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PRANKSTER QUESTIONAIRE

By

Matthew Landan
B.A., University of Oregon, 2000

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2014

PRANSTER QUESTIONAIRE

By

Matthew Landan
B.A., University of Oregon, 2000

A Thesis Approved on

November 24, 2014

by the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director
Matthew Biberman

Thesis Co-Director or Second Committee Member
Aaron Jafee

Third Committee Member Name
Michael Williams

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents

Ms. Renee Lustig

and

Charles Lustig

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Matthew Biberian, for his guidance, humor, insight and patience. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Aaron Jaffe and Dr. Michael Williams, for holding my feet to the fire. I would also like to express my gratitude to my employees at the Haymarket Whiskey Bar. Without their help I would not have had the time to build a business as well as concurrently write a thesis. Their patience with me when the stress of running a bar overlapped with the stress of finishing a Master's thesis was above and beyond the call of duty for any bartender.

ABSTRACT

PRANSTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Matthew Landan

November 24, 2014

The creative thesis that I have written is a memoir. It is not complete in its detail or ambition but instead focuses on themes and topics of self-transformation, reinvention and the unintentional consequences of several nervous breakdowns and experiments with psychedelic substances. This thesis is just a beginning for a longer more drawn out memoir that will explore the themes above but also discuss family, one's sense of self worth in the world and how patterns between fathers and sons repeat themselves. I hope to eventually publish this work in a commercial setting.

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PRANKSTER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name: Matthew Landan
2. Address: 331 E. Market St. Louisville, Kentucky
3. Age: 42 (birthdate 4/17/72; Grateful Dead premiere: "He's Gone" at Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen, Denmark)
4. Phone Number: 502.442.0523
5. Email: Haymarketwhiskeybar@gmail.com
6. Have you read all of the rules sent as an attachment to this email and agree to abide by them while connected with the Bus? Yes
7. Are there any times in Aug/Sept when you are not available? First weekend in August will be in Chicago at Lollapalooza
8. Do you have any ambulatory issues we should know about? No
9. Do you have any dietary restrictions? No

10. Anything else we should know about you?

Born and raised in Chicago, expatriated to Adelaide, Australia at age of 6. Returned to Chicagoland and studied photography and history in high school. Read EKAT in 1988. Bicycled from Seattle to San Francisco in the summer of 1988, then from Rome to Paris in the summer of 1989. Saw first Dead show at Rosemont Horizon in spring 1989. Went on tour after graduation in 1990 and stayed on tour for the most part until Jerry died. Went to jail in Chicago for protesting first Gulf War in January 1991. Moved to Santa Cruz, California, married, and had a son (Quinn) in 1992. Separated, divorced, and moved back to Chicago in 1994 after a weird adventure on the east coast involving Don Juan, phone phreak Inc., the LSD family, Kings Park insane asylum, and a heroic dose. Worked as vendor at Wrigley Field, photographer's assistant, and produce clerk at Whole Foods. Dropped out of college three times (Columbia College in Chicago in 1991, Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz in 1993, and University of Illinois at Chicago in 1995).

Moved to Bend, Oregon in fall of 1995 after Jerry Garcia died. Spent nine months in Bend, moved to PDX, and applied for entrance to the school of journalism at University of Oregon. Went to Europe in 1997 on Phish tour for a month. Tour ended in high spirits in Italy. Stop over in Bari, Italy led to weird visitations from sirens. Returned to Amsterdam for flight home. Missed flight home due to smooshed Banana in back pocket. Locked bags in locker and babysat some mushrooming girls. Next day did not return to airport and instead got a haircut, a change of clothes, and tore up my passport. Mental fugue. Bought a bike, hung out on streets of Amsterdam for a week. Traveled from Amsterdam by bike to Haarlem, and then by train to Bari, Italy, once again sans passport before waking up from the spell. Made way back to Amsterdam, then USA, and then immediately moved to Eugene, Oregon for school. Worked for Tripp Sommer at KLCC radio. Graduated in 2000 with degree in journalism and Italian. Moved to Milan, Italy for internship with Italy daily newspaper. Got job with Telecom Italia Lab in Turin. Moved to Germany in 2002 to take a job with Deutsche Telekom. Also worked for Opel Autos. Grew tired of the corporate life and returned to United States in time for Halloween 2004 after extended

travels in Holland, Spain, Thailand, Laos, and Morocco. Moved to Louisville, Kentucky to be closer to my son, who lived there. Opened Derby City Espresso on April 1, 2007. Failed. Nearly moved to Honduras. Quinn moved to Brooklyn. Closed DCE in December 2011. Reopened as Haymarket Whiskey Bar in January 2012. Named among top whiskey bars in America by Thrillist in 2014.

11. Do you have any problem signing a video release form? No
12. How would you be an asset to the trip? Archivist, photographer, speaker, storyteller, supplier of fine bourbon, sniffer out of the finer weirdness around.
13. Tell us how and why you would make a good Prankster? Permanently psychedelized and ready for adventure. Two toes are webbed together. Perseverance furthers.
14. Do you have the financial ability to get to and from your leg of the trip? (We may be able to arrange some transportation.) yes
15. ...For meals and lodging and camping while on the road? yes
16. ...For tickets to venues or festivals? yes
17. Do you know the directions to Never Never Land? "The second star to the right, and straight on till morning!"
18. What is your spirit animal? Moose
19. Favorite show/venue? Grateful Dead, Alpine Valley 1989; Jerry Garcia and David Grisman Warfield, SF 1994; Phish, Paradiso Amsterdam & Como, Italy summer 1997; Tom Waits, Hult

Center, Eugene, Oregon, 1999; Phil Lesh and Phriends, Warfield, April 1999; Elvin Jones, Rome 2000; Roger Waters, Deer Creek, Indiana, summer 2006; David Byrne, Palace Theater 2011; Wilco, My Morning Jacket, and Bob Weir, Nashville, Tennessee, summer 2013; Replacements, Chicago, Riot Fest, fall 2013; Leonard Cohen, Palace Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, fall 2013; Debauchees and Deloreans at Haymarket Whiskey bar, March 2014.

20. Favorite TV show: Doctor Who

21. If you were a movie character, who would you be and why? The kid. The kid is a great character to play. He's fun, surprising, tenderized, grade A good and solid. Often underestimated, he can show up and in a lickety split change the course of the river.

22. Cartoon character? Rocky the Flying Squirrel

23. Favorite villain? Ming the Merciless

24. Do you like movies about gladiators? Yes

25. Ever been in a Turkish prison? No, but I went to a Honduran jail for jewel theft once.

26. Have you ever been told you snore louder than a train? Nope.

27. Can you cross state lines? Yes, double clutch hoppity scotch.

28. Legally? Yes, yes, yes, internationally as well. Highly proficient at border crossings and scene changes.

29. What is the longest period of time you have gone without sleep? Eight days

30. What is your shoe size after sex? Same as before—somewhere between an eight and a nine.
31. Do you have any special talents or skills? Yep.
32. What are they? Photographer, journalist, archivist, social media and public relations hack, fluent in Italian, conversational in German, capable Spanish; whiskey expert and ambassador, barista and coffee geek
33. If you are a musician, do you have rights to music we can use in the film? Nope but there are some great bands in Louisville that I know that may grant them.
34. You are in a bus full of crazies who paid to be there for the honor and history of the ride. Up ahead is a young man with his thumb out hitching at an on-ramp... what do we do? Slow down, stop, and pick me up!

DON JUAN AND PIERCING THE FIRST VEIL

Don has parked the car, but where? I can't find my shoes. The sounds of the Grateful Dead parking lot engulf and surround me. My mind is overflowing. Somebody is giving me flip-flops. I'm cold. I'm hot. I'm not really concerned with my body. My mind is on fire and I'm like mercury, pure energy. How did I get here? Am I tripping?

I had just separated from my wife the previous summer, and after she left me for another man, I temporarily relocated to Wicker Park in Chicago. There I lived for a time on the couch of the Bop Shop, a jazz bar on Division Street. In exchange for taking the door and turning the gas on and off each night in the basement, Kate Smith, the amazing owner, allowed me unlimited free pinball and a place to sleep. Chicago legends like Von Freeman (father of Chico Freeman) played there regularly. It was the summer of 1993. Wicker Park was still gritty and broke-down. That summer in Chicago was more magical than I knew at the time. Only now, in the beat of my heart, in hindsight, can I see how unique those times were. I was broke, but I had black coffee and free jazz. I had a Cannon camera with which I shot many photographs, now all lost.

It couldn't last. The wife I'd separated from called me back to California to help parent my infant son. As a mensch, I returned out of a sense of obligation (the story repeats; I would leave another beautiful life in Europe a decade later to move to Louisville to once again be close to my son). It didn't last. "Nothing lasts forever" is a truism that has shaped my life more than any other.

Things fall apart and they did just that upon my return to Santa Cruz (Saint's Crossing, I would improperly translate it for years). I ended up homeless, broke, and living on food stamps and the kindness of my good friend, Seth.

Often on the coldest nights I slept on the floor of his micro cabin up in the hills of Boulder Creek, not all that far from La Honda, where Ken Kesey and his band of Merry Pranksters once made history with their weird acid test parties. After the winter of '93, I somehow pulled myself together, got a job through a temp agency working at the University of California Santa Cruz's bookshop selling Banana Slug sweatshirts, Bic pens, and lots of candy. I found a room for rent in a hippie house in downtown Santa Cruz (downtown being a bit of a misnomer; it was a suburban ranch house about a mile away from the center of Santa Cruz). It was there at the house one night, while taking a ketamine trip, that I met Don.

He was an older California hippie in the classic mode. He looked quite a bit like Sam Elliot in *The Big Lebowski* minus the cowboy getup and the full moustache. He made tie-dyes, sold LSD, and hung out at the house quite a bit.

As we got to know one another, I made the fortuitous mistake of telling him how I had learned to make "chingers," or telephone fraud devices (red boxes), back in Chicago from some anarchist friends I had crashed with before moving into the Bop Shop.

A chinger was a small calculator-like device you could buy at Radio Shack. It was for people who still had rotary phones (remember those?) but needed the touch tones. God only knew who would need touch tones but not go ahead and get a touch tone phone. It seems strange to me now that this device even existed, but then again, pagers also seem an incredibly odd bastard half-evolution of technology as we approached the dawn of the cellular age. So you would buy the chinger for \$25 to \$30 at Radio Shack. It had a keypad like a phone on the front and a speaker on the back. My anarchist buddies, whom I had first met back in the cold and desolate winter of 1990 at the protests of the (first) Gulf War, had taught me how to remove the four tiny screws holding the chinger together and pluck out the frequency chip responsible for producing the sounds that mimicked the touch tones on the phone. In its place we would insert another chip, one that raised the touch tone frequencies significantly. Back in the '90s nearly all the pay phones in America were operated by Ma Bell. True, the monopoly had just been broken and the rise of the baby bells was underway, but the flotsam of the original Bell empire was the pay phone system.

A quick discourse on pay phone operation: When you put a coin into a pay phone, it completed a circuit as it slid down into the coin box. This circuit, once completed would send a DTMF (dual-tone-multi-

frequency) signal over the line to the central switching unit. When the central unit had received enough of these signals, signifying you had placed adequate money into the phone, it would connect your call.

When we would change the frequency chip inside of the chinger, it allowed us to mimic the tone sent by the pay phone to the central box. The new chip reproduced the 1700 Hz and 2200 Hz tones together.

Badda-boom, badda-bing, you've now committed telephone fraud (a crime that back then carried a ten-year sentence with a corresponding \$10,000 fine for each offense). Once you built the chinger you could go up to any Bell pay phone in America, dial your long distance call, and the primitive robotic metallic female voice would come on the line. "Please deposit \$2.35 for the next three minutes." Instead of putting money into the phone, we would put noise. A noise like, "beep-beep-beep-beep-beep" equaled a quarter. Now those beeps happened pretty quickly, one 66-millisecond tone represented a nickel. Five in succession equaled a quarter. It really sounded like be-be-be-be-beep Do this over and over again until the early computerized operator was satiated and connected your call. Magic. Phone Phreaking. Voila. Free phone calls from anywhere in America to anywhere in the world.

Well, Don saw some real potential in my skill. Up until now chingers were fringe devices seldom seen and usually only in the hands of anarchists and random greasy-haired phone phreaks who looked like Buddy Bradley out of a Peter Bagge comic. Don suggested I try to sell these at Grateful Dead shows. Deadheads travel all the time. Many of them need to be able to make anonymous phone calls to make connections with various nefarious criminals and family members. The chinger could facilitate this perfectly. Up until this time the preferred method of making free phone calls while traveling the country and seeing the Dead was via stolen calling card numbers (also a kind of phone fraud). The only catch with those were: (1) someone got the bill and on that bill would be the number of the drug kingpin you had called in Miami; (2) they only lasted a few days or a few weeks, depending on when they were stolen and how deep into the billing cycle. As soon as Ms. Smith got her bill and saw all those CRAZY calls from Boise, to California, from Tempe to New York City and god knows where else, she would sure as shit is slippery shut the calling card number down.

So the chinger could change all that. First off, the calls were truly anonymous. No one even knew a fraudulent call had been made until whoever was responsible for emptying the pay phone's coin box went

to do just that. The phone would have a record of \$50 worth of calls having been made, but uh-oh, there's only \$40 in the coin box. Which was the fraudulent call? Who knew? Perfect.

So, off Don and I go traveling from Santa Cruz to San Francisco, where we attend a Jerry Garcia concert at the Warfield Theater. Again, I have to note how oblivious I am to how fucking magical this time and place is. To have seen Jerry Garcia in the last years of his life playing acoustic guitar with mandolin player extraordinaire David Grisman was a rare experience. Truth be told, it was one of the last five shows the two men would ever play together. I look back now and see how lucky I was to be there. In that precise moment, and it is there at this show outside the Warfield at 982 Market St. in the heart of the Tenderloin, that I sold my first chinger for \$300.

Thus the model was proven, and word begins to spread. We were going to make a fortune. For an investment of \$30 to a sale price of \$300, Don and I hatch a plan to go on the spring tour with the Dead. From Oakland, California to Phoenix, Arizona, to the Rosemont Horizon outside of Chicago, Richfield, Ohio, Nassau Coliseum on Long Island New York, finishing with Atlanta, Orlando, and Miami, Florida. Only I would never make it to Miami.

Don has parked the car, but where? We are at the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island in New York. I can't find my shoes. The sounds of the Grateful Dead parking lot engulf me, surround me, and my mind is overflowing. Where are my shoes? I'm freezing. I'm manic. Where's Don Juan? It's March in New York. The spring equinox has just passed. I'm tripping on more acid than I have ever eaten in my life, but I'm so high I don't even know I'm high. I'm not myself. I'm not anybody. I am the total sum of my collected experiences and subconscious, but "Matthew Landan" has left the building.

Only later would I come to understand what had happened to me, that Don was a junkie and with nearly \$15,000 on the table from our chinger business he had decided the time was ripe to cut me out of the deal. Take me out of the picture. And when you're a brujo like Don Juan, this is easy enough to do.

One gram of lysergic acid diethylamide is equivalent to a sugar packet (also one gram). Yet it only takes 90-100 micrograms of LSD to activate its effects on the average human mind. So imagine if you licked the tip of your finger and just barely for the briefest of moments touched the spilled contents of a packet of sugar. How many micrograms is that? How many millionths of a gram are now sticking to your finger? Welcome to the world of cysing or being thumbprinted. Cysing is a term used when one takes or

is given some amount of raw LSD crystal. Typically, a gram of LSD is broken down into either 100 vials each containing 100 drops (with each drop containing roughly 100 micrograms of the psychotropic substance), or 100 sheets of perforated paper each containing 100 hits of acid. Crying is like taking a whole sheet or drinking a whole vial. It's enough to drive anyone out of his mind.

And after Don Juan thumbprinted me, I was out of my mind. After we parked the car at the Coliseum and I got out, I never found the car again. I'll never know exactly how or when he dosed me. I was high already in the car when we arrived in Nassau. Once out of the car I wandered around the Dead parking lot all day. When the show was starting, I tried to turn myself invisible so I could get in. Over and over again I tried to sneak into the show. Needless to say it didn't work. Still, shortly thereafter I was given a free ticket.

I walked in as the band was playing "Way to Go Home," the lyrics a poignant wake up call to me as I danced my way toward the front of the stage:

Who do you want to be?
What do you need to set your body free?
I don't mean to pry this ain't no third degree
But looking at you baby you remind myself of me
If there's anyway to tell you anyway, anyway to persuade
I'd really love to spare you the mistakes I've made
It's a long long long long way to go home
It's a long long long long way to go home
Any, which way you are tempted to go
It's a long long long long long long long long way way to go home

The show chugged on like a steam engine, the twin drummers keeping time, Jerry Garcia's ethereal alluvial flood of guitar notes, and Phil Lesh's booming bass. And then the show was over and I was back outside the Nassau Coliseum.

Don has parked the car, but where? I can't find my shoes. I search in vain for the car as the lot empties out. The sounds of the Grateful Dead parking lot engulf me, surround me, and my mind is overflowing. Somebody is giving me flip-flops. I'm cold. I'm hot. I'm not really concerned with my body. My mind is on fire and I'm like mercury. Pure energy. How did I get here? Am I tripping? I never find the car. Eventually the lot empties and I wander off in search of people and shelter. I find a sleazy motel. Deadheads fill every room and overflow into the hallway. Horrible unspeakable things are going on inside

the rooms. Heroin is being shot up prostitution, and lord knows what else. How do I know? I can just sense it. I shouldn't be here, but it's cold outside and I'm exhausted.

The night went on forever and the next day at dawn I left that cursed Motel and wandered away from the scene of the shows. All day I wandered around Long Island. From Nassau to Hempstead, past Hofstra University and on and on I walked. I know for sure that for some time I walked on and along some train tracks. I know at one point I got on the Long Island Rail Road. I know at one point I threw away all the money I had remaining in my pockets.

Night fell again eventually and I found myself on a lonely street lit by just one streetlamp. The sign appeared to read, "Peter Cotton Tail Lane" and a feeling of homecoming swept over me. The house on the corner looked warm and inviting. I realized I was home, back in Oregon, and that I was a merry prankster and had been tripping and all this time had been flipping through time like Philip K. Dick in *Valis*. That in fact it wasn't the 1990s, it was the 1970s. I walked up the steps to the Cape Cod-style home. I opened the door and walked right through the door.

The family sitting on the couch watching TV was shocked at my appearance. Instantly and empathically, I knew this was not my home, and this was not the 1970s in Oregon. They shot up and demanded to know who I was. Turning on my heel, I walked back out of the house. Did I say something? Was I speaking in tongues? What a mess I was, in tie-dye pants, a light windbreaker, and some shoes that were too big for my feet and had been given to me, creating blisters that I couldn't even feel. I thought they were flip-flops, but I was wrong. My hair was wild and tangled. I hadn't eaten or slept in at least two days. I started to walk away from the house when they piled out the door behind me.

"Hey, wait a second, are you OK?"

I paused. They gathered around me and I felt safe. The next thing I knew a police cruiser had pulled up. The two cops got out and discussed me with the occupants of the house. Then they approached me. For whatever reason I was in no mind to resist or feel fear as they handcuffed me. Maybe I was just tired of all the walking around and confusion, and anyone who wanted to put me into a nice warm car was a welcome relief. Or maybe it was because I was hallucinating that they weren't even cops. That agents of the B.I.A. were picking me up: the Beautiful Intelligence Agency, a fantasy I had once concocted about secret agents on the path to love and enlightenment. Either way, off I went, hands cuffed behind my back, in the

back of the squad car. Off we drove to the emergency room where they deposited me into the care of the staff. Everyone knew this could happen, by God. The Grateful Dead were in town for five days. There was bound to be a couple of acid casualties.

A nurse washed my feet and applied salve to my blistered feet and swaddled them in bandages. I felt loved. The attention paid to me warmed me. They gave me yogurt to eat and as each spoonful went down my throat I felt it explode with energy and nutrition on its way to my stomach, exploding like mini atomic bombs. Each spoonful brought me slightly back to my senses from the sleep-deprived hyperthermia and delusional state I was in. I wasn't out of the woods yet. The trip would end up continuing for much of the next week. But this was the peak and it was all downhill from here.

After some hours overnight in the emergency room—I'll never know how many, or even the exact timeline of how the week played out, was it two days on the streets or three? All I know for certain is the show I had seen was on Thursday, March 24, 1994. Was this Saturday? Sunday? Two orderlies arrived and asked if I wanted to come with them. When they showed me the straightjacket I knew I did. They bundled me up in it, which I for some reason thought was cool. Maybe I thought this was my big escape scene, that I was a minor Houdini. Or was this my R. P. McMurphy scene? Who can say where my mind was? I can only tell you my mind, that is Matthew Landan's mind, was not in my head. They walked me to an ambulance and loaded me in. As we drove away from the emergency room, the driver looked over his shoulder and asked me, "Hey kid, want to listen to the radio? Do you like rock and roll?" I replied in the affirmative and the next thing I knew it was Jerry Garcia's voice on the radio singing the opening lyrics to "Touch of Grey":

Must be getting early
Clocks are running late
Paint by number morning sky
Looks so phony
Dawn is breaking everywhere
Light a candle curse the glare
Draw the curtains
I don't care 'cause
It's all right
I will get by I will get by
I will get by I will survive

They drove me to the King's Park Psychiatric Center. Established in 1885, it was a brooding gothic castle of a building, a place of nightmares, a place with chains in the basement where they used to

lock up the inmates. There they asked me if I wanted to check myself in. I asked them what the difference was if I did or didn't. The clerk at the front desk told me that if I didn't check myself in the state would have me committed and it would be much more difficult to get back out. Happily, I agreed to check myself in, so I guess my mind was beginning to function with some logic even if it wasn't 'me' at the helm.

I spent the next week on the ward. Like a scene out of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo Nest*, I happily pattered away with the rest of the lunatics. Except, I wasn't insane. I was just out of my mind on LSD. It might seem silly to differentiate the two to you, but not to me. One of the strangest things I remember about that first night on the ward was how on the TV they were showing the film *Falling Down*. In the film Michael Douglas plays an unemployed defense worker who goes nuts and starts lashing out violently in Los Angeles. It was strange fare to show the patients in an insane asylum.

After some days, I was able to communicate to the nurses on the ward that I no longer wanted to eat the little red pills they had been giving me. I had guessed they were tranquilizers and had decided I wanted no more drugs in my system. A day later I was able to explain to them what had happened to me and give them my parent's contact information. After nearly a week in the asylum, I was finally coming down from the trip. "Matthew Landan" had reentered the building. I wasn't the same person I was before I went on this trip, but I was myself once again. It was as if I was the Doctor (Who?) and I had just regenerated. Yet, unlike Doctor Who's mind which remained the same and while his body regenerated it was my body that was the same and my mind that was totally different.

Soon thereafter, I was released from King's Park. I was put onto a flight back to Chicago, where my father received me. A few weeks later I would turn 22. For him, it was the culmination of everything negative he had believed about me: that I was a drug addict, a failure, and without hope. He placed me on a strict regime of tough love: daily narcotics anonymous meetings, strict sobriety, and an internship with a local photographer. I had to pay my father rent and do chores. I had to pick up his dry cleaning and do his dishes and grocery shopping. To be honest, it was a worse trip living with him over the next three months than the actual ten days of my trip on Long Island. He belittled me constantly and sought to break me.

For years, this episode hung like a shadow over our relationship. Even now as he slides into old age and forgetfulness, I remember how poorly he treated me at the time. I remained totally sober for some months after returning from New York. Even after I had moved out of my father's home, yet it was while

living with him that I realized I wasn't a drug addict. One day my father returned home from a business trip. I had been working as a Cracker-Jack vendor at Wrigley Field and had the best day ever on the job. When my father came home all I wanted to do was tell him about it, but he was in no mood for small talk. Throwing his pants over the banister he carelessly let a joint fall out of his pants pocket. I picked it up off the floor as he walked into the laundry room. For minutes I tried to understand what was happening. How could he bring this into the house? It was totally against my program. I had no desire to smoke the joint but I should have if I truly was an addict. Instead of sneaking it off to smoke it, I gracefully returned it to him. Well, maybe it wasn't graceful; I walked into the laundry room and laid it down on the washing machine as he stood there in his underwear. "I think you dropped this." He didn't like this and it turned into a huge row. I shamed him by demanding to know how he could possibly bring drugs into the home of a recovering addict. Did he want to see me fail? Sadly, he had no reply other than his fury, again telling me what a failure I was. It was as if by discovering his secret marijuana habit I had done something wrong. Soon after I moved out. My sanity demanded it.

I would take LSD again several more times in my life, but always at smaller and smaller doses. The final time I imbibed was just a little more than eight years ago at a Roger Waters concert in which he performed the music of Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon. When they set the inflatable pig free, a bubble went "pop" inside of my mind and I decided on the spot that I should become an entrepreneur and go into business for myself and open an espresso bar in Louisville. While the espresso bar failed and is no longer around, that night still stretches out before me. Eight years later, I am more successful than ever before in my life. Derby City Espresso may have failed but it begat the Haymarket. And weirdly enough I owe it all to LSD.

I did see Don Juan again a few times. Once at a Dead show in 1995 at the Palace in Auburn Hills outside of Detroit. It was the Grateful Dead's last tour ever and moments after randomly running into Don on the parking lot outside of the venue I found a vial of LSD on the ground. Coincidence? I often think not. Some five weeks later, Jerry Garcia was dead. The road that I thought could go on forever came to an end. Nothing lasts forever. I saw Don another time, years later, when I was attending the School of Journalism at the University of Oregon. He had just gotten out of prison on drug charges. We hung out but there was no LSD involved.

It's been some fifteen years since that last encounter. Was he really a brujo? A shaman? Did he have any connection to the magical world described by Carlos Castaneda or was he just a junkie who took me for a ride? I prefer the mystery of not knowing over defining him and concluding his story. The trip he set me on changed me forever and helped me integrate my personality and grow into adulthood in ways no other single experience in my life before or after has. I would like to see him again some day, and buy him a drink of whiskey at a bar.

HAYMARKET (WHISKEY BAR)

These days I own a bar. I named it Haymarket, The Haymarket Whiskey Bar. It's a nod to both the space and time of years past and days gone by. If it had been opened a hundred years ago, it would have looked out directly into Louisville's historic Haymarket, a general market that once was the center of commerce in the city. The name has personal as well as historical significance, to me though. It is also a nod to my Chicago heritage and to the labor movement that holds the Haymarket Riot as sacrosanct. You see the Haymarket is my attempt to escape labor. To fulfill the dream of a utopia where I get what I want just like Allen Ginsburg paying for groceries with his good looks. The Haymarket is my love poem to the city of Louisville and a fuck you to the eight-hour work day. Fuck you to the idea that work can't be anything less than play. My great-grandfather was a Russian-speaking émigré from Ukraine or Belarus or somewhere near Kiev, who settled on the southwest side of Chicago. During Prohibition family legend has it that he made stovetop stills for Al Capone's operation. The great lie of Prohibition was that it was 'bathtub' gin. It wasn't. It was 'stovetop' white dog. You had to have heat to boil the mash and the revolution of the 1920s was the promise of the electric light bulb and a gas line running to every apartment in the urban jungle. With that, each household could make up to a liter of homemade hooch a day. Add it up, get ten thousand of these little stills rolling and it still wasn't enough hooch to feed the needs of the speakeasies of the Windy City.

My grandfather, it is said by his son, was a rag and scrap man. He pushed a cart around the immigrant ghettos of 1930s Chicago, amassing a quantity of scrap metal that suddenly with the onset of World War It made him a small fortune and took himself, his wife, and my family out of poverty and into the middle class.

My father became a corporate tax attorney and the first in our family to both go to university as well as to travel in Europe. He had the kind of wealth that could purchase a new BMW or Mercedes convertible every two years. He had an enormous loft with catwalks filled with contemporary art in the heart of downtown Chicago. On the roof he had electric sheep and a clear view of the Chicago River. He was on the board of the Museum of Contemporary Art and numerous charities. Sadly, he destroyed himself in an orgy of greed and corruption. After reaching for the pinnacle of his career, he made some bad business decisions and helped a banker launder hundreds of thousands of dollars through his accounts as he played a starring role in his own one act play called the Savings and Loan scandal. Yet it wasn't enough and he wound up disbarred and a convict with a six-year sentence, he had to go and destroy all of his personal relationships with his children, wives and other relatives. Today he lives in a small two-bedroom apartment on the north side of the city. He doesn't own a bed and instead sleeps on an air mattress. He doesn't own a car and instead takes public transportation. He never owned up to his errors professionally let alone personally. Despite this I take him out for a meal every time I'm in the city.

Then there's me, me and the Haymarket—my attempt to prove that not all work is work, that commerce in whiskey is actually fun. That whiskey is actually a wish key. The ticket to making my dream's come true. My dreams of course are fairly simple. I don't want to work for anyone but myself. I want to some day live on an island and go scuba diving five days a week while money from the bar is deposited into my account. I want to be paid for my charisma and good looks and the fact that once upon a time I put in the hard work and took the thumps and knocks, that I paid my dues and now I can enjoy the rewards of my creation.

Yet like the historic Louisville Haymarket, our name is a bit of a lie. We do not sell hay in any quantity at the bar. It makes sense that there is a lie bundled into the name of my bar. I have always considered myself to be something of a liar and once even went so far as embarking on a career in public relations (another way of saying I was paid to lie).

Owning a bar is a profitable way to make one's living, but it has drawbacks (alcoholic tendencies). I used to own a coffee shop, but this is more exciting and allows me to work fewer hours a day and fewer days a week. In fact I rarely even bartend any longer. Mostly these days I work at playing the host. By and large it is a pleasant way to kill time while on planet Earth. It is rarely boring and there is always someone

new walking through my door. In the two and a half years I have owned the bar it has earned a reputation for being one of the preeminent bourbon and whiskey bars in the city and the nation. We (the royal “we”; a way to refer to myself as well as the bar as a unit that is larger than myself) have played host to master distillers from the majority of the major bourbon distilleries. From Julian Van Winkle of the Old Rip Van Winkle Distillery to Jim Rutledge of Four Roses we have poured drinks for nearly all the major payers in the Kentucky bourbon industry. Haymarket have been lauded in the national and local press. I have served drinks to the mayor, to the bums, to millionaires, the guys building the new bridge over the Ohio River. The Haymarket is home to everyone while they are within its friendly confines. This fills me with both a sense of accomplishment as well as a level of self-satisfaction that I have never felt before in my life. The Haymarket is an accomplishment and an establishment unlike any other. It is a physical manifestation of my dreams and hopes. It is my refuge, my home, and my pal.

The act of arrival at a destination, be it on a train or a plane or by automobile, is not new to me. The act of arriving at success at this level is new. Never before in my life have I been more financially secure. Never have I felt more right foot forward as I approach my destiny. I have not always been a person who sets goals and achieves them. For more than the first half of my life I was adrift and rudderless.

I learned how to be an achiever. I started small. And in no way am I now too big to fail. Failure is always within the realm of possibility. But success at this level is new to me. I no longer have to work in the conventional sense. And in that sense, the bet I made with the Haymarket has paid off in spades. Of course I still work. I manage, I stock and order, I count the money, and I pay the bills. But I don't have to work a forty-hour week (let alone the eighty-hour weeks I used to work when the bar was a coffee shop called Derby City Espresso). In the place of work, I have found a new calling, that of the host, that of the professional drinker, that of the professional entertainer. “Step into my parlor. Let me pour you a dram.”

The Lower East Side Manhattan starts off with two ounces of Old Forester Signature 100-proof bourbon. Add to that an ounce of Torino, Italy's finest Antica Formula Carpano sweet vermouth, two dashes Angostura bitters, and two teaspoons cherry juice. Stir vigorously over rocks and then strain into a coupe cocktail glass. Garnish with two Maraschino cherries. The flavors of the bourbon and the vermouth are accented by the bitters and cherries and blend together sublimely.

I never intended to own a bar, yet now that I do, it seems to fit me well. I am fascinated with the history of my newly chosen profession. From the history of American bourbon and rye whiskey I sell, to the specific history of the site of the building I sell the whiskey in, to the larger histories of bartending, cocktails, and the human fascination with libation and intoxication, I love to share what I know with my guests and they in turn share themselves with me. It is a kind of exchange: a snappy barter doled out in chitchat and other tokens of gratitude and appreciation. That I don't have to really work as my great-grandfather, grandfather, or father fills me with happiness and gratitude to them all for all they sacrificed so I could sell whiskey for a living. Whatever guardian angel(s) I may have looking over me have done their work well. I am not a religious man. But it is clear that I have so much more and have to do so much less for it than anyone in my family who came before me.

The financial success of owning the Haymarket and liberation from the drudgery of common work has not lessened the anxiety I sometimes feel rise within myself. Now that I've arrived at this lofty plateau how do I remain here? God forbid I must depart suddenly. What if the train runs out of rail and goes flying in the unknown ether once again? What if something goes wrong? What if something goes right? I know there is so very little I actually have control over. Life is a kind of masquerade in which we pretend to know what comes next. We pretend to control circumstances. But in truth, there is precious little I have control over. There is very little I can do on my own. My success is due to the efforts of others. I have learned that the more I let go, the less I try to take control of every situation and scenario, the more successful I become. I must trust in others. I must have faith that they will show up for work on time, that they aren't stealing from me, and that they have my interest at heart as much as I have theirs.

From the four bartenders I employ, to the sound engineers, booking agents, and public relations team that work for me, I for the first time have a direct financial impact on others. Never before have I been the employer. In my past I have only ever been the employee. I love it. I love owning this bar. My love for the River City has grown exponentially and is in line with my profit. I love sitting at the bar drinking a beer with my regulars, with the irregulars, with the one timers, the strangers, the no-namers and the naysayers.

I have found a home in Louisville. After decades of wandering, I am finally home: Market Street, in the town with a downtown. The Haymarket is much more than a bar. It is a shipwrecked love letter to the city. It is a beacon in time blinking, winking on and off throughout the night. It is a siren song to my past

selves... “Keep going, keep walking. You’ll get here eventually. Don’t stop. Press on.” If I were to lose this ability to write, if I were to forgo this liquid poetry, I would not know what to do next with myself. I am roped in, tied down, married in a kind of way to this city now. Divorces are never easy. And god forbid, I would have to return to work. Can you imagine me as a night watchman, a cab driver, or a public relations writer? If not those jobs, then how about a Cracker Jack vendor at Wrigley Field?

SIRENS AND THE OPENING OF THE SECOND VEIL

I can hear the sirens singing to me as I wander through the park in Bari, Italy. The sounds of the seashore are near. This is how things fall apart. This is how my mind fumbles itself and swirls in spiraling circles like a dervish. Am I on Long Island again? Is this park a metaphor in reverse for what happened to me on Long Island? What time is it? Where are my shoes?

The next day, I stand on the platform of the train station. I board a train. It's the wrong train. I leave it suddenly, realizing my mistake, but not before the train departs with my sleeping bag that I had placed on the overhead rack. I'm discombobulated. I'm almost delirious with sadness. My friends are heading to Greece. I must return to Amsterdam. My flight back to Chicago leaves in three days. After that, I return to Oregon to enter the undergraduate journalism program at the University of Oregon. I feel so alive. I feel so inspired. I'm in tears to be leaving Bari.

That summer I was on tour with the rock band Phish. It was June 1997. After arriving in Amsterdam, I met up with acquaintances from Oregon in Belgium. We drove first to Vienna, Austria. There, while waiting for the show to begin at the Arena Theater, a man approached me and asked if I remembered him. I replied that I didn't.

"Do you remember the Greyhound bus trip from Chicago to Oakland back in 1990? We were both heading to the New Year's Grateful Dead shows. We shared a hotel room in Oakland and then never saw one another again."

Suddenly, memories flow backwards, and yes I do remember. Coincidence or just happenstance? Suddenly, halfway around the world we meet again. I never made it to the NYE show. Instead, I ended up in jail for possession of mushrooms. We had been sitting in Denny's near the Oakland Coliseum after the December 29th show. A police officer walked in and told us we had to leave. As he walked away from the table I muttered under my breath, "White Aryan pig."

We paid our bill and left the restaurant without further ado and walked to the Motel 6 next door, where we were staying. As I gathered my belongings from the VW Bug where we had left them, a police cruiser rolled up. The cop from the restaurant got out and searched me. In my hip sack he found a quarter ounce of magic mushrooms.

“Now what was it you said about me being a white Aryan pig? For that you’re going to jail.”

He put me in handcuffs and then shoved me in the back of his squad car not bothering to notice how I hit my head on the way in. I sat there alone feeling stupid for the next hour while he went into the hotel and arrested some other dead head. What a jerk. Still, I learned an important lesson and I would never again mutter anything under my breath in the presence of a police officer. I spent the next seventy-two hours locked up in the Oakland City jail on felony drug possession charges. It was only due to the fact that it was New Year’s that there was no judge around to arraign me, and that I managed to escape a class X felony. After three days in jail, they released me for Habeas Corpus. If things had been different, I would have been charged with a felony. Had I been convicted, I doubt if I would have been able to obtain a passport and most likely I wouldn’t have been in Vienna chit-chatting with the guy who I had ridden the bus with to Oakland some six and a half years earlier. We talk for a few minutes. He tells me he is studying in Austria. I tell him I’m no longer selling magic mushrooms but instead glass beads with tiny glass mushrooms inside of them. After smoking a joint together, we go our separate ways. After some six and a half years the connection is fleeting and strange. I can’t believe he recognized me. I would have never recognized him. I would never see him again, though I half-expect to serve him a drink some day at the Haymarket.

From Vienna my friends and I traveled to Germany and France and then back to Amsterdam. There I had friends from Chicago I stayed with. Steven Svymbersky founded Qvimby’s Comics in Wicker Park in 1991. I visited him often throughout the years when passing through the city and traded him LSD for comic books and other zines and cult (not occult, just strange fringe) books. In 1997, he had just moved to Amsterdam to raise his daughter in a more bucolic setting than the Windy City. He had taken a job with a troupe of Chicago comedic improvisers called “Boom Chicago.” He guided canal tours on a small motorboat and worked as the lighting tech understudy for the theater. I would stay with Steven when I

returned to Amsterdam from Bari, Italy the day before my flight home to Chicago. That's the flight I would end up missing because of a banana smooshed in my back pocket. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

From seeing Phish "you're on the back of the worm" in Amsterdam, I traveled back to Germany and Nuremberg to see them play several more concerts and then traveled on to Como and Desenzano, Italy for a total of eleven shows in twenty-eight days. It was an amazing voyage and the band was at its peak, having written a spate of new material that they were premiering for the first time in front of the smaller European audiences. They were captivating and spellbinding, psychedelic and funky. Songs like "Ghost" with its haunting lyrics:

I feel I never told you the story of the ghost
that I once knew and talked to of whom I'd never boast
for this was my big secret how I'd get ahead
and never have to worry I'd call him instead
his answer came in actions he never spoke a word
or maybe I laid down the phone before he could be heard...

The tour ended for me in Italy and I found myself in Desenzano on the shore of Lake Como. There I meet two guys. I'll call them Bart and Dave. Their actual names are lost to my flawed memory and to time. Together we had breakfast and then decided to travel to Venice together. This was the second time in my life I had been to Italy. The first had been in 1988, some nine years earlier. Then I had traveled by bicycle and rail from Rome to Paris. At the time, as a teenager, I had hated Italy. But now I was mesmerized by the landscape as we traveled by rail from Como to Venice.

In Venice, we wandered around and around. The maze of canals and alleys lay ahead and behind us like an eternal switchback. I could have sworn at one point while walking around alone I saw my deceased grandmother peering down at me, smiling from a window. I could almost hear her thoughts from beyond the grave, her concern and care, her wonder at how far I had traveled. She appeared like a guardian angel looking over me and as I thought back to her final years and my role in her death, I felt my heart rush with love.

You see, I have to admit here and now that, I killed my father's mother, my favorite grandmother. Not in any kind of homicidal rage or intentional manner. No, it was simply nothing more than me slamming a door that did it. During the final years of her life she suffered from Alzheimer's and had been largely neglected by my father, her only surviving child. He never put her in a home despite her inability to

care for herself, nor provided the kind of in-home care that she would have benefited from, despite his wealth. Instead, she slowly sank into dementia, while living alone in a second story walk-up apartment on the north side of Chicago.

She would flash back and forth in time. Often, when her younger sisters, Goldie or Florence, would pay her a visit, she would fight with them as if they were all children once again. When I would visit she would see my father and not me. I was just out of high school at the time and living on my own in the city. I would visit as often as I could to keep her company. I loved her more than anyone else in my family; she had always been there for me and had always spoiled me with affection, mushroom barley soup and spending money. Sometimes we would watch baseball together. Sometimes we would go to the grocery store. And sometimes we would sit and play War if she was feeling up to it. Occasionally, we would talk about politics or current events. At the time, I was quite politically radical and opposed to American military intervention of the Regan Bush years. Some of my friends were self-styled Maoists and others were autonomists or declared anarchists.

One afternoon, while paying her a visit, we argued about capitalism—or about the sitting President George Herbert Walker Bush, I forget exactly what it was. We rarely argued, but on this day we did. I couldn't stand being yelled at by the person I loved most in the world so I stood up in a huff and announced I was leaving. On my way out, I slammed the door behind me. I boarded a bus and headed south to work.

At the time, I held a job with Greenpeace as a professional beggar. I would ride out to the suburbs in a van with other canvassers and go door-to-door educating people about pesticides in the water, PCBs in the air, and saving the whales. Hopefully I would sign them up for our monthly magazine and get them to pledge \$50, \$100, or more. I was terrible at this job, and despite my real and genuine passion for the environment; I was typically the person in the van on the way home with the least amount of money. When we got back to the office that night, I was told that there had been a phone call from my father. Upon returning his call, he informed me that my grandmother Lillian had had a heart attack that afternoon and was not long for this world.

The slamming of the door had sparked it. Our argument had been the root. I knew this for certain. I rushed to the hospital to be by her side. Lucidly she forgave me for the argument. No longer clouded by

dementia, she told me she loved me and always would, and that I was the apple of her eye. She died quietly in her sleep that night. But I would never completely forgive myself for arguing with her that afternoon. I carried the guilt around for years and years, for slamming the door as I stormed out. For shocking her ailing heart into an attack and causing her death.

So when I saw her smiling at me from the windowsill in Venice, I was positive it was her. As positive as a twenty-five-year-old kid who smoked pot every day and had done more than a lifetime's worth of LSD could be, I felt her love radiate down and again I felt her forgiveness. It was a moment out of time, in a city out of time, at a moment in my life in which gears were shifting and I was finally embarking tentatively on the first steps of a more true adulthood.

That evening Bart, Dave and myself found a campground on a small island in the Venice lagoon. The next morning, when I awoke, I wandered around the campground looking for a bathroom. That's when I met the Brazilian girls. I was singing to myself some old song about Annie laying her head down in roses. It was a ghost song and had a quiet little melody. In those days, I would sing to myself all the time as I walked around or stood on subway platforms. It didn't seem to matter if I was alone or in public, I sang. I guess it was a way to overcome shyness and a way to stand out. It was also a decent enough way to meet people.

I pray for your forgiveness, but the girls' names are lost to time and memory detail failure. They were beautiful in the way only Brazilian girls are. One was brunette and the other blonde. They told me they were heading to the south of Italy to pick grapes for the summer. Bart and Dave were heading to the south of Italy as well, after Venice, in order to catch a ferry to Greece from Brindisi. That morning we decided to travel south together. I had no agenda after the tour and was just killing time before my flight back to Chicago from Amsterdam a week latter.

Arriving in Bari after the long overnight train trip, we managed to find our way to a free campground run by some local folks in partnership with the city. Bari was a strange old fishing city. Located at the top of the boot heel of the Italian peninsula on the Adriatic Sea, it was beautiful and crisp, run down, and ramshackle. It had the weight of centuries of history behind it.

We spent the next several days wandering around Bari, eating at the campground's pizzeria or taking free bicycles on trips along the coast and through the old city. There we would eat seafood in the

evenings and gelato for dessert. One night the folks who ran the campground took us to a private birthday party where we drank marijuana spiked chai tea and danced until dawn. It was there in the small park where the free campground was located that I began my nocturnal wanderings and first encountered the sirens. The three ladies appeared to me out of the shadows one night, singing to me a song of Annie and her head in the roses.

I followed them through the park and down to the seaside. There I sat all night listening to the lapping of the waves, their enchanting song, and my own strange meandering thoughts. The voices in my head were not all mine. Slowly something was shaking loose inside of me. I didn't want to leave the park. I wanted to stop over forever in Bari. It was so peaceful there, so beautiful. I was mesmerized and in love. The next morning, Bart and Dan left for Brindisi and their ferry to Greece. The girls left that evening for the winery.

That night, I made my way from the Stop Over Park to the train station to catch the night train north to Milan and then my connection onward to Amsterdam.

At first I boarded the wrong train, then the correct one. My sleeping bag remained on the first and was gone for good. I had no regrets. I felt it was a fair price to pay for these amazing days and nights in Bari. One could always replace a sleeping bag. As I traveled north, I dreamed of the sirens. I dreamed of the Brazilian girls and the way they loved it when I would sing to them. I dreamed of my grandmother looking at me out of the window in Venice. She seemed to be saying something but I couldn't quite hear her. The shrill sound of the rails underneath me was not the siren song. But nevertheless it was enough to rock me to sleep. I awoke when the train pulled into Milano Centrale.

Making my connection in the chaotic station at Milan I headed back to A'dam. Little would I guess that I would live in Milan just a few short years later and that while this was my first stop at Milano Centrale, it would not be my last.

Arriving in Amsterdam, I made my way to Boom Chicago, where I reconnected with Steven. I returned to his home with him where I regaled him and his common-law wife with the stories of my adventures in Italy and on the road with Phish. We drank beer and smoked marijuana. There was news on the television of a plane crash. I don't know why, but I became afraid. I was slipping in and out of myself.

The siren song was humming in the back of my mind. Steven told me not to worry. But I knew something was wrong.

The next morning, I said my goodbyes and left for the airport. While riding the metro to Schiphol Airport, I managed to smoosh a banana in the back pocket of my jeans. Was the metaphor of slipping on the peel not enough? Did I have to stain my pants with the banana to make a point? To who? Myself? Arriving at the airport I checked in only to be told that I was late and the gate had already been closed. I would be placed on a plane going out the following morning, at least that's how I remember it.

I went to the basement of the airport and placed all my bags in a locker. It would be weeks before I saw them again. Heading into town, I decided to visit my favorite magic mushroom shop, after all I had time to kill, one more day in A'dam, best to enjoy myself. There I met two young American girls who wanted to take mushrooms for the very first time. I volunteered to babysit them during their trip. I wouldn't take any but would hang out with them while they were high and make sure they avoided any trouble. We met later that evening.

I remember distinctly the brunette. She was very American in that suburban New Jersey white college girl kind of way. Who knew how I came across? Was I the experienced head? Was I just a cute boy? I'll never know what they thought of me, but despite my recent aural hallucinations and missing my plane, we set off on a walking tour of Amsterdam. We made our way from the red light district just off Central Station up Oudezijds Voorburgwal. We curved right to head to the Dam. Onward up Damstraat, then on the left we skipped Spuistraat, instead going the extra measure and instead walking up the Singel. To my right, were the Herengracht, Kiezersgracht and the Prinzengracht, four canals in all. Encircling the central district of Amsterdam from Grachttenordel-West to Weesper En Plantage to the West. And in between all of it sits the Tweede Kamer coffee shop caught between a street, a narrow Dutch alley, a canal, and the cross walk. We went in. I ordered for us. What exactly we smoked, I can't say—likely a white widow or white rhino variant. Either way it was strong. In those days, I smoked a lot of cannabis, and at that time, in the summer of 1997, there was no city on Earth with as much variety and quality of cannabis sativa and indica as Amsterdam. We smoked; they were already high on the mushrooms and the pot got them higher. I empathized. The Tweede Kamer is not like any other coffee shop in Amsterdam. Now days

as I sit thinking it reminds me of the Absinthe Depot in Berlin. It was more of a place where people come to gather and talk about the newspaper industry than a touristic weed bar. I loved it very much.

They say there is a kind of psychically transmuted energy between minds on psychedelic substances such as psilocybin and those that are not, if they are in close physical proximity. I did not eat any magic mushrooms that night, yet I was tripping right alongside those girls. All it took was some potent marijuana and a Cocoa-cola. We wandered all over the city, from the Grachts, to the Museumplein, to the Vondelpark. All night we walked, we talked, we smoked, and we tripped. Toward dawn we made our way back to the Red Light district down on Oudezijds Voorburgwal.

They had a pinball machine at the hostel where the girls were staying. I remember I was playing it when the girls went upstairs to their room. I tried to follow; not realizing the night's trip was over. The hostel attendant asked me hostilely if I had a room and I told him no. The girls walked upstairs without saying goodbye. This time it was only two sirens to lead me awry instead of the traditional three like in Italy.

I walked back onto the street after winning a free game of pinball. It was just before the sunrise. It felt cold for a July dawn. I'm not sure what happened next.

I walked around all morning, oblivious to the fact that I had a plane to catch. The longer I walked the less I knew. I walked a maze, an intricate pattern through Amsterdam. I found myself in front of a barbershop. I decided on the spot to cut off all my hair. I no longer wanted to look like an American, with hippie overalls and long thick hair that might as well have been developing into dreadlocks. I asked for a cut like the photo of the Dutch boy with the black Euro modern coif. He wanted to know if I was sure, and I was. The cut liberated me like Sampson. Upon leaving the barbershop, I went to a nearby clothes store. There I bought all new clothes. A pair of blue mod cut pants and a green turtleneck and a hip-looking jacket. Or at least that's what I remember. There are no photos of me after this transformation. This all happened in the days before people had mini cameras built into their phones. In fact this was before cell phones were ubiquitous in Europe. Nobody took as many pictures of himself or herself as we do now in 2014. The selfie reigns. Back then things were muddled. To the best of my knowledge the next photo that would be taken of me would be some ten days later, in the United States Embassy in Rome.

I threw my old clothes away. I ripped up my passport. I was staying in Amsterdam and I was no longer myself. Instead I was someone new. That new me would live the next ten days out on the streets meeting people at random, playing football in the park, walking the canals. Eating, smoking, drinking beer and wandering the streets at night, I completely abdicated myself and all of my responsibilities. I gave no thought to my parents who had been waiting for my return, expecting me on a flight days earlier. Time flew by. I only remember snapshots from this other person's vacation. Like slides from another person's vacation they are both beautiful and foreign.

How do you describe living in a waking lucid dream? Where everything has significance and nothing counts? Amsterdam is by far one of the most beautiful cities in the world in which one can lose his mind. But there are dangers. Never get on the night busses... who knew how lost you could get? Sometimes, I heard the song of the sirens as I had in Bari. Sometimes I heard the ghost voices of my friends. One day, I ran into Steven Svymbersky. "I thought you left for Chicago days ago. What are you doing here?" I leered at him with a lupenisch wolf grin. I don't think I had any other response. It was as if I was under a spell. I remember walking away from him and the encounter, not even recognizing its significance.

At one point, I even ran into Don Juan. It had been years since I saw him last. His face was craggy and he was dressed all in black. Three crows circled overhead as we spoke of how far from home we were. He spoke to me in his secret brujo accent and I listened intently. He told me this walk through Amsterdam was the inverse of the one I took three years earlier on Long Island. That I had been untying my own belly button back then and retying it now, that this trip had to happen in order for the first to make sense. That despite how cold I was, how lost this was all a part of a greater plan in time and space and that the day would come when I would be grateful for this. I could see myself from outside my self. I whispered in my own ear over the ocean and across the years to myself on the Long Island. "Turn left on Peter Cotton Tail Lane. There's nothing to worry about. Don't worry about your shoes. You'll get new shoes."

Eventually, I bought a bicycle. I never seemed to run out of money to feed and care for myself, and after days of wandering the streets from dawn to dawn, I decided a bicycle was just what I needed. It was a beautiful green and black Dutch stolen beater special. I paid 100 Dutch guilders (about \$50) for it—what seemed like a reasonable amount. I christened it the Albert Hoffmann Alligator special bicycle in

honor of the Swiss chemist who first synthesized LSD. When I rode the bike around town I felt an incredible rush of endorphins, as if the bike was adding fuel to my mental psychedelic fire.

There was a comic book I once read that featured a super villain named Mr. Nobody. Well, Mr. Nobody gets a hold of Albert Hoffman's bicycle and Ken Kesey's bus and creates a super powerful psychedelic avatar when he places the one inside of the other. Just driving this vehicle around (pedaling the bike powered the bus) caused chaos and psychedelic energy to spread in its wake. That is until the intrepid heroes of the Doom Patrol shut down Mr. Nobody and imprisoned him inside of a painting. The Doom Patrol traveled around the world and was headquartered on Danny the living Street. Danny ironically was always depicted a little bit like the streets of Amsterdam, quaint with cobblestone streets and narrow buildings.

When I was a teenager, I used to love to ride my bike long distances, always on unknown roads. I would begin in Lake County and head north, up into Wisconsin through the cornfields. Sometimes, I would ride east to the lake and then either north or south following its shoulder to the city or toward Milwaukee. Sometimes, I would ride west into an endless maze of suburbs.

I tore around Amsterdam having the time of my life. Everything is more beautiful in Amsterdam when riding a bicycle. That night, I heard a voice tell me to leave town. "Your life is in danger if you remain in the city." I took the first road north and rode as if the devil was on my tail. I rode all of the night, following the taillights of passing autos as they swirled and replicated themselves in a hail of color and darkness. They stuttered like frames of film in an off-speed production. Throughout the Dutch night I rode, not knowing where I was going, just one stroke of the pedals after another.

Eventually, I found myself in Haarlem, just west of Amsterdam. The town was quiet and closed when I entered the center. I had been here once before by train and I instinctively made my way to the church square in the center of town. At one point shortly after arriving I was approached by two Dutch police officers in the predawn gloom. They wanted to know where I came from, so I told them I had ridden my bicycle from Amsterdam. They were suspicious but I showed them the alligator squeaky horn that adorned the bike so they decided to leave me alone. As they walked away, I sang them this song.

Sleepy alligator in the noonday sun
Sleepin by the river just like he usually done
Call for his whisky He can call for his tea
Call all he wanta but he can't call me

Oh no I been there before
and I'm not comin back around there no more
hung up waitin' for a windy day
Hung up waitin' for a windy day

Dawn eventually reared its pointy little head and I somehow found my way to the Haarlem youth hostel. Locking up my bike outside, exhausted, I checked myself in and quickly fell asleep in a bed for the first time in days. Hours later, I was awakened by the sounds of a group of people speaking Italian. There was a group of four Italian twenty-somethings in my dormitory. They were playing Briscola, a kind of Italian trump card game, loudly and smoking a joint. I approached them and in English asked them if I could join them. I had seen the game played once before when I was in Italy on the Phish Tour.

Despite the fact that I spoke no Italian and they spoke no English we soon become friends over the card game and the joint. They said they were checking out and returning to Amsterdam that evening if I wanted to join them. How I understood their intentions I'll never know, it must have been some kind of psychedelic Esperanto we were communicating with. It felt like returning to Amsterdam was the prudent thing to do so I left the alligator bike locked up in Haarlem and we boarded a train back to A'dam. Upon arrival we found a hostel room in the very self same hostel where the girls had abandoned me a week earlier, just down the street from the mushroom shop where my trip had begun the night I missed my plane back to America.

The next day, they invited me to come to Italy with them. I agreed. We split up at the train station. They had reservations on one train, and I would take another in order to meet them in Paris. On the train, once we had crossed into France, two polite French border control agents asked for my passport. When I couldn't produce one, they took me into a back cabin they were using as their office. Sitting across from me, I told them again that I didn't have a passport. That I had lost it. They seemed suspicious. I didn't tell them I tore it up. I'm not even sure if I knew that I'd torn up my passport at this moment. They asked me to empty my pockets. I unloaded a pack of cigarettes and a few grams of pot. I didn't even realize I'd brought it on the train or that in France marijuana possession is a crime. The border officers were incredulous and shocked at how cavalierly I dumped my illegal booty onto their desk. They confiscated the weed and told me to go to the U.S. embassy in Paris as soon as the train arrived to get a new passport. They laughed and told me in broken English how lucky I was. Lucky they were not the Gendarmerie, that, in fact, if they had

been the true police I would be headed to a border town jail instead of Paris. Unlike the similar incident I experience two years later in Italy, I didn't think to ask them to return my stash.

I returned to my seat until the Thalys high-speed train arrived at Paris Noord station. There I met the Italian Beatles. We ran into each other on the platform just like clockwork. Joyfully we bought tickets for the next train to Milan. Our train this time was second-class train, and we occupied the rear of a half-empty carriage for the long ride south. We spent the ride smoking pot in between the carriages and playing Briscola. Eventually I fell asleep.

The train shuddered to a stop. Italian border control was opening the carriage door. "Passport Control." The Italians I had been traveling with for the last three days were nowhere to be seen. I had no passport. The border control guards forced me off the train. I wiped the sleep from the eyes as I watched the train depart. It was a crisp morning; the sun was bright on the platform. The border guards disappeared.

I saw there was a cafe across the street. I left the station and headed across the street to buy some smokes (I must have made thousands selling those glass mushrooms on Phish tour). At the cafe I ordered a cappuccino and smoked. Everyone inside was speaking Italian. After the coffee and a few cigarettes, I returned across the street. The sign on the station wall informed me that I was in Bardonecchia, Italy. On the solitary platform I found a train schedule. The next train for Milan was a local one leaving in fifteen minutes. When it arrived there were no signs of border guards. I boarded the train without a ticket and headed immediately to the bathroom. Inside, I hid for the next half an hour to make sure nobody was going to throw me back off the train.

I was sure I'd never see my Italian friends again and I couldn't even understand why when I was thrown off the train at Bardonecchia there was no sign of them. Were they ever there at all? I arrived in Milan around midday. The station was as chaotic as it was the last time I had been there on my way north to Amsterdam from Bari. There were no sign of the boys I had met in Haarlem two days earlier.

I finally broke down, emotion flooding me, and for the first time in days the enormity of my situation was laid naked before me. I realized I had been vision walking for days. That I was suffering from sleep deprivation, that my mind had broken again and that I had been hallucinating for a week. None of it

made sense to me. Why did I go to Milan? Why did I tear up my passport? Slowly my mind was emerging out of a rich and terrible soup.

Everything had made sense until I arrived in Milan. Now the world seemed impartial, cruel, and incapable of signaling me what to possibly do next. I was alone, truly alone, a stranger in a strange land.

Then I saw the train board flashing, click, click, and click as the schedule shuffled itself around. On the top, departing at 7:48 a direct to Bari and Brindisi. And suddenly I knew I had to return to Bari. I had to stop over in Bari again in order to complete whatever circle I had been rolling on for the past two weeks. In order to regain myself I had to traverse the entire Italian peninsula.

On the train south I occupied myself (and being myself in myself, in my own head, had more connotation to me now than it had in more than a week) by trying to review everything that had happened to me since I left Bari in the first place some two weeks earlier. The scenery rolled by. The train chugged on through the day into the dusk, finally arriving in Bari at nearly midnight. I exited the train and was filled with euphoria upon leaving the station and seeing the layout of the town spreading out in front of me. Hurriedly, I walked towards my favorite pizzeria in town. There I ordered slices of mushroom and artichoke pizza. Wolfing them down, I felt liberated. I felt at home! I felt jolting return to myself, and a sudden shock at the lengthy fugue state that I had been trapped within for the past days. I couldn't yet ask myself the hard questions, such as where was my mind? Why did this happen to me? Was anyone worried about me?

Instead, I walked through the town toward the camping park on the side of the Adriatic where this had all began. Stop Over At Bari. There I ran into one of the camp organizers, the same one who had brought me to the disco party a week before where I had drunk the laced chai tea and danced the night away. Was it the tea that had sparked my visions of the sirens? He was leaving for the night and was surprised to see me once again. Despite my excitement to explain to him what had happened to me he informed me that it could wait until tomorrow, that he must be going. Disappointed, I sat alone in the park. There were no siren songs. Even the sea's waves were muted. Everything seemed flat, one dimensional and black and white. My mind rolled with questions. How would I get out of this? How did I manage to travel clear across Europe without a passport? Clearly I had to go to Rome and get a new passport and then head back to Amsterdam. Somehow without sleeping I passed the night.

As dawn approached, I decided to make myself useful by walking around the park picking up trash off the ground. The park was a mess. Soon a city garbage truck pulled up and the two waste men that emerged were astounded by my volunteer efforts. They tried to stop me from helping them. One of the two trash men was deaf and dumb. His colleague explained to me in Italian that I didn't understand (yet somehow understood) that this was their job. Soon the cafe in the center of the park opened and the trash men, having completed their cleanup with my help, left. I ordered a cappuccino from the cafe and sat at one of the outdoor tables drinking it. There I met a beautiful couple. We sat and chatted pleasantly. They told me they were Croatian, a brother and sister. He had been a soldier in the war. They were taking a vacation in Italy. They told me they were headed to the highway to hitchhike to Rome. I asked if I could join them on the journey, explaining my circumstances to them and how I had to obtain a new passport. I tried to explain to them all of the events of the past weeks and they agreed to let me tag along.

It took most of the day to hitchhike our way north. A truck driver picked us up and drove us 300 kilometers north. Next a priest in a Fiat station wagon picked us up and drove us from Foggia to Campobasso. He bought us lunch at a rest stop and let us smoke cigarettes in his car. . . When we arrived in Rome, we were met by an acquaintance of the Croats. He ran some kind of charity and once they told him my story he knew just what to do.

"You'll have to file a police report claiming your passport and bag were stolen on the train. You will need this police report in order to go get a new passport from the US Embassy. You cannot possibly tell the Americans the truth: that you destroyed your own passport while suffering from a nervous breakdown, drug flashback, or whatever it was that happened to you."

So at the train station I lied to the Carabinieri and told them how I had just arrived in Rome from Bari and that on the train my bag had been stolen when I got up to use the bathroom. They filled out the police report, and finally after a long day of collecting garbage, hitchhiking and lying, the Croats' contact took us to a small hotel. It was a bit like being in a spy film. The charity man was my contact and tomorrow I would go to the embassy for new papers. There was no cost involved for the hotel and by this time I was finally nearly out of my magic pocket of money. I still had no idea what would happen tomorrow. To be in Rome finally heading north was enough. I saw the Croats alternately as angels and beautiful intelligence agents in the moment. They were the manifestation of the good will among strangers, the agents of my

guardian angels made real. The fact that they had come through the wreckage of the Yugoslav war meant something profound to me. It was with utter kindness that they took it upon themselves to assist me.

The next day, I made my way to the U.S. embassy. There I told the desk clerk my fabricated story. The woman, a smart looking 30-something government worker didn't believe me. But because I had the police report, she really had no choice. At least I no longer looked like a vagabond hippie. She snapped my photograph for my new passport. "Now I'm going to tell you if you ever "lose" your passport again, and when I say "loose" I mean sell for drug money, we are under no obligation to issue you another one. You are granted the passport by the State Department." I nodded silently and told her was grateful to get a new passport and that I really didn't sell mine, that it was stolen along with my bag on the train north from Bari to Rome. As soon as I was finished at the embassy I called my mother.

"Where have you been these last two weeks? We've been worried sick about you." With tears streaming down my face I described how I had a nervous breakdown or some form of flashback to my LSD overdose in New York. I told her how I had spent the week on the streets of Amsterdam with no concept of the fact that I had missed my flight home two weeks earlier. She told me that I had to return to Amsterdam as soon as possible and return to the airport and talk to the airlines about getting another ticket to Chicago. I told her I would and that I would call her again as soon as I got there

The next day my Croatian angels put me onto a train to Amsterdam. Their contact bought my ticket as I was down to my last handful of lire. I never saw the Croatians again. This was in the days before the proliferation of email addresses and well before the time in my life where I carried business cards to hand out to people with whom I wished to remain in contact. On the long train ride from Rome to Paris and then onto Amsterdam I sat within myself trying to not read too much into the past weeks events. There was nothing to do but move forward and trust that upon my arrival in Amsterdam that I would be able to retrieve my bags and somehow obtain a new plane ticket back to America and to the safety of home.

When I arrived at the Schiphol airport I found that my bags were no longer in the locker in which I had placed them and instead had been impounded. I had already called my mother upon arriving in Amsterdam but I now I was forced to check in with her again and ask her to wire me money to get my stuff out of hock. While waiting for the wire transfer, I went in to the desk of Delta Airlines and asked to speak with someone about having missed my flight and how I could get a replacement ticket. I was led upstairs

from the main arrivals hall into a set of back-room offices. There a nice lady assisted me and without even having to do much convincing she issued me a new ticket for that evenings flight to Atlanta and then onto Chicago.

My wire transfer came through and I was able to pay the storage fees on my baggage and retrieve my belongings. I even managed to squeeze in a return trip to Haarlem in order to retrieve my Albert Hoffman Alligator bike from the youth hostel where it was still locked up six days later. I returned with it to the airport and had it boxed up in order to ship it home in the belly of the airplane. It was the only tangible evidence of my adventures other than my Rome-issued passport, new haircut and Euro-style outfit.

I didn't leave the airport again. I swore I would never again in my life miss another flight (I did miss one more due to falling asleep at the gate and missing boarding. It was a domestic flight and they put me on another within an hour). I ate a whopper at Burger King and made sure I had no traces of marijuana on me or in my bags. I bought a cheap razor and shaved in the airport bathroom. I barely recognized myself with my short hair and tired eyes. Where had my mind been those past two weeks? How much was hallucination? What triggered this insanity in the first place? Still to this day I believe that I must have psychically synchronized to the tripping girls I had been babysitting. That it was the proximity to their trip that somehow unhinged me and left me adrift. But I'll never know for certain. My mother still on occasion suggests that I seek out professional psychiatric help in order to retrieve the exact events of those times.

I flew back to Chicago to an unhappy homecoming. My parents were livid. How could I put them through something like this? It brought back too many nightmares of my overdose on LSD and locked away in a psychiatric ward on Long Island. Despite my protests that this wasn't the same thing, it sure looked like the same thing to them. They asked me what I was going to do next and I told them that Phish was playing in Indiana and that I had to go. This infuriated them even more. In their eyes it was the following the Grateful Dead and Phish around that was the root of the issue. Years later my mother would tell me that she believed I was into much more serious drugs like heroin and cocaine during this period of my life. It wasn't true but for years it helped her to believe that I was a junkie.

But just like I had to return to Bari, I had to go and see Phish once again. I caught a ride with an old friend to Deer Creek, a summer time concert venue outside of Indianapolis, Indiana. I borrowed my sister's BMX bike to take to the shows. There at Deer Creek I ran into some of the people I had traveled

with in Europe. They couldn't believe my transformation. Shorn of my hair and with this strange new sparkle in my eye, they wondered aloud how such a few short weeks could change me so much. I did my best to explain but left most of the story unspoken. Upon my return from the shows, my family asked me to leave. My stepfather was furious with me for borrowing my sister's BMX bike and putting stickers on it while at the shows. He was furious at me for even going to the shows. I was 25 and had nothing to show for it. In their mind I was a wash-up, a junkie and a terrible son.

Later that day, I purchased a train ticket back to Oregon on my credit card. I called my then-lover, Jane, in Portland where we had been renting a room together; only to find out she had borrowed my car and taken it to California. This was despite my asking her to not drive it out of the state while I was away in Europe.

I decided to break up with her but held off telling her so I could first retrieve my Subaru GL station wagon. Instead of taking the Amtrak to all the way to Oregon I decided to meet her in Santa Cruz, California. My return to Santa Cruz was also a kind of homecoming. I had previously lived in Santa Cruz and it was the town where my son had been born.

Reunited Jane and I drove north up Highway 1, the coastal road to Arcata in the heart of Humboldt County and the Emerald Triangle. There we turned east and went over the coastal range into the Trinity Alps to spend some days with my old friend Seth. Despite my being upset with her for having taken my car to California, we tried to patch things up, but it was there in Trinity where things broke down for good between me and her. My attraction to her in the wake of my trip was gone. I wanted to be alone; I needed to be alone to once again begin my life. When we left Seth's home a day later, it was in silence. Upon arriving in Portland, I made my intentions to leave her clear and packed up my belongings and moved out. I headed first to Cougar Hot Springs, located in the mountains between Bend, Oregon and Eugene. There spent the next several days camping by myself, soaking in the hot springs, and contemplating my entry into a new world. Three days later I drove to Eugene, Oregon and moved into a rental apartment with two strangers. Within a week I was attending journalism classes at the University of Oregon.

Nothing was ever quite the same for me after that trip to Europe. I was a much more serious person upon my return. I would not take a break from my schooling for the next three years. While I'll never fully understand what happened to me during those days, it did set me on a path to finally complete

my bachelor's degree and become a "more mature" adult. I graduated on time in the summer of 2000, ten years to the day after my high school graduation. After one last wild and crazy Phish tour I moved to Milan, Italy to take an internship with a newspaper there titled Italy Daily. That internship turned into work with Dow Jones Newswires and I won a job offer from Telecom Italia Labs.

I spent the next four years in Europe, with short hair and smart jackets. I built a career for myself as a public relations writer and translator. I knew it wouldn't last forever but I enjoyed being an expatriate more than I ever enjoyed being an American. I never lost my mind and never had another flashback like experience. I never visited Bari, Italy again, but I would end up living in Amsterdam toward the end of 2004 just before returning to the United States for good.

In Amsterdam again, I found myself walking down the old familiar canals and alleys of the city, riding a bicycle along the Singel, and spending time in the Vondelpark. The city had changed less than I had; the Tweede Kamer coffee house was still there but the Magic Mushroom shop was gone. I haven't been back to Amsterdam since October 2004. Since then all of my travels have largely been to Central America and Mexico, except for one trip back to Germany and Italy in the winter of 2011 right before I opened my bar.

The Albert Hoffmann Alligator bike was stored in my parents' garage for years and I kept saying I would eventually bring it to Oregon, but one summer my parents sold it at a garage sale. Does it imbue the rider with psychedelic super powers as it did me?

To be who I remember I once was or to be the constant reinvention of myself has been a question I have struggled with recently. Normally at night I come down on the side of reinvention, shedding myself like so much snakeskin, starting a new chapter with little concern for what has come before. Yet I will never be free of the specter of my mental illness. I will never stop being a prankster. I don't even really want to no matter how craftily I wear the disguise of businessman and responsible bar owner. Despite this constant shadow of instability hanging over me, I have become a successful entrepreneur and businessman. Despite my success I sometimes still wish to be as carefree as I was back then. Now I have far too much to lose to ever get so weird. I always fancied myself a free spirit, someone who lived in the moment. Now I live not in the moment but in the weekly cycle of purchasing and selling, the spreadsheets of net gains and gross sales. I pay payroll taxes and sales taxes and personal taxes. First quarter, second quarter, profit and

loss, purchase orders, and cocktail recipes. One and a half ounces of Rittenhouse Rye, half an ounce of
Domaine du Canton ginger liqueur, one dash cherry bitters over ice, top with soda water and two teaspoons
of cherry juice. Garnish with a Maraschino cherry.

HASH ON THE TRAIN

The carriages of the train are finally off the ferry. Why is it the Italians can't build a bridge across the Straits of Messina? It's only three kilometers across at its shortest point. It must be a mafia thing. I'm returning to the mainland from a week's vacation on Sicily. The night before hiking up Mt. Etna, in the little village of Nicolosi at the foot of the active volcano, Marie and I ate a quaint dinner in a little trattoria. After indulging in several carafes of the local house wine we stumbled out into the night. While making our way to the hotel the next thing I know is I'm fucking her in an alley. She insisted. It began so innocently, a single kiss against a fence under the moonlight. Next thing I knew she was pulling me into the alley's shadows, pulling my pants down, and lasciviously licking my thighs. She insisted, I swear. I don't normally go in for this kind of public dogging. But how could I resist when she offered me her flank, bending over and pulling her dress up so I could easily access her. The next day we were both so hung-over. Combine that with the hike and the altitude, by the time we reached the summit of Etna we had migraines.

After descending the volcano, we left for Catania. It was there we met the squatters who were disguised as street performers. It was from them that I got the somewhat bigger than a golf ball-size handful of hashish from the Rif Mountains in Morocco. It was cheap, something like 50,000 lira (about \$30), which was a third of its cost up north in Siena, where I was studying Italian. We had met the street performers cum circus sideshow while wandering around the old city, where they were performing in a square for the summer tourists. They walked on broken glass, juggled, breathed fire, and even did a bit of comedic burlesque. After their show, we tipped them and they asked us where we were from. A chance encounter soon turned into drinking beers on the square and then them taking us "home." Home was a warren of abandoned buildings on the edge of the old city. We drank some more Moretti Pilsner, we opened a bottle of red table wine, and we rolled cigarettes spiked with hashish. One of the male performers hit on Marie while we drank. Typical Italian dude. Still, I was only one part annoyed and two parts turned on. I wondered if they would both go home with me.

In turn I flirted with a cute little street performer with dreadlocks. I fantasized about what a foursome between us all would look like. Dismissing this I instead asked them if they had any hash for sale. Of course they did. After smoking, talking, drinking and flirting it became clear that it was just Marie and I who would head back to our fleabag hotel only two stars above the squat. We smoked another joint before bed and I asked her if she liked the Italian saltimbanco who had been hitting on her. I ask her if she would have liked a threesome with us both or a foursome with the little dreaded girl I had been interested in. She is noncommittal and later, when in bed as I lie on top of her, stoned, immaculate, her legs held splayed in a V thrusting into the night of her, contemplating the soft breath of her and our sighs and mingling scent, I realize that I have no idea who Marie really is. I have no idea that this will be the last time I am ever intimate with her. Only now, nearly fifteen years later, do I realize how good this moment was. How special those days were. How unique and real and precious. The next evening, we leave Catania by train heading to Messina, where they will put the train carriages onto a ferry to take them across the straits.

Why can't the Italian state build a bridge? It must be a mafia thing— (*ma non c'e' la mafia, c'e' solo la famiglia*) even though I was told by a mafia friend of mine once, "There is no such thing as the mafia, there is only family." Of course my great-grandfather was a small-time gangster who made stovetop stills for Al Capone so he could place them in the homes of nice West Side Jewish families during prohibition. Each still could make nearly a liter of unaged whiskey a night. Did he ever come down to Kentucky to bootleg some of the fine bourbon whiskey that was still resting in farmer's barns and rick houses? I'd like to believe he did, but that's more myth making than provable family fact. Still, can't a family build a bridge?

So the train carriages are loaded on the boat, we make the twenty-minute ferry voyage across the Straits, and then are unceremoniously offloaded in Reggio Calabria, where another locomotive awaits us and the voyage all the way back north to Florence and Siena. Marie is heading to Amsterdam and then back to America. I should realize I will never see her again, but I don't. Somehow I think she'll come visit me in Oregon. That we will romantically reunite back in the U.S., back in the U.S., back in the U.S.A. The train lurches from the station. It's late, 11 p.m. and the midnight moon is shining brightly on the southern tip of the Italian boot. The conductor comes into our couchette to check our tickets. He whips out his ticket punch and then is just as suddenly on his way. This is my cue. Time to bring out the hash and roll a joint.

As soon as I have the giant marble of hash in my hands and I am applying a flame to its brown surface to make it malleable like playdough, the door to the couchette whooshes open again. And standing there as shocked as I am are two Italian Carabinieri in all their navy blue and red piping martial glory. The Carabinieri are the national military police and are not to be trifled with. These are not the standard city cops who you can yell at when they pull you over, or have a coffee with when they are lollygagging in the cafe. No. No. No. This is not good. Immediately I pocket the super dense ball of hash. “You want to see our passports, right,” I said rapidly in accented American English, kicking Marie. “Get your passport out,” I hiss at her. She looks frightened. I play my brave face.

“Che sta dentro la tasca,” said the Carabinieri with the three stripes on his sleeve.

“I don’t speak Italian. I’m sorry,” I lied to him.

“What is in your pocket,” he said in his accented and drawn out attempt at English.

“Nothing is in my pocket, officer, here are our passports,” I said loudly as I grab Maria’s out of her hand and press the two passports into the cop’s face.

“We don’t want to see your passports,” said the junior Carabinieri. “We want to see what’s in your pocket. Take it out!”

“Oh you want to see our train tickets,” I respond with a deadpan expression. “Here they are!”

“NO! Che sta dentro la tua tasca? What did you put in your pocket? Take it out now or I will arrest you!” he shouted just as loudly as the boss Carabinieri.

“OK, OK, you got me,” I whine as I take the ball of hash out and their eyes light up. “I’m sorry. I’m a dumb American. Just leave Marie out of it. She had nothing to do with it. Please, please, please. Mi dispiace, sono un stupido Americano,” I say, suddenly switching into Italian.

The Carabinieri responds in Italian. “You know this is illegal in Italy. I could have you kicked out of the country for this.”

“Please no, please, I’m just a dumb American exchange student.”

“Where are you studying?”

“Siena,” I say.

“What are you studying?” he demands to know.

“Italian history, Etruscan art, and Dante,” I lie again. I didn’t want to tell him I was primarily studying Italian language even though we were now speaking in Italian and even after I had told him I didn’t speak Italian. My mind wasn’t acting very sensibly. Maybe it was the fact that I could smell the hash sitting in his hand and I wanted it back so very badly. I wasn’t even frightened. At no time did I believe the Carabinieri would arrest me. Why, I’ll never know. He certainly had the power to take me off the train, lock me up, confiscate my passport, steal my money and my hash or just dump me off the moving train with a swift kick to the arse.

“Va bene, I won’t arrest you. It’s your lucky night. But I must throw this,” he said indicating my hash, “out the window. It’s forbidden and you must pay a penalty for it.” All of this sounded much more elegant and musical in Italian.

“Nooooo, you can’t!” I cried.

“Of course, I can!” he responded.

“Nooooo, you can’t,” I cried again.

“Of course I must!” he insisted.

“No, no, you see it’s not mine,” I lied again. “I was bringing it to Siena for my friend, another stupido Americano. And I used the very last of my money to buy it in Catania. If I don’t arrive with it he will beat me and make my life a living hell.”

The two Carabinieri looked at each other dumbfounded. They couldn’t believe I was actually suggesting that they leave the hash with me. I couldn’t believe it myself. Things were about to go from bad to worse. I should have just been grateful they had not arrested me. Marie was looking at me with a horrified stupor on her face.

“If we leave this with you, (they never once referred to it as hash) what’s to stop you from getting caught with it again and telling the next officers that we left it with you? Huh? Then we would be in trouble.” The junior officer asked.

“No, no, no, if you give ‘it’ back to me I swear on my mother’s name that I will put it into the bottom of my bag and will not remove it again before I return to my apartment in Siena where I will give it to my friend. I would never snitch on you guys!” All of a sudden I could see it in the head Carabinieri’s eyes that this Jedi mind trick might actually work.

“No, we must throw it away,” said the senior officer.

“No! Come on guys, please let me keep it and hide it away. I swear I won’t touch it again and if I am caught again then that’s my fault, and I promise I won’t tell anyone we ever even met.”

They looked at Marie. She smiled back prettily. Do I remember her showing some leg, or am I just making that up? They looked at one another and turned their backs on us, muttering among themselves. When they turned around they were both smiling as if they had shared a private joke? My heart was racing.

“Ok stupid Americano, put that away and don’t take it out again,” the junior officer said as the senior handed me back the giant ball of hash. And just like that they whisked open the sliding door of the couchette, stepped out, and were gone. Marie and I were alone once again. I stood there dumbfounded, holding the hash in my hand. She looked at me in disbelief. The train raced on through the night.

HONDURAS AND THE FINAL VEIL

I traveled to Honduras in the winter of 2010. This was my second trip to the Bay Island of Utila. I was fixated on the idea of relocating there from Louisville in order to open an espresso shop and study scuba diving instruction. I had fallen in love with the small little pirate island the year before when I had spent time with a dark-skinned girl and various expatriates who were all living what seemed to me like a very free kind of life. Maybe it was the glamour of the parties I went to, or the flotsam and jetsam raft of people I was meeting, but after some six years in Louisville I knew I was ready for a change.

My coffee shop, Derby City Espresso, was treading water and I was exhausted after four years of being its sole employee. From dawn until midnight I was there, at the shop, every single day. I was making such a paltry sum of money at it that I couldn't even afford an apartment. I was forced to choose between keeping the doors of the business open and living in a tiny elf-sized loft above the bathroom or abandoning the ship and renting a real apartment and getting a "real" job. I was taking classes at the University of Louisville, studying Elizabethan literature, con men, motorcycle theory, and creative public relations writing and social media.

So I imagined myself finishing my classwork and loading everything I owned into a shipping container, from my La Marzocco four-gruppe espresso machine, to my draft and beer brewing equipment. I was thinking about taking the plunge. Driving the shipping container by semi-tractor trailer from Louisville to the Port of New Orleans, where I would heroically board a freighter heading south through the Gulf of Mexico to the Bay. I would land on Utila in this fantasy and live my forties out like Robinson Crusoe but with Internet, cold beer, excellent home roasted Honduran espresso and girls, girls, girls.

Little did I understand, Utila really was a pirate island, where there was no rule of law. On Utila the cocaine cartels made the only rules. On my second visit I stayed in a house with two Englishmen both in exile for one reason or another.

In fact, the longer you stayed on Utila, the more local expats you would encounter with exile stories. It was either tax evasion or running from a drug charge. One of the Brits I was staying with told me he was forced to leave the United Kingdom due to a banking scandal. He didn't elaborate. The other flat mate had just returned from Columbia.

Utila had a cocaine cartel-owned landing strip where the smuggling planes would refuel. In fact, one of the tourist attractions on the island was a plane wreck where one of the mule planes had crashed. It was out a few kilometers into the jungle. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, the power would go off on the whole island. You could hear the prop planes engines in the distance. And then come an hour later, the power would come back on to the sound of the black smuggling plane taking off once again.

There were plenty of military around. The British had a base just up the coast in Belize where they did their jungle training. The Americans, of course, had run the Contra war out of Honduras and still played an influential role in the socio-military drug war economics of this poor and violent country. It was rumored that the DEA had a listening station on the neighboring island of Roatan to monitor the drug trafficking taking place in the Caribbean.

When I visited for the first time on New Year's Eve, December 31, 2009 it was a blue moon and a lunar eclipse and I'm sure that romanticized my far-fetched fantasy of casting myself away.

What I was ignoring was this travel warning:

"The Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens that the level of crime and violence in Honduras remains critically high. Tens of thousands of U.S. citizens visit Honduras each year for study, tourism, business, and volunteer work without incident. However, crime and violence are serious problems throughout the country, and the Government of Honduras lacks the resources to address these issues. Since 2010, Honduras has had the highest murder rate in the world."

That first trip went off without a hitch and I had a wonderful time. I ignored the travel advisory when I went back a second time in the winter of 2010. This time I was there to seriously look at property on the island and consider a bold move and a new chapter in my life. Things seemed fine at the start. I reconnected with some folks I had met the year prior like Gunther the Swiss scuba diver and Dado the Italian bar owner. They were concerned for me when I told them I was staying with the Scion and Aiden and recommended I get my own hotel room. I brushed their concerns aside and spent my days swimming snorkeling, and scuba diving. Breakfast at ten, dinner at seven. It was a paradise and as I relaxed and sank into the island life I let my guard down.

Things began to feel very strange very suddenly. It happened in just one night, like the shifting of a trade wind, changing from paradise to paranoia. That night my flat mate broke into the room where I was sleeping while I was out at the bar. Nothing was missing but there was a sense of dread rising in the house. The next day I began to act strange and feel drugged. I sat in a café reading a book oblivious to my normal habits of sun and sand and sea. That evening I took off all of my clothes and wandered around the house naked until the Scion and Aiden came home and demanded I dress myself. I didn't understand why my nudity was a problem and no longer was in phase with myself. I felt frightened and somehow knew I was about to be robbed. Without understanding how I knew, I concluded that I had been drugged and that I was about to be robbed by my English flat mates.

It would only be upon my safe return to the United States that I came to understand that I had been a victim of the drug "Devil's Breath." Also known as brundanga in Columbia or by its chemical name scopolamine, it is a powerful disassociative that is spoken about in urban legend as the zombie drug. According to a 2012 Daily News article, Devil's Breath renders its victims will-less and can block memories from forming, so that even after it wears off the victims memories are scrambled at best and absent completely at worst. One victim of the drug interviewed by Vice Magazine journalist Ryan Duffy told a horrifying story about a man who approached her on the street and asked her for directions to a nearby address. Since it was so close she accompanied him there in person. Upon arrival they drink some juice together. Now drugged the man requested that she take him to her home, once there she helped him gather up her valuables as he robbed her of his savings. The drug (just like LSD) also has a history of being used by the CIA as an interrogation drug and truth serum and it can induce powerful hallucinations.

That night under the effect of the Devil's Breath I fled the house where I had been staying. I gathered up all my belongings and also took a set of the Englishmen's dive gear. I don't know why I decided to steal from them, but it seemed the right thing to do considering they wanted to rob me. I walked across the island under a full moon to the launch where a catamaran would leave the next morning for the neighboring island of Roatan.

At dawn, Vern's catamaran sailed with me aboard and I left Utila never to return. The trip across the bit of sea between the two islands was a rough and I was glad to arrive on Roatan. I walked away from the boat with my backpack, the scuba gear but not my cowboy boots, those I left behind.

I hopped in a taxi and told the driver to take me to a hotel. We drove around the island stopping into one place after another that didn't suit me. He gave a complete tour of the island from West Bay where the catamaran had arrived to French Harbor and Oakridge on the western coast. Finally, I asked the cabbie if he could show me where he lived. Driving into the interior of the island he took me to a small hillside community tightly packed with shacks and tin roofed homes. The cabdriver was of Mayan descent and upon seeing where he lived I asked him if I could spend the night as a guest in his home. He said yes and then cooked me dinner and told me the story of his daughter. In my addled state of mind it sounded like she had been a princess that was taken away from him by an evil lord and trapped in Tegucigalpa the capitol of Honduras. That night I couldn't sleep. I felt as if I was under a spell. I began to think that the stars were spinning out of speed and that the shadows could be used to transform the night into something else. That magic was real and that my host was a brujo and that I was there to learn shamanism from him, much as I had earlier learned from Don Juan. I looked out over the hillside and peered into the depths of the lights winking on the far hillside. Everything I had been through on Long Island and in Amsterdam came flooding back. My eyes went kaleidoscopic as my identity receded.

All night, sitting there quietly watching the dawn arrive took what seemed to be an instant. Yet I raced in my memories through my entire life. The next morning there was a little boy playing with a stick on the hill behind the house. I walked up to see what he was poking at. There, under a rotting log were two beetles, one jet black and easily as long as a lighter, the other ox-blood red and half as big as the obsidian one. The boy laughed as he poked the black beetle. The taxi driver called to me. I knew it was time to go.

"Do you want to go back to town now? I have to go to work," he asked. Instead I turned away from him and the boy, and the two beetles on the ground, and walked up and away over the ridgeline. I didn't look back. I didn't care that I had just left all of my possessions behind. My wallet, my passport, the stolen scuba gear. None of it mattered to me. All that was important was that I walk. I walk and journey and see through the shaman's eyes. I was tuned in to another frequency. Was it the Devil's Breath still inside of me or had that simply become the activator for some deeper that was swimming under the surface of my waking consciousness?

I spent the entirety of the day hiking over the summit of the island. After crossing the summit of the hill I found myself in a small village. There were three women climbing up the road toward a hill. I

began to follow them. They were the sirens from Bari and in my mind I once again hear that old familiar song. I followed them up a dirt road into the bush, eventually, they disappeared from my sight but I still could hear their call. Soon enough I found my way to a giant radio broadcasting tower at the top of the island. The sky was crystal clear and I could see the radio frequencies. I could hear the siren's song and I knew without a doubt that the strange dual tone multi-frequency sound coming from the tower was in fact sending subliminal messages to every inhabitant of the island. I tried to understand what the underlying message was, but to no avail. Suddenly, I felt as if I was in grave danger, as the sound of a pickup truck coming down the road toward the tower grew nearer. Flushed I took off towards the jungle. Cutting my way through the bush, with my arms and legs I soon lost myself in the woods.

It was all downhill from there and eventually I found myself again on the beach where I had first landed the day before on Vern's catamaran. I splashed into the sea. Swimming rapturously. After the many kilometers I had walked that day in the heat of the jungle swimming in the crystal blue waters of the sea was a baptism. I saw the face of god right then and there, Feeling revitalized and ecstatic I made my way to a lounge chair to absorb the heat of the sun and to dry out. A group of tourists approached, drinking beer.

"Hey, want a beer kid?"

Gratefully, I accepted. We shot the shit for the next hour. What about I can't say... I have a faint image of telling them about the classic English television show "The Prisoner." Eventually, we walked down the beach to one of the beachfront bars for the sunset. People kept putting drinks into my hand. Was I drugged? Was I drunk? Was I simply a brujo on a vision quest or all of the above? Soon the original group of American tourists retired to their hotel and was replaced by a gaggle of Brits. Everyone found me entertaining and kept buying me beers to drink. The sun went down. I felt quite centered there at the bar although I have few memories of the conversations I shared with the people who were buying me drinks. Without any thoughts in the world about what had happened over the past days I relaxed and enjoyed myself. I completely forgot fleeing Utila, staying with the cab driver, abandoning all of my possessions with him or the fact that I had been drugged.

Suddenly, I was surrounded by a group of black-clad machine gun wielding Honduran police officers.

“Come with us.” Peacefully, I acceded to their wishes. At the side of the road a police pickup was waiting for me. There was the Aiden who I suddenly knew had drugged me. He had followed me from Utila.

“Where’s the emeralds, mate? Where’s the scuba diving gear?” I smiled at him knowing that he would never find any of it until I wanted him to.

“It’s at the cab driver’s house,” I responded. He was furious. The police took me into custody and asked for my passport.

I of course had no passport. It was at the cab driver’s home. They took me first to one station and then after some time without much happening, two Mayan officers who seemed less like cops and more like shamans in disguise loaded me into a falling apart police truck and drove me across the island to the main police station. There they interviewed me again. I’m not sure what I told them, but I believe it became clear to them that something was horribly wrong with me. I spent the night at the police station. The next day, having gotten very little sleep, I wandered out of the station. I was not restrained and I walked into the woods and away from the station. Nobody noticed or seemed to care. It was as if I had just been viewed as a drunk.

I wandered around the island all day again, past the airport and through the jungle. I found myself in every kind of neighborhood and on every road. Some German missionary tourists picked me up and took me for lunch. Afterwards I kept wandering. What kind of face did I present to the Hondurans and tourists whose path I crossed? Was I a madman or just a weary soul?

I myself had no clear idea of the time passing or the fact that I was now essentially homeless. Like my trips on Long Island and Amsterdam, sleep deprivation played a significant role in my delirium. The human brain can barely stand twenty-four hours without sleep. Once that number doubles or triples, insanity and delusion are sure to follow.

Cabs would pass me by on the road, but never my cab driver’s cab. Eventually, the police picked me up again for trespassing on a wealthy person’s property where I had undressed and was dancing in the woods to some internal tune. The police weren’t upset with me and instead laughed and joked with me as we returned to the main station. There at the station I helped with cleaning up the lot, picking up cigarette butts and garbage from around the cells.

They told me there was a call for me. It was my step-father in America. How did he know I was here?

“Matthew, are you ok?” He asked.

“I’m fine,” I remember telling him, “I’m researching my thesis.”

We spoke for a few more minutes but about what I can’t remember. The next day a man came to the police station along with the con-artist Aiden. He introduced himself as a private detective and they took me away in a jeep in search of the cab drivers home. I had no idea how to retrace my steps and I while at this point I would have been happy to return the scuba diving equipment and extract myself from this predicament I had no means to do so. Aiden threatened me with more jail time if I did not give up the emeralds and dive gear. I tartly told him to fuck off that I had no emeralds and that he would get what was coming to him soon enough.

I have to stop here because I feel that I can’t continue this narrative. My memories of what happened to me during those days on Roatan are a jumble and here and now nearly three years later fail me. There is fear that rises within me as I look into myself. Flashes of me chained to a wall, racing in my mind, riding an imaginary horse in the Derby. Wandering the streets at night, the private detective who was in cahoots with the Scion and Aiden. Just flashes. As I write this I am filled with feelings of dread. What happened to me? Where did my memory go? Was I drugged was it all a scam to get my parents to send \$2000 to Honduras to pay for a private detective to get me out of jail and send me home? It’s clear that the third veil is a story I am not ready to tamely contemplate.

Looking back at my Facebook page from that time I find this post from my sister: “For all interested a private investigator and the Embassy found my brother and he's finally coming too and is well. He has no memory of what has happened throughout all of this. He will be coming back to the states early this week, and pending all health wise is ok, he will head back home shortly after. Thank you all for thoughts, prayers, and support during this time!!”

That was January 8, 2011; my last Facebook post from Utila was on December 28, 2010. In between on January 3 there is this from “John Smith Zion” the nom de guerre of Scion:

“getting your shit together: matt you havn't paid Eco I have your Ipad You have my BCD Vern has your shoes get your shit together!!!!!!!!!!!! call me 96314198 honduras please!!!!!!”

The more I search for evidence of Aiden Jones and Scion (Jon Smith Zion) the less I find. Google Aiden Jones and you find a gym and a young boy's You Tube. Search for Jon Smith Zion and you find another You Tube channel of surf videos and a tattoo artist's page on Facebook neither of which have been updated in years. I find one photo of him from El Tunco, El Salvador in a blog titled “Never Confuse Having a Life with Having a Career. The only evidence I can find that an Aiden Jones ever existed is a YouTube channel in his name with a number of Slavoj Zizek videos as well as one titled “[24 Hours Project] Vol. 22 Isla de Utila, Honduras.” It must be him? Right?

“Maybe so, maybe not (was it for this my life I sought)?”

Upon my return to Louisville from Honduras on January 13, 2011 I buckled down, returned to my studies at the University of Louisville and resumed my business at Derby City Espresso. Some four or five months thereafter I decided to convert DCE into a new business, a whiskey bar.

I'll never have a complete map, I'll never untangle that maze of half memories, or set of dream like images I hold for those days. Did my mind snap? Was it the Devil's Breath? I'll never know if it was this or if I just flashed back to those earlier decisive moments on Long Island and Amsterdam. The conflict within me of course is why does this only happen to me when I am on vacation, why is it when I am at work be it as a self-employed proprietor of a whiskey bar I never lose my self-control. I never go crazy and wander around for days at a time. No more Han Solo days for me, it's all Lando Calrissian from here on out.

Yet, there is a part of me that *remembers, deeply remembers*, that when I was in this state, this egoless mind, this body without the personality of Matthew there was the sense of terror and freedom and deep mystery all mixed up that was intoxicating. It was the same mental place all three times I pierced the veil of normal quotidian reality. And I still hear it sometimes, the echo of those sirens, the shimmering of the fourth world where all signifiers carried a weight heavier than anything I have ever experienced while running a whiskey bar.

I SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN AN MBA

I decided to become an entrepreneur and open my own bar some eight years ago. I was at yet another crossroads in my life, having moved to Louisville, Kentucky two years earlier from Europe in order to be closer to my son Quinn. I was two years into this new chapter and I couldn't say much for myself. I lived in a shared apartment, and I made \$12 an hour as a cheese monger and coffee buyer at Whole Foods Market. I drove a beat up VW van that was constantly breaking down and I never had enough money to buy my friends drinks. My son hated me and thought I was a loser because I worked in a grocery store and lived in a shared apartment. I wondered if it had been a mistake to leave Europe.

One summer night in 2006, my girlfriend and I went to see Roger Waters perform "Dark Side of the Moon" by Pink Floyd. I made the fateful decision to take LSD again. I was in need of a shock to my system. Something, anything to wake me up and grant me vision on how to move forward in my life. I was miserable at the grocery store. How had I become this drone? After everything that had come before, the parting of the first veil, the opening of the second, and now I was serving brie to bitchy East Enders for the scorn of my son and \$12 an hour before taxes. This was not the fate I had envisioned for myself when I returned to America. This was not the life I wanted.

The concert was amazing. I had seen the "Pink Floyd" David Gilmour variation nearly twelve years earlier in Chicago at Soldier's Field and this concert had more verve, pitch. Waters himself had more poise than that strange arena rock version of "Pink Floyd." In fact upon seeing this show I knew who was Pink.

And then somewhere in the middle of the second set after the performance of "Dark Side of the Moon," when the band was playing a mashed up bag of Roger's solo material and Floyd hits it happened: they released the pig. A giant pink pig balloon covered with graffiti is released from somewhere near the back of the amphitheater, over our heads and behind our backs.

Up it drifted toward heaven floating, arcing outward in a tangible moment of relief and freedom from the drudgery of work and pain on the promise of a new horizon.

You know that I care what happens to you,
And I know that you care for me.
So I don't feel alone, or the weight of the stone
Now that I've found somewhere safe To bury my bone
And any fool knows a dog needs a home,
A shelter from pigs on the wing.

The pig flew away and a bubble burst within me with an audible pop. Was I aurally hallucinating? Did that sound come from the stage? All my mental blockages ceased and I felt liberated. The higher the pig flew into the night the more sober I became. The idea was birthed in that moment. I would go into business for myself! I would open an espresso bar.

The next week I traveled to Chicago to care for my father while he went through a medical procedure involving the placement of a stent inside of his heart. The morning after his surgery he was supposed to telephone so I could drive his car to the hospital and pick him up and bring him to his home. Instead he walked out of the hospital under his own power and took a city bus to the apartment. When he arrived at the he flew into a rage because he thought I had broken his coffeemaker. I went back to bed. That night over dinner I told him that I was going to start my own business. He was incredulous. "How are you going to do that? Where are you going to get the money? Do you even know anything about running a business?" I walked out on him right then and there. I hadn't come all the way from Kentucky, missing work to be by his side, in order to have him once again berate me and tell me I wasn't good enough for the part. Less than a month later, I had signed a lease on a storefront in a quasi-abandoned part of underdeveloped downtown Louisville.

That was November of 2006. Some three and a half years later, in the spring of 2010, I enrolled in classes in order to obtain a masters in English from the University of Louisville. Ostensibly I went back to grad school because I was bored with *only* owning an espresso bar.

I decided to study English and focus on creative writing, which had long been a passion of mine. Long before I ever became a bartender and bar proprietor I wanted to write and had followed that course with my brief career in journalism. I decided to focus on Elizabethan drama because I had never studied Shakespeare or his contemporaries. School was fun, and my return to school was mentally profitable. I met new people, read great books, and was exposed to a number of fascinating professors and literary theories

and thought processes. I liked the challenge of studying combined with owning a business and I was satisfied.

I took a trip to Honduras, specifically the bay island of Utila. At the time I went, I was contemplating moving there or somewhere else in Central America after completing school. I wanted to leave Louisville and go somewhere tropical. I dreamed of putting everything I owned into a shipping container and getting on a boat with it in New Orleans and sailing down to the Caribbean. Once there I would unload my shipping container and reopen my espresso bar and beer shop (perhaps even using the container as a utilizable room) on a tropical Caribbean island. There I could laze the days away, scuba dive five days a week and meet travelers from around the world. Sadly this plan did not come to fruition but that is another story for another time. The end result of my not moving to Honduras was a doubling down on Louisville. Shortly after my return from that strange journey south of the border I decided that if I was to remain in Louisville and remain in business for myself that I had to transform my espresso bar into a whiskey bar.

When I first opened Derby City Espresso back on April Fool's Day 2007, several people, my twin half-brothers included, advised me to skip the coffee business and open a bar. I rebuffed them. "I don't want to own a bar. I don't like drunks and I barely drink myself." Six months later, as DCE was on the verge of total collapse I changed course and compromised. I applied for and received a malt beverage license. Going forward I operated a hybrid espresso/beer bar. Not quite a bar and not quite a coffee shop, DCE was a third location way ahead of its time in downtown Louisville. Years before there was a district called NuLu, I was there on East Market St. Beer helped my bottom line but it never cured what ailed my business. In fact, I was only making about \$4000 a month in gross sales on average a month—just enough to keep the bar open, pay the bills and keep the lights on. It was such a paltry sum that I couldn't even afford to rent an apartment. For nearly four and half years I lived in a small loft above the bathroom of the bar.

It was a humble third world existence, but I kept telling myself it was a compromise I was willing to make, as at least I was doing what I wanted and I was free of the drudgery of a nine to five gig working for Whole Foods. To go from being a professional translator and public relations copywriter in Europe to working in a grocery store was a humbling fall. Yet I knew I didn't have to accept this fate. Owning DCE

and living above the bathroom wasn't making me any money, but it was a creative and self-determinative way to kill my time in Louisville while my son went to high school. At least I had all the craft beer and espresso I wanted for next to free.

It came to me in the wake of my return from Central America: my wish key was going to be whiskey. I was going to close Derby City Espresso, take a month off to travel in Europe, and use the last tranche of my student loan money to buy a full liquor license. For years people had been coming to see local bands at DCE and would ask me for a bourbon. I had always been forced to reply that we only served beer. Enough was enough. It was time to start saying yes to fine old Kentucky bourbon whiskey!

I closed Derby City Espresso in December 2011. After an extended vacation in Italy and Germany, I returned to Louisville and got to work on the new whiskey bar. On January 12, 2012, I reopened 331 E. Market St as the Haymarket Whiskey Bar. It was pretty humble to begin with and the interior was not much changed from the espresso bar days. But even in that first month of business I doubled my revenue from four thousand dollars a month to eight and I saw the promise of the decision I had made. I had no business plan and I was no business man but as I flew by the seat of my pants the Haymarket grew exponentially.

By the end of May, I had finished my course work at the University and had taken a leave of absence to work full time on the bar. Within six months of opening, I had gone from being a sole proprietor with no employees to hiring my first help. By the end of the first year as Haymarket, I had managed to squirrel away nearly ten thousand dollars in savings. My debt from the opening of Derby City Espresso was largely paid off and in the spring of 2013, the Haymarket was now averaging nearly \$12,000 a month in sales three times as much as I had earned as DCE.

A year later, I had doubled revenue again. Now, as I approach the third anniversary of the Haymarket, we are grossing nearly \$30,000 a month. I even put the espresso machine back into the bar so I could have my afternoon cappuccinos once more.

But I still hadn't matriculated with the master's degree. And it slowly dawned on me that if only I had gone to school for an MBA I could have turned the bar itself in as a final project. Instead, I'm writing this thesis. It looks like my bet is paying off. Turnabout is fair play, and I have an excellent fallback plan.

FRACTAL GIRLS

I've known a lot of women over the years. Some I've know carnally, others emotionally, and so many from across the bar, or in the classroom and office. If there is one thing I've learned, it's that women are like fractals. The deeper you peer into one, the more complex she becomes. It's like looking at one's own past. Once you start canvassing the crevices and nooks, once you begin spelunking into your own depths of memory, the more you remember. The finer the points of detail become.

I knew a professor of religious studies recently. She was very intelligent but not very good at communicating. She kept her focus tightly on her work and did not allow much to pierce the veil of herself. She was a decent enough lover and a fine walking companion but she may have been one of the least emotional women I had ever met. Her feelings, if she had any, were kept largely to herself. Even after months of sleeping together, I knew next to nothing about what she wanted out of life, what she wanted out of our relationship, and even less about what she wanted from me in bed.

I made my growing feelings for her clear but she responded with a prolonged lapse in communication. The professor wanted us to be in a non-exclusive scenario, she had another lover in Bloomington. Being open minded I tried to not be bothered by this but with the long lapse in seeing one another and lack of conversation I finally decided to once again date other women. When I told her I was going on a date with someone else she responded. "Aw, I wish it was with me." What a contradiction she was. Yet despite her statement I didn't see her at all in the next month and every time I reached out to have a conversation I was rebuffed with a gruff, "I'm busy. I'm overwhelmed, I'm writing a book and traveling to conferences and I don't have time to shower let alone have a conversation with you."

There is something about a relationship in which one must at least feign the attempt at being present lacking communication and intimacy leaves you with nothing but the husk of appearance, it is not a relationship.

I left the professor shortly thereafter for the affections of other women. A lover from my past had recently platonically reentered my life and wanted us to become lovers once again. I had begun dating another woman as well. She was sweet and tender in ways the professor simply was not. Yet she wanted to codify our relationship from the beginning. She was nervous and suffering from a mysterious illness that would cause her to occasionally faint.

This romantic change of gears all came at a time in my life when I was under an extraordinary amount of pressure and I felt I needed some kind of calming and loving influence in my life. I wanted so badly someone to hold my hand, someone to share my bed with.

My mind was split and almost left teetering on the edge. I felt as fragile mentally as I had in years. Was I primed for another breakdown? I prayed not and I worked to keep myself in check. Yet some days a depression flared up inside of me and I would have trouble getting out of bed to do the mundane tasks required of me at the bar. The cool cotton of the my sheets would envelope me, cocooning me. I longed to be rid of my feelings that still remained for the Professor. I longed to be rid of the raging libido between my legs.

Invariably, after an extra hour or two reading the newspaper and my emails in bed, I would roust myself and return to the real world. I would do what needed to be done. Eventually I would forget the feelings of abandonment that the professor girlfriend had aroused inside of me. Maybe it was just the change in the seasons and my discontentment from my continuing inability to quit smoking cigarettes. I never liked the first days of winter. The first cold of the year and the lessening of the daylight hours. I suffered from a seasonal emotional disorder. I poured myself into my work, and finishing my thesis became a top priority. I avoided going into the bar as much as I could. When a lady would visit I would bury myself in her. Peering into her eyes, I would allow her to hold me tight and let my body take flight in hers.

Three weekends in a row this lover came to visit. On her third visit, I had to go into work at the bar, to cover for a sick bartender. Then when the shift change came in, I had to play proprietor and host, buying a round of drinks for one set of guests and making sure the bands were having a good time. She waited for me off to the side by herself away from the bar. When I got out from behind the bar and began working the room, socializing with this friend and that band member, she seemed upset. "I drove two hours

to be here with you and you're not here with me." "Of course I'm here with you. I'm just also here with my business and everyone else that wants a moment of my time. We'll leave soon and go and be alone."

Her response to this was to stand close to my side no matter where I went in the bar and to grab my ass and run her hands through my hair in a very explicit and public manner. She made quite a scene of her attachment to me. Heads turned. I heard one person say to another, "Looks like Matthew has a new lover." And while it was true inside my place of work I prefer to downplay my liaisons. I decided to stay for the remainder of the concert. It was a band that had never played in the bar before and the lead singer of the band was a man I'd had a falling out with several years earlier. I wanted to make sure he was enjoying himself and make some amends for our falling out. The Louisville music scene is quite tight and interwoven and any time there is a chance to repair a bridge that I may have once burnt it's important to rebuild. Upon hearing this She skunked away and sat in the corner by herself again, looking at me forlornly.

I went to her side. "Do you want to leave without me and head to the apartment?"

"No, I want whatever you want."

"Well, I have to remain here a bit longer. There is some business I have to take care of and then I'll take you home and you can touch me all you want. If it's any consolation I want you very much too."

I introduced her to a friend who I drank whiskey with on a regular basis. Then, momentarily, I had to leave her side to make sure the sound engineer for the evening's show had been paid. She followed me. I'll be right back, I told her. She responded by clutching at my hands and pulling me close to her.

"Hey I have to take care of this. I thought you said you didn't want to leave. Why are you acting this way? You know we're going home together. Do you really need to climb all over me right now in front of everyone in the bar?"

Finally the show ended and I took care of the band and paid my sound engineer for the night's work. Shortly thereafter, we left. When we got back to my apartment I took her to bed. As I kissed her and fondled her breasts drawing her close to me she announced that she wanted to "get to know me better," that now she wasn't in the mood. "Is sex all you want from me?" she asked. I told her I didn't understand. When we were at the bar and I was showing her what I do on a Friday night, when I was introducing her to my friends, and giving her a glimpse into my world, she wanted to climb all over me, pinch my ass and

come on to me in the most public and flagrant manner possible. Now that we were alone and in bed she no longer wanted to be physical with me, and instead wanted to get to know me better? “Are you drunk?” Frustrated and confused I rolled away from her. “I’m going to sleep,” The next morning I awoke to feel her lightly touching my back.

“What time is it?” I asked groggily.

“Ten,” she replied. I rolled back over. “When are you going to get up? I need to eat breakfast.”

“I’m not even fucking awake yet.” I responded tartly.

She got up from the bed, and angrily put her clothes on. “Are you leaving?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied and turned out the door and left. I rolled back over and thought to myself why was it I could never find a woman with whom I could share a rhythm of wakefulness and sleep, physical attraction and platonic friendship. An hour later, when I awoke again she was still gone. There was no sign of her, as if she had never been with me in the apartment at all. There were no messages on my phone except a series of six left the night before when I had been working and not paying enough attention to her. I rose from the bed to make coffee and read the *New York Times*. I answered emails. I wondered where she was. Had she left Louisville to return to Bloomington? Was she at breakfast still? Finally, three hours later, she messaged me asking if I wanted to talk. “No, I think that’s a bad idea. All of my resentment from last night will come spilling out. I don’t think we should see one another again.” And that was the end of that. Maybe I’m too demanding, too dominant but I found it grossly offensive that someone with whom you planned on spending the day, having breakfast, making morning love just gets up and disappears from your side for three hours without a word.

Women are like memory. You want to move through the past like a ship leaving no wake. But the names float by like eddies and ripples from an unseen disturbance underwater. Sarah, Crystal, Martha, Michelle, Mia. And then I try to remember who counted, who really mattered versus who had been the best at sex and who had cooked the best chicken noodle soup and who could sew and whose family I cared for more than I cared for my own. I’m never satisfied with the answers I come up with. I have felt great love but have I been a great lover? I have been a good friend but whenever someone falls madly in love with me I seem to be unable to return that love in even measure. And when my feelings for someone grow to the

point where I think, “this is it, she’s the one I want to be with, for a long time to come,” it ends up like it did with the professor girlfriend. A hung up phone, a connection that no longer responds.

My son, Quinn, recently told me I should give up fornicating (his word) and turn to god. I thought he was joking at first. I told him he would be better off joining a barbershop quartet than joining a church. He corrected me. “I’ve joined a messianic synagogue and this is my spiritual truth, although I learn more all the time. Simply put, Jesus (Yeshua) is the true messiah all the ancient Jewish prophets predicted.”

He lives in Brooklyn in a small 200-square-foot loft with no indoor plumbing and deals drugs like cocaine and “molly” for a living. He also does some bike messengering and delivery work on the side or maybe that’s just how he delivers his drugs. Although, now that he’s found religion maybe he’s not selling drugs anymore. Upon hearing of his conversion to messianic Judaism I suggested he move to Israel and join a yeshiva. I asked him if he had become a Lubavitcher. He didn’t reply. Maybe he’s just pulling my leg about the religion thing. When my son tells me things I tend to take them with a grain of salt. Who knows? I fear he too suffers from the same mental illness and depressions and flights of fancy that I suffer from. But maybe he’s right about the various women in my life. Maybe I should stop dating; maybe if I join an orthodox synagogue G-D will favor me with a wife. Hah, no that may be my son’s path but it’s not mine.

I never wanted to be a father. I never wanted a son. I knew I would not be much better at being a father than my own father was to me. I’m fairly sure I’ve been no better at all. When I was my son’s age, I couldn’t relate to my corporate tax attorney father. Now, twenty-one years later, the shoe is on the other foot and I can’t relate to my hipster Brooklynite messianic son any more than he can relate to his beatnik, whiskey bar-owning Merry Prankster father.

My own father recently (now that my bar is a success) took a greater interest in my affairs. After years of telling me what a failure I am he now congratulates me each time the Haymarket is in the national press.

“I want to see you books,” he told me the last time I was in Chicago. It was one-thirty in the morning and I was drunk and wearing a multi-colored chicken costume.

“Can’t this wait until tomorrow over breakfast?” I asked before patiently listening to him tell me how I needed to fire my accountant.

I had just returned to his tiny apartment from a party where I performed with Ken Kesey's son and a band of Merry Pranksters. I had gotten to know Ken back in 1999 in Eugene, Oregon. He had always been a hero of mine and it was a dream come true to spend time with him in his office drinking red wine and watching his old home videos of the 1964 bus trip and Neal Cassady.

"Ken, why is it these things happen to me? Why is it that I seem to be hand selected for adventure and insanity?"

"I can't say," he replied in his grandfatherly drawl, "but there will always be fewer of us than of them." He never illuminated who exactly he felt those other people were, the ones in the majority, but I knew that he was talking about the people who watch Judge Judy, like my mother does. Or the people who think good whiskeys are Crown Royal or Dewar's. But it was clear that he was lining me up with himself. As if he too wondered why it was that he had lived such a life, one made for the movies.

At the party with his son that night in Chicago, I realized that the sixties were finally over. I was born in 1972 more than a decade too late. It took some fifty years, but they were finally over. The pranksters were just mulling around in their tie-dye uniforms. There was no longer anything revolutionary about them. I was the only one there in true costume. The band on stage at the nightclub played a series of Grateful Dead cover songs. The music was nothing new either.

I was the only prankster not getting back on the bus that night. "You're either on the bus or off the bus," was the famous quote. And I was clearly outside of the circle; I was not on the bus. Instead, I rode away on my rabid rabbit, Stella, my trusty Vespa scooter, which I had brought to Chicago from Louisville for just this party. After all what is a bigger prank than riding the streets of Chicago on a Vespa dressed like a chicken? I realized then and there that the pranksters themselves, along with myself, had become the "them." That none of us were any longer living a life of adventure. That we were just going through the motions. Now I was just another businessman in a rooster costume with a bar to tend to, an overbearing father to humor, and a son who thought he knew the face of god and a series of failed romances hanging from my tail like so many cans dangling from the car of a newlywed couple.

That was three months ago. Since then I've thought long and hard about my past and my present. I've come to only one conclusion: It's better to have a wish key than to have a magic bus. I know now that sometimes a great notion comes not in the form of a thesis or a novel but in the creation of a space. That

my best fractal girl is a living, breathing barroom that changes each night infinitely with the variety of angel-headed hipsters, tricksters, and really cool chicks that come through the door and spend their time in it.

OLD FASHIONED

Start with a sugar cube, preferably one made of raw sugar, in a cocktail rocks glass. If using white sugar, use two cubes. Splash the cubes with four dashes of bitters: two each of Peychaud's and two of Regan's orange bitters. Add an ounce spritz of soda water and then muddle the cubes and bitters together to create a bubbly froth. Make sure the sugar cube is thoroughly dissolved. Add a slice of orange and two high-quality Maraschino cherries (not the neon red variety, preferably fresh or frozen sweet deep reds marinated in a mixture of rye whiskey and Maraschino liqueur). Muddle the fruit into the solution, making sure to get as much of the juice out of the orange and cherries as possible. Add two small spoonfuls of cherry juice. Top generously with ice. Over this pour two ounces of bourbon or rye whiskey of your choice. Give the entire cocktail a stir to sink the bourbon and mix into the other ingredients.

The Old Fashioned was the first cocktail I learned how to make really well. Since then I have invented dozens of other cocktails, although I don't fancy myself a mixologist (although I once tried my hand at being a mycologist and growing psilocybin mushrooms). I never intended to own a bar, let alone a cocktail bar. Now that I do, I find that I'm pretty good at it. I'm not a half-bad bartender, although I prefer to let others do that work and instead enjoy playing the host. I tell people that owning the Haymarket is neither the first nor last chapter in a life already filled to the brim with adventure, imagination, love and mystery.

I believe in mystery. I don't know what happens next. I don't want to know. I know what happens next. I believe in science and technology and their ability to transform. I believe in science fiction and the unlimited possibilities it offers the infinite future.

I believe in perseverance and how it furthers one to cross the great river. I believe I'll open a Jewish delicatessen next door to the Haymarket and name it Rosenstein's. Yes sir, that's my rag. In the swirl of months, and in the endless rotation of the years I somehow have become respectable.

INTERVIEW WITH KEN KESEY

(CONDUCTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON MUSEUM OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL
HISTORY, EUGENE, OREGON. NOVEMBER 18, 1999)

q. What is your idea of an ideal party?

a. No actual idea.

q. What is your idea of a not so ideal party?

a. Again, no idea. In fact the whole party idea has kinda drained away. I like getting together with people and doing something.

q. For example?

a. We performed a play in England in 1999 that I wrote and directed called "Where's Merlin?" We took it on the road and we traveled all over (the UK) performing this play. The object (of the play) was to go through and teach people a number of songs they already kind of knew and teach a dance step, so that at the end the audience joins in. At the end, the object is to get everybody up on stage and all of them singing. And what we finally came up with for that was the theme song "Love Potion Number Nine." At the end of it when we have people all doing Love Potion Number Nine, everybody knows it, everybody understands it, they know why it's appropriate, where it comes from, what it's about, and how it relates to us and the acid test and back through that whole thing of Neal Cassady and Tim Leary and Allen Ginsberg and beatniks and back on to Kerouac back of a tradition that's running through American culture, the whole psychedelic tradition.

Everywhere we went in England performing this, we got huge crowds. And all of them knew what we were talking about. Most of the people in the audience were under twenty or over fifty. It's an affirmation of something. To really keep your voice alive, you've got to actually go someplace and tell a story.

q. By focusing more on interactive performances and plays, was that a conscious decision to bridge the gap between participants on the stage and the audience?

Yeah, very much. The direction I wanted to go had to do with not going off and getting high by yourself, or writing by yourself, or practicing tai chi by yourself, but where you're getting out there and interacting with people, you're plowing new ground. Actually you're plowing very old ground that has been around for a very long time and nobody has brought the plow bit to it in a long time. Now this really relates: we've got a radio transmitter on the. It transmits about ten miles and driving on the freeway we have a sign that blinks and says "Dial 105.7 KBUZ, Coming to you from the Guts of Nowhere." And people will drive along and they'll see it and give us the thumbs up, blink their lights, or give us a little honk. So we'll have people out in front of us listening to our radio program and behind us listening to it.

Q. Um, what was the question?

A. When you go out to tootle and hoot how important is the interaction with the audience?

Q. The interaction with people is the most fun, whether they are on stage or not.

A. You were a key figure in the early days of the Grateful Dead giving them a place to perform during the acid tests. Those concerts were for some the definition of the word party. What did you think of the Dead experience?

Q. When the Dead were really going and functioning well, it was like a crack through the black wall of our consciousness and you saw on the other side there was light though this. The Dead really had no more dogma than that.

They just wanted to get out there where they would do something and you would watch them play and every so often they would get it together and they would be on the same frequency as the audience and they

would be the same and there would be a flash of realization that we weren't for a moment there. We weren't in the same time frame as everyone else. We weren't in the same reality.

That's why people went to the Dead, because they were trying as hard as they could to be more than entertainers. They were trying to become the conduit to another light.

Q. You joined Phish on stage in 1997; they're another rock and roll band renown for the partying and carnival-like atmosphere of their concerts. Did you see that same crack open up like with the Dead?

A. Uh, no, but I wasn't payin' attention that much. But when we went up there we were able to segue right on into the closing song, which was Gloria and everyone in the world knows Gloria and they all know how to sing it and they love to sing it. Just singing Gloria brings something into the heart.

Q. You sent a copy of your film of the acid tests to the Whitney museum of American art for their millennium ending show. Why do you think such an esteemed cultural institution was interested in showing a film of a psychedelic drug party?

A. It's because at the end of this century and millennium we cast our eyes back. We're seeing stuff through a brighter light. I think that the '60s and that whole movement of the Beats have become more important as time went by. And everybody is aware that something happened there, whether people admit it or not, something happened in the '60s and it was unique. The human race has been trying to find something all its life. There's a thing in Joseph Campbell where he's talking about the seekers, the questers, the people who are trying to follow their bliss and the Native American potlatches were probably a version of the Dead concerts, getting together, drumming, drumming and trying to lift up out of the mire. That's what we've been doing forever. We're trying to build up a track out of the bog, so we don't have to bog around down there with the sea anemones and other things. Humans' natural instinct is to rise up above the bog and to help others do the same. There's no way to know this or judge this, but humans have been on a long run and we have the opportunity now to really make a shift in consciousness, because of the Internet and computers and the way people are hooked together around the world. And it's not just the people with the guns and money who hold the reins to enlightenment anymore. It's anybody who has any kind of computer or can find one. They can contact people all over the globe and no one can stop it. It's loose.

Q. Do you still do drugs?

A. No, I don't do too many drugs anymore, but every Easter some friends and family and I like to take some acid and hike up Mt. Pisgah (located near Kesey's home in Mt. Pleasant, Oregon). Not much (he says with a sly smile), just enough to make the leaves dapple.

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