere for a night of star gazing and making out. That precise course of action played out into another drama. The girl says she wants space. I, the sad sappy sucker, say "but why?" like a shmuck. She says she doesn't trust herself with me. Ok. Slow, then, right? That's the gig?

Basically, we cut out the bullshit. I was on top of my game, right? A strapping young lad, virile to the last. I had everything going for me. It was great, right? Right. So we decided we weren't going out, we were just "enjoying each other's company," or whatever bullshit phrase to appease the "masses". Seemed reasonable enough to me, I guess. Brian disagreed. But then Brian left to go on a cruise in Greece for a month. This left me with Ashley and us without a reason not to be together. We reveled in it for a while; we did the "couple" thing a few times- out to dinner, out to lunch, out to the movie, concert, and festival, whatever. Then she left for summer camp.

Let me pause here, for a moment, and reflect on the concept of "Summer camp." The prospect of this has always disturbed me. Let's send a bunch of prepubescent annoyances away for 2 weeks during the summer for some peace and quiet. We'll stick some right wing Christian "we love God and ourselves" chastity bullshit while the kids sneak out at night into the woods to fuck, drink Jack Daniels, and smoke pot. I think it's ridiculous. I could be doing the same shit at home, why waste my time at summer camp with people I see two weeks out of every year. I can dig it for your formative years, but once you get a car and a job, it's time to be done with the happy camper bullshit routine and grow the fuck up.

Anyway, she falls off the face of the earth for two weeks, and comes back and calls me the day before my grad party. She says "I can't be with you anymore. Forget this ever happened." I'm like "You are going to have to present a much better case than that." She complies. We talk on the phone for, literally, just short of twelve hours. Eventually, one of us says to the other "let's just get some sleep and whatever happens, happens." Something to that effect. Either way, I solved it the same way I had gotten myself into the whole mess.

I used to say "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" It was a quote from this book, "Who moved my cheese?" It's supposed to be a metaphorical managerial mantra from a motivational book for middle management mongoloids that need to put some sort of thought into their dull existence. Love that alliteration. Delicious. I decided to take it literally, of course. What would I do if I weren't afraid? Where would that motto take me? I thought about it a lot.

It was a lot like the Mantra, "Buddha Nature is the Nature of Man." That was another one I used to think about a lot. Dwell on it. The nature of being complete and awakened is the actual nature of man. It outlines the basic tenets of Buddhism in a severely condensed form. That's what Buddhism's all about, in the literary department anyway. Profundity in simplicity. It talks about the cycle of life. Everything is a cycle. The cycle ends with enlightenment. The big cycle. The cycle that spans ages and millennia. I didn't get too into the re-incarnation thing, but I think it's relevant. I think it shows us how to measure life. By our deeds. Sadly, however, nothing but a contrite literary metaphor. Just like "Who moved my cheese?"

A major facet of Buddhism is this idea of the Golden Mean, the way to live your life. The Golden Mean is achieved by following the eightfold path. This is the moral code part, similar to the Ten Commandments of Judeo-Christian religion. This is where interpretation comes in. This is where the "everything in moderation" attitude can take over. That's where I got stuck. I decided that Buddhism was essentially a no bullshit answer for a good question. That question isn't "where will I go when I die" like it is in Christianity. Or "What will I do when I get there." That shit wasn't important to me at the time, nor will it ever be. The question I needed

answered was "Ok, so now that I am beginning to see the world around me, what is my place in it?"

I wanted to tap into life. I wanted to understand what it was all about. I wanted to know. I had to know. I didn't want to be one of the people that just went with the flow. I didn't want to sit around lazily watching American Idol eating potato chips and fast food. I wanted to take an active role in my existence. I had to move on from Ashley just like I moved on from Mexem.

It was hard to say goodbye to Ashley. We faded away from one another, and have found quite rare opportunities to talk, but generally always in the company of others. While I spent time bumming about how I didn't have a girl anymore, I began to really start reading about Buddhism. I figured I may find an answer there.

The question Buddhism ended up answering for me was "How should I react to the constantly changing environment surrounding me?" The answer was separate myself from it by eliminating the suffering. What is the root of the suffering? Is it attachment to material possession like Buddhism said to me, or is the attachment to my personal ethics that I needed to rid myself of? This was my stalwart. I didn't feel like my attachments to the material possessions I had worked so hard to obtain were the root of my suffering. I could do without them. No car? Walk. No phone? Knock on a door. No CDs? Sing to yourself. No house? Take a nice hitchhike to Kentucky. There's hundreds of acres of wilderness there just asking to be habited. I don't feel attached to my surroundings, I feel like I benefit from having them around. They aren't necessary. I could go stone-age and live in a cave and probably do just fine. The world is much bigger now, and much more advanced- and there is no reason not to revel in it. I knew then that I needed to stop

trying to ask religious communities to answer a personal question, and find the answer within myself.

This is how I decided to approach it: "What would I do if I weren't afraid?" Why not? If everyone needs a mantra, I already had it. That mindset has taken me around the world, and it has taken me to the bottom of many bad mental depths. It's taken me through winds of change, and it's taken me through wide varieties of opportunities, most of which I ignored, but several of which I embraced.

Ashley was my first step on the road to self understanding. I learned that there are moments in life where a fundamental change has occurred that you haven't picked up on. Ashley was changing, my friends were changing, the season was changing, and it was time for me to start changing right along with them all. But did anyone ever stop to think about embracing the change instead of fearing it? What if you were to just jump into it, ready to go, without any care as to where it would lead?

Chapter Two - Success

"That's why they call me the working man" - Rush

I had been promoted to "shift manager" at Work. I had a real business meeting with the Regional Director. We talked at that table for three hours about my future with the company. I was eighteen, and he filled my head with all sorts of bullshit to keep me around for a while. I fell for it hook, line, and sinker. It turns out that place did take me a lot of places, it's just that sometimes I have to wonder if I really wanted to go to those places.

There was this kid at work, Ken Jeff. That was his name. Have you ever heard the old superstition, never trust a guy with three first names? His last name was a first name, too. Despite my best judgment, I started becoming friends with his friends, et cetera. I started to network.

Jared was also a crucial player in my networking. His archetype was the lovable, yet tragically dimwitted movie buff department store oaf. You can't hate him out of general circumstance, seeing as how he's an idiot and all, but you still get annoyed at the problems caused by his ineptitude. The way I saw it, personality handicaps aside, Jared was a good guy. He was always there for you in the pinch, and as long as you were a friend to him, he was a friend to you. That's all I ever asked for in a friend.

Through Jared, I met Steph, a waitress at TGI Friday's, Tarek and Anwar, Two imports from the "Saudi Arabian American School System," as they

called it. I also met Wes, a catholic prep school jock designer clothes wearing rich kid. Almost entirely out of character, I liked Wes. He was the first of their kind to ever cross my path that was intelligent enough to carry on a civilized conversation. I liked my friends. I liked the fact that I had friends again. I had my job, I had my friends, I had a life, I had a future, and I had a plan. I had everything. It was great, right?

All summer long, we hung out at Ali Baba's hookah lounge, this ramshackle of a place in the strange part of town where the college scene fades into the urban crime sprawl like a Venn diagram gone terribly wrong. We'd always end up there. Almost every day, at least for a cup of coffee. We knew everyone by name; we got free hookahs all the time because the owner had taken a liking to Tarek. I started eating Arabic food and learning more and more about Islam, and how severely fucked up and pretentious it was. Tarek and I would have hours long conversations in his apartment and in Jared's backyard about religion. I was interested. After all, I was going to be studying comparative religion; I might as well take this golden opportunity to learn. I had already decided I wasn't looking at religion as an answer any longer, it was more out of trying to understand the world around me more than anything else.

I had money to burn, and I burnt it well. I bought a hookah the day I graduated from high school. I had a fully functional recording setup so I could make music whenever and wherever I wanted. I had Tarek, a new musician friend, who was an aspiring rapper. He loved Metallica, Linkin Park, and Tupac. I figured one out of three wasn't bad, so we talked about Metallica. Then he started talking about Hash.

I was out of high school. I had sex, I smoked cigarettes, I smoked pot every once in a while, I drank beers with the guys. Sometimes I got cooked

off a bottle of rum and danced around in a pirate hat. I had a good time. Everything in moderation. Live life to the fullest. What would you do if you weren't afraid? Embrace your mantras! Whatever happens, *happens*.

I was introduced to the world of marijuana by Ken Jeff. I had dabbled with the Insane Clown Posse gang back in high school, and I had smoked my fair share of chronic by then, but this was different. This was a group of kids my age, all working, living at their parent's houses, trying to grow up, getting ready for college, getting ready to jump into the fire. Then one of them got his own place, and got a job in the kitchen working for me and Ken Jeff. His name was Bill.

Bill invited me over for a night of smoking, provided I would throw in ten bucks for the bag and the supplies. I complied, and so did four other guys. We bought a quarter of mids and rolled up some blunts. We went down to Bill's bedroom, sealed up the doors and windows, and started smoking. I got so fucking high. Oh man, it was amazing. I felt so good. It was like I found a new state of mind to operate in. A new place in my mind, and a new set of eyes. It made me see things in a different light. The most important thing is that it made me relax. Growing up, my parents always said "take a chill pill, Zach, calm down." I finally found the fabled chill pill. I loved it. I liked smoking weed. Mom, I like to smoke pot.

For the first time in my life I was doing something that I thought was totally logical, totally safe, totally controlled, and totally ok, but I knew my parents; and, moreover, society as a whole, wouldn't agree with me. Yeah, it was illegal, but for fuck's sake it's just pot. I decided to cover it up. I was just hanging out with friends. Watching TV, movies, Etc. It wasn't really a lie. I just happened to be smoking pot while doing so. I just always left that detail out. Sometimes it gets hard to hide when your

friends start going to jail and dying. Sometimes it gets hard to hide when your life falls apart around you. Everyone likes to blame the drugs. I like to blame society. It's a shame that something so harmless, yet capable of making you relax so efficiently be made illegal. I must establish here that I don't recognize Marijuana as a Schedule 1 controlled substance. I completely disagree with the mitigating factor that it has no medical purpose whatsoever. I can name three other things that don't either - tobacco, caffeine, and alcohol.

That was the, truth be told, only god damned lie I ever told my parents in my life. I've come clean with them on everything else, but I'd never been able to break the weed thing to them. For some reason I thought they'd be ashamed of me. I have absolute respect for my parents. It was really hard for me to do something I thought they would disapprove of. Not because I was afraid of making them angry or disappointed, but because I thought differently than them, yet still highly valued their opinion and didn't want them to classify me as what they saw as a person who took drugs.

For all they -"they", not my parents - said, I managed to work seventy hours a week and go to school for thirteen credit hours a semester and get good grades. The whole time, I was smoking weed. I've been high since about October of 2003.

I discovered a new world when I smoked marijuana. I found a group of people; all bound by pretty much the same ideals. Smoke to get rid of the annoying factor of life. When you smoke pot on a regular basis, its normal life. It doesn't really interfere with your job or anything if you smoke a bowl every night. You get up the same the next morning, you do the same job, you think the same thoughts, but it just kind of takes the edge away. You know that it's not all bad. You know life isn't always bad. There will

always be good times at work, and good times at play. You have to take the good with the bad.

Smoke weed, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol. It's fun. Life is way too short and stressful not to take advantage of naturally occurring things that make you feel better. Substances never served as a crutch to me, rationalization and critical thinking worked just fine. I don't solve problems by placing my frustration into a vice.

I extrapolated my views on drugs to my view on just about anything. If I could rationally determine that something I enjoyed doing wasn't affecting my life and my goals in an adverse way, then I did it. I wasn't afraid.

Chapter Three - Wisdom

"Well I'll go to college and I'll learn some big words" - Modest Mouse

At the end of the summer after high school, I decided I wanted to not only start out fresh and new in college with my new friends, and my new job title, and my newly found independence, but I wanted more. I wanted to move out of my parents' house. I talked with Jared about it, and we started apartment shopping. Jared didn't really make enough money because he was too lazy to work a full time job, so he couldn't really afford to go half with me on an apartment, so I had to sit around and wait for a while before I could find a roommate with a work ethic, or at least access to some cash.

I didn't want to move out because I hated my parents, which is the normal reason for people moving out of their parent's house when they turn eighteen. I wanted to become a man. I wanted to take life by the throat and fuck the breath out of it. I wanted to confront life on my own terms, and I wanted to become Zach Elmlad. I wanted to start my story. The story about me and no one else. I wanted to go, go, go. I never wanted to feed off of my parents like all my peers did. I wanted to pay my own way. They had already spent enough money and personal time preparing me to be myself, and I was ready to take care of myself. I figured they could then focus on getting my brothers ready for life and not have to worry about me all the time. I've never been one to just sit around and wait for things to happen. I actively pursued the future, and took it facing forward. I have never been one to sit around idly and watch life pass me by. I am an active participant in life. I ask questions all the time, I don't believe things I learn right away. I am always testing things and ideas. Always learning, always thinking.

I started at KVCC that fall, I wrote down "comparative religion" as my major, which was some obtuse category of liberal arts. The classes that semester were comparative religion, intro to philosophy, college writing, and intro to political science.

Tarek had been living with two guys, each named Hussein. One was a nerdy, 25 credit hours a semester book rat. He had halitosis and severe acne. He wore thick glasses, and even had a nasal twinge to his already thick Arabic accent. A classic nerd, of screech-like proportion. The other was the absolute odd-couple antithesis. He had supple tanned skin, glossy black hair, and was a classical european-paradigm wanna-be soccer jock. Tarek slept on a futon mattress propped up against the living room wall. We called the Jock Hussein One, because we'd be damned to let that nerdy fucker be number one, and the nerd was usually just referred to as "that nerdy fucker."

At the end of August, that nerdy fucker told Tarek that his sister was coming from Lebanon, and he was going to move in with her a few apartments down the building. That meant Tarek had a room. Days later, Hussein One told Tarek that he would be living with his girlfriend because she was rich and had a nice apartment, so that left another room free, ripe for the taking. Guess who took it.

Jared slept on the futon in the living room, and Hussein 1 paid us 75 bucks a month to have a key and sleep on the couch whenever he was fighting with his girlfriend. Four guys, one run-down apartment in a run-down complex in the middle of run-down fraternity row on a campus of a run-down major university. At any time you could hear the drunken screams of a random college fucker taking that last shot and suspiciously eyeing his next rape victim.

If you stood on the balcony, you could throw a bag of garbage into the dumpster if it was open. This was key, you see, because we were all too lazy to actually take the trash down the stairs and put it into the dumpster. Sometimes we would just let the trash sit on the balcony after we cleaned, because we were too lazy to throw it. What did it matter? There were no parents there to say "take out the god damn trash." We did it when we felt like it. I woke up when I felt like it. If I wanted to pass out drunk in my car outside a kegger, I did. Mom wasn't there at the door asking where I'd been when I came home at ten the next morning. There was only Jared, asking if I had gotten any pussy. The answer was usually no, but it was a far better greeting than trying to cover up my debauchery to my mom with an incriminating "ummmmmmmmm..." It was awesome. I worked hard, studied hard, and played hard. We would go out drinking late into the night, walk home from whatever party, and pass out. I'd wake up late for class, skip, do my homework and still get the grade. I'd do my papers at the last minute, but I still got my A's. I thought I was invincible. I worked ridiculous hours at work, but had lots of money to burn. School was easy; I was learning totally basic shit. I didn't have to think at all. So why pay attention? Why go to class when you're not graded on attendance, only the material? I paid for the hours (the state paid for the hours), not the classes. As long as it says "credit" on that piece of paper, it's all good. I maintained this philosophy. I worked 50-60 hours a week throughout fall, winter, and spring. I started hanging out with people from work, especially Bill, and these guys named Stan and Dennis. Ilyse, Tarek's girlfriend, who had coincidentally moved in with us about 2 days after we settled in had known Stan from high school, and Dennis and I found out that we were related through distant family ties. I thought that was fairly interesting, and Stan and Dennis were there with me every day slaving away at Work trying to make ends meet.

That February, I went to see Mushroomhead. Mushroomhead was some band my cousin Eric was always talking about. About a week beforehand, I had bought the two CDs the band released, and I was digging it. I was complaining at work about how I didn't have anyone to go with, so Stan said he'd go with me, since it was on payday.

It was the first real concert I had been to since high school, and I didn't feel like moshing and so on and so forth like I used to do at the punk shows when I was in high school. There was more to this music. Each song has eight parts, each doing something completely separate, but at the same time it all made sense. I had already started listening to progressive music like Opeth and Dream Theater, but this was the first time I had ever witnessed anything like this live. I stood in the back of a crappy bar in Kalamazoo, and smoked an entire pack of cigarettes watching in astonishment. The only time I had ever seen anything that amazing had been when I saw Lansing's Summer Dying in high school a few years back.

Stan and I went to McDonalds on the way home, and then I brought him back to his apartment. It was the weekend before my birthday. I was about to turn nineteen.

Another year, the cycle begins anew. I always liked to retreat on my birthday. I didn't work, I didn't do anything. I liked to roam around until I ran into someone I know, hide from them, and laugh about it. It's there when it starts. The year comes full swing. All the prior connections are plugged in for the new set, and all those that are faulty are discarded to leave space for new connections.

I had been in this whirlwind of fall that was school and work and not much else, then partied all Christmas break, and now it was about time for me to be turning a year older and it was about time for something crazy to

happen. The preceding spring I had quit Mexem, the band I was in for most of high school, so what was next? I couldn't have ever imagined what it was, but I knew it was coming, call it a premonition, or whatever you want, but I knew it was coming. Some sort of upheaval, some sort of paradigm shift, something. It was gonna be big. I decided, again, to take life by the throat. I didn't care what was coming, I was fucking ready.

Stan and I were becoming good friends by now. We used to talk all day long about materia combinations in Final Fantasy VII. We both had the same desire to crank Slayer at ungodly hours of the morning to anger his neighbors.

My birthday came and went, pretty much without incidence. I know Tarek and Ilyse and Jared and I all hung out after I had dinner with my parents. They got me cards and the new Final Fantasy game for the Game Cube. By then, I was pretty much done with video games. No time anymore. Work, School, Work, Work, School. That was my life.

A few days after my birthday, Tarek comes into Work to visit me. I sit down at the table and he says "Seriously, man, my buddy Moe wants you to come down to Egypt with me when I visit him in May. He says he'll make you higher than you've ever been before. He'll smoke so much hash with you, that you'll forget the whole fucking trip. We'll go to the pyramids and everything, man—we can stay with him. Just come, dude."

I called my parents and asked if they'd front me a loan on the credit card so I could go to Egypt. I figured I'd take notes and sketches of the pyramids, smoke a little hash, visit some hookah lounges, and see the sights. After all, if I was going to go all over the world, why not start with Egypt? It's as good a destination as any, I figured. What happened to me in Egypt

and closely thereafter was, without a doubt, the defining moment of my life. I grew up. I had finally done it.

By March of 2004, I had booked my flights and applied for my passport. I got the pictures taken, I filled out the paperwork, and it was on. I was seriously going to Egypt. Everybody was electric with anticipation. It all happened so fast. I got the time off at Work, and decided I needed to hightail it if I wanted to have any cash to burn while I was there.

Almost every day, it seemed, Tarek would visit me at work and tells me about some new thing we could do if we felt like it. He would tell me about these resorts on the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. He told me about Dirt biking in the Sinai Mountains. He told me about the pyramids. Then he told me how much it would all cost us, and that was the best news of all. It was going to be low down dirt-ass fucking cheap, apparently. Cheap beer, cheap drugs, cheap food, cheap swag, cheap vacation. Sounded right up my alley. I did all the prep work. I Checked out all the Terrorist warnings and crap. I figured it would be fairly safe to travel at that time in history. I figured, after all, that I would be with an Arab the whole way, living with his friends, and meeting other Arabs. This wasn't tourist shit. We were living in the ghetto. It was fucking crazy.

At the end of it all, May was coming near. I knew once I got on that plane, something was finally going to happen. I used to talk to Stan and Dennis intermittently, whilst making burritos at my un-named Mexican restaurant hell, about how I kept having this re-occurring day dream while I was zoned out on food service. We had to ask "Cheese or Sour Cream?" at the end of the service line, and I always had this thought of a giant sphinx with a huge ladle of sour cream making a giant Egyptian burrito. I had Egypt on

the brain. I worked and lived solely for May 8th, 2004. That was the day it was all gonna start. I knew it, and I couldn't have been more right.

On the last day of April, Stan got an eviction notice from his Apartment. I was going to be gone for two weeks anyway, so I figured I'd let him crash in my room for a while. We were pretty good friends, and I couldn't imagine he would do anything but use the internet connection, so I gave him a key to the place and told him to move in whenever he had to get out of his own apartment.

By the time May 5th rolled around, it had been something like 40 days I had worked in a row. It was horrific. We're talking ten hour days, usually seven days a week, and on my days off I had deliveries and meetings. It was Cinco de Mayo in a Mexican Restaurant Hell. Terrible.

Stan and Dennis were working right along with me for these days. We ended up making up something like a quarter of the labor cost for the entire store that week between the three of us. Not one of us had less than 75 hours that week. It was terrible. There's a certain kind of bond that is formed between people when they are forced to perform in such an environment. After work, Dennis and I would meet up at Stan's apartment down the road from Work. Even though he had just closed with us, he always seemed to have managed to get drunk from the time it took him to run home until we were done doing paperwork.

Stan's apartment was a trash pit. There was no furniture, only stacks of computer part catalogs and books. There was no decoration except the random half smoked cigar butt sticking up from a black spot in the carpet like a finger pointed at the food stains on the ceiling. The refrigerator contained a single half eaten tub of microwave macaroni and cheese, which had developed a complex system of life which Dennis swore had talked to him.

The hours ticked by throughout the last day of work before my adventure. I remember it was like winning a war for me. I'm pretty sure I just stuck around the kitchen, picking seeds out of jalapenos. I had some beer that I had snuck in inside my briefcase. One of the cooks had a bowl packed in his van, and we would go out and smoke periodically throughout the night during cigarette breaks and slow times. Someone had, for some reason or another, brought in one of those folding camping chairs into work. I figured I had executive privilege, so I popped a squat in the chair while I de-seeded my jalapenos.

Finally, we closed. I went out for the celebratory cigarette. It was finally over. All I had to do was count money, forge my checklists, enter some crap in the computer, and watch the children play. Dennis came out with me; at this point he was glued to me. I had to teach him how to run the store in my absence in like three days because the idiot in charge didn't bother. We were finishing up some discussion, and this dumb register girl- we're talking sixteen year old total fucking airhead- comes out and says, "why do you get to smoke a cigarette while we're in here busting our asses?" By this time, I've had it. I can't fucking take it any more. I turn around.

"Listen directly to me, you stupid little miscreant, I've been working the last three months in a fucking row, and I didn't bust MY ass this long to take shit from a fucking moron. Fuck off, go back inside, and mop the god damn floor. Fuck!"

She complied. I went back inside and finished my work with blessed silence. I went home, and we began the final preparations pre-flight. Tarek and Ilyse fucked, and I went to Bill's. What a shitty day, time to smoke. I met up with Him, his roomie, a couple other guys from work, and we all threw down some cash on a quarter ounce of the best shit we could find. We rolled

three giant blunts. Down to Bill's room, seal up the door, shut the window, and commence clam-baking the living fuck out of his bedroom. You couldn't see in that room when we were done with it. We sat there for two hours and smoked blunts. For those of you that are un-initiated in the ways of marijuana culture, a blunt is pot wrapped up in the outer layer of a cigar.

I tried Salvia Divinorum that night, too. I had never tried it before. This crazy kid sold me a bowl's worth of the extract- the good shit. Five bucks. I torched it. Salvia is one of those "legal hallucinogens." You can buy it at Wicca shops, head shops, and hippie shops. You have to cook it really hot with one of those cheap gas station butane torch lighters. Really fucking hot, man- and you gotta take it all in really quick. Apparently, if you do this all correctly, you have an out of body experience that lasts about twenty minutes, and for about five of it you're totally incapable of movement. Just totally lost in your mind. It didn't work. I spent fifteen bucks trying to get high off that shit, and I'll never try it again. I only like to smoke weed. Other shit sucks.

So I left Bill's. I hit up the local seven eleven for a giant slurpee and some candy. My thoughts were meandering endlessly while I just lulled around in this excited anxiety, about to go to fucking Egypt and see the pyramids. I was on a different level of existence at this point. It felt like I was dreaming. I was totally lucid, but it was all just a bit fuzzy and ethereal. It was the feeling of being alive. The feeling of taking on the world.

The next morning, the feeling of displacement was far more powerful. I woke up around 10 AM, or so, and figured it was about time to pack. After all, we had to clear the entire living room of all furniture so that the landlord could put new carpet in there. We had a bunch of burns in the

carpet from hookah coals, and we figured we would blame it on the Hussein's. It was subtracted out of the other Hussein's security deposit. Haha, asshole.

I stood up, and after a long night of smoking and drinking and staying up late, I fell immediately backwards. Rush of blood to the head, blacked out really fast, and then got up- only this time, a bit more slowly. I ran down the hall, most likely bare-assed naked, and took my morning piss.

I then looked out the still open door through the mirror above the sink, and I could see fog. In the house. It was the beginning of May; I guess it wasn't that bizarre. But it was in the house. Everywhere. My room, the hallway, the living room. The light was peeking in from between the venetian blinds, and you could see each individual beam dancing across the apartment. I instantly harkened back to a thought I had about camera obscura, and wished I had a way to seal off the whole room. I wanted to have a scene throughout our apartment of the trees and shit outside our window. I always thought it would have been cool to have one of those. I've never seen one, only read about them. Supposedly, if you get a room dark enough and then poke a tiny hole exposed to the outside, the light rays will somehow project an image in the building of what is outside. I always kind of thought that was like what it was to act out a metaphor like in Plato's cave myth.

I shook my head, thinking this fog had to have been my sensitive night crawler eyes and not the impending sense of doom it was beginning to rouse in me. It was fucked up. I turned on some lights, took a shower, and it had dissipated. I started throwing together my stuff, and cleaning up for the big furniture move that was about to ensue. By three, Tarek and Ilyse and I had successfully moved everything, and we were ready to relax. In less than

24 hours, I'd be thousands of miles away from home, thousands of feet in the air- and D-R-U-N-K.

We waited till about 6 or 7, checking our bags over and over again. We threw everything into Tarek's Explorer, and we headed off to my parents house to say the final goodbye's and drop off my car. I hopped up to Work real quick to bullshit with everyone and waste some time. We didn't have to be in Detroit until like 7PM or something, so we had the time. We probably got out there about 4, and checked in for our flights, got our visas checked and shit- and Ilyse and I went to the gate to wait for Tarek to drop off his Explorer at his uncle's house in Dearborn. He came back with some baklava from Shatila, which was my favorite snack at the time. We bullshitted and looked for a place I could smoke a cig before our transatlantic flight. We sat in a bar, and I figured we were in the international wing so I'd chance it for a beer. I grabbed a Heineken. Yummy!

I smoked a couple cigs, thought about life, and picked through a Kerouac novel to try to get myself into the mood to travel. It had been a while since I'd been gone, and I was literally going to butt fucking Egypt. We all met up back at the gate, and boarded. We took off, and I threw on some Ayreon and popped a couple unisom. About 45 minutes after we took off, a stewardess nudges me awake. I look up at her with unisom eyes, world all spinning tipsy turvy, and say "the fuck do you want?"

I apologize, when I realize what I've said. She laughs, says it happens all the time. She asks me for my beverage preference. Let me clue you into my appearance for a moment here. I'm a 19 year old kid, but I have a full beard I'd been growing "to blend in with the surroundings, you know" and I grew out my hair to about neck length. I've got two hollow gauges in each ear, chains around my neck, cowboy hat on my head, a dark blue Acapulco

shirt, and I look like a 40 year old man. Not only that, but I look American. I freaked. This is a KLM flight. This is a Swedish chick. I'm Swedish. I look like a fucking 40 year old republican. All I was missing was the camera strapped around my neck, and the bad sunburn. I was embarrassed as hell, and I just look her dead in the eye and say "Jack and Pepsi." She smirks, and pours me the drink. For the next seven hours, she came every 45 minutes with a Jack and Pepsi for me. She also ended up giving me a tiny bottle of champagne, and a beer. I slept like a baby.

We touched down in France at like 9 in the morning or something, and I looked out the windows to see nothing but clouds, rain, and unhappy people. I headed to the nearest store in the airport and bought a bottle of wine and chugged it in the bathroom shortly after changing a fifty into euros. I'm thinking "man, I need a T-shirt or something."

I find Ilyse, because Tarek had to take a different flight to meet up with us in Amsterdam. I go to wander, as I always do, because we had two hours to burn. I check out a bar, finally get the chick to give me a beer, chug it, pay, smoke, and sit. Everyone looked unhappy. Every last one of them. The floor was just bare concrete. The ceiling had wires and all sorts of ancient looking cooling apparatus hanging from it. The people walked around listlessly throughout these raunchy looking alleyway stores and dirty 1960's furniture with gross stains all over. I picked up a candy bar, a tiny Eiffel tower model, and a French Pepsi at a little corner kiosk. I went back to the gate, boarded, and decided that I had enough of France. I never want to go back there. I was there for two hours, and I don't think I've ever been more uncomfortable in my life. It was horrible. Dirty, falling apart, foggy, rainy, and gross. Everyone was ugly, and it looked like something out of a horror film in that place. But, on the other hand, I was pretty fucking drunk at this point.

Somehow I managed to get through baggage check with my drunken stumbling ass, and pop a squat next to a spicy smelling Indian woman. We look at each other, nod, and never speak for the flight to Amsterdam. I open the book, and find myself unable to read another word. I flip through the catalogue of swag you can purchase through the airline on the flight, and read a bit about Amsterdam's Schipol Airport city.

I pounded a few more drinks, ate a really good roll with some weird cheese on it for breakfast, and woke up in Amsterdam. When most people think of Amsterdam, they think of one of three things: 1. Windmills, 2. Weed, 3. Prostitutes. I saw none of these things in Schipol Airport City. What I did see, however, was a fucking metropolis inside a building. There were multiple floors, multiple wings, cigarette machines all over the place with cigs you can't find anywhere in the states for a quarter of the price, bars at every few gates, and every type of restaurant and no duty store you could ever want to find. That means gifts, candy, and booze, all tax free for international customers. I browsed the porn section of a magazine shop for a while, and found Dutch porn to be equally as irritating and boring as American porn. I left without a purchase, mostly disappointed. There was a bar every hundred feet or so, and you could even get a bottle of Heineken at McDonald's (which I did, you can be damn sure of that.)

I'm thinking there's gotta be a wicked Euro Metal section in the CD shop, but all I see is Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. I was disgusted. Here I was across the Atlantic Ocean, and still I can go ten steps and find a Simpson's T-shirt, a Britney Spears CD, or a copy of Sports Illustrated. That's the world we live in today. It's the same no matter where you go. I hit up the bar for a couple glasses of Heineken straight from the draught. I smoked a few cigs, grabbed a bite, and met up with Tarek and Ilyse at our Gate. We sat for a while, talked about how we're only four

hours away from the best trip of our lives, and took a quick nap. I woke up about 20 minutes before boarding. Just enough time for one last beer.

We boarded the plane, and watched an Arabic language episode of "Everybody loves Raymond," with Dutch subtitles. I watched the entire goddamned thing. I was amazed that I was here on this airplane, and things weren't written in English. They didn't speak English when they announced things over the P.A. It was Dutch and Arabic. Tarek translated, but I pretty much knew what they were saying. If we crash, grab the oxygen masks. Liquor's on the house- drink up. The seat floats, the stewardess will be around, put on your seatbelts, etc. I drank another Jack and Pepsi.

The Long Road Home

By Zachary Kyle Elmlad

This book is dedicated to and written for the people I've met and the times I've cherished with them. Good and bad. Yourself and the people you choose to keep around you are the only things in this world worth fighting for.

Preamble

Part One - The Past

Chapter One - The Doldrums

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Chapter Fourteen - When the Lights go out in New York City

Chapter Fifteen - A Destination

Chapter Sixteen - The Long Road Home

Preamble

Remembering things is really fucking hard sometimes. Take, for example, remembering to set your alarm clock, remembering your parent's anniversary, or remembering that although you may sometimes feel invincible under the influence of alcohol; you are not actually God, nor Jesus.

I'm totally in love with myself because I'm the only one that I can ultimately control, and at a minimum because I know I can get away with it. Egoism is such badassory. Nothing close to a bad decision, it can definitely benefit you to think about yourself every once in a while. I watch people make bad decisions all the time. Not like driving home from the bar, not like snorting a line of cocaine from the toilet of a bar, but more like spending every day at the bar because they can't force it within themselves to actually attempt a sober conversation with someone who is just as smart as they are. I'm not afraid of competition, as long as I know I can win. That's the thin razor line we balance on when we're trying to actually relate to each other. Especially while intoxicated. Remembering is a competition for truth.

Remembering, for me, came in the form of writing a sappy novel about my life called *Whatever Happens, Happens*. I laughed, I cried, I beat dead horses with sarcasm, and the whimsical wallowing in self pity of a hopeless romantic teenager. What I remembered, was that I

had become an egotistical, emotionless, vain, and debauched ball of potential energy yearning to become kinetic - and I didn't really mind that much at all. After all, that's what I had asked for. I just didn't expect it to be what actually happened. I always figured someone or something would just swoop in and "save" me. That's how most of those stories end. Either you find love, you find religion, or you find the bottom of a bottle. I found the bottle. Maybe alcohol actually is my savior, which is laudable.

If you think you're right, and people always tell you that you're right; you probably are. There is such a thing as right and wrong, but it's only a personal choice rooted in a personal perspective. The external interpretation may be to the contrary, but as long as what you're doing and thinking is right for you, and you can decide it for yourself in the context of you as a part of "them"- you're never going to fall back down.

There's a huge amount of idiots around this wonderful planet of ours, and it's really hard to get away from them sometimes. I'd be willing to bet that it makes you sick to your stomach to go out in public sometimes, it sure makes my blood boil.

The asshole that cuts you off on the highway, the shithead taking your order at a fast food restaurant, the person that tries to tell you how to raise your kids, the bum you give a dollar and asks you for a five, the degenerates that tag gang signs on your business bathroom walls. They're everywhere, sucking up our precious oxygen, and living for free from the government for being worthless.

I can't take it anymore, and I won't let my wonderful world get torn down by the people that don't deserve to live in it. I invite you to take a journey with me down a road you may never have travelled. It's a long road out, and a long road home, but in the end- it's better to have gone somewhere than nowhere at all.

Part One

The Past

Chapter One - The Doldrums

So, I worked at this place called The Big Burrito. Pathetic. I've nearly spent eight years of my life being a burrito slave. I hate the service industry, I hate the smell of fryer grease, and I most especially hate being stuck adrift in this fucking horrible sea of idiots. I'm not talking about the people I work with, I like them, but more along the lines of the people lined up in front of me like cattle waiting for slaughter.

I don't feel that there is anything more indicative of your mental capacity than how you order food at a restaurant. I see this shit all day long. First, if you walk in and start reading the menu out loud to no one in particular- I will not assume you are talking to me, nor will I engage you in conversation. You get one chance for eye contact, and if it doesn't happen I will not look you in the eyes, because you have no respect for me. If you don't respect me, I have absolutely no reason whatsoever to respect you. I owe you nothing. I want nothing from you, but you want something from me - your dinner. Did you forget? Which one of us has the power position in this struggle?

If you walk right up to the counter and just start demanding things without a traditional conversation-starting word like "Hello," "Good Morning," or even a casual "What's up?", I will not acknowledge

your presence. You do not start a conversation with someone you don't know with "Lemme git one of dem..." That's a dead giveaway that you did not graduate high school. You never got the "look the principal in the eye when he gives you his diploma, because that's how we show respect" speech either, because you were too busy cooking up meth with your sex slave sister.

I can see everything. I hear what you people talk about on your cell phones. In fact, sometimes, I have to see one of you spineless gutter fucks come out of the woodwork and try to order something in between your pointless telephone calls. It's easy to order food while on the cell phone. You say "hold on one second so I can order food," look me in the eye, say hello and order like a human being that can speak the language of an adult.

If it is the first time that you have been at a restaurant, then take a moment to browse the menu. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out. One minute, max. It's on the fucking wall. If it's Chinese food, don't ask for a burger. If it's a pizza place, they don't have burritos. You are all so god damned stupid it makes me physically ill. Where did common sense go? Where did literacy go? How can you be so stupid in a world that made everyone else so smart? Where did the rest of us go wrong by not teaching you? When did you go wrong and turn into a fucking moron?

I'm not saying every single person I pass on the street is an idiot, although it certainly feels that way sometimes. I have lots of friends. I know they have friends that are equal to or above my

intelligence. That's fine. We live in a *society*. That's what I think makes it so hard for some of these people. There's just too many of us. Way, way, way too many.

I first came to realize all of this one day when I was, you guessed it, slaving away at Big Burrito. I got in a subliminal ideological fight with a woman over the cost of her tostada. As you may know, a tostada is a round, flat, fried corn tortilla topped with various Mexican food ingredients. You can argue with me until you're blue in the face about whether or not the tostada is Mexican, American, Texan, or a corporate creation. As far as I cared, it cost \$1.99, plus 6% Michigan sales tax, which comes to a whopping \$2.11 2007 USD. That's roughly 35% of one hour's worth of work at minimum wage in Michigan, which we'll say was \$7.00 per hour. That means that this tostada cost exactly 20 minutes of work at a pet cemetery shoveling dirt and dog shit.

An African American woman in designer clothing walks into my restaurant upon getting out of her decked out Lexus. She orders a chicken tostada with no extras. Hot sauce on the side. Easy. Should take less than a minute.

"That will be exactly two dollars and eleven cents," I say, with my pleasant high pitched "I'm friendly to everybody that tips me" voice. She says nothing, chomps loudly on gum, and whips out the Prada bag. She digs through it, cracking saliva bubbles of gum the whole time until she pulls out a brand new touchscreen phone. Sets it on the counter. Pulls out the matching Prada wallet. Finds an Abe,

and a Washington. She tosses the bills on the counter, although my hand is open, face up, and less than a foot away from her sunglasses-indoors faraway gaze. I look at the woman, puzzled, saying "out of... six?!"

"Well, I went to college, apparently you didn't"

I couldn't believe she had actually said it. I may be a college dropout, but I'm no rube. I know there's no sensible reason to pay a \$2.11 bill with six even. Maybe three dollar bills. Maybe a five and eleven cents, but no way in hell should there be six dollars in my hand. Maybe eight, now that would make sense, in a world one year later where she could trade the old fiver in for a new one with a bright purple numeral on the back and a spiffed up background for good old ironic Abraham Lincoln, great sayer of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Anyway, this bitch looks at me like I am the great Satan incarnate, and proceeds to explain to me exactly how she graduated with a degree in accounting from MSU, and she can tell that I don't know a god damned thing considering I'm employed at a place called "the Big Burrito."

I type \$6.00 into the computer system I programmed after learning the competitor's operating system from the OS I had at the last job. What's the change? \$3.89. There are no computational errors on machine, or in my head, is that correct? 2.11 subtracted from 6.00, according to the mathematics that I know and understand, leaves a sum

of 3.89. Allow me to check the calculator on my Windows Vista Sidebar... 6.00... - ... 2.11... =... 3.89. Ok. I am not hallucinating. She holds out her hand, like I had- but I drop the change and the bills in front of her while looking her in the eyes.

This bitch says "I want to talk to your manager." I now assume I have the upper hand. I smile, wryly, and turn around, walk five paces and about face. I walk forward and look her in the eye again. I put my hand forward and say "Zachary Elmblad, General Manager. How can I help you, ma'am?" coy as a fucking virginal unblemished fit for sacrifice totally white lamb.

This woman is *infuriated*. By this time, her tostada is finished. I calmly bag it, add the requested side of hot salsa, and hand it over. I smile, wryly again, and say "here you are, miss, all set- hot sauce and all."

She stares vacantly from beyond the designer shades. I smile. Not a word is spoken as she turns around and marches angrily back to the Lexus, pulls back the convertible top and drives off post haste with an angry look on her face. I knew what was coming. I had mouthed off to the wrong people at work before, and I had accepted the consequences.

I fucking *refuse* to be treated unfairly. What better example than some bitch black lady to epitomize my total hatred towards what the human race has become.

I.

Am.

Not.

A.

Fucking.

Racist.

BUT! I won't accept the racial injustice of the past as an excuse for someone who accuses me of being a racist simply because I could perform simple mathematical tasks in a superior manner to her. Not only was I accused of being Racist, but *sexist* as well.

Do read on.

I was working the night shift. Wednesday night. That means I wandered in around six at night on a Wednesday, sometime late in the summer. Any hope of leaving less than eleven hours from now is a lost cause. Any hope of having a meal less than eleven hours from now is a lost cause. Any hope of seeing a friendly face or a cigarette in the next eleven hours is a lost cause. I'm beginning to think my hopeless fucking life is a lost cause. I work alone up front helping customers, with two very nice but tragically English inept Mexican matriarchs.

I figure it was about eleven o'clock in the evening when she pulled up. Big Burrito closed at four in the morning. I'm not even

halfway through my shift. There's no one to talk to. I'm a well trained restaurateur, but this is a dilemma-ridden situation. I finally get a second to sit down, and I spark up a delicious Camel Light to take the woes away. Not two puffs in and her fucking Lexus speeds up as she slams on the brakes nearly missing the curb in the process. I knew what was coming. It didn't matter that she was black. Or "African-American." I wouldn't have given a fuck if she was a southeast Asian burn victim paraplegic ex-nun. She interrupted my cigarette happy time, for which she must surely pay.

You know, maybe I was an asshole to that lady- but I don't think it matters. I am who I am, and she is who she is. Anyway, I got woken up at eight in the morning the next day (Thursday.) It's the boss. The owner. This guy is cool as shit. Most laid back boss I ever had. However, this time, he's totally freaking out. I hear a familiar black woman screaming in the background, he's gulping out "Dude, Zach, this lady is screaming at me about how you're a racist, sexist, man-pig that insulted her intelligence last night and she says you discriminated against her because she was black, and because she was a woman- and she says she's going to call the Better Business Bureau if you don't call her and apologize. I can't have that happen, will you please do this for me?"

I am struck with a conflict of interest. I have to work in less than eight hours after working a twelve hour shift. I have been awoken after three hours of sleep to be called a racist woman hater while wandering around the living room of my parent's house in my

boxers. I am not only confused, but I am beginning to become defensive. I say, "*Oh, that bitch.*"

He laughs, albeit *very quietly*. He knew what she was doing, but what could he do about it? Mouth off to her like I had supposedly done and risk having her actually call the better business bureau? She had left now, with her phone number on a piece of paper and a standing threat to inform the "authorities," if there really even is such a thing. Marty was beside himself. He says "you'd better call her right now and apologize. "

I say "I really don't feel comfortable doing that. I feel like she should apologize to me. I'm not a racist. Why would I work for you if I was a racist? 66% of the crew that worked last night was a different race than me. That makes *me* the minority in this situation." That makes one black woman, two Mexicans, and one white guy that didn't make nearly enough money to be accused of being a racist when that word carries such a horrible stigma.

I called her. I sucked it up. I took one for the team, even though altruism disgusts me.

"Hello"

"Hi, this is Zach from the Big Burrito"

"Yeah, I've been waiting."

"Marty gave me your number."

"Yeah, I've been waiting, and you'd better have something to say to me considering what you put me through last night"

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to smoke a cigarette, and I just didn't understand why you gave me six dollars for something that cost less than three, and I couldn't figure it out."

"That's not what this is about. You had an attitude with me, and you need to lose it. I don't think your apology is sincere."

I am throwing things across the room at this point, and biting on a bandana to keep from screaming every single racial epithet I could think of at this woman, if only to make there be a reason for her to be laying into me with such voracity. I take a deep breath, count very fast in my head, backward from ten to one.

"I swear to god, ma'am, I meant no offense, I am sin-cere."

"I will accept your apology, but don't ever insult someone because of their race or gender again, or I will find you"

Seriously. This happened to me. I am not telling you a lie. I have a notebook with this woman's telephone number in it. I will fight this to the grave. I felt like I busted up this woman's chiffarobe and never found Atticus Finch. Oh well, damned if you do, damned if you don't.

I am not a racist. There really shouldn't even be such a thing anymore. There really shouldn't even be a notion of "race." To everyone these days, you're nothing but a screen name with a bunch of

numbers after it and a weird character in it that no one can name that looks like a little "a" with a circle around it. "Commercial At" is the technical term. What a sham. Commercial speak. Orwell should be proud of us. You don't have a race, you have an ethnic background. You select it from a drop-down list so that you can be some kind of fucking statistic in our own 1984 come trickling down twentysome years late because of Reaganomics or something.

Racism was for the idiot drunks in the south that burnt crosses in Martin Luther King Jr.'s lawn. I'm not one of them, I don't think like them, and I am insulted to have been accused of being like them. I read about the civil rights movement in a textbook. I didn't live through it, my parents did, and they were only like eight years old when Martin Luther King Jr. got shot. I grew up with people of all races in my classrooms, and I never even looked at them as anything *but* other human beings, which they are, *and always were*, until you idiot fucks told me think otherwise.

These are the problems we face every day. Sometimes, we don't even know where to place our hate- so we have to take it out on those who least deserve it. In my case, it was a rich black lady with political clout that I mouthed off to because she made a dumb mistake and I'm addicted to nicotine. In her case, she had to deal with some long haired white kid at the burrito place when she was only trying to get a midnight snack.

As far as a sexist, or a racist- I guess maybe some people might think I am. I don't have a problem with women, I don't have a problem

with blacks, I don't have a problem with Mexicans, Jews, Chinese, Arabs, Japanese, Europeans, Africans, Liberals, Democrats, Republicans, oil tycoons, demagogues, kings, paupers, bums, nobody, and nothing. What I have a problem with is Idiots. There is a clear cut difference. Race and socioeconomic strata do not affect your propensity to become a dumb fuck. But if you are a dumb fuck, and I call you out on it- don't call me a racist, you're just being stupid again.

Either way, we both underestimated each other, and we both overreacted. Which one of us is wrong? I don't even think society is equipped to judge which one of us is wrong. We're all morally bankrupt by now. If they thought Babylon was bad, I'd love to see those Bible assholes take a walk down the Vegas strip and not blow a line of coke and get their dick sucked by a stripper.

This is America. Anything goes here. This is the land of the brave. The land of the free. The land of the burgers and fries. The land of the "lets grab up all the oil we can at the end of the twentieth century and fuck over our children before we make them cure our Cancer and AIDS for us."

Yeah, this is my big thank you to you, prick generation of dog fucking swine that gave us the internet, but neglected to take care of the wars, famines, poverty, and gigantic debt. It's the year 2008, I'm twenty three years old, and I am fucking angry. Economic Oil dependency, nuclear proliferation, the Credit Crunch, the Mortgage Crisis, the doubling of gas prices in four years, impossible to pay

medical bills, robots replacing factory workers, this is what we get to deal with. Fuck you.

I get so mad sometimes. I know no one could have seen these things coming at us. I just recently started paying attention to the news again, for one reason or another. The world has gotten *really* fucked up. All my friends have gotten *really* fucked up, and society has gotten *really* fucked up.

I also spend way too much time drinking. I am an alcoholic. I feel it rather suits me. It's in my blood. I'm not bad yet, but we all say that. Give me a few years. The difference, however, is I have finally accepted my fate. My fate is to have to become what I am. I finally found out what it was. I have to be one of the people who tries to band together with the other ones that haven't been struck drooling stupid over reality television and facebook. Yeah, I have one.

I'm immune to your sickness. Your stupidity sickness. It's all around me, but I can't seem to catch it. I'm so happy! To think I'd be able to stay alert throughout these years of alcohol and drug abuse. Is it, now this may be a long shot, because those things don't make you stupid? I know I'm going out on a limb here, but for once in our lives, can we accept the fact that stupid people make stupid choices and end up ruining everyone else's fun? Can we accept this?

Before I start spouting off on eugenics, I'll step off my soapbox for a moment and accept that maybe I'm being too judgmental. Ok,

we'll give it a shot. Have I made mistakes? Yes, many. Have I learned from them? For the most part, yes. Have I endangered any other person but myself in making a bad decision? Rarely. Why is it, then, that even though I regress at times and may lose sight of common sense at times, that in no way makes me stupid.

So is there a way to find the locus of human stupidity? Is there a way to define it? What is it to be stupid? Why is it that some people can just make you want to grind your teeth while smashing their face against a brick wall? What is it that separates us "Normal" people from "Idiot fucks?"

A long time ago, I set out to try and answer my questions. My own personal metaphysical questions. The questions that most people equate to "do I really want to marry this girl?" or "what is the meaning of life?" These are stupid questions with easy answers. No, and nothing. One wrong answer will leave you with half your money gone, the other will leave you with half your useful years gone. Most people pick one of these two things, in one way or another. I don't like being limited to two options. My metaphysical questions are more along the lines of "how in the living fuck can these people get out of bed in the morning? What keeps them going? How do they feel satisfaction in their lives? What is the source of this superficial self fulfilling prophecy that people at bars and in restaurants refer to as "normal?"

What the fuck is normal?

Really.

I seriously don't know. Hasn't "normal" become sitting around yelling at the television, re-inventing yourself, eating fast food, and resting in the comfort of our little white picket fence financial disasters? What's happened to us? Did we become morally bankrupt after we started seeing horses fucking chicks in the ass on the internet? Or were we, perhaps, morally bankrupt from the start because we never defined what it is to be a human being? We stopped with Aristotle. What is the good life? We never covered that. We wanted the money, we wanted the hot chicks, we wanted the fancy toys, and we wanted to fight for them. So that's what we all did, and now we have to pay for it. And it's not my fault, It's your fucking fault. None of us ever asked to be put on this planet, we were just kind of ejected out from your woman parts. It wasn't a choice. And then they make smoking illegal in the bar. I hate this place. I hate this planet, and I hate every idiot fuck on it. Fuck you.

Chapter Two - California

I still wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do with my life until I went to California. For me, it happened a lot differently than a lot of the people that find their calling out there in the wild west. I didn't run away to California. I was only there for like four days. I didn't take the actor route, I didn't take the hippie route, I didn't take the escape to the palm trees and traffic route, hell I didn't even intend on taking the writer route at that time, but here I am typing away none the less.

Anyway, I woke up in Redwood National Forest, which is probably one of the coolest places I've ever woke up in. It was late winter, early spring, depending on how pessimistic you are. I'll settle for late winter. Kevin wakes me up by punching me in the leg. He mumbles something I didn't hear, and I realize we're stopped, so I grab the flashlight to go take a leak. Click. Flashlight shines at a really, *really* big tree trunk. At the same time I figured out where we were, the beam instinctively rose to the tops of the trees. I stood in utter disbelief. A year prior, I had been standing at the mouth of the Grand Canyon, wondering if I would ever see anything as amazing ever again. Here I was looking right at it.

Kevin has been my friend since I was seven years old, in second grade when I moved to Kalamazoo. His first words to me, and I will

never forget, were "hey kid, want to join our club?" Other than my family, no person on Earth has known me longer than Kevin. Sometimes I feel sorry for him because I'm so crazy. Although our paths have separated a few times since that day in Mrs. Enderson's second grade classroom, we've always managed to stay in touch. Kevin and I took it upon ourselves to go adventuring in the way only we knew how. Enter the American road trip psychodrama. This was right before gas prices started getting to be such a wreck on our economy that you can't turn on a form of mass media without hearing about it.

We took two major trips. The first in 2007, which took us through the southern half of the United States to the grand finale of Las Vegas, and a second in 2008 which took us West by Northwest to the root hub of the modern idiocracy, California itself. I'm not going to take my California-bashing much further, because I think California is a beautiful piece of Land. Until you hit San Fransisco.

We had to leave town. We had to escape. That much was clear. We spent the last few months of 2006 and the first half of 2007 sucking down cigarettes in a twenty four hour coffee shop in Kalamazoo called Fourth Coast. It's a dive of a joint, and I've spent enough time in there to notice how much of a culture fuck it is in that place. It's near downtown, in the part of Kalamazoo now co-occupied by the dregs of society and college students.

As likely as you are to see a drunken college fucker wandering around, you will see the bum stumbling down the road talking about an imaginary Asian hooker he fucked in the bushes last night sipping his

cheap vodka through a missing tooth gap in his crooked smile. I see them all. The transvestite with a fresh surgically created vagina hopelessly trying to attract a man. Fat middle aged washout with licorice in his pocket picks at his sweaty armpit before approaching a sixteen year old girl smoking cigarettes and wiping ashes off her vinyl skirt to give her a piece. She smiles, puts the candy in her purse "for later." I always wondered if it was drugged or ridden with razors. He's there all the time. A stranger with candy. In real life.

There's the chick against the back wall wearing too much patchouli and stinking up the place. The text book alternately flipping through some modern vernacular bible translation and Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul. There's the strung out couple arguing about the direction of their relationship at the one lonely table across the room near the payphone that doesn't work. The punky looking blonde with patches all over her messenger bag, and gauges in her ears nodding her head to the garage band on the radio and writing in a notebook. There's a rapper making beats with an MPC and some cheap over ear headphones nodding his head and furiously punching buttons. There's a greasy dude with tattoos all over his face sucking down hand rolled cigs at a rate that would put me to shame. The businessmen come in early for a cup of coffee and a copy of USA Today. The college kids study for their exams and show each other flashcards at the bar. The poor baristas split their tips and complain about how much their laptops cost them.

I always sit in the corner seat, the one with the windows all around it. The spot that's always taken, unless you show up at four in the morning. It'd been eight cups of black coffee, twelve hours since I started working on my book, and forty eight hours since I'd last been asleep. Kevin strolls in, takes a seat across from me. Transvestite waves hello. The barista knows us by name, He's Ben, one of my ex girlfriend's best friend's ex boyfriends. That's life in Kalamazoo. It starts in high school and never ends. You're always running into people you know.

We had to get out! We planned our first road trip so well. We worried about how much time it'd take to get to each place, tried to budget out the gas exactly, talked about what kind of food we'd bring, and how much we wanted to stop. Where we wanted to go, what we wanted to see. It's the first time I realized how big this country was. I'd been to Egypt, but never really got a taste for the vastness of what three thousand miles actually was. When you're flying over the Atlantic Ocean, you don't get much of an appreciation for how humungous some of these spaces are. I'm not even going to bother trying to put into words the majesty of some of the scenic roadside stops along the road in America. This place is absolutely beautiful.

The Redwood National Forest rests just shy of Oregon at the Northwesternmost point of California. Away from all the people. That place is magical. The green of the land leaks out into the road as nature makes one last vain attempt at getting rid of our dominance. The Pacific Ocean smacks up against the rocks with the giant old

growth trees in the background. We haven't managed to fuck that place up yet.

We were only there for two days. It didn't matter, all it took was ten minutes on a rock watching the waves come in for me to make it all click. There it was, right in front of my face. The answer to all of my problems. I was in some totally foreign place to me, digging the fuck out of the scenery, pocket full of cash, a thousand some miles, and several days away from home.

I finally knew what I wanted from life. I remembered. I just wanted to see everything I could possibly see. I can keep going with this charade of burritos and button pressing I call a life if I can keep seeing things like that. I can keep up with the constant demand of whatever thankless job I'm performing if I can sit on a rock and stare at the ocean for two hours every year. I can get through whatever problem life throws at me if I can just know that I can be walking the streets of New York City in less than a day. I can keep going if I know I can escape.

I knew right then and there that I could never go wrong. As long as I kept moving forward, and as long as I always remember that I can always escape. I may not always have the money, but I will still be able to keep going just knowing that the chance for me to see something new is out there. I will never be happy just sitting in front of a T.V. waiting for a phone call. I may as well just be sitting there and waiting to die.

I'm frustrated with what society asks us to deal with. I'm frustrated with the way people chose to approach their defiance. I'm frustrated with everything I see around me, but at least I know that there's a rock in Northern California where I never had a worry in the world. I still know there's a cave in eastern Kentucky that's really, really, quiet inside, about a mile back. I still long for the comfortable anonymity of a large urban sprawl. I still know that there are millions of things for me to see and hear about in this life, and I can get up in the morning and be at peace with the fact that I'm on this planet.

I do not want all of these idiots ruining it for me. I'm not a preachy hippie. I'm not an environmentalist. In fact, I really don't want to be an *anything*-ist. I just want to keep seeing things like the Redwood National Forest kept away from the reaches of spaced out shit heads that will fuck it up for the rest of us. I want to be alive. I want to access all this world has to offer me, and these people keep getting in my way.

Maybe this is a clue. It's a step on the road to understanding the differences between myself, the people I keep as company, and all of my other varied Earthly co-inhabitants. Could it be that we're all just looking to escape everybody else for just a second? That doesn't explain why some people are idiot fucks, but it's going to get us started. I can't assume that everyone should think like me. That's out of line. I want you all to listen to me very carefully, because I think I might be on to something.

It starts here. We're all stuck on this fucking rock together. It's getting more and more crowded, and it's harder and harder to escape. We've gotten a good start at destroying this rock, especially in places where there happens to be a lot of us, or there's something we want. I'm not just talking about obvious things like the trees, the oil, the water, and the ozone layer. I'm also talking about the other things. We robbed all the graves of our ancestors. We charge money to look at the public buildings of Greece, the Pyramids, or pretty much anything we can throw a value on. Not that I disagree with people making money, not at all. Not that I believe artists and architects should create things without being compensated for it somehow, not at all. Not that I even really disagree with grave robbing.

We have commoditized *everything* that we could for *so long*. Now that we have the Internet, all of that has been blown to bits. Art, Music, Literature, News, Socialization- it's all there, and it's all free. You can't keep us away from it anymore. It's over. There are like six something billion people in the world this year, and now we've all got a reasonable chance of talking to pretty much anyone else on the planet. And we've all come to the consensus that something is terribly wrong.

Some agree more than others, but I hope that everyone can see the signs. In the past, we've always had something to blame for our problems. Think all the way back. Egyptians blamed the gods. Greeks blamed barbarians. Romans blamed pirates and rival nations.

Europeans blamed each other for about a thousand years, and then everyone started arguing back and forth until we all had the United States or Russia to blame, depending on which side of the argument fence you were on. Now we have China and India knocking on the door, the Middle east pointing nukes at each other, Europe uniting into some kind of nation conglomerate-slash-commune called the European Union, settlements on Antarctica, and population crisis in Africa, China, and India. South Americans feeding the drug abuse of the United States, Japan covered in concrete, hell we're even driving over Ice roads in Canada to get supplies out to the idiot fucks up there.

Why? We just kept running away from each other until there was nowhere to run, and nothing but people everywhere. Then we started building up walls and roads so we could have little horse carriages, then cars to drive in and avoid people and homes and businesses so we could limit which people we ran into most of the time. Then we stopped talking to each other accidentally. Then we all started to develop regional differences, and started to fear each other. Then we started having all sorts of differences, and invented free speech to cover all the brilliant new ideas we were coming up with. Unfortunately, that let the Idiots have free speech too. Then guns got involved, and the guns got really big. The guns turned into rockets. The rockets turned into nuclear weapons. Then everyone got them, and here we are. Totally fucked.

Traditionally, the people that were smart and built things were kept separate from the people who worked and made things happen. Not

until these last few centuries has man been able to both be smart, and get things done. Power is not placed through a crown to a teenager in a ring kissing ceremony with swords anymore. Power is given to a leader, if not by the people themselves, then by the graciousness of their agreement. The source of the power can be questionable, but even the inner ranks of a corrupt administration can be counted on to act corruptly. People need to be predictable sometimes. We can't all break the mold all the time. That's what normal is.

So maybe being normal could be as abstract as not being normal. Shall I make a categorical syllogism? Acceptance of "norms," in the sociological sense, implies that norms are counterpointed by what *isn't* acceptable to a particular society or culture. If normalcy is determined by its inverse, or what's not normal, then to be normal is equal to the state of being non-normal, by a rule of balance. In that respect, anything is really dependent upon its inverse. Love and hate, black and white, rich and poor, light and dark, agony and ecstasy, life and death, and all the stupid concepts we invented contingent upon the existence of each other. Are you confused yet? I don't think Aristotle would really like that one, but I don't think it really counts as a categorical syllogism anyway. We've come full swing back, with much bigger toys. Society exists as a constantly changing reaction to opposing conceptual forces.

The Greeks were the first to start seriously asking metaphysical questions, and they did it for the right reasons. Times were great, everyone had a bunch of wine, slaves, money, and time on their hands.

They got together, drank a bunch of wine, fucked little boys, and then started asking questions like that stoner kid that thinks life is nothing but Pink Floyd and smoking blunts. "Dude, but what if the way I saw blue was, like, the way you saw red? So, like, maybe we all have the same favorite color, but I just see it as blue. Wouldn't that be trippy, man?"

Fuck you, you stupid hippie. Blue is motherfucking blue. If you want to start talking about philosophy, read a six foot tall stack of books and get back to me in a few years. You have to read them all the way through, not just put them on a shelf and tell everyone you read them. Stop telling me "fuck the establishment" while you drive a Jeep to your two hundred dollar fucking Phish concert. Tell me who the product of fascist consumerism is, you idiot fuck that bought up all their live albums with the special binder, and followed them around for years because Jerry Garcia was dead and you couldn't suck his big money cock anymore. You know what? Patchouli smells eerily similar to dog vomit.

This brings me back to our topic and matter at hand- California. The great golden state of California. Governed at the time by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Not only is he not an American-Born citizen, he's also a meat head movie star. Not that I have anything against movie stars turned politicians, or even transplants, but come on- only California would elect Arnold Schwarzenegger as it's governor. I think, however, that this particular joke has been played to death, so we'll stray away from that one.

How about the Haight district, the hometown hotbed and breeding ground of the hippie culture? I drove through it. Nothing but the very same consumerist garbage they tried so hard to escape fifty years ago on the east coast. Fuck 'em. I hope they die in a patchouli fire. Sissy rainbow loving crap it is, nothing but new age crystal gripping mystical magic mumbo jumbo. Bad Vibes, Bad Karma, Bad Aura. Maybe these people just don't like me, but for as much as they talk about not labeling people they certainly seem to have plenty of labels for me. Especially when I fuck their girlfriends, god how they hate it! You know what, dude- your girlfriend is pretty hot naked after a shower and a close pussy shave. Save your recalcitrant complaining, new age hippie movement, you are all a bunch of lazy pieces of shit that make bad music, bad art, and bad smelling incense. Leave it to the Indians, theirs smells much better. You are also idiot fucks.

I was even more shocked to see Big Sur, which I heard so much about from Jack Kerouac. It would have set us back twenty bucks to walk down a flight of stairs and look at a waterfall. I didn't even bother trying to see the rest of the place after that, I just kept looking out at the Ocean, wishing I was back on my rock. I'm sorry for what they've done to the place, Jack- but I'm sure you saw it coming.

There's a man to look up to: Jack Kerouac. Isn't a lot of this shit his fault, too? Beat culture? I wonder if that isn't part of the reason why The Beatles is spelled that incorrectly. Isn't that where modern Jazz and poetry came from? The first time blacks were

accepted by popular culture? Possible precursor to the civil rights movement? Jack Kerouac is the shit. What happened to him? Drank himself to death because he couldn't escape anymore. Fucking sad. Hunter S. Thompson? Holy shit. Yeah, he's dead now. Been a few years. You might as well be looking at a caricature. John Lennon, Martin Luther King, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Robert F. Kennedy, Kurt Vonnegut, Jim Morrison, George Harrison- all of your heroes are dead, parents of our generation. All of your heroes are dead.

What did we get? Larry the cable guy, Paris Hilton, and the nameless dog fuckers on American Idol. I hope you all get nuked to bits. We got youtube, a way to publicly share all the visual capabilities of the planet, and you film yourselves kicking each other in the nuts with boots on and eating each other's shit out of an ice cream dish. God I fucking hate all of you. Dig your own fucking graves.

How did we get ourselves into this mess? I wanted to know, I had to know- I decided I would roam around the country a little bit and see if it was the same everywhere, or if I lived in some kind of idiot bubble. It's a shame it didn't turn out to be the bubble, because I could have popped a bubble, but there was something more going on.

California was just a destination, as good as any other. It's one state out of fifty, and I had never really even had a reason to go to California until I realized where and what the Redwood forest actually was. It was near Humboldt county, home of some of the greatest weed our country has to offer. I had suddenly become very

accepting of Kevin's plans for our road trip to end in San Fransisco. As long as we made it through Humboldt and I could find some weed, everything would be great.

So after I realized where we were, and that the trees were really cool, we had to bide about two hour's time before sunrise. Kevin napped in the front seat while I sorted through the last few days worth of pictures on my laptop.

Once we could see the sun peaking through the tree tops, I hopped in the driver's seat and started my first experience driving on the Pacific Coast Highway. Fucking gorgeous. Every few miles, the curves break from the forest and rock cliffs to provide you with a breathtaking view of the Pacific Ocean, complete with waves crashing up against the rocks about two hundred feet below. If you ever get a chance to drive the Pacific Coast Highway, take it- you won't regret it.

We stopped at the National Forest information center to talk to the rangers about the possibility of rock climbing, seeing as how that had been a major impetus for our road trip wanderings anyhow. Our first trip had started in Kentucky where we tried sport lead climbing for the first time in the Red River Gorge and really gained an appreciation for the sport, and for the experience of going to the middle of nowhere, climbing a rock, and staring off into the distance. I'll never tire of it.

As it turns out, there was a bit of a problem with climbing here—you can only boulder, and the Native American people living in a reservation there don't take kindly to climbers slapping chalk all over their sacred rocks. We decided to respect their wishes. It didn't really matter that we couldn't climb there, because the scenery was good enough that just walking around the place seemed to be fulfilling enough as it was.

We spent most of that day wandering about the tide pools, looking at the foreign ocean creatures there. It was the first time I had seen the Pacific Ocean, and the first time I had been to the Ocean since I was in Sharm El-Sheik back in Egypt.

That brings us to my rock. I smoked my last bit of grass inside a cave near a waterfall. As I was appreciating the view, I was wondering how I was going to make it through another week of being stuck in a car without weed to smoke. I was on vacation, and I wanted to vacate. That meant lots of weed, and a fifth of patron. I have developed a taste for fine tequila. I had already gone through a quarter of the best weed in Kalamazoo, but I was nearly two thousand miles from home, so that meant I couldn't call Kenny to score a bag. Bummer.

At least the scenery was pretty good. I emerged from my cave after a cigarette. Kevin was about a mile down the beach, poking at rocks with sticks. I walked out to a cyclopean rock with waves crashing up against it, and climbed up to the pinnacle. After reaching the top, I sat down and brushed the ocean creatures from my

pant legs. I happened to glance out to my left to see the distant fog rolling out from the green hills into the cliff face and through the tops of the redwoods out to the sea. I had never seen anything like that before. Everything seemed so perfect. There was little wind, and no sound but the gulls and the waves crashing.

I figured out why it's so cliché to walk along the beach and listen to the waves. There's something uncannily soothing about that situation and those sounds. The fresh ocean smells, the beautiful land, the captivating fog, the total lack of wandering idiots.

I don't have a clear idea at how long I sat at the top of that rock just vacantly staring out into the Ocean. It was one of those moments that you refuse to end voluntarily. You need something to end the moment for you. A wave caught my foot and stirred me back to life.

All of a sudden, I felt an incredible urge to drink. Not because I was depressed, and not because I wanted to celebrate anything, but more because I had all of a sudden begun to feel very heavy. Heavy, here, in that hippie washout kind of mental way. I had remembered that I was finally doing what I wanted to do. I was free from my taxing mental burdens for that small sliver of time on that rock. I had totally been lost there staring at the ocean, and I had forgotten what it felt like to just let myself go free and relax.

My life has always been a non-stop party. Party in all aspects—good and bad. Sometimes there's that point at the party where

something bad happens. The cops show up, some chick starts puking all over everything and dying of alcohol poisoning, someone drives home after one too many and hits a tree. There's always a chance of something ruining the party, but as long as you make it home- or to the nearest couch (or bed if you're lucky,) you'll be fine to party another day.

I don't want to get into the "live life day to day" mantra bullshit, but this is a good analogy. If I'm sitting around at home without a purpose, I feel dead inside. I always need to be going somewhere, writing something down, getting ready for work, recording music, driving somewhere, checking my Email and facebook, or doing anything other than sitting around doing nothing, really. Idle time breeds ignorance.

That was the first clue I had. That's what got the ball rolling in my head. I suddenly felt uneasy on my welcome back into the world. I had always felt like something was wrong with the world around me, but now I felt closer to figuring out what it was. I felt one of those "urges" or "callings" that people always talk about, but can never really nail out a good explanation of what it is. That's one of those things that you can't read in a book. You actually have to take an active part in living your life to really appreciate what it means to be alive. You can't just sit around and watch other people live theirs on TV. Maybe too much idle time has turned you all into idiot fucks.

Opiate of the Masses

I am the greatest human being on the planet. It doesn't matter if you believe it or not, I still do. Karl Marx was an idiot in a prison cell. He believed no one was better than anyone else, and that everyone deserved to have an equal share of the pie. I am here to remind you that his dumb idea never worked, doesn't work now, and never will.

We're all equal in body, but not in mind. Sorry to burst your bubble. As humans, with built in perceptions, ideologies, truths, and questions; have we had a sanctimonious desire to relegate what we don't understand to supernatural beings with unbelievable stories and rationales? Society is controlled in many ways. Be them chemical, role-based, existential, esoteric, metaphysical, guilt-based, respect-based, mystic, idyllic, or otherwise.

Since long before the Greeks stuck a tripod over the gas leak at Delphi, long before the Aztecs feared the return of Quetzalcoatl, and long before fire was first blessed upon us by Prometheus, humanity has sought to explain what it wasn't capable of understanding on its own through fantastic stories about supernatural entities that think, talk, and act solely on the affairs of millions of otherwise perfectly contented people all over the earth. In the last four hundred years or so, we have developed, tested, and tried scientific methods to harness the forces formerly attributed to the divine. In doing so, we have inadvertently walked into a false ideology out of a sanctimonious "respect" for the traditions of our cultures, caught struggling to explain why we've been massively cajoled into believing a self-perpetuated mythos attached to our desire to impress our ancestors with our ability to be intentionally misled by one another.

These lies have been propagated by charismatic assholes who felt they had some sort of extra conceptual and sensual ability than you which allowed them to tell you how to think. Karl Marx included. Anyone who tells you how to think is a piece of shit. Anyone who follows or listens to him is an idiot fuck. You're born into this world naked, crying, and scared. You are a result of a biological fluid exchange that predates you, your family, America, writing, and mankind itself. You were not created by god the almighty king of the universe. Your parents fucked and you came around about nine months

later. No god involved. Whatsoever. Mankind has given birth to a great many stories to soothe its fears.

When Karl Marx wrote his economic theories, he was one of the first to ascertain that religion was nothing but a massively successful form of mind control in an industrial science based society. We have many opiates as a collective. We always have. Mass public entertainment is a social anesthetic as well. Does the Coliseum ring a bell? The idiotic banter of daytime television hosts smothering you with ridiculous and useless opinions? The rattling chatter of political pundits attacking each other with ill-conceived flash animations? The masks of Anonymous as they revolt against Scientology and L. Ron Hubbard?

Scientology is a commercialized religion. L. Ron Hubbard had to be a pretty smart guy to get that whole pyramid scheme up and running. Salvation through purchase, don't you just want to sign up right now? Stop rotting your mind with mass media moralities and take a second to think for yourselves. We're morally bankrupt, because our morals are provided to us in the caricature effigies of made-up television faces, lawless cartoon characters, false idol military commercials, docu-drama re-inventing the past, "modern art" piles of candy in the corners of our metropolitan art museums, children watching their parents smoke pot, and the religious on the radio airwaves corroborating new "truths" blended in the fog of bigoted fascist Christian rhetoric.

Religion is a conceptual force mankind invented to give name and credence to the stories our drunken grandfathers told us while we sat around the campfire. I remember one mindless anecdote my grandfather always used to recite.

*I had a dog and his name was Jack.
He always pooped on the railroad track.
The train came by, the poop flew high.
And it hit the conductor right in the eye.*

What was I supposed to learn from the anecdote? Beware of dog shit on railroad tracks? The futility in trying to find meaning in grandfatherly anecdotes? Religion is a synonym for total shit, straight from the dog's ass. Religion is well steeped in the conceptual stagnate of tradition. Religion is a false sense of security. Religion is a baseless accusation presented as digestible and concrete fact, unerring and steadfast. Religion is lies dressed as metaphysical profundities. Religion is local anesthetic for the brain. Religion is...

The opiate of the masses.

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In all veins artistic there are two kinds of people.

People that ask questions, and people that answer them.

This book is dedicated to my fellow question answerers.

Part One- Man and his Myths

Chapter One - Social Opium

I just can't seem to let myself be controlled by others. It's been both a taxing burden and a total freedom. I've never had a good taste in my mouth for authority. I don't like being told what to do, unless someone can explain why I should listen to them. Most of the time they can't or won't. They just hold their authoritarian hand over me and try to pull my puppet strings. They're sorry to find out that I cut them off long ago and started to walk on my own road.

I've been hearing the word microcosm a lot lately. A lot of people like to describe where they live as a "cross-section," or microcosm (if they know the word) of America. I live in a city in Michigan called Kalamazoo. It's a microcosm of America. That's because every town in America is a microcosm of America. Trust me, I've encountered a good many - and they all look, sound, smell, taste, and feel just about the same. Kalamazoo has all the nameless faces, all the alternate lifestyles, all the big city problems, a good chunk of the religions, all the small-town Midwestern values and appeal, the working classes, the middle classes, the upper classes, the bums in the parks, the pot holes in the streets, and a really long winter with asinine amounts of lake effect snowfall that leaves us all hunkered down in our homes hating the sky for dumping that cold shit all over our cars.

God did not create Kalamazoo. It was founded in the early nineteenth century by European fur traders. That's what created Kalamazoo. The town got its name from the language of the local

indigenous peoples, who were decimated by the Europeans in their epic quest for beaver pelts. That would make for an interesting epitaph, I feel. "He died for beaver pelts in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in some year humanity forgot."

On the topic of epitaphs, Nietzsche said "God is dead." What was god's epitaph? "We'll all just pretend you're really here anyway." Why is it that we kill each other all the time, kill animals even more often, kill god in literature and philosophy, but the best thing we can come up with is "rest in peace?"

Are you resting?! No! Is there peace?! No! You are dead, nothing will bring you back, and there is an expensive stone six feet above your rotting cranium on which your epitaph is inscribed.

"Eat shit, then become it."

I had three grams of Opium once. The crappy red rock kind. It was back when my buddy Stan was still alive. We were at a party my band, Three Mile Island, had played at. We bought it from our friend Rob. It was the first and last time I ever found any Opium to buy. We tried several different methods of smoking it. Bong, Pipes, Hookah, rolled up in a joint. They all seemed to work fairly well. I just liked to sprinkle a little of the dust onto a packed bowl of weed. It smells really good, and works really fast. When you smoke opium, as you exhale, your shoulders droop a little, your eyes kind of go glassy and want to shut, and you just lay back feeling quite comfortable.

I have a photograph of Stan next to me on the couch in an Opium daze vacantly staring into the camera with a glassy look in his eye. He's sunk into the couch looking really relaxed. If you watch a history channel show about opium, they'll talk about the opium bars where people laid on couches to smoke opium and chill out. That's pretty much what it does. It sure doesn't last long, though, only about five minutes. Then you've got to smoke more and more to get high. By the time we got through the two grams, we had to smoke the whole third just to get a buzz. You may know that Opium is a blood brother to addictive as hell nasties Morphine and Heroin. Opiates. Never trust them. Very bad drugs, opiates. Stay the fuck away from heroin. I've never stuck it in my veins, but I've watched other people do it in front of my eyes and it is the saddest thing I have ever seen - and I've been the fuck around.

Now, in being congruous with the title of this little literary train wreck, do you see now why Karl Marx chose those exact words? Opiates make you numb and pacified for a little while, they lose their potency as your tolerance grows, and pretty soon you find yourself wanting more and more of something you didn't have in the first place

and never needed anyway. When "people" are "addicted" to "drugs" we either "lock them up" for selling them, label them as "useless to society," "deviant," or we send them to "rehab" to "clean up" with a little help from a "higher power." Euphemisms. Always with the fucking euphemisms. If drugs are bad for you, people that sell them should be stopped, right? Well by that same respect, shouldn't all those priests telling you about a 2000 year old zombie be put in their place? Hell, in most cases you're all even paying them to tell you these obvious lies. The universe created in seven days? Are you kidding me? Could you build a house in seven days? Could you build a car in seven days? You might as well really be thinking there's someone living in the universe that just assembled it out of things he found in his gym locker on a strange bet between friends that he couldn't create life from jock strap residue. So people say "well you can't build a house in seven days, but god is omniscient and omnipotent." A being with omniscience and omnipotence would have to have it in a world he did not create, and a universe with finite limitations!

What happens to the priestly prayer purveyors? The clergy? The saints and the Eucharist? You have to drop them like a bad heroin addiction. You've got a monkey on your back that's slowing you down, making you stupid, bending you to its flagrant will, and inevitably costing you precious money and time. There's plenty of room for spirituality and feelings of "completeness," but if you have to pay or confess to a stranger in order to feel complete, you're on the wrong track.

And what is this elusive feeling of completeness that we all yearn for? Some contrived sense of purpose for our bane wanderings around this floating rock we call Earth? What we mean when we say "completeness" or "fulfillment," is really "answers." Answers to questions that can't be answered. I've spent a great deal of time in the past talking about "metaphysical questions," such as "where do we go when we die?," "is there a god?," "what is the true meaning of life?"

I've got no better an answer than anyone else does. Here they are. Where do we go when we die? We have two general choices, with a few other weird outliers. Ground, or fire. Either way, "you" as you knew you, do not go anywhere, because you don't exist anymore. Death is the finality. The minute someone starts telling you that they know of some other place after death is lying to you. They don't know, they haven't been there, and there is no god for them to ask.

Is there a god? Like I just said, "no." There's your fucking answer. He's not there, he doesn't care about you, he doesn't have a plan for you, and he won't grant your wishes-slash-prayers. Because he isn't real.

What is the true meaning of life? How lame of a question is that? If you need to be told what to do with your life, there's no point in asking the question, because you won't get anywhere without some idea of what you like, what you want to spend your life doing, and how you want to get there. At least a dream, that's all it takes. The true meaning of life is to fucking live it, stupid. How hard was that? You didn't even have to read past the first chapter to find out.

Now there are some really deep seeded questions that people don't like to talk about all too much. How about "how can you honestly believe there's a magical place called heaven with streets paved of gold, and no worries except how to spend eternity without being bored out of your fucking mind?" Don't you want this to end some time? Sure it's fun to deal with all the shit life throws at you so you can go fuck your girlfriend, hang out with your kids, do tae kwon do, or whatever the fuck you're into; but don't you want it to end some time? Guess what, you're in luck because it's going to.

We create gods to pacify our fear of death. Philosophy for the last three thousand years has been balanced on this pinpoint spot in metaphysics. Death. Death, death, death. Five letters for the ultimate finality. Kicked the bucket, passed on, passed away, late, deceased, beyond, gone, lost, faded, waxed, murdered, smoked, picked off, casualty, blast victim, tragedy, fatal, dead, gone, buried, natural causes, cold, six feet under. Requiescat in pace. Resting in fucking peace till the zombie shows his ugly bearded face. More euphemisms.

I'm going to die, you're going to die, your mom is going to die, your dad is going to die, your wife is going to die, my brothers are going to die, my cat is going to die, and a great many people I have known and loved are now long dead. I used to get upset about it, but now I just say "so it goes," like Kurt Vonnegut. No amount of preparation will leave you stone faced at the death of a loved one. Sometimes even the death of people you know nothing about can still be a tearjerker. Why is this? Because we understand the finality of death, because we've been robbed of our time with someone we wanted more with, because we're reminded of our own death, or because we wish that the good times would never end?

Finality is a nice palpable sort of thing. When Decartes wrote "I think, there for I am," he was trying to prove something with one hundred percent certainty. He was obsessed with god and getting into heaven, so he didn't think of the most obvious next step, "I am, and therefore I will die." Eat shit, then become it. What do you think of that, Rene Descartes you dead motherfucker?

Social opium doesn't have to involve god, either. What about mindless nationalism? Worship of technology? Reliance on chemicals

to feel alive? Drudging on endlessly doing whatever the boss says so you can get your bonus at the end of the month? Idiotically chattering at night clubs about your soap opera sex lives? Screaming the lyrics of your favorite band at a concert? Flipping through the thousand channels on DirectTV? Typing in random search strings on Google and clicking random articles on Wikipedia?

So are you sick of being swindled out of your time and money by shit bag preachers and social-salesmen telling you how to live your life? Here's your solution: stop going, read some books, stand up on your own feet, and live it on your own. You may be surprised to find out how nothing changes after you cut out the monkey on your back. The sun will still rise, the seasons will still change, you will still get older, and you will still be confronted with nothing but contradictions to what you thought was going on around you.

So what if you're one of those people dishing out the garbage, you know it, and you still don't care? Oh well, keep on trucking, man. Bamboozle the fuck out of those idiots, but when one of them stands up and says he's had enough, don't try to trick him into staying. It's too late.

Mankind has as many fools as it has saviors; I know this, and you know this. You bought this book, you had to know what you were getting into by now. God isn't real, I'm sorry. I know it's really hard for some of you people to accept, but it's just not true. In return for this bitter appraisal, I will offer to you a sound alternative based on tangible evidence from the natural world around us, and free from mind-rotting dogma that will leave you stuck doing things you don't want to do.

I ask not for, will not accept, and take offense to your worship. I may be an ideologue, but I am no messiah. The thing that disgusts me most about organized religion and philosophy is the singular aspect of it all. Devote your life to one single mantra, one single ideal, or one single thought; and you will be saved. What a load of trash. Might as well be saying "submit or die." It's even worse than that. Submit, or die forever. Eternity is a pretty long time, man. With the threat of hell, it's no surprise the Christians managed to fool you for nearly two thousand years.

Just as there isn't a god, there is no one single answer to the questions we all ask cumulatively as a society. Sorry, guys, nothing is that simple. The only things we can do are state our opinions, disagree with the opinions of others, then change and re-state our opinions. We use words for concepts that we have invented to legitimize our opinions, and our disagreements. That's called a language, and there are a great many of them.

It's a good thing the world isn't as simple as that. There's a lot of us, and that means there's a lot of opinions. That's OK with me, it's also a good thing to be able to learn from other people. There's a whole shit-heap of information floating around this gigantic rock we're floating through space on, and it's a bit too much to be sorting through all by your lonesome. Friends, enemies, strangers, faceless names, and nameless faces alike; we are all indebted and connected to one another in a multitude of ways - some of which we understand, some of which we lament, some of which we fear, and some of which we intend.

What I am concerned with, for the most part, is the connections between people that we don't always acknowledge. This chemical haze of reality we all experience whether it be illegal drugs, prescription drugs, TV drugs, sex drugs, music drugs, fast-food MSG drugs, or any kind of mind-numbing activity in general, has replaced a large part of the "everything will be OK after you're dead, even if it's not OK right now" function of religion. These days, it goes "everything is OK for all of us, why isn't it OK for you all of a sudden?" We're all lying - to ourselves and each other. It's not OK. We didn't replace the god function in American society.

In god we trust, oh shit. Big mistake. God isn't real. Oh fuck, what do we do now? Well if god is just made up, maybe we can replace him with choose-your-own-adventure vote by text message American Idols. Nope, that didn't work- but at least they bought the T-shirts. Well, we'll try a global economic crisis- FUCK! They elected a black man! Maybe "they" should have never given "us" the chance to think for ourselves. They had to have known we would get wise to their ways! We can blame our parents, we can blame each other, we can blame ourselves, but we have to blame somebody! It's a cruel fucking world, and there's no excuse for it but it just keeps being that way.

I said once that people find love, they find religion, or they find the bottom of the bottle. I seek another alternative. I seek social transcendence. Living life as a human being isn't all it's cracked up to be sometimes. There's a fuck ton of us here, we disagree back and forth, get in bloody ideological disagreements, and we escape each other in a variety of ways.

These escapes, these social opiates, serve to construct a dichotomy between what we are as individuals in society, and what we're to expect from society as individuals. We're given individual rights in our government documents, we legitimize the shit by saying god says it's alright, we take another hundred years to talk about

slavery, we take nearly another century to talk about women's rights and the ex-slave's actual civil rights, and then we get the stupid internet so everyone can get fat and lazy and get their pizza not just without making it themselves, not just having it delivered, but not actually having to talk to another human being throughout the entire process until we sign the little piece of paper after taking our food from the nameless dog fucker with a stupid shirt knocking on the door and "forget" to leave them a tip.

Fuck, man, I'm as broke as you are. I drive a car nearly ten years old, and I still got fucked on the interest rate. I rent my house, it's drafty as shit and the furnace pilot light gets blown out once a week causing me to see my breath when I wake up late in the winter afternoon. My credit cards are maxed out, I live paycheck to paycheck, and my diet largely consists of macaroni and cheese supplemented by cheap generic off-brand vitamins from the dollar store and peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches. I save my pocket change in a blue plastic margarita yard-glass from Las Vegas. I pay most of my bills late, and I give my landlord cash because we're both fucked financially and we would rather keep the banks out of our transactions.

I stay up until dawn more often than I don't, I show up late for work without showering nor shaving, I drink to excess, I take a lot of drugs, I say things to people that I regret, and I constantly question my abilities as a person. Sometimes the stress gets me, and I tremble myself to sleep on the couch wishing I was dead.

We're all the same stupid lonely fucks looking for attention through a variety of mind-numbing rituals. I like to get fucked up, write books, play music, and talk to people I think are smart, funny and cool. Am I any different from you? Probably not, and if I am-you don't fucking matter anyway.

I'm the greatest human being on earth, and so are you. We're all the greatest human beings on earth, because nobody is fundamentally better than anybody else. We're all equally fucked by nature, and equally limited in life-span. Some of us outlast each other, and some of us make more of a name for ourselves than others, but we're all essentially the same. Our heroes wouldn't have gotten anywhere without us to venerate them, now would they? The things that set us apart from each other are the things we use to group ourselves together.

Even if god did exist, and this is a long fucking limb I'm going out on here, he would have surely created us for some stupid purpose

other than sucking the land around us dry and arguing back and forth about what we're here for. So instead of continuing to fight "the good fight," and in lieu of bettering ourselves, we find ourselves eternally seeking escape from what we wish to call a fictional reality but can't get past the realization that this so-called fictional reality we've created around ourselves is all we fucking have. And it also happens to be very, very real. You can only measure yourself based on what the other idiots say about your idiocy.

So should we just keep self-medicating? Buying our opiates with little pieces of paper we give a value to and seeking guidance from our elders while forgetting they're just as lost as we are? Buying and selling DVDs on E-bay like we buy and sell "stock" in companies we've never heard of through mutual funds with investment groups backing them that get bought and sold by each other like we buy and sell drugs on the street corners? Buying consumables with credit cards so we can pay interest on something that was gone six months ago?

Money is the root of all evil? Fuck, man, money's only as conceptually real as evil is. Things happen, we react to them. We trade our ideas and our personal realities with each other as commoditized pieces of economy with only as much value as other assholes put on it. I know it, you know it, we know it, but yet it still goes on every day without end just like it always has. So instead of asking why, we just self-medicate with anything - ANYTHING AT ALL - that will take our minds off; even just for one second, the fact that we're all going to live, die, and rot in the fucking ground whether we like it or not.

So why bother? Why not just start smoking meth and watching NASCAR in a double-wide? Why not leave your wife, kill your kids, shoot some heroin, blow your face off with a shotgun and leave a note that said "I just wanted some fucking sleep?"

Why? As much as we are attracted to our escapes, we are indebted to our timeless ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They used to call it "The American Dream," but now we just call it "America." The future that everyone used to talk about has finally come, and all we have to show for it is the blogosphere, youtube reaction videos, American Idol, and a nation bankrupt on imaginary funding via credit cards and forty-year mortgages that don't end with death. Fuck, even in death we owe money that we force our families to settle in probate court. Eat shit, then become it.

When I die, I want you fucks to put me in the ground and talk about everything I did that you thought was cool. What I don't want you to do is imagine I'm stuck in some pitiful afterlife full of creature comforts watching all of you suffer and letting you metaphysically pacify your self-doubt with my after-worldly presence. Fuck you, death is the only true salvation, death is not to be feared or avoided, it is the poignant culmination of that which must always come to an end: Life.

You're going to die, fucker. What do you think about that?

Chapter Two - Delusion En-Masse

Way back in 1941, when America was struggling with the decision on whether or not to bail Europe out of a second all-encompassing war, there was a man with the idyllically dynastic last name of Rockefeller who made a speech that included the words "I believe in the supreme worth of the individual, and in his right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

I first came into contact with this quote while wandering around New York City in a hung-over vacation haze along with my compatriots Kevin, Dennis, and my brother Dan sometime in the summer of 2007. Frantically spending our time taking photographs of buildings, parks, streets, and people we didn't even know the names of; we left in a rapid hurry staring at the ass of the statue of liberty from the dirty shores of New Jersey needing to be back to work and school in less than twenty hours. I didn't sleep for three days straight.

The now ubiquitously famous plaza in front of Rockefeller center in New York, New York is sunk beneath the ground level. It is accessible via a grand staircase leading down from the mass of pedestrians meandering their ways through life in the most important city on earth. At the top of that very staircase is a giant slab of marble bearing those very iconic words, in addition to the rest of the speech.

I'd be willing to bet that thousands of people walk past that piece of marble every day of their lives. They never even bat an eye

as they pass those immortal words etched in marble for them to ponder at.

Many people carry an undying hatred of the Rockefellers as industrialists and Oil Tycoons using their financial influence to dictate world events. Fuck that, do you see the words of David Rockefeller on that day in 1941 being lived out to their fullest extent? Mankind has not gained one inch of social, philosophical, or ethical ground since that day, several years before we provided ourselves with the capability of mutually-assured global destruction and genocide with the waving hand of the atomic bomb.

There's just one part of his speech I have to disagree with. It reads, "I believe in an all-wise and all-loving god, named by whatever name, and that the individual's highest fulfillment, greatest happiness and widest usefulness are to be found in living in harmony with his will."

Despite all of the self-realization he received through his inheritance of an American-Dynast, he still couldn't bear to leave the god shit out of his statements that day. Sure he adds a nice little ecumenical clause in "named by whatever name," but that's not enough. He must have known god didn't exist. Maybe he was just using that phrase a tool to make the god people flock to his ideal of the future. Doesn't that just serve to back up religion's opiate-like nature? Just tell them their superior likes god, and they won't see him as a superior.

The Rockefellers have a shit ton of fucking money. They didn't get it by swindling, they got it by the hard work of a single man with an iron grip on the oil market who was in the right place at the right time, knew it, and took full advantage. He was an extremely intelligent motherfucker who knew where to throw the damn darts and make them count. We demonized him for his tenacity instead of introspectively wondering why no one else was good enough to compete with him.

Money isn't the root of all evil, our concepts are. God is the worst one of them all. God is good, they say, everything he doesn't like (which happens to be mostly constructed of the things we do like) is evil. That's a pretty big bummer of an ethics code. The epistemology is even worse. Truth is true when some asshole in the sky says it is instead of when the humans test and question it, because unlike infallible god, we are quite fallible. Bullshit. Fucking bullshit. We invented those concepts, and I have a good feeling that we can do much better if we would just fucking try.

We're constantly being fed obvious delusions from every angle. TV says you need to be skinny (but fat is still beautiful somehow even though you and everyone else will hate you), enjoy shitty pseudo-music, buy expensive clothes, eat at fast food restaurants, give each other candy on valentine's day, buy and expect presents at Christmas, and put stupid mass produced trinkets that won't work a day after the warrantee wears out straight on the fucking credit card. It's no wonder that people think money is the root of all evil when our entire ethics structure is based on the possession and relinquishing of it.

Religion says you need to stand in a metaphorical line marching from birth to death "knowing" you'll have a better time after this one ends, genuflect before a statue that someone you don't know told you is a stone effigy of the deity in question, accept and forgive others for their infuriating transgressions, stop asking silly questions like "you really think the universe was created in six days?!" and "so you're telling me a zombie is going to come down on a cloud and judge us based on his personal moral code?!", and allow other useless human beings to get paid to fill you overflowing with this horse shit we call "divine."

Our public schools tell us we can do whatever we want when we grow up, insist that everyone is "special," including the drooling mongoloid in the back of the class that smells like roast beef and goat cheese, look the other way when we take a sip out of our flask in the bathroom, limit our inalienable and self evident right to free speech, award academic scholarships based on physical prowess, award honors to the altruistic, demonize the free-thinking, convince us our C-student community college-educated teachers are always right, award art scholarships to charlatans who are only good at cutting and pasting construction paper, and repeatedly tell us to "think outside the box" while threatening to withhold our diplomas if we try to express ourselves in a respectively unconventional way.

Our colleges tell us they hold the ultimate truths, trade vast amounts of money for pieces of paper "proving" our education, do little to inform us about what they terrifyingly refer to as "the real world," fill the minds of still-corruptible youth with subjective values set by sub-par professors that don't honestly give two fucks if you learn anything or not, convince baccalaureates they are fully equipped members of society although a gross percentage of them have never held a full-time job by the time they graduate, and then suck more funding from them by offering "graduate school." Does that phrase make sense to you? How do you graduate from graduate school?

The government tells us that drugs are bad, that dissidence is intolerable, that fuck is a bad word, that we have to shield children from the realities that they will inevitably face one day even though they may be ready for the shock, and tells us that we all need to conform to one big idea that is in a perpetual state of dynamic change. We live in such a fast paced society that the minute you understand something, there's some other hack re-writing history.

Our parents tell us everything will be alright when they know it won't be. Our bosses tell us we're not good enough when we've been giving it our all. Our enemies tell us we're scum and our best friends tell us we're the greatest. Our loved ones stop loving us. We stop loving our loved ones. We change our minds, we grow up, we learn. There's some times where you just want to feel like it's all taken care of, but don't let that be the rationale for accepting a façade of truth in front of a broken and faulty belief structure pacifying through bullshit toys and inconsistent ancient half-assed narratives poorly written by people that thought the world was fucking flat, and thought disease was caused by demons.

Why would an all loving god create hell? Have you read your Mark Twain? Mysterious stranger? Satanic. Subversive. Genius. Have you read the satanic bible? It's Ayn Rand with costumes and candles for the sake of alleviating boredom with a bit of Crowley and Lovecraft thrown in there just for fun. Anton LaVey was a circus man. He knew the value of letting people dumb it down for a while, but he wanted to provide an atmosphere for intellectuals to associate knowing full well that the people they didn't like would not be involved or welcome. That's why he named his "religion" Satanism. It overtly denies the existence of satan. To exist, satan would imply the existence of god. God does not exist, Satan does not exist, Jesus probably existed but was a total wuss, the tooth fairy doesn't exist, santa claus doesn't exist. You are all being pacified by people that found a way to make a buck from your lack of self confidence. If you got this far, you'd probably like the Satanic bible. Shit, you've probably read it, too. In that case, I hate to tell you what you already know. Read it, it's only a book, and it'll do a whole lot less damage than that stupid Christian bible.

Read them all, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Koran, the Vedas, the Sutras, the Bible (all of them), LaVey's bible, Metamorphoses, the Sagas, the Tibetan book of the dead, and the fucking Egyptian one, too. Read the analects, cast the coins and read your Tao Te Ching. Do it. Make a choice for once in your life. Words are good, books are better, but understanding words and concepts and using them to better yourself is the ultimate goal of sharing knowledge. We have to

take the stories we know, learn from them, and make new stories. Why would you perpetuate a religion from two thousand years ago, when we've all outgrown the usefulness of religion? Do you need god while you drive your car to the supermarket to buy food for your family with money that you earned working at a job you are qualified to do? What's his role in the whole thing? When was it ever about god's plan, you stupid fuck? It's about your plan, and it's going to be greener pastures for you as soon as you accept it. Stop letting your mind be misguided by old ideas that might have value, but completely miss the mark on a society with instant global mass communication. *Global*. When they wrote the bible, they thought the world was fucking flat. It's a god damned globe.

We have come so far, but we still waste all our time on stupid worthless waste of time opiate escapes like religion, sports, movies, television, music, chemicals, social constructs and video games. They're fun for a while, but quickly outgrow their usefulness.

Sure life wouldn't be fun without those things, it takes the "work real hard to stay alive" aspect of life away for a while. We just can't get in over our heads, checking the RSS Feeds six times a day to find out what some stupid Soccer score was in a country on the other side of the earth. In real time, of course. Walking around all day with our iPod cables duct taped to our ears. Smoking weed in your parent's garage after your third MIP. Too much is too much. Too much of anything is bad for you. Drugs are good, sex is good, music is good, sports are good, books are good, religion does good for people that need it, and society has kept a good stock of people's ideas shooting back thousands of years.

Have you ever been to a Library? I feel it's a shock to have to propose that rhetorical question. Libraries are where we store our knowledge in the form of informational language written down on paper. In our lucky case, we have electronic storage that makes it even cheaper and more accessible. This information is the tangible form of our concept of "society." It's the physical copy of all the work that any person did, just sitting there for you to take in and expand upon.

Chapter Three - The Facts of Life

We're all selling our selves, so don't sell yourself short. It's a sad, cruel world we live in that's capable of change, but generally runs in stark terror at the thought of things *actually* changing. We like things to stay the same. We don't want our girlfriends to break up with us, we don't want our friends to move away, we may not like our jobs, but we love the money we make. We don't want those things to change. Change is a dynamic process, and cannot be siphoned or bent to someone's will. Change may sometimes require hard work, it may sometimes present a rapid shift in perspective, but it is through change that we can come to understand time and space. It is through change that we quantify our existence. It is through change that we measure time. It is through change that we make our selves known and it is through change that we are identified and identify.

You are in a constantly changing environment which you can learn from and change yourself. Change is all around us, it's omniscience a beacon of reality. You will end, your time is limited. Change is limitless and liquid.

The facts of life are brutal and unforgiving. You are alive. You will die. You live on a planet that is big, but limited. Many things on it can and will kill you. There are other people on earth with you. You can communicate with them, but you don't have to. This is what we are presented with at birth, and "life," as we know and call it is just a post script to those sentences. What life means to you and what you do with yours are questions that are left up to you to decide.

Value your life, value your choices, value your actions, value your words, value anything, just value *something*, for the love of fuck. Be passionate about life, you only get one. Why would you want to live simply and quietly, waiting in line politely? Why would you just "take it as it comes" and not do anything to change what's coming?

I went to the presidential inauguration in 2009. There were literal millions of people down town at the national mall. Police officers from all over the nation were relegated to directing traffic and guarding gates. Google the shit, look at the pictures. My friends and I walked down the mall after the crowd had dispersed. What I saw made me very, very sad.

Nothing but garbage. Everywhere. Garbage people, garbage piles, garbage cans overflowing, garbage all over the national monuments, garbage falling out of idiot's mouths, and garbage workers cleaning up

the garbage. Barack Obama stands on the steps of the Capitol and talks about change while millions cry and cheer him on from miles away only to throw their plastic water bottle on the ground in front of them when there's a trash can two steps away. There's thousands of assholes walking around and following you down the street screaming "Get your Obama shirt! 5 dollars! Remember this historical day!" The religious zealots walk the streets with megaphones and tell you you'll burn in hell unless you light a candle at *their* fucking church. The homeless stare vacantly from the shadows as their residence is invaded by unwelcomed guests. The shop owners capitalize on the name of Barack Obama in any way they can. Obama beer, Obama soup, Obama salad. Obama hand bag. Obama air freshener. Endless seas of vendors selling anything they can slap the face of the man on and make thousands of dollars with the likeness of his name and face. The police stare suspecting at every pedestrian, worried to death they're going to whip out an assault rifle and go nuts. Obama's face was everywhere I looked, like the cult of personality just fucking became the entire city. They're placing all their hopes and dreams in the hand of one man that isn't really much more than a television personality that signs papers. Important papers, but still only papers, smiles, and handshakes. He's our highest ranked representative. The man inspires hope in the eyes of the hopeless, but the sea of idiots just can't wait to make a fucking buck off of his face and name.

Why fucking save them? Why bail them out? Why do we have to keep the scumbags around us to knock us down when we're trying so hard to get by? Life is what you make of it, right? You have to value it in order to make something of it. You have to know what something is before you can place a value on it. Why does one vendor sell a shirt for five bucks, another for ten, and they both have a line twenty deep? Why were the people buying it all up so voraciously? We should all be very fucking ashamed of ourselves. Walking around talking about change and doing the same god damn thing we always do: disrespect the shit out of each other, sell some crap, and desecrate what other people that were better than you built with their bare fucking hands and sharp fucking minds.

And to all of you cock suckers that threw their trash around my Capitol like that, I hope you painfully burn to death. Fuck you, you don't deserve to live here. Have some fucking respect for the place that gives you the freedom you love so much. Don't throw a fucking plastic bottle on the ground in my Capitol. Don't carve "fuck" in the bench. Don't stomp all over the grass. I'm a proud citizen of the

United States of America, and I don't fucking appreciate you being a disgusting filth pig.

Anyone who can just carelessly jack around like that, showing horrible disrespect for their country and their fellow countrymen can die a long painful death and I will laugh in their faces as they burn. How dare you call yourself an American? How dare you come to this place and fuck with it like that? You don't deserve to be here, you don't deserve to live. End of discussion. Value your life, and know that other people value theirs, too, so don't fuck it up for them. Then you walk in to your stupid church and tell everybody that Jesus said "treat others like you want to be treated." You're a hypocrite, Jesus was a pussy, and I hope hell is real so I can watch your retarded ass burn for eternity. That's how I'd like to spend it. Watching you pay for being such stupid fucks. You don't just make me angry and seek revenge in reality, but my best idea of an afterlife would be watching you people suffer for what you've fucking done. Sweet fucking justice by the hand of society.

The change we're all talking about these days is an ideological change. A change of national priorities. A change of global consciousness. A change of humanity. The new intellectual paradigm. The " This change is based on thinking and feeling in a technologically advanced society aware of the disparaging depressing living conditions of some of our fellow humans. Oh well. They must have done it to themselves, right? Serves them right.

We believe in the rights of man. Individual and self evident rights that are not given to us by god or government, but aren't even given to us. In order to be given something, there must be a lack of it in the first place. There was never a lack of individuality or rights, they were systematically taken away from people en-masse for a few thousand years. The fact about rights is that you can't give something to someone that they already possess. That's a gift. The rights of life are not a gift to be given, they are a vocalization of something you've always had.

The ideological change we need to make is to stop letting people that have no right or reason whatsoever tell us what do and take their so-called liberty to give you a sense of hope that isn't there and never was. It's nice to give people hope, but there's no sense in lying to them. That's cruel and that's cheating. You can only present what you know and create in an honest way, otherwise you are a liar and a charlatan. People say that cheaters never prosper. They do, just not in the long term, and not honestly. Honesty is only a

concept. Reality for some people is what they've been told, not what they know.

In order to know something, you have to gain that knowledge through one or more avenues of thought, action, testing, questioning, proving, and arguing. You can't just say something and have it be true unless you can back it up. You wouldn't believe me if I told you I had died, been buried, and rose again three days later. You wouldn't believe me if I told you there was a giant magical place in the clouds that the good people get to go to and be good in. You wouldn't believe me if I told you that by the simple act of having sex with a woman outside of marriage will result in eternal torture in damnation. Why would you believe it from anyone else? It's not true. You get angry with people that lie to you because it's not nice to be lied to. You can deal with it once or twice, but after that you can't trust a liar. Why would you trust someone that made it their personal commitment to study lies that superimpose a moral code onto your already complicated life.

So it worked for them. Well, that's nice. We could use a few less idiots around here, I hope you all get told to drink the Kool-Aid. Go join a fucking cult of personality buying and selling presidential air fresheners, at least the person you're worshiping is fucking real. Worship the flying spaghetti monster, it's no less ridiculous than believing in an omniscient omnipresent being. It's time to stop selling yourself short and take a firm grip of the direction of the rest of your life. It's time for you to stop asking questions and start answering them.

Asking questions is nice as long as you're prepared to find the answer. Sitting around and talking about things is no way to get them done. Sitting around and waiting for change is not a way to make it happen. Sitting around and talking about a better tomorrow is not a way to make tomorrow better. Sitting around and letting others tell you what to do does not make you a person, it makes you a sub-intellectual human. Sitting around and watching football at the bar does not make you an athlete. Buying a book and never reading it doesn't qualify you to comment on it.

If you value your life, which you should, you'll find yourself a lot more "at peace" with yourself when you stop letting other people dictate your goals and morals. Wake up every day ready to learn. Wake up every day with a passion for making it through to the next. Work hard for what you want, you'll probably get it. Sometimes you won't, it's not your decision and it's not anyone else's. Things happen, they just do. God has nothing to do with it.

