



## Point of Inflection: Young Adult

Even before I had gone through my high school graduation ceremony, I attended classes at a local community college in what would otherwise have been my last semester in high school. I wasn't exactly excited nor ambitious about attending college, but it was something that my mom and brother insisted I do so as to increase the amount of "Survivor's Benefits" my mom received from Social Security after my father died.

Honestly, I was as big a deadbeat then as I had ever been in high school, only with a touch more "jade" in my outlook on life. I had received a Pell Grant to attend school and was confused about how to perceive the benefit. I hadn't been given much similar support in the past, and almost everything I had known thus far had "heavy strings" attached that could choke one to death. I was also completely unfamiliar with the odd admixture of Didactic and Socratic styles of teaching employed by many of the instructors. As well, I was only 17 years old; a bit younger than most of the other similar dead-end students I met in college.

One of the first "interesting" things I recall about attending college was seeing a disabled man fall out of his wheelchair near a bus stop during an apparent seizure. He appeared to have stopped breathing as his face was a shade of blue, and his eyes were closed. Not connecting with the gravity of the situation, I jumped over the man and cursed at him for obstructing my path on the way to the bus to go home. Though there were other students around similarly not knowing what to do, I posited that I needed to get home more than I needed to be involved in that person's struggle to survive. To be honest, it was years later before I had any sense of how calloused I had been, but that was likely because all I had ever known from others was a calloused response to life. He would not have been the first, nor last, person I had seen potentially or certainly die. Life in communities with heavy gang activity isn't quite the same as living in "Pleasantville."

Soon thereafter, I took a job at a Los Angeles county public library, as a "Library Page." That is little more than a glorified title for someone who returns books to their appropriate place on the shelves, and who performs other equally menial tasks. The job provided me with money to waste on all manner of intoxicants, as well as functional cover from overt scorn for being the unambitious and apathetic dead-beat





that I had become. I engaged in my "work" with a vigor worthy of seasoned drunken transient. I was often put in charge of organizing the "periodicals room" upstairs, where my obscurity from the eyes of others allowed me to read National Lampoon magazines, Playboy magazines (no, I didn't "read" them), and any other meaningless publications that captured my fancy.

Though I can't recall exactly how long I worked at that job, I do recall that I left it so as to allow space to take more classes without the "obstruction" of employment. With no more ambition than before, that went awash, and I was soon looking for another job. I found a job with a different branch of the Los Angeles county library system, this time as a "Library Aide." I checked out books to library patrons, showed foreign language films to the many Asians in that community while drinking beers in the projection room, and snuck in various other intoxicants into work. I tried to talk myself into trying to "date" some of the young women there, but to be honest, my only success with women came via random encounters with women whose vigor for intoxicants matched or exceeded my own. I was not really "boyfriend" material as I had a strong aversion to any form of commitment, and a home life not totally dissimilar to that of "Norman Bates."

There were a few other meaningless and mediocre jobs that I held in between my library jobs, but nothing that amounted to much. The only consistent motivator in my life was my dedication to the slow suicide of intoxicants, and an ever-deepening sense of hopelessness. I wasn't overtly suicidal, at least not in any sense that most would recognize. But I clearly had no ambition to accomplish much other than become the drunken writer that had been a recurring theme in my frequent "Pipe Dreams."

At some point, I arbitrarily decided that I wanted to study Physics, so I looked for a way to get back to my studies and pay for school on my own. I had wasted most of the access to grant structures that I had, taking useless and varied college classes. I didn't want to live with my mom "at home" (only in name) while going to school. My mom, for her part, wanted me to stay in school for as long as possible so that she could receive increased "Survivor Benefits" from Social Security. She made her displeasure with my plan to try and find full-time work to save for school by telling me point blank that if I did that I could "get out right now." She was effectively walling off my access to any happier life without her, by making certain that even my job search would result in disaster.

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I ended up settling for a part-time job with the city of Los Angeles at the Griffith Observatory, in the Hills above Hollywood. There, I worked as a "Museum Guide," offering rogue tourists and shelter-seeking homeless people information on the museum's exhibits, as well as answering general questions on science, physics, and astronomy. The people I worked with were mostly a collection of privileged oddballs from the Hollywood and San Fernando Valley areas. Most of them had little or no interest in astronomy or science outside of the job. During my time there, I returned to consuming ungodly amounts of intoxicants, but never actually resumed any classes in college during that time frame.

The job was mostly the realm of goof-offs and college-aged kids trying to either avoid getting "real jobs" or attempting to prolong their time in college while their parents paid their fare. I enjoyed the oddballs that poured into the museum because of its proximity to the Hollywood Hills, and I also enjoyed that no one cared that I was often intoxicated at work, and that most of my "lectures" about the exhibits were tantamount to "drunken stand up comedy routines." Celebrities, and famous people from local media often wandered into the Observatory, and I even had the delight of being a "safety escort" for Ray Bradbury once during an event paid for by a famous science fiction magazine. As an aspiring drunken, dead-beat author myself, that turned out to be one of the highlights of my young adult life. Bradbury was totally cool in offering me insightful insider writing advice and making humorous remarks about all the other drunks at the event. I met other writers like Harlan Ellison, (whom I was later privileged to spend hours chatting on the phone with), and a few other notables, all of which I cherished in my own drunken fashion.

Towards the end of my "Amok Time" at the Observatory, I met the woman I ended up marrying. Before we could actually go out on more than a couple dates, I quit that job after my boss engaged in extremely inappropriate actions one day. Being unaware of the consequences of calling him a normally hidden "male body part" and storming out, I quit that job in a fit of anger. That meant I was unemployed for a large part of the time that I was courting my future wife, something that would come back to bite me on the rear end later.

I managed to find a few truly horrible jobs during that time but didn't manage to hold on to any of them for very long. After dating my wife for over a year, we became engaged. My wife's parents were not exactly thrilled by the prospect of an underemployed brown man





marrying their daughter, despite all their past proclamations about not really being “bigoted” against people of color. After some truly odd offers to me, all designed to lure me away from marrying their Anglo daughter, they resigned themselves to our desire to be married. Even so, as much as I love my wife and am happy to have her and my son, had I known about her growing issues arising from undiagnosed Bipolar Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder at the time, things might have gone differently.

After a period of failed attempts to find other employment options, I ended up deciding to enlist in the United States Air Force, as part of the de facto “economic draft.” I reasoned that it would provide a steady job, access to health coverage, which I had never had before, and a chance to be away from my family, my wife’s family, and the oppressive reality of life in Los Angeles’s smog-filled and traffic-laden Shangri-La.

