



Essays from the 4th of July Weekend - 2010

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July 4th weekend essays

This past 4th of July holiday was great.

It started Thursday night, camping at my favorite Wisconsin place – Devil’s Lake.

Then a full 12 hour day of golf. I love playing alone. And virtually had the course to myself.

Then a day of kayaking the Wolf River, where I met some great folks.

“The cost of Survival,” was inspired by one campground conversation.

I had time to think and reflect.

Created on Wednesday, July 07, 2010

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The Cost of Survival

Everything costs, I've always taken that attitude.

Some we pay the cost in money, some in other ways. Time. Emotions. Stuff.

Some we go into more voluntarily than others.

For instance, In 1974, I was 17. There was a former co-worker I trusted, at Jack-in-the Box I worked at. A black guy. He'd become the assistant manager at a store a few miles away. I gave fifty bucks to get me a stolen bike. Then never saw him again. A 50 dollar education.

Jody

"hi Jody, how are your voices today?"

"oh, not too bad."

Jody hears voices that call her a fucking cunt.

Background.

She's about 30 years old, rotund. Lesbian. Up until a few years ago she'd had her own leather business. But she was an alcoholic. When she quit drinking, she began hearing voices.

Growing up (in Southie, Boston, Irish Catholic area) she was sexually abused by her father and brothers.

She found relief in a fundamental Christian group, 'but they say lesbian is evil.'

From CASCAP, 1981-83

Knot

Ever since his late teens, he had a knot in his stomach. He tried many things to reduce the tension, but nothing worked.

Background.

He graduated from college and was a successful professional.

Entered into psychotherapy at age 36. Seven years into therapy, he discovered there was incest in his family when he was a small boy.

Jimmy McC

Mid twenties. Heard voices that told him he was a shit. Mostly from his father.

In a state mental institution most of his life. Currently lives in a long term residential house for chronically mentally ill.

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Background.

Physically abused by his father as a boy.

Incest

Female in her early 50's. Recovering substance abuser. On physical disability. Manic Depressive (bi-polar). Has not been able to hold down a live-able wage job for about 20 years. Currently lives with a male recovering alcoholic.

Background

Sexually molested by her brother when she was a toddler. Brother is 4 years older.

Many instances of drug and alcohol abuse within this family.

Theory on Hearing Voices

"Everybody hears voices, " it occurred to me one night while hanging out with Henry.

"They are just thoughts. It's just that some people, the thoughts are so painful, they cannot bear them, so they perceive them as coming from outside themselves."

I hear the sound of songs inside my head, or the voice of people I know. I hear thoughts which I identify as "my thoughts". But I perceive them as being located inside myself, inside my head.

Jody and Jimmy, their thoughts are just too horrible, they cannot bear to think that those thoughts came from themselves.

Henry and I were co-workers at a long term residential house for chronically mentally ill, in the Boston area. CASCAP. 1981 – 83. Henry was bi, but he always had good pot, and he never hit on me. I wrote a poem type thing about him in about '84. He'd began getting sick a lot.

When he left, his going away party had a sense of sadness. He was going on a road trip with a male and female friend.

Shock Therapy, #1

She had many previous admissions into the psych unit. For depression. Each time she would wind up moving back in with her father, whom she described in glowing terms.

Finally, the doctors resorted to shock therapy.

Background.

1984, psych unit of a hospital on Chicago's South side.

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She was a wonderfully sweet gal, in her mid to late twenties.

It was known among the hospital staff that her father was sexually abusing her. To my knowledge, this was never discussed with her.

As is common with shock therapy, once you get it, the odds are, you'll get again. And the time span between treatments gets shorter.

That's what happened to her.

I began calling shock therapy "Republican form of therapy. It's radical, people don't know why it works. It seems to work in the short term, but has long term disasterous results.

Shock Therapy #2

Mid 1970's.

College male admitted to psych unit at Christ Hospital, on Chicago's South side. Patient had had a psychotic break associated with drug usage. Developed paranoia and delusions.

The doctor, Dr. Meisner, gave shock therapy early on. Diagonosed it as a chemical imbalance.

Perscribed medication.

No psychotherapy was ever provided.

Patient became a alcoholol and drug abuser.

Married for a few years, then divorced. Unable to hold down a job ever since. As of the late 1990's, lives with his parents.

Shock Therapy #3

As fate would have it, seven or so years later I was working on the same unit, as a Psych Tech. Though We had some therapeutic and patient responsibilities. We had our "1 to 1's" – patients we had to make contact with on our shift, and chart how they were doing. But mainly we were muscle to protect the nurses from violent outbursts. Put patients into 4 point leather restraints.

Dr. Meisner was still there. The nurses called him "The Shocker," for his propensity to use shock therapy. Not as a last resort, but much earlier on.

One guy, an elderly guy, suffering from depression, they finally zapped him. He had a bad reaction, went into a near coma. Had to be moved to a medical unit.

During this time, my 1-to-1 was a nice guy in his mid-50's, from the area. Suffering from depression. His fish store got destroyed, the roof fell in, all sorts of stuff. He had 12 kids. Hell, no wonder he was depressed.

After a few weeks or so, the doctors and nurses started trying to get him to get zapped. They used all the right words – “it’s safe now, it’s not like what it used to be. It’ll make you feel better. We don’t know why it works, but it does. The doctor really thinks it’s for the best...”

He’d seen the other guy getting wheeled out, and wanted no part of it. But the staff worked on him. People in his situation are pretty vulnerable. One night, during visiting hours, one of kids asked me what I thought. They seemed to trust me.

I was in debt and broke, I needed the job. I was low man on the totem pole there. I said nothing. I still feel that was a sin, and I’m not into the concept of sin at all.

Afterwards he told me, “I feel better.”

So we chart that his affect was improved. The treatment was successful. He could be released.

But he added, “to tell you the truth, I forgot what I was depressed about.”

Yep, as soon as he remembers, he’ll be back.

Physical and sexual childhood abuse – by the numbers

Studies have shown that between 15-20 percent of all people will be physically or sexually abused by the time they are 16 years old.

Let’s go with the lower number – 15%.

Let’s assume that each child is abused by a different abuser.

15% (victims)

15% (perpetrators)

-----.

30% (of the population directly connected to childhood abuse)

They say that each alcoholic impacts 10 people - friends, relatives, co-workers, children, etc

Assume the same is true for abuse.

No matter how you slice the numbers, that’s a boatload of the population that’s being negatively impacted.

It’s important to acknowledge that childhood trauma imparted by an adult or relative is not like just getting hurt.

Getting hit by a bike is not the same as getting hit by your father.

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Having your older brother make sexual advances to you when you are 12 is not the same as have the boy at school ask you for a kiss.

Just the asking breaks the Boundary. It forces the child to come to grips with a horrible concept. Once the topic has been brought up, it can never be undone. As they say in the legal world, 'the bell can never be un-rung.'

"What's the definition of a virgin in West Virginia?

A 12 year old who can out run her Dad."

This was told to me by a guy who grew up there. He was part of the Hatfield – McCoy feud. Litterally. Everyday they'd all run home from school to get the best spots to shoot at each other.

A joke always has some measure of truth. It's part of why we laugh.

Beastiality

A farmer was extolling the pleasures of pig screwing to a neighbor. Finally the neighbor mounted one the sows. Afterward he said he didn't much like it.

"No wonder – you picked the ugliest one.'

Ever since forever, the temptation to have sex with an animal has been around. It's a real taboo subject, maybe as much as Incest. I've written about this in-depth in other essays.

But the fact is, rural people of both sexes come into contact with the possibility at an early age.

My brother keeps putting his hotdog in me

I just heard this from a woman who is a grade school teacher on Chicago's south side.

It came from a 5th grade girl. Her brother is in 7th grade.

"My brother keeps putting his hotdog in me. "

It was a campground conversation.

It was after a day of white water rafting down the Wolf River. I'd met her and her boyfriend and some other friends. We'd all had dinner together. One gal was taking a nap, the others had made a beer and ice run.

The river sounds mingling with the crackling fire.

"There's no place I can take this, " she said, "school officials can't do anything about it."

What will this girl do to survive? What will be the cost?

Denial ain't just a river in Egypt.

There are no good answers, yet.

In the case of the 5th grader, for example, any intervention will have it's downside.

What do you do?

How do you fight against everybody who's gonna say she's lying. Even then, what do you do?

Take her away from her family? – to where?

Take her brother away? And leave her with the guilt?

But doing nothing will get us exactly that – nothing.

Simplifying things is no good either.

As my college professor said - "if you don't ask the right questions, you'll never get the right answers."

Survival – the Final Frontier

Survival has it's price.

I really just started out writing about inner - psyche. But I didn't want to leave out the physical.

Our Psyche

Detachment.

Disconnect from your body. Disassociate from your thoughts.

Kill your emotions.

Latch onto simplistic slogans.

Drown your Spirit.

Become a dancer – there, at least, you're in control of sex.

Cling to ideals.

Become a cynic.

Become an asshole. Become a Republican.

Admire corporate heads who are ruthless, soul-less bastards. Deny your Humanity.

Hate everyone who isn't you.

If it helps you make it thru another day, then it is successful. Your Defense has done what Defenses are supposed to do.

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But it costs. Sweet Jesus, it costs.

Our Body

I grew up in Riverdale, the first suburb south of Chicago. On Wabash street. One hundred and 44 blocks south of Wabash and Madison. The 1950's to 1980's.

Average town.

Trades, factory workers, white collar's who took the IC downtown.

Asbestos

Tommy Lynch's dad, he was a great guy. Worked with asbestos in some way. I wasn't that close to Tommy, we'd hung out off and on since grade school. A good friend of my was his good friend. But I remember something, in the late 70's, when they were finding out how bad asbestos was.

The guy didn't know anything about how bad it was to breath that stuff in.

I knew.

I recall another friend talking about him get some kind of lung disease, and may have gotten some money.

Factory workers

I used to look down at the factories. Breeding grounds for alcoholics. The steel mills that lined Lake Michigan, from the south east side into Indiana.

Or along the Calumet River.

Two of brother's worked in them for awhile.

Sometimes I'd go to the bar not far from one factory with my brother Skip.

Places for guys, who weren't cut out for college. Some of them were guys I hung out with, from high school.

Then one summer I had my epiphany.

I was working a summer job for the Cook County Mosquito Abatement program. Since we extra's were hired in June, and the big breeding season was in the Spring, we didn't have much to do. Drive around, inspect the sites. If they were dry the last time, and it hadn't rained since then, no need to inspect them. Just find a good place to hang out and hide, and not get seen by the public.

My area covered where I grew up. So I knew the railroad tracks and backs of factory's.

Plus all steel mills on the East Side. I'd see the guys in the morning, getting off the night shift, and know they were heading to the bars.

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As I sat killing time one day, I thought about Annibal, my brother in law. First generation Puerto Rican. They had 5 kids. He worked fixing TV's, until they stopped fixing tv's in Chicago. Sometime in the 70's. He'd do anything to support his family, that's all he cared about.

Wait a minute.

These guys coming out of the mills, most of them are probably just like Annibal. And from about when they didn't want to be there. It was mean, nasty work. But it fed their families.

The mills went down the tubes, and all these guys got screwed. Second, maybe 3rd generation workers. It wasn't that the factories weren't making money. They just wanted to make more. And they could do that someplace else.

My brother Skip, he quit them in 1975 and went out to Colorado. Just like I wanted to do. Part of the John Denver Colorado Rocky Mountain High trend. He'd been a part of all that. Plus the drugs and the bikers. Calumet City and Hammond and the strip joints.

Steel builders.

I don't know the name of them exactly. They'd moved in next door, back when I was in high school. She'd graduated from Southern Illinois, in forestry or something, and I'd wanted some major where I could work outdoors.

I remember one time her telling me about her dad. Maybe it was her grandfather. He was one of those guys who built the skyscrapers. Walked on those foot wide beams way up in the air. He'd worked on most of the one downtown. I think she showed me a poem he'd written.

Jesus Christ, that was dangerous work. She said some guys would drink at night after work, but her dad never did. Don't wanna come in hung-over.

Coal Miners and oil guys.

The 20 some guys that died last Spring in the coal mine, and the 11 killed in the BP murder. Those guys, especially the coal miners, they didn't want to be there. It's nasty work.

Like the song sez, "a poor man's made outa muscle blood. Muscle and blood and skin and bones, a mind that's weak and a back that's strong. ya load 16 tons and what-do-ya get. Another day older and deeper in debt."

Sales Exec's

My oldest sister tells this story. Mom told her that when Dad went to interview for the job at Relax-a-cizer, he didn't come home until about 3am. Dad told her that after the interview, they took him out to see how he could hold his liquor. She didn't want him to take the job.

Take clients out, have a drink with them, that's sales work. Used to be, anyway.

Dentist

My friend is a dentist. Had lots of problems with his neck, since his late 40's or so. Makes sense, his head is in the same position all the time.

Not that anyone's gonna have to hold a benefit for him or anything. He'll retire fine.

But it just goes to show, every job has it's physical downside.

Whaler's

I watched the old classic Moby Dick last night, with Gregory Peck as Ahab. When they left port, the intensity. Old women with wrinkled faces and sadness in their eyes. They'd be gone 3 years. It just hit me strongly how harsh that life was.

Cognitive Dissonance and other thoughts

Cognitive Dissonance. That's the term used, when one thing in your life contradicts or opposes another. That's hard to deal with. People find reasoning to make it fit.

The oil rig workers probably do.

Heck, they'd have a hard time living with themselves if they were fully cognizant of the fact that oil use is destroying the planet.

Environmentalists, for years and years, they didn't get this. They've been starting to tho. People do what they have to do to survive right now. Their health or the environment be damned. That's later.

And another thing.

Some of these feminists, they talk about how good men have it. Especially back years ago. This idea of fullfulling jobs. Most of us don't have a choice as to what we do for a living. And we don't like it.

This ain't any sort of full list. Heck, Studs Terkle is the man for that. But it's good to keep things in perspective.

The billion dollar question to Corporat-tocracy

Everybody complains about how corporations run the world. They own the politicians. Some say the Democrat's as much as the Republicans. Which is dead wrong, btw.

Buying out government officials and judges, no problem. Heck, the Mafia had that all figured out a long time ago.

So, what drives corporations? Well, they are legally bound to do what is in the best interest of their stockholders.

So the billion dollar question is, how do we get to the stockholders?

If a super humongo corporation is doing something with makes the investors want to bail on them, that's good. Retirement funds invest in stuff like big pharma because it gives a good return.

Same with oil companies.

Now, with BP, this liability, what can happen?

What can be done to get investors to be more active? That will make them want to put Do-Better economy practices on the table at stockholders meetings.

We keep trying to get the Regular Guy 'n Gal to change. I keep saying, we're targeting the wrong group. We need to get to the power people.

Now then, in the last decade or so, more and more average people were getting into the stock market. Certainly you have the big players like retirement funds. So, maybe we can find an angle to use this to our advantage. Maybe we can get to them.

We ain't gonna figure this out overnight. But if I had a talk show, I'd focus part of every show trying to find the answer.

Getting Down-to-Earth with being One with the Universe

When I hear "we are One with the Universe," ah, it doesn't resonate with me. And I've been into this type of stuff since I was in high school. Eco systems and metaphysics.

So I can understand how most people get turned off by it.

For one thing, it seems too much on the Spiritual side. And there's no way to connect to it.

Here's the easy way.

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A plant is made up of cells, right. And cells are made up of smaller things, and even smaller things. These things don't seem alive, right? But the entire plant is alive. And even when the plant dies, all those cells and smaller things are still part of it.

Same thing with animals.

And humans.

Now, just to avoid any unnecessary side discussions, let's assume that humans are the only ones that are conscious of their own self. That are aware that someday, we're gonna die.

But you don't think of your bone cell as having consciousness, do you? And the smallest of particles that make up a single cell, right?

But it's clear that they all are part of a human being. And the human being is alive and conscious. Well, some of us.

So, every particle in our body is One with Our Body. Even when I don't feel it, I am. So me, I'm One with me. Hell, how could it be otherwise?

My neighborhood, East Rogers Park, is part of Chicago. It's made up of everything in it – people, buildings, parks, etc.

To make it more general, a group of anything is made up of parts, and all those parts could be said to be "One with the" group.

Still with me?

Easy right? I hope so.

Keep taking it further, say to our solar system. The earth, the other planets, the moons and the sun. Plus all that stuff in between. So I am 'One with our Solar System.'

Keep going, into being part of our Milky Way galaxy, and up from that, and up from that. Until we get to the entire Universe concept. And even if there are parallel universes or other such stuff, I'm still a part of it.

Thus, I am One with the Universe.

Works for me.

Let's bring back slavery

Last Saturday, July 3rd, I saw a humongo pick up truck with an equally humongous confederate flag on it. I thought, 'what an asshole this guy is. You lost the fuck'in war, deal with it. You fought for slavery, and you lost. The South lost.

Ah hell, if those White Supremist's, white trash rednecks want to secede from the Union, let's let 'em. The Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, they'd all make a great 3rd world country. The South wouldn't have to worry about illegal immigrant. In fact some Confederates them may wind up being illegal immigrants in Mexico.

The advantages to me would be great. Hell, my tax dollars wouldn't go to fixing their stupid stuff, like building on the coast where hurricanes come. And the BP problem – it's all yours baby. We're using renewable energy up here. But we will join the international community in filing a lawsuit against you. Which will ensure you'll be dirt poor forever. And thus might consider slavery a step up.

Slavery. Hmm.

I could see having a slave or two. Some nice young white Southern Belle, about 15 years old. A very train-able age. And she could do all my house chores. Great for sex.

Maybe someday I'd be in a position to afford to hire a strong, dumb, red-neck white guy.

Maybe these Tea-baggers and KKK'ers, maybe their fears are justified after all. But it won't just be the blacks taking over. All us Liberals are getting our fair share. After all these years we've spent working to stop or fix their screw ups, we deserve it.

Blame EVERYTHING on tall people

Throughout the last century plus 10 years, Righty populism has blamed some group for all the problems of the country. Usually immigrants. The groups change, but the ill – logic of it stays the same.

In the spirit of that f'n goofy concept, I feel we should blame everything on tall people. It's all the fault of people 5'10 and over.

As somebody 5'6, tall people have wrecked my love life. No woman ever dreams of somebody "Short, dark and handsome." No-o-o-o. It's always Tall, dark and handsome.

I can't compete effectively in a lot of professional sports because of tall people. They have taken away my right to be a professional basketball player! Or a pro beach volleyball player!

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And president of the United States – forget it!

How many CxO's are short?

The list goes on and on and on. Come, join me in this fight for our Basic Human Rights!