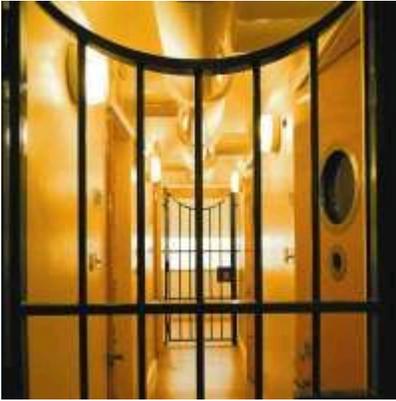




Written by bubba



Good to talk to you tonight my brother. You sounded great, all things considered. It's weird that I knew you would call, but I did. I was waiting for it, hoping that you'd call before or after America Idol...heh heh heh. I'd ask you if you watched it but I know that's grounds for an ass whooping when you're in the clink. In fact, what if someone knows you're corresponding with me and I watched it tonight? I take it all back. All I watched tonight was true crime documentaries on the Discovery Channel. I have no idea what happened on American Idol, or if it was even on. Nor will I ever.

I got a little nervous when you told me about the spat with your cell mate. Freaked me out. There aren't a lot of things I think I couldn't do my friend, but being locked up is definitely one of them. Going to war is one too, actually higher on the list. I'm not kidding either. I've got oodles of self confidence in most things I do and I never back down from a challenge. But when it comes to thinking about going to prison or war, I turn into a little knock-kneed bitch. My immediate fear isn't even dying. It's that I know if I was in either scenario, my life would be changed irreversibly. I've got an extreme phobia towards not being in control of my own life. It's why I act out so much against work I think. Well the point is that I think you are being very strong and I am relieved by that and I admire you for it. I'm 100% certain that I wouldn't be able to handle it as well. Kind of funny I guess, seeing as I actually have been in jail before.

When I did that thirty days at Weld County I was working at Pizza Hut (obviously I had work release). The cool part was that I actually made the schedule. You weren't allowed to work any more than twelve hours a day, so I made my schedule noon to midnight, seven days a week. All the other guys had construction jobs or at least more traditional work schedules. When I'd wake up, they were gone. At night, I'd bring pizza back for the guards, though I'd make them come outside to get it so no one would see. The guards were actually good guys and recognized, I think (maybe hope) that they saw me as different from their usual clientele. Everyone in the pod would be asleep so I'd take a shower and then watch TV, sometimes with the guards (TV, not shower). It wasn't too bad. As I quickly found out, no one liked it there. Doing anything to make that stay longer was the last thing on anyone's mind. After I figured that out, I felt a lot safer.

I wrote a lot when I was in jail, though for the life of me I have no idea what I did with my writing from that time. It may be that I wrote letters versus journal entries, meaning I mailed them off and wouldn't have them now. Probably to Staci Paine. That was definitely during the self-pity, zero responsibility time of my life...ugh. You know right after that is when I moved to California? I just wanted to get the fuck out of there man...get away from everyone. But whereas the scenery changed, I learned an important lesson: nothing else did. All the things that led me from one unsuccessful event to the next still existed inside of me and all those things needed to be unfucked before I could start getting different results in my life. God, that sounds so Tony Robbins...but tougher. It was then that I went through this really awkward time, right around my early to mid twenties. I had so much chaos inside of me and had no idea how to channel it into something productive, or at least something that would relieve the pressure. I guess I could generalize my main issue as 'trying to find myself' whatever the fuck that means. At some unrealized level I knew that I had strung out this unhealthy relationship with Staci for far too long yet I didn't know how to end it or what I would do without it, fucked up as it was. The other big deal was coping with my feelings towards my dad and dealing with him leaving us. It was around this time I really started writing, mostly fiction, rough and uncomfortable stuff...as bad as I could imagine but packaged into characters that I didn't know. Most of it was God awful. In retrospect I know that I was really delicately tip toeing towards getting my hooks into things that were a bit more personal in my own life, coming to terms with myself.



You'll think I'm joking, but my first foray into really thinking about my life and identifying the things I was uncomfortable with or acting out against people or things I was mad at came in the form of these painfully long,



wickedly detailed, hand written letters. It all started one day at my apartment in LA in a rather unplanned way. I can't even remember what preceded it. There I was, swelling on the inside, feeling as though I was going to burst. Finally I grabbed a yellow legal pad and burned through it...*all* of it. I didn't know who I was writing to but I knew what I was writing about – everything. Once I started I couldn't stop. There were things in

that letter that I hadn't thought of in years. Soon into it I started sobbing as I floated over myself playing football, pushing myself to be better so my dad would be proud of me.

Then I was sitting in the passenger seat of his Lincoln where we'd have our 'private time' in the form of a ride to his tailor in Englewood. We'd listen to loud Motown cassettes but never say a word to one another while he smoked a hand rolled cigar and drank Johnny Walker Black from an oversized juice glass. He'd crack my window to relieve the smoke, which I'm sure he thought was a favor to me, his young son. What it really meant was that every breath I took was chock full of carcinogens and that



I'd need to stand outside at the tailor's to try and relieve a stinging headache. After that I'd see myself driving away from a faceless girl's house that I'd just cheated on Staci with, shoving all the pangs of guilt back into their dormant, resting place somewhere beneath my stomach. I'd be playing guitar then, hiding my



passion for music from people close to me, certain they'd never be able to accept the change from who I was to who I wanted to be. There were other things too. A thousand different memories took their turn in line and their place on stage as I painfully auditioned every one of them for a permanent position in my character. The last one was a picture of the coast and there I saw myself sitting in an apartment surrounded by hills, then concrete, then 11 million people, then a beach with an ocean that spread out infinitely. And then it stopped. It stopped because that's where I was and I was lonely and directionless and broken...but finally I

was there...where I was. I stopped writing. I'd caught up with myself and, for the first time, all my past selves and all my current selves and all my future selves were breathing the same air and looking at the same yellow pad of paper...and it was full. I filled up an entire legal pad Eddy. It was all the things I'd never said, staring right back up at me. All the things I'd never processed and never connected to each other. They were right there in that legal pad. And they were real.

You can imagine how raw I felt. It was like shaving off the first 5 layers of skin. I felt incredibly self-conscious. *Now what do I do?* I wondered. What was I supposed to do with that pad? Hide it so other people wouldn't know all that stuff about me? Hide it from me too maybe? I had no idea. All that baggage...all that heaviness. I wasn't even sure I could ever read it again. While I was writing, my face had become hot. I remember clicking on the air conditioner and laying back on my bed to think about what to do next. I fell asleep and slept for the rest of the day and all night. I took that pad to work with me the next day. I just couldn't fathom leaving all that personal information just lying around. Instead, I kept it in my bag and took my bag everywhere I went (no obvious metaphor intended). My new self was a lot lighter like that. It seemed a little easier to think, and that's what I did. Mostly I thought about that God damn legal pad and what I was going to do with all that information.

It took me a day to figure it out. You know what I did? I mailed it. I mailed it to a stranger in the phone book. No joke. I ripped out all of those pages, numbered them and I picked a random name out of the phonebook and shipped them off...no explanation, no return address, no copy kept in my possession. I sent my deepest darkest secrets to someone I'd never met and I knew they were going to be read. Throwing them away or burying them for eternity would have been repression to me. Knowing they would be read and that any person on the street could be the person who read them was my first baby step into processing my internal chokeholds and creating accountability; I'd been honest about myself and, hard as it was, I shared that honesty with someone else. That wasn't the only time either. I started writing letters all the time. Each



one included tons from my past, but I also started to integrate real time stressors as well. When I was done with a letter, I'd rip it out, put it into an envelope, open the phone book and select my next random recipient. Eventually I started writing exclusively about things in my day to day life until finally...I was really just keeping a journal. I can't remember when I stopped mailing the letters and started keeping them, though I bet I could piece it together if I went through the boxes and boxes of filled legal pads that I have in my closet.

From time to time I wonder about those first letters. Must have been hundreds of thousands of words. It makes me curious to wonder how much of what I wrote then have I forgotten. But I know that it's better that I never see them again. It's like laying a dead man to rest. The memories you keep will exist how you need them to exist, however you need to move forward. You can love him, hate him, learn from him...whatever. But brother if that person ever comes back from the dead, those memories are gone and no matter what, you are pissing your pants, wondering why you never believed in ghosts. Ten or twelve years later I'm a lot better at dealing with my shortcomings in life. I've got no problems with talking about my weaknesses and I think that process has made me a better person and helps me build towards being a better writer. I do admit that I feel rather judgmental of people whose motives remain elusive to them. Personal cosmetics are not things I like to spend a lot of time deconstructing, which probably means I'd be a shitty social worker if I ever went back to that profession. I just hate things that aren't personal, and that includes people. I know how hard it is to be real. No one is perfect and no one has all the answers. Let's just all live that way then.

I've included a couple pictures I could dig up in the short term. There are tons of them on my computer, but no hard copies. The problem with digital media is that even though you can take a zillion pictures and make sure you get the one you want, I don't feel like 'they' have streamlined the home printing process yet. I've seen some printers that have decent quality, but mass producing pictures at home just isn't where I want it to be. Plus, it's still cheaper to take them somewhere else and have them printed. I have a fair amount of pictures that I can take in and send. That's what I'll do. In the meantime, here is our Christmas card from this year (a sure sign you're life is on the decline), one of Bob from the reception in Denver and your dad and grandma. They're all weird sizes so I'm going to have to have Rhonda take them to work and put them in a bigger envelope. I hope that doesn't delay the delivery process. Talk soon. ~b!

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