

# **Not My America A Stranger in My Strange Land**

by Christopher Damitio

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## **A Brief Summary of My Life Before 2013**

My story begins with head trauma. I was born without a soft spot, the fontanelles in my cranium had fused early. The first six months of my life were in and out of hospitals. I was fortunate to be born when and where I was because they fixed me. The University of Washington Medical School had perfected the surgery and procedure - I was the second child it was performed on. Without that surgery, I wouldn't have lived past eight and probably would have died much sooner. If I hadn't of been born in America, there would have been no me.

In many cultures if you save someone's life you are then responsible for them. In many other's the person who is saved is responsible for the one who saved them. In a sense, you belong to each other. I belong to America and America belongs to me.

The surgery was a success - then my mom accidentally dropped me on my head when she was doing laundry. She freaked out and some random black lady slapped her, took me in her arms and told my mom to call an ambulance. I'm told my head looked like a collapsed ping pong ball. I wish I could thank that lady for slapping my mom.

When I was about five, I fell off a second floor balcony and cracked my skull again. I had to wear a helmet for my first year of school. I was that kid in the helmet. Luckily, kindergarteners are generally not cruel yet - so I didn't suffer any real social trauma from it.

When I was a kid I lived on a road called Division. Some people grew up on Peace Street, Easy Street, or Lovers Lane - not me - I grew up on Division. It was a great place to be when I was little. Across the street there was a huge National Forest, down the street was a lake, across the lake were three ski resorts, and surrounding it all were ghost towns, dirt roads, streams, and even a little lake with a mill wheel. In the hills were abandoned gold mines, ancient caves, and even a rifle range that we would sneak into and collect bullets that had been flattened out when they hit the dirt embankment.

For a kid, this was the best possible world. It was California in the 1970s. Southern California...mountain style.

Mom and Dad liked to take us camping. We traveled all over the Western states and even went down to Mexico for several months. Mom wasn't too happy about that. The car broke down and Dad decided we would stay. That seems to be about the time that their marriage started breaking down too.

After a few months we went home. It all sounds pretty good right? Well. It was. Right up to about the time we got back from Mexico. After that, Division took on a different meaning. Mom and Dad started having lots of fights. Suddenly our happy and loving parents were drinking a lot more and having these incredibly scary, loud, violent fights. Luckily we had a lot of family in the area that was able to take us for weekends or nights.

Dad started playing music again and kept trying to get us to move here or there. He pulled us

out of our happy lives and put us in a new school in Northern California just like he'd tried to do in Mexico. It didn't really work though. Mom wanted to live where her family was and it seemed like she was going to make Dad's life a living hell until he took her and us back to Division. Eventually he did.

Things just got worse. I was in first or second grade. My brother was in middle school and my sister was in kindergarten. It's hard to explain it because I was really too young to understand, but I'll try. Suddenly there were a lot of new strange friends around. My brother tried to tell me it was all about sex and he and my cousins tried to fill me in on what sex was. They were very knowledgeable. As a result, I was probably the only kid in my class that knew what rim jobs, head, and doggy style were. The way they explained these things to me, made it seem like fucking was the only thing that mattered in the world.

At the same time, they initiated me into the world of alcohol. Since none of our parents were paying any attention to what we were doing, it was pretty easy to steal booze. We stole it from our parents at first and then we started to steal it from the rental cabins that were all around Division. The older guys would get us younger ones totally intoxicated on Southern Comfort or anything else they had. There was a division of responsibility and a division of labor.

I don't remember our parents ever catching us. One time, after we had stolen ten or twenty bottles of liquor from a cabin and hidden them in the woods, I showed Mom and Dad where it was. They were surprised, but I don't remember getting in trouble except from my brother and his girlfriend. She always smelled like horses. She was the daughter of some of Mom and Dad's 'closest' friends. They would all spend the night together and the girl would show us porn that her parents let her and her sister watch.

There I was, a kid that wanted to be a scientist or an astronaut, watching pornos and drinking shots. I was maybe seven or eight years old. But that was Division. Because of the breaking and entering, the porn, and the booze, I was fairly obsessed with losing my virginity. For the next ten years, I felt like I was missing out on the biggest thing in life and as a result, I probably scared off every potential girlfriend I might have had.

My brother had to break things off with his girlfriend when Mom and Dad broke their friendship with her parents. Mom got drunk on wine and told us that they had all been 'swingin' and something went wrong. I guess she thought we were old enough to understand. Dad had started playing music in the bars and Mom was there a lot. They both drank a lot. They had a lot of couple 'friends' and a lot of single 'friends' too. We kids were mostly left with babysitters. There were many. There was a sweet one named Elaine who cried for days when Elvis died. During that time we had a different one who made me watch her poop. She was a terribly ugly girl and I hated her. She was cruel, but I don't remember anything she did beyond making me watch her poop.

Anyway, all these 'friends' and all the drinking led to problems. Mom got jealous when dad hooked up with some female hitchhiker in her cabin for three days. They fought loudly and all

the time. As a result, I think, my brother started getting loud when he fought with them. As a result of that, so did I. One time I remember telling them I hated them and then saying 'Fuck You' to my Dad. They had always been no-spank kind of parents, but not when I said that.

They fought and fought and fought and screamed and screamed and screamed. They hated each other. Dad moved out. Mom filed for divorce. Soon Division was a different place as our parents made a division of assets and a division of children - or at least hired lawyers tried to do it. Their divorce was ugly.

Life in our Division house was Hell on Earth. I remember taking them to a pretty field of yellow mustard flowers in the forest once and then screaming while I ripped all the flowers from the ground. They were horrified. I was trying to show them what they were doing to my soul there on Division.

There was a lot of violence at this time.

Mom found a new boyfriend. He was the tallest guy in the world. After the hell that we had been going through, he seemed like the greatest guy in the world. He had a big fuzzy dog named Kona and a four wheel drive truck. He was a cowboy and would take us up camping at cool places. He was only a kid really, twenty-four years old. His name was Scott and I was glad to have him for a role model. Life was fun again on Division. The lawyers gave Mom Dad's new boat and we were all pretty excited when Scott married Mom. It seemed like things were going to be good again.

Mom got custody and we didn't see much of Dad anymore. He built himself a new house and I pictured him sitting there waiting to grab us by the arms and yank us around or maybe to beat up our grandma again. Dad had been divided out of Division.

Scott was young but he moved quickly. Mom had gotten a lot of money from Dad and he did his best to divide her from it. The house on Division, ten acres in Montana, vacant house lots, and plenty of other stuff. I missed Dad, but Scott was pretty nice. For a while anyway.

He and Mom started drinking a lot. They decided to buy a farm in Oregon where they had taken their honeymoon. I was in third grade and thought I would spend all my school years with the friends I had made around Division. We moved to a tiny little Oregon town where no one knew us and we didn't have any family or friends. His friends moved into our beautiful house on Division and soon it was lost.

Somehow in five years Scott had managed to divide mom from all her money and land. She had nothing but bruises and broken bones from his beatings. He had turned evil.

We had gone from prosperous to the lowest kind of poor, white trash. We lost everything. We ate government cheese. We had church people coming out to try to help us and even bringing us Christmas presents. We weren't even good enough to all live in the same single wide- I slept in the camp trailer, my brother slept in the shed. We were poor, white trash in an ignorant, drunk, racist, and poverty stricken town. It was hell. The teachers in junior high school beat us

with paddles. We were the bottom of the trash heap.

One day, during what would have been a regular type of beating, Scott threw mom on the floor and broke her back.

I had been in the hills hunting quail by myself - I wasn't even a teenager yet. I found her on the floor with him kicking her so I cocked my shotgun, pointed it at him, and told him to move away. I wanted to shoot him but I'd never shot anyone.

Mom begged me not to kill him from the floor where she couldn't move. She said she loved him. She cried and pleaded. I figured Dad had to be better than this. I told Scott to get in his truck and go away. That's what he did, but I knew he would be back. I called the ambulance and then I called my dad.

I was hoping to go back to life on Division after those painful five years in Oregon. The only division that remained was the division of my family. My brother had gone to college in Oregon. My sister stayed with my mom even though I begged her to come with me. I was with my dad.

So I packed up all my guns and moved to Dad's. He had no idea that I had brought a trunk full of guns and ammo with me. Mom would have known to warn him if she hadn't of been so drunk and stoned and fucked up all the time. As it was, it's lucky I didn't kill anyone.

Dad was surprised at who I had become. He shouldn't have been. Dad must have been expecting the sweet kid I had been on Division, but I had been divided from that little kid who loved space and trees. When I was a little kid, all the adults used to say I was like an old man in a kid's body. Now I was like a seriously fucked up guy in a teenager's body. I had guns, I was allowed to drink and drug, I did whatever I wanted.

I thought it would be cool to have a girlfriend but after seeing so many fucked up adult relationships, I was terrified of women and relationships. All of my friend's single moms tried to fuck me - they terrified me.

Dad attempted to rein me in a few times, but inconsistently. He would leave for a few days or a week at a time. One time he came back and had gotten married. We moved to a desert resort for a week and then one morning he woke me up and said I was going to learn how to drive. I was fourteen. He needed someone to drive the second car away from the new crazy wife who had maxed out his credit cards.

Dad had always told me that he would pay for me to go to college. He told me that after 9<sup>th</sup> grade we would go to Australia and ride motorcycles if I got straight A's in school. I fulfilled my part of the bargain, he came up with excuses for why he couldn't fulfill his. I began to get bad grades to punish him. It was a bad decision on my part. It didn't matter any more than my good grades had except to my future.

He told me lots of things but I can tell you he didn't pay for college or take me on any trips. He didn't teach me how to ride a motorcycle or anything else. Mom says he never even paid the child support but I think her and Scott were just drinking it away each month.

I smashed holes in his walls. One time he came home and found me hiding from my friends troglodyte mother who was drunk and screaming from outside that she wanted to fuck me. One time I told him I was running away and he physically attacked me. He was bigger than me - but I had guns. That was when he found out I had guns. I lived in a campground not far from Division for a while.

Mom finally divorced Scott. Right away she married a trucker who was only five years older than my brother and that made him just ten years older than me. He was like a cool older brother. At their house we took bong hits and watched Star Trek: The Next Generation. I moved in with him and Mom.

My sister had lived with my grandma and then my Dad and then, like my brother before her, she had to move out of Dad's and live with her friend's family because Dad was such a dick. My Dad likes to claim he was a great parent, but he didn't manage to have any of us live with him through high school. That must say something. He's funny though, he has created an image of himself that doesn't contain what we remember. I'm sure he thinks we're just making it all up.

Once again, division happened as we moved far from Dad and Division. I used to wish I were adopted because my Mom and Dad were so awful, but really, that was only after I turned eight or so. Before that, they were great.

I moved to far Northern California with my crazy mom and her new husband. He took pretty good care of us. I had problems though. I was a young drunkard. I did a lot of drinking and a lot of driving. I was smart so my grades were okay even though I skipped classes and smoked tons of pot and drank gallons of alcohol. I was still a virgin at seventeen - all my friends had lost their virginity when they were younger. My friends were cool - or maybe they were liars.

I started dating my sister's best friend. She was my date for the big homecoming dance. She was fifteen I was seventeen. I was crazy about her. She was incredibly attractive and flirty. We had a hotel room. We stopped at the game so she could tell her cheerleader friend that she was 'spending the night at her house' in case her mom called. Her football player ex-boyfriend was there. She was super flirty with him. She and I had both already had a few drinks. We had a big fight. I abandoned her at the game and then I got drunk. Then I got a DUI. My mom didn't want to spend money on an attorney so I got a public defender. She told me that the judge might go easier if I joined the service. I did. He didn't. This was 1989 - judges didn't care about joining the military. I should have gone to Stanford but instead I went in the Marines.

The recruiter told me that I could become a pilot. He told me that I could get a red jeep like his and a wife with big tits, just like his. He told me to join before the DUI went on my record, he told me to lie about my drug and alcohol use, and he told me that with my scores I would probably go wherever I wanted. I was seventeen. I believed him.

Besides, I wanted to get away from my mistakes. I took his advice and I joined quickly before I had a record. I got convicted, I graduated, and I went to boot camp. Desert Storm happened while I was in Boot Camp. After boot camp, the rule was that if you drank on base, you could be

underage if you were active duty. I turned 19 in boot camp. It was better than some of my other birthdays. That says something, right?

On the first night when I showed up for Marine Combat Training, I went to the enlisted club and drank myself drunk. When I went back to the barracks, I was assaulted by the other guy who had shown up early. Everyone except him and I had people who loved them. There was a reason no one loved him. Was there a reason no one loved me? Everyone else showed up the next day. It was not a good way to start.

Mom was proud. Dad was upset. I didn't care about either of them. I drank and drank and drank and drank and drank. On leave after Marine Combat Training, I drank with my friend from high school. I told him how lucky I thought he was to have a wife and kids. After I dropped him off, he blew his brains out on his father's bed.

He left a suicide note and it happened after I was gone but his father and his wife accused me of killing him. The police ignored them, it was very clearly a suicide. I got to my first duty station and called my mom to let her know I had arrived safely. She asked if I had killed my friend the night before? It was the first I had heard of his death. It was not a good way to start.

His Dad just kept calling me and drunkenly accusing me of killing his son, my friend. There was no chance for me to grieve. I drank. I was an Air Traffic Controller. I wasn't an enlisted navigator, I didn't have a jeep, and I didn't have a wife with big fake tits. I had finally lost my virginity after the DUI when I was seventeen though. I was at a party and a notoriously slutty girl asked me to stay with her. I did. It was a let down. Sort of gross and disappointing. That's what twelve years of anticipation will get you. That's what division will get you.

Four years in the Marines. I got arrested for being a drunk but managed to get out without any venereal disease, no felonies, and only having been to rehab once. I got an honorable discharge and didn't crash any planes. I even got a couple of awards for being a 'leader of men'. In addition, I was a rifle and pistol expert and everything else a Marine is. I made it to Sergeant. Not bad. Especially since I was drunk the entire time except for the three months I was in rehab and under observation.

When I got out, I became a bartender. I had several insubstantial relationships and then imploded. I was in college and needed money for the next semester but Dad told me he didn't have a 'pot to piss in' because he had a big vacation planned. I'm sure he meant it. So I dropped out and fled across the country.

My grandfather had cancer and Alzheimers. Maybe he needed my help. He accused me of stealing onions and his hearing aide. To be fair, I did use the onions when I cooked dinner one night.

I moved out and into my truck on New Years Day.

I fell into the usual profession of alcoholic men - I became a house painter. I got a job painting houses and moved into a hippie house. I got another DUI when I was on the way home from the

bar with a girl I'd met. I wasn't really very drunk, but I was tripping balls on LSD. I figured it was better to just let them think I was drunk. I spent Thanksgiving in jail. I traded a tiny jail pumpkin pie to a vegetarian for his jail slices of turkey. It was only a weekend in jail.

While painting houses, I listened to the radio each day and fell in love with the hosts of a morning show. I decided to get a job there - and somehow - managed it. Then I became the producer of that morning show. Then after several years and many opportunities in radio, I just fucked off and moved to Alaska. I became a bartender. Then I lucked into a job in the movies. That job put me on the big screen in the credits and landed me a gig in England. Good lord, I'm a lucky person. I'm either a person who is meant to be something, a very lucky person, or an extraordinary person that shines despite his issues. In any event, I am grateful.

I returned to the U.S. and got a job in technology in Seattle. Then the dot-com crash happened and I decided to move into a VW van and write a book about being homeless. It was too cold in Seattle, so I used my unemployment checks to gamble and won enough money to buy a ticket to China. I wandered around Asia for several months. Then I came back to the USA, moved to Portland, and was homeless and living in my VW van again. Then September 11, 2001 happened and all the American flags and patriotic bullshit disgusted me so I moved to Hawaii where there weren't so many white people.

I got a job as a painter, drank like a fish and somehow became the manager of a youth hostel. Then I moved to Kauai and became a kayak guide. Then I went to the Philippines. Then I came back to Oahu and became homeless and wrote a novel. Then I became a tour guide for the wealthy. Then I got involved with an amazing and beautiful woman and then I drank myself into problems, she cheated on me, I made things much worse and I broke up with her and enrolled in university. I graduated with honors and awards and thought about finding a job. Then the financial crisis hit. So I just said fuck it.

I had earned a Bachelors degree in Anthropology at the University of Hawaii. I had learned to take responsibility for myself and for my actions. I left Division behind me. I intended to leave the USA behind me forever.

The economy collapsed and I decided to travel the world. I met the girl I wanted to marry. We overcame huge adversity to get married. We had a daughter - she's the reason I decided to take my family back to the USA. If you want to hear about the beginning of our life together and the period from 2008 to 2013 you can read my book *Not My Morocco - My Life in Morocco*.

## **Back to the USA**

My family and I emigrated to the USA on April 17, 2013. For me it was a return after five years of living abroad. For my wife and child, stepping off the Emirates flight from Morocco - this was their first time touching what had become their home.

While I had been away, I'd dreamed that my family would have become normal and we would be entering an American version of my wife's Moroccan family where we ate meals together, laughed, joked, and always were there for each other. That was some pretty wishful thinking.

My sister had said we could stay with her for as long as we needed. My mom and her husband had also said they were there for us. My brother was considering a move back to California from North Carolina and happened to be in San Francisco when we arrived.

I'd booked us a hotel for the first few days in San Mateo. We had a baby and we had jet lag and my wife was sure to have culture shock. Our trip over had ended up costing a lot more than I'd expected because the United Arab Emirates had refused to let us debark from the airport since my wife was a Moroccan national without a return ticket to Morocco. Never mind that she had an onward ticket to the USA and a green card. As a result, I'd had to pay a flight change fee and we'd lost out on reservations we'd made in Dubai where we had planned on sort of processing the fact that we were emigrating to a new country and a new culture.

I'd debated moving my family to Hawaii but I wanted to see California first. I'd built a pretty good business with blogging and social media and my expectation was that as a result I would be able to land a job in tech. Silicon Valley, where my sister lived, was the place to do that.

My sister's marriage had fallen apart since she told us that we could stay as long as we needed. Now she was in a smaller apartment and going through a nasty divorce with two little kids. My brother and his family were sleeping in her little living room when we arrived. The invitation to stay for as long as we needed turned into we could stay a week. I really had no desire to go to my mom's house in Redding but my brother was going there and he insisted on giving us a ride. It was a four hour ride in a big cab pickup truck with me, my newly arrived Moroccan wife, our seven month old baby, his Filipino wife, and his three year old daughter. By the time we reached Redding, he had decided he didn't want to spend any more time with us. He dropped us at my mom's and went to stay with friends.

My mom's husband made us feel welcome - for the first day. I was trying to figure out where we were going and what we were going to do. I hadn't intended to come here at all. I had intended to stay in the Bay Area, find a job, and then come visit here. My mom wanted to get us out of the house so she put us in her truck and drove us to Lake Shasta and then twisted something in her back. I drove her home and when it didn't get better we called an ambulance.

Before we knew it she was in the hospital for days. She came close to dying. She had a surgery

that went wrong. Her husband treated us like we were at fault. We offered to stay and help - because it was obvious she would need help when she got back. He told us he didn't need help and told us we should leave. He and I came close to getting into a brawl - while my infant screamed, my culture shocked wife cried, and my paralyzed mother wept from the sofa she couldn't move from.

I got us a hotel room, we bought a car, and we left. Welcome home.

I couldn't afford to rent an apartment or hotel in San Francisco. In fact, after five years of living abroad, no rental references, and no job in a housing market that was still in the shitter from the recession - there was no one who would rent to us. We had nowhere to stay and nowhere to go.

My high school friend and his girlfriend were living in Sacramento. They were anarchists and had been squatting in a foreclosure in Arden-Arcade since it had been foreclosed. They were trying to use some fuzzy law logic to claim the house for their own because they had been continually occupying it for a few years. They paid electricity and water. They mowed the lawns. They just didn't pay the mortgage or any rent.

"Come on down," they said "We have an extra room. You can have it as long as you want."

My wife and daughter's American experience started with dysfunctional family and squatting in a foreclosure. Welcome to America. This is not MY America. Maybe I should tell you about my America.

## **My America**

My America was born in those hellish days of living in a dysfunctional and abusive family at the bottom of the trash heap in a small Oregon town. There was no escape for me. I went to the woods and taught myself wood craft. My so-called parents weren't the type to put me in the Boy Scouts. I bought the scout manuals from a used book shop and started teaching myself. I spent my days learning how to build shelters, make fires, get clean water, and trap game.

I'd always been a reader and this led me to reading outdoor adventure stories like 'Big Red' and 'My Side of the Mountain'. These were stories of boys in the wilderness using wilderness skills. These stories in turn led me to reading "Young Daniel Boone" (it wasn't until decades later that I learned Daniel Boone was my ancestor), and "Jim Bridger, Mountain Boy". Jim Bridger was the king of the mountain men. He was one of the rugged pioneers who opened up the west to settlement. That book "Jim Bridger, Mountain Boy" was part of a series 'Childhood of Famous Americans'. My school library had them all and I read them all. There were at least a hundred of them.

I built several treehouses in the woods and I would escape my hellish home and delve into the idealized childhood of all the great American heroes. Not just Jim Bridger and Daniel Boone but George Washington, Booker T. Washington, Abe Lincoln, Ben Franklin, Crispus Attucks, FDR, George Washington Carver, P.T. Barnum, Cesar Chavez, Edison, Einstein, Sitting Bull, Harriet Tubman, Buzz Aldrin, Walt Disney, Sacajawea, Alexander Graham Bell, Will Rogers, Thomas Jefferson, Henry Ford, John Adams, and Lewis and Clarke. The list of books is impressively diverse and impressively huge. As a kid, abused and alone in a log tree fort in the woods, I learned about all these other American kids and they taught me about America.

These books were about kids coming from troubled backgrounds who worked hard, used their minds and their abilities, and overcame great odds to change the world into a better place for everyone. These kids succeeded because they lived in America, because America gave them the freedom and the opportunity to change the world. They weren't trying to make themselves rich or take power - they were trying to make the world - the whole world - a better place for everyone, especially their descendants who were not yet born. They didn't do it for Americans, they did it for the world.

Such was the idealism of these children's authors as they wrote idealized stories of the childhoods of all the American heroes that it painted a picture of a world that was in constant cognitive dissonance with the reality I experienced each day.

Our house was filled to overflow with racist jokes but some of the nicest people in our town were the only black family that lived there. They brought us food when we had none. The jokes didn't stop but they stopped when they were there. Our whole society was like that. The joke that the

old white people laughed at the most was an N-word variant of "What comes before a racist joke?" and the answer was looking around to make sure it was only white people around.

It wasn't just racist jokes but sexist jokes as well. It wasn't just my beaten and abused mother who was demeaned. It was the disabled, females, the non-white, the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, the gay and lesbian, Polish, Italians, Jewish. Everyone was hated. There was even a song about hating everyone and how that was alright.

I knew it was wrong and I tried to ignore it. I got a job as a paperboy. I actually had people sick their dog on me when I came to collect the bill. I kicked the dog in the head as I pedaled my bike away. It was adults who sent the dog after me but the next day at school, I fought with their child - a boy a year older than me. I was just trying to work hard, like Ben Franklin.

I was always very conscious of the fact that I was alive because of that black lady who slapped my mom into taking action and I would never forget that kind black family feeding us while our drunken parents fought their way through town. I started to see little injustices everywhere I looked. Why was I promoted to busboy but the latino guy who had been there longer than me was kept on the dishes? Why were women treated like vaginas with bodies around them? Why were gay and effeminate boys so brutally bullied?

Why did my childhood friend live in a mansion? Why were my wealthy friends going away to expensive summer camps?

In seventh grade I was awarded a summer scholarship for a GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program at the University of Oregon in Eugene. It was my first time away from my family for any length of time. It was my first experience in a city larger than 20,000 people. It was a huge eye opener.

I saw homeless people for the first time. You don't see homeless people in the country only in cities. I was around smart kids from all over the state of every ethnic background and income bracket. It was cool to be smart for once. There was still an economic hierarchy, but over the month long program, I became part of a tight group of friends. A 2nd generation Asian kid, an effeminate black boy, a nerdy poet in coke bottle glasses, and me - the backwoods nerd. It was the first time I'd ever been around my people. We played D&D, shared science fiction, geeked out about NASA, tried to get girls to talk to us, and talked about our dreams.

They introduced me to social inequality, taught me about the homeless and why they were there, and gave me the science fiction that would lead me to understanding that our society's problems were a choice. Philip Jose Farmer, Robert Heinlein, Andre Norton, and Piers Anthony. These were the authors who took over where my idealized version of America ended. It was shortly after this experience that I left Oregon.

Back in the California mountain town I remembered so fondly, the same bigoted racism was also on display. Drug dealing bikers were more welcome than people of color - as long as the bikers were white. Latino bikers were called all kinds of racist names. We didn't see black or Asian people in our mountain town.

I became obsessed with economics and inequality. I learned that it was systemic along with racism and every other ill in our society. I still believed in that idealized America that was fighting for equality for everyone. I still believed that America was founded on beautiful principles and we just had to work hard to keep them alive. I still believed that America was a place worth fighting for. That's why it wasn't too hard for me to join the Marines. I felt like I owed it to my country.

To be honest, my country hadn't given me anything beyond government cheese in the 1980s and that GATE summer program. but I felt like I owed something. I was ready to pay for my privilege of being American. I went to Marine Corps bootcamp with a war brewing with Iraq. I was ready to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Bootcamp changed me. It changed my mind.

"Little baby rag-head sitting on the porch, napalm turned her to a screaming torch."

This was just one of the hate filled songs that were used as marching cadences while they attempted to brainwash us into killing whoever they wanted.

The idea of U.S. Marines lighting an Arab baby girl on fire has never left my mind. Another jolly ditty was about going home after bootcamp and raping your ex-girlfriend and killing the guy who she was now dating. They actually had us line up facing each other one time and then worked us up until we thought the person facing us was going to kill us unless we killed them first.

I can't say what Marine Corps bootcamp is like now, but in 1990 it was filled with all kinds of sick and twisted shit. Those who went through the brain washing and didn't resist, I'm sure they will argue with me about that - but I know what I saw, I know what I heard, I know what I did, and I know what I experienced.

I resisted. I pretended to be what they wanted so they wouldn't put me in the industrial dryer again. I pretended to become what they were building so they wouldn't have my platoon attack me again. I made myself look like exactly what they wanted - but I held onto myself and I never let them kill my soul. I began breaking rules when I could and took every excuse to shore up my resistance. I snuck into the drill instructors duty hut and tied their boot laces in knots. It was a small act of rebellion, but it allowed me to remember who I was. I refused to chant the racist and hate filled cadences. I would mouth the offensive words but refused to say them out loud.

Every small act of rebellion was a brick in the wall of defending who I am. I would not be brainwashed.

Sixteen weeks later, I graduated. I got promoted from recruit to private to Private First Class. I fooled them. I wasn't one of them. Over the next four years, I think they knew. At the very least they suspected. I pasted Greenpeace and Nature Conservancy stickers in the officer's quarters when no one was looking. I continued to rebel and as noted before, I drank far too much in an attempt at dealing with being trapped where I didn't want to be. For me, the Marines were a prison sentence. I served my time and as soon as I was able, I got the fuck out. During four

years, I had been privy to seeing what America is actually about. Black Marines didn't get promoted as quickly, didn't get as good of assignments, and generally were treated like shit. Women Marines were also treated like shit. I was one of the few white Marines I knew who would sit at the tables where black Marines ate. Generally, I liked the black guys better than the white guys, but I wasn't always welcome - after all, I was a white guy. Sadly, I took part in treating women like shit - not always, but female NCOs were never treated with the same respect as the male ones.

The biggest things I learned about America while I was in the Marines were about economics, advancement, and waste. Marines of color were less likely to be promoted, women had to work harder to be promoted and then earned less respect, if a Marine was friendly with officers and NCOs they were more likely to be promoted regardless of ability, if a Marine came from money they were more likely to be promoted, and finally, it didn't matter if you did the work as long as those above you thought you did the work. I labored quietly for two years waiting to be noticed and then I realized that only those who blew their own horn (with or without merit) were being advanced. As soon as I set about doing my own PR, I was fast to be promoted.

I'd been put in charge of a barracks of 300 Marines. I had a fixed budget. Over the course of a year, I managed to lower expenditures and save about \$25,000 of our budget. I was proud of my accomplishment. I had my ass handed to me. This was when I learned that in government and corporate budgets, if you don't use it, you lose it. There is no reward for being efficient. The captain had my men and women bring out all the wooden furniture from their barracks rooms and pile it in the courtyard. There was nothing wrong with the furniture. We burned it. It could have been donated to schools or sold for charity. We had to burn it so we would have that \$25,000 kept in our budget. This is how America works. I should have embezzled it. No one would have cared.

Fuck America.

After the Marines, I tried to go the corporate route. I tried to be an employee. I tried to live the American Dream. The American Dream is a lie. It was obvious. I published an anti-authoritarian magazine. I organized salons and protests. I protested in Seattle at the WTO in 1999. I protested in Los Angeles at the Democratic National Convention in 2000. I marched with the Anarchist Black Bloc in both cities. I volunteered with Food Not Bombs. I worked as a community organizer for ACORN and organized tenants unions in impoverished communities. I organized protests against gentrification and predatory loans. I intentionally became homeless so I could understand homelessness. I wrote a book about how the American Dream was a lie and how you could have everything you need by dropping out and living in your car. The book is called *Rough Living*.

Fuck America.

Terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center. I cried for the lives lost. I was filled with hope. I thought it was an opportunity for America to turn away from greed, war, and corporate

profits. I thought we had an opportunity to become the America that still lived in my heart. We didn't. We used it as an excuse to bomb and invade Iraq and Afghanistan even though the terrorists had all been Saudis led by an American trained Saudi who was upset that Americans had kept their bases in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War. People began waving American flags and calling for blood.

Fuck America.

I moved to Hawaii. The last state to become a part of America and culturally speaking, the least American place in America. I became hopeful. I worked hard. I learned about finance. I got a degree. I was ready to embark on the American Dream. I would get a job, buy a house, get married, have a family. American corporate greed had led American companies to embrace predatory lending, to create derivatives based on bad loans, to encourage lenders to make loans to those who couldn't afford them, to make money from when those people lost their life savings and their homes.

Fuck America.

The housing crisis of 2008 was the last straw for me. I left with no intention of returning. I carried \$50,000 of student loans I never intended to pay back. I would never come back. For five years I lived abroad, I got married, I had a daughter, I still remembered the America of my youth. It still lived in me. I wanted to believe in it. Obama was president. Things were getting better. It was 2013. I wanted my daughter to have the best possible future. I wanted to believe my family had a chance. I wanted to believe my extended family could be like those idealized families on American television. Five years away had me believing (like the rest of the world) that maybe America was what it portrayed itself to be. We emigrated to America, hopeful, like all immigrants.

We moved into the foreclosed house in Arden Arcade and became squatters. Tech company after tech company told me that I was 'overqualified' to work for them - code for I hadn't worked for a big tech company, was independent, was forty years old, and needed a salary that would support a family. They could hire interns to do the same work for free. I'd fallen for the American Dream again.

Fuck America.

My America is that imaginary place I carry in my heart and everything I see in real life is a betrayal of that place, those ideals, and all that could be good and positive in the world.

## **Squatting in America 2013**

We were living the American Dream. We'd arrived ten days earlier with the promises of family and dreams of success. Family quickly showed what it was worth and friendship came to the rescue. My friend and his girlfriend welcomed us with open arms.

It was a cute little house in a nice suburb with good neighbors and no crime. The biggest crime was that my friends had been staying there rent free since 2009 when his cousin had been foreclosed on. We worked on building a life.

I hadn't given up on finding a job in tech and took multiple trips to San Francisco to interview with startups in the Mission District. We looked at houses near where we were staying, but rents were \$2000 per month and landlords wanted first, last, and deposit equal to a month's rent. I only had \$5000 left. No one would budge. I looked for a job in Sacramento but had the same experience as the Bay Area but with lower salaries. I was given multiple offers but not one of them would cover rent, groceries, and necessities in Sacramento.

If I took a job and moved into a house, I wanted to make sure the job would cover us. None of these would. We squatted with my friends from May to July. We had been hitting estate sales to find the furnishings and things we needed. I saw an opportunity. I started selling books on Amazon, selling vintage toys on Ebay, and learning about what antiques and collectibles I could flip. In a short time I was earning a little over \$1000 a month. It wasn't much, but without having to pay rent, it was helpful.

I began buying full estates and then having garage sales from the front yard of the squat. This was even more profitable. Landlords still wouldn't rent to me without a job. They wanted to see an employer and a guaranteed salary. As if employment is a guarantee of anything but exploitation in America....

Finally, in July, I realized that my California dreams were not going to materialize. I didn't have enough money to chance moving my family to Hawaii. It looked increasingly likely that my friends were going to be evicted as the banks caught up with the mass evictions and foreclosures of 2008-2011. We would be evicted with them. I needed to find a home for my family.

I focused on the Oregon Coast and found Reedsport, Oregon when I realized that I didn't have enough or earn enough to find a house with a yard in California – at least not in any part of California I wanted to live in. I just didn't have the income or savings to rent a house in those areas and starting a business seemed unlikely given the startup costs.

Reedsport sits at the confluence of three rivers – the Umpqua, the Smith, and the Scholfield Rivers. It's on the beautiful Oregon Coast on Highways 101 and 38 on the banks of the Umpqua River – the largest river between the Sacramento and the Columbia. Located in the heart of the

Oregon Dunes National Recreational Area, Reedsport is in close proximity to seventeen large freshwater lakes and is just four miles from Winchester Bay and the Pacific Ocean. Reedsport is the home of the Umpqua Discovery Center a Natural and Cultural Interpretive Center and has a population of about 4500 people. Reedsport sits about 20-miles south of Florence and 20 miles north of Coos Bay.

Blog Post: What makes Reedsport perfect? Violent crime is zero. There are no registered sex offenders. The town sits slightly inland on the Umpqua River and is safe from tsunami, the coastal region is wet and safe from forest fires, the town is a completely undeveloped tourist mecca which has the Oregon dunes, the Oregon coast, the Smith River, the Umpqua River, and Winchester Bay all within a stone throw. Coos Bay is 20 miles south and Florence is 20 miles north. Because it is inland it doesn't have the wind you find along the rest of the Oregon coast. The climate is mild with lows in the winter around 37 degrees and highs in the summer around 80 degrees. It has good schools, good fishing, crabbing, and a health food store.

Even though it was in the same county as my childhood hell home, it was far enough to be okay. I found a nice little 3-bedroom house with a big back yard for \$675/month. It was an older house, but it was near a good grade school and in a friendly neighborhood. Reedsport was mostly a retirement community but had a health food store, a good coffee shop, and a quirky vibe that I liked. It was a fishing town with the Umpqua River going through it and a big Elk preserve nearby. The Oregon Dunes extended into it on the coast and the little village of Winchester Bay was just a couple of miles from our house. I was in love with Reedsport, to be honest. It was a little slice of heaven. I thought maybe I had found my place.

Now, to be fair - there's a lot of poverty in Reedsport. The education level is on the lower end of the spectrum. The winters are long and grey and rainy. And...people tended to be white, conservative, and a bit on the racist side - which wasn't obvious at first (the racist part) but came out the longer we stayed.

My credit was good. Between Ebay and online work - I was earning more than enough to pay the rent. The landlord looked at my application and instantly approved it "Most people around here don't have a credit score anywhere near that, " she said. I was surprised - it wasn't that good, really. Somewhere in the 700 range.

So we packed up our estate sale accumulations and moved from the squat house in Sacramento to a place with our names on the lease. My wife took a job cleaning in a hotel and I started working for Banker's Life Insurance - which didn't suit me at all. I got certified, made a little money, and then said 'fuck this'. Selling bad life insurance to senior citizens wasn't something I could do. So, instead of that, I jumped back into buying and selling as 2014 started.

## Picking America 2014-2016

*Excerpt from my journal:* It's the first day of 2014. We arrived in the USA in April of 2013 - I'd been away for several years, my wife and daughter had never been here. By the end of the year, I'd gone from 160 to 185 pounds because of a diet consisting of mostly empty carbs and sugar. My bank account went from about \$10k when we left Morocco to less than \$2000. My online work can support us here but there are some issues.

Last night, at the stroke of midnight, I kissed my wife. I opened the door thinking I might see a firework or two and was bombarded by hails of gunfire as the rednecks around us fired into the air like they were celebrating a Mexican wedding in the time of Pancho Villa. There are a lot of guns here. I don't have any guns. I don't want any guns. I've fired a lot of guns. I know what they can do. I don't want anything to do with them. The people here though, they love their guns. It's not just in redneck Oregon - it's all over America. This country is a time bomb. All those bullets have to come down somewhere and I'm thinking that I don't want them to come down on those I love.

I opened a little antique shop on the main drag in Reedsport. My rent was \$300 a month and I caught all the travelers driving down the Coastal 101 Freeway. I became a regular at all the estate and garage sales. Soon I began to run estate sales for other people, which is where the money really is. The little town paper *Coffee Talk* announced it was shutting down at the end of 2013 and I began putting together an alternative.

As soon as *Coffee Talk* sent out its last issue, I was at every advertiser they had offering a new paper. I called it the not overly creative *Reedsport.info*. I was able to create a website version and figured out how to print a weekly version, where to distribute it, and within a very short time, I was earning more from the ad revenue of my paper than I was making in my antique shop.

I needed a bigger shop and rented a big abandoned storefront in Reedsport's dying downtown. There was not much there. The only book store in town was closing down and was right across the street from me. I bought his shelves, his fixtures, his neon 'Books' sign, and everything else he hadn't sold in his closing sale. It was fire sale prices.

In my little newspaper, I was a big advocate for marijuana after Oregon legalized it. I suggested that Reedsport could enjoy a huge benefit from bringing in dispensaries and catering to weed tourists. This didn't win me any fans. I had several advertisers threaten to pull out if I continued to make jokes about 'Weedsport' - so I toned it down.

On a whim, I decided to enter politics. I ran for Umpqua Port Commissioner, a county level post. I got nearly 40% of the vote without really doing anything. It was becoming increasingly clear that my 'liberal California' ways were not loved by most of the folks in Reedsport. I was starting to enjoy this American Dream thing, however. A business in town would fail and I would scoop

up the leftovers and incorporate it into my business. A person would die and I would buy their estate and put it in my shop. I made my living from failure and death. I was living the American Dream.

My wife (thankfully) had left the hotel job and got a job as an educational assistant at the elementary school. She began the process of getting certified to work with special needs children. We managed to get her American citizenship in late 2016 – while Obama was still president. We were doing pretty good, actually. Our daughter was in kindergarten, our businesses (and her job) were earning us a nice income, a brewery had opened up across the street from my shop, and the little downtown was coming back to life. This was late 2015 and early 2016. That's when things started to get ugly.

Journal Entry: I read recently a few statistics that make me wonder what my country is doing. The distribution of wealth in the USA is worse than it was when we revolted against the English rule. There are more guns than people in the USA. And, that the rest of the world overwhelmingly views the USA as the biggest threat to world peace. These are not encouraging statistics.

And yet, there are things I like about America. The sheer volume of stuff means that I can go to a thrift store, garage sale, or estate sale and find valuable things for pennies on the dollar. I paid \$46 this weekend for stuff I sold for \$500 today. Watches, whiskey bottles, and jewelry.

I don't know what country this is. Here I am, doing what I do, and wondering where the fuck I am. This is not my America. Not my U.S.A. Not my USA. Here I am, and I don't know where the fuck I am. This place is a monstrosity of hyper-sensitivity and ultra-violence combined with a *je ne sais qua* of unsmellable being. A country lost in space that can't find it's way out of a cardboard box which can no longer be recycled due to budgetary cuts and mighty vigor. Here I am.

I got here two years and some months ago. The some months composed of mostly California and acclimatization followed by a forced march up the coast dragging my unwitting family with me - wandering Arabs in the land of milk and plenty, lost Berbers wandering through a unique Muslim hell. A 360 degree takeoff followed by a rapid ascent firmly into the middle class of a very small Oregon town. Altitude zero and two plus years gone by.

I'm thrown into a land where Smith tells me about the problems with 'the blacks' and Jones starts a conversation about the superiority of the white race while using a hammer to bang my fridge door back into place. That's not, a fucking metaphor. He was using his hammer to bash the door of the refrigerator into place – he, the highly paid appliance repairman - and, so good was he at bashing appliances into shape - that he thought it a good time to bond with me, another white man, by bashing all of the other people of the world.

I'm not sure how I would have handled it if I owned our home. Perhaps I would have done the same I did. Maybe I might have done worse. I gave no agreement - while trying not to give any condemnation. I reminded him that my wife is African and my daughter African-American. It only brought the response "She doesn't look black..."

My response felt a relief and a shame. "She's not black, she's Arab. North African."

His approval deepened my shame. The sense of relief I felt upon denying any blackness, grabbed my self respect and shoved it up my own ass. I was made complicit. It was true - my wife was not black. Our daughter is a white American girl with an Arab background. What will become of her?

This is not my America. I'm relatively certain that I don't want it to be her America either. There is something fundamentally depraved about the American psyche. Sucking in violence and horrifying news as a hobby. Light entertainment as a rape of the heart. I know that virtually every country has terrible things happen because of terrible men. I haven't found a perfect country - but the world creates new nations based on thought patterns every day. The US, however is the master of psyching the rest of the world into drinking the fucking kool-aid.

## **The American Dream Sours Again 2016**

My wife was born a Muslim. I converted, so I am a Muslim too, but I'm not a religionist on any level. She's a dark brown color. People in Oregon always thought she was Mexican.

The Trump rhetoric started on the campaign trail in early 2016. His hate talk towards Muslims and Mexicans activated people. His racist talk made people feel it was okay to be racist. I began having more and more old white men come into my shop, see that I was a small town white guy, and start saying hateful, mean, violent, and racist things about President Obama, about Muslims, and about immigrants whether they were Mexicans, African-Americans, or Jewish people.

They just assumed I was part of their club - I shut them down the best I could and generally raised the prices from where they might have been. Great thing with an antique shop is that your prices are generally set 200% above what you really want - I would only let these guys give me a large profit for the stuff they wanted. Their racism cost them.

Reedsport started to feel much less inviting. The health food store closed, the cool little quirky coffee shop closed, the book store had already closed. A marijuana dispensary opened and then quickly closed. I started to get some bizarre harassment because of a chainsaw statue I had bought and put on the street in front of my shop- it was an attempt at the famous David and the nudity offended people - even though his privates were covered with a leaf.

I became hyper-alert and anxious because I was living in a town where my wife and my child were targets because they weren't white or Christian. I didn't need to worry about my 5 year old getting harassed for saying "Allah" in kindergarten, but that time was coming. I knew what small town bullying looked like.

I watched with disbelief as Trump got more and more support. My fellow townspeople loved him! They carved chainsaw statues of him and put them up on the three roads coming into town. To me it screamed "We're racist here!" One of the guys who worked for the state highway department began driving around with a huge confederate flag flying from the back of his pickup truck.

I was an early Bernie supporter. My "Feel the Bern" signs didn't bother anyone too much though a couple of old guys felt the need to mansplain that I was supporting a 'Jew Communist' -but when Hillary got the nomination - the ugliness of 2016 really came out. "Hillary = WWII" "Lock the Bitch Up" - these were actual signs I saw people put out in their yards or bumper stickers on cars. I saw one bumper sticker in town that simply said "Cunt 2020" in the style of her campaign.

I was never a huge Hillary supporter, but of course I was going to vote for her because the

alternative (Trump) was so much worse. There were a few signs that went up supporting her. I noticed them on my drive to work one day. They made me feel good. Hopeful even. On the drive home, they had been stomped, broken, or thrown in the slough.

This happened multiple times. I was still trying to do business in this town, so I didn't put Hillary signs up in my shop - but I did start selling bumper stickers that said "Vote Neither in 2016 because WTF....NOOOOO!" I would have made a killing selling Trump hats and stickers, but I refused. I had at least twenty people come in looking for Trump gear. I made one exception. I bought an old Trump game for a dollar and started selling the Trump bucks to his supporters for \$2 each. Even on Ebay the entire game with all the money in it only sold for \$5.

The town was filled with Trump signs and Trump supporters. More and more old white people were saying things to me like "When he gets in there, the (N-word) are going to have to pay". I wanted to ask them "Pay for what?"

They said things like "He's going to lock that (N-word) Obama up". I lived it, on the ground as a white person at Trump ground zero - I know why they voted for him. People voted for Trump because they are racist and they hate people that aren't white. Period. You don't vote for a racist because he is a good business person unless you are a racist. And by the way, he's a terrible business person.

You know the story, Trump won. I had seen the dirty souls of the people around me. As fun as it was to overcharge them for their dead neighbor's possessions, I no longer felt like my family was safe. I listed my shop and my newspaper for sale and hoped that a buyer would come along in 2017. I dreamed about moving back to Hawaii and bringing my wife and daughter with me.

Journal Entry: I've gained 30 pounds since returning to the USA, a combination of unhealthy food, a sedentary lifestyle, and stress. I am a huge ball of stress in this country. As I write this - one thing is clear. I hate it here. It took a while, but I hate this city, this county, this state, and this country. I hate what it has become. I've tried to become involved, but that only makes it worse. Up close the political machine is even uglier than it is at a distance. The face of racism, ignorance, corruption, and greed.

The buyer for my shop showed up at the end of May, right around the same time our landlord informed us she was selling the house we had been renting. It was all the confirmation I needed. The garage was falling apart and needed to be condemned. It had developed a rat problem. We asked her to pay for an exterminator and tear the garage down. Instead she evicted us and said she was selling the house. I think that was illegal but I couldn't leave mainland America fast enough.

To be honest, the whole thing broke my heart. I loved that little town. I loved the location, the outdoors, and the untapped potential. I liked living in a friendly small town (before Trump). We had a lot of friends there. Our businesses were doing good. I'm not sad that I came back to Hawaii - but I'm sad that things went the way they did. The fact that a government worker was

allowed to drive around flying that confederate flag and the awful Trump statues proclaiming ignorance and racism - and making the families there who weren't white, Christian, straight, or Republican feel like they weren't welcome.

Those racist old white dudes suddenly felt like it was okay to throw the n-word around in public - all of it - it makes me sick to my stomach to think about it. This is America. This is your America. It's not my America. I want nothing to do with it. There are some great people in Reedsport. It's a cute little place with a huge potential - but as much as I loved it - it wasn't worth having my family in a situation where we were at the mercy of heavily armed bigots.

On a strange note - the David statue has been converted to a Trump statue by the new owners of my old shop.

## The American Project

*The following section is composed of journal entries from something I called 'The American Project' – it is roughly the narrative already told but in journal form. You can skip it unless you want more details.*

### **April 13, 2013**

I'm considering a new direction and project in my life and work. I've never been keen on the American dream or being American (aside from the passport) - but as I get ready to come home and bring my immigrant family with me - I realize, maybe I never gave the USA the chance it deserves. I've never taken the time to indulge in watching spectator sports or being a team fan. I've never tried to climb the career ladder, I've never indulged in great American past times...

When it comes down to it...I'm as much a foreigner to America as my wife who has never been there yet. Especially since I've been away these past 4 + years while technology and social conventions have totally changed the face of a country that I knew in passing to a country I feel like I don't know at all.

My perspective is incredibly fresh. I know little to nothing about America or being American. To be completely fair, I left America when I left the mainland back in 2001. Hawaii has never been and will never be like the rest of America. No professional sports teams, not the same patriotic fervor, not the same vibe. So, in reality, I've been away from America for more than 12 years (with a couple of visits in the first 8 years I was away).

I don't know if this would be of interest to anyone - but it seems like an opportunity for me, my Arab wife, and our 19 month old baby to discover the America that we've never known. To write and blog about it. To learn things from real Americans. To dive into everything I've spent my life avoiding...football, college basketball, rodeos, pilates, marriage counseling, shrinks, TV dinners, office politics, watercooler chat, sitcoms, Applebys, gun culture, pop stars, and all the things that I can't think of and don't know about America.

This is an opportunity to share the real America with the world. Real Americans are probably laughing at my list but that should give you a clue to how clueless I really am about my own country. Imagine how clueless the rest of the world is? I've met a lot of people all over the world and been astounded at the ideas they have about my country...who knows? Maybe they are right and I'm the clueless one (I am for sure but I suspect that they may also be mistaken.

### **May 3, 2013**

It's only been two weeks since I arrived back into the USA, bringing with me 9 bags, an Arab wife who has never been here, and a 20 month old daughter who is also fresh off the boat. The visa

process, as I wrote about previously in my book *Smooth Living* and via social media was a year long process of forms, griping, and headaches - but we made it through that. I bought our flights through Emirates airlines and we flew from Casablanca to Dubai and then after 7 hours in the beautiful and mall-like Dubai International Airport - we flew the long haul from Dubai to San Francisco, California. At this point, it might make sense to share a couple of my Social Media updates:

Tired.— at Dubai International Airport (DXB). (April 17, 2013)

#microvictory Flew over the North pole, saw the tallest building in the world, and brought my family to the USA. It's been a hell of a day. (April 18, 2013)

Back in the USA after a long time away....we freaking fucking made it. Hell yeah..now...not sure what. (April 18, 2013)

And so, my more than four years all around the world and my round the world trip of epic proportions came to a close.

We have a hotel to decompress and get over jetlag the first two nights. I fell in love with San Mateo, the peninsula, and Coyote Point while we tried to adjust to the time schedule. My brother was in San Francisco visiting my sister and so we had a mini-family reunion where, for the first time, our kids (with the exception of my brother's three eldest) all mingled. It was a child fest as four little kids ran around and went nuts playing while we ate bacon and eggs for dinner. Bacon, was one of the things I missed most along with maple syrup and so my sister thoughtfully decided to make our dinner a breakfast instead. My brother had waited for us so he could offer a ride up to Redding where my mom and her husband live - I hadn't intended to leave the Bay Area so soon but there was some pressure and I didn't want to fight, so after just two short days - we piled in his big truck and drove three hours North. We would visit then move forward to finding a job and creating our American life. They told us we were welcome for as long as we wanted and so my plan was to catch up on my work, arrange some interviews in the Bay Area, find a car with the approval of her husband, and finally to head back down and find a house. Three days seemed like it would be plenty. I told my wife to leave most of our nine bags at my sister's since I figured it would be a short stay anyway.

My mom's husband was pretty patient as his normally quiet house and kingdom were filled with kids and grandkids. During those three days, it wasn't very possible to get anything done. The women folk were visiting and I was searching through used cars on Craigslist and realizing that everything in the USA, especially cars in California had become much more expensive than when I left. I'd thought I could find a beater that would run well for \$1000. For \$1000 there were often not tires or running engines included. I began looking in the \$1500 range - it wasn't much better. My mom had been buying baby things for us and she loaded us up with a playpen, high

chair, toys, stroller, the works. She and my wife were hitting thrift stores and by the time my brother left Redding, we had more stuff than we had left at my sister's and it felt like we had more than we had in our house in Morocco. My mom had hurt her back several months before and went to daily physical therapy sessions. I'd forgotten that without a car, you can't do much in America. I walked six miles to a Best Buy because there was no bus and no taxis that I could find and saw only two other walkers on the way...both homeless. My laptop had broken somewhere between SF and Redding so I needed a new one...turned out Best Buy didn't have what I was looking for so I ordered a Chromebook from Google and had it delivered. Fuck yeah. Online shopping and the USPS. Awesome. You don't get that in Morocco. Two days later it was in my hands. Getting sim cards for our phones wasn't as simple as it is everywhere else in the world, but I managed to get us a couple of T-Mobile prepaid phones and one of the sim cards worked in my GSM smartphone, though Hanane's was locked. Finally, on Friday, after 5 days in Redding, I had the chance to go look at used cars. I'd found a couple that seemed like they might work, a 95 BMW and a 72 VW Bus.

My mom had the time to drive me out to the boondocks to look at them. I needed a car. I was going crazy in Redding and feeling like a prisoner in my mom's house. The BMW was \$2000 and the VW was \$2600. The advantage of the bus was it was a VW bus, it ran well, I could work on it, and being older it was exempt from California's smog laws. My stepdad hadn't taken any time off work so he wouldn't be able to look at a car until Sunday and at that point, who knew what would happen, I needed to just do things on my own. The BMW had a broken (cracked) front windshield the owner said he would fix for \$130. I checked out both cars, test drove them both, and decided that the BMW was the safer car for my family. I offered him \$1500 and he took it. Next began the process of getting the car smogged, getting insurance, and changing the registration and ownership - nightmare. It didn't pass the first smog test \$30. I took it for a little tune-up \$100. I bought some maintenance items \$30. I took it back to the guy to get the window fixed \$130. I took it back to the smog and it failed again \$30. I took it to a mechanic who told me it would pass after changing the o2 sensor \$290. I took it to the smog shop - another fail \$30. I did a little bit of complaining and finally it passed \$30. I changed the registration \$202. I got insurance \$143. And suddenly, there it was, a high mileage but legal and well running car for a grand total of right around \$2300. That's what it costs to get a car that is safe, runs, and looks halfway decent in California. About the same as flying three people halfway around the world. Airfare, visa, car - and our savings is looking very very battered. I need to find a job.

Then, on the edge of being victorious. My mom's back had big problems. A social media update might express this best:

In the past 24 hours I saw the American Healthcare System in action. Holy shit...completely fucked up, and yet, great medicine. My mom had to have emergency back surgery. The surgery went well and she is recovering well... but to get to the surgery required an ambulance where the paramedic was scared to touch her and made her move from her bed to the gurney without his help (presumably because of lawsuit fears), the ambulance dropped her off at the emergency room where they put her in a

fucking chair (with a major spine injury!) for 13 hours while she waited to be seen by a nurse, a doctor, or an anesthesiologist...one nurse came and guided her in breathing but for the most part they ignored her as she moaned and groaned and cried in pain. Finally when she began vomiting from the pain, they gave her some drugs and then she had to wait another 6 hours for an MRI because the MRI machine broke so they had to take her to another hospital...after that the neurosurgeon came and from then on, everything was incredible...top notch treatment, care, surgery, and, inchallah, recovery. The problem was the nearly 24 hours between emergency call and treatment and the careless disregard which she and everyone else in the emergency room were treated with...like Leonard Cohen said, America, the cradle of the best and of the worst...(April 27, 2013)

This was the same period I was having the smog issues with the car.

I see that the healthcare sucks, that public transportation outside of major metropolitan areas sucks, and that as a result Americans are forced to buy expensive cars and subsidize the auto and health insurance industries as well as the oil industry through being wage slaves to support their auto, transportation, health, and insurance costs - that the need to work all the time makes people eat less healthy foods thus increasing health issues, and that in general when I take a walk, the only people I encounter walking are either homeless, mentally ill, or on drugs. I've only been back ten days and already someone I know from high school was shot, my mother had to sit 13 hours in agonizing pain in the emergency room, and I've had to shell out about 1/3 of my savings to get a shitty car, make it pass inspection, and insure it...Wow. God bless America.... (April 30, 2013)

Two major surgeries later and a stint in the ICU and mom is recovering. Not the homecoming we expected but we were willing to stay and help out with chores, cooking, and other stuff- we figured out though that her husband just needed his house to decompress from the trials and efforts of taking care of my mom. Poor guy has a daunting task ahead of him. Mom's recovery will be years with at least six months before she can walk again. With the car ready and mom stable, we decided to give him some breathing room and came down to Sacramento, where, as luck would have it, friends needed a house/cat sitter. And now, two weeks on, here we are with friends, with car, with place to stay, and with America ahead of us.

### **May 28, 2013**

It's been a month since we arrived in the USA - we haven't seen a lot of the country, but we have seen a lot. We saw a bank robbery in Millbrae, California when we went to go meet my friend for dinner. Officers had the Bank of America surrounded and were using AR-15s and drawn handguns as curious onlookers took pictures with cellphones - and yet, no mention of it on the news. It was real, there were no film crews and those were real cops with real concerns -

but there it is. We went to Folsom, California and my daughter and I caught a case of the Folsom Prison Blues, while the wife scoured through antique shops looking for Moroccan tea glasses. No luck on her part. As I wrote before, we got to experience the emergency room, an ambulance and surgery when my mom's back injury took a sudden bad turn. I'm glad to report that she's recovering from two surgeries and doing much better. In fact, we've only done a small triangle in Northern California thus far. We arrived in San Francisco, stayed in San Mateo where we loved the park and little museum at Coyote Point. Then we went to Redding to stay with my mom. From there we came to Sacramento where my friends are fighting the legal system to try to keep their house from being stolen- technically, the bank considers them squatters - we've been house sitting for them for two weeks now while they travel in the Southwest. So we've been house-sitting a very nice squat. While here, we've explored the American River, old town Sacramento, and checked out the history of California at the Sacramento History Museum and the California Museum of History. We've strolled through the grounds of the State Capital and I've introduced my wife to American Car Culture. We've gone to a drive in movie, gone through fast food drive thrus, and even tried to buy calamine lotion at the pharmacy drive through. We've also driven all over looking at thrift shops, dollar stores, and garage sales.

Last weekend we went to San Francisco and visited the California Academy of Sciences with my sister and her kids - my wife had never seen a dinosaur of any kind before so the bones/model was astounding to her. She asked if they have dinosaurs in the zoo - which I found completely awesome because since her studies were focused on English in Morocco, she never studied zoology - it's one reason I've brought my daughter to the USA - say what you will about the schools here - they are better than most in the world albeit certainly not the best the world has to offer. While we've been in the USA, I've been perpetually on the computer looking for work, finding a car, earning what money I can from my own business. This has yielded a handful of interviews and may bring a job - but until it does, I'm hesitant to rent a house anywhere because I want to keep my options open - rent in the Bay Area is freaking steep - first, last, and deposit will kill our savings (because I just spent the rest paying visa fees, flying my family from the other side of the world, and buying a car and making it all legal) and without a job to follow up on that - life could get fairly terrible fairly quick. It's astounding how fast the money flies out even without rent...gas and food aren't cheap. Still, we're making it. So far, so good. Next for the job and the house....resting time is almost up. If the right job doesn't happen in the Bay Area, I'll take us up the coast to Seattle and Bellingham and then onward to Hawaii- at worst, we can live on the beach and fish all night. It's better than blowing my wad on an expensive house that I may not be able to pay rent on in two months time. That's my thinking anyway.

### **June 30, 2013**

We've been back in the USA for a little over three months now, though it seems like it has been longer - while there is good and bad to be had in America, one thing is for sure. This American Life can be difficult. For us, it's been pretty easy thus far - far easier than it is for immigrants who

come here with nothing. Sacramento, California is filled with immigrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, China, Mexico, the Philippines and elsewhere in the world and we've met many of them and shared stories of life here.

Most of them, we've met at the two garage sales we've had since we got here or at garage sales where they were either selling or shopping. Hanane has also befriended an Afghan family at a free lunch program for kids that is held at a nearby park. Like I said, for us, it is relatively easy since we both speak English fluently, I have friends and family who are supportive and helpful, and I at least, literally wrote the book about how to survive in the USA without a job - so I have a good understanding of how to maximize my resources, earn money through hustle, and leverage good deals through eBay, craigslist, used book stores, and garage sales.

Our income since we got here has been about 1/3 from my writing and web development, 1/3 from ad renewals on Vagobond.com, and 1/3 from garage sales, ebay, junk, and craigslist. We are extremely fortunate in that I've created a lifestyle where we can earn money no matter where we are so long as we have an internet connection. Even so, we have burned through 3/4 of our savings and still don't have a house of our own. We have been staying with our friends in Sacramento but that time is coming to an end very soon. I'll explain that in a second.

As I mentioned, we have had two garage sales since getting here - primarily from a huge garage sale I bought the remnants of for a hundred dollars but also from picking things up from the free listings on craigslist, bargain hunting at Goodwill, other thrift stores, and garage sales, and always being willing to take what other's don't want. Even with the two garage sales we still have a truck load of possessions now and our daughter has great educational toys, clothes, and all she needs. We have the best bed I've ever owned, beautiful oriental carpets, and plenty of hobby items and decorative stuff. And...it's time to move on.

The Afghans are living three families to a small apartment here, don't speak English, and can't find work. They push their kids around in a grocery cart because they don't have a stroller. We've given them a lot of kids clothes, toys, and baby things and Hanane has tried to explain about garage sales, thrift stores, and the free section of craigslist but they don't speak Arabic or English and she doesn't speak Farsi - for them, life is much harder. The Iraqi's seem to be faring better as they gather at the Arab American Learning Center and all seem to have cars and a bit of money - some left Iraq with money but left behind property and family, many of them have suffered huge losses. In every case, they have been extraordinarily kind. We gave an Iraqi family all of the leftovers from our last garage sale rather than take it to Goodwill and they told us that they were going to distribute it to new immigrant families who are arriving here.

Sacramento is cheaper than the Bay Area but it's difficult to find a two bedroom house for less than \$1200 a month and landlords want first, last, and deposit. Apartments run from \$500 up but the neighborhoods and conditions tend to be pretty rough. We could easily do that, but when I started considering life here, I realized that we're in a medium city that is far too hot and far from the ocean or forests. While there is some culture here in the form of museums and theatre - I would much prefer to have beach access, hiking trails, and lush forests. I'd rather live in a small

town and have nice trips to other places than live in this big city and have no money left over to spend. I've always loved the Oregon Coast and so after a trip there to confirm that Hanane too enjoyed it - we've decided to move there. My writing and online income can easily pay our rent and expenses. I will have more time, energy, and focus to spend on new projects and enjoying life (not to mention more money because the rents where we are looking are significantly lower than in California).

I bought a jeep, had a tow hitch put on it, and we've started packing our stuff. In a few days, we'll go celebrate Sophia's 2nd birthday with my mom and I'll do a little work over the weekend and then I'll take a quick solo trip up to Oregon to rent a place for us. After that, it will be time to pack up the family and move to our real American life. I can't wait to go crabbing and I've always wanted to learn to fly fish - I'm heading towards the life I've always wanted - that of a Renaissance Redneck. I just hope my wife can get into food preservation, gardening, and home crafts...but we will see.

### **July 12, 2013**

Despite my intention to come to the USA and grab a job with some start up that wanted to use my editing, management, and/or SEO/SEM/SMM expertise to jump to the next level - what I've found in the USA is something all together different. Companies aren't interested in hiring a 41 year old guy who has been running his own small business from all over the world for the previous five years -

What they are looking for is 28 -30 year old professionals who have been working for Fortune 500 companies since graduation and who offer a working pedigree that can be touted on a website About Page. There is just no way I can fit that. I managed to get a handful of interviews in my first month back in the USA but all of them sort of ended with the same "We are impressed by what you have been doing, but we're not sure that an entry level position would work for you" - and, needless to say, none of them are offering me executive positions. The highest offer so far was a hotel in Vallejo which offered me a position as GM but it only paid \$2000 per month - not enough to take care of a family in the bay area - so I passed.

Housing has been almost as difficult. It turns out that landlords now aren't happy with cash up front. They want to see proof that you can deliver 3x the rent amount every month. Uh, hello, I just moved my family from literally the other side of the globe and I've been taking just fine care of us and putting us up in four and five star hotels for years - but sorry, I don't have a steady gig at McDonalds. Yeah, go fuck yourself - especially the guy that asked me to pay first, last and deposit of \$2000 each and still wanted to consider my credit report and see where my income came from - he wasn't as bad as the guy who said "Hey, you do web development? I've got a great domain (it wasn't) - why don't you do all the work and we will get rich together?" Yeah, no thanks. I've got better domains than that you jackass - you should have offered me free rent instead of moving a bunch of hillbillies in two days later (no offense hillbillies).

I'm still earning enough to get by and part of that comes from the fat stream of junk-milk that squirts out of America's bloated tits. There is so much stuff here that one can't help but be satiated by the stream. Garage sales, estate sales, thrift stores, yard sales, the bins, free stuff on craigslist - you name it. We are living on the throw aways of the world here. I've been pimping myself out as a garage sale savior and so far have turned several sales into success where they might have given away the farm if I hadn't of spoken up.

As I write, my wife and our room mates have just come back from a garage where the lady was giving away 25 pound bags of rice, canned goods, frying pans, pyrex, and so much more. We've filled our housemate's garage to the brim with free stuff and more keeps coming. We are selling it on eBay, having garage sales, and trading/selling stuff on craigslist. It's astounding. We are very lucky to have a place to live and keep all the copious amounts of stuff this bloated tit is feeding us.

### **August 8, 2013**

I know pickers. Man, I know a lot of pickers. I know glass pickers, gun pickers, fishing pickers, fish pickers, antique pickers, advertising pickers, and toy pickers. I know nose pickers, too. No se pickers? I know pickers. I read about the economy of the USA and how jobs have increased but those jobs are mostly part time or less than average pay at a time when prices are higher than ever for gas, food, rent, and homes. All of that has led to a huge number of people turning to non-traditional ways to make money - among them, working online with blogs, websites, and online business along with pickers doing some serious picking.

I've been helping friends with garage sales and holding a few garage sales of our own as we get ready to move and I can tell you that the first twenty people to any garage sale are pickers that are either wheeling and dealing on their own, own a shop, or sell the stuff on eBay. As a matter of fact, most of the rest of the people who hit garage sales are selling on eBay, Amazon, or Craigslist too. While almost all of them complain about the rising cost of things at g-sales, due to g-salers using eBay to look up prices, I would say that there has probably never been a better time to be a picker.

The reason? Baby boomers were hoarders of the cool stuff their parents left them and they are dropping off like flies now. In addition, those boomers whose parent's still were alive, are mostly dying right now too. It's sad, for everyone - everyone except the pickers who are loving it. On the table are vintage antiques from the 1890s to the 1940s plus tons of the ultra-hot mid-century modern furniture, modern Danish furniture, and incredible mid-century glass, ceramics, and decorative items.

Ebay and shows like American Pickers, Pawn Stars, and Storage Wars may have encouraged millions of out of work Americans to join the picker force thus making the picking more competitive and educated sellers about what they have so they don't give it away, but is that very terrible? Not really. The reason is that the internet and those shows have also made

millions more collectors and the education of sellers is a good thing - unless you think it's cool to pay struggling families low dollar values for high-end items. Personally, I don't think that's cool at all. I've always tried to be fair when I buy stuff. Don't get me wrong, I don't say - "Hey, I think I can sell this for \$100 so maybe you should charge me more..." but I do say "Hey, this thing might be valuable - are you sure you want to sell it for a dollar?" and a couple of times "Hey, don't sell this before you check it out." It was painful a few times..I found a signed Hawaiian Ukulele from the 1920s that was for sale for \$100 and insisted that the owners check it out - It was worth nearly \$12,000! I really wanted that Uke, but I couldn't afford the higher price...still, I don't think I could have afforded the bad karma from knowing I was stealing it either.

Still, I have ended up with some amazing bargains. Most of the time, people just want cash in hand and since there are so many pickers and collectors out there now - there is a market for just about anything cool you might buy. I bought a monkey wrench for \$8 yesterday at a thrift store (by the way, no need to tell thrift stores that something is valuable) - it's selling online for nearly \$100 - but I'm not worried if I don't sell it - it's a working monkey wrench! I love that...btw...never mind Old McDonald sitting on a fence - I've washed it..

Anyway, it's a picker, collector, and seller heaven right now - which is funny, because aside from that, nobody seems to have any money at all.

### **August 31, 2013**

I've moved my family from North Africa to Turkey back to North Africa to California and now to Reedsport, Oregon. From here, I'm not planning on moving my family again. Sure, life in the USA isn't as great as it once was, the days of children having more opportunity than their parents have never existed for me, but I hope they will exist for my daughter.

We have a nice life here. I've rented us a pretty house with a pretty yard, a nice garage, plenty of space in a nice neighborhood. Somehow, we've filled our little house up with nice things that make us comfortable and happy. We have everything we need - luckily, neither Hanane nor I need to have a lot of friends around all the time. She is happy to talk to her family and friends on Skype when she isn't working and I'm happy to have the chance to hang out with Sophia, cruise around exploring the area, and once in a while to have an interesting conversation at a shop or a garage sale.

It's nice that we have friends that will come visit and it's nice that we live in a beautiful place where people will want to come visit. I am staggered by the beauty of this place. Equally amazing is the fact that this is a dying town - there are 4000 people in Reedsport and most of them are senior citizens who live in RVs and come for the good weather and leave with the bad. There are a dozen mediocre restaurants and dozens of empty shops and storefronts both in the old downtown and in the new. This town lived on timber and mills and those days are gone. There is no industry here.

But there should be - I've been all over the world and there are few places that have floored me the way this area has. Twenty miles south is Coos Bay and North Bend with cute little downtown shops, a nice bay, and many of the same problems we face here, but with a more diverse population. Twenty miles north is Florence where the snowbirds have built RV colonies like Florentine Estates where every house has an RV barn. Both are good sized towns with healthy tourist industries. In between are Reedsport, Gardiner, and Winchester Bay and forty miles of the most scenic lakes and forest of the Oregon coast along with the Smith River, the Umpqua River, the Siuslaw River and streams and ponds beyond mention. Tahkenitch Lake, Ten-Mile Lake, Siltcoos Lake, Woahink Lake, Clear Lake, Eel Lake, Saunders Lake, Beal Lake, Snag Lake, Spirit Lake, Horsefall Lake, Bluebill Lake, Three mile lake, Elbow Lake - and just in case you forgot - Unger Bay, Winchester Bay, Umpqua Beach, the Oregon Dunes. Yeah, the Oregon dunes - the largest expanse of coastal sand dunes in the North America. Frank Herbert was inspired to write Dune by being here!

This is my backyard! And it's populated by pensioners and retirees. I am literally in the vacation wonderland of the Pacific Coast - sure - this isn't a winter sports or surf mecca - but it is a fishing, hunting, motorcycling, hiking, bird watching elk watching, canoeing, kayaking, horse back riding (Dean Creek has two of the largest Elk Herds on the west coast and viewing areas where you can watch them year round). It's not unusual for me to see elk, seals, salmon, crabs, deer, or countless birds every day.

The down side is that the garage sales here are definitely not as good as in San Francisco or Sacramento - the retirees live in RVs and have mostly already gotten rid of the junk I like to find and sell and in a rural place - people tend to value their junk a bit higher - but, that's a small price to pay. The truth is I amassed a nice horde in California that it will probably take me a while to sell anyway. And besides, if I'm going to do this for a living - it's more fun to go on missions to different places for great sales and rare finds anyway.

So, that's the reason why there is no one here but me, my family, the retirees, and a few people I haven't met or figured out yet. No jobs, no industry. But, the schools are good but small without crowded classrooms, the people are friendly, the crime is almost non-existent, and I'm loving it. My goal though - is to become the tourist bureau for Reedsport. Hell, maybe if I succeed at that, I'll even become the mayor. To start all that out, I've bought a couple of domains for Reedsport, Oregon- coming soon.

### **November 20, 2013**

Well - here we are - still alive and struggling. The USA has been incredibly hard at times, it has forced us to make difficult decisions, it has, frankly speaking, been a disappointment to both my wife and probably more so, to me.

To illustrate this - I should probably tell you where I am. I'm in Portland, Oregon sitting in a hotel room I'm sharing with a stranger - both of us are here for training on how to sell life insurance.

This is not where I wanted to be!

The United States is like that though - it smothers your dreams and forces you to become someone else so that you can take care of your family. The combination of my student loans and our forthcoming mandatory family health insurance means that my income from writing and blogging can no longer sustain us. We moved to one of the cheaper places I could find, but even so our monthly needs are barely covered by what I earn - and that's before health insurance and student loans. The past few months, I've been earning an additional \$1200 or so buying from estate sales, garage sales, and thrift shops and then reselling on eBay - but \$1200 seems to be about the top I can hit with that. Inexplicably, the fees seem to go up exponentially with whatever I earn above that so that I end up with \$1200 no matter how much I sell.

The buying and selling has gotten harder too. The dreary economic situation of the majority of people (but hey, the DOW JONES just hit record highs --- yeah, whatever) means that there are more pickers, more sellers, and less buyers on eBay than ever before. Shows like Pawn Stars and American Pickers and Storage Wars have led people to overvalue their junk so that when you do actually find something you can sell - it's usually priced too high for you to earn more than a few dollars on it.

Food is so god-damn expensive that it's made my wife cry more than once. I was spending the days watching our 2-year-old while my wife took a job at a local motel. I loved the time with Sophia but my earning potential was floored and what my wife was earning wasn't even close to what I was no longer earning - and she was stressed out, and our relationship hit an all time low, and her job really really sucked...and I didn't want to force her to quit but wanted her to see that her job was actually costing us money, destroying our relationship, and stealing the joy from all three of our lives...

We had a total melt down before that became clear - but thankfully, we both saw that what we were doing totally sucked. At one point, it hit me that the only way to make her see the effects was for me to find a real job - something I have worked my whole life to be free of - so, I took three steps backwards and hitched my wagon to a Life Insurance Company - which isn't so different from back a decade ago when I was a stock broker in Portland. I took the courses, passed my exams, got my license, and here I am - waiting for the final bits before making my millions as a small town life insurance agent. Yeah, right.

During that process, my wife realized she was missing out on our little girl's life and her job was making her miserable - she saw the effects it was having on my ability to work at home and how it was badly affecting our marriage - and thank god - she left that awful place of her own volition with a new understanding of why I've always worked so hard to be independent.

By that point though I was already in this process and realizing that the health insurance and student loans were looming in January and my writing and eBay wouldn't sustain them and us...so, I've stayed the course. The good news is that we weathered our problems and emerged from the other side of the storm with a stronger marriage and a greater understanding of each

other. For the first time, I feel like my wife actually gets what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. Even when she's mad, I'm no longer 'the craziest American' or 'the most difficult American' - she's seen much worse now - god, I hate what she had to see at that hotel...she gets it now. She understands why I was freaked out about money before we left Morocco and why I never wanted to be tied down to a job, and maybe even why I left America and didn't want to come back. That, if nothing else has made our move to America worthwhile...at the moment, I feel like we have room for our marriage to grow.

But, like everyone else in the USA - money is now a big concern. The states have burned through our savings and at the moment we are living month to month. Life insurance pays on commission with no base salary - so while I'm training - we have to live on what I can squeeze from eBay and blogging.

Just in case you missed them....here are a few status updates that might fill in some of the holes:

Just spent a while reading the reviews that have piled up this year while I've been putting our life together in the USA - it's an interesting experience to see how the world views you. Equally loved and despised from my written words but at the end of the day - probably not at all the way that either side thinks I might be. Although - maybe I'm every bit as despicable and great as both sides seem to indicate - more likely though - I'm just another regular guy doing what he can to take care of the people who count on me and hoping to have a good time doing it.

I've failed so far as a novelist and writer. Oh well, not the end of the world. I've written books, they weren't as good as I'd hoped, and now - it's time to do something else. I'm sure I'll write more in the future - but I'm done identifying myself as a writer. Sometimes you have to tell yourself the truth because it's not fair to expect other people who love and respect you to do that.

I have the sense that I'm no longer a writer. I'm no longer a traveler. I'm no longer a free spirit of any kind. I'm no longer a drunk. I'm no longer manic and no longer depressed. I'm no longer a stranger.

I'm just a guy with a license to sell insurance, a wife, and a little girl. I'm a guy with more bills than savings. I'm a guy with no more dreams of seeing the world or finding what I was missing. I don't want to be famous. I don't want to be loved or admired by strangers. I don't want fans. I don't want escape from reality.

I only want to keep the roof over our heads, fix the car, pay for health insurance, buy some ice cream, and help my little girl to be the best her she can be.

And, once that's done, I wouldn't mind moving to a villa on the Turkish Riviera or some Greek vineyard and becoming a better sailor.

I bought a food dehydrator and dried a huge bunch of apples and pears from the neighbors trees. Now I'm drying my first batch of beef jerky. My first batch of home brew beer was bottled on Friday and should be ready to sample in a couple of weeks.

Since I'm selling life insurance now, my regular name Christopher Damitio is what pops up on the contracts - so it just doesn't make sense to insist on Vago when it's so confusing to people. Besides, Christopher is pretty nice.

An old woman at the post office today was complaining about the USPS issuing Al Quida stamps - actually they were Eid stamps - she said "They're supposed to commemorate American events and achievements" - I wanted to remind her that millions of Americans are Muslims and to ask her if she thought creating stamps commemorating the carpet bombing of Tokyo or Laos would be good, or maybe the bombed and dead civilians in Serbia, Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere. Maybe a stamp celebrating the international arms industry or the exploitation of mineral rich lands...

Then, I swallowed all my bile and smiled. She just kept complaining and talking about how they should celebrate American holidays like Christmas and Easter and I thought about how I wished someone would toss her in a barn and shut the door, crucify her, and then bury her in a cave...actually though - judging by what I hear from most people her age - they are all miserable and the only thing they have to look forward to is dying and knowing they've left nothing for their 'rotten' kids. Wow....imagine if heaven is filled with her kind....

In the USA there is an undercurrent of dread which is very hard not to tap into and start feeling. It is the reason for the unlikely strength of the prepper, bugout, and survivalist movements. Even those you wouldn't expect it of are storing food and carrying survival kits in their vehicles. Worse - it's not actually a feeling of dread as a feeling of excitement and anticipation. A desire for something truly terrible to happen...Nobody says this, but America is collectively manifesting and creating something truly terrible and worse - and people won't tell you this because they don't know it or want to believe it - but people are looking forward to it. They are preparing for it, dreaming of it, and subconsciously, we all know that somewhere in some basement, laboratory, or compound - someone is engineering it. People want it! There is this sickness here in the land where people have more than anywhere

else...when disaster strikes in the USA, people might wear somber faces, but inwardly they will want to be dancing in the streets....it scares the living shit out of me.

I can see why the sidhus would split and go hide on mountaintops to avoid being tempted back into this world of illusion. The tax man, the insurance bill, the visa process, the courts, the water bill, the big tata blonde, the car accident, the hospital bills, the x factor, the latest superhero film, the latest health diet, the bad relationship with parents, the feud between siblings or friends, the loud neighbors - etc etc etc - All of that pulls us away from God, pulls us away from joy, pulls us away from the spiritual life that we all want. My leaving the USA was an attempt to get away from the distractions of this world, going to Hawaii was the same, but the distractions are necessary - we must learn to be centered and loving WITH all of the distractions because that is what this life is. I sometimes feel RAGE at being consumed by the petty day to day illusions that I am forced to contend with - sometimes it turns to DESPAIR, and usually after that - I find myself here - in a moment of CLARITY.

Perhaps Vago was a good name for me these past few years , unclear, unfocused, and unable to define myself or my purpose. I won't be changing my name again, but if I were to do so, I would probably pick Claro, because that is what I want - to see clearly and with purpose. My love and thanks go out to all the friends who have offered support, love, and compassion through these years. My love and understanding go out to those who are stuck in the illusions (as I so often am). We are all on this journey together. May God (whatever name you choose to use for that universal force) help us all and give us clarity, serenity, strength, and wisdom.

Finally bought a scale yesterday - I've gained around 25 pounds since coming to the USA, for the British friends - that means I've increased my weight by nearly 2 stone... time to get on a healthier diet and regular exercise regimen! I'm amazed my clothes still fit me...it must have all gone to my face...lol.

#### **April 17, 2014**

Hard to believe but it's already been a year since I brought my family to the United States. I wasn't sure we would make it but a year seems like a pretty good indicator that we are and will.

Of course, it's been a struggle - but we're making it. *Major Ab Adversis* - through struggle comes strength. My work with travel blogs has mostly carried us - by the time we were set up in a house and went through the expenses of moving, buying a car, paying utility deposits, and finding where to live - our savings was pretty well exhausted. Through a combination of picking, garage sales, eBay, and selling advertisements on travel blogs - we've made it. We've managed to pay all of our bills on time (or in the case of student loans, defer one more time) and

somehow we navigated through Obamacare and got the three of us covered with health insurance.

We didn't make it in California's Bay Area - which was what my initial plan was. A weird combination of circumstances skewed that and put us in Sacramento for a few months while I tried to arrange interviews and land a start up job in travel and social media - unsuccessfully. Even when we considered staying in Sacramento, I found that since we'd been living outside of the USA and we were living on a self-employed income that landlords were unwilling to rent to us without paying an impossible deposit and first and last.

I knew we had to leave and go where the income I was certain I could earn, would pay for a decent place for us to live. We could have gotten a low income apartment in California but I've never wanted my family to live in that kind of situation - so I found a dying town on the Oregon coast where rents were dirt cheap and the quality of life was much higher. For the same amount a scummy California apartment would have cost us - I rented a 3 bedroom house with a big front and back yard and a leaky garage.

Reedsport is a dying town filled with geriatrics and people on disability. There is no industry here and more than 3/4 of the jobs that were here when we arrived have disappeared - but we're making it. Our little family has a nice garden, a pleasant house, and a wonderful environment all around us including the Pacific Ocean, four major rivers, dozens of lakes, plenty of streams, and beautiful forests and sand dunes. Environmentally it's heaven. Culturally - it's not even on the map.

For the past few years, my main income stream has been advertising on my websites and doing SEO for small clients. Changes in Google policies and updates have been drying that stream up and the writing is definitely on the wall as to whether or not it will survive at all - so we have diversified - I've discovered that I can usually support us using eBay and we've begun experimenting with antique malls and the flea market. We are now vendors in two locations and have a permanent table at the flea market - only time will tell if that works for us or not.

I was planning on having a garage sale today, but the weather turned grey and rainy - so I ditched the plan. Maybe tomorrow - Oregon is like that. Twelve days of sunshine while you expect it to rain but when you count on sunshine the rain comes - if the garage weren't so leaky, I would have the sale anyway, but we aren't starving and the bills are paid - so it can wait.

We've tried a few other jobs. My wife worked at a hotel as a cleaner for a few months and that wasn't good at all. The pay was almost as awful as the work and she was repeatedly solicited for sex by weirdos traveling through. I took my insurance license and tried my hand at selling life insurance but the company was such a crock of shit filled with liars and cheats that I couldn't look at myself in the mirror - and the money was a lie - at least here on the Oregon Coast - maybe it would be a good job in a big city somewhere or anywhere that people have more than the bare minimum they need to survive.

The highlight of our year here has been to reconnect with old friends and family. Being able to

see my daughter and wife with my mom, my aunt, my uncle, my sister, my cousins, my brother, and my nieces and nephews has been awesome. Seeing those relationships grow has been so good.

One would think that my wife would have learned crafts like knitting and sewing in her native Morocco but it turns out that instead, being in boring Reedsport has given her the time and impetus to learn many new crafts. I am hopeful she can turn her crafting and jewelry making into a business - again time will tell.

The hardest part of being here in the USA is that we just don't have any money left over to travel or do the things we used to do - even when there is a surplus, we are living so month to month that we need to save it in case the car breaks down, the eBay biz fails, or the antique mall spots don't earn enough to cover their rent. All of that means that there is very little time for relaxation or enjoyment and almost no money for it - it's taken a toll on our health and on our marriage - but what can we do? It's not different for most Americans - although when we watch the \$100k fifth wheels and RVs towing dune buggies and motorbikes start to roll through our town, it's hard not to wonder where they get all this disposable income....

But what the hell - maybe they'll stop and buy some antiques and collectibles from us tomorrow...

### **November 30, 2014**

For those who don't know - I returned to the USA in April of 2013 after 5 years of living abroad. I was pretty much gone for the first term of Obama and a part of his second term. I came back with a wife who had never been here and a 1 1/2 year old daughter who was born in my wife's native Morocco and conceived in Turkey where we had both lived and taught school, worked with hotels, etc.

We arrived in the USA without very much. Two suitcases each and about \$6k. I thought I had a plan, but it quickly went awry. My plan had been for us to stay in San Francisco but I quickly discovered that no one wanted to pay me enough money that we could stay there any longer than we had. I'd thought that running my own small international business and becoming a self trained expert in social media and online travel would have opened doors, but I found instead that I was 'overqualified' for the positions I was considered for. A 40-something guy with a family and no fortune 500 experience. So, running out of money and options I scoured the Pacific coast for a town where I could support my family on the small income I was still earning from online work.

We arrived in Reedsport in August of 2013 with enough money to last for a couple of months at best and as I have written before, my online work drying up. The thing I had noticed since arriving in the USA was the huge glut of stuff here and the amount of valuable items that were sold at garage sales, thrift shops, and estate sales for far less than resale value. I was buying as much as I could and selling it online and at garage sales - but our new town had a limit on the number of g-sales you could have per year - just three.

Ebay by itself wasn't sustainable. I found an ad online for a job selling life insurance and bit - after an expensive course of study and a couple of months which burned through our savings - I became a licensed life insurance agent - and quickly realized that the business I had jumped into was a bad match for me - particularly with the scammy heavy handed sales practices my new company required me to use. Uh oh.

I had more valuables accumulated than I could sell on Ebay - not enough for a shop - but a good bit. So we signed on with an antique mall in Florence and rented a space. I learned a lot from the experience - in particular that the only people who earn a living from antique malls are the owners. We survived by a couple of garage sales, selling online, and making a modest amount from the antique mall. But here was the catch with that - we paid \$200 per month rent for our space plus a 15% commission - so if we sold \$1000 worth of goods - the owner of the mall got \$350 and we got \$650. A fair amount of our antiques were a consignment from friends who had lost their parents and grandparents and found themselves with an overwhelming amount of stuff - that was a 50/50 split - mind you - that was before the antique mall owner took his cut - so that meant they got \$500, the mall owner got \$350, and we got \$150 out of \$1000 (which, by the way, was a number we never reached in the mall). Of course, if we sold our own product the amount we got was more - but you get the point, I think. It wasn't a sustainable way to do business.

So, I scraped together as much as I could and in June of 2014 - we opened our own shop, Reedsport Antiques. There were bigger spaces available but I found a space that had a very modest rent of \$300 per month - with utilities and insurance we pay about \$500 per month total. Since that time, I've been supporting my little family with the combination of eBay, a little bit of online work, and mostly - our little antique shop. The good news is - it's working. Even now as winter slows the tourist traffic to nothing and we are left with only the very poor residents of this place and some bit of drive by traffic on Hwy 101, it is supporting us. The bad news is that it is only just barely doing so - and only because I've managed to once again defer my student loan payments of \$500 per month for another year...

Here is the summary of our life in the USA - we made it here, we found a place we could afford to live, and we've started a little business that is sustaining us. The town is dying and devoid of cultural activities - but it is cheap. We are not sinking in quicksand of debt but mainly because we don't have any credit and I've managed to defer my student debt.

Most importantly, we are making it. It's a constant battle, but worth it to see my family happy and healthy. Is the USA a land of opportunity? Yes it is - but - the truth is - I found far more opportunity in Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, and Europe - because I'm American. Here in the USA, I'm just another 40-something guy with a useless B.A. - at least when it comes to employers. In other countries, being an American meant something and gave me value.

I'm not sure that we will stay in the USA for the long term - but while we are here - I will keep busting my balls and building this and other business. I don't know if I will be a model of American success - I don't know how likely it is that we will become even middle class - let

alone upper middle class or wealthy. I have my own definitions. Middle class folks have a car less than five years old, own (or are making payments on a house), and have enough savings to survive several months with no income and take a two week vacation each year. We are not close to that yet - my car is nearly 20 years old, we rent, and if I stop working for even a week - it becomes questionable if we can pay our bills the next month. There is virtually no safety net. I don't want to say we are lower class or poor - but maybe it's safe to say that we are in the worrying class. This life is filled with worries and there is almost no time to relax and breathe. Not yet, anyway.

I think we will start to do our Jefferson's move on up in 2015. That is my plan. And that is the state of our world.

\*\*I should also note that without the generosity of our friends this move to the USA would have been much much more difficult. We had friends that hosted us for months when we arrived and friends who trusted us with their family treasures. We had friends who welcomed us and offered advice and emotional support. Without friends, this would have been a much harder year and seven months.

### **April 18, 2017**

It was yesterday that we passed the 4 years in the USA milestone. Yes, of course, I was born here - but the milestone is in regards to my family - and our time together. We've been here 4 years now. My wife spent her entire life without having ever been to the USA and so did my daughter at least until the age of one. So, yesterday, April 17th, 2017 marked four years for us in the USA. Here is what we have done:

We arrived in 2013 with three large suitcases and about \$7000. We had no home and no jobs. My relatives turned us away and told us they had their own problems to deal with - despite their assurances while we were abroad that they 'had our backs' until we were on our feet. I should have known better than to trust relatives.

I bought a \$1500 car and moved my wife, 1-year-old daughter and myself into a foreclosure squat with a friend from high school in Sacramento while I looked for work in Silicon Valley. I quickly learned that over forty meant too old to get a job in the Bay Area.

I moved my family to the town on the West Coast that had the lowest incidence of child molesters combined with the lowest rent. I paid our expenses buying at thrift shops, yard sales, and estate sales and then selling on eBay. Then I opened an antique mall space. Then I started selling in flea markets. Then I opened an antique store in our new town. Then I started publishing a small town news-sheet. Then I ran for public office but lost after only getting 33% of the vote. Then I realized that small town elected positions are volunteer only and decided to focus on my family and business.

Then I ran my business for a couple of years. Now, here I am, but not very satisfied with my existence...now, I am ready to change...meanwhile my wife became a citizen, my daughter started kindergarten and dance classes, and we have become a part of this small town...

Now, what to do?

### **May 30, 2017**

Thus far, in my life, I have never owned my own home except when I've lived in VW vans. It's my own fault - mortgages were easy to come by several times in my life and I chose not to invest. This will sound funny, but the prices always seemed too high. In the early-1990s - a Staff Sergeant in my Marine Corps unit suggested that a bunch of enlisted guys pool our money and start buying real estate. It was a good suggestion and none of us took it. In the mid to late 1990s, I was struggling to find my calling - if, while I had worked in radio, I had applied for a mortgage using my VA Loan - I could have bought a modest house in what is now the booming real estate market of Bellingham, Washington. In the early 2000s - I had the opportunity to purchase a small studio apartment in Honolulu for \$100,000 - the price seemed pretty extreme to me and I passed. And then, the housing boom came and I was sure that the economy was heading over a cliff but mortgages were incredibly easy to come by - I chose not to seek a home loan. That was it for me - those were my opportunities. We all know what happened in 2007 with the economy and housing - as a result of that - the requirements for getting a home loan became much more stringent - in fact - in 2016 when I talked to several banks about getting a loan - they told me that my VA Guarantee was no longer worth much and that as a self-employed business owner that my reported income was too low to qualify for a home loan - both bankers suggested that I 'find a way' to report a higher income. Yes, I could have lied on my taxes this year. I could have taken less deductions. I could have paid more tax...but the truth is that this year with the long grey winter and the bizarre politics of 2016 - my business wasn't sufficient to do that. We needed those deductions.

Now, the housing market is again red hot. Things like AirBnB have made housing prices soar in desirable locations. I am in the midst of closing or with any luck selling my business (I do not own the building that houses it). For the present time, my VA Home Loan Guarantee sits in a folder - worthless and unusable. I console myself by imagining that the housing market will again have a massive crash and perhaps I will be able to buy something afterwards - but I don't really believe it. I tell myself that the banks own most of the houses that people live in - and the mortgages are simply another form of rent and home ownership is by and large an illusion anyway. We have been served an eviction notice in the house we've rented for the past four years because the owner wants to sell it. I am thankful that we had already been making plans to move before we got the notice, but can't help asking myself "What if we had not?"

We currently exist in a 60 day limbo in which lies a form of homelessness that terrifies me. The landlord was apologetic and felt bad about serving the eviction because we have been great tenants - but right now is the time to sell. I don't blame her a bit. I would have done the same thing in her position. We are 60 days away from involuntary family homelessness.

Yes, we have been making plans. Yes, I am sure we will find something. I'd be foolish, however,

not to be concerned. AirBnB and the red hot housing market have driven rents sky high.

I am a person - actually, we are a family, that if you want to send a birthday card to my 5-year-old daughter, a letter to my wife, or even a bill to me - more than 60 days from now to us - we have no forwarding address.

So, once again, here I am. This time, I was ready to seize opportunity - and this time it was denied me. I am rooting for the collapse of the economy. I am rooting for the collapse of the housing bubble. I am rooting for the collapse of AirBnB and more. I would rather be cheering for the economy and housing - but this Gen-x USMC veteran has been left behind by it. I have been left out of it. I accept my responsibility in this process - but no matter how hard I try - it just doesn't make sense that this is all my fault. And so - here we are. Here I am. Here we go.

### **June 6, 2017**

I am very pleased to no longer be a shop keeper nor a small town publisher. I am yet more pleased to be able to say that the shop I poured myself into these past three years has not died in a fire sale but instead has changed hands and will continue on - but without me behind the counter. The same goes for the paper I have published since the demise of the Coffee Break – a much longer established and well known rag than my own - and so it is nice to see that the Coffee Break's fate is not the fate of my little paper. I like the people who will now be operating both businesses and I really and truly hope they succeed. I am giving them every assistance and instruction I can to get them going. They have energy and ideas and are willing to work hard - so I think it likely they will prosper. This has been one of the great learning experiences of my life. I am completely and totally appreciative of what I have learned.

### **June 9, 2017**

I have a lot of stuff. It all needs to go away from where we live by the end of the month. My wife has a lot of stuff. Our daughter has a lot of stuffed animals. All of this is keeping me pretty busy. Packing, sorting, pricing (for a total estate liquidation) and more. I'm thankful that I bought a quality trailer, but not so thankful that it started leaking in one of Oregon's wettest and gravest winters since they started keeping records. And the rain just keeps on coming...that complicates things...but my options are limited so I pack it in the trailer in tubs the best that I can. What else can I do? I am working very hard to figure out exactly where that trailer is going to go and how it is going to get there...moving us is easy, moving the stuff is more problematic. My Vanagon isn't made to pull anything larger than a utility trailer - so it won't do. I sold my Jeep Cherokee which is good because it wasn't really up to the job either. I'm working on selling the Vanagon to raise money for our transition - but much to my surprise - the market for Vanagons seems to have cooled a bit from where it was a few months ago. This particular market seems to have peaked and then gone a bit higher before dropping down and leveling at a still very reasonable price range which is several thousand dollars below the peak. I've noticed a huge increase in

inventory availability on craigslist in the past month - which means that for the moment - everyone who wants one and can pay for it probably has one. It probably also means that now is a great time to buy a Vanagon or VW but not the best time to sell one. So, Misefrou may come with us when we figure out exactly where we are going. That wouldn't be a bad thing - but the money would be useful at the moment. Still, I'm doing everything I can and trusting in the universal to bring about the right circumstances. This last week was busy - my daughter had her kindergarten graduation - I was proud as punch as all the kids walked on stage and said what they wanted to be when they grow up "army, jet pilot, mother, vet, basketball player" and then comes my little girl - the smallest girl in the school and she walks up and they have to pull the mic down for her and she says in a clear and confident voice "When I grow up I want to be a paleontologist." There were audible gasps - I'm guessing that a large number of the adults in the room didn't know what the word meant, but she did. So proud of my little genius and the math we do every morning, the reading we've been working on together for years now, all the fun study we do together and the smart conversations - this was payment in full with interest. Wow. Yesterday I looked at my annual list of goals for this year and was able to put check marks next to many of them or to update with positive progress...things are happening. I am so thankful. So very very thankful. Things are happening. Good things are happening. I've become cautious though about counting my chickens before they hatch. There is lots and lots of work to be done still. I'd better get to it.

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It wasn't very long after this that I decided the best thing to do was to move my family to Hawaii, which I posited was not really a part of America when I began this so called 'American Project'.  
Thus ends the American Project.

## Hawaii is Not America

We closed the deal on the shop and paper, had a huge sell off garage sale at our house, and I packed a trailer and shipped it to Hawaii in July of 2017. Honolulu may not be perfect - but it's filled with a diversity of people and racism isn't a big problem like it is on the continent. Hawaii is the least violent place in America, and Hawaii voted 70+% against Trump. Plus, and this is true - Hawaii had always felt like it was home to me - I finally had enough money to get my family there and give us a start.

I made a quick trip to Honolulu, landed a job as an archaeologist, rented a little apartment - and then went back to Reedsport for the last time to pack up my family and bring them to Hawaii. In a way, this was the conclusion of the trip I'd started back in 2008 when I left Honolulu to see the world. I'd come full circle.

Blog Post: Our first night here - my wife and daughter's first night in Hawai'i - I wanted them to experience being a tourist - so we stayed at the most touristic hotel of them all - Hilton Hawaiian Village. It was cool. We had a top floor room with a complete ocean view and thanks to my credit card points/rewards strategy we didn't have to wait in the 1-hour-long or more check in lines. Yes - money and privilege - if they think you have money, you get the privilege. Joining the awards programs gave us free internet, a free checked bag on Hawaiian Air, and for some reason got us a free upgrade on our room. But, back to lines - our first meal in Hawai'i as a family was another touristic thing I'd never done - The Cheesecake Factory in Waikiki - huge lines, decent food, ridiculous prices, and bad service. The girls loved it - I was not impressed except that the cheesecake was actually the best cheesecake I've ever had...which definitely counts for something. We couldn't get around that line and I noticed something - parties of two got seated almost immediately and the staff tended to seat parties of five or more with preference - as a party of three we were in a sort of limbo until I complained that larger and smaller parties that came in after us were being seated - and then we were seated immediately - 3 and 4 parties are the lowest price point at bigger tables. And, when we were seated - our table was still dirty. A lame line experience. Yesterday, on the 4th of July, I took the girls on my old circle island tour in our new car (not brand new, but thanks to credit strategy just two years old, no money down, no payments for 90 days and financed for 60 months) - in the old days, I did this tour hundreds, maybe even thousands of times - so I have a perspective on the change - the lines at the Kuhuku Shrimp Trucks are complete insanity...people at Romy's and Giovanni's are waiting up to two-and-a-half hours to eat garlic or spicy shrimp. We skipped that line when we realized we hadn't brought cash - Hanane was amazed that anywhere in the US could be cash only - we went to an ATM and then stopped at the Korean shrimp truck - which used to be pretty good but which yesterday gave us big shrimp drowned in melted butter/oil/fat.

The line was short for a reason. It was the fourth so there were lines of cars going to the North Shore, massive lines for Dole whip at the Dole plantation, and then when we went to Kailua for the fireworks - lines of cars looking for parking everywhere - we ended up going to a little known beach access in Aikahi and enjoying poke and rice on the beach with a small crowd and a perfect view of the fireworks. A quick drive on the H-3 and we were back home in time to watch the fireworks from the mighty Missouri from the catwalk of our apartment. Ah, I just thought of another couple of crazy lines - Costco. On the 3rd we went to Costco to get a few housewares and dinner...I've never seen anything like it. A constant sea of carts four wide and never stopping flowing from the registers to the parking lot and then lines 20-30 deep for food and drinks. Insanity.

When I first came to Hawaii in 2001, I didn't know what to expect. I was surprised to discover that rather than being a big tourist place with a military presence, Hawaii is actually a big military place with a tourist presence. There are more than a dozen bases scattered throughout the islands and that means that at times there can be as many as a quarter million military troops, dependents, contractors, and base employees scattered through the islands.

Hawaii became a state in 1959 but it's American history goes back further. The Republic of Hawaii was formally annexed in 1900 as the U.S. Territory of Hawaii. A few years prior to that, the Republic of Hawaii came into existence when the Kingdom of Hawaii was overthrown by a cabal of Americans who wanted to be annexed. They had the support of the U.S. military and broad swathes of the U.S. government which wanted to build a permanent base at Pearl Harbor as a means of protecting the growing 'American Empire'. The American empire at the time included the Philippines, Cuba, Guam, the Panama Canal Zone, and much more.

The Hawaiian people were never asked if they wanted to become Americans. In fact, history shows us that most of them didn't want that. It's my opinion, that if it were not for the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 – Hawaii would never have become a state. Like Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands (all still U.S. territories) – Hawaii was a far off place, not connected to North America, and filled with 'exotic' 'brown' people who lived and thought in a very different way to 'Americans'. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the consciousness of the American blood spilled there made it an American place. Statehood came less than twenty years later.

Hawaii doesn't even sit on the American plates beneath the surface – instead it is part of the Pacific plate. In terms of culture, plate tectonics, and more Hawaii is more Asian than American. The penultimate monarch of Hawaii, King David Kalakaua actually tried to merge his kingdom with Meiji Japan because he felt that Hawaiian and Japanese culture and thought were much more in alignment than Hawaiian and American were. He was actively trying to prevent an overthrow and annexation by America – but the Meiji Emperor turned him down and America engineered an overthrow within a few years of his death.

All of that doesn't mean that people in Hawaii today aren't proud to be American. They have flags, they honor the troops, they celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, they vote. But it's not that same

mindless patriotism you find on the mainland. People in Hawaii are aware of the fact that Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown by America at a time when the Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States were close allies with treaties and deep cooperation. People in Hawaii understand that America takes what it wants and doesn't care about anything else.

When I arrived in 2001, barely a month after 911, there wasn't the same sort of flag waving and blind patriotism in Hawaii as there had been on the mainland. Even ultra-liberal Portland, Oregon had fallen for it. There were still American flags but it seemed like they were outnumbered by Hawaiian flags – the flag that flew over the monarchy and which is still the state flag today.

I noticed some new and some old problems in coming back to Hawaii. I wrote about them in a blog post.

Blog Post: There are some big issues in Hawai'i. They were issues when I left in 2008 and they have gotten worse. In some cases much worse. Don't get me wrong - I am plenty happy to have the bathwater with the baby - but as a logical person, I can't help looking beyond band-aids and seeing some not very simple solutions.

1) Hawai'i has a car problem. There are so many cars on Oahu that the other day when I had my trailer in my assigned parking space it took me an hour and a half to find a parking space within a half mile of my apartment. This problem comes from many different sectors - and nearly every problem I will mention below has contributed and is connected to it. Housing is not affordable so you have three and four generations stacked in a single family home plus an ohana shack in the back yard - every adult has a car and the garage has been converted into an apartment so you have 3-10 cars on a property that was designed for one in the garage and one in the driveway. Add to that problem #2 - Hawai'i has a homeless problem - the worst in the nation and many of the homeless live in their cars - or try to. Then you have apartment buildings like ours - a 14 story building where each apartment has 1-2 spaces and many of those have been sold or rented to earn the money necessary to live on. Then you have the military - problem #3. Every soldier, sailor, Marine, or airman has a car that they've had shipped over by the military - and their spouses have cars. Then you have tourism - car rental is a big business and tourists like to drive - huge lots of cars sitting and waiting to be rented and then looking for parking. As I remember, public transportation was pretty good in Hawai'i - but I can't say for sure now because my job REQUIRED me to have a car - it was a condition of employment. The city and county are building a light rail system - which actually should help when it is someday completed- but they are going to have to take more drastic measures because car addiction is not easily solved. I don't like these solutions any better than anyone would - but they have worked in other places. Creating car-free areas in urban congested zones to encourage commuting and using public transportation. Waikiki - car free. Downtown Honolulu - car free. University of Hawai'i - car free. Next are the less popular ideas - somehow banning the military import of

personal vehicles and raising the price of car rentals - even less popular is the idea of raising the registration fee and taxes on vehicles - and offering buybacks on older and larger models. Nobody wants to have these things done - but the problem is far worse than it was and from what I can tell - this is the only way to make it better.

2) Hawai'i has a homeless problem. On this one, there is really only one solution - the humanistic solution. Every person should have the right to a safe, secure place to call home. Our greedy capitalist focused society has somehow made it 'okay' for there to be huge camps of people who have been left behind socially and economically. We pay huge amounts of money to house prisoners, we allow the ultra rich to buy huge properties and leave them vacant (in some cases entire apartment buildings). All of that needs to be said but ultimately - the homeless problem here and elsewhere is systemic and needs to be addressed at the root - housing is unaffordable here. Desirable real estate has gone so high that undesirable real estate has gone sky high and the rates that hotels and vacation rentals can bring have driven rents even higher. We have allowed the formation of a complex caste system to take place in our society where the higher castes can own unlimited amounts while the lower castes starve - this is considered 'okay'. It's not. Land that could be used for housing is gated and closed by the military, by golf courses, by country clubs, and by the ultra-wealthy.

3) Hawai'i has a military problem. There are huge numbers of military personnel here - and their dependents - wives, children, dogs, vehicles. The military long ago took all of the best lands on Oahu for itself. Pearl Harbor, Hickam Air Force Base, Bellows Field, Marine Corps Base Hawaii, and more. These lands and beaches should be given back. Pearl Harbor and Hickam are a city that could house a huge population. I am not saying that the military should leave Hawai'i completely - but the amount of land and number of troops should be reduced greatly. This would reduce traffic, homelessness, rent and property values, and other problems.

4) Hawai'i has a golfing problem. I'm not a golfer. I admit it. Golf courses shut down huge areas of land to any other use thus cutting the non-wealthy off from using that land, the amount of water they use is obscene, and, frankly, they are elitist symbols of our caste system. Seriously, there are dozens of courses on Oahu. A large number of them are on military bases. Ban golf on Oahu or limit the number of courses to five and make them all public - or, if you are crying in your elitist cup of cat poop coffee right now - allow one private course but make them pay full retail for the water.

5) Hawai'i has a tourism problem. Tourism here is a mess. It's expensive to come here and the lines are out of control. I know a lot of mainland people have never come here because (and I'm quoting) when they price compare, they get a better deal, less crowds, and cheaper flights when they go to Mexico. Air BnB and Uber and Lyft are giving people a chance to earn with their cars and properties but driving the cost of housing up and the profits of tourism down. None of that is what I am referring to though. The

tourism problem is that huge amounts of money get spent here and are promptly deposited in mainland and international banks by companies and corporations that are not based here. That is the tourism problem I am referring to.

So, in a nutshell - here is what I propose (if anyone that could make it happen is reading this):

- 1) Reduce non-essential troop levels and base sizes, require the military to provide transportation for troops stationed here, no personally owned vehicles (POVs)
- 2) Eliminate most golf courses and require full payment for water and land from those that stay, no sweet elitist deals
- 3) Ban POVs from congested urban areas and raise taxes and registration fees on urban POVs
- 4) Create a vacancy tax to drive hotel/housing rates lower - owners must pay a tax on unoccupied property or rooms - if they are using AirBnB or similar or are a hotel resort, the tax is nightly - for residential it would be monthly
- 5) House the homeless in vacant military housing, provide low skill employment to those capable of working
- 6) Require resorts and tourist business to be based in Hawai'i and to bank in Hawai'i.

Would these solve the problems? Of course not. Would new challenges arise? Of course. Would these be a good start? Absolutely.

In 2016, Hawaii had the lowest percentage of Donald Trump got votes in Hawaii from districts that have a strong military presence but also in districts where people are more fundamentalist Christian. I've never understood why so called Christians flock to his banner – but he carried the Mormon and Christian towns in Hawaii. That's it though, the other 70% - forget about it.

Hawaii really is paradise. The weather is perfect – not too hot and almost never cold unless you go to over 10,000 feet on the Big Island or Maui. The waving palm trees, the tropical fruit, the beautiful beaches, the crystal blue water, and more. I was incredibly happy to be back. I'd landed a job as an archaeologist for what seemed to be a decent wage. I was finally putting my degree to work.

I soon learned, however, that my 'decent wage' of \$18 an hour wasn't even close to enough to pay for my family to live in Hawaii. The cost of everything had gone up and I'd forgotten what a huge chunk taxes, FICA, social security, and employer health insurance (they covered me but not my family) took. I'd been promised a raise once I proved I could do the work – so I held on.

The work wasn't anything like what I had expected. I was doing contract archaeology. This meant that I was supervising any digging at construction sites and if I found any hint of human remains or cultural material older than fifty years – I would shut down the job. You can imagine how this made the construction guys feel.

For two months, I had a first hand look at how the construction industry works in Hawaii. It

wasn't pretty. I worked on the Marine base in Kaneohe and at the Joint Traffic Management Center that was being constructed in Kalihi. I once watched the supervisor outline where he wanted trenches dug. I tried to point out that he was digging his crew into a corner they couldn't get the excavator out of but he brushed off my objection.

Over the next two days, I watched the excavator dig itself into a corner surrounded by trenches it couldn't cross. The two days following that, I watched the excavator fill in the trenches it had just dug so it could get out of the corner. I already knew the material it was digging didn't have any archaeological material in it – so I took a long lunch and went to the beach for a swim. When I came back, it was still filling in the trenches it had already dug. The next three days were spent redigging the trenches without trapping the excavator in the corner. Same material, same trenches, same excavator – and all of this with a crew of five guys working on it.

I was bored and asked how much people were earning. I wanted to figure out how much this little fiasco was costing the state. The excavator operator was earning \$56 an hour. The shovel guys were earning \$40 an hour. The supervisor wouldn't tell me but I think it's safe to assume he was earning \$100 an hour since he was a qualified machinery operator and supervisor. The guy who swept up leaves (that was really a job) was earning \$36 an hour. We spent about 60 hours on that particular set of trenches. The excavator operator earned \$3360 in hourly on that. The shovel guys earned \$2400 each. The supervisor probably pulled about \$6000. The leaf guy got \$2160. The qualified archaeologist, the only one who had gone to college got \$1080. Once I knew the other guys were earning that much, I asked the supervisor how much my company was getting for me being on site. My company was charging \$80 an hour. So actually, me being there watching the same dirt get dug over and over had cost \$4800. I was outraged that this stupidity had just cost the taxpayer \$20,000.

I was more outraged that my bosses had pulled \$3700 for my work while giving me only 1/4 of that. I politely demanded the raise they had promised me when I took the job. They gave me a \$1 per hour raise! I thought they might give me a raise to \$22 or maybe even \$25 an hour, but no, they raised my wage to \$19 and acted like they had given me the farm. I told them I knew how much they were making from my work and they told me that was how capitalism works. They told me that there were lots of people who would pay to be archaeologists in Hawaii and I should count myself lucky. I was still making half as much as the leaf sweeper. I needed to find a new job.

I considered getting a job in the construction industry but the inefficiency drove me crazy. Also, no offense to the intellectual construction guys out there, but the guys working around me were a bunch of meatheads. I'm just not one of those guys who wants a big truck or who enjoys friendship or camaraderie with those kinds of people. So, I started looking for a job in tourism. Tourism had been pretty good to me before. I wanted to get back into high end tours. I would drive rich people around, tell them stories of Hawaii, show them beautiful places, and let them tip me hundred dollar bills at the end of the day. I had to find that job but I knew it was out there.

One of the big lessons I've learned in life is don't quit your job until you've already found a new

one. I remained an archaeologist while I looked for my gig. I bought 2016 Nissan Versa and signed up to drive for Lyft. It filled in the gap that my wages left in my expenses. I made a deal with the supervisor on the JTMC site – he would keep me coming into the site even on days when I wasn't really needed and I would fuck off. He was a good guy and was sympathetic to the fact that my bosses were ripping me off. He'd been promoted to site super because the three guys above him had all been fired for corruption and inefficiency. He was young but smart. The job had been shut down by archaeologists before me a couple of times. He knew that having the archaeologist in his pocket was a bonus. We both knew that at that point, all of the dirt on that site had been dug and supervised multiple times. Since there had been a couple of findings, the state mandated that an archaeologist be kept on the job until the digging was complete.

Our deal worked like this – I would go to the JTMC and clock in. He would show me what digging was to be done that day. If his bosses or my bosses were going to be on site, I would stay and watch the digging. If they weren't he would say “Keep your phone handy, I'll call you if we need you”. Then I would leave. I would go get coffee, have a swim at the beach, make a little extra money driving Lyft rides, and look for my next job – all while on the clock. At the end of eight hours, I would go clock out. The JTMC was a sweet gig and if I could have kept it, I would have but the digging was only going to last another month at most.

At the end of the JTMC project, my capitalist archaeologist bosses gave me a cool job on the Big Island, they didn't give me any extra pay but I was given a per diem for being away from home. Every two years, our firm did a survey of the archaeological sites above 10,000 feet on the Mauna Kea volcano on the Big Island. There was one guy who didn't get altitude sickness in the firm – the rest of them had health conditions or got altitude sickness when they went up to the 14,000+ foot sites. Due to the wilderness conditions and the extreme altitude, it was mandated that two people go. I got the job because I was the only option.

The job was scheduled for seven days. We stayed at the scientists lodge at the 10,000 foot mark. This is where all the astronomers who man the many telescopes at the top of Mauna Kea stay. We were scheduled to work five hours per day due to the conditions. We would get paid for the full eight hour day and get our per diem. I say we, but actually, that was just my deal. I thought we had the same deal, but I was wrong.

He was getting a flat rate for getting the job done. He was the senior archaeologist so he set the schedule. I didn't find that out until we were on our way home. Instead of working five hours a day, he had us work ten hours a day. Instead of taking seven days, we finished the job in four days. He changed our flights to return to Oahu early. He made his full rate in less time. I got screwed out of three days per diem and 21 hours of pay plus had to work ten hour days at an insane pace for four days without having time to acclimate, enjoy the mountain, or get to know the scientists. I was pissed.

When I got back, I started laying the groundwork for my own company. I brainstormed and came up with creating an automated tour app. I could make a phone app that people would plug

into their cars. It would give them instructions on where to go and then when they got there it would give them the history and stories of the place. Eventually, I dreamed of installing it in self driving VW vans. A fleet of self driving tour vehicles. Fully autonomous vehicles weren't quite available yet, but they were coming. I set up an LLC and began laying the groundwork.

That was the easy part. The hard part was that there were a shit-ton of barriers to entry. I needed to take out a huge bond, I needed to have an insane amount of insurance to drive people around, I needed to pay the taxes and fees to get a license from the Public Utility Commission. It would cost me \$100,000 to start my own tour company before I even had a customer. The industry was well protected. The choice was to come up with a hundred grand, continue to be exploited, or run the risk of going cowboy – which carried some large fines and the possibility of jail time.

Blog Post: Coming back to Hawaii - there are lots of obvious changes - there are now lots of really expensive trendy shops. Whole Foods is here and you can spend a fortune on groceries if you choose to, Bed Bath and Beyond, Gucci, Saks Fifth Avenue, etc - the list goes on and on. There is no shortage of expensive shops here - and seeing all of that, it's easy to forget what used to be in those spaces. Same goes for restaurants - every famous chef you can think of has a great little corner location and all the little great cheap places that used to be here - they've all grown into bigger, multi-location restaurants - so you can find the same great food on all the different corners of the island. Here's the thing though - the quality in those little hole in the wall places that have grown so big has gone down and the prices have gone up. And guess what all those fancy retailers have replaced? Affordable stores. And guess what's happened to the rents in those little places where you could buy everyday things for living cheaply? They've gone up - so no more cheap sponges and coffee in Chinatown - no more cheap produce from Farmer's Markets - no more dollar stores, no more Grocery Outlets, no more big affordable Daiea markets or semi-affordable Don Quixote - instead those stores are closed and moved off island and Don Quixote is no longer a bargain. Those who have stayed here through the last 10 years may not have noticed - like looking in the mirror each day and missing the ten years of wrinkles - but all the little shops that used to make it affordable to get by each day - those shops are gone. I notice it because I went looking for them - and instead found Chuck E Cheese and an upscale boutique or found higher prices than I get on Amazon. Safeway doesn't do \$5 Friday on Oahu. This island has seen real estate prices skyrocket since the recession and at the same time these systemic changes - where affordable shampoo, rice, or toilet scrubbers are no longer available - they are stealing the pennies and dimes. Parking downtown costs \$30/hr and an expired meter will cost you \$35-\$50 depending on where it happens. I've always said that Hawai'i was worth what it takes to live here - but I'm not sure about that any longer. It seems that the truth may well be that it has reached the point where paradise is only available to those who already have enough money to not worry about paying \$15 for a jar of peanut butter.

In the meantime, I needed to make money. Archaeology wasn't cutting it. I didn't want to do Lyft full time. When I sold my shop, the majority of the valuable antiques and collectibles had been in my garage – not part of the deal. I shipped those here as part of the move. I rented a storage locker and had things stacked in my closets. It was time to start selling. I'd thought of possibly opening a shop but rents were impossible to make a profitable business in Hawaii. I started selling at quarterly antique and collectible shows. I started selling at the swapmeet on weekends at Aloha Stadium. People in Hawaii didn't want the same kinds of things as people in Oregon wanted. Pyrex that would sell for \$50 in Oregon wouldn't bring \$10 in Hawaii. In Hawaii, they wanted gold, jade, and things that had to do with Hawaii. My antique chairs, old books, pyrex, cast iron, and pottery was worth 1/10<sup>th</sup> as much in Hawaii as it had been in Oregon. There was an opportunity for regional arbitrage, but I didn't want to take it. Shipping is messy.

Estate sales and garage sales aren't nearly as lucrative in Hawaii as they were on the mainland. In Oregon, it was common to see an estate sale start on Thursday and run all day every day until Sunday. Garage sales would often run Friday thru Sunday 8am-3pm. In Hawaii, estate sales were few and far between and garage sales ran on Saturday from 8am to noon. My mission became more about getting rid of my stuff than getting a profit from it. I still needed a job.

I saw a craigslist ad for a private tour guide on Oahu. I was still working in archaeology but most of my work now was on the Marine base in Kaneohe. It wasn't kick back like at the JTMC. There was no opportunity to escape the job site. It was hot work in the hot sun in full protective gear and we found nothing. Mostly, we weren't even allowed to work, we just had to stand there. It sucked. I would imagine since it was on the base, my bosses were making even more from my sweat than at JTMC which had been a state job.

I immediately became friends with the guy looking for a tour guide. Adam, from Private Tours Hawaii. He was a laid back surfer dude. He offered me \$20 per hour with no benefits. I would be a contractor. Tips were mine and didn't need to be reported. If I extended a tour longer than it was scheduled, I'd get a higher hourly wage. It was more fair than most guide jobs. I'd been offered a couple already that were much more exploitive and I'd turned them down. Adam was a capitalist, but he was fair.

I started taking tours on the weekends and when he offered me some during the week, I called in sick to the archaeology job. After about a month, I was sure that I could earn more than from archaeology so I gave notice. In my notice letter I said that I'd be happy to stay or return if they could offer me \$30 an hour so I could support my family without a second job. Doug, the big boss responded "We'll be happy to have you back if you win the lottery or something." I took that to mean they would never consider paying me enough to support my family.

The best part of being an archaeologist had been telling people that I was an archaeologist so I asked Adam to make my job title 'Archaeologist'. He agreed. For the next two years, I supported my family with a combination of private tours, buying and selling at antique shows and garage sales, and selling on Ebay.

My wife got a job as a Registered Behavior Technician and began helping with the bills in the second half of 2018. This was right on time because Adam's company was being out competed by private tour companies that were charging less (and paying guides less). I admired Adam's principle of not lowering his prices or pay – but his business was being destroyed by cheaper competitors.

When I left Hawaii in 2008, there were about six million visitors per year. They generally spent a lot when they came and were affluent. By 2017, when I returned, Hawaii was pushing ten million visitors per year and they were spending far less per person. Hawaii had focused on increasing visitors instead of increasing the quality of visitors. Affluent visitors were finding new destinations and who could blame them? Hawaii had become far too crowded with tourists. Instagram and Facebook had turned once hidden locations into crowded messes. Tourism was destroying everything I loved about Hawaii. Adam felt the same way but we were trapped in it. It was our livelihood. We hated tourism, but like a majority of people in Hawaii – it paid our bills.

Blog Post: Hawaii may be paradise for people on holiday but for those who live and work here it has long been unaffordable. The money flowing into the islands flows out as fast as it flows in and what stays has never been shared fairly. Hotel companies, like Kyo-ya Hotels and Resorts (a Japanese company) which own many of Hawaii's hotels, and large mainland based corporations, like Marriott, are profiting from Hawaii's tourist economy and making their investors (who mostly do not live and work in Hawai'i) rich. Meanwhile, the cost of living in Honolulu is skyrocketing, rents are increasing and real estate prices are exploding upward constantly. Health care and insurance costs are rising quickly and food prices (along with everything else) are more expensive daily. Working people in Hawai'i now must work two or even three jobs to make ends meet. This is not new, but it's getting worse.

Wages have not gone up in Hawai'i for a long time - the cost of living goes up and workers give an increasing share of their wages to the 'paradise tax'.

Marriott is the largest and wealthiest hotel company in the world. The company earned \$22.9 billion dollars in revenue in 2017 and has a net worth of \$46.8 billion dollars, almost twice that of it's nearest competitor, Hilton. As a giant in the hospitality industry, Marriott has the resources to lead the way in creating good, life-sustaining jobs. Instead, the company has refused to meet the modest demands of its employees, and now these workers are on strike.

Workers want a say in how new technological changes can improve working conditions rather than lead to the elimination of jobs. In addition, they want better pay and benefits which are more in line with the high cost of living in Hawai'i. While wages might seem high to workers in other states, Hawaii's wages are roughly 10% lower than the national average across a broad spectrum of careers. In addition, Honolulu is among the top five most expensive cities in America. Median price for a 2-bedroom, stand alone home is

roughly \$1.2 million dollars with 2 BR condos and townhouses at a median of about \$800,000. Rents have soared skyward with the advent of AirBNB, vacation rentals, and foreign investment in 'affordable housing'. Hawaii has the lowest rate of home ownership in the USA. Tourism workers in Hawai'i often are hired on a part time basis so that company owners do not have to pay healthcare costs.

The workers who clean, cook, and serve in Hawaii's hotels want to be able to survive and live in a state where costs are rising. They want to see their incomes rise, they want have access to year-round health insurance, and they want to retire with dignity rather than in to poverty.

Honolulu workers are striking for all tourism workers who believe that one job should be enough. They are demanding that the largest, wealthiest hotel company in the world take responsibility for creating jobs that allow working people to live and survive in our state. In doing so, they are providing an example of how working people, united and with a clear vision, can solve some of the economic problems of our society.

One thing for sure, the Hawaii Convention and Visitors Bureau is nervous as hell - next week 10,000 dentists will descend on Honolulu for their annual convention - and everyone knows you don't want to piss of a dentist on holiday. Hell hath no fury like a dentist whose vacation was ruined by striking workers. They'll make the hurricanes and volcanic eruptions look like nothing in comparison.

## Cryptocurrency and Nuclear Corporations Late 2017-2020

I was happy to be doing tours again. My guests usually tipped anywhere from \$100-\$400 for an 8-10 hour tour. I'd go home with as much as \$600 for a day of sharing paradise with people. It was a casual job so I didn't have to wear a suit, I just had to show them a good time.

Of course there were problems in Hawaii. The biggest problem was that the pressure of the rat race was making people crazy. The second biggest problem was Donald Trump. He was having a childish spat with the dictator of North Korea. A dictator who had recently shown he could produce nuclear weapons and missiles capable of reaching the closest part of the United States to North Korea: Hawaii.

Blog Post: Hawaii is my home. I've lived here longer than anywhere else I've ever lived. I've been following the news for a long time - even when I was away. The last week has been insane...I've never seen so much violent crime in a single week. A deadly shooting in Waikiki a few days ago, a deadly shooting in Chinatown last night, three attempted kidnappings (two of them kids on the way to school and one a grandmother at Ala Moana Shopping Center), a couple of incidences of road rage - one where a man smashed the window of a car with a two year old girl in it, and more. This is absolutely insane. Three weeks ago there was a violent and armed home invasion. I can only guess that the pressure of insane cost of living paired with low wages and far too many vehicles on the road and the overall violent pressure from earthquakes, hurricanes, and nuclear war are driving people to the edge. One thing for sure - it's awful and I hope it stops soon.

In 2017, I'd seen an obscure blockchain game called Crypto Kitties that was taking off. It was the kind of interesting tech I look for. I'd been paying attention to crypto currency since it was invented – earlier actually.

My love affair goes back to working with alternative currencies and barter systems in the 1990s and then extends through the 2000's as I learned about the possibilities of using digital currencies to disempower banks, corporations, and governments. In 2005 I became fascinated by the concept of using in game currency to buy real things. I read about it in a book called *Play Money* by Julian Dibbel. I watched as Bitcoin was born from Morocco. I was fascinated but I wasn't in a position to invest.

In 2014, I created a Bitcoin wallet and hung a sign in my shop that said cryptocurrency was accepted. No one ever even asked me what it was. I really should have bought some. I'd been hoping that someone would buy my goods with it. It was on my radar but like most people, I was too late.

In November of 2017, I jumped into the swirling maelstrom of digital money and began learning

everything I could about the good, the bad, and the ugly of Bitcoin and the thousands of digital 'altcoins' that exist alongside it. My thinking was that I had missed every economic opportunity that had come my way in life and I wasn't going to miss this one. I made enough by December to book myself a three day birthday holiday in Japan. It wasn't much time and it wasn't much money, but it was a place I'd always wanted to go. I went to Osaka and Hiroshima. Bitcoin peaked while I was on the plane home.

When I got home, I went all in. I set up a scheme to use my airline credit card to buy Bitcoin. I would collect the miles, sell for a profit, pay off the card, and repeat. It worked the first few times I did it. Then I started buying Litecoin. I wrote about all of this my book *Crypto Confidential*. I became the co-founder of a worthless crypto token, wasted a bunch of money on other worthless tokens, and ultimately, got burned. I was too late to be a crypto-king, but the good news was that it excited my desire to invest and create innovation and to participate in the entrepreneurial culture of disruption. I was going to be a disruptor, if I got the chance.

The rhetoric between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un had reached a fever pitch. On January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, I was waiting to pick up a group of old ladies from a cruise ship to give them a tour of Pearl Harbor. It was the kind of tour that I found least enjoyable, but it didn't require a huge commitment of spending time with them because they would be inside the memorial visitor center for most of the time I was getting paid. I would be reading in the parking lot. In any event, I checked in with them at 8 am and agreed to pick them up an hour later at 9 am. At 8:07 a ballistic missile alert was issued via the Emergency Alert System and Commercial Mobile Alert System over television, radio, and cellphones in the state of Hawaii. The alert stated that there was an incoming ballistic missile threat to Hawaii, advised residents to seek shelter, and concluded: "This is not a drill". While the rhetoric had been heating up in the fall of 2017, our state officials had publicized the fact that if North Korea launched a nuke at us, we would have about fifteen minutes until it hit us. Fuck.

I didn't even have time to drive home and hug my daughter. I called my wife and told her to grab some bottled water and the first aid kit and get in the bathtub with some blankets. We live just a couple miles from the Pearl Harbor Naval Base. They would be at ground zero. I would never see them again. I told them I loved them.

The old ladies were calling. No one at the cruise ship knew what to do. They were making everyone get off the ship. I was two minutes away. I drove to the port to rescue four old ladies from a nuclear attack. At the port, the security guards were clueless. I pulled in and started directing people to get in the building. That was the order. Take shelter wherever you could. The security guards followed my lead.

Two weeks earlier I'd taken a trip to Japan and visited Hiroshima. We were all fucked. We were all going to die. These were the last moments of my life, my wife's life, my daughter's life, and these old ladies lives.

Except they weren't. It was a false alarm, a mistake, a societal PTSD inducing fuck up. Life went

on. Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un became buddies. People in Hawaii walked around for weeks with the vacant stares of PTSD victims.

Life was short. It was time to act. I needed to invest, learn, and build. I would create tech companies.

I dug a \$30,000 hole with cryptocurrency. I was sure that someday it would pay off, but in the meantime I had an extra \$30k in debt to pay off and nothing to show for it but some crypto that was already worth far less than I'd paid for it. I put it away.

Blog Post: It's my opinion that the most insidious institutions on the planet are banks, lenders, mortgage companies, and the governments that profit from them and allow them to prey on individuals and turn us into 'consumers' and other financial products. I can see a way out of this human caused mess – the way is called cryptocurrency.

Banks exist because of the need of humans to have a trusted third party confirm our financial and business transactions. (Personal as well, which is why there is a witness necessary at weddings). The trusted third party is witness to loans, transfers of property, etc.

The problem is that the trusted third party is not trustworthy. People cheat for profit. Simple as that. Maybe not all of us, but enough of us. It's why government, finance, and other institutions are corrupt – that's what corruption is.

Blockchain eliminates the need for trusting a third party. A blockchain is a ledger or record book which is immutable – that is, it cannot be changed. Transactions of any kind are encrypted using the most powerful encryption tools available and then encrypted with all previous transactions to form a chain of blocks that are distributed far and wide to every 'node' in a network. Bitcoin, for example, has tens of thousands of nodes.

In short, blockchain and cryptocurrency create a decentralized immutable ledger that is distributed widely and cannot be changed. Cryptocurrency is the payment for the extremely costly math that creates the blockchain. It can be traded and has real value to create new blocks and to take away power from banks and governments.

I loved the revolutionary nature of crypto but for now I needed to focus on other things. I began investing in stocks with the Robinhood app. I was good at picking winners but I lacked patience and I always sold too early. As soon as I bought Amazon (5 shares at \$1300 per share), Trump started attacking the company with threats of antitrust and raising the postal rates. The price dropped – his rhetoric went up. The price reached \$1500 and I got out thinking he really would keep attacking. He didn't. I'm convinced now that he was simply using the pulpit of the presidency to create better prices for his managers to buy at. If I would have bought and held, my stock holdings would have been very profitable. My big initial investments were Amazon, Tesla, ABB (industrial automation), Apple, Square, and Paypal. If I had bought and held those

stocks, I would have turned my \$10k investment into \$50k at the time I write this (July 2020). As it was I sold at 10% gains, bought into IPOs (NEO, UBER, LYFT, Luckin Coffee) and then when the economy began looking precarious I sold most of it and bought into IBM, McDonalds, and Disney. I liked the dividends and they were all growing. The long and short was that over two years, I'd earned about \$1700 on \$10,000 as opposed to the \$50,000+ if I had bought and held.

I'm not a communist. On some level, I'm definitely a capitalist. I'm not against people making profits. I think that's a pretty good incentive to make the world work better. I do think that corporate capitalism has gotten way out of hand. I don't think anyone should be allowed to be a billionaire. Want to be a hundred-millionaire? I'm for you. Want to be a half-billionaire?

Awesome. That should be enough for anyone. Our whole culture of greed and materialism is really super disgusting. Start up companies like Tesla and Uber were getting billions of dollars in funding without ever actually earning a profit. Disruption was cool on the level of fucking with corporate capitalism but the downside was that corporate capitalism was becoming incredibly resilient. It was learning how to assimilate disruption without having any actual disruption. Cord cutters had brought about subscription platforms with less choice and more cost than the cable they had replaced. Couchsurfing was replaced by AirBnB. Uber had killed taxis and now gig-work was one of the most exploitive out there. I wanted to disrupt travel. I wanted to create a tech company that would disrupt tourism. I wanted to rake in billions of dollars from banks and venture capitalists and then use it to destroy the system. If I became a billionaire – most of my money would be used to disrupt the entire system. I've never understood why the billionaires don't do that – the only possible reason is that they are sociopathic assholes.

Blog Post: An Open Letter to America's Billionaires:

Dear Billionaires,

I've done my best to join you, but so far – I haven't even gotten close. The reason I've tried wasn't because I want to be a rich guy with a big swimming pool and a fancy car collection. Nor is it that I want any of the other trappings of wealth and power that I've seen you exercise. I'm not interested in buying the presidency or colonizing other planets. I'm not interested in eating exotic lizards or putting my name on hotels. No, the reason I've been playing and failing at your capitalist game is because I can see how glorious our species and our world could be – I can see how desperately we are failing at creating a utopia and frankly, I'm surprised you don't see it. If you do see it, I'm surprised you haven't done anything about it. The attempts that I see you guys engaging in – largely seem focused on just creating your own personal gilded utopias – and frankly, I just don't get it. Don't you guys see that if you improved the condition of everyone – it would improve your own condition that much more? Hey, let go of your wallet's money bags, you don't need to worry, I'm not talking about redistributing wealth. You know and I know that a wealth redistribution scheme wouldn't work out that well for most people – it would just be a re-filtering of wealth to the top again.

No, I'm talking about actually building fucking utopias. You are the first humans in history

to have the resources, the power, the technology, and the opportunity to actually build utopian civilizations. Why are you fucking around with politics at all? You have the ability to go around all of that. You have the ability to hire the best talent, the greatest minds, the most visionary thinkers. You can take the best ideas the world has ever known and build upon them, expand them, and implement them.

The utopian communities and communes of the 19th century, the cooperatives and communes of the 1960s, even the Raj Neeshi city in the 1980s in Oregon – all of these were built with less than any of you earn in a month. There are people willing to volunteer, there are people willing to work, there are people willing and desirous of living in a different type of society.

You have the power to create the way human civilization will function for the next ten thousand years. You have the ability to buy towns, cities, states, islands, countries and to create new forms of human civilization. Forms that actually work – or forms that fail and pave the way for the forms that will eventually work.

Why have none of you bought a town and found the people who are willing to live in it and build the future? I can't understand why you focus on golf courses and eating steaks and just building your bank accounts bigger when you could be creating ten thousand years of the future? Nobody will remember most of what you are doing in two hundred years, if anything at all.

I appreciate some of what Elon Musk and Bill Gates and some others are doing – but by working within the framework of governments they can only fail. Why not start at the smallest level and build the next level of governments? Why not start with the municipality, build the coalitions of them, and then move forward?

Why not create 'Dream Spaces' where visionaries and artists can expend their energy doing what they do best instead of finding the time to follow their purpose between 50 hour weeks of drudgery? Why not use your wealth, your power, your achievements – to truly change the future. Build a town, select the residents, establish a new system – not capitalism, democracy, communism, or dictatorship – something new, something truly revolutionary. Why not create a viral form of human existence that defeats all the known -isms? Why not build a garden of eden and fill it with people who share your values?

Maybe you guys are doing this and keeping it all secret – seems like that would be a hard secret to keep. Maybe you just don't care and want to fill your time living with more steaks, more rounds of golf, more pussy or dick, more yachts and jets – but you have the opportunity right now to do so much more. I think you should take it.

Also, I think you know this, but, you should probably not waste any time. It sure feels like your time is running out quickly. You may have 99.9% of the wealth, but there are still nearly 8 billion of us and life isn't getting any easier for most of us – in fact – most are steps away from desperation. Everything has failed the rest of us – and unless you can

find a way to appease us, win us to your side, or kill us all – we are probably going to be coming for you very soon.

I hope you decide to change the world and the future.

I'm going to keep trying to make my way to where you are – because in our system – I can't see any other way of doing what I've mentioned above. If I get there, I'm going to show you what I mean – if not, I hope you show me.

I'll be honest. There's still a little bit of me that thinks I might actually have it in me to become a billionaire – that's the American dream shining through again. I still believe in this country and the lies it has told me. I also recognize that there must be a better way. I've never stopped searching for it.

In researching my app, I discovered that there was already a company in Hawaii that was doing what I wanted to do. Shaka Guides was creating fully automated tours using GPS geo-fencing. I contacted them to see if they were hiring. I'd be happy to work for a startup. It had been a dream for a while. They were looking for a community manager. Someone to do social media and a lot of writing. I was perfect.

Now, to be honest, Shaka Guides wasn't doing exactly what I had envisioned. I was thinking of creating an app that allowed anyone to create their own tour, in their own voice, anywhere they wanted. Shaka Guides was using voice actors to create specific automated tours using scripts. Still, it was close enough.

I met with the founder, Andrew via Zoom and we hit it off. He told me he'd be in touch. I followed up a week later. He said we should meet again, this time in person. I was stoked. I was going to work for a startup in tourism automation! When we met, I had done my research on what similar positions paid on the mainland and in Hawaii. Hawaii is always around 20% less – I understood that. A similar position on the mainland would pay about \$110,000 per year. In Hawaii, it should pay about \$80,000.

The interview was a little weird. Andrew told me that he wanted me to create a podcast and sell advertising for it. He wanted me to develop a blog following and sell ads on the blog. He wanted me to develop multiple channels that would earn revenue for the company through advertising. I could do all of that. I was happy to do all of that. It was weird because none of this was in the job description of the community manager position. That was cool, I could roll with it. This was start-up world! We got around to how much the job would pay and I was ready with my salary request. I was actually willing to take less in return for stock options. I just wanted to be in. It got weirder. He really hemmed and hawed when we started talking about money. I'm a pretty straight shooter. I could tell something was wrong.

“Andrew, I'm confused. Are you offering me a job? I'm confused because this is all pretty exciting, I think we have a good rapport, but honestly, none of this stuff was in the job description. I'd like to be your community manager, but are you going to offer the job to me?”

There was a really awkward silence as he looked around the room. Then he told me they had already hired a girl on the Big Island to be their community manager and they didn't have budget to hire anyone else. He liked me but he wanted me to build paying products for his company and to figure out a way to pay myself a small percentage from that. I learned two things that day. First, no one hires a dude in his forties to manage online communities. I should have already learned that. They hire girls in their twenties or women in their thirties at the latest. Female. They almost always hire women to build online and social media connections because there is a perception (largely true) that women are better at that than men. The second thing I learned was that I wasn't going to be willing to work for anyone ever again that was taking more than I was making for them.

We parted and I was incredibly offended. He had the nerve to ask me to build paying products without pay and then to expect me to pay myself a small percentage (10%) of the revenue I built? I would build my own company. I saw opportunity in the fact that there were no existing apps that let you record audio on a map.

I dove into the world of building a tech startup. I hired a contractor to build a minimum viable product. He was Indian and he did sloppy work but the price was cheap. I called it Hawaii-Tiki and then the Vagobond App and finally, I decided to call it Iwahai – all the letters of Hawaii rearranged. I started building a company around it. I had no idea how to build an actual company. I had a lot to learn. I'm good at learning. I began reading a lot.

I met with Adam, my boss from Private Tours Hawaii. We were friendly and met for coffee a couple times a month. He was a boss and he was exploiting my labor, but at least he always paid for the coffee. I told him about my new business venture. I explained about how Shaka Guides was a threat to the tour business. I showed him my new Iwahai app.

“Can you hire people to build a tour guide app like Shaka Guides?” He asked me. I told him about the complex app I had in mind that would allow us to make and sell tours from local tour guides. He liked the idea. He saw the vision. I told him why I had gone for the simpler Iwahai map recorder. I wanted it to be simple enough for one person to build it. He was interested in the more complex project. He was excited about it. He wanted to know if I could get it built.

“Sure,” I told him, “but it will be expensive. I've got some developers that are willing but they tell me it's going to be \$10,000 for the iPhone app.”

“Let's do this,” Adam said. “I'll fund it.”

I hadn't expected this. I didn't want to give up control of my Iwahai project.

“It will have to be a brand new project,” I told him, “Not including this app or the work I've done so far. These are different developers.”

“Sure,” he told me. “Sounds good.”

“You want to be co-founders doing this?” I asked him. “I don't want to tackle a project this big by myself. This is going to take a team. You provide the seed money, I'll get the app built, and then

we'll build the company together?"

"Sure," he said.

"Fifty-fifty," I said and held out my hand.

He shook it. I think he was stoned. He wrote me a check for ten grand.

I put the Iwahai project aside and spent the next five months building the company we decided to call ZguideZ. I was working with a super annoying team of Indian developers who had taken advantage of how little I knew to completely fuck up the project. They took all the Indian holidays and since they were working for an American, they took all the American holidays as well. There were countless delays. They didn't meet a single deadline. By the time 2018 was ending, the app was supposed to be done. It was time for us to incorporate our business. I got all the paperwork together. I sent it to Adam for approval. I had the shares split 50/50. I was listed as the CEO and he was the CMO, the chief marketing officer. This was what he had told me he was interested in. He balked.

"I don't really want to be active in building the company," he said. He didn't want to do anything. He didn't want to be a co-founder. He'd decided that he just wanted to be an early investor. It really took the wind from my sails. I didn't want to do this alone. I'd never wanted to do this alone. I'd been saddled with an albatross. Solo founders almost always fail. The company we were building was too much for one person to do by themselves.

We renegotiated his percentage down to 15%. I was hopeful I could find a co-founder. I started attending startup events. The first potential co-founder I found was a fellow vet, a fellow world traveler, and a fellow entrepreneur. Things went well until we met with Adam. Adam mentioned that I was involved with cryptocurrency and this sent the guy into some PTSD induced tailspin – his ideas about cryptocurrency were that it was all organized crime and foreign spy agency stuff. He had worked with Naval Intelligence until he got out of the service several months earlier, he was always very vague about what he had done. His job had involved preparing for 'black swan' events. He accused me of being a foreign intelligence officer trying to rope him into some situation. Obviously, this partnership wasn't going to work.

Blog Post: I feel like the entire year of 2018, both nationally and internationally - economically and politically, can be reflected pretty well by my own working life over the same period. So, it makes sense to touch on that a little bit.

I've been a productivity machine these past few months. I've been learning new skills, prepping myself for new careers and discovering new tools which allow me to get past stuck points of the past. My reading has been focused and constant. I've been using my time running or in the car to listen to podcasts and educational lectures. I've been writing, revising, and researching. To give some idea of my progress here - in 2018, I co-founded a cryptocurrency, started a podcast, launched a new blog, re-launched an old blog, become a featured blogger for a major publication, developed an app, started a new business, developed another app and took investment in it, and am working with a

partner to co-found a third app (This idea fizzled but it was to build a Pokemon Go style game that was based on real nature). All of this in addition to working hard to be a caring and present father - which means that time needs to be dedicated there - and to working at a job that actually pays my bills - because despite the fact that I'm doing all that stuff listed above - none of it is earning a dime - in fact, most of it, the education, the books, the development, the hosting, the domains, the licensing, the business registrations, the research, the parenting - none of it earns money (yet) and it all costs money.

That's what I've seen in the U.S. economy, the international political world (and the U.S. political scene), and in the overall progress of the human species as a whole. There are a lot of great and powerful things happening right now but none of them are paying the bills (yet) and as a result - there are a lot of short-term thinking people who are complaining about the waste of energy, resources, and capital that these things currently look like (from a short term perspective). It's as if my wife were nagging at me for reading too much or spending too much time on things that don't provide for us - and forced me to go get a job at McDonalds- which, to be fair - might actually end up paying more than everything I am currently doing in the long run. It might. And the money and energy going into genetic research, industrial automation, cryptocurrency, advanced materials, artificial intelligence, and other forward thinking technologies - it might be wasted.

But probably it's not. (And I am still hopeful that my efforts will yield more than \$15/hr as a fast food worker as well.)

Planet Earth is in a bit of a dark spot right now. There are really two camps. Those who want things the way they've always been - and those who want things to be very very different. The hard work being put in is yielding results. However, there are those who don't want to see things change. They are the know-nothings or more accurately the don't-want-to-know-nothings who deny climate change, poo-poo on concepts like Universal Basic Income and they don't want to see anything like equality between people who have been separated by oceans of hate, racism, and misogyny. They are in a position that is likely to lose power - so they don't want to see anything actually change.

Yes, I'm talking about old white men but more broadly I'm talking about the military, industrial, economic, government power structure and the elaborate control systems that it has constructed world-wide. Old Asian men, old African men, old Arab men, old Indian men, and also the women who are entrenched in benefitting from that system too. There's a reason all those old white women voted for Trump, Brexit, and right wing racists...it's called power and privilege.

A few days ago, I watched with breath held as Russia seized Ukrainian war ships and protestors took to the streets in France...and then...something shifted. The system did not collapse. It appears to have some tendency to rise - which makes me nervous for the future.

It would be nice to have all that going going going actually lead to somewhere we want to be...on both a personal and a global level.

I began applying for startup accelerator programs. I was accepted into a couple that didn't have investment aspects, but for the most part, nobody wanted to invest in a startup with a solo founder who didn't know how to code. I was teaching myself to code, but it was slow going. I started feeling some heavy resentment towards Adam for diverting me from my very achievable one person project into a project that no one could do alone. I was failing. Adam's company was also failing. He was unable to provide enough tours for both me and his other guide. Since the other guide had seniority, he got most of the tours.

I began doing tours through an online company called Tours By Locals. It was the Uber of tour guides. I set my own prices and they took a very reasonable 10%. I was earning the same on one tour that I would earn on five of Adam's tours. I didn't want to work for him anymore anyway. We had become friends and the employer relationship was uncomfortable for me anyway. I gave him notice that I would stop doing tours for him at the end of 2019.

Blog Post: For a species that has created hundreds (if not thousands) of religions and philosophies which essentially all say "Be kind to each other" or "Take care of each other" it's mind boggling how badly we humans have failed.

My personal belief is that those of us who would be inclined to work together have fucked up the worst because for some reason we've all turned on each other and adopted the psychopathic 'Winner take all' mentality as a constant.

Don't agree with me? That's fine.

The homeless seniors on the streets don't agree with me either. Most of them will turn their back on someone worse off than they are - just like the rest of us do. They buy into the philosophy of deserving a better existence than those worse off than them the same as you do and I do. Go ahead, get all self-righteous about it. Bottom line is that as long as someone else is suffering beneath you, you don't have a leg to stand on. Neither do I.

Imagine a bottom up revolution where taking care of those less fortunate than you was what empowered people.

Start at the very bottom. The mom with one apple and two starving kids looking out of her tent on the side of the freeway and seeing the mom without an apple and two starving kids. She decides 'Fuck this' - and gives half her apple to the other parent. Suddenly four have something and two have hope. The bum with half a pizza splits it into sevens instead of filling his belly. And so forth on up the line. The poor, the starving, and the destitute coming together until suddenly - it's 8 billion to 80. Those last 80 men and women have as much as the other 8 billion people. They live high and mighty, but in my imaginary scenario the 8 billion aren't playing their game any longer. They aren't

taking scraps to exploit each other any longer. The jig is up.

We've all fallen into the trap they set for us. It's not socialism or communism or redistribution of wealth or any of the other bullshit they've fed us. It's survival of OUR species versus survival of a couple of greedy fucks with clever ideas.

We humans (especially American kind) like to dream though - we like to think that we deserve more than the others. We like to imagine being one of those 80 and that we have the potential to be one of those 80 and we like to create and support systems to protect the wealth we will never actually have. The same systems that cause that homeless mom to cut her apple into three pieces and close the tent door.

2019 had been dominated by the ugliness of American politics. A diverse field of Democrat contenders wanting to challenge Donald Trump's hold on the presidency was eventually reduced to the blandest of candidates. Another old white man. Former vice-president Joe Biden. The innovative ideas of Andrew Yang and Bernie Sanders were ignored. The many African American and female candidates were rejected in favor of bland Biden. Even the young gay wartime veteran was forced to endorse Biden the bland. Biden promised to pick a female vice-president. As for Trump, his base remained strong. He had gutted financial regulations and the economy was on a roll. He had gutted environmental regulations and the economy was on a roll. He had filled the country with hate and the economy was on a roll.

Blog Post: To say that things seem to be precarious would be an understatement.

Climate change is having devastating effects around the world.

Totalitarianism and Fascism are on the rise and seemingly ready to march.

The act of simply living has become an increasingly expensive proposition.

Children in the US and other countries spend their childhoods staring at screens and going through lockdown and 'active shooter' drills.

And then there is that big fake thing - the economy - along with the other fake things like nations, freedom, and liberty.

Hate and anger rule the roads, the checkout lines, and of course - the main way that people interact with one another now - the online world.

I could go on about the big stuff - but what about the small stuff - Craigslist now charges for ads -after killing all the little free ad papers in America. Starbucks isn't a '3rd place' to spend time and make friends any more but it killed all the little coffee shops that were. All the 'craft breweries' and microbreweries are now owned by big international conglomerates and those hundreds of cereal brands in the grocery store are all made by the same three companies.

People are waiting in line for hours to have a 'new chicken sandwich' and literally stabbing each other over them.

Cord cutting is now more expensive than cable.

Not only do you have to pay for your phone but also data and storage plus any apps you might think you need.

All the 'free' places that used to be good for kids or a relaxing day are filled with sometimes violent and psychotic homeless - for god sakes don't leave your kid alone at the park or the library and don't try to spend a quiet afternoon there unless you want to smell pee and hear someone on their cellphone.

No hike in the mountains is complete without some asshole blasting music on a portable speaker as they go down the trail looking for an 'epic selfie spot'

A new car costs more than a house did when I was a child (the 1970s) - and yet annual wages are about the same or less when inflation is considered.

A trip to the dentist used to be \$100 for a cleaning and checkup, no insurance required and if you needed a filling you would get it that day for \$100 more or a root canal for \$500. Now, they won't see you without insurance and your co-pay on the root canal will be \$1500 and the cleaning, filling, and root canal will require 4-5 appointments that will total in the thousands at the very least.

As for the doctor - just forget it. Let the sickness run its course and die if you have to rather than leaving your kids with huge medical debts.

Everything is more expensive - and yet our schools constantly are sending home fundraising notices so the kids can have field trips, drama, music or anything else.

National Parks are no longer free and often require reservations just to see them.

The internet is no longer a reasonable place to search for information because you are so bombarded by paid search results and advertisements that the chances of finding what you are looking for are slim to zero unless you are a highly paid search professional. There are no more random exciting discoveries on the internet - only clickbait.

People no longer write letters - email has become so overwhelmed with spam that it is useless. People no longer answer their phones because of robo calls, no one checks their voicemail - most are over-full, and texting is following the same trajectory. The end result is isolation and loneliness.

Social media is filled with malicious ads, fake news, and mind control material - not to mention trolls and hate mongers.

I could go on. I don't really need to. Let me just lay it out for you in simple terms.

The world is not as good as it used to be. The world sucks. It's not your imagination or bad attitude. It really sucks.

We've created this world and now we have to live in it. If you pray, you should pray for divine intervention, the arrival of aliens, a takeover by artificial intelligence, or the birth of some sort of viral movement that has the ability to sweep all of the world around us away. Those are the only things that can change the trajectory we are on.

Otherwise, we just need to hang on, keep struggling, and make the best of what has become - at best- a very sucky situation for the majority of us in 2019.

I write a plan for every year. I decided that 2020 would be my year of emergence. Marriage and parenting had stopped my travel. I would focus on my startups. I would learn to code. I would learn to speak Chinese. I would start to travel again. I booked a trip to Australia for the end of February and beginning of March. I started paying attention to airfares to other destinations I wanted to visit like Bali, Cuba, Iceland, and Sri Lanka. 2020 was going to be awesome. I called it the Year of Emergence.

## **Pandemic 2020**

The virus emerged in Wuhan at the end of 2019 but no one really noticed until 2020. I was aware of it. I began selling my stocks towards the end of January. The markets kept going up. I bought back in. That was stupid. I knew better. I fell the the FOMO, the fear of missing out. Just like I did at the end of 2017 with all the alt-coins.

Blog Post: First of all, I recognize that the state, the corporations, and the banks are really all part of the same capitalist entity. The police, armed forces, and other tools of force belong to the same entity. For the most part, the entire globe and every nation-state on it are firmly in control of capitalist forces now. Yes, there are variations on the capitalist theme - fascist capitalist states, pseudo-democratic capitalist states, state-controlled-capitalism states, and tyrannical capitalist states. The bottom line is that all of these states are under the thumb of bankers, corporate boards, and big finance.

Independent nation-states are an illusion that capital has created in order to keep the people focused on the relatively unimportant business of electing impotent legislative bodies, debating amongst political parties, and protesting tyrants and blowhards like Trump, Dueterte, Kim, Erdogan, Putin etc. I've fallen for it and quite likely - so have you.

People (workers) with more power to change get the benefit of living in countries where the standard of living is higher. Organized labor and abundant resources made the UK, USA, Japan, and other 'Western' nations dangerous to the capitalist system - and as a result, the people living in those regions are given a higher standard of living and inundated with larger and more powerful control systems such as the internet-entertainment complex.

The good news is that capitalism is failing. The bad news is that it is destroying our one and only planet, enslaving all of us, and quite frankly, a major dilemma for capitalists is already rising - what to do with a workforce that is no longer needed as automation eliminates jobs. Capitalism relies on consumption and control.

This is where Bitcoin comes in. There is no central authority over bitcoin. Bitcoin does not require bankers to mediate exchange. Bitcoin does not require governments to regulate trade. The true identity of Bitcoin's creator is unknown, it is run on nodes distributed over the entire world, and it is a functioning peer-to-peer monetary system that does not require a federal reserve, the approval of corporations, or government backing.

Bitcoin is the greatest threat to capitalism in the history of capitalism. Owning Bitcoin, enables you to transact without government approval. There is no way for governments to automatically tax Bitcoin, they cannot 'inflate' or 'deflate' bitcoin by producing more.

The price of Bitcoin reflected in fiat currency is a direct result of the true value of fiat declining, rather than the value of Bitcoin rising. A Bitcoin is a Bitcoin.

The simple act of buying any amount of Bitcoin, is the single most revolutionary thing that a person living today can do. Every Bitcoin transaction takes away the power of the capitalist machine. Every Bitcoin transaction, moves power from that machine to the holders of Bitcoin.

As I got ready for my trip, I became more and more outraged at the political and economic machine we are forced to live under.

Blog Post: A huge focus of my life's work has been identifying and rebelling against individual control systems - while this may not at first be apparent when looking at the parts of my work - when taken as a whole - the message is clear.

My goal has always been that of maximizing human individual freedom. I have always been my own test subject.

To begin - we need to agree on some definitions for words that get thrown around carelessly in the modern world: freedom, liberty, and independence. These are important words that have (frankly) lost a lot of their power through misuse - so let's reclaim them.

**FREEDOM** - this has nothing to do with governments or flags or warfare. True freedom has to do with individuals - freedom is the ability to act, think, feel, and speak as one wants. Are you expressing freedom when you go to work because you have to pay your rent? Are you expressing freedom when you have been conditioned by a bell and an industrial workforce school system? Are you expressing freedom when you have been psychologically manipulated to feel as if material possessions will fulfill you? None of those are freedom. FREEdom is the opposite of SERFdOm and if you are forced to work by a master (even a government master) then you are not free, you are a serf (which is essentially a slave who works for wages, rights, or privileges provided by a master).

**LIBERTY** - this has nothing to do with statues or eagles or other symbolism which has subverted it to a nationalist patriotism. Liberty is when you are not constrained by oppressive restrictions in movement, thought, action, or belief. Liberty is individualistic. Liberty is taking a walk (literally and figuratively) and not being fenced onto your course by walls, fences, or barriers. Walls, fences, and cages are the opposite of liberty. Liberty is essentially, the ability to make one's own decisions. It is the root of Liberal as in Liberal Society and Liberal Arts which both posit that a person will have more liberty if they have more education - i.e. knowledge/education increases liberty.

The difference between LIBERTY and FREEDOM is important - Freedom is the ability to do what you want while Liberty is not being constrained in what you want. For example- Freedom is deciding to take a walk and Liberty is no one telling you that you cannot.

**INDEPENDENCE** - Here's a big can of worms. Independence is the state of not being

controlled by others and most importantly not relying on or needing assistance from others - it's both, not just one. The U.S. founding fathers broke with England so that they could make their own political choices - they were able to do so because they did not need assistance from England to govern themselves.

All three of these concepts get thrown together into a mixture of bad definitions that muddy the waters and make it difficult to consider these important questions with clarity - but once the concepts are defined - the essential questions suddenly take on a much greater amount of meaning.

Who is free?

What are they free to do?

What forces constrain them?

At this point, I would like to introduce the most important concept I have ever come across - to me - it supersedes Liberty, Freedom, and Independence. I would argue that without this - all three are impossible.

**AUTONOMY** - There is no concept more important. Autonomy is the ability to make an informed and un-coerced decision. There are two key parts - informed and un-coerced. If you go walking in the park because you think you have to - you are not exercising autonomy. If you go walking in the park because you don't know any other place to walk (but other places exist) you are not exercising autonomy. Without autonomy there is no independence. Without autonomy there is no freedom. Without autonomy there is no liberty.

Autonomy is the mother of all three. To achieve autonomy you must shake the shackles of conditioning - you must be willing (and able) to look outside of the box that has been constructed around you. The box around you is built over all of human existence - societal roles, religion, politics, laws, culture - these are the invisible control systems that limit your choices. Education gives you the opportunity to learn about the walls. Travel gives you the opportunity to see the walls. Philosophy gives you the tools to think about the walls. Art, literature, and music are the tools that will help you to shatter the walls.

In our world, in this country, there is not much that is more stressful than being faced with the prospect of not being able to pay your bills, not being able to take care of your responsibilities, and possibly even being faced with homelessness.

Many workers have been painted into a corner where they are not allowed to quit or leave work, even if they are not getting paid. Essentially, the limited definition of slavery. It is my hope that these workers can break their dependence on the enslaving jobs, and thrive. I hope that they are able to find enough autonomy to declare their independence, enjoy their freedom, and exercise true liberty in the process.

Election years always work me up but this was working me up more than usual. Watching

Trump and his cronies make themselves rich, watching billionaires like Musk and Bezos and Zuckerberg take more and more of our lives away from us. My outrage was beyond the normal election year.

Blog Post: We, as a species, have built a great and terrible machine. It is a planetary behemoth which uses everything in its reach to make itself more great and, sadly, more terrible. I do not believe that the terrible part is an intentional design - for the most part - though there are some who at times wield great influence over the machine with intent that can be characterized as nothing but evil. Of course, evil must be defined. In this case, it will suffice to be defined as hatred or malice against the innocent; working towards the destruction, suffering, or eradication of entire populations. That is evil. The machine has also been, on occasion, been harnessed and directed toward good - the opposite of evil. Good is the uplifting, relief, and protection of the entire population - as a whole. Good benefits all of humanity. Evil benefits only a select group at the expense of the rest. These are the definitions of good, evil, and the definition of the machine is simply the totality of human civilization as it exists at any point in time.

I do not think we can smash the machine, I do not think we can destroy the machine, I do not think we can be rid of the machine. The only way to do so would be to eradicate our species from the universe. We are a social species and so long as there are three humans there will be a machine. If there are less than three humans, our species is eradicated.

The machine is broken. It is badly broken. The chain of human events which have led to the current incarnation of the humanity machine are immutable. We cannot change the events of the past. At the moment, the machine propagates evil intent by placing maximum conditioning and stressors upon as many individuals as possible. For example, a man works to fuel the machine. In return, he is rewarded with the means to fulfill his needs. The same is true of woman. The joining together of man and woman should create an excess of resources and reduce the need to work but the machine does not benefit from leisure time. The machine benefits from maximum output from every individual, so it raises the cost of fulfillment while reducing the benefit of work. If the man and woman have a child, the cost of fulfillment is more than tripled and by necessity the man and woman must each work longer hours while the child must be cared for - the machine offers school - an indoctrination and worker training program. School allows the man and woman to work longer hours and gives the machine the chance to prepare and condition new workers. After school childcare is a means to keep workers working and create work for new workers. The machine demands production and for those who chose not to produce, the result is punishment in the form of homelessness, incarceration, no health care, and ultimately death.

Once you become aware of the machine, despair can easily set in. When you see the machine, you see how futile is our existence. What reason to live, work, rear children,

save, and die? None. Only the machine. The machine does not love you, the machine does not care about you or your future, the machine does not respect you. You are nothing to the machine. You will disappear and there will be no memory of you. You do not matter. Nothing you do matters. You are only fuel and replaceable fuel at that.

You cannot drop out of the machine. You cannot escape from the machine or opt-out of the machine. The machine owns you and controls you - you and every other human being on planet earth. The machine has billions of back up systems just like you and more are being made, conditioned, and prepared every second.

I was approaching manifesto territory. In fact, I wrote a couple.

**Manifesto of Sociopathism** - American Capitalism is a Serious Problem

Lobsters generally don't know the water around them is getting hotter until it is too late.

Look, I admire entrepreneurship. I think that the marketplace of ideas and products is a wonderful thing. I am a firm believer in the idea that if you work hard, make sacrifices, and tread carefully - you should be able to enjoy life more than those who don't do those things.

But, but, but ....

This American capitalism thing is way out of hand. There used to be this American golden story about how we take care of each other, lend a helping hand to others, and are all willing to work hard so that the world can be a better place for ALL the future generations. Somewhere along the line, this got buried under the idea that YOU deserve to have the opportunity to be the next Oprah, Bezos, Gates, or Trump.

There are literally miles of homeless encampments under freeways in Seattle, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area. There are even more people like me who can't afford a dental insurance plan (or other insurance or medical treatment) and go through each day dealing with excruciating pain because they are putting every penny into keeping a roof over their head, paying back student loans, or some other expense deemed more important. And make no mistake - not becoming homeless is worth the pain - that's a spiral that is incredibly hard to escape.

Somewhere along the line it became more acceptable to be greedy than to be altruistic. And at the same time it became less acceptable to be needy than to be dead.

Hey, I'd love to be a billionaire and if the opportunity came, I would take it - and then I would use the wealth and power that came with that to fight against the existence of a billionaire class at all. There should be a limit. I'm willing to give up the opportunity to become a billionaire but only if we can collectively agree that no one 'deserves' this opportunity in the first place.

You know what people do deserve? All people deserve to know that they will not starve

or die from the elements. All people deserve to know that they can get medical treatment, dental treatment, a meal, a bed, school for their children, the ability to get to and from a job, a job interview, the grocery store, or a sick relatives.

When did what I just listed become something bad? When did treating every human being with decency become 'socialism' or 'communism' - I can pretty well pinpoint it to the election of Ronald Reagan and the rise of the 'compassionate conservatives', the 'free market republicans' and the greedy sons of bitches who deregulated Wall Street, gutted the unions, created a culture of shame around being in need, and in general led the way to what seems to be the ugly conclusion of the United States of America.

What is that ugly conclusion? Look around. A lying and greedy sociopath manipulating markets, discounting injured servicemen and women, insulting honored veterans, and running a sham trial in a bought and controlled senate where the outcome is already known before the evidence is presented.

We should call the current system Sociopathism.

The markets kept going up. My outrage kept growing.

Consider the untenable nature of our current civilization. Perhaps the most amazing thing about our current world civilization is the fact that it does not crash. This ridiculous house of cards seemingly only held together by brain washing and threats of force. An arrangement which benefits an extreme minority and disadvantages the extreme majority. How in the world is our current system still standing? Why have the common people not risen up and destroyed it or at the very least demanded something more favorable? The answer, is democracy. I'm not saying that democracy is good, far from it, I'm saying that democracy allows the control of the masses. We all know that politicians lie and that campaign promises are rarely kept, and yet we continue to extend our votes and our trust and our hope ...and to be disappointed. Meanwhile, the engineers of this system continue to fine tune their control through distraction, stress, and misinformation. The dissemination of information, the requirements of capital, and the politics of voting - all of these are distractions from the true issue. We are not being allowed to live the lives we were born to live. Were you born to commute? Were you born to have a job that doesn't fulfill you? And even if you have a job you love and a commute you enjoy - were you born to fill out forms for health insurance and continually worry about things which have nothing to do with the veracity of your existence?

I wrote another manifesto this one was more positive.

### **A Manifesto of Peopolism**

[pronounced {pee-ah-pol-ism}]

For too long, humanity has boxed themselves into outdated and antiquated -isms that were created to describe different times, different strategies, and different human conditions than those which exist today. The -isms of yesterday are no longer useful -

and in some cases have been proven to be deadly but still they are used today despite no longer being accurate containers for the wants, needs, or actual conditions of humanity.

The major -isms used today for the description of socioeconomic conditions are the following: capitalism, communism, socialism, consumerism, despotism, humanism, individualism, isolationism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, nationalism, totalitarianism, anarchism, conservatism, environmentalism, feminism, feudalism, fascism, libertarianism, populism, progressivism, trans-humanism, and finally one that should be an -ism but is not, democracy. All of these -isms are poison because they put you in a box and force you to exist within a framework that in some cases is centuries old. We categorically reject these and all other -isms.

Today is a time like no other. The condition and needs of humanity cannot be described, enhanced, or confined within the definitions of previous centuries. We refuse to be confined by borders, ideologies, religions, or cultural heritage. We are human beings. We are one species, one world, and one people.

Therefore, be it known, that we the people will neither be governed, imposed upon, encumbered, enslaved, nor bound by the faulty understandings and misguided definitions of our ancestors. No person alive today was involved in creating the foundational structures which dictate our very existence. We function as slaves to ideologies and misguided cultural architecture that has proven to be an existential threat to our entire species. The old -isms have forced us to kill one another, to spend our limited time on earth creating profits for greedy monsters, and to have actively taken part in destroying our planet when we should have been reaping the benefits of being alive. The old -isms have made us choose between starving our children or starving other children, between killing or being killed, and between working or dying. Life does not need to be so complex. If you doubt this, simply look at the other living populations we share this world with. They live without 'jobs', 'governments', or 'religions'.

We acknowledge that human beings are complex and that in order to maximize all of our individual happiness we need to have a collective set of rules to which we can all agree. For human 'civilization' and its many benefits to exist, human needs must be agreed upon and mutually understood and respected. Therefore, and with the understanding of all stated above - we propose a new -ism for our modern age. Change is happening at an ever faster pace and we recognize that it will not be long before these beliefs and ideas sound equally antiquated and perhaps become obsolete.

Yet, we must try to create an -ism for our age, a system that recognizes that we live in a world where automation, artificial intelligence, instantaneous communication from the furthest reaches of the planet, and relationships that transcend the concepts of borders, language, and culture have created new ways to understand our planet and our respective place on it.

And so - we present this first version of the Manifesto of Peopolism. It is our hope that the greatest minds of this and every generation to follow will embrace and contribute to this new way of existing. It is also our hope that the people of the world will leave the -isms of the past behind and embrace a fluid meaning to existence which respects the rights of all people, all creatures, and all forms of miraculous life to co-exist.

We borrow from the great minds of the past without apology, for this intellectual and philosophical heritage is our true gift from our progenitors - the world that we shape will be the gift we leave to our descendants. It is our hope that it is a welcome gift and not a burden such as that we have inherited. We, the living, have inherited wars, inequality, disease, greed, genocide and more. To some extent, much to our disgust and dismay, we have perpetuated the same. No more. We wash our hands of the horrors of the past and move forward starting with this universal bill of rights.

We, the living, hold these truths to be self evident.

All living things have an inherent right to exist. It is our hope to someday create a living bill of rights, but to start we must focus on our human brothers and sisters. These rights apply from birth until death

All human beings have the right to live without fear.

All human beings have the right to live without hunger.

All human beings have the right to travel freely from place to place so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others.

All human beings have the right to shelter from the elements.

All human beings have the right to medical, dental, and psychological assistance if it can be provided.

All human beings have the right to self improvement through education and training.

All human beings have the right to improve their (and their family or clan's) living situation through hard work, ingenuity, and innovation.

All human beings have the right to love and live with the person of their choice, to build a family, and to freely associate with whomever they may choose.

All human beings have the right to live in self-governing communities or groups so long as all members are allowed the freedom to come and go as they choose.

All human beings are allowed the freedom to interact or not interact with others be they individuals, communities, groups, clans, clubs, or municipalities.

All human beings have the right to live on an environmentally safe and stable planet. No human being, group, or municipality has the right to endanger all life on the planet. Protecting our environment needs to be one of the cornerstones of Peopolism.

We recognize and honor the validity of the United Nations Universal Bill of Human Rights so long as the rights above are not infringed.

We recognize that the right to build wealth and legacy is a human desire but history and experience have shown that there need to be limits to wealth.

We do not believe any human being needs to have more than the equivalent of a half billion U.S. dollars. There is nothing that anyone can buy that will cost more and if there is - it should not be available for individuals.

We do not believe in the concept of 'corporate personhood' and believe that the super-human lifespans and abilities of globe spanning corporations need to be severely limited. It is our belief that actual stakeholders should be the only shareholders - that is - the communities affected by companies, the users of company products or resources, the workers of companies, and the people whose lives are connected with the business that a company conducts in any way.

We do not believe in rule of nation states, counties, countries, states, or provinces. We believe in the rule of municipalities, neighborhoods, towns, and cities. We believe that it is possible for such ruling bodies to represent the will of the people but that anything larger skews the representation in favor of a few and helps to create elite classes who inevitably use their power to benefit themselves and give themselves more power.

We do not believe in rule by religious authorities though we respect the rights of all people to worship and believe as they choose. Religion and government are terrible bedfellows and inevitably lead to abuse of power.

We believe that people have the ability to rule themselves better in small groups than in large and we recognize that small groups may want to confederate for mutual benefit in trade, jurisprudence, defense, and other human needs. We will rigorously defend the right of individual confederated groups to peaceably withdraw when the decision suits their citizens.

This document is a living document. Today it is written and signed by one. In the future, it is our hope that it is written and signed by all.

The virus was getting more serious. Millions of people were quarantined in China. The USA didn't care. The markets kept going up. Trump's approval ratings kept going up. Trump got impeached and then he gave his State of the Union address. It was a dystopian nightmare.

Blog Post: Words just can't express how far we've already fallen - and yet, the crash is going to be so much more incredibly painful when we hit the bottom. We still have a long way to go. With the exception of Mitt Romney, the entire Republican Senate essentially proved that they have already sold their souls with the vote on Donald Trump's impeachment. They gave him a pass - for everything. This is only going to get worse.

The Democrats meanwhile are so hell bent on keeping their campaign funding and

power that they choose to completely ignore the will of the people.

At this point, we can't get rid of Trump. There's no candidate who will beat him and if they do, he will be able to call foul play on the elections and refuse to step down. This is going to get really painful for some. My advice is that we just step back and let it play out. When things that actually threaten lives, freedom, or existence take place - then we step up. We need to embrace jiu jitsu here and just let him run with his head.

There's plenty of other stuff happening at the same time Wuhan Corona Virus continues to balloon, the stock markets continue to go up and up and up - just like a roller coaster that is pulling the car up to where the tracks stop before pushing everyone to their deaths. None of this really matters - the stock markets I mean. That wealth is ephemeral. We're all going to die at some point and this whole system is reaching the point where all it can do is collapse.

It's my hope that when these cataclysms happen - we, as people, can find a way to take care of each other - and more importantly to take care of each other's children. Right now there are 50 million people locked into a quarantine zone with what seems to be a very contagious and deadly disease - think about that. At least a third of those fifty million are kids - probably more.

We are at a time when we need leadership in the world - but we don't have it. Maybe this crisis will bring it to the fore. Maybe this crisis is what will bring about real change. It's coming. God help us all.

My concern with the virus was such that I considered cancelling my trip to Australia but with no cases in Hawaii and just nine cases in Australia – I decided to go for it. It was a solo trip. My wife and daughter needed to be in work and school. I had nine days and hoped the world wouldn't end while I was gone.

I had a great trip. I loved Australia. A few days before I flew home, I told my wife to go buy toilet paper and some N-95 masks because the shelves had already been cleared in Australia. She didn't take me serious. By the time I got home, the shelves in America had also been cleared. At this point, I'm just going to share my COVID-19 journal. I wonder how many other people kept these? I'm going to give it a chapter of its own as it is. It's up to date as I write this.

## **My COVID-19 Journal**

*My Experience with 2020, the year of COVID-19. You lived through this unless you haven't been born when I write it, so you probably can skip this section unless my casualty counts and observations are of interest to you.*

I'm not sure if I've just been waiting for a disaster, if I'm more informed, or if I tend to have a longer view of things than other people – but this pandemic has come as no surprise – though I must admit that the speed with which it is happening is mind blowing.

Late last year (December 31, 2019) I started reading about the outbreak in Wuhan, China. This was the official notice that China gave to the WHO that there might be a problem. I didn't think much of it, but decided to keep an eye out.

This was going to be the year I started traveling again – so by the start of 2020, I already had several trips planned. The first to Australia in late February and early March – then a trip to the mainland USA in April, and then I was thinking Iceland over the summer and maybe Cuba before the year ended. In any event, I pay attention to the world. I've had more than a passing interest in epidemiology for more than a decade.

By January 3<sup>rd</sup>, China was reporting 44 cases. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, they identified it as a coronavirus. The first death came two days later. Thailand had it by January 13<sup>th</sup>. Another Chinese death on January 15<sup>th</sup>. Japan had it by the 16<sup>th</sup>. It jumped to 204 cases on January 19<sup>th</sup>. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, WHO revealed that it was passing from human to human. On the same day, Netflix released a series called Pandemic.

I made some snide social media comments about how callous Netflix was to release their mini-series 'Pandemic' right on the heels of the 'Wuhan Coronavirus' starting to spread in early January (They released it on January 21<sup>st</sup>). A couple of days later the death toll was at 17. By January 23<sup>rd</sup> China had three cities on lockdown and had cancelled Chinese New Year Celebrations in the Forbidden City. Singapore and Vietnam now had it.

I didn't really expect it to be 'the one' but apparently it is – at least so far. I began to feel alarmed when China began taking extraordinary measures to quarantine and contain the virus. China is far away – I've been there, I pay attention to China – and putting millions of people into a lockdown quarantine was not a normal thing for the Chinese government to do.

January 24<sup>th</sup> there were cases in the US as well. The next day Hong Kong suspended flights to

and from Wuhan. France had it, Australia had it, Malaysia and Canada had it. January 26<sup>th</sup> more than 2800 cases and 80 deaths. January 29<sup>th</sup> the WHO finally declares it a world health emergency. The U.S. In the meantime was doing nothing, the president brushing it off as nothing. It kept spreading. Philippines, India, Nepal, UK, Russia, Spain, Sweden. February 1<sup>st</sup> 14,380 cases and over 300 deaths.

On Super-bowl Sunday (Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>) – I had a tour with a couple off of a cruise ship. I was already feeling hesitant about cruise ship passengers – because cruise ships are notorious for norovirus and as virus incubators. Still, I took them to the North Shore where they sat on Sunset Beach and enjoyed the day. While they sat there, I had a conversation with a woman named Sally in the next car over – we were both watching the big waves from our cars. She was coughing – I joked – “Did you just come from China?” To my surprise she said yes. She and a friend had just come from a tai-chi retreat in Wuhan province and he was back at the hotel sick – she had come out to see the waves but was heading back to the Turtle Bay Resort and they were going to watch the Super-bowl in the bar there...

I'm incredibly grateful that we didn't get out of our cars or shake hands!

At this point, I knew that things were serious. I asked the app developer I work with to put aside all projects and build me a coronavirus app that showed where cases were, number of deaths, and the spread. I told him to build it fast. He told me he could have it ready in three days.

This was the day that the first death outside of China took place. A 44 year old man in the Philippines. Travel bans began and donations began to go to China where millions of people were under quarantine. 17,386 cases and 362 deaths at this point.

China was building hospitals in days and various anti-viral medications began to be tried. In early February stories began appearing on the mainstream media in the US though no one outside of the Gates Foundation, medical personnel, or geeks like me seemed to be taking things very seriously. February 5<sup>th</sup> was when 10 passengers on a cruise ship in Japan were identified as infected. 28000 cases and 565 deaths.

My developer told me the app would be late – February 7<sup>th</sup>. On February 7<sup>th</sup> – he said it was delayed further. That day an article came out from some guys who built an app that launched that day and had 3 million users. They beat me to the punch, but I should have been two days earlier if my developer had done what he said he would. Who knows, maybe he built it for them instead. In any event, this should have been a bit of foresight that earned my family millions – but my mistake was trusting someone else to do it. No matter how you look at it – he royally fucked me, but given that hundreds of people were already dying – I tried to keep it in perspective.

February 7<sup>th</sup> the WHO announces that there is a severe global disruption taking place. Cases on the cruise ship explode upwards. Two days later deaths exceed the SARS epidemic from 2002-3. Over 800 dead.

I started thinking I might have to cancel my trip to Australia – but with only a few cases there and a few in the USA and none in Hawaii – I figured I was probably okay but I had a number of things to make sure were done before I left – health insurance, deferring my student loans, getting taxes done, paying the rent, getting the registration and safety inspection on my car up to date...I didn't have time to agonize over my missed opportunity with the app – actually, I give myself credit for seeing it – and have mixed feelings about profiting from it – so maybe I got missed by a bullet there. On February 11<sup>th</sup> the death toll passed 1000 and the virus was named COVID-19.

On Valentines Day, I took my wife and daughter on a whale watching cruise. Cruise ships were already a big problem in my mind, but this was on a smaller ship – still, I couldn't stop looking at the other passengers to see if they were coughing or sweaty. Feb 16<sup>th</sup>, an American woman on another cruise ship tests positive.

At this point, it was already global and obviously going to be a big problem so I made sure that my friend would take care of my wife and daughter if I were stranded in Australia because flights were cancelled. He thought I was being paranoid to even think it a possibility.

On February 20<sup>th</sup> – Iran and South Korea announced that they were seeing spikes. On Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> it becomes a big problem in South Korea with over 340 cases. Italy begins to see a spike. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, the day before I flew out – I heard the first use of the word Pandemic – the WHO Director General warned that the world needed to get ready for a potential pandemic. US President Trump suggested that it was all a hoax.

I was in Australia for ten days during which Hawaii reported no cases and Australia's cases grew from 8 to 12. In Tasmania, I was struck by the abundance of caution in airports and on a brewery tour where they said that anyone who had been to China, Japan, Iran, Italy, or South Korea would not be able to go on the tour. I watched and hoped that my flight back to Hawaii would not be cancelled. COVID-19 began to spread much faster outside of China than in it. Travel bans began cropping up. The US still was playing a game of poo-pooing the seriousness while the world began to take notice. Toilet paper shelves were stripped naked in Australia in the days before I left. I found it bizarre, especially since Aussies are much less prone to panic than Americans. I suggested to my wife on March 1<sup>st</sup> that she go buy toilet paper, bottled water, and some shelf stable food. She thought I was being a bit silly, to be honest, so did I.

I flew back to the USA on March 5<sup>th</sup>. On the very empty Qantas flight, I watched Mr. Rogers with Tom Hanks and thought to myself how he was the most iconic of baby boomers and how

the shit would hit the fan if he contracted the disease. I have no way to prove it – but it's true. As Forrest Gump, he pretty much represents the way every baby boomer thinks of themselves – as Vietnam Vets and protesting hippies both.

By that time, the US had started to take notice. The US Congress had approved an emergency spending package. It wasn't much, but it was something. March 7<sup>th</sup>, the number of COVID-19 cases passed 100k. It was pretty much everywhere by this time – over 100 countries had reported cases which meant it was probably everywhere. The U.S. Hadn't even begun testing yet.

In Tasmania and Australia I had been rigorously tested and screened before my flights. Arriving in Hawaii, no one even bothered to ask if I had been to any hard-hit virus areas. No thermal scanning. Nothing. I was surprised to see that cruise ships and tourists were still operating.

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the WHO finally declared COVID-19 a pandemic. President Trump continued to claim it was under control even as Seattle, the SF Bay Area, and New York began to see a huge increase in cases. By this point – which seems a year ago but was less than a week ago – there were a couple of traveller cases reported here in Hawaii.

On March 12<sup>th</sup> – Tom Hanks and his wife Rita Wilson were diagnosed with COVID-19. I started having dreams that I was actually in some sort of artificial reality. I find it difficult to believe that I am not. The world has flipped on it's head. I had one dream where I was told that I was in a coma and needed to wake up if I wanted to live. I saw similar social media posts.

In 2005, my girlfriend (a brilliant epidemiologist!) and I went to Burning Man – when we came out, we learned that Hurricane Katrina had happened. It was surreal. It was nothing compared to this reality.

I suppose I must summarize the past five days – The U.S. Cancelled flights to and from Europe, Seattle, San Francisco, and New York went into lockdown, and the state of Hawaii slowly moved to stem the tide of possibly infected tourists. Schools have been closed.

One of the ways that my family makes ends meet is by me buying and selling old stuff. Luckily, I no longer have a store but I sell at a variety of 'shows', on Ebay, and often buy at either the weekly swap meet or garage/estate sales. On March 14-15, I was scheduled to sell at a gun show coinciding with a collectibles show at the Blaisdell center. On March 13<sup>th</sup> virtually all events in Hawaii closed down. The gun show, however, did not. I was going to sell knives and collectibles there. The collectibles show shut down at the last minute. The gun show vendors and attendees largely seemed to think that the pandemic was hype and 'fake news' which fits with their right leaning demographic. I did not think that but saw this as a possibly last effort to make some cash before everything closed down. At the show, the main things that seemed to

be selling were ammunition (lots of it) and military MREs (Meals Ready to Eat). The day after the event the venue closed down to any more events.

My wife and daughter were going to go visit friends in Oregon on Spring Break but we cancelled the trip. I am so grateful we did. Spring break has been extended one week and then two weeks and probably will be more. All of us are being told to shelter in place and exercise social distancing. School has been cancelled in California, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii – and probably everywhere else in the USA. Every hour there are new developments in the past two days we've gone from 1 case in Hawaii to three to eight to sixteen to twenty-six. And we've barely begun to test people.

The US and Hawaii governments seem to have finally woken up to the nightmare unfolding. Hawaii resisted shutting down tourism since we rely on it – but it is foolish to keep letting irresponsible vectors come here to enjoy paradise and bring the seeds of destruction with them. Wiser heads seem to be prevailing. Shut down the airports, put arrivals in quarantine, shut the hotels and restaurants, stop the fucking madness.

As for me, I have what I think is the flu. My wife has it. My daughter has it. I think it is flu. Our noses are running. We don't have fevers. We are all tired and grumpy. We have mostly been inside our little apartment together for almost a week.

I've bought a reasonable amount of food (but no toilet paper- yet) and my wife has slowly fallen into a depression that I am becoming fearful of. She's a teacher, so her work has been stolen from her by this virus. All of my guide work has also been taken away, but I don't really mind. The stock market has only begun to crash losing 33% so far, but I suspect it will go much further down. Still, I've been surprised by the resilience and recovery of hated capitalism before – so I keep buying quality stocks as the price goes down.

The truth is, I don't know if any of us will survive what is happening. This may just be the end of us all. Or, maybe it's the end of the world as we know it. I hope so.

I feel like this is a last ditch effort by our planet, Mother Nature, to get us to stop. It's funny, but while we are freaking out about toilet paper, the air and water are clearing. Dolphins are re-appearing in Venice, Italy. People in Beijing can see the stars at night because the pollution that blocked them is gone. I have always felt like it's ridiculous to think that my collection of cells and systems has consciousness but OUR entire collective collection of cells and systems does not. Our planet almost certainly has a consciousness – and if you think it does not – well, I urge you to rethink that. Why wouldn't it? We are a part of that consciousness.

I may die in the coming days. You may die in the coming days. It is my hope that my daughter won't die in the coming days and thus far – I can only express gratitude to whatever powers

may exist that this disease is largely sparing children.

I'm going to say something here that may shock you – I'm glad whatever is happening is happening. I love my child. I didn't want to see her grow up in the the disgustingly ugly, dog-eat-dog, god-eat-god, capitalist monstrosity that has emerged from our collective history. I want to see us change the way we do things. I want to see us begin to take care of each other, take care of our planet, and take care of all the other inhabitants on it. If COVID-19 is what it takes to make that happen, I'm happy to welcome it.

But of course, it's easy for me to say that. All I've lost from this is work that I didn't particularly enjoy and money that I've never felt particularly in love with. It is so early – and there is no telling what I will think tomorrow.

Yesterday (March 19<sup>th</sup>) the city shut down all of the beach parks and the state's Lt. Governor suggested that all arrivals should be put in 14 day quarantine. California's governor effectively shut down the state. State, local, and federal governments are enacting more and more stringent rules and restrictions. This feels like science fiction as I write it – but not the good kind with space travel and cool new technology, but the depressing kind where lots of people die and a huge dystopian society emerges.

I suppose from this point forward it makes sense to simply organize this by the date, number of cases, number of dead, and any news that I deem important.

March 20, 2020, 6 am HST – 250,356 Cases, 10,869 deaths. U.S. IRS just moved tax deadline from April 15 to July 15<sup>th</sup> – Another first I thought I would never see. People have started to become fearful of bank notes and mail – as the virus might be spread on them. Spoke with my brother, we are both fatalistic about the future of the USA but surprisingly optimistic about the future of humanity. He thinks the internet is going to fail because it wasn't designed to have everyone watching movies on it at the same time. I'm not convinced this will happen – but if it does, people will be freaking out much more than they are now.

March 21, 2020 6 am HST – 287,239 cases, 11,921 deaths. U.S. Republican Senators heard briefings about the virus in January and reassured the public there was no problem while dumping millions of dollars in stock. Trump administration has been told this would escalate to pandemic since December, yet told people everything was fine. Member of U.S. Vice President's staff tests positive. Latest stats from Italy indicate that 99% of the fatalities had an underlying medical condition – this is like a culling of the herd – maybe aliens are coming to have a feast on us. By 1:30 pm number of cases is over 304k and number of deaths has gone up over a thousand to 12,973. I went to multiple stores to get a few things, actually wanted to find toilet paper – but wasn't willing to wait in the huge line for it at the USN commissary. Went to Costco where I filled up my gas tank but did not go in the store – huge line, 15 people at a

time, no toilet paper anyway. Went over to the US Marine base in Kaneohe and registered for base access – I am very grateful that as a disabled vet I am given base privileges – bought some meat, a package of paper towels, milk, ice cream etc. Much calmer. If the shit really hits the fan, I'm going to head for that base with my family. Next went to Whole Foods where the bulk food bins were emptied, of course no TP but bizarre to see so many people out enjoying the nice Hawaii weather – tourists mostly, making the best of it, but generally probably making things worse. Hawaii is up to 48 cases at noon. Hanane has the shits – which might be a sign she has it, I've had a sore throat for a week – Sophia has had a cough for months. We're probably okay, but of course, maybe none of us are okay. Nearly 5000 dead in Italy – but the US is growing fast...now the number three country for cases behind China and Italy. We will soon be the largest...

March 22, 2020 6:00 am 316,659 reported cases, 13,600 deaths. That's a slower growth rate than yesterday, but it's Sunday and the number of cases is probably just a matter how many tests are administered at this point. I'm going to throw a guess out that we cross the 1-million cases mark in less than a week. Deaths are more tricky. Japan seems to be an outlier with few cases and few deaths. Not much reported from Indonesia (or India) for that matter. Europe and the U.S are getting hit hard. Russia claims to have few cases – to have done effective control early (like Japan also claims). South America and Africa appear to have many fewer cases, but that is probably just a matter of testing and reporting. 329,600/14,376 at 10:28 am. That's 700 deaths reported in 4.5 hours.

March 23, 2020, 6 am – 353,692 / 15,430. This is a very grim score keeping. Stock markets again in freefall. Apparently this is the fastest 30% drop in the history of the stock market – we've passed the great depression in terms of speed. The USA is 5<sup>th</sup> in total deaths and 3<sup>rd</sup> in total cases. The Federal Reserve has agreed to purchase assets without limit – in effect, they are turning on the money printers. I suspect this means we can expect huge inflation and I hope this means that both cryptocurrency and gold will begin to rise rapidly. World 367,457/ 16,113 at 8:49am . US is at 41k reported and 500 deaths at 8:49am

3/24/20: 6:00 – 396,249/17,252 – Roughly the same growth as the day before; U.S. 46,548/592 ; Hawaii 89/1- Fairly certain numbers aren't fully updated for the day until around 10am. The Olympics have been postponed for a year. The U.S. Congress continues to focus on benefitting themselves and their donors instead of actually helping people. 8:17am 407,485/18,227 – nearly 1000 more people reported dead in about 2 hours.

3/25/20 : 6:00am : 438,749/19,675 U.S. 55,243/802 Hawaii rates unknown but they said the one death was not COVID-19 caused – so possibly something like 90/0. U.S. Congress agreed with White House on the stimulus plan, Senate expected to pass it today, House will probably not – so there is a lot of hot air about something that isn't law yet. We'll see if it will help or even happen. Yesterday was the largest percentage gain for stocks since 1933. Today is a follow up

rally, so far. Prince Charles of England has COVID-19. 9 am 454,358/20,550 U.S. 61,167/849 I've noticed that you have to go through some extra steps to get the US figures, instead it is broken down into states by default. The U.S. Will become second only to China in terms of total confirmed cases in the next day or two – in terms of deaths we are still behind Italy, China, Spain, Iran, France and will probably pass France in the same period.

3/26/20 6:00 am : 492,603/22,184 : 69,684/1049 : 93/0 : 58/0 (Honolulu): 3.3 million unemployment claims last week – triple the previous high: 8:30 am 510,108/22,993; 75,223/1070 ; 95/0 ;68 – numbers don't really matter but we've passed ½ million mark and will soon exceed China in the number of cases.

80k+ cases in the US by 11am. We may become the true epicenter by the time today is done. I've placed some early morning short orders for Amazon, Microsoft, and Square – but they probably won't get filled – still, if they do, I expect that next week's news will plunge markets to new lows – but I could be wrong. 83507/1201 for the US at 1 pm. More cases than any other country in the world – numbers are skyrocketing.

3/27/20: 7am: 559k/25.5k: 86k/1380: 106/0: 76: Boris Johnson, the British PM has it. I am feeling lightheaded today with constant pressure in my chest but toothache has abated. \$2 Trillion relief bill signed. Hanane thought it was going to be \$2900 every month and was disappointed when I told her it was a one time deal. How will we survive? She asked. We will make it somehow, I assured her. We will. I've filed for unemployment and an SBA loan – not expecting either to be approved, but worth a shot.

3/28/20 622k/29k: 105k/1710 : 115: 87: The big money grab is on. The \$2 trillion is more like \$6 trillion with most of it up for grabs but only by big industry and business. So much money being given away, but only the rich will really benefit from it.

3/29/20 686k/32k: 125k/2200 : 151:105: We are all becoming used to this new reality. The numbers are less shocking, the markets less roiled, the famous people with cases less shocking. Tom Hanks and his wife have fully recovered and returned home. In our home, we've found balance with the three of us sometimes sharing space but often spread out between the living room/kitchen and the two bedrooms.

3/30/20 741k/35k: 144k/2613:175/: 123/: The number of deaths in the USA has passed the number in France and will soon exceed the number in Iran. It will probably be at least until the end of the week before we exceed the number in China – hopefully we will never exceed Spain and Italy – but it will likely be so. Somehow, the stock markets keep rising – I feel like the big round numbers will crush some of that optimism – 1 million cases, 5000 US deaths, 100k deaths worldwide – but maybe not, the money they've pumped into the markets appears to be working, for now. We have passed France and Iran. USA is winning at death. Actually, we are now #4 behind Italy, Spain, and China.

3/31/20: 823,500/45,000: 175,000/4500: 204/0: 139:0 – The US has passed China in deaths now. It's a contest no one wants to be winning. Instead of being the end of the week before we passed China, it only took until Tuesday. Trump and his team said to expect around 200k dead in the next two weeks!

4/1/20 883225/44156: 190089/4102: 224/1/157/1: The number of deaths appears to have decreased over night...that' can't be right. I was rounding up, but not by that much, there must have been a mistake on the Johns Hopkins site. I'm going to start using numbers from Worldometer

4/2/20 965,246/48,236: 217,268/5151(1049 new) : 258;182/1 : Sophia's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class has been meeting 1-2 hours a day using Zoom but because the media has freaked everyone out with 'Zoom Bombers', hackers who get into private sessions and post porn or racial pics – it has been cancelled. Serious bummer as she was enjoying the time with her teacher and class while in isolation here. COVID-19 is now 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death in the US – after cancer and heart disease. It took one month. I think, at this point, we are geared up for massive deaths – if they don't happen, the wrong lesson will be learned by Americans and Trump will certainly lead the way telling about how it was a hoax or a lie. Two terrible outcomes.

4/3/2020/0600 1,041,126/55,132: 245,659/6069 (918 new): 285/206/2

It's occurred to me that what we actually may be witnessing is the dissolution of the United States. Taxes have been pushed back and spending has ballooned. The National Guard has been activated and governors given authority. The election has been pushed back with primaries pushed back, the DNC convention pushed back, and the actual election will almost certainly be postponed. California will be independent before this is done – and if things actually dissolve, Hawaii would almost certainly join the Bear Republic – along with Oregon, Washington, Alaska – and there you have a technologically advanced, oil producing nation with an agricultural bread basket. I like this idea. I'm writing a fictional novel about it – it's called “A Very Good Novel (Coronavirus)”

4/4/2020 6am: 1,141,190/60,960: 278,942, 7174 (1998 new): 319/237/3: The world and national total number of cases have essentially become meaningless. They are too big. The numbers essentially mean that everyone either has it or will have it. 100K new infected overnight – but that's a lie. 100K people were tested and came back positive. A billion people were not tested and are positive – or some other huge unthinkable number. Deaths are measurable – though, there are probably large numbers that are not being counted (unreported deaths) as well as deaths attributed to other illness. The new infection numbers are limited by the number of tests that can be conducted in a day. 100K seems a huge number – will we be able to test more people than that in a day? Should we even try? Or should we just operate on the assumption that everyone has it or will get it? How long can we shelter in place? The local numbers appear

more meaningful. Within Hawaii we have about 1.3 million people – it is conceivable to test everyone – though so far I think I read that only 10,000 or so have been tested – those death numbers though – 30k dead in Italy, Spain, and France. Another 7k in the USA. Yes, this is a disaster. And then I think about the human disasters within this – the domestic violence, the financial ruin, and the mental health of teens and those in their twenties who are cut off from any sort of dating or physical contact with the opposite sex. I am lucky. My wife and I have been getting along better in solitude – which is mind blowing. We love our child and she is an awesome child. Strange that our marriage is actually improving with all of this. Our family is stronger and better. Sophia is getting a better education – philosophy, algebra, biology, history, economics – she is an eight year old sponge, ready to learn everything (with the right encouragement). It's fun to be her teacher.

4/5/20/0600: 1,245,329/67913: 323,568/9172 ;351/266/4 – Approximately 5% of reported+confirmed cases are in serious/critical condition. I'm going to have to assume that most cases go unreported because of a lack of symptoms. I'm starting to think that the mortality rate on this has been vastly overstated and the transmission rates and total number of cases have been vastly understated. The result is a highly contagious disease with a much smaller mortality rate than we are being told. The question is why? I can't be the only one to draw this conclusion. Lots of people are dying, yes – but this is not an end of the world scenario – although the economic fallout from the complete shutdown of economies could certainly be an end of the world as we know it situation. The reason China stopped reporting numbers and re-opened their economy is becoming clear to me – I wonder if we will be able or willing to do the same. The great hope, of course, has been that the mass unemployment, mass health issues, and etc would be a great equalizer – but I don't think it will be at this point. Only the biggest will survive and they will be perfectly poised to gobble up all the rest when the gates are re-opened. Rather than acting as an equalizer, this is tilting the scale the other way – so that the vast majority are being pushed into an equality on the bottom that becomes further and further from those at the top. This largely feels like a tool being used to weaken and destroy the low middle, middle, and high middle classes and leave a feudalistic structure of top and bottom, masters and servants, owners and owned. I suspect that those with nothing to lose have a better opportunity to come out of this with some gains than all of those who have been scrabbling to pull themselves up – providing that either comes out alive – which seems increasingly likely. At this point there are so many celebrities with it that unless they are the biggest and most visible stars, it simply doesn't get reported. Visitor counts are going up daily – and locals who are on a stay inside order are getting pissed that tourists are coming and breaking the 14 day recommended quarantine – I won't be surprised if the spirit of Aloha explodes into the spirit of 'beat the fucking tourist'. Most people wouldn't have much sympathy for the tourists.

4/6/2020/0600 - 1296591/71250: 339131/9689 (517 new) 371/281/4 : Those are either lagging numbers that haven't been updated on a Monday morning or the spread and dying are slowing down. A few hours will tell the tale – but in any event life continues. Markets are pumping

upwards which is strange. It's our 10 year anniversary today. My teeth and jaw continue to ache hurt and once again making sleep more difficult- this despite having completed a course of antibiotics – which seem to have only made me constipated. The markets today drove upwards with ferocity – as if they know something the rest of us don't. 10,986 is the death toll in the US at the end of the day.

- \* 2977 deaths in the September 11th attacks
- \* 7702 casualties for every war or military action since Vietnam combined.
- \* 10,986 is the death toll in the US for COVID-19 deaths (4/6 at 6pm HST)
- \* War of 1812 ~15,000 Casualties
- \* American Revolution ~25,000 Casualties
- \* 36,516 Korean War casualties
- \* 58,209 Vietnam War Casualties
- \* 116,516 WWI Casualties
- \* 405,399 WWII Casualties
  - ~650,000 American Civil War (both sides)

4/7/20/0600: 1,374,564/77,316: 377,317/11,773 (1220 new) : 387/5 292/4: Markets up again but without as much vigor. I made a calculated risk – sold a basket full of stocks that had been hit hard by the virus and not really making a recovery – about \$560 of equity with a loss of about \$360 from purchase price. In turn I bought two shares of TVIX which has dropped from it's highs of \$900+ and is now in the \$220 range and dropping with markets going up. I think the markets going up is temporary and the volatility is bound to hit hard again – but I could be wrong, if they have things in control, this could be a rapid loss as it drops back to pre-coronavirus levels of \$68 – which is where I sold (Dec 3) after a reverse split took my 38 shares to 3 shares (10:1) and gave me \$20 or so for my remaining shares (8) – this is a 3x volatility play. At the moment, today, I am sitting at a total market loss of -\$882 – much less than my all time loss of -\$2234 in December of 2018 or the current biggest loss at around -\$2k. So, this is a gamble – but I think one that the odds are in my favor. I've kept most of my dividend stocks, gains, and biggest losers – which I also think is worth the gamble – for now. The most I've ever been up is \$1700 on this big slot machine – we will see how the future goes.

4/8/20 0600: 1,456,081/83,713: 404,251/12993: 410/5 312/4: Markets are swinging wildly upwards again. My gamble isn't paying off yet. The numbers continue to look wrong to me – or indicate the overall situation is wrong. Trump is becoming more dictatorial. Sanders dropped from the 2020 race. It took me a cup of coffee to see it – the markets are rallying because Sanders dropped out. That's a short lived rally with unemployment numbers coming tomorrow and the US set to reach ½ million cases – I'm not the only one who focuses on those big round numbers. The number of deaths is far lower than I would have expected – a fact which I think is attributable to COVID-19 being far less deadly than at first supposed. It is, however, taking a heavier toll on the poor, the non-white, and most likely – on those in less developed countries.

The true fall out from this, however – is going to be economic over the next year – which will certainly transfer into the political. Overall, I feel like my preparation, my response, and my family's dealing with this has been better than I feared. Time will tell if I get an economic benefit from this.

4/9/20/0600: 1,541,887/90,900: 436,969/15,708 (2715 new): 435/328/6 : The military hasn't been reporting number of positive cases since March 26<sup>th</sup> – with the huge numbers of military here, that skews the numbers horribly. The USA is #2 now for total deaths, surpassing Spain last night – also more casualties than the war of 1812. 16.8 million have filed for unemployment so far – but the numbers are low there because unemployment offices are unable to count all the claims – too many. NY has lost more people to COVID-19 than they lost in the 911 attacks. I suppose all I'm doing is trying to sit tight and hopefully put my family in a better position by the end of this – which includes us not dying.

4/10/2020/0600: 1,633,448/97,602: 475,609/17,061 (2772 new): 442/334/6: I can't believe it's only been a month and five days since I got back from Australia. It's only been 20 days since I started keeping this grim journal. It feels like it has been forever. Still no stimulus checks, no loans arrived, no help or assistance from the government – the bailouts have been for the rich, the big corporations, and those well placed to navigate the bureaucracy – the five biggest hedge funds have put themselves at the front of the line despite having bragged that they had 6 trillion in cash reserves on the sidelines before all of this happened. The Hawaii unemployment office called last night and told me that they don't have federal guidance on gig workers yet – so no money will be forthcoming. Hanane's unemployment letter came and said there was an issue with her application but she was approved for something like \$440 a week. It's Good Friday on Easter weekend – I'm going to have to go out and brave the virus to get an Easter basket for Sophia today – she's such a good girl and she deserves it. I ordered a bag of locally grown farm produce from a CSA Oahu Fresh – it was more like half a bag – two heads of lettuce, a lb of onions, a lb of mushrooms, a lb of crimini mushrooms, a lb of cherry tomatoes, 3 heads of broccoli, and five apple bananas – it was \$15 to sign up, \$20.94 for the bag, and \$7 for the delivery – which comes to a whopping \$42 for the half bag – definitely not worth it. Even at the \$27.94 – not worth it – I've put the subscription on hold and will brave the shopping in the future. I felt bad not tipping the driver but it was already a \$42 ½ bag of produce. This forced time indoors has not been productive, my hired developer has not produced my app. One positive thing is I've rediscovered and organized my passion for book collecting. I've organized and catalogued my library and figured out how to move forward with it – the downside is that we can't really afford to live in Hawaii any longer as things stand. School is permanently closed for Sophia – the state has said they won't open until the state has no new cases for four weeks – which seems like it will be a long time off. She'll never forget 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I have to admit, she's learning a lot and it's fun to be her teacher. Hanane has only been outside a handful of times in the past month – I go out for a bike ride or a walk or a drive now and then. This is a truly strange way to be living. I've been listing books on eBay – most of them seem to have no

interest to people – but to be honest, most of what I've listed has been stuff that I don't want either. Wall Street had it's 'best' week meaning biggest percentage gain since 1974. We need to string up those motherfuckers – meaning bankers, politicians, and big corporation heads. The system around us has been so obviously and completely fucked for so long that watching it explode is a total joy until you remember the dead and dying. Let's just hope that explosion is complete and we are still able to be glad of it in the aftermath.

4/11/2020/0700 1,741,792/ 106,694: 508,575/19,833 :465/343/8: The USA has surpassed every other country for the number of deaths from coronavirus. Nearly 20k deaths. I feel fortunate that I do not know anyone personally with the virus, nor do I know anyone who has died from the virus. It's strange, I don't know anyone who died in wars, 911, or disasters. Death has very rarely touched my life or those whom I care about. I feel incredibly lucky to write that – and also it makes me superstitious and nervous ma'sha'allah. I went to a food handout this morning – it was a huge thing. The salvation army and the Lt. Governor gave out potatoes, milk, bread, and eggs to every person that showed up. When they asked if I wanted one gallon of milk or two and whether I wanted one of the 50 lb boxes of potatoes. I said 2 gallons of milk and no potatoes. 50 lbs is a lot and while I thought it might be cool to give some to neighbors, I thought it better to leave for those who need it. The milk on the other hand – I knew I could give one of our neighbors a gallon. When I got home, I knocked on the neighbors door and gave them a gallon. 10 minutes later they came down with some goodies and ramen which they offered – we accepted the goodies. Mutual aid is beginning. Last night I texted our landlord that we didn't want to not pay rent but we needed our rent reduced to 1200 from 1600 until school started again. She agreed without a question. I feel like a lot of good can come out of all of this if we let it.

4/12/2020/0600: 1,804,698/110,871: 535,173/20,549 (716 new): 486/348/9: Easter. The quarantine is making me a bit dull and lethargic. It's been a month since the chaos really started with Tom Hanks getting it. The U.S. now has numbers that roughly match what the world had on 3/25 – if that extrapolates to today – we can probably expect to have more than 2 million cases and more than 110k deaths in 17 days. A recovered Tom Hanks hosted Saturday Night Live from his home. Burning Man was cancelled for the first time. CDC has forcibly closed all cruise lines – it's about time. I had this bizarre dream – almost a waking dream that workers were installing cameras in our windows to watch us. I went to the Navy Exchange the other day to get an Easter basket for Sophia – we're not Christians – but she is such a good girl and I didn't want her to be disappointed. I never expected an Easter basket run to be death defying, but in our world – I guess it is. No Easter egg hunts this year...Hanane's favorite aunt died in Morocco, probably not of Covid since she was already ill, certainly not a very Happy Easter.

4/13/2020/0500: 1,875,305/116,090: 561,875/22,161 : 499/350/9: Today feels very tired.

4/14/20/0600: 1,955,771/123,449: 591,064/24,600 (2439 new): 504/352/9 – 2500 people died

yesterday in the USA of COVID-19. I suppose we've crossed the revolutionary war mark. I'm losing my ass on the TVIX bet – as the markets keep going up. There is no correlation between individual misery/success/failure and the stock market. There is, however, a correlation with mass panic/delusion. The world economy in 2020 will suffer its worst year since the Great Depression of the 1930s according to the IMF but those markets keep rising. Trump has cut off funding to the WHO and declared that he has total control over states. There is some really weird back and forth between Trump and the state governors -

4/15/20/0600: 2,029,974/129,264: 618,325/26,290 (1690 new): 517/358/9 – we seem to have flattened the curve in Hawaii, but it's still early. The hard part for me right now is coming to terms with the fact that this may not be over for a long, long time. My teeth have finally stopped hurting again – they must know that I have a root canal scheduled for a couple of weeks from now. Markets are heading down again which makes me feel good, it makes sense. We need a bloody retribution akin to the French Revolution complete with a guillotine for Trump and his ilk.

4/16/20/0600: 2,118,894/141,922: 653,099/33,394 (7104 new): 530/369/9 – That's a huge 24 hour jump in the number of cases and deaths in the USA, but the markets continue to go up. I have two competing feelings. First, an overwhelming feeling of gratitude that this thing has spared my family and those I love – that there aren't bodies piled up in the streets. Second, I'm angry that it was quite obviously a 'sky is falling' moment and was used to destroy our way of life, our freedom, and more. Yes, it is obviously bad – but it's not as bad as we were led to believe. I'm not sure that all of the restrictions, the job loss, the closure of schools etc was necessary at all outside of certain dense, cold, urban areas filled with old people and cruise ships. There is even a part of me that wonders if it was all done on purpose. If I am wondering about those things, there are certainly many others. There will be a backlash, and I feel certain, there will be blood. I'm definitely feeling a pent up anger building...I'm not even certain where it is actually coming from or what it is about – but there are so many things – I watch Sophia's teacher struggling to make online class work for her kids and then hear about 20% paycuts for Hawaii teachers (who already struggled to make it in high cost Hawaii). I was feeling the stir crazy and went to Waikiki to take a couple of mile run and jump in the ocean. Seriously, fuck being locked down – there were a fair number of people out and in general, I didn't get near any of them. Getting in the water and walking through the park, feeling the trees, the air – made all the difference in the world.

4/17/20:0600 2226,941/150597: 685,005/35,481(2087 new): 541/373/9 - there's the numbers. People are getting used to the new reality. The run yesterday was great – and of course the story I see today is that runners can trail droplets up to 30 feet behind them and spread it – but I think that's bullshit – because that's what I want to think.

4/18/20:0600: 2282330/156,359: 714,387/37,303 (1922 new): 553/380/9 (recoveries 390) which mean only 163 cases in the state with 1.3 million people which believe means an infection rate

of 13 per 100,000. Hawaii has the highest unemployment rate in the nation at this point. They further closed the beaches and parks yesterday and in an equally bad decision – they've loosened the rules on 'take-out' booze. Hawaii schools are closed for the rest of the 2019-2020 school year.

4/19/20/0600: 2371666/163085: 741243/39,103 (1800 new): 574/382/9: Europe has had more than 100k deaths now. Protestors – mostly Trumpists have started demanding an end to lockdown in the US. They are gathering in large numbers without protection. We'll see how that turns out. I went to Costco today – it was like a bizarre dream – they built stanchions in a zig zag through the parking lot, have bizarre announcements about things that are limited and safety measures, everyone has to wear a mask (and in Hawaii, the masks are very diverse). I spent \$300 – lots of fruits and veg – plus things to prepare for Ramadan next week. Shopping was a bit of a throwback to normalcy even with my mask on. I made my own mask last night – has a surgeons mask in side a sort of camouflage aloha print. Trumpers and crazy haoles protested at the palace today about the lockdowns. I've been griping about the beaches and parks being closed – but these people are just fucking idiotic. They want to go back to work and open everything up – and they went out with no masks, brought their kids, didn't do any social distancing etc. All middle age and boomers – and all white. Ridiculous.

4/20/20/0600: 2,436,811/167,278: 767,402/41,229 (2126 new): 580/385/10: ~2000 deaths per day seems to be the average in the US – strange that number isn't rising faster. There was that big jump between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> – but other than that it's been a remarkably consistent march since the 4<sup>th</sup> of April when it jumped from 1k to 2k. Rates on Oahu, on the other hand are all but non-existent – 166 active cases in Hawaii and hot spots seem to be Maui and the Big Island with clusters on those islands accounting for about 75 of those 166. Essentially, that means we have about 91 cases spread through 1.1 million people on this island. Less than 10 per 100k – but of course, it could be far wider spread than we know because of testing lapses. Still, unless these numbers spike, it really seems that we have nothing to worry about here in terms of virus – but the economy, is totally and completely fucked – there is no doubt about that.

4/21/20/0600: 2,528,378/174,547: 802,590/43,545(2316 new) : 584/385/10 : I lost my nerve on the TVIX trade. Markets kept going up and it kept going down, yesterday it climbed and hovered around my buy point and I sold with a profit of \$5 or so. Today, of course, it jumped. I'm a terrible stock trader in general. The markets continually going higher spooked me – I know they will drop again, but TVIX has burned me before with a reverse split. No new cases detected on Oahu yesterday. There are a lot of places reopening and easing lockdowns – probably a huge mistake. In any event, the political is equally if not more devastating for the future than the medical – and the economic, of course, is going to be catastrophic. Oahu, in the meantime has completely shut down walking and running on beaches – the governor says we may see a gradual lifting of restrictions in about a month. Trump in the meantime has taken another unprecedented step – he has suspended immigration. The unemployment system in NY has

collapsed.

4/22/20/0600: 2,587,819/180,000: 820,073/45,430 (1885 new): 586/385/12 : Honolulu's stay at home order was extended to May 31<sup>st</sup> but parks will be open for exercise: It is Earth Day – and actually, the earth is probably much healthier than it was a few months ago – so that is a good thing. It looks like the federal government isn't going to help states with an additional bailout which means that state workers, state pension holders, and things like unemployment etc are going to suffer greatly.

4/23/20/0600: 2,668,889/186,324: 851,195/47,798 (2368 new): 592/388/12: 2300 deaths in the USA yesterday, rising slightly but staying within the 2k range – that's really weird. I should start keeping track of active cases in Hawaii – currently 148 known cases mostly split between Oahu, Big Island, Maui. 26 million unemployed – all job growth since the 2008 recession has been wiped out.

4/24/20/0600: 2,754,506/192377: 888,881/50,369(2571 new): 596/389/12: The numbers are rising, but there is really something off looking back at new US deaths each day. Two possibilities – social distancing measures were working or the numbers are artificial since Easter. Either way, they appear to be rising now. First day of Ramadan fast for 2020. I'll be fasting but Hanane is menstruating and so won't be starting the fast with me – which is such a strange rule I really don't get it.

4/25/20/0430: 2861183/199372: 927026/52264 (1895 new): 601/392/14: Was so tired and back hurting all day. Rough fasting but it worked. Hanane's 37<sup>th</sup> Birthday – Sophia and I baked her a cake from scratch. The president told his supporters that injecting disinfectant might be a good idea.

4/26/20/0600: 2943546/ 203916: 963,472/ 54,357 (2093 new): 604/395/14: They opened up the parks and beaches again for exercise but we didn't go yesterday – I saw video of the crowds – horrifying. Very little social distancing. I'm not convinced at all that the numbers are telling the truth. I feel like everything about this virus and the lockdowns are pushing me towards some drastic life change. I'm glad to be fasting but I need to be exercising more – that is one change. Work wise, I know that I need to find some focus – writing and coding, I think – the entrepreneurship is fun. Using eBay, I'm gradually reducing my stuff, but I feel like a big geographic change is coming for us. I think we'll hit Vietnam war American casualties tomorrow – that's a big leap, but the numbers tend to lag on the weekends.

4/27/20:0500: 3,016,845/207,978:907,988/55,461(1104 new): 608/396/15: One of two things is going to happen 1) We will go right back to where we were but with more people on the bottom and those at the top richer or 2) Secondary black swan event will create global chaos (it could be economic/further outbreak/terrorism etc) – Neither option is good, but it seems to me that

option 1 is the worse of the two when considering a better future and way of living. It looks like my estimate for 4/29 was about double what the reality is shaping into. Those numbers represent a doubling of cases and deaths – but what I thought would play out based on numbers between 3/25 and 4/12 was a quadrupling. There is definitely something weird going on – this translates to each person giving the virus to one instead of three – and the death rate remaining constant – so maybe it's just that containment measures have been effective.

4/28/20/0500: 3,087,185/212,691: 1,012,147/56,933 (1472 new): 607/396/16: Less than 1/3 of Hawaii's approved unemployment claims have been filled since March 1 – that's going to be a big problem. We certainly haven't gotten ours, but I have cash put aside and our landlord lowered our rent – but for others – this is going to be very painful.

4/29/20 – My forecast (made on Easter) for the USA 1.8 million cases and 110k deaths. Let's see how I do on that. Actual numbers at 0500: 3,163,408/219,357: 1,037,151/59,329 (2396 new): 609/396/16 – We exceeded American Vietnam War deaths yesterday. Next stop is WWI war deaths – which is about double the current number of dead – to be honest, back when I started this grim tally, I didn't think we'd reach this level (and at the same time I thought we would be much higher). The resilience of the American people and economy amazes me – and frightens me – I don't think either can possibly be real. I'm just about \$100 shy of my break even point on stocks despite putting \$1k into TVIX and having it tank badly since...if I had not made that investment – I would actually be over my buy in price – which is insane.

4/30/20:0500: 3,248,187/229,349: 1,066,885/61,799(new 2470): 613/399/16: Unemployment numbers in the U.S. (official so probably more like 25% of the total) have passed 30 million. I'd be willing to bet we are at 30-40% unemployment. I'm finally getting this fucking tooth pulled today. The root canal failed because the tooth was cracked. Idiotic that it wasn't pulled out when all this started back in February. I feel like I've paid some karma with the pain and trauma of this tooth.

5/1/20/0500: 3,333,494/235,136: 1,099,275/63,972 (2173): 618/399/16: May Day. People are adapting to this new reality and feeling comfortable. Madonna tested positive for anti-bodies and went for a drive to breathe the COVID-19 air. The news is starting to talk about non-COVID-19 things again. I'm super grateful to have my painful tooth gone. The state finally set up unemployment registration for self employed/ contract workers – I applied within hours. Hopefully it will yield something.

5/2/20/0600: 3,429,229/240,655: 1,135,984/ 65,960 (1,988 new) : 619/400/16 – Trump and McConnell are resisting bailing out 'blue' states and suggesting they be allowed to go bankrupt unless they end sanctuary cities and provide a clause of the fed not being liable for results of re-opening. Big protests yesterday – three arrested on Oahu – hundreds in California 'stormed Huntington Beach' – these protestors all seem to be the worst kind of white baby boomers so

maybe one can be forgiven for hoping there were some COVID-19 positives walking amongst them.

5/3/20/0500: 3,511,213/245,491: 1,164,007/67,522 (1562 new): 620/400/16: Sunday numbers appear to always be underreported or late. Got an email that says my EIDL loan will be filled in the order it was received – which seems a good sign. Went shopping yesterday at the MCEX and was surprised how many Marines on base were not wearing masks – Tim called it Macho against the virus. Dad actually called me yesterday – which never happens. Warren Buffet sold all of Berkshire Hathaway's stake in airlines – an ominous sign for tourism.

5/4/20/0500: 3,592,788/249,083: 1,191,854/68,702(1180): 620/400/17: Yesterday was harder than normal with dental pain, fasting, lockdown, and a beautiful day outside.

5/5/20/0500: 3,673,389/253,401:1,215,457/70,129 (1427):621/400/17 : The number of daily deaths seems to have dropped but I keep seeing news stories that say it was the deadliest day of virus in the USA. Not sure what is happening...that's a pretty big disconnect. It's Cinco de Mayo, Taco Tuesday, and we all are affected by a virus called corona.

5/6/20/0500: 3,759,256/259,590: 1,240,654/72,454 (new 2325): 625/404/17: Jumped again. 20+ Million jobs lost in April. Still no unemployment on our end. The madness of reopening continues. Trump said tens of thousands more will die to reopen, but he thinks it's worth it. I opened a Facebook account with my real name and recollecting old friends/acquaintances – so many right wing nutjobs among my old USMC and Big Bear friends – it's really bizarre to see into their worldview – the big conspiracies they promote are that Bill Gates and Biden are both child molesters and that COVID-19 is a plot to install microchips. Went to a food giveaway and waited in line for an hour without moving before pulling my car out of the line and driving away.

5/7/20/0500: 3,852,668/266,067: 1,266,442/74,948 (new 2494): 626/405/17: I think the numbers were being artificially kept low and now they are starting to raise them bit by bit with people 're-opening'. I read that 66% of new cases are coming from people who are sheltering – it's from the stores, it has to be.

5/8/20/0500: 3,950,455/271,799: 1,295,058/77,058 (new: 2100): 629/408/17: Worst jobs report since the Great Depression – 20.5 million jobs lost in April, unemployment at 14.5% (22.5% 'real' unemployment) – this probably means that at least half the country is not working. We still haven't seen any UE checks in our household. There's this feeling in the air that's sort of like 'the pandemic is over' - you can feel it in the stock market, the way many people have stopped wearing masks, the number of cars on the road again, the stories the news is pushing, the stock market action - BUT - I have a feeling that it's actually just getting started.

5/9/20/0500: 4,044,795/277,087: 1,325,519/78,762 (1704 new): 629/408/17: No new cases or

deaths in Hawaii yesterday. Great news. The death count drops on weekends, which has to be due to reporting. People want to believe this thing is over – you can tell by the numbers at the beach, on the roads, etc. Donald Trump, Mike Pence, and Ivanka Trump all have personal assistants who have tested positive. Fingers crossed that at least the Pres and VP get it – although, on the downside, that would fuck up my 'A Very Good Novel (Coronavirus)' novel which is at 40k words now and almost complete.

5/10/20/0900: 4,156,054/282,794: 1,355,967/80,393 (new 1631): 631/407/17: Maybe the tide is turning on this thing. I hope so. Seems like warmer places have less of it. I keep waiting for the spikes in cases but they don't seem to be coming.

5/11/20/0500: 4,218,496/284,765: 1,370,433/80,862 (469 new): 632/408/17 : The numbers seem to show that we are winning against the virus. No big spike since the protests, deaths dropping dramatically. Hard to believe, but if the numbers are right, good news for humans. According to the Star Advertiser there are just 54 active cases in Hawaii and the rest have been released from isolation or have died. If there is no spike by May 15 – then we have probably survived at least the first wave and downward trends will continue.

5/12/2020/0500: 4,292,487: 288,973/ 1,388,283/82018 (new 1156) : 634/410/17 (56 active cases): Trump should be a comedian. He said yesterday that the reason the US has the most active cases is because we test more people and that if we stop testing our numbers will go down – it's true...but... The rush to open up the economy continues. Elon Musk is defying California orders to keep his Tesla factory closed – he's shown himself to be quite the ass during this whole thing. Trump is backing him up on it. Hanane finally started getting unemployment, it is far more than she earns when working because of the \$600 from the CARES act – hopefully mine will also get processed. Still holding out hope for the EIDL loan. I've put off all the credit card bills and loan payments

5/13/20/0500: 4,381,278/294,728: 1,412,440/83,646 (new 1628): 635/411/17: Are the numbers ticking up two weeks after the May Day protests and re-openings? The next few days will tell the story. Visitors are starting to come back to Hawaii – 286 of them yesterday. This is idiocy. We've pretty much defeated this thing in Hawaii and now, we're going to have it roaring back before long. The markets seem to be realizing how lofty they are – confidence in the economy sapping. I have 5 shares of TVIX bought for an average of \$235 each – I'm down about \$400 – Amazon seems to be propping the market up more than anything else.

The whole thing is warped. I had a conversation with my Dad yesterday, it was really very good – he told me about life in Alaska during WWII when he was a child – stories he had never told me. Digging through the Army dump to get food, living in a log cabin with gaps in the walls in Fairbanks in Winter, watching movies on Saturdays with newsreels, seeing the Russian and American pilots and airplanes.

5/14/20/0500: 4,466,706/299,499:1,433,375/85334 (1688): 638/414/17: More dangerous than the virus are the conspiracy theories and the people who believe and spread them. Astounding levels of stupidity.

5/15/20/0500: 4,566,476/304,768: 1,460,902/87,025 (1691): 637/414/17: Lockdown order in Honolulu extended until the end of June. The MayDay protests don't seem to have caused any spikes. Another four days for the 2-week mark on major 'reopenings' of other states. Honolulu is softly re-opening one on one sports like Tennis courts etc. Trump's son-in-law floating idea of delayed elections, conservative FB naysaying vote by mail.

5/16/20/0500: 4,660,851/309724: 1,486,083/88,557 (new 1532): 638/414/17 : Some 23 year old kid from the Bronx came and flouted our 14 day quarantine on Insta – got arrested. Beaches yesterday were almost as full as pre-pandemic. Beaches are opening up today. Opening up my Facebook to right wing former classmates has opened my eyes to how stupid these people really are. You can't talk with them – they only let you listen – and the listening is painful. My early paperwork is starting to yield some results.

5/17/20/0500: 4,751,636/313,844: 1,510,286/90,178 (new 1621): 639/415/17: Beaches and malls reopened, we didn't venture out to either yesterday. Another silly instagrammer busted for violating 14 day visitor quarantine. Finished recording the podcast reading of my COVID-19 novel yesterday.

5/18/20/0500: 4,837,094/317,303: 1,531,465/91,060 (new 882): 640/415/17 – We are down to 50 known active cases in Hawaii. Early trials of a vaccine showing positive results. The president is calling for huge crowds in stadiums again for sporting events. Obama came out and openly criticized the Trump response. Took Sophia for a drive and to the beach yesterday – I've never seen so many locals on the beach before. Let's hope we have this thing beat – but at the same time, it would be great to watch the capitalist economy of the world continue to get smashed.

5/19/20/0500: 4,926,566/320,892: 1,554,272/92,133 (new 1073): 640/415/17: The president revealed he is taking zinc, antibiotics, and chloroquine – which some tests say contribute to earlier death. One can certainly hope. It's bizarre he's taking it- I wonder if he has it.

5/20/20/0500: 5,002,863/325,669: 1,573,600/93,697 (new 1564) 641/415/17: Forecast is that US GDP will drop by 38% this year! But hey, markets are up. My TVIX gamble is becoming expensive.

5/21/20/0500: 5,125,206/330,843: 1,596,526/95,057 new (1360) 643/416/17: My TVIX gamble is losing but I upped the bet and lowered my cost – 15 shares at \$178/each – funded the + 5 shares by selling Disney for a modest profit – bought back 3 shares for a discount of \$2 from my

previous buy price. Sold my stake in Uber a few days ago and ditched AliBaba at cost. Increased my investment in three ADRs (NIO, QTT, LK) only to have Trump senate threaten to delist Chinese companies. At least I got rid of BABA before it tanked. Over 5 million reported cases worldwide, unemployment up by another 2.5 million – but still, markets are up. I got my first unemployment payments – a serious wage increase from my previous earnings. The injustice of that is going to come and bite us – essential workers didn't get a raise for staying on the job and risking their lives, but those like me got raises. Republicans hate a free lunch for the poor (but love paying the rich to eat) and the blowback from this will be heavy.

5/22/20/0500: 5,232,431/335,636: 1,623,352/96,432 (new 1375) / 647/416/17: the Southern States and the states that didn't lock down – these are where cases and deaths are spiking now. Alabama getting hit hard – not a surprise. And yet, the openings continue unabated. They say now that it's harder to catch it from surfaces than previously thought. Here are my thoughts on what this thing looks like based on all the news, watching the spread, etc.

There hasn't been a huge spike among homeless or construction workers - or protestors for that matter – but there should have been. The common thing among those groups is being outdoors – the virus doesn't spread in open air and doesn't like sunlight. The places clusters happened were churches, senior citizen homes, hospitals, cruise ships, meat packing plants – no sunlight, confined spaces with no flowing air. Trump hasn't gotten it but many of those around him have – he refuses to wear a mask. I'm convinced he used a vaccine though he claims to be taking chloroquine. The virus largely leaves children alone and attacks people who are obese, heart conditions, underlying weakness in body. Infections in tropical places seem much less robust than those in temperate climates. So here are my non-scientific takeaways:

- 1) Doesn't transmit outdoors easily
- 2) Doesn't like sunlight (affected by natural Vit D in body and sunlight radiation)
- 3) Thrives in cool, dark places – like a fungus
- 4) Capitalism is too robust to be taken out easily
- 5) Work and school from home are here to stay
- 6) Shopping will largely remain an online affair

5/23/2020/0500: 5,346,876/340,869: 1,648,959/97,732 (new 1300): 642/414/17: The tourists are coming back – idiots from my high school (among others), flying in and refusing to wear masks or quarantine. Hertz declared bankruptcy overnight. Churches reopening this weekend. Brazil has jumped to #2 on Coronavirus. People are acting like this thing is over – but it's not over. Nevada has official 28% unemployment, Hawaii at 22.8%. It may or may not be Eid. My understanding is that Eid begins at sunset but my wife insists it began already (but still woke and fasted with me) – Either way, my 30 day ramadan fast ends at sunset. Apparently it's also memorial day weekend.

5/24/2020/0600 : 5,438,968/344,586: 1,670,717/98,750 (new 1018): 643/414/17: 37 cases active at this point in Hawaii. I'm bored with keeping this morbidity count. I'm not sure the numbers have as much meaning as they should anyway since this whole thing has become political and just as I wrote in my novel, the numbers aren't reported the same way from place to place. I think I'm going to transition to weekly number recording (Sundays) and significant news/milestones/events on the daily. Ramadan is complete. Churches have largely reopened with the exception of many enlightened pastors/priests who have chosen to remain closed. Malls and shops have re-opened. Many restaurants and bars have re-opened. The virus appears to be blossoming in the American South as well as Mexico, Brazil, and other South American nations.

5/27/2020/0630 – Passed 100k deaths in USA. No significant change in Hawaii. Not sure how that will pan out. Trump tweets got fact checked and he is issuing an executive order on social media. How do people not see that he is already a dictator?

5/30/20/0530 - The week has gone by much slower without doing the daily count. There are riots and protests throughout the USA over the killing of an African American man named George Floyd who had a police officer kill him with boot on neck. Minneapolis was on fire last night. Trump and Pentagon activated the insurrection act. Protests in over 30 cities. It's unbelievable how racist and ignorant many of the people I grew up with are. Now they are suggesting that it was a staged execution by the left to erode support from African Americans for Trump! The big new white message is riots are as bad as murder. I hope that black people burn this whole motherfucker down.

5/31/2020/0530: Sunday update: World: 6,200,772/371,763: USA: 1,819,797/105,634 (6884 new in a week avg 983 per day: Hawaii: 651/421/17 – 7 new cases Oahu, no new deaths – 28 active cases. Those numbers are looking good for the USA and Hawaii – Brazil and South America are heating up and worldwide 3800 deaths average per day. USA about 100 deaths per day – far less than before but still a very troubling number. Violent protests and riots across dozens of U.S. cities again last night. The riots and protests combined with the pandemic will almost certainly result in higher numbers from COVID-19. Luckily in Hawaii, we are spared – at least for now.

6/7/20/05:30: Sunday Update: 7,027,180/403,080 (32k dead in a week globally [avg 4571 deaths per day – increase of 750+ per day over last week]): 1,992,453/112,041 (6407 dead over the past week in USA avg 915 per day down from 983 ): 673/439/17 (40 active cases)(no deaths in Hawaii over the past week) – the number of cases is ticking upwards rapidly but deaths in the USA are dropping. After about a week of no new cases in Hawaii we suddenly saw a sharp increase – 9 each day the past two days. The protests have grown. Trump is increasingly isolated and has blockaded the white house. Riots have slowed. We went to a restaurant for the first time in four months yesterday – it was nice to be able to eat out but the

experience was different with servers wearing masks, tables socially distanced, etc. The protests will almost surely result in a huge spike in COVID-19 cases – but maybe the virus has mutated and become less deadly... We are right on the cusp of exceeding the number of dead from WWI (but in a much faster period). USMC Generals have led the charge in denouncing Trump and limiting his ability to use the military – also, USMC finally banned the use of the stars and bars (confederate flag). I'm proud to be a Marine this week. Colin Powell and other right leaning figures (and possibly even some Republican presidents) have endorsed Joe Biden – these are extraordinary times. Increasingly it looks like Trump is done, but he's not the type to go out quietly and his supporters are batshit crazy.

6/8/20 – **Personal finance update:** The stock market has me far too spooked. I cashed out most of my major holdings when they approached pre COVID-19 investment levels. I withdrew about half (\$4890) and have the remainder split this way 20 shares of TVIX – with a current value of \$2199 – I've lost about 1/3 of my investment value on this bet because the market just keeps going up – incidentally, I've also lost on the stocks I sold because they just kept going up as well. I've kept my 'biggest losers' which are mostly weed stocks (TLRY, ACB, CGC, APHA) and IPOs – I also have kept small positions in five stocks I think have big upside QTT, NIO, SPCE, BPT, AGTC, RIOT – excluding TVIX, my position is about \$2250. My total stock market play is about \$4440 with big bets on weed and volatility. My actual investment stake is about \$4200 which will drop dramatically if the market keeps going up – but that is a loss I can deal with versus the potential gains if a big drop should happen again. What I'm doing isn't investing, it is gambling. I'm happy with the level of my gamble right now and I can live with any losses that might accrue.

6/14/20 Sunday Update: 7,919,474 / 433,212 (killed 30,132 this week, average of 4305 per day – down from 4571 per day last week) : 2,150,240/ 117,587: (killed 5546 this week avg 792 per day – down from 915 average last week): 723/489/17 – steep spike in new cases over the past week up from 78 from 40 – nearly doubled. American dead over the past four months from Covid-19 have exceeded the number of dead from WWI. There are rumblings of a second shut down but I don't think people will do it unless they start seeing their neighbors dying. They government won't do it unless it is forced by mayors or governors. This is a bottom up situation as those at the top are far more worried about bad poll numbers and the dangers of a shuttered economy than about the lives of citizens.

The number of cases seems to be spiking in many areas, but the number dying appears to be going down. That seems like a positive to me as it has the potential for herd immunity growing while less people overall are dying. It's nearly two weeks since the protests over the murder of George Floyd began and the protests show no signs of dying down. Numbers from states with the first large scale protests are ticking in – sharp rise in new cases and new deaths in Minnesota.

The stock market suffered a sharp decrease last Thursday and a minor rebound on Friday. You had to be wearing blinders not to see this coming. I suspect it will rally in the coming week – maybe more – before another deeper, sharp sell off. In Hawaii there are new notifications of longtime and loved businesses shutting down forever every day. Larger companies will weather the storm longer. But how long can hotels, tour companies, airlines, luaus, and other tourism businesses survive without tourism? Hopefully at least until the end of July which is when the mandatory 14 day quarantine has been extended to.

Politically, Biden is in a strong position. The election is his to lose. There are many more voices now saying that they doubt Trump will leave regardless of outcome – something I've said all along. Hopefully I am proved wrong on that.

6/21/2020 – Father's Day, Summer Solstice, End of the Mayan Calendar. 8,972,140/467,786 (34,574 newly dead – avg 4,939 per day – up from the previous two weeks by more than 500 per day) : 2,339,603/122,049 (4462 newly dead, 637 per day – this average is actually down) : 803/557/17 – Sharp increase in new cases in Hawaii averaging about 11 new cases diagnosed each day – active cases have risen to 142 – doubled again. Trump had his Tulsa rally the day after Juneteenth, a number of his staffers had the virus, turnout was low. No big incidents. The BLM protests have continued but seem to be dying down while actual reform seems to be taking place both legislatively and in the minds of people – which is a good thing. Fears of a second wave of COVID-19 deaths don't appear to be born by the numbers in the US, though the number of cases in the world, the U.S., and Hawaii is steeply on the rise. Of those three, the rate of deaths is increasing (so far) only outside of the U.S. Trump actually requested less testing and said that it seemed to be increasing the disease prevalence...lol.

6/28/2020/0530 10,154,425/502,537 (34,751 newly dead avg 4964 per day – that's remarkably close to last week's 4939) : 2,610,399/128,211 (6,162 newly dead, avg of 880 per day- that's a steep rise of about 250 more people dying each day): 872/613/18 (about 9 new cases per day and 1 new death – an elderly Oahu man) – about 140 active cases on Oahu now – down from 142 last week. The markets had a mild freak out this week as case numbers grew. BLM protests have largely subsided but thankfully change does appear to be happening. Lots of freaking out about coronavirus on the mainland as cases spiked in Florida, Texas, California and other places. Younger people being diagnosed in greater numbers. Bars appear to be incubation hot spots. Trump appears embattled and largely seems to be ready to quit – it's recently come to light that his buddy Putin was offering the Taliban a bounty on killing U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan – while Trump was buddy-buddy with him and offering negotiations to the Taliban – and that Trump was briefed on it. It's only a matter of time before his status as a traitor was confirmed.

7/5/2020/0600 11,464,471/535,013 32,476 newly dead, avg 4639 per day – this is down by

about 300 per day. ) : 2,954,999/132,387 (4176 newly dead, avg 597 per day – this is also down by quite a bit from last week) : 999/720/19 ( 224 active cases. 127 new cases about 18 per day – a big jump again in new cases in Hawaii w/ 1 new death) : Once again, these numbers are surprising to me. The number of deaths going down could be due to better treatment, bad reporting, or the virus actually killing less people who contract it. Reports came out last week that the virus has mutated and is 6-9 times more virulent than before. Multiple states are back in panic mode as hospitals are filling up and cases are rising far faster than expected. The USA is the big failure story in pandemic control. Re-opening the country too early was a huge mistake. Another month of lockdown wouldn't have killed us – in fact, it might have been enough to quash this thing. No doubt we are testing far more people than before. In news, there was chaos again this week. Trump giving multiple dystopian 4<sup>th</sup> of July speeches at Mt. Rushmore and in DC. Hong Kong had it's independence stripped away by a new Chinese security law this week. Putin made himself leader for life in Russia with a 16year extension of his presidential term. Jeffrey Epstein's sex crime accomplice Ghislain Maxwell was arrested this week and has threatened to name names – one particular picture of her and predator Kevin Spacey sitting on the actual English thrones paints the picture of how this will roll out. Kanye West has announced he will run for President – giving his MAGA hat, this is probably a Trump ploy to draw African American votes away from Biden. The Seattle Capital Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) was forcibly dispersed this week and the power of the protests has largely died down though Black Lives Matter has gained huge political power from it – so it does feel like change and representation have made giant steps forward. One sign of this was Trump's 4<sup>th</sup> of July speeches which attacked the left as terrorists and nazis. Most surreal moment of the week (aside from the throne picture mentioned above) was white protestors chanting go back to where you came from to Native Americans in front of Mt. Rushmore.

Personal Update: We are on the Big Island for some time away from our apartment. Travel during COVID is nerve inducing. We have a great, isolated cottage in Honoka'a and spent yesterday touring through the Volcano Nat'l Park and hanging out with Rodolf Pan on the farm he is helping build in Kurtistown. The day before a trip up to Hawi in North Kohala and a visit to Hawaii's only Vanilla farm. I've 90% decided to homeschool Sophia. School starts in a month and they are clueless about how to keep kids safe, plus, half her classmates graduated 3<sup>rd</sup> grade with only half the year accomplished and she has been working hard with all the work I give her so she will be light years ahead and bored silly with school. The social aspect will have no real positive. My cousin Dean's friend caught COVID and died three days later – he was 51 with no underlying issues – this isn't a time to throw caution to the wind – although, by traveling – we are doing that. Tourism with the mainland won't open up until August 1<sup>st</sup> though – so it is a calculated risk and this time away is doing great things for our heads and mentalities.

7/8/2020 We just got back from 6 days (4 nights) on the Big Island. It was really good. Now I find myself in a serious funk. I'm not positive what is going on. We have another trip scheduled

back to Big Island in a few weeks. I've got a co-founder – my company is growing legs and possibilities. My child is awesome. My marriage is what it has been for a long time – completely dissatisfying. We haven't lost anyone through the pandemic, which I'm grateful for. I suppose my malaise comes from watching the world go through so many things that give it the possibility for growth and changing for a better world but instead – it just keeps going on – the same as ever. The rich have gotten immeasurably richer from all of this chaos. The poor have gotten immeasurably poorer. People like me, somewhere on the edge between poor and not poor – we have managed to improve our situations, build in a little bit of wriggle room. I recouped my losses from the stock market drop and then I piled a smaller amount into waiting for another drop – it hasn't come. My stock market gambling is essentially \$2k of my own money and \$1k of house money – but all my strategizing and calculating have been for naught. If I had kept my stake of 5 shares of amazon and 5 shares of Tesla – well, I didn't so never mind. These aren't life changing amounts of money – but it has shown me that I'm no good at playing this game. TVIX, my favorite gambling stock will be delisted in a few days. I'll sell it and pull my \$2k out and just leave the house money in. Crypto has been flat or a loss for the most part – though I'm still hopeful it can be a big win. I've failed to get investment in my company (with the exception of Adam investing in ZguideZ which was definition 3Fs Friends, Family, Fool Money). Travel has been shut down so my great escape 'crazy plan' is no longer possible – though Bali opens up in September – so maybe. I'm going to pull Sophia from school – she will be homeschooled for 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The covid plans for schools are just too chaotic. In any event, I enjoy teaching her and this is the last year before she turns 10 – and moves into being a 'tween' so I want to embrace the moment. I'm torn, because I want the world to collapse – but at the same time, I have built an almost livable future for us if it does not. Done. \$1,144 of house money left in the market. Give to Caesar and all that...

I'm out of shape, getting fat from not moving enough – though I take hikes and walks fairly often. I need to fix Sophia and my bikes. I need to get rid of stuff. I need to reduce and declutter the leftovers of my antique life.

7/12/20/0600: 12,925,331/569,097 (34084 newly dead – 4,869/day – from 4639 last week) : 3,380,429/137576 (5189 newly dead – 741 deaths per day from 597 last week) : 1200/905/19 (309 active – avg 29 new cases per day) – This felt like the longest week since the early days of the pandemic. Lots of people died this week. Now remember, this is the season we are supposed to have it easy as the virus gets weaker during the summer – so brace yourselves for autumn and winter. More and more accounts of healthy people who put themselves in precarious social situations (a party, a day at the lake, a family gathering) and then caught the virus, were hospitalized, posted on social media about their mistake and then died. Also 40 Bay Area principals meeting to discuss school opening strategies with other principals ALL BECAME COVID POSITIVE. 3 teachers working in the same classroom ALL CAUGHT COVID and one died. Even Trump is wearing a mask in public now. Many states are quickly reaching ICU

capacity and death is marching across the most populous states in the USA. If you aren't alarmed and you think all of this is some sort of hoax – good luck with your burial. Hawaii is considering pushing back the August 1 'reopening of tourism' which would end the mandatory 14 day quarantine for out of state visitors but seems to be rolling ahead with the August 4<sup>th</sup> school re-opening. Disney World re-opened despite 15,000 new cases a day in Florida.

In politics – it was the Trump show as usual. Trump's niece was allowed to publish her tell all book which among other things told how he paid someone else to take his SATs and college entrance exams. Trump gets to keep his financial info secret from congress but not from the New York prosecutor. Trump says he aced a cognitive test. Trump commuted his buddy Roger Stone's sentence – Stone was convicted of, among many other things, lying to congress. Trump's son's girlfriend caught Covid-19. Trump's admirer (president of Brazil) caught Covid. The US left the World Health Organization this week. Trump is trying to bully states into re-opening schools by withholding federal funding for education. Trump cancelled his New Hampshire rally – the Tulsa rally resulted in a large number of Covid cases to attendees – but his campaign says it is because of rainfall, not COVID – insiders say it is because of lower than expected attendance.

In economics – Chapter 11 bankruptcies are up by 26% but the stock market continues to climb based on the barest whisper of a possible vaccine or cure ignoring the fact that unemployment is still higher than anytime in generations, people are still not going out, and that the home saving \$600 UI stipend will be ending at the end of the month. Renters are already skipping paying rent and the biggest foreclosure and eviction pandemic in US history is on our doorstep.

*COVID has put more than 100 U.S. companies on court-assisted life support and hundreds more are destined for a similar path. All told, Chapter 11 business filings increased 26% in the first half of the year and the pace does not seem to be slowing. In the past few days, Brooks Brothers, Muji, and Sur La Table joined the somber list, which already includes Chesapeake Energy, Cirque du Soleil, Hertz, and J.C. Penney.*

In social justice/protests/BLM – the marches and protests have largely stopped. The tearing down of statues has largely stopped. There has not been a huge amount of systemic change but it does feel like this has been a giant leap forward – if not in political action at least in awareness.

In international news – President Erdogan of Turkey continued to roll back the progressive moves of the country's founder – this time by turning the Aya Sophia (Hagia Sofia) from a museum back into a mosque. Kamal Mustapha Ataturk turned Turkey from the 'sick man of Europe' into an economic and political powerhouse by making the country secularly

governed while still Islamic in nature – Erdogan has largely ruined Turkey, selling national assets to his cronies, destroying the political structure, and in many cases blatantly trying to erase Ataturk from history. Trump has largely been following Ergogans game plan in shoring up power in the USA. Erdogan has been the most frequently telephoned world leader from the White House since Trump took office. Eventually, I believe we will see that the two of them are financially intertwined on multiple levels.

Serbia is facing huge anti-government protests over the country's handling of coronavirus.

Most bizarre story of the week: Apparently after Hurricane Maria – Trump considered the possibility of selling Puerto Rico.

Most ominous herald: A new comet called NEOWISE is now visible in the night sky. It's the picture I've posted with this update.

Personal update: I've pulled Sophia from public school. She's a homeschool kid now and I'm a homeschool dad. I met with our landlord a few days ago and it seems like she isn't planning on re-raising the rent anytime soon for which I'm incredibly grateful. I'm trying to figure out how to get \$40k together to buy a 2 acre property with a shack on the big island. I've kind of emerged from my post trip funk. Being Sophia's dad is the best thing in my life.

## **A Series of Blog Posts from March Through June of 2020**

**Blog Post:** The emerging consensus seems to be that we will get through this - it will take some time, but we will emerge from the other side of it. I reject that notion.

I reject the concept of we, since already more than 30,000 of those who were 'we' are no longer among the living. By the end of this - it will be hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions that will no longer be among 'we' - and thus we will no longer be inclusive but exclusive - numbering only the survivors.

Yes, a good number of survivors will push on, but they will not be we. You may be among them, I may be among them, but the survivors will not be us. The survivors will have borne witness to death and suffering that 'we' cannot imagine. The survivors will have seen and experienced the greed and selfishness of robber baron tech capitalism up close and far too personal.

Personally, I don't think the United States will survive this. Not the United States as we know it - but maybe a different form. My prediction is that California, Texas, New York, and Washington state will all find themselves in possession of more autonomy than any states have had since the civil war. Maybe they will be independent - I don't know, I don't see the future - I simply look for patterns and historical currents.

The USA will survive through the year, but come 2021, it will be gone - at least as we know it. The inept campaign of Joe Biden and the incessant rallying of Donald Trump have virtually guaranteed that. Trump wants his name to be on the meager relief checks. He wants people to feel like he has paid them! In an election year. His mailers are paid for by the government and say Donald Trump's Social Distancing guide.

If there is an election, it will be called into question and the USA cannot survive that. If there is not an election, the USA also cannot survive that.

The stock market and big business? They may well survive - as we speak they are sucking the last drops of prosperity from the bloodless corpse of America. The \$6.6 Trillion money grab is a way to preserve the wealth and power of the dominant entities on this planet.

China will be fine. The European Union will survive. Australia and Canada will carry on. The Latin American, Asian, and African nations will survive and suffer as they always have - but the USA cannot and will not make it out of this in tact.

Only a miracle could save the USA. A candidate with the savvy and strength to inspire loyalty across party lines, with the bravery to make decisions that seem suicidal but are the only way to survive, and a desertion by the media from their blind allegiance to capital. I see no other way that the USA gets through this.

So, be prepared. WE will not survive. Many of us will die. The way we live and interact with each other will change. The new rulers - and the new rules - they are coming but we are blind to their advance.

**Blog Post:** As the U.S. federal government continues to run the money printers at full steam, continues to send magic money to banks, tech, and industry, and also continues to systematically shut down the economy (through necessity) - one outcome seems to be becoming more and more possible. The complete insolvency and dissolution of the United States of America.

Personally, I'm not convinced that it isn't intentional. Certainly this was the stated goal of Steve Bannon and other Trump agenda planners. As crazy as it sounds, Trump and his cronies would do nothing but profit from the dissolution of the USA - which could be why they are pumping all the resources they can into business, industry, and finance. After all, just because a huge country fails in a globalized economy, that is no reason for all of the companies in that country to fail.

How would that happen? Well, frankly, it's already happening. The largest economy in the world has shut down. The USA is sending out T-bills to foreign banks in ever greater numbers for a like amount of foreign currency on the condition that the foreign currency can be redeemed at the same rate in the future. The debt of the USA has reached levels where it can no longer be repaid. The treasury bills and dollars held by nations like China are a ticking time bomb that could literally break the bank.

Troops have been stationed along the southern and northern borders. National guard has been activated and troops have actually been deployed throughout the nation but especially in (blue) urban areas hit by corona-virus. Reported numbers of up to 10 million have filed unemployment, but the real numbers are probably somewhere in the 50-60 million range. What happens when the US can no longer pay government retirement, disability, and social security? Technically, those aren't employment, but they are how a huge number of people live.

I'm not saying this is going to happen, but it sure seems more likely than it did. As the election gets closer, the economy contracts, shelves become emptier, and chaos becomes more pronounced - I will not be surprised if the Trump administration simply dissolves the USA and thus absolves itself of all debts, all encumbrances, all foreign obligations, and all responsibilities towards its citizenry. The fact that taxes and the DNC convention have both been pushed back are icing on the cake.

As crazy as it sounds, I don't think it is impossible that Trump vacates the White House, moves to Mar a Lago and begins issuing edicts from his personal palace. I've given a lot of thought to what happens to the troops in a situation like that - are they simply told to go home? Are they given over to each state's National Guard units? Or are they asked to swear a new oath to an emergency war time government? Maybe a combination of all three.

In any event, I don't see California or New York cooperating with such a plan. Governors Cuomo and Newsom are in unique positions total control of their own sovereignty. California would be one of the wealthiest, most technologically, greatest food producing nations in the world - and it's an oil producing state with vast natural and renewable energy resources. California doesn't need the USA and in the situation outlined above, I don't think the USA would need California.

Interestingly, California could easily militarize her borders - since agricultural inspection stations already exist on every road into the state. The governors of each state control the National Guard and Governor Newsom could easily absorb military personnel and bases into the California National Guard. What if he also said that all taxes should be paid to California instead of to the IRS?

There are a large number of possibilities here that didn't exist two months ago. I'll admit it - the idea of a liberated Bear Republic is an exciting prospect to me.

What about Hawaii? Far too distant to be ruled by a Florida Trump - but also home to one of the largest US military contingents in the world. Unlike California, Hawaii is not self sustaining as it is right now. Hawaii would need the help of the outside world. I don't think it's at all unlikely that Hawaii would turn to the Republic of California for help. The bonds of mutual aid and friendship between the two states run deep.

Suddenly - you have a vast Pacific power born. If you want to talk dominos, it seems likely that Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Alaska would also be a part of this new Pacific nation.

As to what would happen east of the West Coast - I have no idea but given current politics - it wouldn't seem too unlikely to have the rest of the Western states and the Southern states align themselves with King Trump of Florida.

All those purple and blue states up North might well band together - Michigan, New York, New England, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania - culturally, that seems to make sense. But hey, it's probably just wishful thinking - I can't think of a single person in that red area that I want to have making decisions that affect my family or me - can you?

**Blog Post:** I'm going to go ahead and coin the name for the coming crisis the Pan-Depression short for Pandemic Depression. It's coming and it's going to be ugly.

#pandepression

Capitalism is eating itself and the result isn't the creation of a giant uniform middle class. The middle class is what capitalism is feeding on.

The rich are sheltering in place. They are not worried about surviving this - though they will certainly lose the most in an absolute sense. These are billionaires.

The wealthy are scrambling to save their wealth - they are maneuvering for bailouts, looking for safe-havens, and cutting expenses - mostly this means cutting workers and worker benefits.

The top of the middle-class who thought they were wealthy are quickly heading towards losing it all. They are not going to get bailouts and they are not going to be collecting rents. They are not going to be getting paychecks but they will still have to cover their bills. They are freaking the fuck out. They are wondering when their wealthy and rich friends with power are going to look out for them. They are quickly learning that they are not as important as they thought.

The middle of the middle class is getting a bit of a lifeline - they think they will get three months of paychecks while unemployed, they think they will get a break on rents, they think they will get a stimulus check. They think they can make it for a couple of months and then this should all be over.

The bottom of the middle class has lost their jobs, they are unable to apply for

unemployment, they don't know how they will pay rent, they are hoping that they are not forgotten by their government. They no longer have health care (if they ever did) and they are torn between looking for work, hustling, or just saying fuck it.

The working poor are ready to stop paying rent, stop paying bills, stop paying anything. Their work is gone, they don't have enough money to last the month, they fully expect to get sick, they don't have health insurance and they will just have to deal with it as they always have. Many of them hope that this will create an opportunity for them to improve their place in life.

The poor are wandering the streets, looking for easy shit to steal, making soup from whatever the fuck they have. It's easier for them - there are more hand-outs being given, more people looking out for them, more helping hands being offered. Like the homeless guys who moved into Occupy camps - they are seeing some benefit from this.

So, what's going to happen when the shit 'really' hits the fan? Here it is - laid out for you.

The rich will be fine. The most mercenary and heartless of the wealthy will be fine. The other half will realize they are fucked - along with nearly all of the upper middle class - these are the people that will be killing themselves as they move progressively faster down the ladder towards the great equalizing station - the working poor. The middle and bottom of the middle class will also fall - but the drop isn't as far or as painful and it is my opinion that many of them will manage to hold on - they are essential - grocery store workers, retail workers, restaurant workers, small farmers, civil servants - but the majority of the population are heading straight to the working poor and a large number of them will fall to the actual poor. You will have former millionaires living in tents next to former (and still) homeless. Bankers next to bartenders. People in America and Europe are about to learn (in the next six months) that what actually divides you isn't your intelligence, your skill, or your hard work - it's the luck of being born where you were and to who your parents were. That's it.

There will only be two classes that survive - we can call them the haves and the have nots. That is it.

**Blog Post:** The stock market crash caused by the pandemic was the largest transfer of wealth in the history of the world. That wealth went exactly the opposite of how most people (99.99%) should want it. It went directly from the bottom to the top.

As I write, Trump and the talking heads on economic television are crowing about the amazing economic recovery. The stock market has pumped back up to levels where it was prior to the crash, the May jobs report just came out and blew everyone away by adding 2.5 million jobs instead of losing another 8 million.

I don't know how to break it to you, so I'm just going to tell it like it is. This is all fuckery -

or more accurately - trumpery. Websters Dictionary defined trumpery as 1) deceit, fraud or 2) worthless stuff. That's exactly what this is.

The 2.5 million jobs that came back were mostly leisure and hospitality - jobs in restaurants and hotels and bars - and they come back while a real unemployment rate of close to 20% still exists (the trumpery rate is 13% which is still an alarming rate). The jobs that 'came back' were almost completely temporary layoffs that were brought back from a near total lockdown mode to a gradual opening of the economy.

Those stock market gains? Who can afford to invest during a pandemic and economic collapse? The point-one-percenters, that's who. Who gains from the pandemic going away and the stock market rising? Trump. His campaign has been in tatters as people see the economy erode. This is trumpery in more than one way.

Covid-19 cases have been steadily rising since Memorial Day and the increase from the George Floyd protests aren't even showing themselves yet. The moratoriums on mortgage and rent haven't yet expired - that will be the end of July. And, do we even need to talk about the largest mass protests in U.S. history?

This 'economic recovery' is one of the biggest lies that has ever been told and here is what is going to happen - people are going to flood into the stock market trying to recover their losses (because most people suffered huge losses and couldn't afford to speculate when society might be collapsing) and then - it's going to happen again.

The political protests are going to hit critical masses.

Covid-19 cases are going to explode upwards and death tolls will begin rising again..

Evictions, foreclosures, and defaults are going to light up the night sky.

The markets are going to crash again as the smart money takes their insane profits and exits amidst the chaos.

This whole thing is an economic mass shooting. Not to mention, a deadly pandemic is about to hit us harder than ever - again. Get ready for the biggest transfer of wealth in history - part 2.

Best of luck out there.

This is as much as I can write about the past because I'm now in the present. It's the middle of July 2020. Here I am. Here we are. This is definitely not my America. Perhaps I can write more about my America but I'm not sure there is even a point. America has failed. I don't think there is any way back for her. I'm not sure how that plays out. I toyed with the idea in the book I wrote at the beginning of the pandemic, *A Very Good Novel Coronavirus*. I think the America I want is no America. I want my country to fail and something else to replace it. We deserve something better.

## **My America**

I love America. My America. It's a place that never existed even if I thought it did. My America is beautiful, educated, and free. In my America, neighbors get together for casual games of softball, volleyball, and soccer. In my America, kids can get on their bikes and take all day rides without parents worrying they might be abducted or killed. In my America, the kids who work harder, have more innate talent, and demonstrate a true desire to learn get the attention they need and the teachers who will guide them. In my America, when someone is hungry, someone else feeds them. In my America starvation doesn't exist because there is always someone looking out for you. In my America, there are no homeless. Those without homes are provided one without any requirements of religion or sobriety. In my America, there are wild places where wild people can go live wild if they want to – but they can't just do it in city parks and at bus stops. They can't just move into the restrooms at the park or live in the library parking lot. They have somewhere they can be but they can't restrict where other people want to be – even if that is a restriction through how they smell or the diseases they may carry. In my America, a person can drink themselves to death if they want to, but not without having someone give them options or offer help. In my America, anyone can start a business without having to get permission or a license or a permit. No kid should be denied the chance to start a lemonade stand, no person should be denied the chance to sell their cookies, cakes, bread, home grown fruits and vegetables, or BBQ plates. There should be no barriers to entry. There should only be consequences for negative outcomes. If you make someone sick, you have to make it right, pay the bill, or do the time. In my America, there are no prisons. If someone rapes, kills, or hurts another without cause and with intent – that person loses it all. What does that mean? It means they either lose their life or if some other country is willing to take them, they lose America. Either way, they are ejected from America. If someone is mentally ill, they get treatment or confinement. If someone commits a property crime or other offense, they pay with their time, time put to good use in making communities a better place. They build schools, they clean streets, they build housing, they work for the good of all until their debt is paid. There are no police in my America. There are no judges in my America. There are no planning departments, tax departments, or large restrictive bureaucracies in my America. There are communities. There are schools. There are expert citizens. There are trials and judging by random jury. There is policing by community. In my America, a 12-year-old can have a gun, everyone can have a gun but those guns are used for sport and self defense and if they are used unjustly against others – the consequences are severe. My America is not a Christian or non-Christian nation, it is a place where people can worship whatever and whomever they choose and where there are no tax breaks for religious organizations. There are no tax breaks for any organizations. There are no government recognized organizations or corporations – there are people, there are communities, and there are limits on how much wealth you can have. There are expectations

and responsibilities towards those communities. There are community industries that generate profits for those communities. There is no timber industry, there are communities that have timber and the timber is used to benefit those communities – to pay for the roads, the schools, the infrastructure, the assemblies. There is no farming industry, mining industry, seafood industry, or manufacturing industry – there are communities that farm, mine, fish, or make products and benefit from that. Does that mean one guy can't have a 10,000 acre cattle ranch? Yes, that means he cannot. Does that mean one guy can't own a fleet of fishing boats? Yes, it means one guy cannot. The rancher can have a ranch as big as his family can take care of. If he has to hire people, he has to give them their own ranch. The fisherman can have as much boat as he can handle, each captain owns their own boat. The manufacturer can manufacture as much as he can within his family, if he has to bring others, he has to give up ownership. It's simple. In my America, no one is bigger than a human or human family. There are no corporations with unlimited lifespans, there is no generational wealth that grows without end, there is no massive conglomerate or zaibatsu that controls multiple industries or sectors. In my America there are people and there are communities. The people are represented in their communities. The communities themselves form communities which are represented by and answerable to the people. The communities of communities form further communities which are represented by and answerable to the people. This is descending into a manifesto again.

## **Anarchism**

I 'discovered' anarchism in the 1980s. As a teenage boy, nothing sounded so incredible as a world without rules and a world without rulers. I was into punk rock and 80s punk rock was all about anarchism. Unlike most teenage boys, I did a deep dive into the philosophy of it all. I had some bizarre ideas about revolution and where the future was headed. I still do. My bizarre ideas led me to some bizarre places. I hated authoritarians and authorities. I hated the police. So, when the opportunity presented itself, I joined an elective class on law enforcement.

Through that class, I joined a junior police officer program called the 'ride-along' program where we would meet at the police station once a week, have a class from local police, and then go out for a 'ride-along' in a patrol car. In my journal I described it as 'getting to know my enemy'. Most of my friends referred to it as the 'Junior-Narc' program. At the time, I was a full on pot-head. I was already dropping acid. I wasn't law-abiding.

I was convinced that there would be a second American Revolution before I was thirty. I thought it would be a violent revolution, I thought it would be another civil war, I thought it would be a bloody street battle. I was wrong. I'm convinced that there was a second American Revolution before I turned thirty, but it was a bloodless coup. The America I grew up in is not the America we live in now. This is not my America. It's not the America I dream of and it's not the America I grew up in. This is a much worse America. The Second American Revolution happened and the good guys lost.

When I went into the Marines, I had the same mentality as when I joined the Junior-Narcs. I would learn the skills I needed to defeat my enemies. I would use those skills against them when the time came. Maybe this is part of the reason why I was never fully indoctrinated. Maybe this is the reason my brain was never 'marinified'. I was a secret operative going into an enemy camp. There were so many lies in my enlistment applications that I had to be on guard all the time. It wasn't just the high school DUI my recruiter lied about. He asked me if I had ever smoked pot. Yes, I told him. How many times? Maybe a thousand, I lied, it had been at least ten times that much. He said "Tried it one time and didn't like it, noted." He asked if I had tried LSD. Yes. How many times? Maybe five, I lied. It had been at least ten. "Never tried it," he wrote down. Same thing for coke, speed, PCP, and all the rest. He reached heroin. "Ever tried heroin?" he asked. "No, I told him." His eyes were wide as he looked at me? "Seriously? Or are you finally catching on?" I'd caught on right away. I'd just wondered what his reaction would be to all those answers. Technically, my LSD use was supposed to disqualify me – but only if it was noted. I'd read that they would be able to detect it with a spinal tap but there was zero chance of that happening. Anyway, I didn't lie about my drug use when I enlisted, the recruiter did.

I was telling the truth about heroin. I'd smoked opium but I'd been offered the chance to shoot up or snort heroin dozens of times and had turned it down every time. That shit was addictive

and deadly. I saw how fucking zoned out and happy people got on that shit. I knew that if I tried it once, I'd be hooked for life. So I made a deal with myself. If I wanted to try heroin, I had permission to do so on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I was a smart kid so why did I try all those other drugs? I wanted to know what they were actually like. I'd seen the 'Angel Death' movie about angel dust and PCP but when I smoked a joint lined with that, it didn't make me think I could fly. Most of those drugs I tried were fun but had pretty harsh hangovers. Not worth it. LSD and psilocybin mushrooms were the exception. LSD had a terrible hangover but it was worth the fun it brought with it. Smoking weed had almost no hangover associated. Mushrooms were a lighter hangover than LSD. I tried most things once. Speed was never my thing. Cocaine was fun but too expensive. PCP didn't feel good at all. And besides, part of being an anarchist was breaking the rules – if those drugs had all been legal, I probably wouldn't have been half as keen to try them.

In any event, it's probably fortunate that the Marines got me away from drugs (mostly). Also, living in a regimented and militaristic society for four years kept me pretty far from any sort of radical politics – including Anarchism. Voting for Ross Perot was as radical as I got – I knew I hated the two-party system and voting for any other system was a vote for change. It wasn't that I liked Ross Perot – it was that I hated Republicans and Democrats. When the Unabomber published his manifesto, I was the first in line to buy a copy. I didn't agree with his murders, but the overall flow of his philosophy seemed more reasonable than the Republican or Democrat platforms. I wasn't sympathetic with the causes of the Branch Davidians or those at Ruby Ridge – but I knew that the methods of the government went against everything I believed in. I didn't have any sympathy for the Oklahoma City bombers, but there was always something about it that didn't feel right. I've never stopped believing that the government was complicit in it, somehow, as a way to justify broader surveillance and a heavier domestic hand.

A friend in the barracks knew that I enjoyed sci-fi and gave me a book called *The Lanague Chronicles*. It was a science fiction ultra-libertarian manifesto. It woke my political interests back up in the months before I got out of the service.

I wavered between Libertarianism and Anarchism for years. I didn't realize that mainstream anarchism had largely been coopted by the left and mainstream libertarianism had largely been coopted by the right thus erasing any sort of reasonable common ground. I felt drawn and repelled by aspects of both philosophies. That was why.

In the mid to late 1990s, I rediscovered my passion for anarchism as a philosophy. In the early 2000's that grew. I lived in the Pacific Northwest and dove into researching the utopian communities, communes, and micro-societies which had thrived in the region. I also was drawn into the ideas of alternative currencies, barter systems, permaculture, and intentional communities.

In 1999 and 2000, I became heavily involved in the protest culture of the Northwest and the growing anarchist movement on the west coast.

All of that personal history may help explain these essays which I wrote between 1999 and 2005.

## **A Notice to All Young Men (1999)**

### **A NOTICE TO ALL YOUNG MEN**

Russia is drafting young men. Who are all those young men going to fight? Maybe they are going to fight you! That's right. The military is hard pressed to fight two air wars and maintain worldwide bases. There is good news though. For the first time in recent history the U.S. military has lowered requirements for getting into the service. You no longer have to be a high school graduate. World War III and you could be right at the front of it all. You might even end up being the last one alive, in the battle or the world. Just think, you'll get to fight in a war. A real war like your great granddad fought in. Of course it'll be as ugly as Grandpas Vietnam. It's already been named for you. World War III. At least we've given up naming them things like "The war to end all wars". You may have ideas about running to Canada and evading the draft, but guess what? Canada is a member of NATO!! You'll get to Canada and be sent to the war. Just imagine, when you're older you'll get pay for PTSD ( post traumatic stress disorder), gulf war syndrome, various injuries, or mental illness, just like all those Vietnam Vets who haunt dirty bars all over America. Don't worry though, you're fighting for a good cause. You will be killing people in order to stop people from killing each other. As a veteran of the Marine Corps, let me tell you what a few good men will get to experience in training. I was in bootcamp during The Gulf War, so training was intense, we expected a long war.

Phase I: Sleep deprivation, endless signing of forms, all your hair shaved off, clothes taken, given uniforms, no talking, heavy physical punishment, creation of victim mentality a' la holocaust

Phase II: Heavy physical training, more responsibility, allowed some hair, the carrot is dangled, weapons training, camaraderie builds

Phase III: Responsibility taken away, heads shaved, heavy discipline, intense physical training to the point of body failure, graduation, pride in accomplishment and all it represents, even if you previously disagreed completely.

It only takes 16 weeks. Now you're off to fight in a war you believe in. I came out of bootcamp talking about 'sand-niggers' and 'raghead' motherfuckers. New prejudices given to me so I could kill easier. Luckily the war was over before they could send me. I would have gone then, gladly. It took me years to find my way to my own beliefs after the brainwashing and indoctrination my country gave me. I still get confused about it.

You'll get stories to tell around the campfire of civilization. It makes me a little sad as I see you young men riding skateboards, eyeing young women, and causing mischief on Railroad Avenue. You will probably die in a war. You're the ones we'll send first. You'll be the first to die. I

just thought you should know.

## **A Free Thinkers Association (1999)**

The government exists to serve its citizens. Our government is a government of, by, and for the people. As citizens we have both rights and obligations. These rights include voting and holding office, saying and writing what we think, practicing our own religion, having a fair trial, and maintaining our privacy. Our obligations include getting an education or learning a trade, serving in juries, and paying taxes to support our government.

We have the right to human dignity. Every person should be treated with equal respect. We deserve freedom of thought movement and choice.

The first requisite for citizenship in this Republic of ours is that he shall be able to pull his own weight.--Thomas Jefferson

The key to expressing our views effectively is knowing the issues.

What is the problem?

How is it affecting us or our children?

What is proposed?

How will it help or hurt?

We need a free thinkers federation....A collective of open minds for the betterment of all humanity.

The Platform:

To better humanity through understanding, communication, and cooperative effort. As The Free Thinkers Federation becomes larger these truths will evolve, as all truth must. We hold these truths to be self evident but acknowledge that in the universal scheme of things, situations may alter cases when things are viewed in the long term rather than the short. All people are created equal and share a fate of living followed by death. The following is a bill of rights which all people share.

- 1) The right to speak freely and with responsibility for ones own words.
- 2) All person have the right to claim responsibility for their actions. Damaging actions such as polluting, theft, vandalism, excessive waste, and white collar crime shall carry the penalty of the assessed property or damage plus 125%. Crime does not pay.
- 3)All persons have the right to make moral decisions which do not affect other individuals. These include but are not limited to sexual orientation and practice, drug and alcohol use, birth control, abortion, religious preference, and medical assisted suicide.
- 4)Any person violating the right of others to exist peacefully through violence, murder, rape,

molestation, or illegal incarceration shall lose all of their rights and be assigned to government works projects.

5) All persons are guaranteed the right to a place to live, enough food to eat, and medical treatment.

6) All persons are guaranteed the right to work for their sustenance. Above the guaranteed basic necessity's citizens may enter free enterprise or civilian works projects which pay above and beyond the governments individual subsistence allotment.

7) All persons have the right to bear arms after having served a period of one year of governmental service and completing certified government training courses. Firearm regulations will be strictly enforced and all firearm privileges taken away at the discretion of an advisory gun safety committee.

8) all persons have the right to assemble and operate a free press except when the interests of national security are threatened.

9) All persons have the right to vote in free elections and to run for elected office in same elections. Votes will be counted individually with the candidate with highest popular vote winning.

10) The right to the future. Any person violating anothers right to the future through negligence, pollution, wastefulness, carelessness or intention will suffer the severest of consequences.

## **The Corporate Problem (2000)**

It has been pointed out that corporations are "super people". After all, under current law, corporations have the same legal rights as people yet are not subject to the natural restrictions of mortality and biological growth. We believe therefore that the existence gap between people and corporations must be closed and encourage dialogue and discourse as to how this is best done.

## **Of Anarchists, Protestors, and the LAPD (2000)**

Over 600 anarchists from all over North America converged upon Los Angeles for the North American Anarchist Conference. I was one of them. From the moment I heard of the conference I knew I had to attend. This was an opportunity to meet my comrades, share ideas, and work together to bring on the revolution. I drove from Seattle to Los Angeles picking up hitchhikers, anarchists along the I-5 corridor who needed a lift, and a bizarre blond woman in a pink top who is a missionary for Ted Turner. She told the rest of us in the car how Ted is God and performs miracles like Jesus. The real bizarre part was how often Ted Turner turned up in conversations over the next week.

Arriving in LA we followed directions to the check in point, a cooperatively owned Mexican café. A large group of protestors from different groups were laying out guidelines for the following weeks marches and protests during the Democratic National Convention. Simple guidelines. Support each other, respect each other, and do what you have to do to get your message out. A severe looking brother handed me the schedule and information packet on the NAAC.

The packet contained directions to the conference space, a giant orange warehouse beside the LA River. We checked in and made our way inside. It was about 10 PM. A motley group of anarchists were watching a video about the police problem in Eugene, Oregon. Almost everyone was wearing a nametag with his or her "handle" on it. Paranoia was running rampant and very few people were using their real names. The house rules were posted in obvious sites "No alcohol, drugs, weapons or anything that will give the police a pretext to close us down" and "No cameras, video, or recording devices."

It was hardly typical of the first hours of any other conference. People were gradually introducing each other, claiming space to crash, eating free food prepared by Food Not Bombs, and taking in the remarkable anarchist scene. People ranged from clean to crusty and young (14) to old (70+). I met up with one of the organizers who had agreed to let me crash at his house for the next week or so. I said goodbye to my road companions and followed my hosts to their Pasadena residence. They were pretty confident that their phones were tapped, the house bugged, and that cops and/or FBI had rented an apartment across the street. Sure as hell, when I woke up in the morning to go back to the conference a cop in a cruiser watched me walk out of the house. What do you call paranoia when it's very real?

The conference kicked off with about 200 anarchists present. Mixed in were reporters from the mainstream media and almost certainly a few undercover law enforcement officers. Workshops on Friday covered bike repair, insurrectional anarchism, first aid training, welfare reform, race discussions, radical art, primitivism and green anarchy, legal support, and vision discussion groups. Each hour contained far too much information to go into detail in this article. Each individual had their own ideas of what anarchy is and respected the views of every other person. Los Angeles Times staff writer Nicholas Riccardi described us as "...a multifaceted, hyper-intellectual, communitarian bunch..."

The most heated discussions were between advocates of Primitivism (Green Anarchists) and Syndicalism (Red Anarchists). The greens are very anti-tech calling for a return to a more natural human condition while the reds are more involved with radical unionism (IWW), workplace democracy, and collectivism of industry and work. The two philosophies are not mutually exclusive, though an outside observer might of thought so based upon some of the arguments and discussions. Both fill necessary niches in an anarchist future. For more

information on Primitivism a good starting point is John Zerzan's book of essays *Future Primitive*. Other works on primitivism and syndicalism can be found at your local anarchist bookstore or lending library.

Security was tight and most of us expected the LAPD to burst in and arrest us at any minute during the 3 day conference. They never came. On Friday a federal judge disallowed "pre-emptive" police raids like those used in Philadelphia two weeks earlier.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were community meals. Some of the most interesting discussions took place in spontaneous groups sitting on the concrete floors or next to the concrete river outside.

The second day of the conference focused on strategy. How to bring about an anarchist society. John Zerzan opened up the day with a somewhat controversial presentation in which he argued that civilization erases a world of egalitarian food sharing and creates organized violence. He berated the political left and described primitivism as part of the vision the left doesn't have. Many were angry or disturbed by his straight up radical vision, but everyone respected his voice and views. As anarchists, we agree that we can disagree. Other workshops covered police abuse, anti colonialism, combating homophobia, developing consensus skills, political prisoners, food politics, and womyns(*sic*) and mens groups.

A panel of radicals and a workshop on anarchist tactics again illustrated the divide between greens and reds. Reds and non-green anarchists shared tales of ditch digging collectives, book stores, and direct action to reclaim the economy and workplace from fat cat capitalists while the more militant Greens condemned industrial tactics and trust fund anarchists as ineffective and contributing to the problem we live in. Both sides have valid points but most of the anarchists there fell somewhere between the two extremes.

One of the day's most important workshops was on developing a security culture. Knowing that our direct action movement will increase the governments surveillance and harassment of activists and revolutionaries, there are some simple steps we can take to cover our asses. In a nutshell, be sure to know who you are talking with. Many monkey-wrenchers have been exposed by people they thought they could trust. Lying, bragging, gossiping, and talking about direct actions unnecessarily are some security breaching behaviors. Never discuss plans in buildings, businesses, on telephones, or in cars. These areas can be bugged and tapped. Another well attended workshop focused on the Black-Bloc. The Black-Bloc has its roots in Europe where anarchists dressed all in black and wore masks so that police could not identify individuals. This tactic also makes it easier to "unarrest" other activists because the cops aren't able to tell who's who. Veterans of Seattle, DC, Philly, and other violent protests shared tips and

tricks to help keep people safe. Avoid showing tattoos and other identifying features, do not put grease or gels into your hair(they hold chemicals which can drip down into your eyes), wear gloves so you don't leave fingerprints, have a gas mask handy, do not wear contacts as CS gas can weld them to your eyes, don't use sun block or oil based lotions as they cause pepper spray to burn your skin worse, link arms as you march so that you can pull comrades back from the cops, do not bring identification or address books as they can be seized by cops, do not let media film or take pictures of black-bloc activities. Above all, be prepared to be arrested and beaten- but don't let them if you can help it.

About 30 people woke up sick on Sunday. The amazingly clean porta-potties became puking dens when we could make it to them before hurling. I threw up twice and missed the crapper once. We think it was the fruit or possibly the untreated water we were drinking in the warehouse. Many left the conference to march in the Free Mumia Abu Jamal March, the first of the week. About 15,000 protesters, 2000 media, and 5000 cops showed up. I wasn't among them. After I finished throwing up, several of the countries most visible anarchists decided to go to the beach. We were going to go to Venice but got a bit turned around and found ourselves looking at what might have been a checkpoint. Motorcycle cop after motorcycle cop zoomed by us. I decided to head the other direction and whipped an illegal u-turn. A cop sped by me and yelled..."Nice U-turn" and then kept going! We stopped at a beach a mile or so down and stood beside the road watching all the cops go by. Suddenly...there was Bill Clinton himself whizzing by us in his presidential limousine and waving. Random chance got us within 15 feet of the President. One of my comrades whispered "The secret service must of never heard of McKinley." It was an obvious joke, but made all of us a bit nervous.

The DNC opened up Monday with fat cats and delegates sitting inside the posh Staples Center while thousands of activists marched from Pershing Square to the designated protest area or "free speech cage." The cage was about 2 blocks of parking lot surrounded by a 10 foot high security fence and about a thousand cops with night sticks, rubber bullet guns, pepper spray and tear gas. The black bloc marched and chanted rousing slogans like "Racist, sexist, anti-gay...LAPD go away" "Fuck the police and corporate media" and my favorite "Tonight, we're gonna, smash the fucking state". Once inside the cage Rage Against the Machine played a free concert and agitated the crowd with anti political/corporate rhetoric and anti authoritarian music (strange coming from a band on a big bucks corporate label.) The media was largely ignoring the protests focusing instead on the buyers of democracy having a fancy party inside the DNC. Several individuals began throwing water bottles at the police. A lone anarchist climbed the fence with a black flag and began waving it and was promptly shot by the police with a rubber bullet. The police pulled the plug on the second show and ordered everyone to disperse. They gave the huge crowd 15 minutes to leave but started shooting and gassing after 5 minutes. The black bloc picked up abandoned protest signs and covered the fence to protect the fleeing peaceful crowd. Two anarchists climbed on top of the fence and waved black flags taking shot

after shot from the brutal and cowardly cops on the other side. Several people began pulling no parking signs from the street and using them to bust up concrete and battering ram the fence. Individuals began throwing rocks at the cops and shooting slingshots at the giant windows on Staples Center. The cops fired indiscriminately hitting peaceful protestors, the media, and even a 4 year old child in the back with a rubber bullet. The black bloc continued skirmishing with the police and then melted into the crowd. The police arrested 10 people, none of them anarchists. Suddenly the media began paying attention to what was happening outside the glitz.

Earlier in the week, members of the community had met with anarchists and organizers and expressed fear that property damage would occur. The LAPD was finally on the ropes about police brutality and the neighbors were concerned that property damage would not only bring on more brutality later but also do harm to poor working people who are having a hard enough time getting by. The overall consensus was that property would not be damaged. To my knowledge there was no property damage...not because of police but because of communication and solidarity between activists, anarchists, organizers, and the community.

The week continued with massive marches protesting racism, police brutality, womyns rights, corporate control, and a variety of causes. The LAPD had several more skirmishes with those pesky anarchists and continued to brutalize a mostly peaceful crowd with strong-arm tactics. The number of police in LA was overwhelming. They were everywhere. Rumors of white vans abducting people from the street began circulating. The FBI nabbed one girl and questioned her, the next day two police cruisers were sitting outside of her mothers home in Michigan. The media largely ignored most of the issues until some brave anarchists created some eye candy violence for the corporate lap dogs. Politicians and delegates never even acknowledged that upwards of 15,000 people were a few hundred feet away calling bullshit on their big money politics and being brutalized by the most racist, violent, and cowardly police force in the country.

As we left LA and California, we all felt relief at escaping the police state. The story doesn't end there though. We stopped in Eugene where anarchists are serving free coffee traded from Zapitistas. The enterprise is called Café Anarchista and happens on the street daily from 9-11. We scavenged a large bag of donuts from a dumpster to contribute and enjoyed the coffee and open camaraderie on the sidewalk. I dropped off several riders along I-5 and finally drove to Bellingham to relax and de-brief myself so that I could return to our normal fucked up society. I was absolutely stoked to find the good work of anarchists blooming in the ham. The Colmena Collective has established a library /bookstore /beauty shop on State Street. For those of you who haven't been there...you absolutely must check it out and support it. Other anarchists are working on similar and diverse projects too.

Lessons or morals learned? Anarchy is coming and its bringing free food and coffee, clean

restrooms, respectful relationships, friendship, lending libraries, and a damn fine time....Viva La Revolution.

## **Trash and Waste (2000)**

One of the biggest problems our society faces is the amount of waste we produce. Our dumpsters, our landfills, and our landscapes are overflowing with waste. What is waste? Webster's defines waste as (1) Using, consuming, or expending thoughtlessly (2) to lose or cause to lose energy, strength or vigor and (3) to fail to take advantage of; lose: waste an opportunity.

I'd like to offer another definition to add to this list. Waste is an unused resource. I'll repeat that, because I think it's important: Waste is an unused resource.

Our society is overflowing with waste- resources we are not using. From paper cups to food waste to no longer wanted, though once favorite toys to senior citizens who are pigeon holed into "human landfills" depriving us of their life experience and wisdom. Why do we do it? Why is our society like this?

Let me explain. After World War II, we entered a period when the industrial base which had been built to supply a world war was turned to civilian use. After years of rationing and scarceness, suddenly there was more than one society could use. A new ethic was born, a new society was born. "The Throwaway Society". You've heard that term before, right?

The throwaway society was able to provide maximum employment and offer huge amounts of goods and services to the public at prices they could afford. Suddenly, Americans had more available to them through production and gainful employment. The key though, was to keep people spending their paychecks by providing incentives to buy "new, bigger, better" products. By building in obsolescence, we could keep the factories in full production creating a disgusting symbiosis....people had more income to spend, and it was necessary to encourage them to spend it to keep the assembly lines rolling.

Sounds pretty good, right? Not know, but at the time it did. It wasn't an easy thing to do though. As Americans, we're descended from imminently practical ancestors. Ask your grandparents...it may be hard to believe now, but prior to about 1950, there were three values most Americans shared...Frugality, Economy, and Neighborly Cooperation. These weren't just arbitrary values. Survival depended on it.

Frugality, which we look at as a bad thing, "being cheap". In fact, frugality is defined as practicing or marked by economy...What does that mean? Well, it means making the best possible buying decision, weighing the power of your buying dollar and getting the most for it. Makes sense, right?

Economy refers to running your household efficiently, using that frugality to make your dollar go even further so that you can buy more seed, a new plow, or maybe even splurge and get one of them newfangled telephones to communicate with your neighbors and loved ones.

Neighborly cooperation meant knowing your neighbors and being willing to help them with your skills or work- What you got in return was the help of your neighbors with their skills of work. Imagine a barn raising, where all the men in a neighborhood come together to create something. And instead of pigeonholing the women, children, and elderly at home- utilizing their skills to benefit everyone. The men, and the women who choose to, work on the structure, the other women prepare a midday meal for the workers, and meanwhile, the elderly and children spend quality time together removing plants from where the structure will go, or just learning from each other. Youth and experience, who says they don't go together.

You see, our ancestors needed these values of economy, frugality, and neighborly cooperation....and so do we. Without them, there was and is no hope of building homes where families can grow up and prosper.

So, back to the 1950s. In order to get people to support this new "throwaway society", the simple values needed to be replaced with a new ethic. That ethic was a different sort of economy...the government realized that in order to make it successful, the capital had to be in a constant flow, from employers to employees, from employees back to the employers. By building in the concept of consumer debt, they ensured that people would need to keep working in order to satisfy the need to "keep up with the Joneses". In short, it worked, in a very short period of time economy, frugality, and neighborly cooperation had gone out the window.

The self made man replaced the community leader as role model and the new model replaced the trusted old car. The new products rolled off the shelves nearly as quick as they were produced and dreams of utopia inspired newer, bigger, and better replacements even quicker. Which brings us to today.

We're starting to see the drawbacks of this "throwaway society". Consumer debt is at an all time high. Instead of working less, we're working more. Do you realize a family with one income used to typically be able to buy a home, raise multiple children, and still have time to enjoy the home

and kids? Now it's all we can do to have two incomes support a rental home with one child-- and forget about time to enjoy either.

The key to this problem lies in our perception of waste and the three values I've been telling you about.

For example: a few years ago, I started paying attention to the amount of "waste" I produced... amazingly, I was producing more than 15 pounds a week! Me, a single guy! What did I do? I started by recycling. Jars, pizza cartons, packaging, bottles, scrap paper. Next, I started to compost. My food scraps now create healthy soil for my garden. I was still producing too much waste. So I started to pay attention to packaging, refusing to buy overpackaged products. I was still producing several pounds of waste every week- so I started thinking of ways I could use what was still going into my garbage...instead of tossing it. As an example, I've found over 70 uses for plastic grocery bags! Isn't that amazing?

## **My Anarchist Manifesto (2000)**

The following is an approximate summation of my beliefs as an anarchist. My system of beliefs is constantly evolving and so it is impossible for me to put down on paper anything more than the basic premises that define my overall worldview. I do not write this to have anyone agree with me.

Chances are that at some future point, I will not agree with everything contained herein. This is not a picture of a future anarchist society. There are no examples of ways individuals or collectives can solve problems. There are no guidelines for bringing the revolution to a head.

This document simply defines the way that I have chosen to structure my life as an anarchist. I encourage you to read what I have to say, adapt the parts you like to your own worldview and to e-mail me with comments and ideas so that I can continue to evolve as a human being. I heartily discourage you from adopting my (or anyone else's) ideas in whole without spending sufficient time thinking, researching, questioning, discussing, and changing them to fit with the definition of what you believe.

### **I. Definition**

There are plenty of historical, scholarly, and scientific definitions of anarchism. Enough so that I feel comfortable jumping straight to my personal definition:

Anarchism- a political system composed of no system wherein the adherents are enabled to be complete human beings and exercise free will to the extent that other human beings are not restricted in their own exercise of free will, a non-system where individuals are allowed to work out their

own destiny (karma) and organize individual and community ideals of living both alone and together.

There are of course contradictions in this definition i.e. a system which is a non system. The truth is that contradictions are normal. Look for them and they exist everywhere.

## II. My Personal System

I believe that each person is responsible for creating his or her own set of rules to live by (10 commandments, code of conduct, etc.) As stated above, I also believe that each individual is responsible to personalize their rules...i.e. take the 10 commandments and make them your own. (Thanks to Robert Heinlein for introducing this concept in *Time Enough for Love* ) The following are my 10 commandments, they form the basis of who I am (right now.)

- 1) You're not the boss of me, I'm not the boss of you. – this rule goes back to childhood when we were all equal. Remember when one kid would start acting like the boss, we'd always say "You're not the boss of me," kids are born anarchists and it takes years of conditioning to create whatever it is our society turns them into. I've added the second part to remind me that I too am conditioned to "take charge" and I am not the boss of anyone else either. The truth is no one is the boss of anyone. Leadership is derived from either consent or coercion. Consensual leadership is a giving process that utilizes compassion. Coercive leadership is a taking process that utilizes fear.
- 2) NO thing is SOME thing. This rule is to remind me that a lack of anything is still something. If you create a vacuum in a bottle there is nothing in the bottle except a vacuum that is something. If you eliminate all hierarchical systems in day to day activities there will be a vacuum of order. The vacuum of order (anarchy) is not non-existent simply because NO thing defines it.
- 3) Over esteem leaders and the people lose their power. Over value possessions and people begin to steal. This one is straight from the Tao Te Ching. It says to me people are people and stuff is stuff but there is something else more important so don't put too much value on what any person (including yourself) says or has.
- 4) What isn't worth saying or doing isn't worth thinking about. If you are thinking about saying or doing something either do it and accept the consequences (good or bad) or quit thinking about it. Take a stand or shut up.
- 5) Autonomy builds community. If you are able to take care of yourself, you are more valuable to your community. Not only are you not a problem, you become a part of the solution. By asking the community (the state) to take care of us, we give up the joy of knowing we can take care of ourselves and (later) of each other. Focus on being the provider of your own needs and you will have better relationships with spouse, children, co-workers, and friends.
- 6) Don't preach, live your life and let others ask the secret of your happiness (success). This

seems like another contradiction if you take this treatise as a sermon. However, I am not forcing anyone to listen to me. I am simply defining my own existence in the hope that it will encourage others to define their own existence. The essence of this one is twofold 1) don't try to force your ideas on others 2) be prepared to share your ideas with others when asked to.

7) No one is right, no one is wrong. We are free to form our own ideas. We are free to agree or disagree with anyone. We are not free to make determinations of "right" and "wrong" this way lies totalitarian government. An idea may be appropriate or inappropriate but it may not be right or wrong in my reality. Galileo was "wrong" and the church was "right" etc etc etc. Right and wrong are subjective impressions based on worldview.

8) Walk a mile in the others moccasins before passing judgement. Before condemning someone for their actions try to figure out why they acted that way. A business person may be trying to be less of a burden, a cop may not know how else to improve society than enforcing society's rules, and a thief may not know another way to live.

9) Respect others as you would be respected. This one is just about being cool. Don't rip peoples personal shit off unless you want yours to be ripped off. Think how you would feel if you were treated the way you might be considering treating someone else. Don't stomp on their beliefs or ideas...listen, acknowledge, question, and respect others.

10) What is a good man but a bad man's teacher, what is a bad man but a good mans job. Another one straight from my Anarchist's Bible (the Tao Te Ching). Think about it. A "bad" person gives you a chance to teach about true "goodness" by your reaction, your words, or your being.

### III. The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease (the role of violence in the revolution)

We are entitled to defend ourselves. We have voices to speak up against the injustices of the world. Sometimes, it takes a little something extra to make the world listen to what we have to say. Violence against private property is an excellent way to make a point. If a company is abusing our right to exist, we ask them to stop, we use our voice, and then we begin to make it expensive for them to operate. This is the worst nightmare of a capitalist. Human life is cheap compared with the cost of operating a business to the capitalist. He (she) would rather you killed employees than destroyed his shop. Violence against property makes the capitalist angry and he (she) will try to provoke you to violence against himself or his employees so that he can feel justified in condemning you and your cause. This is why it is good to smash and run. This leaves the capitalist unable to conduct business and yet uninjured. It also leaves you uninjured if he (she) should have a gun handy. Leave the looting for those who don't know any better, stuff is a burden we do not need for fulfillment.

### IV. How we will do things after and during the revolution (now)

That is up to us and our comrades. Each group (family, collective, cell, affinity group, etc etc.) must come up with their own way to solve problems and to provide necessities for the members of their community. In order to bring about the future, we must act now. Collectivize your business. Buy out your bosses (by grouping with your fellow workers and pooling your resources.) Seek out other anarchists with new ideas and ways of doing things. It is my thought, that if we all act as anarchists how we can, where we are, right now...we will suddenly find ourselves living in an anarchist world based on liberty, equality, and solidarity. Remain open to change, but most of all speak your mind.

8/6/2000

## **Anarchism as Religion (2000)**

*This is another essay from 2000. Again, my credentials as an anarchist are not clear since I can't put myself in a box. I'm not sure what to call my beliefs in a religious, political, or economic sense, though I am clear on what my beliefs are...more on that later.*

I thought that the first time I heard of anarchy was when I was 15. I was listening to the Anarchist Collective "CRASS" and had become fascinated by the anarchist symbol. My understanding of anarchy then was simply a world without rules, that was why I thought I'd never heard of anarchy before. As years went by I studied anarchy along with the usual curriculum of subjects taught in American schools. On occasion, I would come across amazing people in history who stood out as individuals, even when the odds were against them. Ben Franklin, Albert Einstein, Nikola Tesla, Thomas Jefferson, Sacco and Vanzetti. Remember Sacco and Vanzetti? We learned about them in grade school history. A couple of "anarchists" who were convicted of murder and executed on August 23rd, 1927. A cobbler and a fish peddler found guilty of being anarchists before being given a fair trial. The teachers in grade school glossed over what anarchism was. It was thrown in with Communists and Socialists as uniquely European ideas. That was why I hadn't thought much about Anarchy prior to CRASS.

Watch the full length documentary, "*There is no Authority but yourself.*" It goes deep into these things.

In my studies since, what has anarchy come to mean to me? Before I go into that, I need to explain that I have always wanted to learn the truth about souls, and in particular my soul. Do I have one? What is it? Where does it go? Where is it? I studied many of the world's major religions and learned the following more or less:

*There is more to everything than anyone knows. Each of us has the potential to be anything. We have free will and can make the choices which define our "soul". If we have choice, we can soar with angels or wallow in mire, it is up to us.*

At this point Taoism became a force in my life. Again choice determined everything. Anarchy is everything. To me, anarchy is teaching a society to take responsibility for their collective actions. The ideal anarchist society would prohibit nothing and simply have well known ramifications for certain acts. People must be allowed to make whatever choice they need to. The responsibility of society is to be sure individuals are educated about the consequences in broad terms.

## **Authority in an Anarchist Society (2000)**

I wrote this back in 2000 and as has been pointed out by anarchist friends and colleagues, the whole thing is rather un-anarchist in its perspective. Thirteen years later, I have to say that I'm still not certain what box I fit in, with regards to political and economic pigeonholing. It may be that not fitting in any box is the only answer I can give with certitude.

Second update 2020 - after many years of looking, what I've realized is that this vision most closely aligns with the ideas of Murray Bookchin and Abdullah Ocalan- these ideas are known collectively as Democratic Con-federalism, and Libertarian Municipalism. The ideas are truly revolutionary and were changing the way things were done Rojava and other places in Northern Syria among the free Kurdish and Peshmerga forces until collaboration between the U.S, Turkey, Russia, and Syria ended the experiment.

### **A Question of Authority**

Often with the topic of anarchy comes the question "But what about authority? Who will be in charge? And how will they stay there and be kept from corruption?"

The answer is much simpler than you might think. A nearly perfect example is the cooperative movement. Co-ops are owned by the workers who operate them and the customers who purchase the goods or services being manufactured. They are run democratically and have checks and balances built in to protect against abuse of power. Authority is granted by the workers and patrons of the co-op.

To the average American, this formula sounds good. Democracy, checks and balances, responsibility. Sounds just like what we all learned about America, but the truth is, America has changed.

One of the more obvious changes from the ideal is the representative democracy made up of the two political parties, the delegates, and the electoral college. Democracy has been subverted. The popular vote is meaningless. The mainstream media has even taken to calling the popular vote the "beauty contest", implying that true democracy is only for show. The real decision is decided by delegates. Who are the delegates? Ask anyone, someone is sure to

know. Good luck.

The checks and balances are in place to keep the executive from cheating the supreme court and the congress, but what if they work together? Even if the visible figures of the government are kept in line, who is responsible for the un-elected and mysterious delegates.

So to start, my answer to who would be in charge in an anarchist government is 'Who the fuck is in charge now?' Where does authority come from, because it certainly is not coming from the people. In the paragraphs that follow I will attempt to outline an anarchist society from the ground up. My postulations are based upon my own studies of government, human systems, and human events.

1) The Group (neighborhood, office, school, or other place of grouping)

Groups are simply people who have reason to be in contact discussing the rights and wrongs as they see them in their lives. A representative from a group takes these concerns to a city or county referendum where all group representatives meet and vote on issues. No laws are passed, instead people talk about the problems and how to solve them. No time is wasted in legislation that deflects interest from the actual problem.

Ex: There are homeless people in our group, how can we help them?

Current Authority: We will hold a conference telling everyone that your group has homeless people, we will condemn homelessness and offer our sympathy, after some time we will give some money to a foundation so that they can run more ads to tell people that people are homeless. We will pass more stringent laws about residences so that people who don't think they are homeless get to become homeless.

Anarchist Authority: Okay, we've got some wood and so and so has that old house, do we know any carpenters? Lets build a house? Wait..but what about permits and rules and regulations? Ha..don't be silly there are no rules when someone doesn't have a house to stay in.

This same group process is taken up to the next level if it needs to be. Decisions are made as close to the bottom of the ladder as possible. Eight is the age required to vote.

Pride in self rule brings about innovative solutions to keep problems from needing to go beyond the group. The group and the individual are allowed to do whatever they like so long as no other individual or group are affected. If other groups are affected than a meeting of groups gets together and finds the problem and the solution.

Ex: Group A is strip mining and the slag is running into the river which Group B and C require for agriculture and human use.

Current Authority: Acknowledge everyone's right to either mine or suffer the consequences of mining. Build up ill will between miners and farmers by making it a mine or don't mine scenario. Ignore all other possibilities. Create legislation which allows strip mining and limited polluting of the water source. Rename strip mining and pollution to mineral extraction and emissions.

Anarchist Authority: Shut down the mine. The groups get together and figure out exactly how to

provide the same income and needs to the mining group. If a satisfactory answer is achieved it is implemented. If it is not, the mine is reopened until an answer can be found.

Taxes, revenues, records, and land ownership.

There is no authority for collecting taxes. Revenues are collected from a portion of all business operating within a group. Land is owned by title and deed by individuals and groups.

Corporations cannot own land.

Corporations are taxed upon the amount of revenue generated by their product or service in each city group, a percentage of this is used to fund education.

Education

From grade school, children would be encouraged to explore their interests in elective classes and apprenticeships. Schools would be funded primarily by the students labor and the "wages" earned in apprenticeship programs. The Mondragon cooperatives have a beautiful working model.

Roads and Transportation

Gasoline tax would be used to maintain roads. Tolls would be collected to fund massive public transportation projects using "clean" energy.

Of course, the collective could decide on completely different criteria. The one constant would be to avoid creating laws which require a police force to enforce the laws. In the case of murder, let a jury decide and the family sentence.

AUTHORITY RESTS WITH THOSE AFFECTED BY YOUR DECISIONS.

## **Anarchism is the Absence of Absolute Authority (2000)**

In many ways, our society has been undergoing an anarchist revolution from the moment the first shots of the American Revolution were fired. The expansion of the west was about moving beyond the reach of the government. The West, where ideas ranged free with the cattle.

Unfortunately, the forces of repression followed quickly on the heels of the anarchist trappers, hunters, and settlers. The long arm of the law reached further and further into the homes of the fleeing masses. A system of property taxation quickly established a virtual leasing agreement between "owners" and "landlord government." The long arm kept reaching, first into schools, then into transportation, then into the pockets of the peasants. Income tax became standard, mind control media systems were in place, the constitution was violated by one president after another. The high hopes and ideals of the founding fathers were gradually subverted.

Labels were quickly established for political parties which called for alternative administrative techniques. Anarchists were labeled as angry revolutionaries based on the 1901 assassination of President William McKinley by self proclaimed anarchist, Leon Czolgosz. Socialists,

communists, labor unions, and anarchists were lumped together as enemies of the American way of life. A way of life which increasingly took liberty and replaced it with legislated morality, community, and a decided lack of financial integrity.

Some anarchists took matters into their own hands in an effort to break the public's glossy-eyed perception of their "enemies". No sacrifice could be too big. These were people who accepted the consequences of their actions. Vinzetti wrote:

If it had not been for this thing I might  
Have lived out my life among scorning men  
I might have died unmarked, unknown, a failure.  
This is our career and our triumph. Never  
In our full life could we hope to do such  
Work for tolerance, for justice, for man's  
Understanding of man, as now we do by accident.  
Our words- our lives- our pains- nothing!  
The taking of our lives-the lives of a good  
Shoemaker and a poor fish peddler-all! (Coull)

The struggle for freedom is at its best, the struggle to control our own souls. We don't wish for people to suffer, we see the opportunity to avoid most of that, and we see the other alternative. Anarchy is the chaos in nature which controls the population of a food chain. Extremely good conditions can create an abundance of grain, which in turn causes the rabbits to breed excessively, which attracts a number of foxes which in turn multiply. The result eventually is that a regular season comes, there is not enough food for the rabbits and they die or migrate, the foxes are faced with the same problem and either die or migrate...eventually the populations reach an equilibrium. Now consider humans and the food chain. If the governmental foxes collect the grain before the rabbits and trade them meals for whatever they want. They create a class of consumer rabbits dependent on handouts. Within the consumers create a system of subclasses with varying degrees of affluence. Demonstrate how certain rabbits can become foxes by complying without question to fox authority ( in fact, the compliant rabbits are gobbled up by foxes who replace them and smile at the rabbit masses) . The consumers are given one luxury item after another while their freedom to collect grain, lie in the sun, dig burrows, or browse meadows is taken away. Soon the consumers are working longer to collect the grain for the foxes, in order to collect a smaller portion of the grain, while giving up liberties from sheer exhaustion. The rabbits can never win...even if they did, the foxes would eat them.

Emiliano Zapata said "A strong people do not need a government." Strength comes from knowing you are right. Having faith in your beliefs, your values, and yourself. Strength does not come from having your individuality undermined by "what is right" by society's standards.

## **The Day the USA Began to Die (2000)**

Tuesday was Election Day. The big race between Al Gore and George W. Bush. The race had taken a fairly nasty turn in the last few days of the election. Bush said Gore wasn't qualified and Gore said Bush wasn't. As if anyone is qualified to be the boss of the world. I was antsy in the morning. I kept going upstairs and turning on the TV to watch CNN.

I had decided to vote. The thing that swayed me was a program detailing the number of people in this country who are completely disenfranchised. Anyone who has committed a felony. Generally for life, they cannot vote...even if they served their time and have been trying to be a good citizen for years. The homeless. The extremely poor. Illegal aliens. People who registered to vote and were not allowed to because the registration cards were not sent in on time.

I voted for Ralph Nader.. At first they told me I couldn't vote because I hadn't brought my ID. The nice old lady let it slide when I told her I'd lost my wallet. I wonder if my vote was ever counted.

The Gore campaign kept saying a vote for Nader was a vote for Bush. To me it seemed a sneaky way to avoid the fact that there were really very few differences between the two parties. It allowed the two party system to steal a block of votes based on fear rather than conscience. It pissed me off. They didn't let Nader in the debates. That pissed me off more.

Election night was like a Monday Night Football game. I'd never seen it like that before. A big screen with the score showing in the upper right corner. I watched the 'big game' with my roommates while we chugged beers. It was fun. Men, sports, and politics. Never mind how we felt about the things that really affected us. Never mind that every one of us probably felt like there was something missing from our lives. Let's watch the game. I was really into it. It really was fun. The race was neck and neck. We took a lot of bong rips and drank plenty of beers. It was like I was living in a frat house.

Florida went to Gore. He was penalized. The networks later awarded Florida and the Presidency to Bush. The Democrats called a foul. A recount in Florida as Bush's 50,000-vote lead fell to 500 or less. I went to bed with Bush the winner and woke up with the race undecided. American democracy had failed. Gore won the popular vote and Bush's brother had publicly said his brother would win Florida -where he happened to be the Governor. How far would it go?

Wednesday the confusion in the Presidential race continued. The Bush people let the world know that Gore had called and conceded the presidency with the 50,000 vote Florida lead but then called back to take back his concession after the true results came. They started throwing the idea of recounts in other states out there. The Gore people demanded a hand recount in Palm Beach County. The count got underway. Shads and bullshit.

The results flip-flopped. No one knew anything. While not leaderless, America was suddenly facing a crisis like no other in modern times. Gore held a strong majority in the popular vote. It

was the faulty Electoral College that would determine the winner though. Florida was key with the winning twenty-five electoral votes going to the winner of the popular vote in Florida itself. It was within a few hundred votes. Already there was substantial evidence of voter fraud.

“What do you think about this election?” People everywhere asked the same question. We all talked about it. Everyone was talking about it. Rage was simmering - everywhere. Outrage.

I watched the continuing saga unfold in the political arena on the television. The country was pretty much split down the middle in party lines. I liked the idea of Republicans and Democrats throwing rocks at each other like Palestinians and Israelis. It was a battle of the rich versus the rich while the poor waited to see how they'd get screwed this time.

Eventually, weeks later, the Supreme Court (mostly appointed by Bush, Sr. told the world that George W. Bush was the winner. Al Gore bowed out gracefully - he showed himself for a pussy. Gave up again when he knew he had been cheated. There were no casualties. No casualties except the dignity and character of the United States. If these fuckers could steal a government, it meant they could do anything they wanted.

## **You Stick to the Internet (2005)**

I had a dream that made me remember it the other night. Maybe you guys experience these too. Sometimes I wake up and am like "Okay, awake, dreamed, now on to life" etc. Other times the dreams remain in my brain and most rare of all is when I meet someone powerful and profound and they tell me something that I need to keep repeating in my head until I get it right. This was that kind of dream. The language used in dreams is not used in the same way as the language in this waking world and sometimes the meanings aren't as clear as one would hope. I'm fairly certain that is why these things bounce around in our heads and souls. It takes time to get them.

In this particular dream this powerful and profound personage said this to me "You stick to the internet". As soon as it was said, I knew that it was important. I need to explain that something I recently experienced was the unraveling of reality. It is fairly tenuous and held together by the most ephemeral strands and forces. It is my belief that at some point reality came together creating the past, the present, and the future (all at once mind you, not in order) and that at some point it is all going to come apart (at exactly the same moment it was created in and everything in between).

I am starting to think that this point could be the singularity. In fact by definition, it is, but more what I am referring to is the point that machine intelligence capability exceeds human intelligence capability. The singularity. At this point, all begins and ends. And it is at this point that you may survive or disappear. You stick to the internet.

Today on a tour I was leading, there was a pretty sharp 15 year old kid from Oakland. I don't remember what the group was talking about but at some point I said "That's the thing, the

internet sticks to you" and his immediate reply was this.

"No, you stick to the internet. Definitely, you stick to the internet."

Not just sharp but profound. I'd tried to rearrange the words from my dream and he corrected me.

## **Essays from 2006-2020**

*I was a university student from 2006-2008. I admit that it changed the way I think. It changed the way I wrote. It changed my ideas. From 2009-2013 I was living in Morocco and Turkey as an expat. In 2009 I got married. In 2011, I became a father. In 2013, I emigrated back to the USA with my family. From 2013 – 2017, I struggled to create a future for my family on the US mainland. In 2017, I left 'America' and came back to Hawaii, a state that is a part of America but not American. That should give some context to these essays.*

### **The Day the Terrorists Won (2007)**

You might think you know what I'm about to write, but chances are that you are wrong. The terrorists didn't win because they killed thousands of innocent people, they didn't win because Bin Laden got away, and they didn't win because we are mired down in a war that we never should have been in. These are all factors but they don't constitute the victory.

The victory came when the American people reacted like predictable assholes and demanded revenge. The victory came when Americans took the goodwill of other nations and turned it to bitterness and disdain. The victory came when the United States decided to abandon the concept of justified war in favor of preemptive war. The victory came when America chose a course that would cause untold death, destroy lives, and give legitimacy to a handful of extremist murderers.

On the day after 9/11, I saw my countrymen turn from shock to rage. I saw ignorance and hatred and xenophobia raise their heads. I watched violence wash over the soul of my country. I stenciled my bed sheets with the message..."No retaliation. Enough have died. Feed them into submission. Drop bread not bombs" or something similar and hung them beside busy roadways in normally peaceful and left leaning Portland, Oregon. Then I watched and cried as motorists pulled over and ripped my sheets to shreds. The news was filled with threats to Muslims all over the country. I saw a woman freak out when she found some Thai Baht in a phone booth. She called 911 and said she had found some terrorist money!

I saw mainland America awash in American flags that more than anything represented a collective desire for revenge and genocide. I knew what would happen. I knew we would invade Afghanistan and Iraq. I knew we would kill countless thousands of innocent people way out of proportion to those we had lost. I knew we had lost.

America is dying and the death began on 9/11. It was the day the terrorists proved that America was made up of petty people and that her ideals were only so much rhetoric. The 9/11 attacks were disgusting and horrid, but not as disgusting and horrid as the reaction of what was once called 'the greatest country.'

### **Violence, War, and Terrorism (2008)**

As human beings we are, by nature, social creatures. We live in groups, work in groups, and most of us spend our free time in group settings as well. If someone chooses to have less interaction with the society of humans in their day to day lives than most of us do, it is very likely that even they will be forced to have a certain amount of interaction with other human beings. The fact that there are more than six billion of us crowding onto this planet makes that a near certainty.

I do not claim that we are superior to animals in the way that we deal with one another. In many ways, I think we are inferior as we have often made things more complex than they need to be. That is the price we pay for being creatures that have an abundance of adaptation aimed towards decision making, time distinction, and self preservation. In point of fact, it is probable that mice aren't exactly making plans, which may be the reason why mice aren't generally killing themselves or having wars with one another.

Human beings have the ability to visualize and conceptualize a number of different future possibilities. This is what has made us such a successful (in terms of dominating our environment) species. It is probably also why we are able to justify the violence that we inflict on the natural world and upon one another. We are a self centered species. In fact, some would argue, that we are the only species with a sense of self. It is the unbridled concern with ourselves that have led us to violence, war, terrorism.

It is easy, as a human, to consider one's own situation to be more important than the situation of a fellow human being (or fellow living thing for that matter). As an example, white farmers along the East Coast of the United States looked at the successful farms of their Cherokee neighbors and felt that it was more important that they (the white farmers) have the successful farms than their neighbors. The result was genocide and the tragic Trail of Tears as the Cherokee were

forced from their fertile land to the dust bowl of Oklahoma.

This is a tragic example of what happens when morality, ethics, and human rights are not considered and the 'self' is allowed to run rampant over others. Human rights are a reminder that all humans deserve the same respect and consideration that the self does, whether that self is an individual, a community, an ideology, or a nation. Had the white farmers looked on the Cherokee as their equals, deserving of the same human rights, the Trail of Tears would certainly not have happened. Nor would the Israelis be treating the Palestinians like prisoners, nor would the Chinese be treating the Tibetans like lower than humans, nor would the United States be so quick to drop bombs on areas that non-combatants might be injured in. Morality and ethics are codes that allow us to consider our actions without regard for the prejudice of the self. It is important that we utilize morality, ethics, and human rights any time that we consider the issues of violence, whether they be in regards to understanding or waging war, the causes and effects of terrorism, or the best ways to approach nonviolence and peace. Consider peace without regard for human rights, this could easily become nothing more than harsh and dictatorial rule, and thus not be peace at all. Or the use of non-violence in situations where one's morality and ethics might lead one to abandon this principle for some cause that benefits the greater good.

Morality and ethics are not universal, but human rights should be. If, when we study or engage in any phenomenon, we make our decisions with an eye towards promoting the greatest human rights, then, perhaps, we might become more than we have ever been. The social animal might become a better sort of creature, and perhaps we will even begin to make our decisions with an eye towards creature rights.

## **How Mass Media Shapes Personal Identity (2008)**

A huge part of being a human being is the ability to ask one's self 'Who am I?' Certainly, we cannot know for certain that all creatures don't ask themselves the same question, but since, as human beings, we are able to communicate the thoughts that we have within ourselves to other human beings outside of ourselves, we can be certain that a part of being human is this desire to understand who we are.

While, on the surface, 'Who am I?' may seem to be a simple question that can be answered with a name, a profession, or a nationality; it is, in fact, a much more profound question that generates more questions than it does answers. The questions follow on the heels of one another and after the simple answers we might at first be tempted to give. These questions can start with our original answers. Why is my name ...? Why am I a certain profession? How did I come to think of this profession, and thus myself, in this way? Why do I consider myself a

member of this nation, state, or organization and how did I learn to think of it in this manner? These and further questions lead, inevitably to the great questions of philosophy. The questions that do not have solid and verifiable answers. Questions such as 'Why am I here?' 'Where was I before I was born?' 'Where will I go when I die?' and 'Am I a part of my body or is my body simply something I am attached to at the moment?'

While it is beyond the scope of this paper (or arguably any paper) to address the deepest of these questions, I believe that it is possible to address the surface questions of how we form our identity and where the information our identities are built with comes from. Our identities are formed by the people that surround us at any point in our lives. Parents and siblings, teachers and classmates, colleagues and friends; all of these relationships aid in the building of our sense of self. These are the direct human contacts that help us determine our likes and dislikes, our passions and joys, and our endeavors towards future selves that we have, as yet, to become. Within and surrounding nearly all of these relationships, however, is another force that shapes us. It is a force which is visible and invisible, pervasive and consuming, and with us, in this modern world, from the day we are born until the day we die. This force is that of the mass media. Mass media is present during our entire waking lives in the form of books, film, music, newspapers, art, and advertisements. The influence of mass media shapes our concepts of who we are, what is important to us, and how we live our lives.

Michael Foucault addresses this influence in *Text, Discourse, and Ideology*.

*...in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Foucault, p. 50).*

Foucault goes on to talk about how by creating the way we think about things, our society is able to actually limit the things we think about. Foucault refers to this as principles of exclusion within discourse. An example might be that one thinks of oneself as an 'American' and not a 'North American' and thus in the individuals thinking, the identities of both Mexican and Canadian are excluded by the simple exclusion of the word 'North'. Thus we reach one of the many ways that the mass media is able to shape the individual identity, through the conditioning of thoughts towards thinking in a certain way. Any message which is able to achieve mass media is controlled and selected by the author(s), is arranged in a way that the author(s) feel describes their worldview (or more insidiously, arranged how they want others to view the world), and is then distributed within the population that either 1) shares that world view or 2) is likely to share that worldview in the future.

Manuel Castells in *The Power of Identity* provides specific examples of how the mass media shapes the individual identity. Castells looks at modern social movements as diverse as militias in the United States, Japanese doomsday cults, Al Qaeda, and WTO protestors and shows how all of these movements were able to spread and attract followers, not because of the

inherent message of the groups, but more importantly because of the message in the media and how it came to be accepted as a truth in the societies represented and thus aided in the formation of the identity of individuals through mass media outlets such as Rush Limbaugh, al-Jazeera, Indy Media, and even the nightly news. Castells sums this up neatly:

*...the actual conspiracy with no names (or multiple names) and with no organization (or hundreds of them) flows in the information networks, feeding paranoia, connecting anger, and maybe spilling blood. (Castells. p. 95)*

Not all of the identity formed by the mass media is negative however. Purnima Mankekar shows how television in India helped to shape and empower the images of womanhood among those who watched serials on television. Mankekar demonstrates that mass media is capable of not only fostering domination of the individual but also able to bring about resistance to domination. Indian women who had a preconceived notion of their identity and watched the notions of womanhood within India on television programs reshaped their views on what it is to be a woman in India based on the message transmitted in the mass media and as a result have begun to redefine what it is to be a woman in modern India.

Jayhasinjy Jhala goes even further by examining the effects of films intended for a western audience when viewed by an Indian audience. The ethnographic films are documentaries about Yanaomamo culture that have taken place with the advent of television and mass media within that culture. Jhala and his wife showed films made for Western audiences to groups of Indian nationals and got very different reactions to the films than from Western audiences. The Indian audiences had not had the same messages broadcast to them in the building of identity as those of the West and thus had a very different reaction to the films. While this study did not necessarily demonstrate the effects of the films upon the identity of the Indian audiences, certainly they demonstrate the differences in national character that local mass media have in the way that individuals view the world in front of them.

This is important to consider because in our vast world media culture, a message that is intended for one audience often has very different reception by an audience that has constructed its identity from a different set of cultural markers. Take for example the typical action film in which the hero kills his enemies in overwhelming shows of firepower and yet to the western audience remains sympathetic. To a Western audience, the hero is justified because his innate character are understood within the tropes and markers of that society. When the same film is shown to an audience that has been conditioned by different cultural influences, the overall meaning of the film and the sympathies of the audience are often completely different.

In *The Tongan Tradition of Going to the Movies*, Elizabeth Hahn, looks at the very different way in which citizens of Tonga encounter western media and the effects that these differences create in the identity of the viewer as opposed to the effects which influence the identity of a viewer from the West. The Tongan experience of the cinema is a much less restrained experience than that of going to the movies in a Western country. Westerners are often

annoyed by the shouts and applause that come from the audience. This difference is born of the different cultural practices of each culture. In a traditional Tongan performance, the viewer is led through the event by a narrator who personalizes the experience for the viewer while in the West, the viewer is expected to detach from the experience. Thus, it can be argued that watching a typical film for someone from the West has little to do with the identity of the individual, those in Tonga are much more likely to leave a film feeling changed by the event. A Tongan viewing may, in fact, have more to do with the identity of the individual than with the story of the film itself. This is a result of the traditional culture of the place more than differences spread through mass culture, but may, in the course of time, have a greater effect upon shaping the future Tongan identity than that of the Western viewer.

Mass media, of course, has become much more than just film, television, and the printed word in the past few decades. Today the mass media is also interactive because of the advent of the internet. The internet has enabled people to find communities that fit their interests and thus has made it possible for an entirely new sort of identity to be possible across the world. As an example, a person who is drawn to an obscure hobby such as collecting pencils that have the erasers chewed off, no longer has to exist in isolation. It is probable that there are more than a few such collectors in the world and that at least one of them (and probably more) are on the internet. As a result, the chewed top pencil collector can find those with similar interests and perhaps will discover that he or she shares more than a single interest in this community. The chewed off pencil community may have bulletin boards, blogs, newsgroups, or even annual get togethers. Because of the collaborative nature of the internet, such collectors will be able to form a more concrete identity within a community of such like minded individuals. The same is, of course, true for those interested in more common pursuits.

Tom Boellstorff documents one such avenue for the creation of identity through online mass media in his *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Second Life is an online world where participants can create alter egos with avatars, interests, and even real world incomes. Boellstorff did traditional anthropological fieldwork in the virtual world of Second Life. Second Life, like all forms of human interaction, creates unique forms and means of shaping the human identity.

*While some see virtual worlds as marking the emergence of the post-human, through terms like homo cyber I argue that the forms of selfhood and sociality characterizing virtual worlds are profoundly human...it is in being virtual that we are human. Virtual worlds reconfigure selfhood and sociality, but this is only possible because they rework the virtuality that characterizes human beings in the actual world. (Boellsteroff 2008: 29)*

Thus, we see yet another way that the inner self of the human being can be shaped by the social world of human society, even when there are no humans physically present. This would seem to answer the question as to whether the sense of self is contained within the body or the body is separate from the self. In the case of virtual worlds, the body is not present and yet the self is.

This idea though, may not be as new as the technology that creates it. Some writers have theorized that all forms of mass media are similar to Second Life in that the self that is consuming the media is able to pick and choose from among different programs, magazines, and films and thus is actually not having the sense of self created by mass media, but using mass media to nurture an already formed sense of self. Not everyone agrees with these ideas though. Many, believe that mass media tends to encourage some forms of self identity while discouraging others. David Morley argues in *The Construction of the Viewer* that

*...the celebration of audience creativity and pleasure can all too easily collude with a system of media power which actually excludes or marginalizes most alternative or oppositional voices or perspectives.*

*(Morley, p. 14)*

Morley's point is well made. After all, many forms of mass media today are generally controlled by business and government. Business wants to increase profits while government wants to encourage behavior that provides more control. With these goals in mind, what is it that mass media is encouraging and discouraging in its consumers?

In looking at the mass media today, one should look critically. What are those in control of mass media trying to make us believe about ourselves? When I ask myself 'Who am I?', how much of the answer comes from within me and how much has come from sources outside of me? Who benefits from the conception of self that is being taught, pushed, forced upon each of us through the mass media? Are we being accidentally shaped into something different from who we are by being an unintended audience? Are we developing new ideas or just regurgitating the ideas that have been fed to us through print, video, and digital media?

Mass media plays a huge role in the development of the self in the world of today. We are exposed to ideas, people, places, and communities that can cause us to bloom or, in many cases, cause us to hide who we really are. The sense of self is yours and yours alone. No one can tell you who you are or answer any of the profound questions for you. No one except for your self.

## **A Short History of the Mass Media (2008)**

The history of mass media stretches back beyond the dawns of recorded history to the people that figured out that they could reach a larger audience through painting a picture on a cave wall than just by telling the story to whatever group happened to be present. While these distant mass communicators may not have been Homo sapiens sapiens, certainly they were human.

Humans are many things and the definition of what it means to be human is rarely, if ever, completely agreed upon within all schools of thought, however, one characteristic that defines humanness across all such definitions is the ability to communicate through the means of

symbols, whether those symbols be words, pictures, or some other form of representation. As James Shreeve points out in *The Neanderthal Enigma*:

*What was truly revolutionary about the Upper Paleolithic was not language, style or art, but the opening of the social conduits through which information of all such novel forms could flow. (Shreeve. p. 312).*

Shreeve goes on to point out that cave art was probably designed to be a part of a ritual experience which was carefully planned and transmitted through the societies of the time. This magnificent leap may well have been the spark that lit the inferno that has led to today's mass media.

The next great leap from representational pictures and art was to be able to express words or ideas clearly with written language. The invention of hieroglyphics and alphabets allowed more complex forms of information to be passed between individuals even if the individuals never actually encountered one another. Being humans, those who were able to control and use these tools used them to control and use their fellow human beings as well. Thus, this conversation which henceforth has been concerned with the idea of humans communicating meaning, moves into the more insidious realm of human beings utilizing power within human populations.

In *The Media and Modernity*, John B. Thompson dissects power into four distinct types. These are economic power, political power, coercive power, and symbolic power. The four are connected at multiple nodes, however, for the purpose of a less complex explanation, Thompson considers each in distinct form.

Economic power is that which controls material and financial resources in a society. Some examples of this in ascending order of influence would be farmers, merchants, bankers, and major financial institutions such as the Bretton Woods Institutions (the IMF, World Bank, etc.).

Political power is that which is concerned with authority and governance. While those with economic power are able to wield political power more easily than those without, for the purposes of this paper we will look at political power in a vacuum. The ascending order of power here might be citizen, council member, representative, senator, governor, and president.

Military power is that which uses physical and armed force. Military power falls within the realm of the coercive institutions such as prisons, police forces, sheriffs, national guard, and offensive militaries. Again, there is certainly a connection between this form of power and economic and political power. There is also a connection between all three and the final form of power Thompson discusses.

The final and one could argue, most powerful form of power is that which Thompson calls symbolic power. Symbolic power is the glue that binds the other forms of power to one another and to the people which form the basis of all power systems. Through schools, churches, and the media people are convinced that the individual power they possess should be given freely to those who wield economic, political, or coercive power in human societies. It is for this reason

that the rise of mass media has also given rise to heretofore unknown levels of power among human societies.

The common factor necessary for such consolidation of control is a standardized and efficient means of production and distribution for the message that the media is to carry. In general there is a lag time between the communication and the reception of the message that mass media carries. By utilizing this factor, those utilizing mass communication means have been able to carry messages much further than the eyes of whoever might look upon a cave wall. Mass communication has managed to take this lag time and use it to transcend both time and space. This means that whatever message is being carried can reach people who are distant in geography or in time.

The next example of the mass media to carry this to a new level was the introduction of the scroll, book, or codec. By means of this often hand transcribed form, the dead were able to extend dominion over the living and the unborn came to be held in the thrall of the dying. Men were able to share their ideas with other men over the course of thousands of years and to give control in an economic, political, and coercive sense to whomever they might choose. An example of this might be the power wielded by the Vatican and the Catholic Church today being a result of the books hand-transcribed by the monks of more than a thousand years ago.

Through this process, the few are able to exert influence to overcome the resistance of the many. Through the power of the word transcribed and written some men were able to legitimize the illegitimate taking of individual power from other men. One example of this could be how the symbolic power of the media has been used to convince the poor that there is a separation between economic and military forms of power and thus keep them from rising up in arms when they realize that the two are actually one intertwined entity. Thus the symbolic form of power is used to tell the consumers of the media how to value and see the world.

By this process it is easy to see that communication on a mass scale is responsible for the building and defining of individual cultures. Culture, after all, is meaning that is shared. This shared meaning is exhibited through the mass media and thus it can be concluded that communication is not only communicating culture, but communication is in fact creating culture.

As one can imagine, things really began to kick up with the invention of the printing press and movable type. The first movable type was probably developed in Korea and China, but in 1439 Johannes Guttenberg created movable type in the Roman alphabet out of strong metal alloys. This combined with oil based ink opened the door to more people sharing the same ideas and thus sharing the same culture more than ever before. This new form of mass media spread throughout the world rapidly. One could argue that the ability to share how to move about the world rapidly in printed books, allowed the printed books themselves to travel more rapidly.

The rapid spread of information allowed the rapid consolidation of power and it is probably no coincidence that the number of people under the control of the various powers grew exponentially during this period. Through sharing culture and information, advances were made

in an ever quickening pace. One of these was the creation of radio which Lewis Lapham describes in the introduction to *Understanding Media* by Marshal McLuhan as essential to the rise of Adolf Hitler and fascism in Nazi Germany:

*...ascribing the existence of Nazi Germany to the match between the medium of radio and Adolf Hitler's political persona (a persona that would have failed utterly on television.) (McLuhan. p. xvi)*

Lapham goes on to explain how McLuhan has decoded why the media is always focused on the bad news.

Bad news engages the viewer's participation in what McLuhan recognized as a collective surge of intense consciousness (a "process that makes the content of the item seem quite secondary") and sets him up for the good news, which is much more expensively produced. A thirty-second television commercial sells for as much as \$500,000 and can cost over \$1 million to make; in Time magazine, a single page of color advertising costs roughly \$125,000 (a sum equivalent to the annual salary paid to one of the magazine's better writers), and McLuhan accurately accounts for the orders of priority by saying that the historians and archeologists one day will discover that the twentieth century's commercial advertisements (like the stained-glass windows of fourteenth century cathedrals) offer the "richest and most faithful reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities."

This, I think, raises the central point of this paper which is to get the reader to question whether the media is the result of modernity or if modernity is the result of the media. This brings us to the point that McLuhan stresses throughout his text that the media is the message. The book is empire, the radio is fascism, the television is consumption, and what then, is the internet? Since most of the texts thus far pre-date the ideas of email, instant messaging, or cellular phones, it is left to the reader to make sense of what the message of this media is.

The rise of the media of the printed word led to a standardization of language, a shared sense of commercial value, and the sense that members of geographically distant people were still members of a virtual community that transcended both time and space. This led to the rise of Protestantism, the spread of mercantilism and early capitalism, and the sense that as human beings, all individuals were imbued with certain inalienable rights. These three factors played integral parts in the birth of the United States, modern democratic process, and the growth of human rights issues. With the introduction of the electronic media such as radio and television, individuals in widely separated parts of nations or the planet itself became aware of desires that they otherwise might have never imagined. With desire came the means to subvert populations to the will of those with agendas who were able to convince the masses that they were capable of fulfilling those desires. Enter totalitarian government, deceptive media, desire manipulation and the stage is set for the major problems that contributed to shaping the twentieth century. If ever there was a double edged sword, mass media would seem to be it.

Thompson breaks communication into three categories: face to face, mediated, and quasi-

mediated. Face to face is between two people who are both present in the same time and space. Mediated is between individuals and/or groups and is separated by time and space, thus a media is needed such as letter writing or two way radio. Quasi-mediated interaction is communication that is directed one way rather than both ways. This would be the case of broadcast media and it is not subject to either time or space. The indication that it is two way communication is illusory in nature. By employing quasi-mediated communication to create culture and shape the thoughts of citizens, those in control of the mass media offer the illusion that it is actually a two way communication. This can be done through news tip hotlines, eyewitness accounts, and 'independent' oversight by regulating bodies that are supposed to be working in the public interest. One might suppose that even those working in the media are fooled by this ploy.

Today, things are more complicated. With the rise of cell phones, internet, and instant messaging; a face to face communication that is not dependent upon time and space has emerged. An eyewitness is not dependent upon the news reporter to tell what really happens in any situation. Take for example a bus accident. While the news media has been called and is enroute to the accident, a bystander has taken a video of the scene with his cell phone. He posts it to his blog using a cell phone/internet program such as flickr. Next he text messages/IMs his contacts using his cell phone and a cell/web interface such as twitter. Those who receive his text can look at the video and text him back with questions. By the time that the news media arrives, it is conceivable that huge numbers of human beings have been notified, seen the accident, and even been able to ask questions of the bystander. All of this is irregardless of time and space. This change from quasi-mediated to face to face communication of a different sort is most likely the next stage of human culture. We are in the beginning stages of it.

Because of the widespread dissemination of cellphones and the internet, it is easy to forget that both technologies are extremely young. As such, it is not likely that we, living in this society are able to focus the lens of history with any sort of clarity upon what effect these technologies are having or will have upon us in the future. It is easy to think that these are simply the latest things and as such are not terribly important, but we are not talking about fads such as hula hoops or video games. We are talking about communication. We are not just talking about communication, we are talking about mass communication. We are not just talking about mass communication, we are talking about mass power to shape the future of human culture. As shown earlier, communication really is culture and since we are looking at new forms of communication, there can be no doubt that we are looking at new forms of utilizing power, new forms of controlling individuals, and new forms of shaping the human culture to come.

## **Social Justice as Societal Healer (2008)**

True justice involves 'removing social domination' as well as removing the domination of nature. It is this ethic of domination which has led to the ills of our society and the degradation of our environment. By creating true justice, it is likely that we would also restore the imbalanced natural state of our world to eco-sanity.

Justice is possible but it requires giving equal weight to humans, animals, plants, and entire ecosystems when considering whether something is good or not. The Ok Tedi mine in PNG affected the environment directly but the environment was also damaged through altering the lives of those who were the traditional land-owners and those who came to live on the land in order to construct and work in the mine.

These changes even took place outside of the immediate area of the mine when toxic substances flowed downstream in the Fly River. If justice had been considered from the beginning for those on the land, those downstream, environments in all affected areas, and wildlife, significantly different actions would have been taken and as a result, the damage would not have been as intense as it was. As Barbara Rose Johnston points out human rights violations often follow environmental degradation. By utilizing resources sustainably we can raise the quality of all life and fulfill the basic needs of those reliant upon a particular locale instead of destroying life-sustaining resources.

Our current system of valuing nature is unsustainable and thus eco-insane. 'Industrial development has brought neither social justice nor a healthy environment to all people. By changing the way that we think and act towards non-human nature we can move from eco-insanity of control and domination to the eco-sanity of cooperation and sustainability. "Under capitalism the earth is bought and sold as private property" and yet does the earth belong to these 'owners' more than to the plants that grow upon it or the creatures that rely upon it for life. Certainly not. The work of Murray Bookchin leads one to believe that these ecological issues will ultimately cause the current capitalist system to self-destroy.

Human populations are just as reliant upon environment as they are upon positive social interaction with one another. In order to have world peace, we must ensure that all human populations have fresh water, enough food, shelter from the elements, and clean air. These necessities are reliant upon having a healthy ecosystem, in the past, wars may have been fought over power, but in the future, power will certainly be reliant upon the availability of these resources. By ensuring that there is an abundant 'common' we are taking positive steps towards peaceful social relationships between all people . Privatization of these necessities is not only unjust, it is unhealthy for the entire planet. One example of this is seen in the destruction of Thailand and exploitation of the people there happening concurrently .

By embracing true justice the entire world will benefit. A great example of this is in regards to global warming. The fact that Tuvalu might be completely destroyed by the rising oceans as a result of global warming is not the fault of the Tuvaluans, if anything it is the fault of the entire human population and thus the Tuvaluans should not be forced to endure the consequences while the rest of the world does not shoulder the burden of providing relief, assistance, and justice to them. Certainly it is not justice that the impoverished people of the world suffer the worst consequences of climate change. By embracing an ethic of justice, we increase the ability of all people to weather future hazards whether they are drought, flood, natural or manmade disasters.

Eco-sanity involves not only respecting and protecting the environment, but also respecting and protecting one another and valuing all human beings as much as we value ourselves. An example is when farmers are obligated to work for wealthy land owners because they don't have the justice which would allow them to own and work their own land. This lack of justice leads to relationships of inequality, exploitation of people, and ultimately of the land. As Townsend states, "It is rarely possible to understand fully the relationship between humans and some other species without getting into questions of power and inequality" Merchant offers a means of escaping from this by positing a science of interrelated organisms and environment within an 'ecological socialist society'

One part of ecosanity is respecting all human beings regardless of class, religion, sex, or ethnicity. Can true justice can restore eco-sanity? The answer is simple. Yes. However, it is more complex, for the eco-insanity of the present will inevitably lead to the destruction of an unjust system, even if it takes all of humanity out to the garbage with the system that has led to so much injustice and enviro-devastation.

## **Social Justice, Education, and Society (2008)**

First of all, let me posit, that society gives those with wealth a definite advantage over those without. This isn't news to anyone, but let me give an example that you may not have thought of. To break free of a background in poverty, one path is that of achieving a higher education. Getting a degree is an expensive proposition in time, labor, and effort. Yet, many, like myself willingly choose this path out of the cycle of poverty. And now, I move into my example of how the wealthy are favored: those who have their education paid for by parents or others, do not have to deal with the complexities of financial aid. It is only those of us who are poor that are forced to deal with the entrenched bureaucracy, paperwork, and jumping through hoops that is

required in order to get loans, scholarships, and grants.

I have lived in poverty for nearly all of my life. As a child in Oregon, I was a recipient of free lunches and a staple of my family's diet at home was the government subsidized cheese, powdered milk, and peanut butter. As an adult, I have worked in minimum wage service industry jobs that allow me to pay the rent and make just enough income to live at or slightly above the national poverty line. I escaped from the backwater town my parents lived in by joining the Marine Corps right out of high school. In 1996-1998, I used my G.I. Bill to get an Associates Degree. A few years later, I realized that a two year degree gave me scant advantage over a high school diploma. I was still working in service industry jobs. At this point, I decided that the best course to follow was to embark upon achieving a Bachelors Degree and so I gave up my full time job in order to become a full time student at the University of Hawaii.

In order to pay for school, focus on my studies, and manage to pay living expenses, I needed financial aid. In order to get financial aid, I had to provide a slew of tax forms, documentation, proof of residency, and more. Applying for school was easy, getting accepted was easy, getting financial aid was time consuming and difficult. When I provided all of the documentation, I was told that it was a random process and it was unlikely that I would need to provide so much information again. Apparently, the odds have been against me as I have had to provide the same information every semester without fail. Tax returns, documentation of veteran's benefits, and further proof that I am who I say I am.

This process has been, without question, the most stressful part of achieving my dream of a higher education. It has taken more coordination, more running in circles, and more angst than writing my B.A. Honors Thesis. It's the money, you see. Without the money, I remain an uneducated guy suited to work in the service industry, regardless of what I have learned or what I know.

With this, hopefully my final semester, I knew there would be challenges and trials, but I thought that I had figured out how to give financial aid everything they needed. Imagine my surprise when the semester began and I was told by Financial Aid that my aid money had been reduced by nearly \$5000 because they had determined I was receiving benefits from the G.I. Bill. Especially, considering that not only was I not receiving benefits, but that my benefits had already expired and couldn't be used!

This was especially traumatic as I had counted on the aid money to pay rent. Without it, I would be homeless. So, I jumped through the hoops they required by going to the V.A., a bureaucracy that is noted for it's glacial pace, and managing to get them to certify that I was not receiving the G.I. Bill. When I returned to the aid office, the surly counselor looked at my paperwork and told me that even though I had rushed to solve the problem, it would still be a month before they could process it and correct the error. So, I sold my tools, I sold my books, I sold my movie camera, and I did yard work for my neighbors so that I could pay that months rent. All of this while I was still taking three writing intensive courses and two more upper division classes. Oh, and I was working as a tour guide whenever I wasn't mowing, selling, or writing.

Thankfully though, I didn't have to move out of my apartment, and after a month, Financial Aid resolved the issue. The surly counselor didn't apologize, instead he said "It's not our fault." Of course, they might have seen that I had never received the GI Bill at UH and confirmed with the VA, but why would they do that, after all, I need them, they don't need me.

I thought that was it until I got a letter on Halloween that said an audit of my account had shown I had been overpaid and that if I wanted to graduate I needed to pay \$1500. This was \$1500 that had already been allotted to rent for November and December. The alternative to paying it back was to not be allowed to graduate.

I called the Financial Aid office to determine what had happened and the girl on the other end who I later found out was on her last day there, was hostile and uncooperative as I tried to explain that they had misplaced the paperwork when she told me I was receiving VA benefits. She put me on hold for fifteen minutes, told me the corrected form I had turned in was not there, and told me that I would need to go back to the VA to get another copy of the form, or pay \$1500, or not graduate. I lost my temper but managed not to cuss at her.

Come Monday morning, I decided to go to the Financial Aid office to resolve the issue and make sure that getting the VA form would solve the issue. The student worker was friendly but solving the problem was beyond her authority level. She asked me to sit, she explained that the problem was the Scholarship I had been awarded that they hadn't known about (when I knew that they had), and finally told me to sit and wait for a Counselor. At this point, I had had enough. I refused. I told her and the people who had formed in a line behind me that I refused to leave until the problem was resolved to my satisfaction. She asked me to sit and wait and again I refused. I apologized to the people behind me, but the time had come for action. The time had come for non-violent civil disobedience and I had decided that the only way I would leave was if the problem was resolved or if the police came to take me out of the building.

I refused to move. I stood there, wearing my Ralph Nader t-shirt and told the student worker that I was sorry, but that I would not budge.

At this point she went in the back and interrupted the meeting of Counselors. The first truly competent person I had been allowed to speak with came out and pulled up my file. She immediately found the updated VA benefits form, saw clearly what the problem was, told me that the girl I had spoken with on Friday no longer worked there, and amazingly, she fixed the problem. It took her only a few minutes.

And that brings me to how I started this story. The amount of stress that this situation caused me from Friday to Monday was incredible. I saw ahead of me a future where I had earned a degree and didn't get it or where I screwed up my final semester because I was homeless. I saw three years of work going down the drain and I saw that all of it was a result of me needing to get financial aid rather than having my education paid for by someone else. It's something I hadn't really considered before. Maybe as you read this, you think it is trivial, but I can tell you that it's not. The extra hurdles that the poor have to face in our society to achieve an education,

to break free of the cycles of poverty, or to do any of countless other necessities are not easily leapt. Our society is designed, however subtly, to keep the poor in poverty. Whether it is through the people they know, the education they get, or the work they are able to find.

Take a moment with me and consider what the results would have been if I had not stood up this morning, if I had listened to the petty bureaucrats telling me what I needed to do, or if I had simply given up. Is it any wonder that sometimes people simply split at the seams, explode, commit suicide, or worse? I don't have the answers to our societies problems, but I do know this, if we don't take a stand, nothing will change. A simple stand, like refusing to leave or sit down, not moving to the back of the bus, or refusing to fight in an unjust war makes the difference. I know that my stand is of seemingly marginal importance to the world, but imagine if everyone took the same respectful, non-violent, and non-compromising position when faced with even the most trivial of unjust situations. Please, think about it and the next time you are in one of those situations, refuse to bend.

### **Is Human Nature, Anti Nature? (2008)**

Humans are as much a part of nature as any other species on the planet and while it is permissible to talk about the impact that human populations and culture have had on the planet, the idea that human nature is inherently anti-nature does not fit with the facts.

Indigenous people have managed forests for a long time. (Townsend 2009:33) In addition to the examples given by Patricia Townsend about how human beings have successfully managed forests and promoted nature, there are plenty of other examples where human culture and thus human nature have not only promoted nature, but protected it.

One such example is that of the Mbuti Pygmies as related by Colin Turnbull, the Mubuti's society and religion are rooted in nature (Turnbull: 1961). Through inherent biodiversity cultivation, many peoples have preserved nature despite the presence of significant human populations. A more recent example of the inherent desire of human nature to protect and preserve nature is the Declaration of Belem in 1988. This is an example of human nature being pro-nature.

Human cultures are intimately related to the physical and biological environments in which they occur. If one is to argue that human nature is anti-nature, than one must argue by furthering this reasoning that human nature is anti-human. The reason for this leap forward in the argument can be seen by how closely humans must rely on the ecosystems in which they live. Consider the Indigenous adaptation to Rio Negro in the Amazon consisting of mixed subsistence, diversity, ethno-ecological practices and ethno-conservation methods. Like the Shoshonean and Columbia River Indians (Townsend 2009:10-19), humans throughout the world have molded their cultures to preserve, nurture, and protect their natural environments.

Cultural ecology is about the relationship between human culture and nature (Townsend 2009:11). According to Leslie E. Sponsel, cultural ecology is an analysis of how culture

influences the interactions between a human population and the ecosystems in which they reside (Sponsel 2001: 395-397). This is not always a positive impact.

Some human behavior and culture is maladaptive and thus anti-nature. In the same study mentioned above, Sponsel brings us to the conclusion that the net impact of human populations is to reduce biodiversity. This can be seen clearly in the “American preoccupation with manicured front lawns” and the massive decline in Northern Cod through overfishing. (Townsend 2009:14-15) Despite these examples of humans having an anti-nature impact, if human beings were truly anti-nature, our species would certainly have perished long ago.

The health of human populations depends upon the health of the ecosystem they live in. In the process of change as human populations grow, environments mature, and history runs its course, we, as humans, depend on the health of our environment. If the environment is not well we lose the plants we need for medicine, we encourage the emergence of diseases such as Ebola and the black plague, and...we starve (Townsend 2009:30-31). To claim that human nature is anti-nature is actually a form of environmental racism much like that of Kent Redford (Redford 1991: 46-48) who claims that indigenous cultures offer no models for sustainability and that all humans have an impact on the environment. The truth is, all life has an impact on the environment. That is nature, no anti about it.

## **On Responsibility (2008)**

It's never been easy being a human being. From the dawn of time, we have struggled to survive, struggled to find shelter, struggled to find safety, and struggled to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe and alive. The way we do this has changed, but the necessity to do so has not. The world is a brutal place, even without the brutality we cause to one another. One need only look at the headlines to see this is true. The world is a deadly.

When one adds to all the natural disasters, the threats posed by other human beings, the world becomes that much more dangerous...and complex to survive in. In Hawai'i are fortunate that we have more deaths from drowning each year than from disasters, both natural and man made. Unfortunately, that is not the case throughout most of the planet. My purpose in writing today is to explore the reasons why we, as humans, tend to create political and social institutions that make basic survival that much more difficult for our fellow human beings.

When I speak of human disasters, I am referring to the worst that we are capable of doing to each other. I am referring to genocide, murder, rape, and looking on as others starve, die from disease, and suffer in plain site. How have we let this happen? How have we allowed these things to become our reality? How have we let this world come to be a place where we look on as these things happen and feel that we can do nothing to stop it.

Strange as it may sound, I think I actually have an answer. At some point in creating societies and civilizations, it was necessary for individuals to take on different specialized roles of responsibility. This is a necessary and good thing, within limits. For instance, one person took on the responsibility of growing food, another person took the responsibility to create tools, another person became a builder, and so forth. This specialization allowed for the refinement of crafts and trades which in turn allowed us to develop more sophisticated technologies. These technologies created the means for us to live in abundant, secure, and peaceful communities. This division of labor was a successful strand in the cloth of our cultural evolution.

Imagine, the first community of farmers, builders, weavers, and tool makers celebrating after their first truly successful season. The shelters were warm, the clothing was functional, the tools were efficient, and the specialized techniques of farming had created a surplus of food. Great stuff! Suddenly, there was the time to create art, the time to create music, enough surplus food to try new recipes, and perhaps even the impetus for a harvest celebration.

And that is when another band without these advances wanders into our peaceful setting. Since they speak a different language, they cannot understand why some should have so much when they have so little. They begin to take from the efforts of our young society. They are doing so without contributing.

As you might imagine, this quickly becomes a problem. Since our young society has been so successful in assigning specific responsibilities and leaving other responsibilities to others, they decide rather quickly to assign responsibility for this new challenge to a specific sector of the population. Thus are born the first lawmakers and the first law officers to enforce those laws.

The farmer can now keep farming and the lawmen will protect his crops. The builder can build and the lawmaker will decide where the property line is. The cloth maker can weave and the law will set a price and be sure it is paid. When there is a problem, refer it to the law. When there a question about the law, refer it to the lawyers. When protection is needed, seek it from the soldiers and police. In order to make these protectors more efficient, give them the means to create new laws and the strength of arms to enforce them.

Responsibility was given away. Personally, I think this was our first mistake. Think about it. Maybe it is time to start taking the responsibility for our lives back. The question is, how do we do that?

## **Why I'm Not Voting for Obama (2008)**

I have been considering voting for Obama. It's created this sort of nauseated feeling in my gut as I've watched him swinging to the mainstream (sic. moderate Republican) view of things lately. A few examples are his recent support of a conservative supreme court decision regarding gun ownership, his kow-towing to religious and patriotic nutters, and his statements

about how withdrawing troops from Iraq would be left up to field commanders. Not to mention his abandonment of his pledge to use public financing.

I've never been in love with candidate Obama but I was considering voting for him as the least worst of the candidates available.

Until last night. Ralph Nader showed up and spoke at the University of Hawaii last night. I voiced my fears to Nader, told him I had voted for him twice before (once writing him in on the Hawaii ballot in 2004) and that I wanted to vote for him but I was scared by what 8 years of Republican rule have already done to our country and that I felt we might not be able to survive another four years of it.

Nader asked where I was voting this year. I told him Hawaii. Then he laughed.

"You're actually worried about Obama losing here? As long as we are in the electoral system, your vote only counts in Hawaii."

I was confused at first but he explained it in further detail and I realized he was right. It is virtually impossible for Obama to lose in Hawaii and besides that, I'm not convinced that Obama is as big a change as he would have us believe anyway.

So I'm voting for Ralph Nader for the third time in three elections. For the record, here is my lifetime presidential voting record. In 1992 I voted for Ross Perot, this was my first election. I was voting not so much for Perot as for change and the inclusion of more than Republicans or Democrats in U.S. politics.

In 1996, I voted for Bill Clinton, I was drinking a lot in those days and couldn't see far enough to find a viable third party candidate. Besides, I had just read Al Gore's book and thought it was pretty cool that a Vice President could be an environmentalist.

In 2000 I voted for Bush...haha. Just kidding, I voted for Ralph Nader of course. Having just come off the highs of the WTO protests in 1999 and then having gone to the North American Anarchist Convention in L.A. during the Democratic Nominating Convention, I was not going to back the Democrats or Republicans despite the fact that I still had a soft spot for Al Gore. It was at this time that I really fell in love with the radical idealism of Ralph Nader. I saw him speak at several venues and everything he said resonated with me. In 2000, I am proud to say I voted for Ralph Nader. My vote for Nader was for Nader and everything he stands for...I wouldn't change it.

In 2004, I voted for Nader again even though it virtually negated my vote here in Hawaii. I wrote him on the ballot here in Hawaii where he didn't appear on the ballot and we don't have a write in line. It's my vote and it went to the man who I felt (and feel) is the most likely and able to put the United States back on the track of being a country I can be proud of.

And in 2008, a vote for Nader is not a vote for McCain, nor was it ever a vote for Bush. A vote for Nader is a vote for radical change in American politics. A vote for Nader is a vote for a man who has never had a credit card, never been in a McDonalds or Walmart (really!), and a vote for a man who started his life of public service by hitchhiking to Washington D.C. and getting autos made safe because he was tired of seeing his friends die in unsafe automobiles and who has continued to fight for principle, for truth, for liberty, and for justice for all, not just the few.

If Ralph Nader can show that he has 10% support in the country, he will be included in the Google debates with the major party candidates. If you want to see the candidates shaken to their core, pray for this to happen.

The event last night made me sad in a way, sad because I look at this great man and listen to his words and realize that my country could be great again if he were able to take the helm--and I see him being ignored by the mainstream media, being marginalized, and being villified.

At the same time I feel this stirring of fire in my belly as I recognize that Ralph Nader has not given up, that he has not lost hope, and that he never will. This feeling that I get from this man who doesn't hide from the nasty truth of our politics and yet who refuses to compromise his own values, politics, or ideals. This feeling is hope being born again, this feeling that is replacing the nausea I've been experiencing as Obama becomes like Clinton who is not really all that different from Bush...not really.

I'm going to vote for Nader...again. So should you. Ralph Nader is not a spoiler. In fact, he might be the only candidate that can prevent this entire country from going sour.

### **If You Want to Fight the Power, You Have to Know What Power Is (2008)**

Throughout the recorded history of humankind, and presumably even prior to that, human beings have ordered themselves in groups and often placed themselves into positions which necessitate relying upon other human beings. One can imagine the possibility of lean primates running across the Savannah in small groups and coming to some sort of point that would require a decision to be made. It is in these moments, when the welfare of the entire group rests

in the hands of an individual, that the consequences of power become most obvious. If the leader of this pack of primates makes the wrong decision, his people will suffer; but if he makes the right decision, his people will thrive. In either case, his decision is both dependent on and resultant of something called power.

Power is more than just electricity. It is more than strength. Power is something that is actually, very hard to give a concrete definition to. If you ask five people on a bus in Nairobi what the definition of power is, you will most assuredly get five answers that are not the same. The same goes for if you ask any number of people anywhere on the planet. The opinion of one is sure to conflict with the opinion of another, somewhere at least. For instance, many Americans conceive of power as wealth, fame, or influence. They would tell you that power is a result, primarily of money. However, this is not the answer you would get, if you were to ask many of the people that live in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia has a diversity of conceptions of power within it. By no means, is there a single definition. The Shan people of Thailand view power in a very different way than the people of the United States. The Shan view power as the result of positive or negative actions taken in the current or past lives. Since the Shan are Buddhists, they conceive of this lifetime as one of many that each individual lives. In every life, an individual is able to build up a sort of bank account called Karma. Karma is what determines the position of an individual and hence, power (Tannenbaum 1989:74) The benefit of power to the Shan is a sort of protection that allows the individual to do whatever it is they want. (Tannenbaum 1989: 71). In this case, the result of power is not very different from the result of the American conception of power.

American power also offers degrees of protection but without the benefit of actions in past lives or concern for future lives to deal with. One of many factors that does affect the American conception of power is sex. American magazines and periodicals often point out that there is a gap between the wealth and hence the power of humans of different sexes. This is particularly interesting when one looks to the recent studies of sex, gender, and genetics. While Americans typically class individuals into two sexes and two genders, this may not be the most accurate way to divide the population. Typically, it is assumed that all men have a y-chromosome and that all women have two x-chromosomes. Sometimes, however, there are women with a y-chromosome and men with two x-chromosomes (Errington 1990: 19-22). Thus, this particular conception of power, may have to change.

The Lisu people of Northern Thailand, have a similar sort of association between wealth and power as Americans do. They believe that two elements of power are generosity and proper conduct. Since generosity is dependant on wealth, wealth is a means to power (Durrenberger 1989: 106). To be fair, this is a bit different from the American conception, but it does involve money. The American conception probably has less to do with generosity after acquiring wealth than with having the visible wealth itself.

The Javanese are also concerned with the visible signs of power. Rather than judging a person's power by the actions they are able to take, the Javanese are more concerned with

culturally important signs that a person has power. These signs span such things as specific talismans and personal strength of concentration (Anderson 1990:28). In addition, the Javanese lack a judgement of power, that is they think of neither positive nor negative power, simply of power (Anderson 1990:23). Power itself can actually take a physical form in many cultures.

Within the society of the Minangkabau of Western Sumatra, each person is held to be equal to each other person. That is to say that each person is regarded as having an equal voice to each other person. This equality is not as simple as there being no power, however, instead those with more prestige, rank, or wealth are actually in a position of power (Blackwood 2000: 45). Thus, even in an egalitarian society where people are conceived of as having a base level of equality, there is still a hierarchy of power. Power is a constant in human society. There is no such thing as an interaction of humans without the effects of power being felt.

How then, does one get power? How does one take power? How can one fight power? The answer, of course, depends on where one is and how the power that one is interested in is accumulated and held. If you are in a society where power is something that resides within a certain individual and cannot be removed, the answer might be as simple as the life of that person (but you may have to deal with them in their next life.) In a society where power is a result of wealth, one can affect the status quo and the distribution of power through manipulation of personal wealth (one's own or another's). In a society where power is based upon something else, one will have to figure something out.

If one wants the power, if one wants to fight the power, if one has the power and want to keep it, than one better spend a little time thinking about the source of the power that one is interested in. It might save a lot of confusion later, when one is discussing what one has done on a bus in Nairobi with one's five friends that have a different conception of power than one's own.

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## What am I doing with my life? Not Much (2009)

Did you ever ask yourself this question? I ask myself all the time. My answer is usually something along the lines of "Not much."

And I'm okay with that. At the moment, I'm trying to figure out where I can make some money writing online, trying to reform Islam into something that incorporates the truth of many religions and philosophies into one solid package that will probably end up being something quite different from Islam, and yet more like Islam than Islam is. (And more like Christianity than Christianity is, more like Buddhism than Buddhism is, and more satisfying than any of the other religions that just don't quite cut it out there either.) I'm trying to figure out how I am going to get married to Hanane later this year when I don't quite measure up to all the requirements that the Moroccan government wants me to fulfill, trying to figure out how to get enough resources so that I can take her somewhere else to get married, and trying to figure out where I should go next and what I should do when I get there.

What am I doing with my life? Not much.

I'm not really interested in being anyone's corporate slave. I'm not interested in being a soldier of fortune. I'm not interested in volunteering for some organization that I don't ideologically agree with.

I'm not interested in getting a flat screen TV. I'm not interested in having a big SUV. I'm not interested in most of the things my society and culture seem to be telling me are important.

I'm not doing much with my life.

I'm working on a book about a different way to travel called *Liminal Travel*. I'm studying four different books on spiritual traditions. I'm coming to terms with some uncomfortable truths about my parents and grandparents. I'm learning who I am more and more each day.

Don't get me wrong. If a corporate job fits with me going to Morocco, marrying my love, and starting our life together. Not only will I accept it, I'll jump through all the hoops necessary to apply for it. But I'm just not particularly interested in a job for the sake of a job. I'm not interested in telling someone they are right when they are wrong. I'm not into pretending someone knows the best way to do something when they obviously don't.

What am I doing with my life? Not much.

I'm spending way too much time online. I'm really trying to figure out how folks make money on the internet and what I'm finding is that everything is for sale. It all revolves around pagerank, a ranking system that google came up with. The higher the pagerank, the better your chances of making any money. There are people selling everything online:

Want traffic to your site? You can buy 10K unique U.S. visitors for \$10

Want links on pageranked sites? You can buy them.  
Want comments on your blog? You can pay for them.  
Want content? That's for sale too.  
Want site reviews? For sale.

Essentially it all comes down to me asking, what is real on the internet? The answer? Nothing. It's just like everything else. A big illusion hidden behind a mask that pretends to be real but isn't. Crazy stuff. Wow.

## **Modern Expectations (2012)**

They're not so different from the pre-modern expectations.

- Owning your own home is the key to your security
- Having a steady and secure income makes life enjoyment possible
- You have to work now in order to buy your freedom later

That last one is the one that kills me. Think about it for a minute. Who works to buy their freedom? Slaves and indentured servants do, that's who.

Last I looked slavery was illegal. For that matter, it seems like owning a home didn't work out so well for all those who've lost them in the past few years. As to a steady and secure income - your employment can end at any time. Yikes!

That means that the modern expectations make you a slave with no security and little to no freedom to enjoy life. Yuck. Get out of that mindset.

I'm not going to tell you to quit your job, follow your bliss into a \$100 startup, travel all over the world and blog for money, or become a 4-hour-escape-artist. Other guys are pushing that agenda.

Here's the message I'm pushing:

You should be able to enjoy life a little before you die. That's it. That's the one expectation you need to embrace. Stop being a slave working for your freedom, stop thinking that expensive cologne or a fancy man-bracelet is going to get you laid, stop pretending that travel is the answer to all your problems.

If you own a home, good for you. Enjoy it!

If you have a good job, good for you. Enjoy it!

If you don't have a home or a job, good for you. Enjoy it!

You are not a slave. I'm not going to tell you that you can do all the things I do and I'm sure I can't do all the things you do. We have something in common though...We are not slaves. We are FREE.

Put down those modern expectations that have shackled you. You only imagined that chain around your neck - you made it up. Stand up tall and look around. You are free and that is awesome.

What are you going to do with your freedom? That's the big question.

## **America on the Road to Poverty (2013)**

This is not the problem friends. This is the symptom. The problem is that the United States of America should be the greatest country in the world and it is not. Not even close. We should be the country that is able to solve the social ills of the world, but we are not. We should be the nation that shows the world how to advance, and instead we show them how to move backwards. This isn't easy for me to say friends, but I hate the United States for what it has become and for what it has failed to achieve. What happened to the beacon of hope? What happened to the bastion of freedom? What happened to the greatest experiment in the history of mankind?

I'll tell you. It was stolen, it was subverted, it was destroyed, and it was turned into that which it was supposed to oppose. Americans (obviously not all of us) have become fat, greedy, selfish, and full of shit. Figuratively and literally. We drop bombs that explode houses when we should drop bombs that blow minds. We invade when we should lead by example. We are hostile when we could be strong. We are proud when we have more to be ashamed of than ever before.

I am pissed. Look at what has happened and is happening to MY country. These jackasses we elect might have good intentions to begin with but we have allowed the system to become so entangling that pretty soon they realize that the only thing they can accomplish is to help themselves and their friends to a bigger slice of the American Pie. Meanwhile, like pre Nazi Germany, the common man turns to an outside source for a solution to why he is getting less and less but being asked to put more and more in. Blame it on the Mexicans. That is what those who are hogging the meal want you to do...

You can't get good healthcare because it doesn't exist. What exists is a system that limits doctors ability to heal, taxes the sick, and makes the heads of unnecessary bureaucracies wealthy. Don't blame an immigrant. Blame the legislation, the legislators, the lawyers, the judges, and the god damn AMA. Blame the rich that have abandoned their responsibility to those they have pilfered their wealth from.

We've all been duped. This is my country. I served it honorably. And I say, unless something changes soon, it deserves the fate it is heading towards. It may be too late already. My

prediction is that if things in the US don't change drastically in five years. The United States of America will be torn apart at the seams and cease to exist. If it doesn't change, I will gladly help rip the stitches out.

## **Amazon's New Virtual Currency Is Not Play Money (2013)**

*Note from 2020: Why didn't I buy \$100 of Bitcoin here?*

The world of virtual currency is nothing new. However, Amazon just unveiled a new virtual currency. It will be coming in May and lots of people are excited about it...but not everyone.

I remember hearing about this phenomenon a few years ago. I laughed, I thought it was a media sensation, I pretty much forgot about it. The whole idea was just too ridiculous to take seriously. However, in the first three parts of *Play Money* by Julian Dibbell, he gives enough background, enough empirical data, and enough of an introduction to the real people who are making real money in MMORPG's (Massive Multi Player Role Playing Games) to bring the idea from the realms of the ridiculous and into the realm of the real, albeit with a certain surreal quality to it all. Amazon, of course, is going one better and making it very very real.

Several things jumped out at me from these sections of Dibbell's Book 1) The population of the virtual countries that serve as the backdrop for the games he describes is often in excess of the population of real countries, i.e. a game like Ultima Online has more real people in it's virtual confines than a real country like Tonga has real people 2)The gross domestic product per capita is actually higher in a game like Ultima (in real world dollars produced) than it is per capita in a real world country like Russia and finally 3) That a worker in Mexico or other less industrialized nations can earn more real world money through playing an MMORPG than through labor or other forms of real world work, that is, by producing fake ingots of fake gold and selling them on a real dollar ebay, a worker can earn more real dollars than by digging ditches, picking fruit, cleaning rooms, or cleaning schools. Unbelievable, and yet this is the reality that we are living in.

Another aspect of this phenomenon that Dibbell blew my mind with is the idea of scarcity and value. Using real world economics and virtual world statistical data, Dibbell shows that given a choice between a garden of Eden ease or a dog eat dog world, people will choose the dog eat dog. His examples of online world's where people could have anything they want for free that lie unpopulated while online worlds that incorporate real world values of scarcity fill up with more and more people shows that we value what we have to work for. It shows that we don't want the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve probably left the garden willingly and have never really wanted to go back. Why would you want to simply pick the fruit you want to eat when instead you can find the seed, dig a hole, water the dirt, tend the tree, protect it from predators, and finally, pick the fruit you want?

One has to wonder if perhaps the string of necessary steps in the real world is artificially lengthened in order to make our lives feel more satisfying. Do we all go through massive numbers of extra steps to achieve a sense of purpose? For instance, if we want a new car, is it really necessary to get a degree, get a job, pay off loans, build credit, get another loan, test drive, set up a payment plan, get insurance, and finally drive it off the lot? Or have we simply created all of these steps to keep us occupied, locked up in our own little virtual world of mining fake ore to make fake ingots to buy fake armor, to get to the next artificial level? It's only one example, but it is definitely worth thinking about on a greater scale. Is Eden still all around us but we choose not to see it?

Jumping ahead to parts 7 and 8 of Play Money Dibbell cranks up the intensity meter as he gets serious about meeting his financial goals in the virtual world and doing it by any means possible. At the beginning of part 7 he is feeling confident and has even started to make more money in an easier fashion. He takes this mental break to delve into the realities of real world taxes from real world money for virtual world income. He doesn't find answers yet, but explains the totally bizarre concepts that he is thinking of in regard to his new vocation and the tax consequences thereof.

In the meantime, he is facing ethical dilemmas as he considers whether to make a profit from a virtually stolen 'bone crusher'. He is ultimately, okay with fencing the item, mainly because it is within the rules of the game. Also, Dibbell is taking huge strides in the virtual world's and even acquires the tower he described in the beginning of the text! None the less, Dibbell is becoming desperate to meet his self imposed goals and does the math to see how far he has to go...it is not looking like he will make it. His desperation leads him to start dealing in manufactured gold from notorious gold farmers. His profits go up...a lot.

He gets ripped off finally and finds that the authorities don't take this sort of thing very seriously. Sometimes, this has bad consequences...as he points out that it has led to murder in China. Meanwhile he continues to try to figure out what exactly it is that he is selling. He goes to San Francisco and starts meeting the bigwigs of the virtual gaming world. Dibbell seems to be undergoing an identity crisis as his life is falling apart, his life in the virtual world is becoming more important than his life in the non virtual. Finally, he sets up a Chinese virtual sweatshop and hopes for huge profits.

In these sections, we see Dibbell slowly compromise the values he thought he had and justify his decisions. At the same time, we see him exploring the ramifications of virtual actions within the real world. Violence, death, fraud, and taxes. Sounds like the two worlds aren't that different after all.

Let's see if Amazon Coins can make a bigger difference between the real and the virtual world than Dibbell's experiments did.

## **In Defense of Government: The Tree of Liberty (2013)**

Just as I've had to shed clothes that no longer suit me or fit my needs, I have often had to shed labels that no longer are suitable. I wrote some time back about why I cannot, in good conscience, describe myself as a Muslim. Yes, I converted, but that was mainly because I had to in order to marry my wife. My conception and belief in God is such that it doesn't matter what label I choose, they can all fit or none of them can, but I certainly don't pray in a prescribed way five times a day, I eat bacon, I drink alcohol, and - well, I'm sure you get the point. I'm not a Muslim - though I am a man on the path of God who frequently submits his own ego to the expressed will of the divine - but that's another story.

Through my teens, twenties, and even into my thirties - I was very much able to describe myself as an anarchist. For me, as for many people, the term was more of a statement of what I was against than what I was for. I was against the use of force by a coercive government, I was against bureaucracy and taxation without representation, I was against tyranny by the majority, I was against centralized control and decision making that left the individual out of the process. To some extent, I can still say that I am not a fan of those things. If you had asked me what I was for, I believe I would have said I was for personal responsibility - I still am. I have simply come to the conclusion that Santa Claus is more plausible than a society where all members take personal responsibility and act in a mode of enlightened self interest.

That is what has changed. In traveling the world, studying diverse cultures and history, and meeting countless people - I can say that I am pretty certain about one thing.

THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE GIVEN A CHOICE WITH NO IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES WILL CHOOSE IN THEIR OWN IMMEDIATE SELF INTEREST REGARDLESS OF LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES TO THEMSELVES, OTHERS, OR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

A simple example is firewood. If there is one tree that provides wood for fires and no one regulating it, you can be sure that the dead wood will first be harvested and hoarded, then the accessible branches will be stripped, and then someone will come along and cut down the rest of the tree. I watched this happen in Morocco. Those who held back to share are left in a position where they must now buy what was a community resource and there is no longer a tree to provide dead wood next year. That is the true tragedy of the commons. You either grab as much as you can while the tree is standing or you end up beholden to those that did. The idealist is left to complain and theorize. What a bummer.

The only way to prevent the tree being looted is to have the threat of force i.e. enforcement which can roughly be translated to government. Government, when it comes down to it, is a body of enforcement whether it is a dictatorship, a democracy, or something else. Someone has to carry the stick which will be used to enforce laws for the common good - it can be an individual who appoints themselves through brute force or it can be an institution created and backed by the people. Government, i.e. an enforcement agency, is essential because the

majority of people are either unwilling or unable to make decisions that extend beyond their own immediate self interest.

The problem, of course, is that the government itself is much like the tree. It can also be stripped and looted. First someone comes along and takes all of the dead wood, then someone a bit stronger comes and strips the branches, and finally someone comes and takes the rest of the tree and the rest of us are left beholden to them. It's a much more dangerous situation than being left without wood though, because the government can then be used AGAINST the people for the immediate self interest of those who have seized control. At that point, the people are either forced into serfdom or when conditions become completely unbearable, they are forced to rise up and seize control of the enforcement agency from the thieves who have stolen it. Such was the case in the Arab Spring, the Russian Revolution, the French Revolution, and the American Revolution. In fact, every popular revolt is such an uprising against unbearable conditions.

The challenge at that point is to create a system which has protection against thugs seizing control. This is the point of our checks and balances in the USA. The President is kept in check by the Supreme Court and the Congress, the Congress is kept in check by the Judiciary and the Executive, and the Judiciary is kept in check by the President and the Congress - at least in theory. Also in theory, all of these bodies are directly accountable to the people. The problem, is that when we allowed corporations to lobby and interfere in elections, lobbying, and appointments - we were giving the wealthy people behind those businesses a bigger axe to cut down the tree with. Suddenly decisions were being made that were of greater benefit to business than to individuals - short term decisions that lined pockets at the expense of our future. That's the problem, that's where we stand now.

Given all of that, I can't describe myself as an anarchist. We need a government. We need a threat force. We just don't need a government and threat force that is working to make us all into serfs. The current government is killing the future for us and our children, grand-children, and generations to come. By favoring business over education, profits over parks, and the needs of the few over the needs of the many - our government is slowly screwing our backs to the wall - they are stripping the tree right in front of our eyes. At what point does common sense dictate that we stand up and defend the tree of liberty?

## **The Crock of Shit that is America (2014)**

Believe.

Let me preface this by saying that I'm a fairly affable and easy going guy. I'm a loving father and husband with a happy wife and a happy kid. I believe in focusing on the positive and do my best to not latch onto the negative - though I sometimes fail.

Those who have been reading my writing for a long time, probably understand a few other things. I'm a downwardly mobile white guy in his early 40's that no one wants to hire. I'm a pissed off former Marine who can't believe his country has gone to the shitter the way it has. I'm a racible shit stirrer who can't keep his mouth shut when he sees something that is fucked up.

I'm not autistic, I don't have Aspergers, I don't suffer from paranoia or delusions (except perhaps of grandeur). I'm a decent writer and a damn fine thinker but friends tell me that while I'm one of the smartest people they know, I have some issues like not being able to put my nose to the grindstone and grit my teeth while I do some bullshit job that makes more money for a boss than it pays for my labor.

I'm bossy and impatient with incompetence, I don't stand idly by while stupidity reigns and I'm far too outspoken for my own good. I call bullshit when I see bullshit and it might be the main thing that makes me un-hireable by all the companies I thought would offer me jobs in silicon valley - or maybe it's something else. Maybe I don't market myself well, maybe I'm not a good enough liar and bullshit artist, maybe I don't take it up the ass like I'm supposed to when someone offers me a slave wage for all of my time.

In any event, America is a crock of shit and while I still love the land and many of the people - I can't really stand what I see before my eyes. I see a country divided equally between ignorant redneck racists and utopia wielding narcissists who don't have a clue what it means to actually live. Over both camps reside a plutocracy of merciless blood suckers that use the media, internet, and free time of everybody alive to push their profit making self-serving agendas. Business is king in America and business is anything but good - in fact, it would be closer to say that American business is the most vile form of evil to ever raise its head on Mother Earth.

Nationalist agendas are a farce that shield the all seeing hand of the corporate agendas. The corporations don't have any desire to see you succeed - it's not possible, they are not people, they are super-entities that don't die and serve one purpose - to make money from your sweat. If you are worth more, they give you more, but you never get what you are really worth. Me? I'm worth nothing in America. Worthless.

While the US population watches fake reality television programs and listens to talking heads go on about the price of gold and the price of commodities and the price of whomever the real deciders put on the figurehead seat of the Presidency in 2016, the ability to work independently, live independently, or think independently is being eroded away by the powers that be. Your house and car are getting smart which means that they are telling someone else about your activities. Your phone and tablet and laptops already tell what you don't blab about on social media.

The internet? I hate the fucking internet and social media. I'm trapped into using it because it's the only way I've found to support my family since no one will hire me for a real job or if they do I end up realizing they are a churn and burn business that doesn't care if I live or die, make my rent, have food for my kid, or anything else.

Speaking of kids - they've been zombified. The zombie apocalypse is on us and it's our youth. I spent five years trying to bring my family back to the USA so we could have better health care, better education, and a better life and getting back here I found that music and arts programs no longer have funding in the schools, health insurance is mandatory and so out of our budget that we can't afford to go to a doctor even if we have the insurance, and that the price of a cup of coffee is roughly what an ounce of silver cost a decade ago. I see five year olds playing with tablets and seven year olds ignoring each other as they look at their phones. I see movie theaters closing and laying off all the 17 year old kids that worked there and being replaced by Redbox robots that don't hire anyone - so long video stores and clerks.

I see people competing on social media to get the most attention and nobody really has the ability to pay attention to anything at all. I finally have a month where I earn two months rent and guess what - one month of it has to go to pay health insurance and the other month of it has to go to pay for my long held student loans because let's face it - a job in Anthropology? Yeah, right. Only if I want to go back to school, get a Masters and then use that to teach others about Anthropology so they have to get a Masters so they can teach others about Anthropology so...so...so.

I'm here, we're here, and we're fucking stuck. So don't tell me that love it or leave it bullshit. I'm trying. I want to get us out of here before the shit hits the fan. I want to get us out of here before the corporate powers that be come after me for non-payment of my student loans, not making my family health insurance premiums, and not paying enough taxes. I want to get out of here before we get sick and have to go to the welfare hospital and before the school system finds out my daughter is African-American. I want to get out of here before the cheap empty-carb diet filled with GMO vegetables that look pretty but carry no nutrition takes a further toll on our health. I want to get out of here before the racists or the utopians take complete control and before the corporations dissolve our ability to go where we want.

America is a crock of shit. Don't come here. Get out while you can. Pray for something to change. Shut off your devices, hug your children, and pray for rain.

## **The Failure of the Internet (2014)**

Back in the 1990's I was an activist. Even while I was still in the Marine Corps, I was placing Greenpeace stickers on garbage cans in the barracks and trying hard to bring about little changes in consciousness - granted, it was probably the wrong place to do it and that might explain why I was fairly miserable in the Corps - a person out of place.

When I got my honorable discharge and split that scene, I set out for an activist town. My choices were either Boulder, CO or Bellingham, WA and I went with Bellingham because I was born near there and I wanted the chance to spend time with my grandfather before he got too

old and passed away (sadly, I missed that boat - after about two weeks, I realized his dementia made it impossible for us to get to know each other better than we had), but Bellingham was a wonderful choice.

I still consider it one of my two hometowns with the other being Honolulu, Hawaii. Bellingham was a hotbed of 1990s hippie activism and before too long I was the head of a Citizen's Initiative Group, working on campaigns to save frogs, a member of the Community Food Coop, and involved in Permaculture workshops, organizing protests, and by 1998 actively involved in organizing disparate groups to protest at the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle in 1999. I'd also set up a magazine and website called Conchsense with the stated goal of uniting creativity and culture through the medium of the internet.

Back then - we thought that the internet was the great leveler - we thought it was the tool by which activists could finally level the playing field with the media and corporate interests by using citizen journalism, organizing online, and educating the public about the 'truth'. We were all big fans of the X-Files back then and the tagline "The Truth is Out There" resonated with us.

When my friend, John Zerzan talked about how the leveling of the playing field was temporary and how the internet was an illusion that would disappear as soon as the establishment figured out how to regulate it, or even that technology was just a means of greater control of the population - I couldn't see it. I didn't want to see it. I wanted to see people being exposed to new ideas and changing everything. I wanted to see a better world and even though I'd read Ted Kaczynski's Unabomber Manifesto when it was published and heard the Green Anarchist arguments that sided with his beliefs that all technology led to enslavement - I didn't want to believe that.

And it's only now that I start to realize that John and Ted were right. Technology is the great enslaver. Whether we are talking about the technology of the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution, or the information revolution - every bit of it has managed to enslave and blind the common man further from the truth of the matter - we are controlled by those who control the technology.

Those early days were a window and that window has closed. Facebook, Twitter, and Google are publicly traded corporations that have boards of directors and public relations departments. Facebook feels justified to conduct behavioral experiments on users without their knowledge and you can be certain that Google and Twitter are doing the same. Google is analyzing your mail and Facebook is looking at what you post and Twitter is sharing your user data with the NSA and more. They are justified in it - you agreed to their terms of service.

People make a mistake with these companies by thinking that they are empowered users with rights - they, we, are not. We are the products. Our information is the product. We are not the clients. The clients are the advertisers, the marketing companies and the governments that pay with treasure or privilege - we are the chattel. Like slaves in tobacco fields, we provide the product and like masters in the antebellum manor houses - the internet companies figure out

how to sell it and use the profits to enslave us further.

I know - there are many positive things which have come from the internet - too many to recount here - but in fact - the internet is the worst thing to ever happen to the human species. I know too that I am writing this on the internet, that I earn most of my family's bread and butter on the internet, and that without it - most of what I've done in this life might not have been possible. I know that and still I say that this is the worst thing ever created. Worse than atomic weapons. Worse than DDT.

We thought the internet would free people. Instead it has stolen their souls. It has turned them into sociopaths. It has destroyed much of what was good in the world - not all of it - but much of it. Ted Kaczynski was right. Dammit.

## **America's Three Zombie Herds (2014)**

Coming back to the USA has been traumatic in many ways, but perhaps the biggest trauma has been in recognizing that most Americans have been zombified and then, once their minds have been erased, they have migrated to one of the three great zombie herds which roam the highways and byways of this once great land.

**Herd #1:** These are the ones that my new friend Get Back Jack described as being so fucked up on meth they just circle around the Best Western in Kelso, WA - or somewhere else. No explanation needed. Tweaker herd. Crankster herd. Meth herd. Ice herd. No coming back and so fucked up they won't care when they die herd.

**Herd #2:** The Narcissistic Selfie herd. At one point in my life when technology still seemed cool and new and benign - I was enthusiastic to be a member of this herd. Then I left the country for five years. Like not looking in a mirror for half a decade, I returned to see people eating dinner while looking at their phones, riding the bus with phones, driving and texting having become a big crime, and somehow thinking that nude pics on their cellphones are secure. This was the culture of burners and techies and Boing Boing podcasters and cool maker techno awesome which somehow devolved into selfie culture. People who are so caught up in what others are thinking of them that they have no room to actually think about who they are or should want to be. No self awareness only awareness of how others see their self. No self development - like a car with a perfect paint-job but an engine that is falling apart.

**Herd #3:** The pissed off patriot herd ready to blame all the problems on someone else. If it's not the Mexicans, it's the Arabs, if not the Arabs, it's the Californians, or the Mushroom pickers, or the Democrats or the Republicans or the Libertarians, or the people down the street. I feel for the people in this herd - I agree with them sometimes which I guess puts me in the herd sometimes, but the problem is they never look at the rest of the world - they only listen to the American view of things.

Then there are the rest of us - the retirees, the screwed, the spit on, the over regulated, the under served, the tired, the poor, the restless souls, the hungry, the few who perhaps could do it better if not for the over regulation, and the community minded.

Fuck it, I'm not innocent. I don't have the answers. I do see the problems pretty clearly though. It all comes down to two issues - 1) Too much technology and 2) Too much government - unfortunately, those are two of the most powerful forces to ever exist - Government automagically encroaches on the freedom of it's citizens to protect itself - Technology is the same and worse because it forces all to use it or be left behind. There are no more pay phones in my town - if you don't have a cellphone, you can't make a call. Government is savvy and uses technology to control and inform on its citizenry. Technology is savvy and uses it's power to control government, citizens, and to gather information.

I may have the freedom to write this but I can only have that freedom if I pay for a laptop, a connection, electricity, a place to sit, and do that by earning money, spending money, and using technology. Freedom is gone. I could tell you a million freedoms I don't have

- to disappear
- to live in the woods (without a permit)
- to stop paying bills or taxes
- to be free

All of it is clear in America, but only if you have taken some time to not look in the mirror.

## **We're All Fucked - Even You (2014)**

Okay, the bad news first - We're all fucked. Now that we have that out of the way - let's move on to the good news - oh, wait - there's not any. We're all fucked and that is all there is to it.

How are we fucked? Well - let's look at freedom. Think you have some? Yes, you do - you can either have an iPhone or an Android phone but if you need to use a payphone you are out of luck - because they are all being turned into wifi devices so if you don't have a device with a tracking chip in it you can't check on the bus schedule which runs on a QR code, you can't check in without paying a 'desk' fee, and - well you get the point. But this isn't a big brother rant about how the technology is getting a better rein on you and tracking your movements, purchases, online browsing behavior, and relationship status to decide whether you should be detained, given online dating ads, or awarded a bonus Farmville page...no, it's not that.

Want to build a house? Just buy some land...uh, no, it doesn't work like that anymore. To buy the land you need to have proper documentation to start with - try to buy a lot without a phone number and you will find lots of problems..and then even when you get the land you need to work with the planning department, the zoning department, the EPA, the city works department, the public works department, the approval of approval department, and the bank because even

if you don't take a loan out you still need to have insurance and paperwork. You are free to fill out forms with personal information to do something which affects you on land that you own. None of this is new though....

Illegal immigrants are flooding over the border - but that's not the problem- the problem is we're spending huge amounts of money to send them home and catch them instead of embracing them and letting them work hard and build a better life as they wanted to come here to do...and meanwhile, the immigrants who came here and did everything legitimate and earned a good living and became successful - they are buying property in their home countries and getting ready to flee this disaster of a country to go back home to where they can eat non GMO foods and have reasonably priced healthcare with no insurance premiums and not have to face a bunch of angry lazy white people who look for the closest successful brown person to blame their failure at life on...but that's not really a problem for everyone - just for America - which will soon be a nation of very rich haves and pissed off ignorant have nots who aren't able to get close to the rich without setting off proximity alarms because they are carrying cheap devices in their pockets...

Does anyone else realize we are all carrying around micro chip transmitters that tell our movements, record our conversations, and offer total access to our most personal data? And since when has data really mattered? Since all of our valuable possessions became lines of code and alphanumeric passwords...your bank account has been hacked - hard to do that if you use cold hard currency - but then the currency has transmitters in it too..

I don't know much about common core but I know that when you take away the incentive to ACHIEVE you are taking away one of the greatest motivators of growth - we live in a society which is quickly heading toward "Everyone wins and no one loses" which doesn't really serve to make everyone equal as to make it a problem for anyone to go after their full potential and for any conversation or moving forward based on ability and potential and achievement to be a source of taboo. A forbidden topic. God forbid that your child should be an honor student and you should be proud, - the sticker for the new America - My child is a drone. All children are drones. Proud Drone Parent.

They're giving kids medication to make them more amenable to the drone school system and for those parents who decide to discipline their children in an attempt to teach values and character who are caught lies a future of losing your children and having them put with drones who will not push them in any direction but that of droneness.

We're not fucked because of the wars or rumours of wars or because of the immigration problem or because of the technology - though if you think Google and Facebook and Twitter aren't playing with what you see and are exposed to in order to make you a better consumer of the clients which pay them (including the governments) - you are a consumer, you are a product, you are a well greased wheel in the machine of society. And, by the way...you are fucked.

You are living in an age when decency is being replaced by a culture of outrage over people suggesting they might be better at something than someone else is. And then there is decency and respect - seems to have died with the WWII generation - the baby boomers brought in the ME ME ME generation and destroyed ancestral inheritance as they kicked their kids out at 18 so they could focus on themselves again (if they even waited that long - since divorce and remarriage effectively alienated kids from anything they might have ever gotten in the first place (both materially and emotionally) as family homes were sold and since people generally remarry younger spouses - that takes care of that - if you see what I mean) Those kids grew up seeing their parents taking care of themselves and those parents just couldn't believe it as they asked "How can they be so selfish?" because when kids have to take care of themselves and give everything to themselves because their parents are so selfishly doing what is 'best for them' - it doesn't exactly engender selflessness...and of course that cycle continues and now you see parents that don't even seem aware of the fact they have kids as they pursue whatever they want despite having kids they should be taking care of (hello crack baby babies). And it doesn't get any better...

All of this might be fixed if the power would just go out and the grid were shut down and civilization as we know it were to crash down around us - those who know how to work and use their brains would be able to succeed based on hard work and merit and brains... but shit, that ain't going to happen. It's just not.

The governments will keep the power on and the labs and companies will keep making people more useless as truckers no longer need to drive their trucks and no one else needs to do anything to do their job either and then it will just be a matter of either 1) the rich and powerful figuring out how to get rid of all of us unnecessary drains on their enjoyment or 2) the machines figuring out that there just don't need to be as many of us as there are.

Sorry, unless the aliens come and decide to intervene or society crashes - those are the only two logical outcomes. So, in conclusion - if you aren't rich and powerful - you are fucked. If you are rich and powerful you are fucked because you are on the way to losing your humanity - but maybe I'm just saying that to make myself feel better - in fact - you might just not be fucked if you are rich and powerful enough.

## **Thoughts on Creation (2014)**

Without a doubt, the greatest impediment to innovation or creation is not inspiration, but procrastination - most specifically , waiting for the right time, right materials, right circumstance, or right something - if Leonardo or Michelangelo had waited the world would be a poorer place - if Steve Jobs had waited, the world would certainly be different - if Henry Ford or countless others had waited - the world would be unrecognizable - which may or may not be a good thing - I haven't seen that other world, so I don't really know.

I only know that America makes it harder than ever to get started - gone are the days when a

poor immigrant can make aprons from cloth bought with his last few dollars and start a grand enterprise - today - to do so legally he needs to have a license, a premises, a tax ID number, and countless other sanctioned impediments to doing business. Our system is seemingly, a system which goes to great length to encourage inertia and to discourage innovation and forward movement.

I, like many others, am a man of ideas. My whole life has been a complex system of coming up with ideas and then working to make them reality - often the only canvas I have had to work with is myself, who I am - and I've painted several different me's through these four decades. My antique shop was born in three days - I spoke with the landlords, I signed the rental agreement, I moved what I had in, and I opened - meanwhile - two shops down the street prepared for months to open their doors - one of them to much better effect than me and the other to about the same lukewarm welcome and success.

My desire is to create, to make new things, to innovate, to paint, to write, to play music, to make art, to start business - that is what I do. I am a creator - not a creative - a creator. I create things. I create books, stories, worlds, websites, magazines, businesses, people (characters and children), and more. I would create far more if I were not stymied by process, procedure, start up costs, regulations, and other artificial impediments to my creative genius. I find it funny, by the way that art is contained in the word artificial - when I find true art to be the most genuine products of humanity...I also find it incredibly annoying to have creators like myself labeled as 'creatives' by those who are not. We are not creatives, we are creators. We are not makers, we are creators. We create!

If God did create us in his image, we creators are the ones he must love the most. We create! We understand! And, we also understand how a creation can turn south or end up being disappointing, or not work out the way that we intended.

In the beginning, God created Man and then Man (and woman) started doing all kinds of things God hadn't intended or thought about - yeah, I get that - the characters in the books I write usually take over at some point and deviate wholly from my preconceived plot-lines - when I paint - it often ends up something completely different from what I started thinking I was painting - even my antique shop is not quite what I had expected it would be - it has been filled with stuff people walked through the door with to sell me - I had no idea this stuff would come here - and so it goes. The stuff I thought would sell has been gathering dust while the stuff I didn't plan on has paid the rent, I sure hope that continues...

It's enough for now - although one more thing - I think that perhaps the internet and its offer of allowing me to create whatever I want for the world to see may have dragged me off a path where I would have made more real world things - stuff you can touch and hold. As a matter of regret - I regret that - all this website crap - it disappears when the power goes out - if I had been making furniture or gardens - they wouldn't be so ephemeral - or maybe they would. I don't know.

## **Thank God for Stupid Terrorists (2014)**

On this anniversary of the September 11th attacks - which I'm sad to hear called Patriot Day - because it's not about patriotism - it's about a heinous and cowardly act and mourning the innocent men, women, and children who died as a result - anyway, on this September 11th, I'd like to give thanks for stupid terrorists.

Apparently the smartest ones died in the first attacks (and those later in Europe and Africa) because since that time, there have been nothing but bumbling shoe bombers and nincompoop jihadists trying to arrange terrorist acts with FBI informants or using their cellphones to arrange meetups. Thank god they are all apparently retarded.

There have been no successful terrorist campaigns and at the point when they look like they might be on the verge of setting up an Islamic State and having the world let them - the idiots decide it's a perfect time to execute American journalists and make threats to the American people. Jesus H. Christ - didn't these boobs realize that the war weary American public and the second term President would have let them create their own country and have all of Iraq and Syria (and probably much of the rest of the middle East) if they would have just left the Kurdish oil fields in peace and not taunted the most powerful, egotistical, and fearful country in the world?

Now we watch as the idiots make a mockery of themselves and get systematically bombed and bludgeoned until something smarter and less prone to provoke American fear and it's deadly response replaces them. Fuck you Isis, you should have called yourself Shazam.

Anyway, thank god for the idiot terrorists who haven't managed to poison our water supply even though a drunk kid in Portland managed to piss in the drinking water reservoir just several months ago.

Thank God for idiot terrorists who haven't figured out that a truck stop or buffet would be a great place to poison a bunch of pork eating infidels. And thank god they didn't figure out they could shut down our electric grid and freeze hundreds of seniors or derail trains carrying toxic waste through urban areas.

It's hard to believe the terrorists are so lazy, stupid, and idiotic that they haven't figured out they could poison our air by mixing bleach and ammonia in a confined stadium or sell a bunch of toxic waste filled containers to someone that wanted to make a few extra bucks storing it on their land bordering agricultural fields. It's really hard to believe.

If they wanted to, it seems like they could have killed so many of us by now...but then, maybe we should thank god for our genius homeland security and the long lines at airports and the invasive searches and wire tapping that have foiled the plots we never heard of. Maybe we should thank George W. Bush and Dick Cheney for the war against terrorism.

Or maybe, the terrorists are smarter than we think - maybe they are playing the long game and just waiting for us to implode and destroy ourselves with GMO foods, carcinogenic additives, pill popping depressed grade schoolers, and narcissistic social media obsessed sociopathic teens who don't know the difference between killing a zombie on TV and shooting a person in the park.

Either way, thank God for idiot terrorists and for the fact that since 2001, there has not been another successful mass attack on the people of the USA.

## **The Culture of Distraction (2015)**

I find myself with time to think - but not too deeply - since I am distracted and put off from an in depth continuation of any ideas by the world that surrounds me. At the moment - it is the landlord of my shop - who decided that the best time to paint (and scrape off the sloppy mess he made on my shop windows) was when I am open. This has been going on for months...and frankly, yes, I'm annoyed. It does no good. His view is that when the weather is nice, he should be hunting or fishing - and painting the building I rent from him (or cleaning up the mess from his painting) is best done when it is most convenient for him - without regard to what is convenient for me or my customers. We've expressed our views to one another - which ended with him screaming obscenities in my face on the street. I pay him money every month - and that's how it ends. He knows I don't want to move my shop - so unless I want to move it - that is where it ends.

It's no different than many other aspects of life today. Back in August, I bought three leather bags from an Ebay vendor. Ebay subsequently suspended the seller so I never received the bags and was unable to file a dispute since the seller had been removed from their system. I called Ebay to determine how to get my money back and was transferred to a call center in the Philippines where a girl who should never have been hired based on her English skills, tried to help me and entered a request for a refund for one bag - which I received less than a week later. Since then, I've spent hours on the phone with various Filipino call center employees who are trained to appease me but have no ability to fix my problem or even to transfer me to someone who can. I've reached the point where a billion dollar company has stolen \$40 from me and there is nothing I can do about it. Even if I were to hire a lawyer, my contract with Ebay (and yours too if you have one) specifies arbitration rather than a lawsuit - so I can't combine with other disgruntled users and file a class action lawsuit or demand damages for the time and frustration this issue has cost me. I can curse and rail at a low level employee who will say over and over "I'm sorry sir, we will file the request for you and then we have to wait 5-7 days" and cannot say more or has been trained to say nothing more.

Eating my lunch while my ugly landlord looks in the window was unpleasant. I was hungry. I had

a burrito I was rather excited to eat. I lost my appetite. I have to stay in the front of my shop - and I can't make him go away. Cold burrito in the near future sounds much less exciting.

The world is this way. The customer is no longer right unless the customer is a whale (spending millions or billions). Customer service is dead. Your money gets you what the mega-wealthy want to give you and only that. The uneven distribution of wealth has gone to such extremes that your entire paycheck is no longer of interest and can be flushed down the toilet without a second thought by those at the top.

Try to have a conversation without either you or the other party becoming distracted by their phone. Try to sit and breathe without being interrupted by the incessant beeping of our society. Car door, microwave, backing up truck, text message, low battery somewhere, siren, or some other high pitched noise. I've been diagnosed with tinnitus - but even without it the high pitch tones don't stop. I've lived in the Arab world - I know what it's like to be stopped by the call to prayer five times a day, to have everything grind to a halt when it's prayer time, or how hard it is to concentrate when you are expected to get up and say salaam a leycum every time someone enters the room...but the technological society seems to have one-upped the Muslim world. We are being trained to lack concentration.

On the ebay calls - I have been required to give the same information over and over and over - and then to do it again and again. Is that on purpose? Or is there a reluctance to look at the notes on my account? Maybe it's easier for the account reps to force me to give the info again than it is to read it on the screen in front of them. I really don't know. How could I?

I only know that we (the average) have lost something in this century that was a fundamental tenet of the last one. Our money, no matter how little it might be, used to give us a certain amount of respect/credibility/deference - we used to be important because our little bit of money made up a part of the wealth and power of the elites - without it, they would fail. No longer. They no longer fail based on consumers and if they do - they are bailed out by other, larger organizations. My contribution is no longer valuable enough for them to waste more or effort than it takes to hire a third-world teenager to tell me everything will be alright.

And why do we let them get away with it? Because we are distracted. We are constantly distracted by celebrity stories, animal stories, terrorism, economic stories, political showdowns, the latest superhero movie, the new star wars, the newest gadget, the latest health scare and more...not to mention the tweets, texts, calls, Facebook updates, and emails...

Have you noticed any of this? Or is it just me?

## **The Internet Has Ruined Us (2015)**

After approximately 17 years of observation, both academic and casual - I have reached the conclusion that the internet is killing us. It is a gradual death - much like being poisoned one

drop at a time over the course of years - but death it is. Like a heroin junkie, an alcoholic, or a hard-core smoker - even knowing it is killing me, I find myself unwilling to give it up.

It is useful for making money. It is a way to connect with distant friends (and even those close by). It is an extension of the ego, my ego - and everyone else's.

Baby steps. I am getting our internet at home cut off later this month. I will retain my iPhone and service and have internet at our business - but this is at least one step. I don't want to be part of the internet of things. I don't want to be further sucked into the time-suck we call social media. I want to use it for work and necessity - while abandoning it for hobbies and social interaction.

We will see. I'm sure you already see that I am still here. Getting poisoned one drop at a time.

## **The Human Revolution (2015)**

Now is the time for all great humans to come to the aid of themselves and their world. The way to do that is within each of us. I am engaged in a great struggle within myself these days - a moment of turmoil, an epic battle between the best possible me and the just sort of okay, muddling along, middling version of me. I am caught up in the human revolution and at stake is my happiness, my worth, and my entire being. It's the greatest possible battle I can be engaged in and it will never end - nor should it. Every moment of every day, the battle rages on - each decision and the decision of how I spend each moment determining not just my fate, but the fate of those around me, and around them, and around them - like ripples in a pond echoing outward until virtually the entire world is touched.

I'm afraid, my friends, that many of our fellow humans have lost the battle or are losing the battle. They have given in to the dark side of this existence. They have allowed themselves to tap into the baser side of things. We all do it - from time to time- but unfortunately, some people create more powerful waves than others on the great pond of our reality. WE are constantly hit by the selfish, angry, greedy, and manipulative waves of those who are lost in the pleasure principal of this world. They are taking this life for everything they can - regardless of the cost to they or us. Violence, degradation, murder and worse surround us and are used to push us into the same sorts of behavior, the same sorts of desires, that the sick are addicted to.

A great deal of my life has been spent trying to outwardly fight, to expose, and to resist these forces. It is only now, as I approach my 44th year that I realize just how misguided I have been. I may have made a positive difference from time to time, but ultimately, I have not changed anything with my anger, my rage, my fear, or resistance. I sought an external revolution. I was wrong.

The revolution will not be televised because it cannot be filmed. It must take place within us. The revolution must be individual and it must be internal. Rather than hating the circumstances of the world - we must accept them. We must make peace with them. We must discover peace

in the midst of turmoil. As the waves smash into us, we will drown if we try to calm them. Like surfers on a breaking wave - we can be wiped out and smashed against the reef - or we can ride the wave. The revolution must come from within. It will be a silent revolution. When the revolution is complete - people will not even realize that it has happened.

I am engaged in my human revolution. I am telling you about it. Those who don't read this will never know, they will simply wonder why I smile more and why they enjoy being around me. Viva la revolucion humano!

## **The Technological Point of No Return (2015)**

I am a neo-luddite. I make no bones about it. I have come to believe that technology - in particular information technology is a bad thing. And - for the most part - I think we would be better off without much of the rest of what we call technology as well. Don't get me wrong - I'm not a green anarchist touting some future primitive ideal - I am a fan of our vaccines, of fire, of the printing press, and many other things - there is such a thing as positive technology. I, however, am of the opinion that most technology has turned out to be a negative for the majority of the human species (not to mention for every other species on Spaceship Earth).

Unfortunately, most technology has been used for one of three purposes I see as negative. 1) Greed and wealth accumulation - i.e. unchecked capitalism and exploitation 2) Command and control of population increasingly including the shaping of opinion, idea, and day-to-day activities 3) Maintaining the status-quo - i.e. keeping power and wealth where it lays, preventing societal change, keeping the technological society alive and well.

Barring an event of grand enough proportion to shut down the electricity on a massive scale and thus allow a 'reset' of human society, I fear that we may have reached a technological point of no return. Even as I write this - the forces in control of our thoughts and minds are rallying to protect and expand the power of the technological control state. Facebook (among others) is deploying wifi broadcasting drones to extend the mind control of the web to even the most remote reaches of the planet. Elon Musk is in the process of creating batteries which enable the technological state to power itself indefinitely from off grid - thus providing protection from the near certainty of future attacks against electricity and fossil fuel infrastructure and resources. We are very near, the technological point of no return.

## **On Trolling and Trolls (2015)**

It's been a strange trip since the internet arrived. I remember the first time I saw the internet in about 1993 on Marine Corps Air Station New River - Corporal Hansbury showed me how he could use his computer to talk to base ops and how he and the duty NCO there would exchange jokes over a chat relay. I thought it was neat.

In 1996 I used my first cell phone at the radio station I worked at. In 1997 I got a Yahoo email account. By this time it was pretty normal to prep for our morning radio show using an 'online' service. Around 1998 the internet was really blossoming.

I was in my 20s. My favorite writers were irreverent and anti-pop-culture. I was convinced that the best way to get people to see the real vulgarity in the world was to shock them with vulgarity. I even wrote a song called vulgar. It was all about how words weren't vulgar but the world was with pollution, war, wage slavery, and other ugliness. It was a pretty good song - but not one that most people want to listen to. I discovered chat rooms. I became a troll. For a little while. It was fun to bait people and then torment them. It was awful - now that I think of it. At the time - it seemed harmless - it seemed like it was just playing with a computer, not making someone feel bad. It took me a while to realize there were real people on the other end. It was about the time of Friendster and Napster and MySpace that it hit me. I started meeting people through the computer. That made a profound difference.

Too bad I got so lost in that perverted form of winning. There's a lot I could have done during that time as the internet grew. Instead I developed a blog called fukn.us Fucking Us. I started an online bookstore called Fukn Books - silly move. I thought I could be an acceptable form of offensive. Offensive was a way I shouldn't have tried to go at all.

The truth is - I'm mild mannered. I'm polite. I'm nice. Perhaps unbelievably, I'm a bit of a prude. Maybe that was what I was fighting all along. I don't know. I think that's the problem with trolls though.

Like me - they hide behind a screen trying to project themselves as something they are not. They use false names and false avatars. Maybe they are really creeps - but my gut suspicion is that they are mostly just frustrated people living in this artificial world of ours with all of its artificial boundaries and weird invented rules. Here we are - advanced fire making primates quickly building the walls of our cages higher and higher. I like to think I'm fairly intelligent - but when I try to comprehend the difference between 1993 and 2015 - I'm not sure that I can. I lived it, but I don't think I really understand it. I know I'm not alone.

I used to think that my grandparents saw the greatest changes in human history. They went from horse drawn carriages and telegraphs to men on the moon and broadcast television. I feel like I may have already surpassed them. I lived through the last years of independence from electronics. Those days are gone now. The days of kids freely playing in neighborhoods.

A friend came in my shop today. He's a holdout on technology. Doesn't even have a cellphone. His car broke down two days ago 12 miles from town. No one stopped to help him, not even the police. He had to spend the night in his car then walk back to town in the morning. My aunt and uncle talk to their adult children every day - when my cousin didn't answer her phone over 8 hours - they called the police. It turned out she was hiking. When I was a little kid - we were frequently out of contact with our parents for 10-12 hours every day we didn't have school.

I'm rambling a bit - I know it. It's all connected though. I'm not defending trolls - I don't like them

either. I've got a friend on Facebook who seems to still be stuck in it - he's still single, doesn't have kids - maybe that's a part of it. He's a nice guy, but he always responds to things with lots of vitriol and f-bombs- looking for a reaction - I think, but then again - maybe he's not the nice guy I remember anymore. Maybe he's unhappy with the world and where he is in it.

I'm tired of being unhappy with the world and where I am in it. I'm tired of being pissed off and bitter about life. Actually, I'm happy with life. Life is interesting and fine. Maybe that's why things are starting to be more clear. I hope so.

## **The World No Longer Needs White Men (2016)**

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying the world ever needed white men, but there was a time when many people were convinced that it did. White men did a pretty good job of convincing and bullying all the non-white-men (women of all colors including white and everyone else) that white men were essential to civilization. Lately I've been struck by the bloated sense of self-importance that fills the prose of my favorite writers - Steinbeck, Hemingway, London, Kipling, Maugham, Verne, Melville, Stevenson - these guys were convinced of their place in the world and how important it was to keep it. White men - the keepers of order and civilization. White men - the last bastion of sanity between the encroaching primitive civilizations and the hysteric female imperative. White men. Yes.

I think - and I'm not sure of this - but I'm pretty sure - I grew up in the last years that white men were the self-acknowledged and self-proclaimed masters of the universe. The 1970s and early 1980s were a time that the world was still processing the movements of feminism, Native Americanism, Black Pride, Hispanic pride, Asian pride, and multi-genderism. I don't know what to call all of these movements - but they can all be lumped together under the banner of "Straight White Men Are Not Better Than Anyone Else" movements. These movements took place mostly from the late 1960s through the 1990s and during much of that time - white men still held the keys to the kingdom.

It was a time when white people thought it was still okay to tell black jokes (if there were no black people around), if they thought it was okay to characterize Asian people with a language that sounded like ching chong and fingers making slanted eyes, to whites, Hispanics were still considered lazy and sneaky (the men) or lascivious and waiting for rescue from white men (the women). It was fine for white men to demean other white men with descriptions about how they had female genitalia, how they were homosexual, or how they were (fill in the blank) like a (fill in the blank). To be a straight white man was the ideal.

I think I can pretty well pinpoint when it began to change. Bill Cosby and the Cosby Show - a black doctor wearing colorful sweaters and raising a respectful family. Whoopi Goldberg becoming a wise character on Star Trek: The Next Generation. All of this right around the 1984-1988 period. The world was thrown on its head - suddenly there were African-American

characters who didn't speak with a ghetto accent, Hispanics on television who were not drug dealers, and Hillary Clinton - the First Lady, actually had the audacity to take on real political issues like healthcare and gender equality. Mind you, straight white people still felt it was fine to tell gay jokes through much of the 1990s - but much of the mythology of the straight white man being the pinnacle of civilization had worn off by the time I graduated in 1990.

Perhaps it was that sense of being thrown adrift into a world heading towards equality that pushed me to join the US Marine Corps - a last bastion of white masculinity. I'm happy to say that in the USMC, I was part of a multi-racial fraternity - that while still heavily self-segregated (whites and blacks tended to sit at different tables in the mess hall) introduced me to African Americans, Latinos, and even Eskimos - but I'll be brutally honest here - it was much easier for white guys to get promoted even in an equality Marine Corps. And it was don't ask/don't tell - which translated to it not being okay for guys to be gay. As for women in the Corps - they were treated as inferiors and sexually harassed almost constantly during the time I was in.

Between 1994 when I got out of the Marines and 2008 when I graduated from the University of Hawai'i - things changed even more drastically. I majored in Anthropology - I suppose in part because I grew up reading Tarzan, Robinson Crusoe, and other books where white men encountered and learned to live with the 'savage' other. I was always fascinated by the pre-Christian, pre-Muslim, primitive cultures of the world. I was drawn to the wild blood drums of howling fires in far off lands. I sought the pageantry and intense passion of intense humanness. I wanted to peel the onion layers of civilization back to see the reality of the human condition. I gazed at the other with a white man's eye. My advanced level of civilization - looked down on the people of the world with a paternal eye born of thousands of years of white men dominating everyone else. Our society, however, was moving on.

Now, in 2016 - I live in a rural Oregon town where straight white men still rule supreme. From the time I graduated to now, I've traveled a good bit of the world. I married the daughter of an Arab shepherd I lived with in a poor African village. I left my country for half a decade and then returned to this region of ignorant white men in huge gas guzzling trucks who look down on the world with a paternal eye while they cut down ancient trees in exchange for paper money to buy gas and vegetables grown far away by non-white laborers on multi-million dollar corporate farms owned by rich white men.

And all of this has led me to a conclusion that I should have come to long ago. The world doesn't need white men anymore. It really doesn't. And it never did. The reign of the white men is coming to an end. They won't give up without a fight, they will continue to dominate for as long as they can. Donald Trump carries their banner. To some extent Hillary Clinton carries it as a proxy for her husband - a man who was the most powerful man in the world and used his position to fuck an intern who was just barely out of her teens - and got away with it. Bill Clinton would carry the white man vote if he were able to run - and for that reason. Hillary Clinton might win because she brings Bill with her - she was the 'Good Wife' who stood by her man. White men don't hate Obama for his policies nor because he is black - they hate him because he is

not a white man. It's why Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio stand no chance of winning - they are Latino - they are other. Bernie Sanders is a different story - being a non-practicing Jew who likes guns - he stands as an almost white man other - but not quite. He may get the white man vote - it's hard to say.

I'm saying a lot here - I don't expect this kind of honesty to go without harsh responses from white men and from non-white men both. Let em go. I'm happy to hear my blind spots. Thank you.

## **The Joy of Teaching (2016)**

One of the great joys of my life is being Sophia's primary teacher. From the time she was born, I've tried to never overlook an opportunity to open her eyes to the way the world works - from pointing out the science and math in everyday objects to letting her know about the vast amounts of information she can find in books and libraries. Sophia is a kindergartner who reads at a high level and now has a firm understanding of addition and subtraction and a basic level of multiplication - she can tell you about planets, elements, and a huge array of other things. She has (I think) a decent understanding of birth, life, death, and how the body works. All of this wasn't learned from someone standing in front of a classroom or from hearing a lecture - it was learned because I saw her interest and helped to guide it to the things I think it is important that she learns. This idea didn't come from a vacuum either. In the 1990s, I read a lot about un-schooling and different ideas about how education could be reformed - changed from an industrial model. In the early 2000's I was introduced to the work of Tsunebaro Makiguci and his philosophy of education (Makiguci was not only an educator but the founder of one of the schools of Buddhism I follow - SGI) Makiguci was persecuted by the Imperial Japanese government for his pursuit of non-traditional education methods - in particular - the idea that a child should be encouraged to follow their passion and it is the educator's job to guide that enthusiasm into the subjects the child needs to learn...that is what I have been doing with Sophia. I wish I had been given that kind of education, I wish we all had. I can only imagine how different the world would be. Not a world where money is the driving force, but a world where knowledge is. I hope that this reaches someone and allows them to find the sort of joy I am finding in helping my daughter to become the person she is meant to be.

## **Digital Enslavement (2016)**

It's too late for this blog post because let's face it, only a small handful of people even read this blog and the truth of the matter is - I am fairly certain that barring a worldwide power outage or

massive solar flares, the digital chains that bind the majority of the world are already too strong to be broken. First this - the populist movements which gained ground in 2016 did so using deep psychology and behavior control mechanisms combined with the very intelligent use of big data (everything you do on your phone, smart TV, smart car, Amazon, credit cards, or on the internet). If you think I am overstating things, you haven't read this <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/big-data-cambridge-analytica-brexite-trump>

(Interesting note from 2020, the article now leads to a 404 page – I know that it is no longer any sort of revelation, but I've left the copied article below even though it is really long.)

I have posted the entire article as first translated at the bottom of this post. It is long, but if you want to know what is really going on, you need to read it. Here it is in a nutshell - big data (aka the internet) is tracking where you go (via the GPS in your phone), what you buy via credit cards, what you watch, which websites you visit, and based on the simple metric of what things you like via Facebook alone- can predict with somewhere around 90% accuracy your religious and political beliefs, your marital and parent status, your income, your gender and sexual preference, and pretty much everything else about you - including your personality type and what state, city, neighborhood, or district you live in. Every time you have taken one of those "Which Star wars or Harry Potter Character Are you?" quizzes and clicked that little button that lets them analyze your Facebook or access your Facebook, you have authorized them to look at all of your data - even if you have your profile on privacy lock-down (which I do, but which it turns out, doesn't really matter). Alright, so privacy is dead, we all know that, not a big deal or not a deal we care about anymore - but here is where it gets interesting - using this data, the Trump and Brexit campaigns (and other movements we are unaware of) identified huge segments of the population and targeted them with specifically tailor made stories and wall posts which shaped the way they think and in turn, shaped the way they voted.

This quote from the article:

*"On the day of the third presidential debate between Trump and Clinton, Trump's team blasted out 175,000 distinct variations on his arguments, mostly via Facebook. The messages varied mostly in their microscopic details, in order to communicate optimally with their recipients: different titles, colors, subtitles, with different images or videos. The granularity of this message tailoring digs all the way down to tiny target groups, Nix explained to Das Magazin. "We can target specific towns or apartment buildings. Even individual people.""*

This is not a conspiracy theory. This goes way beyond giving up our preferences, we have taught them how our individual brains work and told them exactly what our motivations are and with that information - there is a long established science which can be used to make us do exactly what we are told while we think we are doing exactly what we want. One branch of this is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or CBT - which is used with autistic and neurological disorders to help patients gain control and live in our societies. The dark side of this science is that it can be used for straight up mind control. The politicians and idea marketers are not constrained by

the same ethics as the CBT therapists or the psychological community.

Big Data means, in essence, that everything we do, both on and offline, leaves digital traces. Every purchase we make with our cards, every search we type into Google, every movement we make when our mobile phone is in our pocket, every “like” is stored. Especially every “like.”

You need to read the article below. We have manufactured the chains and then offered to try them on while handing them to our new masters. We never questioned why there was no key mechanism to unshackle us from our manacles. We should have. Now, we are stuck. There may be a way out, but the biggest obstacle is that most people have now been conditioned to believe that the chains are necessary for survival or worse that they are not even there or worse still that the chains are actually what give us life and liberty. This is the lie.

*“I just showed that the bomb was there.”*

*By Hannes Grassegger and Mikael Krogerus for Das Magazin (Zurich)*

*3 December 2016 (original post translated into English)*

*Psychologist Michal Kosinski developed a method of analyzing people’s behavior down to the minutest detail by looking at their Facebook activity—thus helping Donald Trump to victory.*

*On November 9th, around 8:30 in the morning, Michal Kosinski awoke in his hotel room in Zurich. The 34-year-old had traveled here to give a presentation to the Risk Center at the ETH [Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule or Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich] at a conference on the dangers of Big Data and the so-called digital revolution. Kosinski gives such presentations all over the world. He is a leading expert on psychometrics, a data-driven offshoot of psychology. Turning on the television this morning in Zurich, he saw that the bomb had gone off: defying the predictions of nearly every leading statistician, Donald J. Trump had been elected president of the United States of America.*

*Kosinski watched Trump’s victory celebration and the remaining election returns for a long while. He suspected that his research could have had something to do with the result. Then he took a deep breath and turned off the television.*

*On the same day, a little-known British company headquartered in London issued a press release: “We are thrilled that our revolutionary approach to data-driven communications played such an integral part in president-elect Donald Trump’s extraordinary win,” Alexander James Ashburner Nix is quoted as saying. Nix is British, 41 years old, and CEO of Cambridge Analytica. He only appears in public in a tailored suit and designer eyeglasses, his slightly wavy blond hair combed back.*

*The meditative Kosinski, the well-groomed Nix, the widely grinning Trump—one made this digital upheaval possible, one carried it out, and one rode it to power.*

*How dangerous is Big Data?*

*Anyone who didn’t spend the last five years on the moon has heard the term Big Data. The*

*emergence of Big Data has meant that everything we do, online or off-, leaves digital traces. Every purchase with a card, every Google search, every movement with a cellphone in your pocket, every “like” gets stored. Especially every “like.” For a while it wasn’t entirely clear what any of this data would be good for, other than showing us ads for blood pressure medication in our Facebook feeds after we google “high blood pressure.” It also wasn’t entirely clear whether or in what ways Big Data would be a threat or a boon to humanity.*

*Since November 9th, 2016, we know the answer. Because one and the same company was behind Trump’s online ad campaigns and late 2016’s other shocker, the Brexit “Leave” campaign: Cambridge Analytica, with its CEO Alexander Nix. Anyone who wants to understand the outcome of the US elections—and what could be coming up in Europe in the near future—must begin with a remarkable incident at the University of Cambridge in 2014, in Kosinski’s department of psychometrics.*

*Psychometrics, sometimes also known as psychography, is a scientific attempt to “measure” the personality of a person. The so-called Ocean Method has become the standard approach. Two psychologists were able to demonstrate in the 1980s that the character profile of a person can be measured and expressed in five dimensions, the Big Five: Openness (how open are you to new experiences?), Conscientiousness (how much of a perfectionist are you?), Extroversion (how sociable are you?), Agreeableness (how considerate and cooperative are you?), and Neuroticism (how sensitive/vulnerable are you?). With these five dimensions (O.C.E.A.N.), you can determine fairly precisely what kind of person you are dealing with—her needs and fears as well as how she will generally behave. For a long time, however, the problem was data collection, because to produce such a character profile meant asking subjects to fill out a complicated survey asking quite personal questions. Then came the internet. And Facebook. And Kosinski.*

*A new life began in 2008 for the Warsaw-born student Michal Kosinski when he was accepted to the prestigious University of Cambridge in England to work in the Cavendish Laboratory at the Psychometrics Center, the first-ever psychometrics laboratory. With a fellow student, Kosinski created a small app for Facebook (the social media site was more straightforward then than it is now) called MyPersonality. With MyPersonality, you could answer a handful of questions from the Ocean survey (“Are you easily irritated?” – “Are you inclined to criticize others?”) and receive a rating, or a “Personality Profile” consisting of traits defined by the Ocean method. The researchers, in turn, got your personal data. Instead of a couple dozen friends participating, as initially expected, first hundreds, then thousands, then millions of people had bared their souls. Suddenly the two doctoral students had access to the then-largest psychological data set ever produced.*

*The process that Kosinski and his colleagues developed over the years that followed is actually quite simple. First surveys are distributed to test subjects—this is the online quiz. From the subjects’ responses, their personal Ocean traits are calculated. Then Kosinski’s team would compile every other possible online data point of a test subject—what they’ve liked, shared, or*

posted on Facebook; gender, age, and location. Thus the researchers began to find correlations, and began to see that amazingly reliable conclusions could be drawn about a person by observing their online behavior. For example, men who “like” the cosmetics brand MAC are, to a high degree of probability, gay. One of the best indicators of heterosexuality is liking Wu-Tang Clan. People who follow Lady Gaga, furthermore, are most probably extroverted. Someone who likes philosophy is more likely introverted.

Kosinski and his team continued, tirelessly refining their models. In 2012, Kosinski demonstrated that from a mere 68 Facebook likes, a lot about a user could be reliably predicted: skin color (95% certainty), sexual orientation (88% certainty), Democrat or Republican (85%). But there’s more: level of intellect; religious affiliation; alcohol-, cigarette-, and drug use could all be calculated. Even whether or not your parents stayed together until you were 21 could be teased out of the data.

How good a model is, however, depends on how well it can predict the way a test subject will answer certain further questions. Kosinski charged ahead. Soon, with a mere ten “likes” as input his model could appraise a person’s character better than an average coworker. With seventy, it could “know” a subject better than a friend; with 150 likes, better than their parents. With 300 likes, Kosinski’s machine could predict a subject’s behavior better than their partner. With even more likes it could exceed what a person thinks they know about themselves.

The day he published these findings, Kosinski received two phonecalls. One was a threat to sue, the other a job offer. Both were from Facebook.

Only Visible to Friends

In the meantime, Facebook has introduced the differentiation between public and private posts. In “private” mode, only one’s own friends can see what one likes. This is still no obstacle for data-collectors: while Kosinski always requests the consent of the Facebook users he tests, many online quizzes these days demand access to private information as a precondition to taking a personality test. (Anyone who is not overly concerned about their private information and who wants to get assessed according to their Facebook likes can do so at Kosinski’s website, and then compare the results to those of a “classic” Ocean survey here).

It’s not just about likes on Facebook. Kosinski and his team have in the meantime figured out how to sort people according to Ocean criteria based only on their profile pictures. Or according to the number of their social media contacts (this is a good indicator of extroversion). But we also betray information about ourselves when we are offline. Motion sensors can show, for example, how fast we are moving a smartphone around or how far we are traveling (correlates with emotional instability). A smartphone, Kosinski found, is in itself a powerful psychological survey that we, consciously or unconsciously, are constantly filling out.

Above all, though—and this is important to understand—it also works another way: using all this data, psychological profiles can not only be constructed, but they can also be sought and found. For example if you’re looking for worried fathers, or angry introverts, or undecided Democrats.

*What Kosinski invented, to put it precisely, is a search engine for people. And he has been getting more and more acutely aware of both the potential and the danger his work presents.*

*The internet always seemed to him a gift from heaven. He wants to give back, to share. Information is freely reproducible, copyable, and everyone should benefit from it. This is the spirit of an entire generation, the beginning of a new era free of the limits of the physical world. But what could happen, Kosinski asked himself, if someone misused his search engine in order to manipulate people? His scientific work [e.g.] began to come with warnings: these prediction techniques could be used in ways that “pose a threat to an individual’s well-being, freedom, or even life.” But no one seemed to understand what he meant.*

*Around this time, in early 2014, a young assistant professor named Aleksandr Kogan approached Kosinski. He said he had received an inquiry from a company interested in Kosinski’s methods. They apparently wanted to psychometrically measure the profiles of ten million American Facebook users. To what purpose, Kogan couldn’t say: there were strict secrecy stipulations. At first, Kosinski was ready to accept—it would have meant a lot of money for his institute. But he hesitated. Finally Kogan divulged the name of the company: SCL, Strategic Communications Laboratories. Kosinski googled them [so did Antidote. Here. —ed.]: “We are a global election management agency,” said the company website [really, the website has even creepier language on it than that. “Behavioral change communication”? Go look already]. SCL offers marketing based on a “psychographic targeting” model. With an emphasis on “election management” and political campaigns? Disturbed, Kosinski clicked through the pages. What kind of company is this? And what do they have planned for the United States?*

*What Kosinski didn’t know at the time was that behind SCL there lay a complex business structure including ancillary companies in tax havens, as the Panama Papers and Wikileaks revelations have since shown. Some of these had been involved in political upheavals in developing countries; others had done work for NATO, developing methods for the psychological manipulation of the population in Afghanistan. And SCL is also the parent company of Cambridge Analytica, this ominous Big Data firm that managed online marketing for both Trump and the Brexit “Leave” campaign.*

*Kosinski didn’t know any of that, but he had a bad feeling: “The whole thing started to stink,” he remembers. Looking into it further, he discovered that Aleksandr Kogan had secretly registered a company to do business with SCL. A document obtained by Das Magazin confirms that SCL learned about Kosinski’s methods through Kogan. It suddenly dawned on Kosinski that Kogan could have copied or reconstructed his Ocean models in order to sell them to this election-manipulating company. He immediately broke off contact with him and informed the head of his institute. A complicated battle ensued within Cambridge University. The institute feared for its reputation. Aleksandr Kogan moved to Singapore, got married, and began calling himself Dr. Spectre. Michal Kosinski relocated to Stanford University in the United States.*

*For a year or so it was quiet. Then, in November 2015, the more radical of the two Brexit campaigns (leave.eu, led by Nigel Farage) announced that they had contracted with a Big Data*

*firm for online marketing support: Cambridge Analytica. The core expertise of this company: innovative political marketing, so-called microtargeting, on the basis of the psychological Ocean model.*

*Kosinski started getting emails asking if he had had anything to do with it—for many, his is the first name to spring to mind upon hearing the terms Cambridge, Ocean, and analytics in the same breath. This is when he heard of Cambridge Analytica for the first time. Appalled, he looked up their website. His methods were being deployed, on a massive scale, for political purposes.*

*After the Brexit vote in July the email inquiries turned to insults and reproaches. Just look what you've done, friends and colleagues wrote. Kosinski had to explain over and over again that he had nothing to do with this company.*

### *First Brexit, Then Trump*

*September 19th, 2016: the US presidential election is approaching. Guitar riffs fill the dark blue ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York: CCR's "Bad Moon Rising." The Concordia Summit is like the WEF in miniature. Decision makers from all over the world are invited; among the guests is Johann Schneider-Ammann [then nearing the end of his year term as president of Switzerland's governing council].*

*A gentle women's voice comes over the PA: "Please welcome Alexander Nix, Chief Executive Officer of Cambridge Analytica." A lean man in a dark suit strides towards the center of the stage. An attentive quiet descends. Many in the room already know: this is Trump's new Digital Man. "Soon you'll be calling me Mr. Brexit," Trump had tweeted cryptically a few weeks before. Political observers had already been pointing out the substantial similarities between Trump's agenda and that of the rightwing Brexit camp; only a few had noticed the connection to Trump's recent engagement with a largely unknown marketing company: Cambridge Analytica.*

*Before then, Trump's online campaign had consisted more or less of one person: Brad Parscale, a marketing operative and failed startup founder who had built Trump a rudimentary website for \$1,500. The 70-year-old Trump is not what one would call an IT-whiz; his desk is unencumbered by a computer. There is no such thing as an email from Trump, his personal assistant once let slip. It was she who persuaded him to get a smartphone—the one from which he has uninhibitedly tweeted ever since.*

*Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, was relying on the endowment of the first social media president, Barack Obama. She had the Democratic Party's address lists, collected millions of dollars over the internet, received support from Google and Dreamworks. When it became known in June 2016 that Trump had hired Cambridge Analytica, Washington collectively sneered. Foreign noodlenecks in tailored suits who don't understand this country and its people? Seriously?*

*"Ladies and gentlemen, honorable colleagues, it is my privilege to speak to you today about the power of Big Data and psychographics in the electoral process." The Cambridge Analytica logo*

*appears behind Alexander Nix—a brain, comprised of a few network nodes and pathways, like a subway map. “It’s easy to forget that only eighteen months ago Senator Cruz was one of the less popular candidates seeking nomination, and certainly one of the more vilified,” begins the blond man with his British diction that produces the same mixture of awe and resentment in Americans that high German does the Swiss. “In addition, he had very low name recognition; only about forty percent of the electorate had heard of him.”*

*Everyone in the room was aware of the sudden rise, in May 2016, of the conservative senator within the Republican field of presidential candidates. It was one of the strangest moments of the primary campaign. Cruz had been the last of a series of Republican opponents to come out of nowhere with what looked like a credible challenge to frontrunner Trump. “How did he do this?” continues Nix.*

*Cambridge Analytica had begun engaging with US elections towards the end of 2014, initially to advise the Republican Ted Cruz, and paid by the secretive American tech billionaire Robert Mercer. Up to that point, according to Nix, election campaign strategy had been guided by demographic concepts. “But this is a really ridiculous idea, the idea that all women should receive the same message because of their gender; or all African-Americans because of their race.” The Hillary Clinton campaign team was still operating on precisely such amateurish assumptions—Nix need not even mention—which divide the electorate up into ostensibly homogeneous groups...exactly the same way as all the public opinion researchers who predicted a Clinton victory did.*

*Nix clicks to the next slide: five different faces, each representing a personality profile. It is the Ocean model. “At Cambridge, we’ve rolled out a long-form quantitative instrument to probe the underlying traits that inform personality. This is the cutting edge in experimental psychology.” It is now completely silent in the hall. “By having hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Americans undertake this survey, we were able to form a model to predict the personality of every single adult in the United States of America.” The success of Cambridge Analytica’s marketing arises from the combination of three elements: this psychological behavioral analysis of the Ocean model, Big Data evaluation, and ad targeting. Ad targeting is personalized advertisement tailored as precisely as possible to the character of a single consumer.*

*Nix explains forthrightly how his company does this (the presentation can be viewed on YouTube). From every available source, Cambridge Analytica buys up personal data: “What car you drive, what products you purchase in shops, what magazines you read, what clubs you belong to.” Voter and medical records. On the screen behind him are displayed the logos of global data traders like Acxiom and Experian—in the United States nearly all personal consumer data is available for purchase. If you want to know, for example, where Jewish women live, you can simply buy this information. Including telephone numbers. Now Cambridge Analytica crosschecks these data sets with Republican Party voter rolls and online data such as Facebook likes, and constructs an Ocean personality profile. From a selection of digital signatures there suddenly emerge real individual people with fears, needs, and interests—and*

home addresses.

*The process is identical to the models that Michal Kosinski developed. Cambridge Analytica also uses IQ-Quiz and other small Ocean test apps in order to gain access to the powerful predictive personal information wrapped up in the Facebook likes of users. And Cambridge Analytica is doing precisely what Kosinski had warned about. They have assembled psychograms for all adult US citizens, 220 million people, and have used this data to influence electoral outcomes.*

*Nix clicks to the next slide. “This is a data dashboard that we prepared for the Cruz campaign for the Iowa caucus. It looks intimidating, but it’s actually very simple.” On the left, graphs and diagrams; on the right, a map of Iowa, where Cruz had done surprisingly well in the caucuses. On this map, hundreds of thousands of tiny dots, red and blue. Nix begins to narrow down search criteria to a category of Republican caucus-goers he describes as a “persuasion” group, whose common Ocean personality profile and home locations are now visible, a smaller set of people to whom advertisement can be more effectively tailored. Ultimately the criteria can be narrowed to a single individual, along with his name, age, address, interests, and political leanings. How does Cambridge Analytica approach this person with political messaging?*

*Earlier in the presentation, using the example of the Second Amendment, Nix showed two variations on how certain psychographic profiles are spoken to differently. “For a highly Neurotic and Conscientious audience, you’re going to need a message that is both rational and fear-based: the threat of a burglary and the ‘insurance policy’ of a gun is very persuasive.” A picture on the left side of the screen shows a gloved hand breaking a window and reaching for the inside door handle. On the right side, there is a picture of a man and child silhouetted against a sunset in tall grass, both with rifles, obviously duck hunting: “for a Closed and Agreeable audience, people who care about traditions and habits and family and community, talking about these values is going to be much more effective in communicating your message.”*

*How to Keep Clinton Voters Away*

*Trump’s conspicuous contradictions and his oft-criticized habit of staking out multiple positions on a single issue result in a gigantic number of resulting messaging options that creates a huge advantage for a firm like Cambridge Analytica: for every voter, a different message.*

*Mathematician Cathy O’Neil had already observed in August that “Trump is like a machine learning algorithm” that adjusts to public reactions. On the day of the third presidential debate between Trump and Clinton, Trump’s team blasted out 175,000 distinct variations on his arguments, mostly via Facebook. The messages varied mostly in their microscopic details, in order to communicate optimally with their recipients: different titles, colors, subtitles, with different images or videos. The granularity of this message tailoring digs all the way down to tiny target groups, Nix explained to Das Magazin. “We can target specific towns or apartment buildings. Even individual people.”*

*In the Miami neighborhood of Little Haiti, Cambridge Analytica regaled residents with messages*

about the failures of the Clinton Foundation after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, in order to dissuade them from turning out for Clinton. This was one of the goals: to get potential but wavering Clinton voters—skeptical leftists, African-Americans, young women—to stay home. To “suppress” their votes, as one Trump campaign staffer bluntly put it. In these so-called dark posts (paid Facebook ads which appear in the timelines only of users with a particular suitable personality profile), African-Americans, for example, are shown the nineties-era video of Hillary Clinton referring to black youth as “super predators.”

“Blanket advertising—the idea that a hundred million people will receive the same piece of direct mail, the same television advert, the same digital advert—is dead,” Nix begins to wrap up his presentation at the Concordia Summit. “My children will certainly never understand this concept of mass communication. Today, communication is becoming ever increasingly targeted.

“The Cruz campaign is over now, but what I can tell you is that of the two candidates left in this election, one of them is using these technologies. And it’s going to be very interesting to see how they impact the next seven weeks. Thank you.” With that, he exits the stage.

It is not knowable just to what extent the American population is being targeted by Trump’s digital troopers—because they seldom attack through the mainstream broadcast media, but rather mostly with highly personalized ads on social media or through digital cable. And while the Clinton team sat back in the confidence that it was safe with its demographic calculations, a new crew was moving into the Trump online campaign headquarters in San Antonio, Texas, as Bloomberg journalist Sasha Issenberg noted with surprise after a visit. The Cambridge Analytica team, apparently just a dozen people, had received around \$100,000 from Trump in July; in August another \$250,000; five million in September. Altogether, says Nix, they took in around fifteen million.

And the company took even more radical measures: starting in July 2016, a new app was prepared for Trump campaign canvassers with which they could find out the political orientation and personality profile of a particular house’s residents in advance. If the Trump people ring a doorbell, it’s only the doorbell of someone the app has identified as receptive to his messages, and the canvassers can base their line of attack on personality-specific conversation guides also provided by the app. Then they enter a subject’s reactions to certain messaging back into the app, from where this new data flows back to the control rooms of Cambridge Analytica.

The company divided the US population into 32 personality types, and concentrated on only seventeen states. And just as Kosinski had determined that men who like MAC cosmetics on Facebook are probably gay, Cambridge Analytica found that a predilection for American-produced cars is the best predictor of a possible Trump voter. Among other things, this kind of knowledge can inform Trump himself which messages to use, and where. The decision to focus candidate visits in Michigan and Wisconsin over the final weeks of the campaign was based on this manner of data analysis. The candidate himself became an implementation instrument of the model.

### *What is Cambridge Analytica Doing in Europe?*

*How great an influence did these psychometric methods have on the outcome of the election? Cambridge Analytica, when asked, did not want to disclose any documentation assessing the effectiveness of their campaign. It is possible that the question cannot be answered at all. Still, some indicators should be considered: there is the fact that Ted Cruz, thanks to the help of Cambridge Analytica, rose out of obscurity to become Trump's strongest competitor in the primaries; there is the increase in rural voter turnout; there is the reduction, compared to 2008 and 2012, in African-American voter participation. The circumstance of Trump having spent so little money on advertising could also speak for the effectiveness of personality-specific targeting, as could the fact that three quarters of his marketing budget was spent in the digital realm. Facebook became his ultimate weapon and his best canvasser, as a Trump staffer tweeted. In Germany, the rightwing upstart party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) may like the sound of this, as they have more Facebook friends than Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) combined.*

*It is therefore not at all the case, as is so often claimed, that statisticians lost this election because their polls were so faulty. The opposite is true: statisticians won this election. It was just certain statisticians, the ones using the new method. It is a cruel irony of history that Trump, such a detractor of science, won the election thanks to science.*

*Another big winner in the election was Cambridge Analytica. Steve Bannon, a Cambridge Analytica board member and publisher of the ultra-rightwing online site Breitbart News, was named Trump's chief strategist. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, ambitious Front National activist and niece of the presidential candidate, has tweeted that she has accepted the firm's invitation to collaborate. In an internal company video, there is a live recording of a discussion entitled "Italy." Alexander Nix confirms that he is in the process of client acquisition, worldwide. They have received inquiries out of Switzerland and Germany.*

*Kosinski has been observing all of this from his office at Stanford. After the election, the university was in an uproar. Kosinski responded to the developments with the most powerful weapon available to researchers: a scientific analysis. Along with his research colleague Sandra Matz, he conducted a series of tests that will soon be published. The first results seen by Das Magazin are unsettling: psychological targeting, as Cambridge Analytica deployed it, increases the clickthru rate on Facebook ads by more than sixty percent. And the so-called conversion rate (the term for how likely a person is to act upon a personally-tailored ad, i.e. whether they buy a product or, yes, go vote) increases by a staggering 1400 percent.*

*The world has been turned upside down. The Brits are leaving the EU; Trump rules America. It all began with one man, who indeed tried to warn of the danger, and who still gets accusatory emails. "No," says Kosinski quietly, shaking his head, "this is not my fault. I did not build the bomb. I just showed that it was there."*

## **Angry at the Wizard (2017)**

I find it a constant challenge to not be angry at the complete bullshit that we are all wrapped up in. Here we are, all wrapped up in our world-views, struggling, fighting, suffering, striving, dying, and all to achieve what we view as 'the way it is' - and yet, it's not really the way it is at all. Not even close. Consumer culture, politics, capitalism, success, failure, (the list goes on) these are all human constructs which in point of fact, have no actual basis in reality. Yes, they are real, yes we are trapped in them for the time being, and yes they affect us - but these things are not actually real.

In the book, *The Wizard of Oz* (not the movie, the book), Dorothy and her friends and all of the inhabitants of Oz are forced to put on green glasses before entering Oz. The Wizard is not simply hiding behind the curtain and manipulating light and sound - he is fucking with the reality-perception of an entire society! He is using every trick he can to maintain control and keep the society under his control - and he sends Dorothy and her friends on multiple death errands because he feels threatened by their awareness and power. He sends them with the thought that if they succeed, it's good for his people and if they die, well, it's good for him.

Our human society and governments are the wizard. In reality, we are not missing the things we seek. We have brains, courage, heart, and even the ability to get 'home' - meaning in this context home to our true nature, to what we truly are. We are not made to be politicians or business people or financiers or developers or any of ten thousand other things - we are made to be friends, family, nurturers, builders, craftsmen, explorers, and more - but the wizard has blinded us so that we only see green, so that we only see financial security, monetary success, and so that we become consumed by riches.

It's difficult to not be angry with the wizard. I'll admit, I've been incredibly incensed for most of my life. I've made myself sick with anger at the false nature of our existence for most of my adult life. I was young when I tore the glasses from my head and have spent the better part of my life trying to convince others that what they thought they were seeing was only an illusion - most people seem to already understand that on some level - but most of them prefer to live in the illusion - they understand how to navigate in the wizard's world and intuitively understand that navigating outside of it is far more dangerous than mastering life within the illusion. The problem of course is like that of a video gamer who is very good at a video game but terrible at life - you may be President in the game but in reality you are suffering from malnutrition and alone in a filthy pile of refuse.

So, those of us who know the truth about the glasses - we are left with a dissatisfying choice of either wearing the glasses and immersing ourselves in the illusion or removing the glasses and suffering the reality that all around us are living the lie. The Buddha offered a third alternative which is - from my experience - the most difficult. The middle path allows us to live in the world of illusion while seeing it for what it is. Finding the true middle path is incredibly hard - I have spent my life bouncing from one side to the other - and when I get close - I am distracted by this

anger, the anger at the illusionist, the anger at the illusion itself, the anger at being put in the position where I must don these green glasses and walk amongst the delusional - my anger is self-righteous (as all anger is) - and it is dangerous. I must strive to put my anger away- as far as I know, there are only two ways to do that - acceptance of what is and releasing the anger as love through compassion and empathy.

## **Hidden Dangers of the POTUS (2017)**

The POTUS is easy to make light of. It's easy to not take just how dangerous he is as he gives a buffoonish speech to 40,000 boy scouts in which he touts an ultra-nationalist agenda, demonstrates to young people that it is okay to be an a-hole, and uses the event to push his sociopathic agenda. All of this stuff as he publicly shames the attorney general he hired, pulls back from promise after promise, and seemingly accomplishes none of what he set out to do - all of that is dangerous in itself - but the real danger is that behind the scenes, behind the cover of the great buffoon, beneath the radar of massive undertakings that are nearly impossible to fulfill, there is serious policy work being done and serious cultural shift taking place in the the fibre of the USA. I'm glad to no longer be on the mainland, surrounded by bafflingly vehement Trumpers who appeared to have brains but appear to have stopped using them. Oregon, a state that is ruled by liberal politics but inhabited by a massive number of poor white people who actually still believe that Trump is their savior - that he has their best interests in mind - that he is there to HELP them. Not just poor, uneducated, white industrial workers - but all those closet racist baby boomers (and let's be clear here, baby boomers are white Americans born between the 40s and the early 60s) who secretly don't think a woman can do as good a job as a man, who secretly think that white people are naturally better than non-white people, and who are convinced that they deserve a good life more than anyone else. That is Trump's base - and it's not shrinking as we watch him turn our highest office into a mockery - no, his base is growing. As unbelievable as it seems to an educated liberal like me, there is no denying it - his base is growing - and I promise you - he just won a whole new generation of voters. Trump is causing a massive shift in the ideology of the United States. He is taking plays from the dictator playbook daily. He is making us immune to the dangers of totalitarianism with his seemingly foolish actions - but there is nothing funny about threatening to fire people as they stand next to you on a stage, there is nothing funny about demanding political opponents be investigated and jailed, there is nothing funny about loud, yelling, nationalist chants in front of brown shirted adolescent boys. I'm grateful to have left the mainland. I'm grateful to have my family in Hawaii and away from so many of the Trumpers, but they are still here - I see them on construction sites, military bases, and in business suits. We, the people of the United States, are in a very deep lake of shit - and it's time to stop laughing about how funny it is or how unlikely it is that we are here or how it's impossible that things can get worse. We've been walked right out here laughing our heads off and denying it could happen. It's happened. It's happening. It's not good and not getting any

better.

## **The USA isn't God and Worship isn't Required**

I'm a veteran. I was honorably discharged. I joined and served in the US Marines willingly as a service to my country because I love the ideals we were built on and the way we have grown. I sometimes feel tears well up when I hear taps and there are times that the national anthem makes my skin tingle with pride.

And now - with the current evil motherfucker in the white house - I can no longer stand with pride when I hear the national anthem and it's getting to where I am starting to feel the same revulsion for the American flag that I feel when I see a swastika.

I am proud of my country (at least until the election of 2016) and even since then, I have seen the best of these United States shine through the sewage of the current administration - but I can no longer look at the flag or hear the national anthem without seeing Donald J Trump demanding that we worship both (and him) as if they were GOD.

The United States is not God. The flag is not God. The National Anthem is not God. Donald J. Trump is not God. No human being is God. The more the current President co-opts the flag and the anthem, the more we must distance ourselves from them.

The flag and the anthem and Donald J. Trump are not God and neither are they the United States of America. The United States of America is more than that - we are a land, a people, and an idea that all humans are created equal and deserve the rights to pursue life, liberty, and happiness without impediment from domestic or foreign tyrants. If it makes you happy to take a knee during the anthem or to wipe your ass with the flag or stand proud and salute - either way, I support your right to do so. But if you are telling others how they should behave in regards to the dangreros idea of patriotism - I served in the Marines to defend my country from people like you and I will gladly serve in that regard again.

The USA is not God and even if it were, my United States of America would never attempt to force you to worship. So, up yours flag, anthem, and America worshipers - Go to hell with Hitler and your President.

## **The Fat Bacon States of America (2017)**

I saw an article this morning that said fat Americans are giving up on trying to lose weight. Large numbers of them are simply getting rid of their bathroom scales, buying larger clothes through Amazon, and continuing to proudly wear their 'BACON' trucker hats and t-shirts - which, frankly, have a completely unintended irony when they are worn by human pigs. Is that fat shaming? I'm not sure - it seems to be true but none the less, probably does make an extremely overweight person who reads it feel a sense of shame - so yeah, I have to own that - it's fat shaming. Another headline said that American biggies are eating too much bacon and not enough nuts - and yet another headline talks about how Americans are having far less sex than they were

twenty years ago - all of this, is no surprise.

When we arrived in the US back in 2013 (my wife and daughter for the first time and me after having been away for five years), one of the first things I noticed was the bacon obsession that Americans were gripped by - when I left in 2008, bacon was still a breakfast food - albeit one that foodies had discovered and been singing the glories of for some time - frankly, I blame it all on Anthony Bourdain and Top Chef - Bourdain's lyrical praise of smoked, fried, pork took bacon from a truck stop and wagon train staple to high cuisine and then, Top Chef with its pretentious focus on ingredients and the celebretization of good cooks merged with the 'maker movements' of the late 2000s to glorify foods that had always been good. I used to have to find a butcher and ask them to save the bacon ends for me - and they were cheap - but in 2013, I found them being sold at farmer's market's as premium product. The roommates we lived with for several months in Sacramento had a bacon fetish that bordered on being creepy - and which I later discovered was a mild form of it. So, the obesity thing and the overeating of bacon are not surprising...and as far as nuts - the prices for them are outrageous...and the cheap ones are low quality and high in salt and additives.

I have sympathy for the obese because I too have weight that I can't get rid of. This despite exercising almost daily and generally eating healthy foods (my wife and daughter don't eat pork so when I eat bacon, it is usually Turkey bacon) I've put on 20 pounds since getting to the USA that I can't seem to shake - I'm sure a part of that is a slowing metabolism and certainly my sugar addiction plays a big role in it - which is something else that is killing us and which I'm struggling to gain control over in my life - but really it comes down to day to day living. We sit in front of computers, sit in front of televisions, sit in our cars, sit at our desks when we work, and all that sitting is only broken up as we move between places we sit and places we sleep.

And then there is the acceptance of the biggies - even if you haven't consciously said to yourself 'It's okay for people to be overweight, obese, fat, large, extra large, etc" that message has been bouncing around in your head for a while now. Remember when there was no such thing as a plus size model? Here's a thing to think about - back when I was in kindergarten - there was one boy that was overweight. All the way through grade school, I can only remember a handful of fat kids - I remember them because they were the oddities, it was strange to be overweight. Currently, one out of three kids in the USA are considered overweight! And when I see the overweight kids in my daughter's elementary school, they are far bigger than the 'fat kids' I remember from my school days - in fact, the kids that look as big as the 'fat kids' of my time, aren't even considered fat anymore - they are considered average!

We all know it's a problem. The obese folks that are giving up, they know it's a problem. The airline people that are having to make seats bigger, they know it is a problem, everyone is aware of it. What can we do about it? Nothing.

That's right. I just said that there is nothing we can do about it. Nothing. Nada. Zip.

It's a symptom of a larger problem, of a sick society that cannot be fixed. We have shown that

as a people, as a nation, as - to some extent - a world , that we are not willing to address the real systemic problems we are faced with - we are not willing to address the sick values of capitalism gone bad, we are not willing to reset our fucked up priorities - which can be summed up with profits over people but which run far deeper and far more ugly - and if we do not address the system which created the conditions that allowed for a culture of bacon fetishism and glamorized foodies who probably have secret millionaire parties where they eat long pork (aka human flesh) and delight in the flavor and texture of their guest of honor/main course - than we cannot address the symptoms - one of which is a sharp increase in obesity and an acceptance of obesity and as follows a decrease in sex drive.

So go on you 300 million little biggies - fry up some more bacon and get yourself ready to be slaughtered because somebody out there is going to eat you and there is nothing you can do about it until you recognize that the system has already consumed you.

### **The Fundamental Problem with Wealth (2017)**

There are fundamental systemic problems that are literally killing us - both individually and as a species. Unless we can get a handle on these issues - we are almost certainly doomed. The first problem is wealth. Not wealth inequality, not wealth distribution, not how wealth is earned or spent - but simply wealth. Wealth is a fundamental systemic problem.

Wealth allows for exploitation, individual versus collective good, and a disproportionate allowance of power in terms of access, accumulations, and use of abilities. Wealth is very good for the individual who has it - but, as history has shown us, very bad for everyone as a whole - including the person who has it. This is a matter of long term versus short term good. The individual profits while the species, the biosphere, and the planet as a whole is degraded.

The problems of wealth are not a new revelation, though for most people, wealth appears to not be a problem at all. The main issue is that wealth has so firmly entrenched itself into our system and into our worldview that the idea of ending the concept is not only unfathomable but completely abhorrent to nearly everyone - including this writer who feels that he completely understands the problem of wealth intellectually but still has an inherent desire to strive for wealth personally because of the short term net positives wealth could bring to my individual life, the life of my offspring, and potentially, the good which could be done if wealth of any size were accumulated and controlled.

One hopes that there is a way to end wealth once and for all - because it is the fundamental drain on our existence - however, given the above - it is unlikely that such an end would be pursued, allowed, or embraced by anyone. While there are religious and philosophical systems which have eschewed wealth, there has yet to be a political or economic system where wealth of one kind or another has not found a way to flourish.

Wealth is a fundamental systemic problem which appears to have no solution. As such, it may be best to move on to further systemic problems. Your thoughts are appreciated here as more

than one brain is definitely better than just one.

## **The Regulated Society (2017)**

I remember having a conversation with a 'gun nut' friend who insisted that she should be able to carry and shoot her gun anywhere she likes. I disagreed. I found it astounding that she couldn't see that 1) her gun created a power inequality between her and anyone without a gun and 2) that unless she could guarantee that her bullets had a certain trajectory and stopping point, she was impinging on the freedom of others to move about without concern over being hit by stray bullets. She, on the other hand, was bothered that I thought there should be regulations in place to protect people who she had no intention of threatening - her problem with my arguments could all be boiled down to "Who is given the power to enforce these regulations?" and further that anyone given that sort of power is almost certain to use it for their own advantage. Why should she have to give up power to someone else in the interest of unknown others? Why should she have to give up her own best interest to the interest of others with uncertain motivations? We were at loggerheads - I tried to argue that it wasn't her, a person with presumably benign motivations, that the regulations were protecting society from, but from people with darker reasons for having or shooting a gun. Her counter-argument was that criminal person wouldn't be swayed by regulations so all the regulations were actually doing was dis-empowering her while empowering an enforcer class that would create more regulations thus depriving her of more power and beefing up the power of the enforcer class which would eventually come to be controlled by those without an altruistic intention. I tried to argue checks and balances, protection of the weakest members of society, representative government, and more - and left the table pretty sure that I was right and she was wrong - and a part of me still wants to believe that - but in my heart, I know she was right. I don't like it because I want to believe in the hallowed institutions of self-governance and U.S. style democracy - but damn it - she was right. Or at the very least, we were both missing some 'right' middle ground.

The regulated society is a disaster. It's a disaster that most people are completely blind to. As humans we made a bad turn- this idea of disempowering individuals for the betterment of all is a terrible idea - like lowering test standards to increase the average score. The regulations are not working. All the gun laws we have did not stop any of the mass shootings (or individual shootings) that happened anyway. Speed limits do not stop people from driving fast. Food regulations do not keep companies from selling poison as processed food or using dangerous pesticides - yes, if they get caught they get penalized - which is what the regulated society is when it comes down to it - the penalized society - or the penal society - or the prison society. We live in the Prison Society. There is no freedom except that you are allowed to have from the enforcer class, the guards, the regulators, the power elite. We have willingly given up our power and they have willingly taken it.

I have never wanted to live in the Prison Society, but here I am. There are ways out, but none of them are easy. My world travels and travels within the United States have shown me that the Prison Society is a worldwide phenomenon - there are different flavors, but no escaping it. The Prison Society lives on enforcement and bureaucracy and the illusion of the common good. A dictatorship can offer more freedom than democracy, or less - it depends on the levels of enforcement, bureaucracy, and regulations. The only way out of the Prison Society is self-empowerment - we must re-empower ourselves and refuse to give up that power to anyone - and the only way to create a society that is good for all is to create a new way of thinking about power and wealth and humanity. My friend was right about the regulation society and that we should not give up our power to an enforcer class and she was right about the need to arm ourselves, but I think she was wrong about what we need to arm ourselves with - we don't need to be armed with guns, we need to be armed with knowledge. The Knowledge Society is the only path that leads to freedom from the Prison Society.

## **A Great Disturbance in the Force (2017)**

Imagine a soldier who retires to a quiet life of solitude, his goal, to come to know and understand 'the force' and to find some simple happiness in this life. As he begins to feel and understand this mysterious power and find a tiny bit of that which he sought - some jackass power mad egomaniac grabs ahold of the force and starts doing all kinds of crazy shit with it.

Or, alternatively, imagine a hobbit with a very light taste for adventure who has come to terms with the quiet life in the Shire, but then a bunch of drunken dwarves show up with a wizard and reveal that some jackass power mad egomaniac has grabbed hold of the 'the one power to rule them all' and has started doing all kinds of crazy shit with it.

Or, imagine a boy who has a miserable life but he is rescued from it and taken to a school of magic where he finds friends and wonders, but then some jackass power mad egomaniac starts doing all kinds of crazy shit with the dark part of magic.

Or imagine, an intelligence agent who has finally come to terms with his career and the world he lives in, while peace will never be achieved, he is ready to retire because the most powerful country in the world is on course to keep the world safe without him but then some jackass power mad egomaniac grabs the presidency and starts doing all kinds of crazy shit with it.

Fiction seems to have become real life. Call it what you will, the force, magic, power, peace, or what have you - there is a big deep dark and ugly disturbance going on and as much as each of us would like to ignore it and live in peace - the possibility of that happening, grows slimmer every day.

Where will you stand when the dark days are upon us? Have you thought of it? Have you

thought about where your tipping point is? Have you considered at what point you have to abandon your own interests in the interest of others? We need to all be thinking of these things now...I wish it were not so, but it is.

## **Social Insecurity (2017)**

I'm certain that I'm not alone. I have no retirement plan. There is no windfall waiting for me. No inheritance or IRA sits patiently waiting for my time of need. I have enough debt to keep me awake at night from time to time. No social safety net protects me or my family from a very hard fall - a fall that could be triggered by an accident, an extreme weather event, or sudden political chaos - all of which could be imminent. I am sure that I'm not alone in my social insecurity and the dark pit of hopelessness that looms around each and every corner. This is the unpleasant American Dream realized - constant dread of financial disaster which is coming whether I like it or not.

Is it my own fault? Certainly I have made many of the decisions that have brought me here. I could have stayed in the Marines for twenty years. I could have gone to University right after graduating high school in 1990 instead of going in the Marines and deferring a degree until 2008. I could have stayed in a number of careers that didn't bring me joy -I could have pursued a management career in hospitality, I could have remained an Air Traffic Controller, I could have stayed a stock broker or an insurance agent, I could have stayed in Hawaii after graduating and taken any job that might have been available at the height of the recession, I could have stayed in radio, I could have persevered in a tech career after the dot-com bust, and so on. I second guess my life decisions all the time. I made them, I live with the consequences - but there is no going back. At the time, I made the best decision that I could and did what I thought was best for my future. Usually, those decisions had very little to do with finance and much more to do with things like ethics, spiritual beliefs, and an awareness that life is transitory and if I didn't take the time to live while I was young, I would someday be old and regret that I had not. My life is worthy, my experiences a joy and comfort, and my integrity mostly intact.

But this is the United States of America - the country I was raised in was a country formed by revolutionaries and shaped by organized labor. A country with laws to protect workers, the poor, the sick, the elderly, the insane and handicapped. We were supposed to have social security and peace of mind in our old age. I'm not old yet - mid-life at worst - but I don't see any sort of retirement or ease of living in my American future. I see a nightmare. For two decades now, I've seen senior citizens filling the low wage workforce - working in jobs that in my youth belonged to high school students. Senior greeters at Walmart and senior fry cooks at McDonalds. In the 1970s and 1980s - I remember people having retirement parties when they reached age 65 - When was the last time you heard about someone actually retiring? Yes, it happens in government and maybe in some other isolated fields - but not in my world. I have some friends who will retire - but not many. Most of us will have to scabble until the day we die for enough to pay our insurance, buy prescriptions, pay heating bills, and buy food. That's the fate of the

majority of us in the United States.

I don't know why, but I thought we were better than that. We've elected billionaires who have put millionaires and billionaires in charge of the public protections and we've gotten what we pay for. And when you elect billionaires, one thing you can be sure of is that they want everyone to pay. There is no public safety net. There is no protection for workers. There is no future for this country except for increasing oppression against the working class and the poverty class until the pressure becomes so extreme that it explodes. We are already seeing the vents of steam jetting from the cracks - and there is more of that to come.

At some point, the United States decided that taking care of business was the best way to take care of people. That point happened somewhere between the 1950s and the 1980s - it was a gradual erosion of the New Deal until suddenly, we found ourselves living in a society where there is no longer a deal at all except perhaps for *The Art of the Deal* - from nurturing to shystering and exploitation.

I find a strange comfort in beating myself up at not having made the right choices - but if I had made different choices, I could easily have found myself in worse conditions than those I live in now. The Marines and ATC could have led to an early death from alcoholism, radio has merged and consolidated until only the most talented are able to achieve careers, I could have been a dot-com has been, or a real estate tycoon who lost everything in the recession, the soul sucking work of selling stock (let's make money from this war Bob!) could easily have led to suicide, and the list goes on. There's really no reason or purpose in beating myself up over the past.

The future though - it is that which worries me. I cannot see a future that I want to be a part of in the United States. I cannot see a future that I want my child to be a part of in the United States. When I attempt to see the future here, I see tragedy and hardship. I wanted to come back to my country and succeed. I wanted to come back to my country and find a future I could believe in. I am trying. I am really trying to see past the storm on the horizon. From my perspective though - it just looks like it will get worse and worse and worse with no prospect for a sunny day.

## **Trumpism is Winning. What if Trump Won't Step Down? (2018)**

I'm sorry to tell my liberal friends, but the American system of government has failed. This is not a process that is happening, it's something that has already happened. The American system of checks and balances, representative democracy, and a constitutional republic have failed and they have failed completely. Donald Trump and the forces aligned with him are in complete control. Sorry, I know it's not pleasant, but it's the truth. Unless, you accept the truth now it's going to make the future much more difficult to understand. Here are the facts:

1) Despite breaking with the norms of transparency (tax returns etc), decency (groping women, cheating on his wife, racism etc), and honesty (documented evidence reveals that Trump has told more than 2000 verifiable lies since being elected) - Donald Trump has not only been elected President with the faulty electoral college system but also remained in power despite

scandals that would have previously brought down any President.

2) Russia meddled in the election. We don't know how much power they gained as a result. We don't know if they hold something over Trump. We don't know if there is ongoing collusion and collaboration.

3) Both houses of congress have shown where their loyalties lie. At the beginning of the Trump presidency there was a chance for Senators and Representatives to resign or resist - a small number of those in the Republican party did. With the death of John McCain, the remaining Republican congress members capitulated to Trumpism. They are either Trumpists or they are leaving at the end of their term.

4) Democrat Party congress members have shown themselves to be ineffective at resisting. Over and over again they have bowed to the pressure of their corporate masters or to the uneducated, angry, and vocal supporters of the president. In addition, Democrats have repeatedly turned on their own party members and created opportunities for Trumpers to build their base in traditional Democrat territory.

5) Trump and his Justice Department have stacked the judiciary with unqualified, right-wing, toxic male judges. This includes the Supreme Court where Trump has pushed through two Supreme Court Justices who will back him and his administration from dawn to dusk and then through the night.

6) Trumpism - which I define as seeking victory by whatever means possible including race baiting, racism, lying, cheating, stealing, and screaming to drown out dissent - as well as fostering a sort of exhaustion through constant media attention - is winning. The Democrats, who have worked for decades with Republicans to destroy and assimilate any viable third party, have no working defense against Trumpism. Currently elected Democrats are almost all vulnerable to attack because they have been part of the system that created the current mess. They can't point fingers without being charged with hypocrisy. There is no possibility for Democrats to win because they are constrained to be fair, honest, ethical, and saint-like while no such standard is used on Trumpers. There is no way for Democrats to win.

7) The military and law-enforcement leadership have nearly whole-heartedly bought into Trumpism. While there are many women and people of color in these careers who are not Trumpists, the leadership has mostly used military and police indoctrination to put the military firmly in support of Trumpism. Loyalty to the President has been tied to loyalty to the flag and the national anthem and thus the country. We cannot expect the military to rescue the Republic.

There is much more, but that brings me to the question. Imagine that 2020 comes and Donald Trump loses to some candidate - any candidate. It could be Joe Biden or Bernie Sanders or Oprah or Jamie Dimon or even Michelle Obama - we have an election and Trump loses.

Breaking with the tradition of a peaceful transition of power, Trump declares the election invalid. The left has already built this narrative but didn't act on it with Trump's (probably) illegal election. {The reason I say it was probably illegal was because if there was Russian meddling which

gave Trump the election than he should not have been allowed to take power - but it's too late for that now}. So, Trump loses - he steps on stage and he says that the justice department has reason to believe that there was meddling from the Russians, the Chinese, the North Koreans - anyone - and that as a result, he will be appointing a task force to look into the results and determine what happened. To protect the country, he refuses to give up power until we have answers.

Who will stop him? The congress? He will scream and accuse them of being part of the conspiracy. Will the judiciary step in? No, he has already taken control of the most powerful courts in the country and has built the basis of a partisan (and loyal to him) Supreme Court. Will the military step in? No, they will look to their leadership and the military leadership is almost completely Trumpist.

So, that leaves the people. The people take to the streets with signs and chants. The protests grow. And guess what? The police are on the side of the Trumpists. The protests will be crushed. The National Guard will be called in and breaking with tradition, the US Military will be called in. Trump will denounce any opponents, he will tell lies, he will mock and destroy the credibility of anyone who challenges him. His police will round up those who oppose him. He will lie and he will build a case for retaining power and he will not step down. Ever.

I'm sorry my friends. I appreciate your efforts to effect change with voting and activism. I love what you are trying to do. I, too, want to see our country saved. But it is too late. The United States of America cannot be saved. It is not my desire to discourage you from the noble work you are engaged in, but the truth is that your efforts are not going to work. They cannot. And, as a result - your efforts are wasted. You are beating your fists against a brick wall.

So, what can you do?

To save the United States? Nothing. It can't be done. It's too late.

Instead, people and states who are not Trumpists need to be making other plans. Getting out might be one option. Heading to states like California, Hawaii, Vermont, New York, Washington, or New Mexico might be another option. It's my opinion that the secesion of California might be the only viable option to save the values that made America great and eventually defeat Trumpism.

I know, that's an ugly thought because it leads to a second American civil war. I'm not without hope for the future but a positive future for the United States no longer exists. The sooner we accept that, the sooner we can focus on an alternative to an America completely under the control of a madman.

## **The Fall of the Soviet Union in Reverse (2018)**

The Soviet Union ceased to be a major political force in the world and unraveled in large part

due to two factors:

- 1) A long and economically exhausting war in Afghanistan that brought terrorism and poverty to the 'homeland'
- 2) The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent 'People Power' movement which chipped away at the edges of the USSR until there was no longer any semblance of control and the disparate states and territories began to secede.

Add to this the glamorous allure of capitalism to the masses, the power grabs of former Soviet oligarchs, and the shining beacon of democracy calling to the masses and what you have is a complete collapse in just a few years. So much for the USSR, right?

Well, so we thought. Unfortunately, the bright minds at the KGB had produced Vladimir Putin and while he isn't even giving lip service to bringing back the brightest ideals of the Soviet Union (i.e. a workers paradise, economic equality, and a future egalitarian socialist liberator) - he has instead appealed to the destroyed ego of the former Soviets. His wrestling with lions, seizing territory, and bitchifying of the U.S. President have restored that old pride in the Russian people. And he has done it without forcing his friends and supporters to give up their massive oil and media fortunes.

It's no coincidence that the American war in Afghanistan and the figurative building of a non-existent wall between the U.S. and Mexico are heralding the downfall of the United States. Putin is in control and he knows what he is doing. Russia has been and continues to fund the enemies of the U.S. in Afghanistan. Putin's puppet U.S. President continues to do his master's bidding and create the wall between Mexico and the U.S. - all so Putin can exact his ultimate revenge and say "Mr. Trump, TEAR DOWN THAT WALL". In the meantime, Trump's supporters become more and more militant and well armed and the Russian Hackerforce is working hard to enable California to break up into three pieces and then to begin seceding from the U.S. - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania - but on the West Coast of North America. In the meantime, the American oligarchs are seizing power on every front, and the divide between those who admire a strongman and those who see a buffoon continues to widen.

Will Putin succeed? So far, the odds seem to be in his favor but those who favor justice have been known to succeed in the face of failure before. Let us hope that things do not go as the oligarchs have planned.

## **An Inflection Point for the USA (2018)**

Rather than focusing on a breadbasket of currencies, stocks, bonds, or economic indicators – I'd rather focus on the overall mental and cultural trends with regards to advances in technological adoption, societal inclusion, social justice, and distributed economic benefits. So, in a nutshell - - it means that we (humans as a whole) are progressing towards a sort of Star

Trek Federation ideal where you can have your favorite food assembled in a kitchen gadget, where the color of your skin or other physical features don't matter, and where life is valued over individual wealth. Alternatively, it means that we (humans as a whole) are moving backwards towards a more feudal state where dictators of nation states, entitled nobility, and the 1% get to do whatever they want to the rest of us.

But don't worry...we are already far below the all time high and still a little bit above the all time low. What does this mean? Well, it means that despite the crowing of the left over the 'blue wave' last week, that what progress was actually made is being sabotaged. Now, here is the thing - the left doesn't actually want to live in a futuristic utopia...they want to live in a very similar economic world to the right - the difference is that the left acknowledges scientific evidence about climate change, the obvious roles of racism and sexism in power politics, and doesn't tend to be as buffoonish when it comes to things like religion and sexuality. This is what gives the country a boost when Dems win - the problem this time is that there is an entire camp within the democratic party who are every bit as dangerous as the Trump-know-nothings who are currently in charge - yes Hillary Clinton would have been a better option to Donald Trump, but she would still have driven us lower if she continued to follow the neocon pathway laid out by her husband, the Bush's, and Reagan.

It might seem strange to group Clintons, Bush's, and Reagan together but they are one and the same. Trump is a completely different category. Obama was a completely different category though he followed much of the neocon playbook when it came to war, defense, and international relations - where he was different was on his domestic policies, his views towards science and technology, and his attitude towards religion and sexuality. So essentially, we have four parties in the USA.

Trumpism - essentially fascism and strong man politics based on fear, xenophobia, and racism

Neo-Conservatism - The politics of the Reagan, Bush I, Bush II, and the Clintons with a focus on corporate control of the military industrial government complex

Obamaism - Neocon Foreign Policy with Liberal Domestic Policy

Democratic Socialism - This is the domestic policies of Obama combined with a liberal foreign policy which has never been tried - this could be incredibly dangerous if it becomes evangelical in nature meaning if the DemSos want to export their world view.

Unfortunately, all of these are flawed because they all start from the basis of nationalism and the priority of one nation over all others. There is no viable political party in the USA which views the interests of all people with equality. Right now, there is a massive battle going on between the Neocons and the DemSos for control of the Democratic Party. It does not seem that there is anyone capable of the balancing act which Obama performed for eight years.

We are at an inflection point with a great unknown ahead of us. The unknown lies with the Democratic Socialists - they could lead us to a place of greatness or - if they are rash and can't figure out how to navigate the ship of state in a safe manner - they could lead us to catastrophe.

The next 60 days will be key in figuring out which of those things will take place.

## **State of the World (2019)**

We are all very busy. Very very busy. Especially in the United States and other developed countries. Personally, I think that's by design - I believe it's a massive control mechanism based on the model of 'idol hands are the devil's work' or to put it more clearly 'busy people don't have the time or energy to create problems by rocking the boat'. Our busy-ness (business) is a control state's dream come true.

I admittedly have a problem with thinking - I think too much. My brain never shuts down but just chews and chews and chews on things and carefully observes what comes out of the cud. Mind you, I'm not saying I'm a genius or above average intelligence (I don't believe I am), I'm just saying that I have a problem with being cerebrally inclined and where most people can shut that annoying part of their human-ness down and watch a good sporting event or let some annoying event slide off of them - I don't seem to possess that capability - although meditation definitely helps.

But back to the world. We are moving rapidly towards a massive societal change. I think of it as humanity being in lifeboats from a sinking ship on a giant river. There are only so many boats for the survivors to get on and we've occupied them - our boats have careened towards a massive split in the river - the current has picked up considerably - some boats have gone to the left, some have gone to the right, and some have stayed in the center - we know that there is danger ahead on all courses - but we aren't sure what it is.

The middle course, the human tendency towards totalitarianism and massive control and exploitation seems to be carrying the bulk of us. Totalitarianism always ends with an explosion and a huge loss of life. So, let's just say that for those on that path, the channel narrows and pours down into a deep chasm at the bottom of which is a huge deposit of raw sodium (which explodes on contact with water). Most on that course won't survive.

On the right is total free market capitalism - a very small number have followed this because it is scary and loud and disruptive and dangerous - there is a big waterfall at the end and it cascades down to a paradise that ends with humanity achieving all that it dreams of - but it's almost impossible to reach because every time a stream gathers some force - it branches off towards totalitarianism - 'protectionism', 'protected capitalism', 'controlled markets' and more.

On the left is what I call cooperationism - this is another paradise branch of the stream with a healthy world, healthy people, and all of the ills of humanity solved through cooperation - but of course, the tendency towards totalitarianism creates things like 'war communism' 'centralized control' and other 'we're smarter than you and will decide what's best for you' systems.

So, the bad news is that humanity is heading towards a 98% chance of full totalitarianism and

the explosion that follows - there is virtually no chance for our survival. The good news is that there has never been such a great chance that we can fix ourselves and our way of thinking. Do I think we will? No. Do I hope we will? Hell yes. There are many small streams which are running towards paradise scenarios.

People are finally rethinking cars and 'reinventing the wheel'. People are looking at the planet as what it is - a giant spaceship that carries all of us through a dangerous universe. I believe that more and more people are starting to see the very real possibilities and power of working together despite cultural differences.

So where does that leave us? It leaves us in March of 2019. We are on the verge of a tyrant seizing power in the United States, the peaceful cooperation of Europe seems to be crumbling with Brexit, the world has been so degraded by our actions that we have somewhere between 20-100 years before it is uninhabitable for us, unemployment is down and servitude is up, and - finally - there are technological disruptions coming on such a massive scale that the old apple cart is going to get blown up. We don't have a choice about changing - we will have to.

## **The Mueller Fiasco (2019)**

I'm not sure what Democrats were expecting, but they sure as hell didn't get it. Over the course of this thing, I certainly allowed my hopes to create fantasies of Trump getting impeached, skewered, and locked up in jail - but that was early on. As the thing dragged on and on, I started to realize that if there were evidence of treason or anything similar - the investigation would have given us some indicator early on. Instead, what they did was hand off a series of Trump cronies as they uncovered unremarkable greedy capitalist crimes and a whole slew of scumbag moves by Trump and his crew that didn't come anywhere close to the high crimes that Democrats and those of us who are disgusted by Trump wanted...

As we passed the two year mark, I began to realize that we had waited too long to go about impeaching this scumbag and it was that realization that reminded me that Mueller was a George W. Bush Republican appointee as FBI director and that he was put in his current role by the Trump justice department. So, a Republican appointee Republican appointed by Republicans investigating Republicans - yeah - that was never going to be a party destroying report. I'm not saying he lied or didn't do his job honorably - but it's pretty doubtful that the guy had any desire to destroy the party that he'd been a part of for his entire life and give Democrats the tools they needed to take the presidency, congress, and more. Was never going to happen.

It just goes against unchangeable human nature. Then add in that Trump JUST appointed a new attorney general who has a favorable view of Trump and the senate is still under

Trump/Republican control and that Democrats had built themselves up into a serious frenzy that put them on the edge of a cliff - while balancing a 'green new deal' 'socialism' and a resurgent stock market on top of their heads. It was like a present to the Republican crooks.

So, no surprise and only minor disappointment. It wouldn't surprise me if eventually we learn that there was a back room deal made with Mueller - whether threats, blackmail, cash, or even something like a deal where Trump agreed to give up his plans of Tyranny, sever his ties with the Kremlin, or change course -

I realize that last sounds outlandish...but think about it for a second. A report that said Trump was a puppet of the Kremlin would have torn the country apart. It would have invalidated the election of 2016, created chaos, weakened the Presidency, and could have even led to the destruction of the USA....so...what if, instead, they simply got the situation under control - buried the truth for the good of the country - and simply move on and wait for the 2020 election to normalize things

## **Dominators and Cooperators (2019)**

The problems in the world can be traced to one group of people - no, it's not an ethnicity, religion, or nationality. It's a mindset.

**Dominators.** Dominators are those who believe they should be able to force the world to do what they want. Not just single people but communities, states, nations, and even the whole planet. This mindset has created every problem we face in the world.

**Terrorism** - people who were dominated and learned the dominator behaviors. Terrorism is literally the act of attempting to force the world to do what you want with fear and intimidation.

**Colonialism** - people at a higher level of technology dominating people with a lower level of technology

**Racism** - the attempt of one group of people to assert dominance over another group based on skin color (same for nationalism but with nationality)

**Global Warming** - attempts to dominate nature with catastrophic results

And the list goes on and on - it's September 11, 2019 - 18 years since the terrorist attacks. A child born that day becomes an adult today. Things have only gotten worse since that time. We've all lost. We've lost our freedom, liberty, privacy, time, money, and mental health. We've lost lives. We've lost democracy. We've lost our minds.

Buddhism tells us that fighting hatred or anger with hatred or anger is always a way to lose. We can't all be good buddhists or christians and love our enemies - but there is a practical way to overcome these problems. It's been there all along -waiting for us. Cooperation.

Cooperating with each other, cooperating with the planet, cooperating between nations, states, and individuals.

The problem, of course, stays the same. The dominators. The dominators have an unfair advantage. Here is how it works:

Cooperator + cooperator leads to cooperation - everyone wins

Dominator + dominator leads to domination - everyone loses except single entity that dominates the rest

Dominator + cooperator leads to domination - everyone loses except single entity that dominates the rest

Whenever a dominator (individual, society, company) encounters a cooperator (individual, society, company) the cooperator is faced with a choice - be dominated or become a dominator. This dilemma leads to a world that is increasingly ruled by dominator behavior and entities. It becomes increasingly hard to even think about cooperation.

Many have tried to overcome this Catch-22 and few (if any) have succeeded. If they have succeeded, they do so by existing outside the notice of the dominators. Secret societies of cooperators and esoteric sufis. And all it takes to destroy them is notice by a dominator and the will of that dominator to do what dominators all do - to dominate.

I believe there is a way out of this mess. I believe it is the way out of all of our messes. It's a way that we don't have the will or the fortitude to take because it will be messy and ugly. On that morning 18-years ago, we were presented with horror and tragedy but we were also presented with opportunity - an opportunity to not respond to domination with domination - but we failed. We created a hellish world of never ending war, violence, and domination on the political, economic, and personal levels.

What is the way out?

Cooperation. Those who are cooperators need to join hands, join forces, and join hearts. We need to clearly state what is acceptable in a cooperative world and what is not acceptable in a cooperative world. We need to make a declaration of independence from domination and dominator behavior. And then - the hard part that we must do or we will fail. When a person, a company, a country engages in dominator behavior they need to be totally and completely stripped of everything. Stripped of money, stripped of family, stripped of diplomatic status, stripped of resources, and on an extreme individual level - stripped of life. This is our only way out of the downward spiral we have become trapped in.

How do you recognize a dominator? Easy. They are in it for themselves and don't care about the cost to others, the cost to the future, the cost to the planet, or the cost to humanity. Dominators must be destroyed or completely disempowered. We cannot out-dominate the dominators, we can only destroy or disempower them completely. It is the only way.

## **Manifesto of a Cultural Terrorist by Oscar Wallace (2020)**

(I wrote this in response to it being mentioned on a fictional TV show but attributed it to a TV character. The Netflix show Messiah has drawn a lot of attention to this document and the pseudo-fictional identity of Oscar Wallace. It's one of those 'this is a work of fiction' moments that really isn't. )

### The Manifesto of a Cultural Terrorist by Oscar Wallace

The squeaky wheel gets the grease, or so it is said. Though, in some cases, the squeaky wheel inspires just enough annoyance and loss of sleep that it brings the victim to an epiphany - an idea that might not otherwise seem worthwhile, rational or possible. It may be that the role of violence and fear in terrorism has been vastly over rated by those who use it. Terrorism, after all, is simply a course of political action where no other means is available. Yes, violence is one means - but not a very good one because as the Buddha said - there is no cure for violence except an act of love - and in our world - acts of love are nearly never adjudicated, legislated, or ordered. So, violence, as we have seen countless times simply begets more violence - and those who have the most power usually have the ability to enact the greatest violence leading to spirals of genocide like we've seen burst out in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Make no mistake - these are acts of genocide. The bombing and starving of a million Iraqi children is not 'peace keeping'. We see that which you worship and we despise it.

There is no such thing as an absence of worshiping. Everybody worships. The atheist worships their life. The deist worships their god. The capitalist worships their power. The masses worship their masters. The only choice we get is what to worship. The most compelling reason for choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship is that anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already - it's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness. We believe that the sacred cows must be slaughtered.

However, our goal here is not to rationalize violent terrorism. Our goal is to present an alternative: Cultural Terrorism. I am a cultural terrorist and thus far - no one has died because of my acts - nor do I expect anyone to. I certainly hope that no life is lost in the pursuit of a better world. Cultural Terrorism does not kill people, it simply confuses them and causes them to consider ideas that might not otherwise seem worthwhile, rational or possible.

A terrorist who hijacks an airplane or plants a bomb in a crowded shopping center apparently

doesn't care who gets hurt as long as they achieve their aim. That innocent people are turned into bloody corpses or maimed for life is not a concern. The cultural terrorist is no different. The cultural terrorist, an assassin of the future, an executioner of obscene morality. Cultural terrorism, an attitude, a state of mind - not a set of values to be dogmatically followed. Cultural terrorism is a celebration of the power of the individual to affect the future from the present.

Our aim is to pollute the minds of the public, to sow the seeds of sanity into an insane society. The victims are of all ages - everybody from the cradle to the grave - and we aim to liberate them. Man cannot bear too much reality and as a result of this the cultural terrorist is in the business of providing a reality attack. An over exposure of reality that brings down the curtain - the dirt behind the day dream. No subject is taboo, all must be exposed. No one is sacred. Everybody as well as everything should feel the wrath of the cultural terrorist. The object of cultural terrorism is to exploit situations and people in order to cause a change that no one sees coming. Our aim is to make war upon the concepts and foundations of civilization itself. We will tear into the heart of all that is considered normal but which is truly foul. We are the white blood cells that would painfully destroy bio-toxins even if it destroys our host culture. We are working to erase the conforming instinct. To prevent humanity from ever acting with a lemming's will.

The cultural terrorist's weapons are a digital media, film, video, audio cassettes, music, photocopiers, printed words, pictures - any media whatsoever is acceptable as long as it achieves the objective. We are little concerned how much our material appeals to the very lowest of emotions, or how much the material twists and pollutes controlled minds. We believe nothing is impossible, there is no god stopping us, there is no morality compelling us, so we manipulate our environment to its fullest extent. Plagiarism is not only acceptable it is preferred. We believe that you should not be afraid to steal from anyone and that property itself is an affront. Our way is that of the liar and trash receptor. We know that the bigger the lie the better the chance of people believing it but also know that small lies sometimes carry a heavy load. Undercover communication is the enemy of crime not politics.

Elaborate safeguards may be placed at airports to separate would-be terrorists from their weapons. But we, the cultural terrorists are free to distribute our soul confusing information to whom and where we choose. The cultural terrorist is neither benevolent nor evil. Pull the wool over your own eyes in a call to arms. We feel vehemently that an active role of participation should be taken in this struggle by people already interested in this form of warfare. The cultural terrorist is involved in every act of revolutionary suicide while protesting the conditions of an inhuman world. Cultural terrorism is the antidote to this society and our thought-bombs will tear open wounds that may never again heal. Tomorrow belongs to us. Confusion as a weapon. Confusion as the word.

Confusion sparks the need to question. Confusion calling the adrenaline to flow, the blood rush and the life force to sit up and take a break while the soul of present civilization floods. Confusion making us question everything in search of (un)sense. Everything deserves to be probed into. Indulging in whatever subjects we are attracted to. Making our lives more

interesting while stripping false meaning from the lives of those surrounding us. No subject holds a taboo. Unrecognizable confusion superimposed on boring reality.

We stand everywhere and nowhere. We wade in cool rivers and do forced marches through waves of dog shit. We provide the tickets for a mindfuck to oblivion ... A disjointed, chaotic and rapidly decaying globe is our target. Gladly we take our part in the ejaculation of war in a heedless way. Ours is a wide open mouth sucking the balls of a busty woman. Ours is a wide open gut-wound wrapped around a throbbing shaft of capitalism. Ours is the shitting of the junk food you line up to consume. This stink and defiance of dead unicorns wrapped in bloody blankets protesting too much free candy and not enough mescaline. We face backwards to fuck off from "peer group pressure". No attempt is made to conform, no attempt to speak explanation or confront truth nor power in the manufactured words that decry consent. Their words and our actions. We fight against those who would control our minds and our bodies, we offer hope to those born into chattel information slavery, and we offer our bodies as the bullets that will destroy your mental infrastructure. In this our weapons are our very lives.

We smash and we run but only to smash and run. We leave the capitalist control systems unable to conduct business and yet uninjured but totally useless. We remain uninjured and leave the looting for those who don't know any better, stuff is a burden we do not need for fulfillment.

## **Not My America**

As I write this, in July of 2020, federal agents in camouflage uniforms are driving around the city of Portland, Oregon in unmarked vehicles and abducting protestors without due process or reading them their rights. That's not my America.

Locking kids in cages is not my America. Kids getting shot in schools, people getting shot at a movie theater, mass shootings of any kind – that's not my America. Trump manipulating Facebook to win the White House, that's not my America.

It's not my America where black men are arrested, harassed, or questioned by armed police because they are black. It's not my America where parents have to have some version of 'the talk' with their kids because they have to understand they will be discriminated against because they are not white (or not straight or not male or not Christian).

Trump is not my America. The Republicans and Democrats are not my America. Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Tesla, and Apple are not my America. Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffet, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Tim Cook are not my America. My America isn't a product or a company or a billionaire or a politician or a political party.

My America is not a place where lobbyists buy elections, where pharmaceutical companies reap huge rewards shilling opiates to doctors, or where landscapes are destroyed, water is polluted, and air is made poison so that shareholders and executives can buy mansions. My America is not a place where small businesses are gobbled up by conglomerates and powerful monopolies are excused with a wink-wink and a nudge-nudge.

My America is not a place where people can't afford medicine or treatment. My America is not a place where seniors have to go to eat cat food or starve. My America is not a place where some people eat \$1000 meals and others don't eat at all. My America is not a place where the mentally ill are thrown onto the streets while the wealthy buy yachts. My America is not a place where money buys elections. My America is not a place where money buys freedom. My America is not a place where money buys life. My America is not a place where children are sacrificed for the economy.

My America isn't invading Iraq or running a twenty year war in Afghanistan. My America isn't fighting with allies to defeat the Islamic State and then abandoning them to be destroyed by Turkish, Syrian, and Russian troops. My America doesn't destroy people's lives because they are sick and need medical help. My America doesn't require people to pay insurance companies. My America doesn't separate families who are trying to escape war. My America doesn't turn away hard working people who want to be American. My America doesn't steal people's homes or prevent them from starting a business because they aren't rich.

My America doesn't turn a pandemic into a political battle. My America doesn't ignore disease experts and endanger children to score political points. My America doesn't have every Senator

who goes to congress become a millionaire. My America isn't run by greed and corruption. My America doesn't pay women less for the same job men do. My America doesn't lead the developed world in infant mortality. My America doesn't make it so expensive to miss work that people go into work sick and pass illness on to their co-workers. My America doesn't spend more on weapons and military than any country in the world and rank number sixty-five in education on spending.

My America does not incarcerate more of their population than any other country. My America doesn't export more weapons than any other country in the world. My America doesn't create the most wealth inequality in the industrialized world. My America is not dominated by a religious philosophy that is only a thinly disguised excuse for greed, misogyny, homophobia, and hatred. My America is not a place filled with obese people with guns. My America is not manipulated by dictators, despots, oligarchs, and an aristocracy of wealth.

My America is not a place where one person's voice or vote is worth more than another persons.

All of this is America but it's not *my* America.

This America, the one we live in, the one I described above...it needs to go away. It needs to change or die and, my friends, it has passed the point where it can change.

America needs to die.

## **My America - What's Next?**

It's been an amazing experiment. For two hundred and forty-four years America has run an experiment in self governance. It has been an inspiration and a light to the world. It has succeeded on so many levels and it has failed on so many more.

The biggest success of America has been in demonstrating to the world that a living document, like the American Constitution, can generally set the course of power. The system of checks and balances has performed admirably though of late, it has been eroded.

America showed that power does not have to be hereditary. America showed that there can be a peaceful change of course as power is handed off from one person to another. It was George Washington, in some ways the best President (but in some ways one of the worst) who made this possible. He could have been king. They wanted him to be king. The colonists needed him to be king – but he stepped down. He stepped aside. He demonstrated what the peaceful transfer of power could look like.

America was built on the backs of slaves. America stole land from the Native Americans and committed genocide on them. America stole land from freed slaves and free blacks, America stole land from Mexicans and Spaniards, America stole entire countries like Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii but in some cases gave them back and in others gave them equality. America has failed in so many ways, but in others, she has succeeded beyond what anyone could have imagined.

America sent people to the moon, fought a brutal war with herself to end slavery, and rose to the challenge of joining with our allies to defeat Nazi fascism. America built the most incredible industrial base the world had ever seen. America became a nation of immigrants and embraced the idea of being a melting pot (not without many trials and tribulations and many failures, to be truthful).

In two-hundred and forty-four years, America demonstrated the best and worst that humanity could be. It's three times as long as most humans live. A child born in 1776 conceivably could have lived to eighty-one years old and seen the American Civil War. A child born at that time could have lived to 1938 and seen the Great Depression. A child born at that time could have lived until today and seen the rise of American fascism with Donald Trump and his know-nothing followers. Each of these could have been the end of America, but so far, none of them have been. That eighty-one year old in each case may have expected this to be the end of America. We survived.

I don't think we can survive this. I don't think we should survive this. America needs to die.

I'm not saying that the ideas of America need to die. I'm not saying that the country needs to explode like so many others have. I'm saying that it's time for something new, just like it was time for the Declaration of Independence, the forced signing of the Magna Carta, or the 13<sup>th</sup>

Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which ended slavery. It's time for a new document. It's time for a new definition. It's time for a new path forward.

Our world has changed too much. Our world has grown too different from the world that the defining document of America was written in. We need to convene a new Constitutional Convention. We need to create a new Constitution and we need to redefine what we are, who we are, what matters to us, and how we will move forward. We cannot do that with the current constitution. It has been subverted, worked around, and corrupted. We cannot move forward with the current institutions. They have been subverted, worked around, and corrupted. We cannot move forward with the current or past leadership. They have been subverted, worked around, and corrupted. America must die.

In that death, we must birth something new. I don't know what that will be. It is something we must create together.

I know what I would like to see. I would like to see the birth of the America I dream of, the America I love, the America we could be. I'd love to see my America – no matter what it be called.

My America is a place where the over-riding objective is the liberation of all human beings from the misery and suffering of poverty, hunger, homelessness, violence, lack of medical treatment, exploitation, enslavement, and ignorance.

I would like to see an America where people are represented by themselves, not by parties or delegates or corporations. Not by lobbyists or platforms or politicians. I would love to see an America where power resides at the bottom and decisions are made from the bottom. I would love to see an America where the bottom isn't the bottom at all but simply the base of representative power which can be recalled as soon as it is no longer representative.

We live in a time when technology has given us the tools to distribute power. There needs to be no concentration of power. It is the anarchist's foolish dream to eliminate power, but it can never be achieved. Power exists and it must be dealt with. The only way to do that is by distributing it fairly.

Why do forty-million Californians only have two senators while 40 million Americans distributed over twenty smaller population states have forty senators? Why are districts which assign representatives cut up and assigned by politicians? It's time to deal with these questions. The states are no longer representative of the people, the federal government is even less representative of the people, even large cities are no longer representative of the people.

Towns, villages, neighborhoods, and municipalities. These are representative but they have little to no power in our system. Why not create councils with delegates from these represented bodies? Why not make the delegates instantly recallable and fireable if they do not represent the people they are asked to speak for? Why not have total transparency in every matter? We have the ability to create immutable ledgers that distribute power.

Money and capital are power. They need to be dealt with. Resources are power and they need to be dealt with.

When I picture My America, I see towns and neighborhoods determining their own fate without interference from above. If those municipalities choose badly, they lose power that is distributed from partnerships and con-federalization with other municipalities. It's not perfect, but it's a better representative system than we have now.

If homelessness were solely a local issue and local councils were fully empowered, do you think it would be an issue? Do you think neighboring municipalities would empower a district that didn't take care of problems (which would eventually spill over, as they always do)? The same for other issues.

In My America, power comes from people meeting in school cafeterias not from pharmaceutical lobbyists meeting over \$1000 a plate fund-raising dinners. The power of those people in the school cafeterias goes to the council representing all the school cafeterias. Those council members choose delegates (recallable) to go to the larger con-federal councils and so on.

In My America, you have the freedom to make whatever business you choose and the freedom to run it however you choose but you do not have the freedom to control the health, home, time, or future of your fellow humans. If you work, you have a say in the business. Workplace councils are just as important as municipal councils. Our current system is nothing but a thinly disguised feudalism. Workers are serfs and owners are lords. We need to end these dysfunctional relationships.

In My America we don't export bombs and munitions, we export ideas. We export food if we can and medical help if we are able. We export our ideas and the means to implement them. In My America we offer shelter to the shelterless and food to the hungry. Does this mean we are defenseless? No. In My America, everyone learns how to safely use a gun and if they are mentally sound (as determined by their community) they can have one. In My America defense is a necessity not an industry.

In My America education is not an industrial system designed to produce workers. In My America education is tailored to each student and teachers are among the most respected of professions. If a student only wants to learn how to make mud, they learn to make concrete and build with it. If mixing the mud is as far as they want to go, then so be it. If they want to go further and learn about architecture, math, drawing, engineering, and physics – they are guided and encouraged – no matter what their age.

I have ideas and I have ideals but I'm not an expert on all of these things. This is why community and equal representation is essential. I don't have all the answers. No one does. I have some ideas of what My America looks like.

And I know two things for certain. There is not an American alive who would whole-heartedly support all that America has become. This America has failed and this America needs to die.

My America can never exist while this America continues.

How do we kill off America? There are many ways.

My choice is that we don't do it with violence. We don't do it with war. We do it by working from the least effective to the most effective.

It starts with school boards. People who want to see power evenly distributed and believe in this cause must run for office. The smallest and least important offices. They must gain control of those school boards and empower them. They must take power from the cities and give it to the neighborhood boards and the school boards. Then they must run for those city and neighborhood boards and take power from the counties and distribute it downward. Then they must take the power from the states and distribute it downwards. Then they must take the power from the American Federal Government and distribute it downwards. Then, they must vote themselves out of existence, just as the Soviet Union did.

From there, those empowered boards and municipalities need to convene and create a new system, a new constitution, a new way of moving forward. That is how I dream of us moving forward. That is how I have always dreamed of us moving forward.

Or maybe it comes from the top. Maybe those at the top of the power structure suddenly become rational and altruistic. Maybe they decide to vote themselves out of existence. Maybe they save us all the trouble of organizing. This seems less likely to me.

Unfortunately, the most likely scenario seems to be the one we are watching unfold. A power mad despot seizes power and forces us into a violent revolt. Millions of people die from a pandemic because of his hunger for power. Elections are turned into a sham and the people are forced into a reckoning because America has been murdered. The exploitive economy moves wealth and power ever faster from the bottom to the top. People are turned into products. The masters control our fate with a thumbs up or down.

That is not my America. This is not my America. My America is a dream that exists in the souls of every child who yearns for a life of fulfillment and adventure. My America is a goal that humans have sought from the time we first stood upright. I dream of My America, whatever it may be called.