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How One Life Coach Attempts to Inspire Mindful Music: The Morality of the Soul

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HOW ONE LIFE COACH ATTEMPTS TO INSPIRE MINDFUL MUSIC:
THE MORALITY OF THE SOUL

A Thesis Presented

By

Jared M. Ford

To

The Faculty of the Graduate College

Of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
Specializing in Interdisciplinary Studies

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis will be to examine one student's personal struggle in life and how those events have helped him to find his purpose and reason for being. This examination will be done by using a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) approach to explain how music has been at the forefront of all moral and ethical decisions ever made in his life in order to find his true calling or vocation. This thesis will be broken down into 3 main chapters with several sub chapters taking the reader through the life of Jared M. Ford. This thesis will then culminate with the authors own understanding of what he feels is his purpose for living. A fourth and chapter will also be included to show the author's own musical works in an attempt to give the reader a better understanding of how music has helped him to understand his true calling.

Dedication

*“They say my dream is unreal.
I'm forgetting how love feels,
I'm forgetting how love heals and
My niece is blowing bubbles in the yard...
The Economy is down too
They lying on the damn news.
People are murders for damn shoes and
My niece is blowing bubbles is the yard...”*
“The Wonder Years”
By: Jon Bellion

“This Thesis is dedicated to my niece Jaelyn J. Miranda, for she has taught me more about myself in her short 9 years of life than anyone else has. She has helped me to relax when I believed I couldn't, to smile when I did not want to, to love when I did not know how to, and most of all, she has helped me just to laugh even when I feel I can't. So for that, I wish nothing but the best for her in the hopes she will never have to go through anything that I ever did”.

I Love you,
Uncle Jaye

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Chapter 1: *Growing Pains*

This is a story about the truth. My truth and how it has changed my life. This thesis was not written by any means for people to whole-heartedly believe every word. It was simply written as a means to let others, who grew up similarly myself, know that they have a choice in their lives. Robert Frost once wrote, “*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood and I took the one less traveled by*”. I believe that we all reach a point in our lives when we must make a choice. To stay as we are; walking the same beaten path, or we could stop and take a look around. We can try and see life for its endless possibilities. We could just stand there, admiring what we see, hear, and feel or we could ask ourselves, is there more?

If my readers read this thesis and think, maybe “there is more to my life?” “Maybe my life does mean more?” If these thoughts cross their minds at any time during this thesis than I would say I’ve done my job. I believe that in the end of the day the only person we must answer to be ourselves. We must ask ourselves, are we happy with whom and what we have become? What is my perception of that person? If you can ask yourself these questions and find that you have even the slightest doubt, realize that you want more from your life, or looking to actively change who you are and how you are living, then hopefully this narrative will help you. Help you to stop, look around and just maybe...take “*the road less traveled by*”.

The Intro

“I like this young man. I like this young man, because when he came out, he came out with the phrase, he went from ashy to classy”

“Never let them see you sweat son”

“Please don't be scared of me”

“How can the sky be the limit when there's foot prints on the moon”?

“Just be who you are...”

“You're going to make me say it aren't you. I'm...”

*“Oh Stop—
With your feet on the air and your head on the ground
Try this trick and spin it, yeah
Your head will collapse
But there's nothing in it
And you'll ask yourself...”*
“Where is my mind”?
By: The Pixies

For the longest time I have thought to myself, *“What's my purpose in life”?* I mean, I've spent 27 years of my life thinking of how I was going to make my life something that was worth living. Searching through written and spoken word to make sense of everything I have ever been though. Spending hours reading poems, scholarly literature and listening to music, hoping that I might find that one line or verse that would hold the answers to my questions. However, after 27 years of blood, sweat, and frustration, I have come up empty handed.

Recently, I sat down and re-watched the movie “The Wiz”¹, a 1978 Motown remake of the 1939 classic “The Wizard of Oz” and that got me thinking. Each character in the movie, The Scarecrow, Dorothy, The Tin Man, and The Cowardly Lion were all searching for something they believed that they were missing. They were searching for the one thing that would make them feel complete. Dorothy was looking for a way home, The Scarecrow a brain, The Tin man a heart, and the Lion, courage.

As I watched this soulful musical/action adventure film I couldn’t help but think of what I was missing? What would make me feel complete? The more and more I watched this movie; the more I began to relate to the Tin man. Like myself, here was someone whose joints always seem to rust and lock up, kind of the same way my joints also lock up due the fact that I was born with Sickle Cell Anemia. The Tin Man was physically stuck in life just as much as he was emotionally stuck. Like him, I too feel that I am both physically and emotionally stuck when I begin to think about what’s next in my life. I guess you can say that like the Tin man, I too am searching for a heart. I’ve been sitting here for months; years in fact, thinking of who I am and what’s right for me? I’ve been looking for that one thing that would eventually propel me in the right direction. Aren’t I, in a way walking that “Yellow Brick Road”² coming to its forks, trying to stay away my own version

¹ The 1975 Broadway production won seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical. The musical was an early example of Broadway's mainstream acceptance of works with an all-black cast.

² A fictional element in the 1900 children’s novel *The Wonderful Wizard of OZ* by American Author L. Frank Baum

of life's Wicked Witch? Am I not hoping I can find the "Great and Powerful Oz" because I believe only he/she can give me what I need & desire most?

All I want is to find my heart, to find what I love most, to find the thing that makes me, me. The one thing that I can love so that I no longer feel like "*I'm rusting over*" (The Tin man, The Wiz), dying alone with nothing I could hold dear. That's all any Quarter-lifer³ wants is it not? To feel like they can be passionate about something so much it becomes their driving force in life? The one thing in this world that people content with their lives and the beauty that is the world around them. It's funny because all I did was watch a movie that I hadn't seen in years and now, I've realized all of this. This is why I decided to find my path. This is why I decided to find my heart because right now, I feel so empty inside.

Follow the Yellow Brick Roadblock...

My name is Jared, Jared "Jaye" Ford and this is an attempt at finding my direction and passion in life. I in no way mean figuring out my direction as in my "left" from my "right" or like when my iPhones GPS has completely gotten lost, but continues to say to me "*You have reached your destination*". No, What I mean is that moment in life that you truly understand what your guiding force is. The moment that you stop doing what is normal and start doing that, which sets up a path, destined for greatness. I am by no means asking for people to agree with

³ Quarter-lifer: Term coined by Nash, Robert J., and Michele C. Murray. Helping College Students Find Purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning-making.2010

me or for others to even understand me. I just hope that maybe though these words, others looking to find their own true path understand that they always have a choice.

I believe that every human being on this planet has the opportunity to turn something negative about his or her life into something positive. There comes a time in everyone's life where they will have to make a choice and decide how they want to spend their time on this earth. The moment that we will have to ask ourselves, "*What will be your verse*"⁴? What will be the story of our lives? At what moment do we will simply just say to ourselves, "ok this is it, now I must choose"? I have to make the best choice for myself (whatever it maybe). The moment in which we understand that, "I have come to the fork in the road of life and now I must decide. Should I go left or should I go right?" Creating a new path in which we will walk for some time until we find ourselves back where started. Back at a fork in the road, a choice to be made, hoping that the more we choose the road one less traveled, and the better the next path will be.

This thesis will be broken down into 3 main chapters, with the 4th and final chapter being solely dedicated to some of my own music and feelings that arose during the process of writing this thesis. In my first chapter, entitled "**Growing Pains**", I will use stories from my childhood to show that sometimes in life you will be given many challenges that you will have to overcome and it's never about what they are or the frequency of how they come that helps to

⁴ Dead poetry's Society, Film 1989.

understand them. Sometimes life gives you these challenges just to see what you will do with them once they are in front of you. By using my own story, I will attempt to show that it is the choices that we make in life that help shape the lives we lead. We cannot know where we are going until we know where we have been. Thus, the first half of my thesis will talk about where I have come from, pointing out some of the most crucial forks in my road of life and the footprints that were left behind.

I believe that by looking into my past, thinking deeply about it, and discussing each moment in which I have been faced with a choice to either take the road less traveled by or continue on the road that I was on, I will be able to map out a general direction for my future. Once I have this map or blueprint I can then fill in the blank spaces with things that I hold dear to me in order to try to be happy with my life. I believe that it is this blueprint will not only help me find peace in my own life but possibly could also help others in similar situations find there's as well.

In my second chapter, entitled “**Mr. Robot**”, I will talk about some of my darkest demons. I will discuss how these “*demons*” have helped to shape my current system of beliefs. I will also talk about how it is only because of having to battle these demons, that I have been able to get a better sense of what my path is or could possibly be. To do this, I will be taking the reader into my own mind. Allowing them to understand my thoughts as they were. I will also take the reader into my private therapy sessions in an attempt to show the level of pain I was

dealing with at the time and how I chose to deal with those issues. Lastly, I will talk about my addiction to prescription drugs and how that has affected my life during my college career and why I have chosen to stop misusing these medications.

In third chapter, entitled “**Balancing Acts**”, I will talk directly to the methods and techniques that I have used in order to help center (calm) myself and discover my true purpose. In this chapter I will talk about how I have used music as well as a variety of other techniques, such as *Mindful meditation, The Cognitive behavioral habit model, moral conversation, ethics, empathy, and compassion* to better understand myself and what I want from my life. In this section I will also display some of my own poetry to express my day-to-day emotions to try and give the readers a better sense of the “method behind the madness”. This attempt will be made by explaining how specific moments in my life have not only affected me physically, and mentally, but also spiritually.

While I have never been a very religious person, I have always felt like spirituality has been important for my life. To know who "you" are on a deeper level, a spiritual level is something that not many people ever truly explore. Some might say they believe in “God” because they attend some sort of regular religious services, but is that enough? I feel that in order to find your true self you must be willing to look deeper. You must be willing to become an “inter-being”, looking deeply into who you are and who you were in order to understand the person you have the possibility to become.

Lastly, I will explain why I have chosen to write my thesis in the style of *Scholarly Personal Narratives* (SPN)⁵ I believe that by examining these moments of my life in a SPN format, I can help to evoke my readers to take stalk of their own lives. I believe that a lot of what we learn in the academic world is more quantitative than qualitative and that while quantitative research is necessary in understanding things such population growth, one's behavior, and one's religious and beliefs, that information in itself lacks the personal experience. Without personal experience there can never be a true understanding of a population or society. Thus making many things in our lives peripheral. However, I believe that by I choosing to “dare greatly” and by take the unbeaten path, and discovering one's own true course, one's own direction, and life experiences that I may be able to help my readers to find their own version of the “*Yellow Brick Road*”.

In conclusion, I will close out this thesis with a prologue of my own writing entitled, “**Zugzwang**”⁶. In this abstract examination of my life, I will play with many ideas and musical/poetic elements in an attempt to allow the reader to get to know me better. There will no structure of writing and nothing will be taboo, as this section is meant to show what my actual thought process is when dealing with my own ethical dilemmas. I will then use a final quote from my father, one that I hold dear to my heart, to tie my emotions in writing this thesis from the beginning

⁵ Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN)-A versatile style of narrative writing that illustrates the power and connectivity of story telling

⁶ German for "compulsion to move", pronounced ['tsu:ktsvaŋ]) is a situation found in chess and other games wherein one player is put at a disadvantage because they must make a move when they would prefer to pass and not move. The fact that the player is compelled t

to end of this program. It is my hope that by showing my reader why SPN has become something that I am passionate about and how it has helped to find not only my meaning but my direction in life, it might possibly be a way to help them find their own reason for being.

*“This is real life, the only one we get to live
I remember being broke and thinking something gotta give
This is real life, everything we do is legendary
And we gon' do it to the day we in the cemetery
Real life, it feels like I'm dreaming
Used to feel like I was nothing, now my life has meaning
Said this is real life, god damn this is real life...”
Logic MD, Welcome to Forever*

Waves of Loneliness

For as far back as I can remember I have always been sitting down, Indian style on my bed or my floor, eyes focused; peering out of the window of my bedroom looking at the world wondering, “Why am I here”? What’s my purpose in life and in the end of it all, what am I going leave to be remembered by the loved ones I have left behind? I am always thinking, always dreaming about who I am, what I’m supposed to be doing, living, feeling, and believing. I have always sat there, eyes set between the insides of my window frame, looking out at the world around me wondering if one day, some other child will be looking up at me asking the same things I asked myself for the past 27yrs. Who am I? What am I? Who am I destined to become?

“Loneliness adds beauty to life. It puts a special burn on sunsets and makes night air smell better” (Henry Rollins). Everyone at one point of his or her lives

has dealt with a moment of loneliness. We have all been there; chin pointed at the floor, eyes half closed like two bricks were attached to them, taking death breaths and wondering, “Why am I not happy”? Why am I so sad? Why I am so lonely? Most of the time, we find ourselves saying these things at points in our lives where we haven’t been able to make a connection with the outside world. Moments when our peers are “just too busy to hang out” or we’ve spent a month or two on an endless search for some type of core relationship. Webster’s dictionary defines this feeling of loneliness as “*the fact of being without companions; solitariness*”. However, I on the other hand, have felt that my own loneliness has had the opposite effect. I feel like loneliness has given me so much. It is something that has brought me closer to my true self and my inner most desires. It's as if it was because of the fact that I was so lonely when I was young that it has helped me not only to better understand myself but also to understand what my purpose is or could eventually be.

When I was a child, maybe about 4 or 5, I remember my parents getting into a fight in our apartment. I don’t really remember what it was about nor do I really even care to remember because by that point; fighting was what my family did. Mom would yell and my Pops would curse her out. My mother would call my pops a “deadbeat”, or some other colorful phrase and start crying. My Pops, who was probably already drunk or even a little high at this point, would then grab his stuff and walk out, never to be seen or heard from until hours later, leaving my sisters and myself to just wait until my mother was able to bring herself back from

hysterically crying before we could make dinner. Like I have said, my folks were always in a battle about something, so this time was no different. Like clockwork, my mother was crying & my father was grabbing his coat, slurring his words, and storming out. I remember sitting there at my kitchen table, Batman & Superman still in an epic battle. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles storming the it's wooden legs while Duke Nuckem⁷ and my other G.I. Joes held steady watch over Castle Gray skull⁸. I remember looking up and watching the tears stream down my mother's face. I remember standing up and walking over to her and asking her if she was going to be all right and if she and pops were going to get a divorce. She looked at me like always and said *"No, son that's not happening; you have nothing to worry about"*. Normally when she said this I would think nothing of it and in 5 seconds I would be back into my battles, watching my heroes prevail over their foes. However, this time for some reason I could not sit back down. I couldn't go back to one imaginary battle when I had a real one staring me in the face. So I looked at my mother and said, *"yea, its ok mom, eventually you will get divorced and I'm not too upset about it"*. I then picked up my toys, stuffed them into my laundry bag, slumped it over my shoulder and walked off to my bedroom. I walked down the dark hallway in my apartment into the back, past my sister's rooms, past the bathroom and into my room, slamming the door behind me.

⁷ G.I. Joe Team's First Sergeant, and debuted in 1983. The character is also featured in both the G.I. Joe: Sigma 6 animated series and comic books

⁸ a fortress located on the fictional planet Eternia. It forms a central location in the Masters of the Universe toy/comic/animation universe, and also appears in the 1987 live action adaptation.

So there I was standing in my room, breathing heavily, a laundry bag full of toys and my eyes focused on the window. I pushed my toy chest along the window seal, wedging it between the wall and my bed, climbed on top and sat there for the next few hours. I don't know what it was about that window or even what forced me to just sit there steaming mad. I was thinking of how fun it must be out there, even though out "there" was my terrace and it was 15 stories above the ground. I just thought that maybe it was different; maybe that across that river; in Manhattan kid's parents didn't fight as much as mine did. That maybe, all the dad's that lived in that part of the city all worked down on Wall Street, made hundreds of dollars, and actually took care of their families? I just sat right there, with my eyes fixated on the Manhattan skyline. I remember looking past the metal bars, past my terrace, past the projects, past the river and over to the city thinking, "what could be out there for me"? Thinking and saying to myself that *"I could be so happy if I was just out there"*.

My window for many years became my escape. It became a place for me to reflect, to grow, and my ideas to flourish. However, while my window became the place where I felt like I could escape and run away from what was going on behind me, in many ways it also became my prison. I was stuck behind it, never outside of it and besides a few toys, my T.V. and my sister's occasional moments where they would bust down my door and touchier me by tying me up and dressing me like a little girl, I was always alone.

For years I felt trapped behind that my window, isolated from the world outside. Of course I had friends and I did leave my room almost every day after school to go play or sit with my dad at his daily chess match in the park. However, I always felt alone. It was like no one knew what was going on with my family. I felt like I was never on the same page as everyone else. It was like somehow I was on chapter 12, first paragraph and they we're on chapter 1, twelfth paragraph. In class I asked questions and cared more about the "why or the How" of something rather than the "what". I was "emotional" and always wanted to talk about my feelings, when all the other boys wanted to "fight it out". I was called "long winded" and told that my ideas were "pointless". Almost every day I was told to "shut up" and to "stop asking so many damn questions", and most of all, my father told me almost every day he got a chance to "*shush my jib's because little boys don't have opinions, grown men do*". So I spent a lot of time in front of that window. My eye's piercing gaze streamlining past the welded black security bars and out into the world until suddenly, one day, the window changed and so did its meaning of isolation.

In the July of 2000, my cousin Jámal was getting married in Germany to an Italian woman. Jámal was probably the only man in our family who wasn't an alcoholic and he had never to touched drugs in his whole life. Maybe that was why he was in the Army, traveling the world, seeing it's wonders, and loving every minute of it! Jámal was the happiness man I knew. He knew his purpose from a young age and that was to serve his country. He was nothing like our fathers and I

wanted nothing more than to get away from the pain thrust upon me by their actions.

That summer, he invited me to not only come to his wedding but to take a road trip with him and his wife Lucía from Ferihung, Germany to Rome, Italy. I was so excited! It was not only my first time on a plane, the first time leaving the state of New York, heck the country, but it was also the fact that I was the only one who got to go. My cousin as well off as he was could only afford one ticket because most of his money was going into the wedding. So since I was the youngest and the cheapest to fly out at the time, I was the only one walking down that tarmac that summer. I was the only one strapping themselves in for takeoff, surrounded by hundreds of strangers I didn't know, armed with CD player in my lap, & pilot's wings on my chest. I was scared, nervous and excited all at once. No more fighting, no more "*Get out of here nerd*", no more dealing with people telling me to "*shut up*"! Most of all, no more windows! Or so I thought.

Six hours on a plane was a killer even if it was at night. From the moment the plane took off I was asleep. Seriously, I slept from JFK⁹ to Frankfurt airport for the most part. Honestly, I woke up 10mins before the plane landed and I didn't even pull the shade up. The craziest thing was that somehow, when I got there, I was still tired! I slept in the car to my cousin's condo and once I got there slept most of that day. I actually wasn't fully rested until I got up that night and my cousin and his fiancé were headed to bed. As weird as it sounds I said "goodnight"

⁹ John F. Kennedy Airport.

to them because they were going to sleep and I was just starting my day. Jámal gave me the remote and said “*P-Lee* ¹⁰ ...*don’t freak out. I live next to an army testing base and while the house is sound proofed, I don’t want you to be scared by the flashing lights*”. “*Wait what? What flashing lights*”? I asked. He smiled and said “*enjoy the Simpsons Cuz, pick up some German*”. “*Wait, what flashing light’s Malz* ¹¹”? He walked off and went to bed.

So I sat there, weirded the heck out watching, “The Simpson’s” in German, thinking about how I wish I could have been awake earlier because I would have gotten to go do things in town with my cousin and his fiancé. Instead here I am, in whole other country and I all I have been able to enjoy thus far was the freaking Simpson’s. I paced back and forth in his living room, passing the bookshelves, past the T.V., and the dining room table. Walking in circles around the house, making military turns at every corner I hit. To be honest, I was freaking out with every breath until suddenly, I had the wind knocked out of me...

I jumped back when I first saw it! At first, just a dull glimmer in the background but then a bright flash flowed by the hum of death. But there they were, the “flashing lights”. The living room went white and I walked up to my cousin’s balcony window and stared out. Across the green fields of grass, past the cows, past the farms and small cottage homes, nuzzled right between an open field and a set of rolling green foothills were the flashing lights. It was a bomb-testing site on the far end of the base where the military was testing small amounts of a

¹⁰ ”: Childhood nickname that was given me by my cousin

¹¹ Child hood nickname given to my cousin because I had trouble pronouncing his real name as a child

new chemical compound for combat fighter missiles. I walked to the glass door and put my hand on it. I could feel the smooth vibration coming from the echo of each bomb that was dropped. “No wonder he sounded proofed this place”, I thought. Even though it was 2000 yards away it was still pretty loud. I couldn’t turn away; I scoured the doorframe looking for the lock. There were no safety bars on his windows and doors like at home. So I opened the glass balcony doors and walked outside, quickly closing the door behind me to not wake anyone. The cool night air blowing on my face, the booming rumble of what I hope was non-lethal bomb testing in the background, and my own little light show at 2am. It felt good. No, it felt great! For once in my life I wasn’t stuck behind those bars. That for once I could sit and think about how over in one direction there was so much chaos and turmoil, so much destruction. But then again, on my side, only 2000 yards away, who knew I could be at so much peace. In a way that military base¹², 2000 yards to the west of me was like my apartment back in the Bronx. It was filled with nothing but Chaos and anger. Which wasn't the case on this balcony because here on this balcony to the east, was like my idea of what living in Manhattan was like. It was the other world I had hoped for. It’s like it’s the great American psychologist, Carl Rogers once said, “*The Good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction and not a destination*”. That night I learned something about myself, I learned that once you’ve come to the other side, once you have seen how good things could be, only a fool would want to go back, only a fool wouldn’t keep going east...

¹² Vilseck; U.S. Army Base

*“See I’ve got GPS on my phone (ah-na-aye)
And I can follow it to get home (ah-na-aye)
If my locations never unknown (ah-na-aye)
Then tell me why I still feel lost? (Tell me why I still feel lost?) ...”*
“Human” by: Jon Bellion

Opportunity Cost

*“No dreams too big
Chase anything that you’ve got the passion to do
It’s only a dream till it happens to you”*
“Opportunity Cost”
Lyrics by: G-Eazy,

When I think about that first night in Germany when I was 11 years old it always brings a smile to my face. It makes me remember a time when I felt like I had direction. A time in which, at that point in my life, I knew where my souls or moral compass should more or less be pointing to. Since that day I knew that if I, the kid from the streets of the Bronx could somehow make it overseas and experience something like *“The Flashing lights”*, then I could really do anything I wanted. Going to Europe was and opportunity of a lifetime that no one in his or her right mind would have passed up, no one. Only thing is, if I knew then what was waiting from me I got back home, I still, to this day don’t know if I would have left that balcony....

After that summer everything in my life kind of when downhill. My parents fought more and more every day, even though at this point they were separated. Earlier that year, mother got up one morning and went to work and my family and I didn’t see her again for two weeks. She just checked out, leaving my sisters and I with my abusive, alcoholic, drug addicted, and brokenhearted father. My uncle was

also there but he too was an alcoholic, so you can imagine his idea of “moral support”. This was probably the worst time in my life because even though my sisters and I already fought constantly over who was my parent’s favorite child, this was the moment that would eventually send my family into a downward 3-year spiral, pulling us further and further apart.

When my mother didn’t return home my sisters, my dad, and my grandmother; on my mother’s side, and I became upset and looking for someone to blame. My father of course blamed my mother, calling her a “*punk and a bitch*” for leaving her kids. My sisters blamed my dad, which made sense since we would eventually find out that that reason she left was because she was tired of getting beat by him. As for my grandmother, she kept to herself even though I could hear her from sobbing and praying to God from the balcony outside her apartment because it was right next to her room. Me, I just sat there on my grandmother’s balcony waiting and staring at the bus stop hoping my mother would get off one. Maybe she was just late? Maybe she was hurt and we just didn't know? So I sat there until 2am, until my dad finally came to wake me up and bring me inside.

Hours turned into days and days turned into weeks until my mother finally called my grandmother’s house and told the family that “she would be coming home”. I remember how happy everyone was, even my dad was happy which blew my mind since only 24 hours before he “*didn't care if the bitch was dead or not*”. It's seemed like everyone was excited to see her. Everyone was excited; except for me. It took another week before I would go back to my grandmother’s house

where my mother was currently staying before we would talk. When I finally did see her, there was only one question that I could ask her and that was “why”? At first, she struggled to speak but then in a soft whispered tone she said, *“baby sometimes you are presented with a moment and you just have to take it, no matter how much it cost...and for that I’m sorry”*.

Eventually my parents did get divorced and I thought everything would get better but that wasn’t the case. After the divorce, mother began to lie more and more to my sisters and I. Mostly it was about money. Every other month we were getting evicted from our home. She would get paid on Friday morning and by Friday night she would somehow be broke. My dad, he became even more of a deadbeat and even though for the first time in my life, he actually had a real job. My father's money normally got spent on Fridays when his friend Paul would come over in his tinted, all black Honda Civic LX. He and my father would sit in that car for over 45mins and my dad would then stumble into his house, lock himself in the bathroom for another hour until he emerged, cotton mouthed, and slurping his speech. Sometimes his nose would be ashy and he would be acting all mysterious, like he was only gone for 10 minutes. There was no mystery to it, he was doing coke (cocaine) or crack and probably had one too many hits. Eventually, he would go sleep off his high in his room and once he did, I would then go into the bathroom and clean up all of his drugs. Scrapping coke off the laundry hamper, putting it back into his baggies, picking up his vials, and picking the burnt aluminum foil scraps off the floor. To this day my dad thinks he cleaned it all up

but in all honesty it was me. I knew my dad needed help and while hiding it wasn't actual help, when you're a child who was taught no better, you know no better.

In Nov 2001, while still trying to get a grip on 9/11, I found out my grandmother had been diagnosed with lung cancer. She had been living with the cancer for two years and had said nothing. Sadly, after battling cancer for so long she finally succumbed to her illness on Valentine's Day of 2002. I will never forget the last night I shared with her. She asked me to bring her ice chips because they soothed her throat. I remember walking down the hallway with a cup in my hand and seeing this weird glowing light coming from her bedroom. It was like it was beaming out from the doorframe and for some weird reason all I could think about was what my mother told me after she left, "*sometimes we are presented with a moment...*". I walked into my grandmother's room and slowly rubbed the ice chips on her lips and she began to speak. She told me that life was short and that even though she lived 73 years sometimes she wished she did more. She told me to chase after my goals and never to let anything or anyone stop me. She said that I was a smart, handsome, extremely intelligent, and that not many men my age had that. She told me that I would go far in life but the road would not be easy. Honestly, at the time I thought ever little of what she said because she had been saying the most random things for weeks, so I chalked just it up to the chemo. I Mean, I was a poor black kid with no money and no chances of getting into college. The best chance I had at 12/13 was to learn my math because I would need that if I wanted to be a drug dealer. That was the only way I saw myself making

money and providing for my family. I placed the cup on her nightstand, told her I loved her and walked out the room. I had gotten halfway down the hallway when turned around and looked back at her door. The light was gone and that morning I would find out that she had died in her sleep.

Later that year, On Sept 11th I found myself waiting in line at 138th Street and the Grand Concourse in the Bronx at a soup kitchen because my mother, my sisters and I had found ourselves homeless. My mother couldn't keep my grandmother's home for some reason (probably money) and my sisters and I had spent then end of the spring semester and that summer split up between my father's house in Long Island and various family friends. Still, my mother being my mother had devised some plan with one of her friends in which she would lie to my father and tell him that she had found an apartment in the city when she really hadn't. It was all just to get us away from his violent nature and increasing drug habits.

So there I was, thinking to myself "how could this be"? How could I go from flights to the European countryside and sticking my toes in the Trevi fountain¹³, to this? A Dirty, smelly, alcoholic, and crack addict filled soup kitchen? How did I end up spending end of 2002 and almost of 2003 living in Brooklyn at a homeless shelter on Dean Street? I think about it now and I say to myself "Dean Street". It's so expensive over there now and upscale but then again, I'm talking

¹³ is a fountain in the Trevi district in Rome, Italy, designed by Italian architect Nicola Salvi and completed by Pietro Bracci. Standing 26.3 meters (86 ft) high and 49.15 meters (161.3 ft) wide

about like pre-Barclays Center, Pre-Jay Z, and Pre-Brooklyn Nets¹⁴, back when those cats were still balling out in the Garden State. This was back when living down in that area was like living in hell. My life was hell and at that point, all I could do was feel bad, not for myself but my youngest sister Spin. She was only like 7 or 8 when all this was happening. She never got to have fun or really be a kid and here she was cramped into a room with her two older sisters, her brother, and her mom.

My family was always on edge no matter what the situation was but the fact that we were homeless made it worse. Everyone was mad because none of us got any sleep; every other night you heard somebody crying themselves to bed. My mother was always stressed out and honestly I was always trying to beat someone because I was mad. I was 13 traveling almost 2 hours on a train to go to school in the Bronx, pretending that I didn't live in an in a one room hell with mother and sisters. To make it worse, after spending all day faking it I had another 2-hour train ride back to Brooklyn. Once I got back it was another round of "tit for tat" with my sisters. I felt like they all hated me then. I was the "golden boy"¹⁵, my mother's special little baby. I was the only boy and even when we were all broke and starving, "my parents loved me more", that's why I "went to Europe and they didn't". "I got toys they didn't", "I got to sleep in my own bed while we lived in the shelter and my sisters shared". None of us were eating 3 square meals a day. I was wearing the same pair of shoes for year, the same clothes, and we all looked

¹⁴ NBA Team. Formerly the New Jersey Nets. Own by Rapper Jay-Z

¹⁵ Name Given to me by my family. Meaning, "One who could do no wrong"

like crap. There was no favoritism or at least I couldn't see any. This game of "tit for tat" or "who got more" went on for months and it continued even when we moved out of the shelter and got our own place.

My sisters hated sharing everything "just because they were girls" and the fact that I was the only boy, only fueled the anger they had towards me. Deep down I knew that my sisters were really mad at my parents for neglecting them and that really I had nothing to do with it but to my sister's, I had everything to do with it. In their eye's, I got everything from toys, to later curfews, to the fact that they felt I could basically say anything I wanted to say to my mother and never get beat for it. To be honest, I just think it was the fact that by the time I turned 14 I had put on a few pounds and was an inch taller than my mom, and had been in 17 pretty brutal fights. I think I got away with so much because my mother saw a lot of my father in me at that time and that scared her in a way. It was better to keep me happy than oppose me. Then again, I don't really know why she rarely got mad at me but right now I'm just spit balling...

In high school, I filled my life with extracurricular activities, the Student government, the Golf team, working in the student union, and I was also on the Student leadership team, not just for my school but Columbus Campus (Columbus High school was broken into 4 schools, Pelham Prep; which I attended, Astor academy, CIMS, & Columbus H.S.). I would get up at 5am to be to school by 7:30 a.m. and I would not leave the school until 7pm. Honestly, I think I committed to such long days just because I trying to away from home. So I didn't have to hear

my mother yelling at me or my sisters yelling at her about what they could or could not do, about the opportunities taken from them in the past few years. Like my sister Elizabeth for example, who hates me most of all because she was the middle child. The 2nd of 3 girls and me being the only boy made her feel left out and while I could empathize with that, her being the middle child had nothing to even do with me. Me being the only boy had nothing to do with it because how could I be responsible for my own birth order? That's just how the world works and I can't change that. I guess we all felt trapped in some way and we all resented each other for it. Most of my time was spent inside a classroom, pen in hand, speeches being reviewed, and waiting for meetings. However, like many moments of my life, even that all that "goody, goody school boy" stuff wasn't all it's cracked up to be.

In the first chapter of "Helping College Students Find Purpose", Professor Robert Nash introduces 5 cycles of meaning making. The Third Cycle discusses the moment within meaning making where a quarter-lifer realizes that, "*I'm not really as free to choose as I thought I was*", a feeling in which I have felt since I was 17 years old. In my senior year of high school, I spent so much of my time running away from home that I began to realize that I was no longer doing things for myself but for others. I was a slave to my teachers, my principal, my school, and my friends. My life had become all about their needs as a means to get out of my situation and better myself, but at what cost?

I was barely sleeping and I was barely eating because I never had any money, even though I worked two jobs. One as a school aide and another as I ticket taker for the Bronx Zoo. I spent more time running from meetings, to class, and to work then I did with my own family, causing what I believed was even a larger strain on my family life. No one in my house talked unless it was to scream at one another and as the months rolled by and my graduation approached, I began to forget about my family and my only true friends; Ju\$ Cuz & Deep.

You see, my plan of getting out and getting away from this life was not only mine but Ju\$’s and Deep’s as well. However, by the end of our high school careers, I had forgotten about them and selfishly only looked out for myself. It was almost like “egoism” had reared its ugly head. When we were children my friends and I would dream a lot about our futures. Leaving the Bronx, moving to another state, driving fancy cars, “*popping bottles and dating models*”, it was what we all wanted. That was going to be the rest of our lives. Although, in high school while I made choices to make sure I eventually could do those things they chose to do them right at the moment. They drove nice cars and I took the MTA¹⁶. They popped bottles and I studied. They sold drugs and I barely touched them. I hate to admit it but I was jealous of my friends back then. They both had a great life in my mind. Both had normal parents with great jobs and neither of them had ever been homeless. I felt like they were living and I was always dying. At 17 years old, it

¹⁶ Metropolitan Transit Author (NYC)

seemed as if they were slowing being inducted into “lifestyles of the rich and Famous” and the only thing I was getting was beat down after school.

So in June of 2007, when it was time to graduate I found it so easy to cross the stage at Lemay College, turn my little green and yellow tassel, and watched as the golden letters of P.P.A.¹⁷ passed from left to right. I never looked back, while my friends on the other hand cried like little 4-year girls who lost their Barbie’s. I used to tell people “*Idk why anyone would cry at a high school graduation*” but after having more than almost 10 years to think about it, part of me thinks that they cried because that was it for them. They knew what life had in store for them, while my future was shrouded in mystery and hope. It’s funny because when I think about leaving the Bronx I can barely remember anyone being sad about me leaving, not even myself. See, I never really had a “real” relationship with my family but to this day I still will say that I love them.

My oldest sister Beth was always a strange one. It was like she lived in her own world. She was into shows like “Xena: Warrior Princess” and “Hercules”. She believed in magic and other worlds because it was the only thing that helped her escape her own reality. As for my sister Elizabeth, she’s a hot head. She’s always felt neglected and believes that my birth was the one subsequent moment that destroyed her life. In her words “*it’s was a good 15 months*”. She was also a strange character though. As a child she was like my mother, girlfriend, and protector. Where she went I went. Who she got into beef with...I watched her beat

¹⁷ Pelham Preparatory High School, Bronx New York

up. Who I got into beef with...she'd beat up. She took care of me but today, today she won't even speak to me. My baby sister "Spin" is a star basketball player for Syracuse University. At 21 years old and 6'1-2'ish and I see a lot of myself in her. Driven, determined, trying to find something to love beyond the college limelight. However, I know absolutely nothing about her. Not a single thing. As children we always separated. When our family was divided well, we were separated. As she grew into a beautiful young woman and basketball star, I was off trying to find myself in strange town placed on a scenic waterfront. Don't even get me started I my niece. I've been in Vermont 9 yrs. and she's almost 10yrs old, so you can already imagine how much time I have spent with her. Still, it's the price I had to pay to figure out who I was. I'm still doing that I guess but I know with every word I write I find peace.

In a way, I have found it to be all worth it. To truly know yourself you sometimes have to be totally alone. You need to get to know "me, myself, and I" before you begin you to talk about "us" and "we". I know my family and friends my might see it differently but the journey to self is needed for the road to salvation. I needed to be saved at that point in my life. I was lost, alone, and my heart was broken. I didn't know me, my sisters surely didn't know me, and I didn't know them. I felt like pan's shadow trying to be seen during the day. I never wanted to grow up and move away from home but even Peter Pan grew up. That's how he learned how to "Bangerang". Bangerang, a word inspired by the 1994 classic "*HOOK*", starring Robin Williams as an aging Peter Pan learning to be a

kid again. A word that spoke of the true spirit of childhood and what it meant to be free. It was the “lost boys” way of speaking what was truth to them; I feel that writing this is a way of speaking mind. For that, I hope the ones I left behind can understand.

*“See my mother on Skype,
Hear my sisters though the postcards they write.
Watch my niece grow though Instagram,
Around the world my body will roam
But my souls in New York...”*
“New York Soul”
Lyrics by: Jon Bellion

Lost Boys

*“The Truth is that as the struggle for the survival has subsided,
The question has emerged—survival for what?
Every one today has the means to live,
But no meaning to live for”*
Quote by Viktor Frankl
“Questions of Meaning, helping college students find Purpose”-
Robert Nash & Michelle Murray

My first semester at the University of Vermont flew by like nothing and by the time my 19th birthday rolled around, I had run out of steam. I felt lost, confused, and I felt like that there was no point of really being in college. I felt like I was unwanted and unloved. The A.L.A.N.A (African, Latino, Asian, & Native American) student center was a joke to me because every time I walked in some girl was asking me “*why I was there*” and telling me that “*I should go hang out with my white friends because I didn’t belong here*”. I barely talked to anyone from New York, not even the 25 other kids from my high school that were also

attending UVM. My Pops and I weren't talking, and even though I begged my mother to come visit me she always seemed too busy or would tell me "*we'll see*".

I had a girlfriend and she was an amazing woman but she was a senior and had already planned out our wedding. I on the other hand, was only a freshman and hadn't even gotten through my first semester. I had my new friends Shawn and Oliver and those guys were like my brothers, so when I really think about it, I shouldn't have been complaining at all. However, even with all I had I felt like a lot of it meant nothing. I felt like there was a hole where my heart used to be and everything I had ever loved was no longer part of my life. I started smoking a lot of marijuana in December of 2007 and I barely remember my birthday because I got too stoned in attempts to numb the pain I was feeling. By the time our Christmas break rolled around I felt completely lost and when I got back to NYC I felt like I didn't exist.

I returned home to find out that my mother had moved again and that my sister's had all moved out and were either living on their own or with friends. I found out that my baby sister was living with her basketball coach and his family, which blew my mind because I couldn't understand why mother would allow that to happen, even if it was to better my sister's basketball career. I felt like I had returned home to nothing. The city I once called home had turned into this cold, concrete prison in which I was to stay in for the next few weeks. I did get to hang with my best friends Ju\$ Cuz and Deep but even they had changed. Ju\$ was selling a gross amount of marijuana and now drove around with an assortment of Tasers,

brass knuckles, and what I hope were BB guns in his center console. Deep was going to PACE University in the lower Manhattan but he had become more concerned about getting high, and pretending he was Dominican, even though he was born in India and practiced Hinduism. See, my friends and I were no longer “Dem Boyz”¹⁸ from the block but instead we were some weird mix of ambition, lust, deamination & fear, all brought together by blunts, booze, and past transgressions; left on some cold city street late one December night.

While I really can't remember that much about those two weeks at home, I do remember one thing. I remember standing at the end of Castle Hill Avenue in the Bronx and looking out to the East river. I remember how the lights from the Throgs Neck Bridge¹⁹ danced off the ice, how the air felt so crisp and cool as we passed a blunt²⁰ between the 3 of us. As I sat there I wondered, what now? What do I do now? I feel like everything and everyone has changed and as much as I love and miss my family and friends this was not where I wanted to be anymore. This was not how I wanted to live. But if this is not what I want, then why am I sitting here doing this? I thought to myself and said, *“I think I do this shit on purpose, because then I don't feel so worthless”* (“Perfect”, Cam Meekins). I felt like all the work I had put in and all the pain I had felt in my life was for nothing. I used to truly believe that *“He who has a ‘why’ to live can bear almost anything”* (Victor Frankl) but I knew that at that moment watching the city sleep from the

¹⁸ Song by Wiz Khalifa (Rapper)

¹⁹ **Throgs Neck** (also known as **Throgs Neck**) is a narrow spit of land in the southeastern portion of the borough of the Bronx in

²⁰ a cigar filled with marijuana

hood of Ju\$'s car that I was no longer that kind of man. I wanted to be him, I truly did but sadly, I no longer knew how to because the last time I tried I lost sight of everything around me. Finally, as the last smoke cloud left my lips and disappeared into the night air, I decided that I at least needed to reach out and make up for lost time and hopefully I wasn't too late to do so.

*"I hope it's not too late for me?
Could you just wait for me a while?
Is it too late (too late)?
I hope it's not too late..."*

"Too Late"
Lyrics by: Big Sean

Fraternally Yours

*"Anxiety dances...
Across my pillowcase. My god it dances,
It's like one, two, step
It's asking stupid questions
Like are you living right? Such stupid questions
Cause I'm just..."*

"Eyes to the sky"
Lyrics by: Jon Bellion

My return to UVM was rough. I spent 10 hours on the greyhound bus trying to get back to campus. I spent the entire ride trying to think of what would make meaning in and for my life. Mainly, I was trying to keep the sickening thoughts of suicide out of my head because for my last two days in New York, I really just wanted to end it all. So I sat there, legs cramped on a tiny seat, eyes once again glued on everything going on outside my window, trying to make sense of it all. Wondering, when I would get to at least look as happy as everyone I saw

in their cars as the bus passed them? I wanted what it seemed like they had. Surrounded by people who looked like they loved each other, laughing and joking, no one yelling at one another because someone was living with a “*dreamed differed*” (Langston Hughes, poem). No one in those cars looked scared or nervous because they possibly had a gun under their seat. The people in those cars were all laughing and singing badly at the top of their lungs, just looking like they were having so much fun. I wanted that feeling so badly and I knew that if I was to survive the next semester that needed that feeling of happiness. I needed my life to mean more than it had ever before.

A week after I returned to campus my friend Goldberg invited me to his fraternity for a party. I had been to other parties in Vermont before and they all sucked in my opinion. Still, if I didn't go, all I was going to do was sit in my dorm and drink until I blacked out, so I figured why not go? I quickly got dressed and walked down South Prospect Street with Goldberg and my roommate Shawn. At first, I thought Goldberg was kidding about going into the house that looked like a Barn. It was the giant red house tucked deep in the middle of the block behind the Alpha Chi Omega sorority house. Honestly, it looked like utter crap; a “big red urinal” in my opinion. It looked like I was about to walk in a crack house, like some hobo was going to run out from the back with a knife and beg me for money. There was glass all over the driveway and a random guy throwing up in the grass in the back yard. As we got closer to the front door I began to hear the music, Hip-Hop music! My eyes began to fill with joy because until now almost every party I

had went to was filled with nothing but drunken Frat bro's and their girlfriends, who were as drunk or more drunk than them, standing around a keg talking about sports, fashion, and which pair of salmon colored chinos looked better on the guys. *"HONESTLY, WHAT THE HELL ARE SALMON COLORED CHINOS"*? I get it their pants but who cares? So, to hear hip-hop bumping out of Jewish fraternity just about made my night. As we got to the back door we were greeted by Brother "Colli Buddz" who I had met the summer before while I was on the UVM trek program (week long leadership camping trip). I remember Brother Colli; he was insanely skinny and looked like Shaun White's (Pro Snowboard champion) twin, pushing his way down the stairs, his long red hair bobbing back and forth as he demanded kids to "make a hole" so that we could get in. I will never forget that moment. Walking up those back steps, past what seemed like an endless line of freshmen, noticing how everyone's eyes became fixated on the four of us as we walked pass. It was the first I truly felt important, it was the first time I think I ever really understood the power of my own presence. Which was the problem because *"no one man should have all that power"* ("Power", Kanye West).

The Outside of the house didn't do the inside justice. In fact, it was quite the opposite. It was a massive eight-bedroom house with a huge kitchen big enough for a 200-person coat check and two bars. The living room reminded me of a Burlington nightclub; not too classy but you could possibly have a lot of fun. There were red, blue, and green strobe lights bouncing around the living room and a DJ booth conveniently hidden to the far right of dance floor. A third bar was

stocked to the brim with “Natty (Natural) light” beer and there were dozens of half-dressed girls standing on the tables and couches that surrounded the living room. It was crazy to walk into a house at UVM and see a bunch of white girls rapping every word to the song “*Fantasy*” by Ludacris. “*Back seat windows up that's the way I like to f**k, smoked up, fog alert, rip the pants and the rip the shirt...*”. To top it off, there was also fourth bar on the second floor but they only sold shots, which was nice because I didn’t have to pay for a single one. Adjacent to the bar was a long hallway, which led to the 5 upstairs bedrooms, and it was lined with fraternity brothers and of course, more women. Once we made it to the top floor, Colli brought us into a room, handed all 3 of us a beer, pulled a blunt out of his pocket, lit it, and said, “*Welcome to The Red House*”²¹

To this day the actual events of that night are still a blur to me but the one thing I can say is that that was the night I figured out what I needed in my life. I left N.Y.C feeling like I lost my friends and my family, like everyone was too busy or didn’t have time to deal with me. I left N.Y.C feeling more alone than I had ever felt before in my life but When I walked out of that house that night, a red solo cup in my left hand, and a girl under my right arm; I felt like I had a family, A family that I never had before in my life. I now had 55 brothers and I guess that’s why they next day I returned to the house to hang out. One week later became a Pledge of Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity, Zeta Pi chapter. I felt like for once in my life I

²¹ The Red House: Self-Proclaimed name of the old Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity house

knew where I was supposed to be and all it took was a few scratches of my pen to the bottom of a scroll.

*“Maybe you think what I do is stupid
But it really means a lot to me
And I’m sorry I didn’t see you last week
We didn’t even get a chance to speak,
But you know this shit was hard growing up
I promise, I’m still trying just to be me”*

“Stupid”

Lyrics by Cam Meekins

Tell Me When It Kicks In

Faith has always something that I have grown up with. I was born and raised a Catholic and like many other children in my neighborhood, I attended every Sunday mass my parents could drag me to. Religion was the only important thing to my parents because they saw it as “*giving us a balance*”. As if somehow believing that there was a higher or omnipotent power could put my sisters and I on the right path in life. A path that my parents themselves didn't really know much about. Sitting there, in those tiny pews every Sunday morning, watching some old guy wave incense up and down each isle, choking the life out of everyone in the congregation, was somehow, in their minds, going to make us “good people”. My parents along with every other child’s parents in my neighborhood believed this so much that they even made us go to the local catholic school because if we went to public school we would be nothing more than some “Bad ass little devil’s”. Which is why almost every kid in my neighborhood sat they’re, listening to nuns teach us about God, Jesus, and Mary. Soaking up every

parable and holy sacrament we could, even though once we left the school grounds, it felt like none of it ever happened. Shootings still happened, people still sinned, the world seemed like everyone, even our “holier than now” parents, were still going to hell. So like many of my fellow classmates I questioned everything I was told. *“If God’s so good and great than why does he let bad things happen”?* How is it that the same guy who shot a man at the corner store on Friday night can walk into church on Sunday morning say 5 “Hail Mary’s” and 10 “Our father’s” and be forgiven? Isn’t murder a sin? Belief in a higher power or at least that higher power (Catholicism) never sat right with me at all. I always wondered why I had to sit through an hour of things I couldn't believe? I simply couldn’t find the meaning in it at all. I guess that’s why I was even more tempted to look to other faiths and religions while I was away at college. I was looking for an answer that fit my beliefs, answers that meant something to me. I wanted something I could believe in.

A lot of people wondered why I joined a Jewish fraternity. As I said I was Catholic but now I found myself in a room, wearing the Gold and Navy letters of the Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity (AEPi), which made no sense to anyone, but the way I saw, it wasn’t about what made sense to others. For me, it was all about what made sense to me. It was all about what made sense in my head and what I could decipher as “the truth”. I wanted something more? I wanted to feel like everything I was doing and everything I was saying would be respected. I wanted to be somewhere I felt wanted and I didn’t feel like the odd man out.

After my last visit home, I felt like people were better off without me and that they could care less about what I did or was doing. I felt that even if I sat in front of my family and said I was thinking of suicide at that point in my life because I was just so unhappy; it really wouldn't have made a difference. I mean what did they care? They all seemed to "Ok" doing what they were doing, even if I believed it wasn't the best or most positive things for any of them. So this fraternity and my decision to be part of it was for me and for what I believed. However, I will admit, I really didn't know what I believed in.

I had stopped believing in "my god" (Roman Catholic idea of god) years ago because I felt that if god existed then why he ever would have let me be homeless? Why would god have taken away my grandmother, the woman I loved more than anything in this world, on Valentine's Day? I joined AEPi because I felt that I needed a family and something good to believe in. I wanted my truth and no one else's. So I decided to find a home in the last place I would have ever thought of, a Jewish Fraternity. I wanted to discover just who I was, in hopes that I would not only find myself but also find my true meaning. That was one of the most important things to me in my first years of college, finding out what was important to me.

"People often say that this or that person has not yet found himself. But the self is not something one finds, it is something one creates" (Thomas Szasz, "Personal Conduct," *The Second Sin*, 1973). I wanted to create my meaning even if that meant first discovering a new religion and group of people. I didn't want to

feel pressured in having to maintain a faith I truly couldn't believe in. I didn't want to be told to believe in something just because it was "the will of god". I get the whole his/her will thing and that's cool, but if that's the case then why the heck we're human's given "free will"? If bad things happen because its "God will" then I can't have "fee will" because then, in reality what happens in my life is based on some cosmic plan created by someone or something else, is it not? All I really wanted was the freedom to discover and create my true self and to understand that "Jared" from the one I had lived with for 19 years, but if it's God will then I can only understand "Jared" as it is viewed by God. However, I am not God so how can I possibly understand what is seen though God eyes? *"I'm trying to figure this out but my god, I'm so human"*. ("Ungrateful Eyes", Jon Bellion)

I honestly was just using my fraternity to find out my truths. To figure out who and what I love and trust. Trust was one of my biggest issues growing up because everyone I "loved"; I couldn't trust. Not my mother (she is a pathological liar), not my father (He was a drunk and a drug addict), Not my sisters because I felt they were always against me (even though that could've just be normal sibling rivalry), and not even best friends because as much as I do "love" those two (Ju\$ Cuz & Deep), not once have they made an effort to come see me once since I left for college. I feel that if the love were "real", if that Love was like the "Eros"²² type love then they would have been able to see my true pain. Point is that they didn't and I became a black half Jew for the next four years of my life, using every

²² ἔρως *érōs* "love" or "desire": Eros is one of [the four words](#) in Ancient Greek which can be rendered into English as "[love](#)".

moment, event, study hall, pledge event, and party to explore my soul. I was trying to figure out what I believed in, but sadly, after four years of searching, and my pending December graduation on the horizon, the only thing I believed in was smoking weed & drinking. I believing that love could be found in a sorority girl's rainbow colored bed sheets. I was still confused in my own faith, I still turned my nose at my first version of god (Catholicism) and thought my second idea of god (Judaism) was a joke. To me it was just something that was talked and laughed about over bar stools and half lit menorahs. I had spent 4 years of my life trying to find myself though religious faith when the only thing I really needed was faith in myself. I needed to believe that I could change but in all that time, I was still the same old Jared.

When it finally came time to graduate from UVM in December of 2011, I once again felt lost because like most students, all the friends that I had made in the past four years were moving away. Some back home and others off to their new lives in other states. As for me, I was left waiting for that "Ah-Ha!" moment. Waiting for that moment of divine introspection in which I could tell myself that, "I knew what I was supposed to be doing in my life" but back then, that moment never came. I once again, I found myself turning my tassel from left to right, this time walking out of Patrick Gym, walking home with my mom, my friend Oliver, and my girlfriend at the time, plopping myself down on my porch, drinking and smoking. There was a part of me that was hoping that numbing the pain I felt in side would make me feel better but it didn't, I felt the same. So I sat there. I didn't

care that it was freezing cold; I didn't care that I would probably get sick. I just sat there with a bottle of wine, a blunt in hand, wondering where that "Ah-ha!" moment was at? Hoping that maybe if I altered my state mind for just a few minutes that somehow all my thoughts would fall into place like puzzle pieces, painting the picture of meaning. I sat there for about 5mins just waiting for the drugs to take effect, just waiting for it all to kick in and my answer to be shown to me but it never was.

*"I've got sinning on my mind, sipping on red wine
I've been sitting here for ages, ripping out pages
How'd I get so faded (how'd I get so faded)?
This is how it ends; I feel the chemicals burning in my bloodstream
Burning in my bloodstream, so tell when it kicks in
Tell me when it kicks in"
"Blood stream"
Lyrics by: Ed Sherman*

Vanity

*"Went to school and I was very nervous,
No one knew me (No one knew me)
Hello teacher so tell me what's my lesson?
Look right through me (look right though me)
Look at me! Look at me! How much vanity you see?
"Vanity"
Lyrics by: Wale*

Standing there with the windows of my timid soul looking back at me, shower steam creeping up my bathroom mirror, I wondered just who is Jared Matthew Ford? Not Jaye Ford, JM Sahigher, Jmaf, P-lee, or any of the other nicknames I have been called over the years. I wanted to know and truly understand who I was and what I have become? This process of studying my face

in the mirror had become a morning ritual over the past few weeks. I'd get up, pick out and outfit, shower, shave, and then spend 10-15mins staring at myself, like there was going to be a test on my facial features later that day. My hands evenly placed on the sink, I would just look, peering into my soul as if the "*pain of not being seen was unbearable*" (Amy Tan, Joy luck Club). Feet planted while rocking back and forth, I'd close my eyes and think about my true self. This drove me mad at first because I was making myself a little dizzy with all the rocking. I began to think I was going crazy at first because I was talking to myself! I'd find myself stopping myself in mid conversation, never giving myself my own answer but making this large speech about the "self" and thinking about how "Jared" would answer that question verses how "Jaye" would answer that same question.

Phew...I guess I could say I felt like Peter Pan in a way. I felt like I was standing in that bathroom chasing my own shadow around trying to get it to fall in line. It felt as if I was dealing with "Emotion-riddled thought patterns", (How Philosophy Can change your life), all converging on my head to form this weird "7 sided Rubik's cube"²³. Knowing this, I began to prepare myself for these moments in my bathroom. Every day I would make sure that I gave myself one question that I would try and answer that day. What did I like better, Candy vs. Pastries and why? The next, what types of music do I like and why? Then, it was movies, etc.

I continued in the realm of the "why" for about 6 months, every morning waking up with somewhat of an answer to my question from the previous day. I

²³ The idea that A "Rubiks Cube" (www.rubiks.com) could be 7 sided; Making it impossible to solve

began to build a list of likes and dislikes, with a plan to eventually surround myself around the things I liked. Not as a means to create an ideal life because I mean come on, “*We’re all looking for the ideal life*” (Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen*) and while “*simple joys are both abundant and easily gotten*” (How Philosophy can save your life: Ideas that matter most) I wanted to make sure that these joys in which I was searching for are not ones that in the long run become my down fall. Nietzsche once said “*that success, like happiness cannot be perused, it must ensue*”, so I figured if I wanted to get to know the best of me, of every side of me, I would need to start doing a lot of “Me-searching”²⁴ by first figuring out my “why’s” and how to ensure my happiness.

One of my biggest “whys” would be, why is it important to stay healthy? When I think about myself as a “dual self” Jared and Jaye, one major thing can be found in common. No matter what I want to call myself, I still was born with Sickle Cell Anemia²⁵. So in thinking about why my health was important I started thinking a lot about self-care.

A co-professor of mine once defined Self-care as “*The understanding, maintenance, and rejuvenation of one self.*” (Jang, Jennifer; HESA Thesis, PG 36.) Self-care is having a harmonious balance with oneself, in terms of having a relationship with the self in all manners of finding a balance and understanding; “self-love.” This is what I wanted! This is what I needed! I could no longer deny

²⁴ Nash, Robert J., & Murray, Michelle C. *Helping College Students find purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning-making.* 2010

²⁵ an inherited form of anemia — a condition in which there aren't enough healthy red blood cells to carry adequate oxygen throughout your body.

my self-care because I was tired, too lazy, too busy, because I forgot, or couldn't find the time. I decided that if I kept living like that then I wouldn't need to think about who I was because I wouldn't be here much longer.

When I think back to all those times I was fighting sickle cell crises, losing my eye sight, going to school, working, full time, getting 2-4 hours a sleep a night, drinking, and smoking every two seconds; I realized how pointless it all was. There was no meaning in it. Waking up with tubes up my nose, being pinned and poked in my veins, oxygen mask on my face, and weeks laid in bed. I just can't help but think, "Well damn, I probably should be doing this differently".

I want to let you know that while some people thrive on vanity, trying to love yourself is a full time job. "*I cannot help others until I learn how to love and help myself, so there's nothing wrong with being a narcissist sometimes*" (Gary Ford, My father). I know that when my dad told me that the first time he was joking because he was standing in the mirror and combing his hair, but at this moment in my life it makes perfect sense. This was a time in my life where I was going to do some personal healing, growing and developing myself, dedicating my life to getting to know me. Getting to know who I was and what I needed from my life, so that I could make the "*best of my today's become the worst of my tomorrow*" (Blessings, Wale).

Chapter 2: *Mr. Robot*

*“Low on self-esteem,
Foes been out for me.
Someone's watching me, this world ain't proud of me
Thinking I should probably be-
Dead (dead, dead)”*
“Black Beetles”
Lyrics by: Joey Bada\$\$

Chronicle

[Talking to self-]:

“Why do we do this? Dance this dance of solace, wallowing in our own self-pity? Aren't you tired of it? I know I'm tired of it. Tired of the crying, whining, the bitching, and moaning. Tired of you complaining about what you could and couldn't have had, and how you fucked it all up. Be honest with yourself, this is your entire fault. You chose this path and now you regret it, don't you? You regret me and all that we've done. You regret all that we have accomplished and now you want to throw it away? I mean, may I ask you, in what way you are contributing to society, spending day after day, strumming along on your little heart shaped guitar, thinking about your own happiness? News flash Jared! Happiness doesn't exist until you can face yourself and be ok with what's looking back at you. That's you, that's the real you! It's the scariest shit you'll ever face. Truthfully brotha, you should be more like me; at least I'm not afraid...”

The first day of my life started on February 15, 2013. I got up early, I went to the gym, I ate 2 egg whites, 2 stripes of beacon, I drank a glass of milk and a second glassed filled with O.J., and most of all did not smoke. Instead, I listened to music all-day, living for the high of the beat and dying within the bass. Nothing and nobody was going to stop me from finding myself today. Today I was going to find out whom I was. I was going to find out what I was passionate about! I was going to find my heart, my yellow brick road and I was going to do it fast and quick! All I needed was 24 hours, and for about 8 hours it seemed like it was working...

[Music playing]

*“They told me that my attention span aligns,
Somewhat with a child or a fly.
They didn't understand that I saw signs,
Hearing things but now they realize...
The women that I prayed for became my wife and the dreams that I wrote down,
They came to life...
I figured that there's money in my mind—
I'm glad I live my live Pre-Occupied”!*
“Pre-Occupied”
By: Jon Bellion

See, it was nice at first but after a while it seemed like day was dragging. Like this was going to be the longest day of my life. I spent more time biting my nails and eating than anything else and by the time I went to sleep that night, I must have looked like a junkie going through withdrawals. I told myself, “its only day one”, and this will get easier. So I closed my eyes trying to prepare myself for tomorrow.

April 16, 2013

I woke up, I went to the gym, I ate a bacon, egg, and cheese from Henry Street deli, I took a shower, I had a coffee, and I got high. This morning ritual has become extremely sad process because didn't make it more than I week before something happened and I was back to my old ways. I have been doing this same thing for about two months and I was too lazy to add new journal dates. It's April now and I can't see how my whole "self-care" thing is working. When I first decided I was going to change my life I wasn't prepared for that wave of loneliness washing over me again. No one told me my girlfriend me my girlfriend would break up with me because "I changed". No one told me I would realize that I hated my job as a customer service rep, and no one told me that the more I actively decide to change for life, even if it's for the best intentions, that whatever friends I had left in Burlington will cease to exist. Once again, taking a chance on me and creating a great opportunity seemed to cost me almost everything...fuck.

June 23, 2013

I have become depressed and I am beginning to become disgusted with it all. For the past 4 months all I have been doing is trying to better myself and instead I seem to just be repeating my past. Once again, I doubted my abilities and myself. Once again, I doubted that I could ever and that I would ever be all right. Sitting on my back porch, I leaned back and looked into the night sky. 6 years, 6 years I have been here in Vermont, away from my home, just living out my life, scrapping trying to make it every day. I thought that if I stopped doing what I was

doing, drinking and smoking all day it would help. I thought if I started going to the gym more, and getting out and meeting new people, that I would have actually been able to find good people in my life and not have lost them as I have. What's the purpose of my life? Why do I have to sell my soul just to keep a job? Why does it still seem like I am under so much pressure? Why does everyone else look like they are happy and have everything in order except for me? I really wanted to be happy and more joyful but at that point, I was far from it. My dad always told me I was impatient but honestly I never agreed with his views because I felt that it wasn't that I was solely impatient. It was the fact that, I was the most patiently impatient person I knew. I had spent the past 24 years of my life waiting around and being patient. Staying still, lying low, going by the books and still, I was no closer to what I believed in, I was no closer to finding true happiness.

Heraclitus once said "*all things come into being by conflict of opposites*" and I felt that was true when I thought about my current situation. All my issues and all my problems, the things I was feeling; all came about when I was started to live my life opposite of what I had previously been living. See, before I was doing everything that made me feel happy, whether it was positive or negative. I then, because of some desperate need to change my current situation, started living life for things that I believed I really wanted/ needed, completely cutting out every negative thing in my life. It was an "over correction"²⁶. I was doing too much of one thing because I thought my other behavior was bad, turning my virtues into

²⁶ trying to correct one's previous actions by going from one extreme to the next.

vices. I stalled myself by doing this because I forgot that while sometimes people should try and make sound moral judgments, they still tend forget that just because something seems logical and therefore morally just, that doesn't mean it is right. We also need to follow our hearts and do only what feels right. *“For what the flesh desires are opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh...”* (St. Paul, Ch1: “The divided Self”, the happiness hypothesis). My body was urging for self-care and my soul was just begging for just a little bit of fun. It's crazy how for the past few months I had seemed to miss that. Maybe I should see someone about all this?

July 7th, 2103

[Music playing in headphones:]

*“This is the Basquait blues...
The Basquait blu-he-hu-Hughes
The Basquait, who?
The Basquait Blues*

*Back once again; hello
It's your favorite mellow Schizo!
The pavement on this yellow brick road is messing up my mental.
My mood is like the tempo, heart beats that instrumental
I never lack potential and every [word] is essential...”*

***“The Basquait Blues”
A poem by: Jaye Ford, sampled from
“OCD” by: Joey bada\$\$***

If there is one thing I love more than anything, it's getting high. Nothing can beat the feeling of floating without ever having to leave the ground. I mean everyone has their vice, you know. For some it's cocaine but I can't do that because that messes you up to bad. Some people like heroine but to me that's just a bad as

cocaine, or meth, or PCP. Me, me I like Marijuana and if I really want to fade out and forget, I'll take morphine. I bet you're wondering where the heck did I get morphine?? Well, like said I was born with Sickle Cell SC disease and because of it I regularly have chronic joint pains. It's like someone taking a hammer to my joints and bashing the heck out of me body. It was because of the pain that my doctors prescribed me morphine. Honestly, I've been taking it since I was like 5. So when I first came to UVM, the doctors pretty much gave me an ultimate re-fill and I spent a lot of time in the Fletcher Allen pharmacy. I used to wake up every morning listening to my joints cracking, burning heat coursing through my skin, making my muscles feel like they are being torn from the inside out. My disease has also caused problems with my eyes as well. I have had 11 laser eye surgeries in 9 years to correct my vision. I hate my life sometimes so morphine and marijuana have become my escape; my out. They have become my daemons and my friends. It's sad when you think about it because I used to spend so much of my time living in the darkness, afraid, upset, and mad. "*Life is so much easier when you're numb*" (Elliot, Mr. Robot). I have so many daemons at this point in my life. I guess you can say also have an abundance of friends too? Well, only if you count imaginary friends created by drug hallucinations as actual friends. You know that guy Gizmo, the little green Martian from that cartoon, "The Jetsons"? I see him a lot; he's my friend...

I lie a lot when I'm high. Mainly, because I couldn't think up the truth if I wanted too. Maybe it's because in that lie, I'm shrouded by my own truth;

therefore, it becomes the only truth, which in that case it makes it real. Then again what do I know; I'm high right now. I wonder what part of speech you would consider talking to yourself? Can I count "crazy" as part of my "first moral language"?²⁷ Nah, that gets chalked up to loyalty; "*Loil*" or "*leal*" as the French would say. Morphine's loyal; it's always there when I need it. It never really hurts me; I hurt me. Then again, if I laid out my daily options of not taking these pills or to take them, laying out my points side by side, I'd probably find such a beautiful juxtaposition in my two options. I once heard that "*there's no honor amongst thieves*" and that is why I think like morphine; it doesn't take anything away. Or does it?

[Door cracks]:

"Come in Jaye, it's been a while"

[Talking to self-]:

He's talking about the last time we spoke, 3 years ago. Kevin; my therapist he's a nice guy but sometimes I find his super sensitive mindfulness mumbo jumbo to be too much. Kevin was a 6'2, 175 lbs. black guy, who wore more Dockers and sweater vest than my "want to be suburban dad", Uncle Chris. To keep it real, Kevin just seemed so fake to me but then again had the tendency to say some real shit. That's why I'm here is it not? I want to hear someone tell me some real shit. Maybe hear Kevin telling me that I am not losing it.

²⁷ Nash, Robert J. & Jang, Jennifer J. Teaching College Students How To Solve Real-life Moral Dilemmas (2016).

Kevin: "Tell me Jaye, why are you here today?"

[Talking to self-]

He's got to be shitting me right? I'm obviously here because I want to talk. I want to make sense of these feelings that I am having and figure out how to find peace and to one day be happy. Tell him about hiding out in your closet when you were young because that way, you didn't have to hear your dad beat your mom. Tell him about all the drugs! The heartbreak! Then again, I could always just tell him what's really bothering at the moment. I could always tell him about you "old friend" ...but I won't. I can't, not just yet.

Kevin: "Jared is there something you want to say?"

[Talking out loud]

"I feel...I feel like I'm spinning out of control. Like I am no longer in charge of my actions. Like there's someone else talking for me. Someone telling me what I want to hear and not necessarily what you need to. Sometimes in my head it's like theirs two of me. It makes me depressed and it makes me unhappy. It makes me feel like I am losing it."

Kevin: "Like your losing control of your life?"

[Talking to self-]

Yes! I mean, *“How do we know if we’re in control? That we’re not just making the best of what comes at us, and that’s it. Trying to constantly pick between two options. Like your two paintings in the waiting room. Or Coke and Pepsi? McDonald’s or Burger King? Hyundai or Honda? It’s all part of the same blur, right? Just out of focus enough. It’s the illusion of choice. Half of us can’t even pick our own our cable, gas, electric. The water we drink, our health insurance. Even if we did, would it matter? You know, if our only option is Blue Cross or Blue Shield, what the fuck is the difference? In fact, aren’t they the same? No, man, our choices are prepaid for us, long time ago”.* (Elliot, Mr. Robot)

Kevin: *“Jared The only way this works is if you talk to me. Just because you’re off in your head having the conversation, doesn't mean you are actually having it. Do you want me to have the conversation? It might make it easier if you discussed what you were thinking....”*

[Talking to self-]

I always hated talking to this guy. He tried so hard to be your friend but never really tried to get to know me. Then again, I didn't know him. Who was he? Like I said tall, bald, skinny, and maybe gay? Not that it mattered; I was just painting a word picture. I knew this guy as well as I know you my old friend and that's what scares me because I have to try and trust in people. Baring my soul, looking into the deepest parts of myself and exposing them. “The sanity of the

body is the sanity of the mind” but is your sanity truly based on your exposure? I mean, you don't even know this man. Who is he to be to be the final word in the story? That's should be me but how can I say that I have a final word when I can't even say what that final word is?

[My Old friend-] “You don't know Jared! So how about you start by telling him what you do know...”

Me: “Fine here’s what I am thinking! We whine, we bitch, we moan, and we fight over things we can’t change or know nothing of. We live in a world surrounded by half-truths and white lies. We live in shades of grey because no matter how strong we believe ourselves to be, we still cannot and will not face the one thing that scares us the most and that's the truth. The ability to ‘look deeply’; understanding the nature of what it means to be an inter-being. It's only at that moment, when we are able to look deeply into ourselves can we then allows the barriers between ourselves and others to be dissolved. It's only then is peace and understanding possible. ‘When we have peace within, Real dialog with others is possible’ (Niche Nat Han) but until we can’t find that place to have that dialog, we walk aimlessly into our days, into our lives always trying to prove what we know, when in reality; the truth is that none of us actually know a damn thing about this life. We just live it and to be frank, I think we're just unwilling to admit that”.

Kevin: “That sounds like to me you're searching for something without finding any answers”

Me: “Sounds to me like you’re good at stating the obvious”

Kevin: *“That's not how this works Jared. You can't just say something and then be defense afterwards”*

Me: *“Well why not?”*

Kevin: *“Because this is a proven therapy Jared, it will help you with your unresolved issues”*

Me: *“Maybe, but I have never done this before so how can you say it's been proven if I am not proof? How do you know it will work for me?”*

Kevin: *“Well we have to try at least, right?”*

Me: *“Sure, but this is how I process shit at this point and I would hope that you would have noticed that. I must question before I answer. Me, talking to myself is figuring out my shit. So I say again, how can this be a proven practice if I am not proof? You clearly haven't taken the time to notice my process and you clearing can't begin to understand what is best for me...”*

Fear

“Like, I don't fuck with nobody. Like I don't go outside, I don't go to parties I don't go to bars. I know that seems kind of weird but I just like where I'm at and I don't need that type of cancer around me. You know I just don't need that in my area...”

~Logic MD

I wish I could be more mindful. I wish that I could actually treat my body like a temple and all that jazz but I don't. Like many others, I punk out and say, “I'm not strong enough”. I jokingly laugh that Friday night would be terrible without a scotch and soda or how every once in a while, after a stressful day a nice smoke would be soothing. Trust me, it is but then again; another good feeling

would be me being at my peak. I often wonder what it would be like to “find wholesome spiritual nourishment” because then I would be able to get past my fears. I think I hold myself back from living because punishing myself feels so good. It’s the best way I can numb the pain that has arisen in my life. I wish that one day I could manifest a new me. I wish I understand how to make a nothing become everything in order to make the something. I wish I knew how to make something out of myself.

I've allowed fear to hold on to me back “*instead of dwelling mindfully and knowing that each moment is moment of renewal*” (the Dali Lama). I need to figure out a way to not let the fear of my own greatness get to me and realize that I am nobody but myself! There is truly nothing about that to be afraid of. Deep down I know that once I've realize that I will be free from many of dangers that have been assaulting me both mentally and physically. However, until then I will struggle with my own enlightenment and I will allow the cancer of this world to plague me...what and idiot.

Honestly I’m sick of it. I’m tired of being afraid of my own shadow. I don't know why I do it. Holding myself back from my fears when “fear” is a necessary evil. Everybody has their own time frame in which it takes them to get over something and for me it’s been about 8/9 years, but it’s all been worth it. I needed to learn and to grow in order to truly be able to defend myself and as much as I am afraid of what that is, I can’t sit here and act like it's all a bad thing. That is

just pessimistic and I don't want to come off as that. I just want to come off as "Jared" but I'm having an extremely hard time defining who that is.

Since I started college, I have been looking for myself. I have always said that by the time I turned 25 I would know what I want in life and now and at 26 I do. A career, a woman that loves me, a house, a car, 2-3 kids, and as much peace as I can create within my day. I also told myself that once I understood what I wanted that I would then have 5yrs to get it all and then and only then, I will be happy. So here I am 1 year down and 4 to go until I'm happy. I know what I want but my problem is getting up and going out there to get it. I have no drive, no passion. I haven't had that since High school when I was fighting for love and attention from a woman I knew I would never get it from. The crazy thing is even almost a decade later I can still remember last time I felt passionate about anything like it was yesterday...

*"I wish we could just pretend to be like we once were before
Like back when we were 14.
Like back when Jackie was still oblivious to all of Maryland's tendencies
I guess life is bliss when you're married half a century
But we were married through 6th period.
But now you're saying "School lunch was all it meant to me"
Because now it's you and my homie in the staircase and your moans say
that you've found something better.
Our love was gone before you knew it, but this poem will last forever,
But we will never B the alphabet because U and I will never be
together..."*

***"When it ends"
By Jared Ford***

Standing there with the mic in my hand, reciting line after line and word after word, finishing each sentence with the perfect inflection, the crowd began to clap

and I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. As the Curtain closed, I was left with the view of an empty seat where the love of my life once sat. Needless less, my Senior talent show didn't end how I planned because when it was all said and done, the only person crying was me and those tears, weren't tears of joy. It's funny how 3 minutes of raw emotions can change someone for life, but for me, that failure was too great and since that moment I have been afraid to shine.

I wish I thought more like Confucius when he said, "*Worry not that no one knows of you; seek to be worth knowing*". I should be more focused on being my true self versus hiding it and hoping to get noticed by someone or something that never cared for me in the first place...

*"Be without fear in the face of your enemies
Be brave and upright, that god may love thee.
Speak the truth even if it leads to your death.
Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong
This, is your oath"*

"Here We Go"
By: Mac Miller

Therapy is Music

"When you're young, not much matters. When you find something that you care about, then that's all you got. When you go to sleep at night you dream of [Music]. When you wake up it's the same thing. It's there in your face. You can't escape it. Sometimes when you're young the only place to go is inside. That's just it [Music] is what I love. Take that away from me and I really got nothing..." (Telly, K.I.D.S)

Head spinning, smoke engulfing my face like a warm towel, I wondered, "What was missing from my life"? There has to be a way to do better for myself

while at the same time, enjoying myself and not pushing away everyone and everything I have ever known. What's missing from my life right now? I let my mind skip around between my personal ideas of daily pleasures and moral dilemmas and I came to one conclusion. At that moment, I figured something out that seemed to answer all my issues at once. What is that you ask? Well it's like my dad used to say *"a life will forever be unsung, if the musician can't find one beat that jam's in their head"*. Ironically, once again, I don't think my father was even talking about music when he told me this when I was younger but that's what was missing from my life. I had become so concerned about doing things right, taking care of myself both mentally and physically, and trying to remove negative influences in my life that I had forgotten to follow the beat of my heart. I forgot how to just let my rosaries tap dance across my chest, embracing the song of my day. Sometimes it was slow, sometimes fast, sometimes a ballet. I was spending more time looking at the album artwork of it all instead turning up the bass and jamming out till I was short of breath.

Black ink on a page, my right hand moving vigorously as the thoughts of all my hopes and dreams *"spilled onto my page like I hit a vein"* ("Fear", Drake). I began to write about my life. I wrote about my friends old and new. I wrote about love, my past, and my future...

*"I once tried to sound insightful but my dreams were not as insight as them other
dudes
Left God in the cold and sneezed off the King of Jews (Ah-Chew),
Because I dislike the closed minded.*

*Acting like the right wing, pretending that everything that was saying was
composed of the right things—
My thoughts are violent
Its no wonder why my friends don't hear from me like laryngitis; silence.
I tend to think differently like my IQ's at its highest,
Always knew what I was destined for this like if I was born a psychic
But for that, my friends called me Cole (cold).
A Young black male living with all this pressure,
Just waiting to become a diamond.
But I'm a Prince Cut; shinning!
So I'm trying to live out my dreams,
Staying far from old dusty roads; accumulating mileage".*

"Dream Catcher"
Lyrics by: Jaye Ford

These words became the first in a series of songs that helped me to discover what I needed next in my life. Every day I would get up, walk into my bathroom, pull a large black expo marker out of my top drawer, look into the mirror and write the lyrics would shape my day...

*"I'm a boy lost in his manhood...
Oh mom, look what I've become.
Just a creature looking in his mirror,
Searching for your distance son.
So the years they dance behind me like I play them on the I's.
Mom, please don't be alarmed because my dreams are on the run!
Here they come—
So these thoughts prance upon my sink like little splashes of my soul.
Idea's drip onto my lips,
Until I finally let them go.
Here they come! Here I come—"*

"The Clone Wars"
Lyrics by: Jaye Ford

So that's what I did. I ran with every thought, every feeling, every emotion, and every lyric. The more and more I wrote I began I discover things

about myself, my likes, my dislikes, wants, needs, and feelings that I didn't even knew I had. I began to discover my true self. The word "truth" means "troth" or "trust, faith, and love". So through my own words I was able to find out that I trusted very little because of my childhood. I learned that I could place no faith in anything besides the things I could see, hear, and feel because of the time that I spend homeless; every night lying on my bed looking out the windows of the shelter, praying to a god that never came. I learned that I could not love because I did not understand love. My parents and the way they treated each other never showed me how to love, no matter what they said to me.

B.D.E. (Best Day Ever)

I hated my job. Me, Jaye Ford nothing more than a customer account executive for Comcast Cable. What that meant was that I was the guy you called up to lower your bill but probably just ended up cussing out because I only saved you \$10 a month. I mean really hated this job because it is the only job that when I got there; sucked all the happiness right out of me. I would pull out my key card, swipe the security door and in a matter of seconds I went from happy and vibrant to sluggish, depressed, and upset. My boss didn't care about me; I still had no girlfriend, and no family close to cling to. I also started smoking cigarettes at this point because after spending 8-10 hours on the phone being told that "*I was nothing more than a Piece of shit*" and that "*my mother should have swallowed me*", I then would have to sit through my boss trying to coach me on "how to

Comcast²⁸. He wanted me to be more of a team player. He said that I should “smile more” and that I should wear more “purple” (purple being our team color). So it’s a no brainer why I needed a cigarette; a lot of cigarettes. After work I come home, had a beer or 6 and sit in the dark. I would have joint lit in one hand and I would just sit there listening to music.

Music is my way of escaping the world. It makes me feel like I have friends. Like I don’t hate my job. Music makes me feel like I like “purple”. I hated these nights alone because I had no one to hang with or talk too. I would spend all night wrestling with these emotions and then I would have to go to work and have everything emotionally taken from me. I know customers get mad and to keep it “one hundred” (honest or real), majority of the time they had good reasons because Comcast has ways to get you coming in going. After all of the B.S. I have to deal with in my personal, stuff that makes me feel about “this big”, I would have to then get on the phone for 8 hours and get attacked to the point of feeling microscopic. If didn't need the money would I have never gone to work? Probably not but I did need the money because otherwise I'd wouldn't be able to pay my bills. Isn't that why all people go, especially us quarter-lifers? We have to work because we go to school for four years and after financial aid and student loans we're \$100,000 in debt. Then we graduate with our bachelors and realize it's not worth a damn thing. Your bachelors only get you \$30,000 a year. Student loans are 20% (\$6,000), now you at 24k. Average nice apt 1,500 a month for a year or

²⁸ To be an exemplary employee of Comcast

\$18,000. Now divide your remaining \$8,000 by 12, that's \$667.00 a month. Now add electric, water, gas, and car payments. Honestly, how do you eat? Me, I worked over time in a place that drained my soul.

I interacted with my co-workers, brushing off the fact that the upper management was heartless and the fact I was getting sexually harassed by a few women in the office. They were 12-20 years older than me but because they just loved them some “adorable black babies”, they acted like I was nothing more than a walking sperm bank. So you can see why I really didn't have much going for me at the time except for those nights when I could listen to music...

*“No matter where life takes me, find me with a smile
Pursuit to be happy only laughing like a child
I never thought life would be this sweet
It got me cheesing from cheek to cheek*

*And I ain't get away for nothing cause that just ain't my style
Life couldn't get better, this gon' be the best day ever”*

“Best Day Ever”

Lyrics by: Mac Miller

That's really all I wanted. I wanted to just have one good day because for the better part of a year I wasn't having any. My girlfriend broke up with me; my best friend went and enlisted in the Army. My parents had their own issues, my sisters had theirs and my roommate well, she was always off indulging in her two favorite past times, “wine and boys”. My other best friend was living in Albany with his parents and even though he found ways to come upend visit, it wasn't nearly enough. “No man is an island” and for so long I felt like I was more confused than one of characters from the show “Lost”. A show that is ironically about people

trying to find their purpose I'm the afterlife, so that they're souls can move on. I wanted to move on. I wanted to figure out where I stood in this world but I didn't know. Only thing I knew was that the bus came at 8, I hoped my second at 8:30, walking to work by 9, at my desk by 9:15, lived through verbal hell until about 7pm, two more busses, smoke, cry, and repeat. I hated my life but I felt like the only choice I had was just to deal with it. Deal with it until I could get back to the music. Until I could feel alive again I needed to feel that way every day. I needed to find the "beat that jammed in my head". I needed to find that beat that could help me see all my options but I didn't know where to start. Discovering all of these things about myself and what I needed blew my mind. At first I didn't really know how to handle it so I did what I did best; I got high.

[Talking to self-]

"There it was after all the searching, scraping, grinding, and sweating; there it was. My lifeline. It was a culmination of all my lies & consequences just sitting there staring back at me. It's really hard to think that I chose this. I chose all of this. I left everything I had ever known and look where it's gotten me, right here. Right to this very moment. One perfectly rolled joint and one line of morphine. Is this the life I wanted? Is this really the reason I left New York? I don't know but...as my good friend Trish would say, 'I don't know shit'. Maybe I do though. This line has wanted to own me my whole life. How to do it was shown to me by my father at the age of five, except for him it was Coke. Still, the process was all the same. Using a razor blade to get it nice and straight, rolling a single

dollar bill into a tube to snort it, and taking 3 deep breaths before I took my first hit. Even the wide-eyed face I'd make after the drugs hit my brain was a learned behavior. It needs me, just as much as I need it. Every moment, bringing me closer to this one line. My last line; I promise”.

Chapter 3: *Balancing Acts*

I Took a Pill

*“But you don't wanna be high like me
Never really knowing why like me
You don't ever wanna step off that roller coaster and be all alone
You don't wanna ride the bus like this
Never knowing who to trust like this
You don't wanna be stuck up on that stage singing
Stuck up on that stage singing
All I know are sad songs, sad songs
Darling, all I know are sad songs, sad songs”
“I took a pill in Ibiza”
Lyrics by: Mike Posner*

Admittedly, I was not dealing with my most recent discovery the best way I knew how. So what if I lacked a few emotions because of my childhood? So what if I was upset? What was I going to do blame my parents for what I was doing now? I could but then again, I could only hold myself accountable for my actions. I was making the choice. So it was right then that I decided to make another one. For months I had been thinking about what I wanted to do. Should I pack it all up and go home? Should I just settle with the life that I had? Stay at Comcast, getting yelled at every day because I couldn't magically snap my fingers and fix all their problems? No, I knew that there needed to be more. That I couldn't just sit down

and take it lightly. I had to do something. I needed to feel like my life was going to amount to something more than what it currently was.

When I started to think about what that “more” actually was I strangely thought of graduate school. Thinking, “*Well if I can’t figure out my life, what I want and what I need though higher education, I’ll never figure it out*”. I was tired of sitting alone in my room, being high 24/7, working my nightmare of a job, & blaming it on everyone but myself for my issues. Once again, I felt like I had found myself at a crossroads and I decided to take the “road less traveled by”, but before I could do that I needed to apply to Graduate school and find a new job.

Maybe that's how I got to my last line. One last 6-inch piece of joy wrapped beneath the trees of despair. My one final act of desperation to feel like I was in control of myself. I’ve really never been in control of myself. There’s always somebody who has been telling me what to do or to become. “*Don't be a statistic*” my grandmother would always say. “*Don't be like me*”, my father would follow her with. “*You are not one of those street rats,*” my mother would explain with vigor. They were all right I mean, “*I’m tall and lengthy, so I’m not even a flex guy*” (“Nothing to me”, G-Eazy). I'm not a tough guy and if I had become any of those things my parents talked about then I would have had to have been. I never would have made it on my own. In all those instances I would have needed help because alone, I would have died those situations. I guess it’s fitting though, the idea of life not being your own. The idea of life being one big shared experience; knowing that our lives were actually not ours, “*From womb to tomb, we are bound*

to others. Past and present and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future". (Somni-425, Cloud Atlas). Maybe that's it? No, that can't be it because I am here for a reason. No one will care about my purpose if I don't care, no one will hear me if I don't allow myself to be heard and that line of morphine silenced me. It dragged me into a hole where nothing exists but my on warped thoughts.

[Talking to self-] That line created you (my imaginary friend) and thus, it is the reason I am having this conversation. So without that line, this conversation cannot exist, without that line that you can't exist but if this that's true, then if I remove that line, do I exist?

In February of 2014 I found myself staring at my answer. It was my acceptance letter to the Interdisciplinary Studies Master's program at the University of Vermont. Finally, I felt like I was going home. I felt like the road in front of me, while still entrenched in bushes and dirt was the right path and it was a little bit clearer now than it ever was before. So I kept on doing what I had been doing since the previous August. I spent every night on my laptop tweaking my resume, changing cover letters, emailing every contact I needed, applying to every job I knew at UVM because while getting into grad school was one thing, being able to pay for it was another.

February soon turned into May and my confidence and hope turned into more drugs and a lot more alcohol. Once again I was frustrated, down on my luck, and I felt like a failure, not only to myself but also to all the people who had been telling me I had the potential to do something great with my life. Then, after I

finally said “*I give up!*” I received an email from the University asking if I would be interested in a position and the rest, the rest is history.

Since that time I have been working for the University full time and taking 2-4 classes a semester so that I can graduate with my Masters in two years. I also knew that even though I had gotten both the job I wanted and accepted into grad school that, that wouldn't be enough to fix all my problems. I had given up Morphine a long, long time ago but I still had other bad habits and if I wanted to really make a change I needed to get rid of those as well.

I smoked cigarettes and weed, drank at least a 6 pack a day, and I ate from an array of fast food dollar menus around Burlington. I also stayed at home in the dark a lot on weekends, which wasn't the best thing to do. Luckily, I had just recently come out of my dating slump and I had a very energetic and active girlfriend who herself had just completed the Spartan race²⁹, so at least I had active people around me to help. I wanted to change my behavior from the ground up. I wanted to start out thinking of why I was currently doing these things and move on to coming up with ways in how I could replace that same behavior with new and better behavior. However, at that time I had no idea as to what something like this would be called. Luckily in the spring of 2014 I would learn about the “Cognitive behavioral therapy model” or CBT. *“Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a form of therapy that seeks to alter behavior by identifying the precise factors that*

²⁹ A series of obstacle races of varying distance and difficulty ranging from 3 miles to marathon distances. They are held in USA and franchised to 14 countries including Canada, many European countries, South Korea, and Australia.

trigger negative habits and learning skills to interrupt and redirect responses to those triggers". ("Mindful Happiness", Anthony Quintiani)

So, I tried it. I tried to figure out “why” I did something and I learned that by looking for the factors that caused my behavior, I could then work on ways of correcting that behavior by exchanging my negative habits with more positive ones. As I said, I smoked cigarettes because when I used to work for Comcast, I would get screamed at 24/7. 8-10 hours a day of “*Go fuck yourself*”, “*you don't care about me as a customer*”, and my personal favorite “*You are a worthless piece of shit, that why you work in call center, your life is a waste and your mother should have swallowed you*”; that's actually the full version of the one of the worst thing I've ever been told. So even though I had school, a girlfriend, and a good job, I still hadn't broken the habit smoking cigarettes. Those words stuck with me and it was the fact that I wasn't high all the time that cigarettes became my new addiction. I knew quitting was going to be hard but I couldn't wait for that slow process of “taking day by day” or chewing some crappy gum. Instead, I smoked a whole pack of Camels in 40mins and forced myself to throw up. After that, cigarettes were disgusting to me. However, I still wanted to smoke weed & Hookah but defiantly not cigs. Since that day I haven't smoked a single cigarette. I also tried keeping myself busy. This way, I was always out being active and not hiding in my room. Finally, I changed all the alarms in my house to ring a certain time in the morning with different rings, why? I wanted to change my sleep system so that I could get more sleep, which is something that I wasn't getting. At that

point in my life, I think I was on a 3-day insomnia kick like every other week and the contents in my stomach normally consisted of BBQ chips, coffee, pizza from 3 Brothers, about 2 red bulls, a Monster energy drink, and of course THC. I needed a sleep schedule and I needed it bad.

Life started to become simple. First alarm was at 5, second at 5:30 and the final one was at 6 am. I saw it as my way of jump-starting my engine. I would give it a few quick kick-starts before I revved it up for the day. Normally I would smoke when woke up but instead I started doing pushups. I started eating breakfast and if I had time, I'd go to the gym. I found my routines highly boring after about a week, so I started changing up breakfast and workout times. Also, I made sure that every work out I did focus on a target area of muscles. I started using an APP on my phone called "*Mindfulness Daily*" because it took me through guided meditations. Sometimes, the instructions even came with calming directions and music. I still can't sit still for more than 20mins but it's a lot better than most and I have learned even to do it at work when things get too hectic. I just simply center myself with a few calming breaths to pull myself back into focus. Slowly but surely, I was becoming normal or as normal as one could be if they have been forcing themselves to take part in a daily mind fuck due to their own impatience. Still, even with all the good I was seeing happening to myself I forgot that true change is something that comes from within and while I physically looked and felt better, mentally I was having those same conversations with myself, still running from my "old friend..."

Hello Friend

[Talking to self-]

“Hello, friend. That’s lame. Maybe I should give you a name. But that’s a slippery slope. You’re only in my head. We have to remember that” (Elliot Anderson, Mr. Robot). However, who cares? It’s just us talking right? I mean, isn't it perfect? I have all these thoughts and feelings and I have you to share this with. Still...I must be careful because you’re not really here, are you? I do seriously have to remember that. This is all made up. I made you but...I think that's why you're so perfect to talk to. Sometimes I feel like I’m standing in a glass box, looking out and seeing you standing there looking back in at me. We mimic each other; I lift my right as hand you raise your left, my feet stomp as yours do when either of us is upset, and I cry just as you do. I may have created you but we are one in the same. You begin where I end and I do the same for you. You are all the good I have left in this world but you are all of its evils as well. Sometimes I wish I could do without your latter half but I know I can’t. Something’s are just necessary; they need to be. They need to be seen and they need you be heard. The same goes for stories as well, which is why it is necessary I share this one with you.

Today I feel like a spider trapped in a web of its own filth thanks to all my lies. The last time we spoke, we spoke of faith and of belief. I explained why I barely had any help growing up and why out of all the help I needed, I needed yours the most. I told you that I was nothing more than a *“profit and that you were supposed to be my God”* (Mr. Robot). I put all my faith in you and none in myself.

I guess that's the thing about faith sometimes, people take everything at face value, until one day, they don't. After that moment we searched for the truth, doing anything to find that truth even if it means putting our self in a position to get lost within our own search. I guess that's where you came in as part of my life. You were supposed to be my new faith, my new system of belief, but all you have done is keep me in this damn box. Sitting there, patiently waiting, watching your every stupid move. It's been hell in here, living in my own mental jail. However, jail isn't always bad, especially when you have all the time in the world to think about how you're going to break free.

I remember when I was a child, how much I hated going to church. After spending all week sitting through Catholic school I felt like my weekend should have been mine to explore but no, Sunday was all about what my parents wanted. Family time and church was my entire day. It didn't matter how much "God" was pumped into my ear ducts during the week it was never enough. I didn't really know what it meant at the time but "*I wish I could have been a theologian, a calm academic with a PHD who could explain the thorniness of this issue in a straightforward manner*" (*The Faith Club*) but I wasn't and my parents always knew more than I did. Giving me what at the time seemed like solid reasons as to why I should be at Mass on Sunday mornings. Even though, back then the only solid point that was made was "Because I said so". Shit, I was a kid and my father was a 6'5, 250 lbs. man who always wore black sunglasses. I was going regardless, despite any religious knowledge I had. So I kneeled on the pews, I made the sign

of the cross after dipping my fingers in holy water, even though there's a still a part of me that thinks saying a few prayers over some tap water is a load of crock. Fact is I did everything I was told. I got up at 8:30a, I put on my dress clothes and I took my mother's hand and we walked to church. I did this for years, praying, singing, and staring at the image of a boney and bloody man wearing a crown of thorns hanging from a cross. I wouldn't say that the experience was traumatic or anything but I would say I never felt normal while I was there.

You must be wondering why I am telling you this right? Well, I will tell you soon enough but why spoil the surprise right now. You love to keep me in suspense, so I figured I just return the favor for a bit. So please stop with the faces, you're going to give me wrinkles. Now, let's get back to the point. Ah, yes I never felt right in a church but at least my church days didn't last long because once my parents divorced religion and faith went out the window. Honestly I was relieved. Finally, no more looking at scary Jesus hanging over my face, no more baby bread slices and no more sips of wine. Well, that wasn't true, I started drinking a few years after my parents split so the wine never went anywhere. Still, after 10 years of wanting nothing more than a free Sunday I soon began to feel like since I was no longer attending 9 am mass, a piece of me was missing. I tried a few times to go back to church and mend my now "tortured New York soul" but every time I stepped foot into the church I began to feel uneasy and weird. I realized that my feelings of unease were simply due the fact that I felt I was being lied to. I hate liars, even though I kind of am one. I just felt like I was sitting and listening to

some story about how my entire world was created but I could find so many gaps in the story. So many pieces of the story that weren't being told even though I was always told in order to find the truth I needed to read the bible.

I once read that the definition of insanity and here's what it said. Insanity was, *“doing the same thing over and over again, without changing a single element and expecting a different outcome”*. Well, if I was going to figure out my truths I felt like maybe I did need to read the bible but not the one Deacon Bellow was reading because then, I would only be driving myself insane. My only problem was that “his” bible was the only bible I knew of. It was the only type of bible that existed in my world, so how could I possibly find another that was not like the one I knew? After a few years, a few sins, and one college acceptance letter later I figured it out. By the time my high school graduation rolled around I was tired of it all. Tired of myself, my “friends”, my family, and most of all my faith. I was happy to be moving all the way to Vermont for school. I was happy not because it was so far away and so cold up there that my parents would never even think of visiting me but it was the fact once I got there I could be anyone that I wanted. I could say whatever I wanted, act and believe, as I wanted.

That's where you come in friend, surprise! The bible says god created the world in 7days and as for you; you were created after 4 grams of marijuana, 20mg of morphine, and a Molson Ice (Canadian beer). You my friend are the baby of a drug-induced coma, kind of my own little immaculate conception. I didn't need anyone else to help me cook your ass up. Once I figured out what you liked, how

you would talk, and what you hated, I knew it was time to let you go explore and that was the biggest mistake I have ever made.

Sometimes in my solace I felt like Victor Frankenstein playing with electricity in my basement. However, the monster I have created isn't misunderstood. He is just filled with curiosity and lacks empathy. It's my fault that I am stuck in the box. I sent you out that night to the "Red House", so I blame myself for you finding and cracking open the Torah because we all know what happened after that. I didn't think you become so fascinated with your newfound religion but I guess believing that you would just let it blow past you like every else in your life. I'm the one who gave you this yearning for the truth, so really I can only blame myself for your actions. Maybe if I just gave you a blank slate then maybe this box wouldn't make feel so claustrophobic and maybe I wouldn't spend every day of my life watching you bask in the beauty of my word. I guess I shouldn't be too mad though, you did complete one task that I hoped you would, you figured out the truth or should I say you figured out my truth. After 4 years in a Jewish fraternity listening to scriptures, Torah verses, and slowly understanding the very unique disdain for anything Palestinian, I believe that I had the truth that will make me whole again and get me out of this damn box!

What is that truth you may ask? Well here it this...Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are all the same damn thing! "*Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are actually 3 forms of one religion practiced by Abraham*" (The Faith Club) which means all those years I spend sitting, praying, kneeling, and having a "Bar

mitzvah” (wasn’t a real one) and feeling like something was missing, something was actually missing, the rest of the story. It makes me kind mad that you got the chance to experience that and I only got to watch from the inside of this hell hole you put me in. You were out there finding my treasures and I just got to sit here in this box, hip deep in my murky past. However, even though I dislike what you have become I must admit you have helped me a lot in the process. I created you because I was tired of being myself, tired of believing what I was being told to be true. I knew that in order to find out my truth I needed to change. I needed to become more. I needed to become something new. I needed to find myself and at the same time keep my religious demons at bay. That’s why, at that time. I needed you.

“Daemons. They don’t stop working. They’re always active. They seduce. They Manipulate. They own us. And even though you’re with me, even though I created you, it makes no difference. We all must deal with them alone. The best we can hope for, the only silver lining in all of this is that when we break through, we find a few similar faces waiting on the other side” (Elliot Anderson, Mr. Robot)

I guess you can say though all this; I’ve never dealt with my own daemons. I mean it's pretty obvious since I’m sitting here talking to you, but yet still trying to understand my own beliefs. I really don’t know where to place my faith anymore. First, I placed in my parents and my family. I placed it in the faith that I was born with but I truthfully I never agreed with it, in fact I despised it every moment of it. Then, I created you my friend. My imaginary friend, a person who technically only

exist in my mind and yet you've been the one calling the shots. I've allowed you to explore the outskirts of my mind, wandering through my beliefs, picking and choosing what's real and what's not. It's been you, not me who has the opportunity to explore other faiths and beliefs. It has been you who has had the opportunity to experience these things, to grow and love them, where I have only been able to watch them from a far, relishing in their beauty. Still, something deep down inside of me that knows that you can't be "*absolutely sure that one particular set of values, a personal spirituality of assortments of religious doctrines, no matter how comforting or authoritative, do not represent the truth*" (*The Faith Club*)

My entire childhood I believed that faith, spirituality, religion, and God all consisted of joyful hymns, wine, and wafers. I know you would tell me otherwise old friend. You would say that "I never believed" in any of this religious mumbo jumbo because you think you know me better than I know you. Well you wrong. When it comes to truth you are just an infant. 8 years of mental freedom but I am 27 years of pain, anguish, faith, hatred, fear, and freedom. So you can sit back here and try to tell me that I am wrong about Abraham and his son's if you want. You can tell me that Jesus was in fact the son of God and I will still say, "He's nothing more than a man, who preached only a small part of God's word". You can say that I only know a piece of what the truth is but I would say that it is because of the time I spent in this cubic hell hole you left me in. However, I would also say that my time here has given me time to understand that you yourself only know a small portion of what the truth is. The time I was given here in this place allows me to

know that you are just as lost as I am and it is the simple fact that I am able to acknowledge these facts and you aren't, that allows me to know with great certainty that my time in this box is soon coming to a close. I am one step closer to getting out of this box. I am one step closer to my truth and that it is that knowledge that lets me know I am one step closer to never needing you again. Your time "My friend", is numbered and mine...well my mine has just started.

*"You do not need to kill with your body to be put in jail
You only need to kill in your mind and you are already there"*

~Jesus Christ

(Living Buddha, living Christ by Tinch Nhat Hanh)

Me, Myself, & God

*"You're the only power!
You're the only power that can...
You're the only power!
You're the only power that can...
make this a beautiful morning
You're the only sun in my morning
A beautiful morning
You're the only sun in my morning
I just want to feel liberated (I...I...)
I just want to feel liberated (I...I...)
If I ever instigated, I'm sorry
Tell me who can relate? (I... I...)"*
"Father stretch my hands Pt.1"
Lyrics by: Kayne West & Kid Cudi

I know that no matter how much I want to be able to understand religion I probably never will. How can I understand a system of beliefs and faiths created by someone who is "everywhere and all knowing" when I have no idea of what it's like to be all and see all? It freaks me out, but then again, for someone to know all

means that they know the whole truth and that they are beginning to understand a piece of reality that many never will. However, what if every child on this planet were taught to learn at least one faith in school like they do language? What if all it took was learning a second religious text to create the idea that there could be such a thing as being “separate but equal in religion”? A world were we could all could be right, even though we speak different languages and gospels and we disagree on seemingly big issues. I mean what then? Imagine living *“A holy life of love and compassion could be lived by any human of any faith”* (Thich Nhat Hanh, *living Buddha, living Christ*). At least that’s what I believe is main message of God in all 3 religions. To live a life of love, compassion, peace, and humility, is to show that humans have the ability to recognize god within their fellow man and not the fact that Jesus or any profit is example is god. I feel that God will love and recognize all that recognize god and not so much which religion they practice.

I’d like to think that one day it would be like this. That all children will be able to learn about religion the same ways they have come to study language, maybe then one faith’s truth may also be the truth for others who do not practice that particular belief. *“Religion reflects the quality of its societal state and government. It can only be as enlightened as the human hands it finds itself in”* (Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha living Christ*). But what if those hands were Muslim, given Christian teachings, or Christian given the principles of Judaism, what would that say about the system of belief in this world? What would the world be like? What would “God” be like? Image a world where belief was left to

the people, where religion was solely governed by the compassion of humanity. I bet then people wouldn't act so differently to each other. Maybe we would then be taking the first steps to an altruistic society? Maybe then the idea of a Utopia wouldn't seem so farfetched.

*"I've been working hard; I've been searching for god
& I can hear the devil all around me as they all applaud..."*

"Under Pressure"
Lyrics by: Logic MD

I say this, not in the sense of faith or of a savior (Jesus, God, Ali, etc.), but more in the sense that there is more to the world than that in which I know. I think of "God" or "a god" as the "end all be all", the "alpha and the omega". To me, "god" or that idea of "god" encompasses all that I could ever imagine or begin to love/fear. So when I think about where am I, I think about what encompasses my world and what about those things I put my faith in because that is what I find joy in. When I think about who am I, I think about my position in life and what makes me happy because that's usually what I believe. My search for god then becomes *"a way to seek truths by your own lights"* (The Socratic Method, Socrates Café) or should I say, "How I choose to discover my purpose in life".

I guess the next question is how do I make these discoveries in some way that I can also than relate to others? How will I shed light into the darkness has become my life over the past few years? In what ways has my system of belief spoken to me to form my new ideal or belief? Is there a place that I feel safe? Do people care about me in this place, and if I had to spend the rest of my life in this

place or somewhere similar to it; would I then be happy for the rest of my life? I also must remember that while I say the phrase “this place” a lot, I do not actually mean, “place” as a physical location. However, I mean it not only as an area of physical location but also a measurement of time (This moment) or a state of being. Am I content with the person that I have become? I must think of all of these things while at the same time calling “*common sense into common speech*” (The Socratic Method, Socrates Café) so that I can not only understand myself but also be able to explain it to others. I do not need to defend my point but if I can’t share that point with a clear mind, that point becomes pointless. I believe that for me to understand my purpose in this life, that in order for me truly to be happy with my place in the universe, I must first understand why I am in the position or location that I find myself at that very moment. How many times have we heard the saying “*everything happens for a reason*” but we have never been told what that reason was? Why the heck am I on this earth? I think for me it’s simple, “*I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in all he did, sad—and did not say*” (Fredrick Nietzsche) because sometimes it was the best way to discover his direction in his life. He created a way to dive into conversations on levels never imagined possible by the human mind. It’s because of him I have been able to even begin attempt to answer the question, “where am I?” Right now I am here, finding my way, searching for what I believe, finding my faith, in conversation, raw emotion, and rhyme. I am right where I am supposed to be because for me being “here” or in this “place” moves me one step closer on the path to greatness.

But what is greatness exactly? Some people would say is something that is “remarkable or outstanding in magnitude, degree, or extent” (Webster’s dictionary) but as for me I have always been more of an informal guy so I have always seen it as something that has to do with being “Very good; First rate”. For me it’s not important how big I feel or look, it’s more about what’s good for me. This is probably why I spend more time fighting with myself than I do figuring out what my purpose is in life. I can quote and talk in metaphors all I want but am I closer to my purpose? I have no place to put my faith, no home to pitch my spiritual tent and I am constantly fighting with myself trying to figure out what makes me, me.

To Fluster a Phoenix

*“Excuse me?
Mr. Phoenix why the F#&k you talking when we got problems?
You tried to jeopardize my degree and get my ass thrown out of college
All because I asked you a question, you started wildin’ like my father
Bitter because you have two sons’ who always say that they will call your ass
mañana
I said...Excuse me”!
“Excuse me”
Lyrics by: JMafia a.k.a Jaye Ford*

“Jared, I can’t take this! I don’t have time in my life to sit around and debate your concerns. I can’t and just don’t want to have to deal with this” ~Richard Phoenix

[Feb 18th 2015: 6:45pm]

Standing here, on the steps of my fraternity, I wondered...How in the heck did that escalate so fast? It was only an hour ago that I was listening to my Professor Richard Phoenix express these words to me all because I asked for

clarification on my assignments. I mean seriously, all I wanted to do was clear up a few questions on a final paper. But no, that couldn't happen. How is it that the first four of his classes I attended were able to go without any problems and somehow in all of 45mins, I was being asking to withdraw from what had to be the 3rd graduate class I have ever taken? I felt there had to be more to it. There was no way I could have really angered this man with just a few questions? There's just no possible way, so what happened?

[Feb 18th 2015: 5:15pm, Waterman Building, UVM]

I remember thinking to myself, "*this meeting is going to suck*". First off, I am making up a class for a holiday. I shouldn't even have to make this class up it was Presidents day and the freaking University wasn't even open. Secondly, I still have to explain to my professor that I am unclear on a few things. I needed to tell my professor that not only was unclear as to the details of my final paper but that I am also unclear on some of our course topics. I have never had problems with Prof. Phoenix but I have noticed a few things about him, starting with the fact he seems to enjoy hearing himself talk. Seriously, he can turn a 30 second question into a 45min answer. He also seems very focused on his own thoughts and his thoughts only. Like the first day of class, when I asked him how much of my opinion should be going into our class assignments and he replied, "*Very little*". These are the things that are making me nervous about this meeting. These are the things that are causing me to produce a large amount of sweat in my palms and increasing my heart rate to the point where I feel like it's going to explode.

Something tells me that if I feel this way walking up the stairs from the 3rd to 4th floor of Waterman, then I'm probably going to want to vomit when I am face to face with him.

I tried not to tell myself that anything negative is going to happen but for some reason I can't shake this feeling, like something is going to go down. I tried and to "take deeps breaths" and to "chill out" but the closer I get to his office door, I find myself breathing harder and harder. Finally, as I walked up to room 63-1C, I noticed that the lights were off.

*"What the f***? Dis ninja³⁰ gotta be jokin'?"* Where is this guy? I know I am 15mins early but seriously the whole office is locked. I can't even get into the waiting room to chill in front of his office. "Chill out homie", why would he make such a stance via email about me being on time and he's not on time? At first, I looked around to see if there was any place I could chill without having to just sit in the hallway. Looks like AA/EO (Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunities) is open, I wonder if James is there? James Kraft, my boss during my undergrad years, my close friend, and legal counsel. I have 15mins, maybe I can run some of these feelings pass James and maybe he can give me some advice as to how I should "face the Phoenix".

"James!" I said.

"Jared" he replied. *"What's up kid? How's life treating you?"*

"I'm ok James, just a bit nervous about meeting with my professor today"

³⁰ Term coined by Jaye Ford & Ray Senecal. Instead of calling someone the N word you say Ninja meaning, an ignorant and deceptive person.

“You nervous” he said. *“Buddy I have known you for 5yrs when do you get nervous”?*

I lowered my head and began to explain to James my concerns about Prof Phoenix. However, much to my surprise, once I finished explaining to James about how I didn't really understand my final paper because it was never actually listed on my course syllabus James looked at me with this serious face and said...

“Wait did you say your professor's name is Richard Phoenix”?

“Yea why?” I said.

“Did you research him before you entered this class”? He said

“No”, I replied and then James began to explain his concerns with Professor Phoenix. He said, *“While I cannot divulge any personal information about my own feelings on him, I would like you to read something's about his career. This is all public knowledge, so I am not giving anything you couldn't have found with a basic Google search”.*

As I began to read about Professor Phoenix, a lot of things began to make sense. Like, why is so openly stated upon our second meeting that he was *“not a racist”,* and that *“I should not and hopefully will not bring any of that crap into his class”.* See, at first I just thought what people thought about him was misconstrued. Maybe dozens of people just misread his books. Maybe, he said something to the effect of *“I admired David Berkowitz”* because he believes in A, B, C, and D but because so many people know that our pal Dave was the “Son of Sam” they automatically thought, “oh this guy is just as crazy as he was”. Maybe,

he just admired a certain redeeming quality and not so much the actual person. I get that any sane person would say “why would even use that example, there was nothing redeeming about that monster”. True, I would agree but I'm going to extremes to make a point. I didn't know why people disliked him so much, but I was trying to give him the benefit of the doubt. But of course no, like a true Phoenix he crashed and burned without any chance of ever being reborn from his ashes. After about 5mins and about 500 words I realized that he was in fact, pretty much a racist and if wasn't, he had some pretty strong “racist adjacent” views. There I was, a 26-year-old African American male taking a class that was created by a pro-white nationalist who idealized “Timothy McVeigh’s” in many of his works. You know, Timothy McVeigh? The guy who was responsible for the Oklahoma City bombings back in the day. I mean, my mind was blown because not only was there that article on his completely immoral views but there was also a 2-page book review on his latest book “On Being White”, in which 99% of comments made were negative because no one, and I mean no one, supported his views or anything else he published for that matter. This made me feel sick to my stomach but at this point it was 5:28pm and I really had no other choice but to try and talk through my concerns, leaving everything else I had just learned out of the about my professor in James’s office. So I took a deep breath, lifted my head and walked into Prof. Phoenix’s now opened office. Sadly, I must say I wish I never walked down that hall or opened that office door

[Feb 19th 2015, 9:29am]

What you are about to read are detailed accounts from the night of 2/18/15 sent via email head of the Interdisciplinary Master's Program at the University of Vermont...

“Dear David,

I am writing to you this morning because I am not only upset, but I am also a bit confused about what happened in my meeting with Prof. Richard Phoenix last night. This meeting supposed to be about discussing the details of my final paper and a few course topics that I had some concerns on, but that was not the case. When I found Prof. Phoenix's Class EDSF 299-"Personal & Professional Effectiveness", I figured it would be a great class to help me learn how to increase my productivity at work and find a balance/center in my life. However, five weeks into the course that is not the case. The first 20-30mins of our sessions are spent by discussing the "*Success Principles*" by Jack Canfield and the remainder of the time (the other 2 1/2hrs) is spent talking about Prof. Phoenix's own personal reflections on the books, articles, movies, and magazines that he has viewed, however we as a class never get see those sources.

Last night (2/18/15), I asked Prof. Phoenix if we could start our meeting by discussing the paper in which "he asked" me to write in the beginning of the semester. I highlight the words "he asked" because the paper requirements were never set in stone. This assignment wasn't even on the syllabus. He wanted me to submit a final paper to an academic journal in Sept. 2015 even though I would be

completing the class in May 2015. He also stated that If I did not complete/ submit the paper, he would then have the power to “*deduct a full letter grade off my final grade.*” This, I DID NOT agree with. I also wanted to talk to him about the course content. See, while I was learning from both Canfield’s writing and Phoenix’s own personal writing, I found no congruency between the two and thus, I felt I was missing the "overall moral/point" of the class. I just could not see how one tied into the other.

When I asked Prof. Phoenix to help shed some light on my concerns he responded by saying “*he had some concerns too*”. He then went into a long rant about how I am always "late for class". First off, I take the bus from my job in Colchester to get to campus. I do not control CCTA³¹. I already leave work for class 30 minutes early just so make his 4pm class in which I have never been more than 5-10mins late. Secondly, he stated that I had “*missed multiple classes and he felt it was unfair to him, someone who is there all the time*”. I have actually only missed two classes. The first class was due to a minor sickle cell crisis and the second was this past Monday (Presidents day), which I was making up for last night. Then he told me that “*he could not teach me*” because he and I were not “*a perfect fit*”. This was flowed by him making comments as to how I “*did not come prepared for this class*” because my notebook and notes were not out on the table and his were. After he said that, I then produced my notes from our readings for this week, as well as highlighted passages, but that wasn't good enough for him.

³¹ Chittenden County Transit Authority

Finally, after about 40mins of him cutting me off, I said something. I stated that *"I understood why people keep saying he's was hard to deal* whoever, I knew that what I said was wrong, and so I apologized admittedly after.

It was after that he became flustered and frustrated. He told me that he felt *"nervous", "jittery"* and *"uneased"* by me. He then stated that he would like me to *"withdraw from his class"* because of his feelings. It is half way through the semester and if I drop this class I am in the hole 3 credits because the add drop period is over. Meaning, I would have to take either 3 classes next fall or stay at UVM one extra semester. I really, REALLY do not want to do that because my time here in this state is ending and after grad school it will be time for me to move on. For physical and mental health reason I need to leave.

I am "offended" by his comments. I feel robbed of my education because he just wants to up and quit on me and my education all because I opposed his views. He wants me to drop his class all because as he stated *"he can't deal with people talking crap about him, when they do not know him"*. Why must I suffer because his true anger lies with others? I think this class has had a lot to offer and I was learning a ton from it. Prof. Phoenix even noted that on my 2/9/15 assignment that he "enjoyed my work". This is what confuses me and that confusion now has me at a crossroads. David, I need your help because I don't know what to do. Please advise."

So here I am, sitting here on my fraternity's porch, smoking again, and trying figure out what really happened? As I stated in my above email, all I wanted

was to fully understand the class and his writings and somehow all I got was a big academic F.U. from good old “Dick Phoenix”. Honestly, it’s not like I wasn’t learning anything. In four short weeks Prof. Phoenix actually was getting me to see the areas in my life where I could make a change. I learned about “*Mind mapping, making effective affirmations, taking risk, and how to reject my rejections*” (Canfield, Success Principles, Ch. 1-4). All things which I still want to practice today. I know this might sound crazy or seem completely off topic but until I started taking this class, I was feeling burnt out. I spent pretty much all of last semester, searching and writing my Master’s thesis and in reality the whole 55+ pages I submitted was only like a first draft. I felt like after writing all that I really had accomplished nothing. I was still searching for meaning and after 4months of writing I found myself sitting on my couch, stuffing donuts in my mouth, rolling blunt after blunt, and taking a lot of Nyquil just to feel something. My entire winter break was spent wallowing in my own filth, wondering what’s next? Right now I am bored with my life for the umpteenth time, I needed some excitement. I needed a challenge. This class was that challenge because while Prof. Phoenix may have seen my responses to his writing as “threatening”, for me it was not that at all.

In chapter 4 of Jack Canfield’s Book “*Success Principles*”, he talks about how it’s important to “*ask for what you want*” and he states that if you ask for what you want and still get denied, then it’s best to “*reject your rejection*” (chapter 5) and find the person who will give you that “*yes*” instead of the “*no*”. Now I’ll admit, looking back at this point I really thought Prof. Phoenix was the best person

to ask these questions regarding my concerns about the assignments. I mean, come on man! I went to the source of the information, the core; the flipping root of it all but of course, in my clear minimalist fashion I skim read this chapter. I waited until 30mins before my class to read it and missed the part where Canfield also said, *“Remember, just because someone may have prompted your original question, it doesn’t mean they are the right person to answer it”*.

Still, even with Canfield now running through my head it doesn’t make sense as to why or even how in about 40-45mins I could go from and *“very intelligent, articulate, and handsome young man”* (Professor Phoenix) to being someone who makes people *“nervous” & “jittery”*. Now, I know what you’re thinking... my concerns should probably be less about my homie Dick losing his cool and more about his pro-white nationalistic and slightly homoerotic comments about me as a person, right? However, I have to keep it one hundred or real and say that the man never said a thing about me being black and all that stuff about me be handsome and what not, him hitting on me, or making some creepy advance on me, it was actually all due to his own insecurities and his own self-hatred.

I have always been one who refused to believe that things are said or done *“just because”*. He said A, B, C, & D *“just because”* I'm black and his white. Nah, for me I choose to believe that there was a reason for Professor Phoenix’s actions that evening. So, I started to re-read some of Dicks work, hoping to find his underlining reason for his actions and there it was starting me in the face. Listed on his website, a reflection on personal heath and his feelings own his own finitude.

It's wasn't me, it was him and his own issues. He hated his disabilities, his family, and himself. Which is probably why I cannot say that I hate or have any distain towards him. I just can't bring myself to say that because in all honesty, I feel bad for him. Phoenix will probably die and old and angry man. He probably will die alone and that thought bothers me.

No one should have to die alone. No one should have to go through their lives not knowing what it means to be loved. People always ask me when it comes to my father "*how can you say you love that man*"? Of course, I respond with "*because he's my dad*" but it's a lot more than that. Yes, I get that maybe my dad or Prof. Phoenix have hurt me but maybe they have been hurt too? I know both of them have been hurt in the past. I know what my father went through when he was a child and I know that my grandfather wasn't the nicest dad himself. My pops definitely had it rough but just because he did it does not make it right for him to decide to transfer his anger to me. It also doesn't make it right for me to then take the anger I have for my father out on my kid or anyone else. Two wrongs don't make a right, am I right? Well, same rules apply to Dick over here. Like I said it was four weeks of reading his personal journals and man, he did have it rough as a child. So yes, I do feel for him but Prof. Phoenix will probably never find his happiness and I while am the last person who he thinks cares about him, I truly do. Even after everything he said and made me feel, I still care for him and his wellbeing. So, that's why I can't trash him or his image. I have to "show him love"

because believe it or not, the man, like my father, taught me more that I could have ever imagined.

Moment of Clarity

*“Thank God for granting me this moment of clarity
This moment of honesty-the world will feel my truths
All though my Hard Knock Lifetime, A Gift and a Curse
I gave you Volume after Volume of my work
So you can feel my truths”*

“Moment of Clarity”

Lyrics by: Jay-Z

“Man First of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards” (Jean-Paul Sartre). The moment when I had finally realized what I wanted was the moment that I realized that the only way this whole graduate school thing was going to work was if I figured out a concentration. If I figured out what I like, what I dislike, and what my interests are. I felt that only then could I really make a plan for my future. I needed to know what made me, me? I needed to know *“What makes me who I am and no one else”* (Marietta McCarty).

In her book *“How Philosophy Can Save Your life”*, McCarty defines individuality as “Self-possession”. She states that *“I am the only person who can pull all my disparate pieces of me together as myself, and assemble the parts into one stable, study, whole being”*. We spend so much of our lives defending the reasons of why we didn’t do something verses why we did something that anything hardly gets done. *“I didn’t go to the gym because I got out of work 5mins late,”* or

“I picked up my kids late from school, so I didn’t go grocery shopping; I just got pizza instead”. “I want to fall in love but I don’t go out to meet people and socialize”. “I want people to see me as a professional but I don’t like to wearing a tie and shoes because they cramp my style”. These are all just excuses to why we don't get up a change the way we think or act. Why we refuse to let go of the emotions we have harbored for so many years. We complain about how we feel “stuck” in one or more aspects of our lives but still, we do nothing about it. This ends up making our inevitable midlife crisis ten times worse than we could have ever imagined. This only causes ourselves more confusion and heartache. Here I am in a graduate program and as much as I might have an idea of what I want I still feel like I don't really know who I am. So, I sat down and using what I knew best; music, and I wrote out everything I was feeling at that moment...

Who am I? (Poem)

“So I’m freezing at these crossroads like it's December again
Making poor life choices like Johnny Boscoe³²& friends
Which way should I go? Can you see the eyes of my soul?
At my highest point north like the compass went and froze.
Breathing in what I believe like—
Do you mind if I smoke?
Shedding not a cloud of doubt as my head and heart elope.
Born like a crack baby
See sometimes my thoughts are too dope
Playing with the white,
At my highest point north like my compass went and froze.
I was pricked by the thorns but through the concrete, I rose
With a dollar and dream but I still feel like I never had woke—
Up from this dream but I still try and give others some hope
Because people tend to hang on every word that I ever have spoke

³² *How John Boseco out sung the Devil.* A story by Arthur P. Davis, 1947

*“Jaye tell me one more time
How you deal with that sickle cell bro”?*
Seems like your bodies always failing but you kept with the flow.
I’m a young hearted King living with an old soul
And speaking about it helps me heal every time I feel like I'm losing control
So I’ma get up everyday
See I don’t really know how but you can best believe that—
I’m gonna find a way.
Searching for the Sun and happiness in all of my days
Cuz I need to stop living in this world of grey
I’m just a rose who grew through the rubble and finally basking in these glorious
rays.

By: Jared “Jaye” Ford

Dancing with your Dorothy

*“He dreams dots while he's sleeping in a row boat
Almost there (almost there)
So we go-go! Stop! Stop! Oh no.
I'm a wizard of the Odd; Toto
Dancing with a Dorothy,
Telling her to go slow....”*
“Don't Ask Cuz I Don't Know”
Lyrics by: Jon Bellion

As I come to the end of this thesis I am left with one question and that is “so what”? For the past 90 some odd pages I have talked about direction, finding my place in life, and overcoming the Odds. But Why? What’s the point? In the beginning of the thesis I said that I felt like “*Tin man*”, walking along my own version of “*The Yellow Brick Road*”. I talked about trying to find what I am passionate about and finding my purpose. However, I left something out. Like the Tin Man in “The Wiz” or “The Wizard of Oz”, I had discovered that the one thing I have been looking for all this time was already part of me. If you remember when

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, finally reached the Emerald City, they felt that their quest had finally come to an end. They thought that their long journey was finally over and that each of them would be able to receive the things they desired most once they met the “Great and Powerful OZ”. However, as they soon found out, the “Great and Powerful OZ” was no more than some broke magician who like them, found himself trapped in the land of OZ. He couldn’t give them a brain, a heart, courage, or a way home if you paid him. He himself was no better off than they were. He felt like was selling himself out, trying to keep up appearances all just to keep the status quo. It wasn’t till “Glenda the good witch” explained to them all that the things they were looking for all this time were already there. The Scarecrow had a brain because he was able to outsmart flying monkeys and keep Dorothy safe. She explained that the Tin man had more heart than anyone because if it wasn’t for his compassion and love for his friends than they would of all fallen prey to the Wicked Witch of the West. She told the Lion that he already had courage because he fought off every foe he could, just to make it to the Emerald City and she told Dorothy that if she really wanted to go home all she to do was do a little dance and make a wish. I too wanted to find my heart and find my direction in life and ironically, what I found out was that I was already on the right path. I discovered that there were already things that I was passionate about, one of them being music.

As quarter-lifers we feel lost. We all feel like there is something missing and that's never really the case. That is not really the case because the moment you

begin to ask the question of “why”, you will have then found your answer. No matter how many odds are stacked against you, no matter how far down the road that Emerald City (your hopes and dreams) may seem, the minute you begin to ask the question of “why” and begin to look for more out of your life, you have just stepped on to that proverbial “*Yellow brick road*”. Admittedly, along the way you may have to fight of the “chattering monkeys”³³ and you may run into a wicked witch or two but really, all you have to do is that little dance and click those heels and you’ll find your way home. You’ll find your heart and most of all you will find something that you love.

For me, finding my heart wasn't easy by any means. I had a lot of ups and downs when it came to finding my purpose and I think part of that problem was that I still talked to my “Old friends”. My friends, some who are real as day, just like you or I, and others who only exist in the darkest places of my consciousness. I have discovered something about myself that I never thought or could have imagined. I began writing this thesis as a means to finding my heart and as a way to clearly decipher my passions. I have shared my story, as confusing as it may have been, as best as I could at the time. But even though I have done all this, the question still stands, “what was the point of view opening up my soul”? What will be my vocation? What will my “verse” in this life be?

You see, I believe that I am good at many things that revolve around dialogue and conversation. I believe that I am observant, analytical, and as logical

³³ Nay sayer's; who are against you.

as one could be. I believe in things like “emotivism”³⁴, “constructivism”³⁵, “egoism”³⁶ and “compassion”³⁷. I am someone whose path in life was not easy by any means but with all that I had going on I still somehow made it here. Somehow, I made it out of the Bronx, got way from the violence, and received my bachelor’s degree from a Public Ivy University. I mean, that crazy! It's like I was born to loose but overtime become built to win. I made myself a success and while I did have help here and there, I DID THIS! No coaches, no mentors, no aides. It was just me, my mind, a pen, and a couple blank pages, and a dream. A dream to not fall prey to the socio-economic burns thrust upon by the family.

I wish someone could've coached me in life. I never really played on a team and hardly ever took anyone's advice but my own. Which makes me wonder, how many other kids are growing up today without proper guidance? I myself could name about 5 off the top of my head and one of them is my own niece. I can't help but think, “what if, (in the case of my niece) she actually was getting that guidance”? What if I got it? Would either of us be the same people? What if someone had coached me on things like basic social skills and etiquette. Heck, what if someone gave me advice when I was a child about what it was going to be like being a person of color in a place like Vermont? Would I have even attended UVM? If I hadn't attended this university would I have written this thesis? Would I be knowing as Jared and not Jaye? While I cannot answer all of these questions, I

³⁴ a meta-ethical view that claims that ethical sentences do not express propositions but emotional attitudes.

³⁵ The belief that humans beings construct their own reality; we made it all up.

³⁶ The belief or act that one must do for the self before they can do for others; self-care

³⁷ The act or belief in caring about others and the world in which we live in

can't help but think that if my friends, my niece, and I had someone to talk to about basic social things, maybe my boy Ju\$ would be here with me? Maybe the dream we had as children would have come true and I wouldn't be writing this alone?

It is because of all these factors that I have decided that I want to become a life coach. I want to get my PH.D. maybe in counseling or sociology so that I can then work with children and young adults to figure out their own vocations and if not that, at least let them know they have millions of career opportunities. I want to try and help these children/ Young adults understand that no matter your class, race, nationality, or socio-economic status, they have the ability to overcome and become anything. To do this, I want to combine music therapy into what I hope will be my future coaching sessions. As someone who loves music, I think that the music we listen to truly affects the way we view the world around us. As my father used to say *"You have to find that beat that jams best in your head son. Then you'll know what kind of music you like"* and for me, life and music are pretty much the same thing. There's a moment in a song where you forget about all the minut factors; the stuff that doesn't even matter. The name of the artist, their background, and the color of their skin all just seem to fade away. There's a moment in every song where who and what you may have been or still are, fade away. You're lost in the beauty of the mind, lost in metaphor, and melody. At that moment the only common denominator is the feeling you get while listening to the music. At that moment, we are all one in the same. At moment everything is

universal. Men are no different from women, black is no different from white, and “God” becomes equal to Allah. We can be anything, believe anything and find the possibility in everything just as long as we stay with on beat. I believe that everyone should feel that way and I believe that once people find a way how to believe that they will truly be able to understand their power and at that moment they have the ability to become great.

I believe that as a society we shouldn't be focusing on our difference but instead, we should be celebrating the fact that we are all human and the fact we have be blessed to see another sunrise. Just because I come from a low income area doesn't mean I am any less intelligent than a child who grew up in Beverly Hills. Just because I was born a Catholic it doesn't mean that I am any less or more spiritual than a child born in Iraq or Syria. However, we as a society focus on insignificant things like how much money our family has or crap like who's the better baseball team, Red sox Vs. Yankees? We focus on these things so much that allow them to escalate so far that we will go war for them. Funny thing is even in the darkest of time we all bang our drums and sing to take our minds away from the horror we as humans have created.

I believe that through music there may be a way to bridge this invisible gap that divides us. Music has no limitations and it has the ability to transcend beyond everything that separates people. I no longer want to live in a “separate but equal” nation. However, I also know that there is no easy fix to changing hundreds of years of ideas and ideologies overnight. We can't just snap our fingers and

create a more compassionate and altruistic just like that. No, this changes, especially one of this magnitude will take time but I truly believe in order for human beings to even take a step in the right direction we first must change the way we think.

I know I am just one man. I know that I alone can not be humanities savor but I am not looking to either. I believe that if I can get 3 people, not 1 but 3 people, to feel the same way I do about compassion and altruism that maybe than they too will get 3 people to do feel the same. Then if those 3 people reach 3 more and so on and so on, then maybe then in another 240 years not only will my society but societies around the world will all be working to create the utopia we've always dreamed off.

Why SPN?

For the past few years or so I have been trying to understand my purpose in life. Trying to make everything I do, have done, or have said all is worth something, as if it all was leading up to some Master plan. Every door that my mind could have locked, I have somehow opened. I have thought deeply about who and what I am. Sometimes I did this by attempting draw my reader into my thoughts with quote from a more scholarly perspective and sometimes it was by inundating them with rhythmic choruses. Still the question remains, Why? Why, out of the multitude of ways to tell a story, did I choose one that allowed my writing to fall so freely onto a page? Well, there are many reason in which I decided to write this thesis as a SPN. First, it was because while this thesis was

written for all, it is actually directed to the people I left behind in New York.

Writing in this style gave me “Depth” and it allowed me to bring music into my writing. Like I have previously said in this thesis, this dream was not my own. This was a dream devised by 3 boys one rainy night in 1997, and this is the only way I knew how to speak to the 2 who are still “*chillin’ on the block*”. This is the only I could tell them that “*there’s more to life*”. It’s the only way I knew how to say that while our lives have in no way been easy, it’s still possible to “*date models and pop bottles*”. It’s the only way I knew how to say that there’s still a shot at the “*Good Life*”

Secondly, I believe SPN as adds a new element to the academic world that current forms of education do not. When it comes to one’s education a lot of what we learn is a lot of facts, and numbers. Majority of it is all quantitative information and while I believe quantitate information is necessary to making sense of a lot of things in this world, life isn’t all about the numbers. See, for me SPN brings in that qualitative information that I feel academia sometime lacks. It creates substance for not only the data we as scholars have collected but also allows scholars, such as myself, access to personal experiences of the population or society that we currently studying.

Earlier in this thesis I spoke about how my grandmother always used to tell me “*Not to be a statistic*” because “African American males currently make up 1 million of the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the U.S.”³⁸. Now, while those

³⁸ NAACP Fact sheet statistic

numbers are staggering because it shows that African American males make up close to half of the total incarcerated population, unless you are or have been in jail, those numbers are nothing more than just that; numbers. In order to have real understanding of what those numbers mean and how they effect the African American community there needs to be some sort of shared experience. I believe that though Scholarly Personal Narrative writing we have the ability create that experience by turning numbers into real life examples. Through SPN, "I" am not just a number and the experience of my community or people cannot be pipelined into one figure or table. SPN writing allows these individuals to have a voice. A voice that roars louder than any static everyone could. Like Music, writing in the style of SPN allows the author to touch the reader on a deeper and more personal level. Almost anyone can look at a bunch of graphs and numbers on a page and see how one statistic can be compared to another but if the student themselves has no idea what it's actually like to live in that population, then how can they generally be concerned? I could say that I want to help people who have been sex or labor trafficked but yet all I did was read about them and never meet them face to face and listened to their stories then how could truly understand their story? I can say I want to help refugees because I've been reading all about them in my class, yet if I have never actually meet a refugee personally and talked to them about some of the dangers they have faced in coming into this country then how can I relate to anything that I have learned? We write about and survey all of these populations but if all we're bring back are numbers and general facts then how do we really

know who we are helping? How could anyone expect people to truly care about what going on? I believe that people have the ability understand these situations better when they can see the what people are going through first hand. However, why I would love to be able to take a million field trips to all of these places and experience what all of these people are going through, I can't. I, like many of students are just left with bunch of numbers and one perfectly placed picture that shows nothing but a few smiling faces. However, that is not the case with SPN. With SPN, I get still get numbers but I also get to learn about these populations through the people who live in there. Through their own words I'm getting to feel as they feel. As much as I've seen people try to hold back when written an SPN they normally end up letting everything out. Thinking and writing in this manner has allowed not only myself but others to read, see, and feel all the emotions, joys, and pain that encompass not my world but the world around me. SPN has taught me not just how to take action but to want to get up and not do something about the issues that face our world. SPN teaches students how to feel, how to understand, and how to logically think of ways to better their own society without harming or jeopardizing their own beliefs. With SPN, it's like you can still be you but also feel like you are part of a larger group. It engages you and allows to want to become more without overwhelming you with large facts and numbers, that sometimes become so daunting that they force you to quit before you even begin to try and make a difference.

Writing in Scholarly Personal Narrative has allowed me to dig deep into parts of myself I didn't know existed. I was able to discover that I, Jared “Jaye” Ford, despite all that I have been through and have seen, I was able to do something that not a lot of people can say that they have. Writing like this has shown me how to believe in my own voice. It has shown me that with that voice, I am supposed to help others to find their own voices, even if all it means is that I'm showing them the path to their own “*Yellow brick road*”. This new passion has helped me to want to lead by example, to want to give back.

There will come a time in our lives where we will all feel down about who we are and what we are doing. We will be mentally knocked down at every turn and we will feel like we have been kicked, beat, and ripped of all that we ever known. However, you can rise. You can make it, you can grow, and you can live the life you want to, as long as you're willing to get out of your comfort zone. You will have to be vulnerable in order to even begin understand our wants, needs, passions, and talents. The music of our lives will change, the tempo will slow, and then it will quicken, or stop. Things will get shuffled and then your mental “iTunes genius” will kick in and only the songs you really want hear will play.

I wanted to “Dare greatly”³⁹, “take the road less traveled”; and not to always follow the footsteps laid before me. I believe that it is because of SPN writing that I want to take the advice I was never given and give it back to others,

³⁹ Brown, Brene. *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, 2012.

hoping it my help it will help other quarter-lifer's make their "quarter-life crisis" a bit easier than mine was. So here is my advice: "Grab your iPod of life and just keep changing the song". SPN is how I changed my song every day. I tell my story through my music and in my own words I am able to create my own records and become my own top 40 artists. It is through beats, rhymes, and spoken word that I have found my heart. I have found my pulse in the words and the music that is expressed. I found a way to put myself in the shoes of the artists that I love. In my own way I have become part of the music and eventually it helped me to no longer feel like I was alone. For a brief 3:40 seconds I am able put full faith in what was being said. Within the music, I have found my own "*Yellow Brick Road*" and I was able to find a direction for my life.

In the beginning of this thesis I talked about direction and finding your true north. I spoke of how I had to travel over 3,000 miles to see if the grass was truly greener on the other side. I spoke of my family, my friends and how though the past 27 years of my life my perspectives of those people have changed, all because of the choices I have made. I say this because this is why I write. SPN allows me to see my life through another perspective.

Socrates once said that the "*unexamined life is truly not worth living*". If this is true, then isn't writing this thesis in an SPN format one of the best and most objective ways in examining my life? I may be only 27 years old now, but I have a lifetime and more. A lot of quarter-lifers I know have seen more than their fair share. We can all find universalizability in feeling stuck, not liking who or what

we see in the mirror, wanting more from a job, and not wanting to feel like we have to sell our souls for a paycheck. We are all still so young and I believe that that this is what makes us so different. It's what separates us from our fellow adults going through there a mid-life crisis. Most Quarter-lifers really have yet to establish themselves in the real world and that creates this immense fear of failure. We as quarter-lifers need to examine our lives because otherwise when we go through that "mid-life crisis" we will find ourselves far more lost in the world than we probably could ever imagine, all because we never took the time to just take a good look at ourselves and uncovering our true purpose in life.

I want believe that everything in me in my life is all going to add up and that it will sum up to something greater. I want to believe that in the end of my life I will feel whole. As I have said over and over want to dare greatly and not let my "*shame gremlins*" (Daring Greatly, Brene Brown) consume me as they once have. "*You can't use what you don't have*" (Alex Hitchens) although, you can use what you do. So for me, there were always two things that I loved more than anything else in this world and that is writing and music. My words and my music have always been my windows of escape, so that's why I have chosen to tell my story in this manner. Telling it as honest and as true as I could, through my own perspective, and to the beat of my own drum, I have discovered who I am and where I am supposed to be. I am supposed to be right here, telling you my story, allowing you to read my past as I write my future.

I want to help others find their futures. I want to help others learn that they can do anything. I want try and give other quarter-lifers positive ways of becoming great. I want to help others find their hearts and “listen to that one beat that jams in their head”. I want to teach people to sing along with the soundtrack of their lives. That is my purpose, that's why I am here. I am here to help others be mindful of the own music and as long as I am doing that, well then I will truly be living a good life.

*“Now I, I go for mine, I got to shine
Now throw your hands up in the sky
Now I, I go for mine, I got to shine
Now throw your hands up in the sky
I'ma get on this TV mama, I'ma
I'ma put shit down
Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey
Hey, I'm good*

*Is the good life better than the life I live?
When I thought that I was gonna go crazy
And now my grandmamma ain't the only girl calling me baby
And if you feeling' me now then put your hands up in the sky
And let me hear you say hey, hey, hey, ooh
I'm good”
“Good life”*

Lyrics by Kayne West &T-Pain

Chapter 4: *Zuzwang*

*“One-day baby
We’ll be old oh baby. We’ll be old and thinking about
All the stories that we’ve could have told.”
~D-Why, “One Day”.*

Willie Lynch (Poetic Song)

Low I'm self-esteem
This world wasn't made for me.
Do they dislike what they see? Do They—
Hate me? Most definitely...
See, if they had their way, I would probably—
Dead (dead)

Low I'm self-esteem
This world wasn't made for me.
Do they, dislike what they see? Do they—
hate me? Most definitely...
See, if they had their way, I would probably—
Dead (dead)

To most people, I am just another negro
Who watched roots to many times, believing that
My life was a sequel. People,
Want to cut my legs because that hate what my reach do
That's why we get incarcerated and they hope that we get the needle.
Disliked for how I talk but really they are,
Afraid of my ego.
It makes me walk with my first held high, screaming “power to the people”!
I see the truth like an eagle, so they scrutinize my vision cuz I see this world as it not
being equal.
And I talk about all its problems like a doomsday prequel.
This ain't the place we thought it was, back when we was in pre-school.
Not allowed to show these emotions, my family just tells me to be cool...
Sometimes I wish we all could see ourselves as just being transparent like all of our b.s.
Is see though.
So for those who have hope, I F'in wish I could be you!
Because all that I've accomplished hasn't gotten me jack.
When I can still be murdered for my hoodie and that is a fact
Still I woke up this morning handsome and black

Hated for my views and my mode of attack.
It's like I'm at a loss for words Cause see everything I know, is nothing of what it seems
and since December 88', I've been living in a dream.

Low I'm self-esteem
This world wasn't made for me.
Do they dislike what they see? Do They—
Hate me? Most definitely...
See, if they had their way, I would probably—
Dead (dead)

Low I'm self-esteem
This world wasn't made for me.
Do they, dislike what they see? Do they—
hate me? Most definitely...
See, if they had their way, I would probably—
Dead (dead)

Who would have thought a million people marching would still leave us with tales like
“Trayvon Martin”?
This was not the dream that was told but more a dream that was deferred
So I'm waiting for the next Mr. Hughes to say some more words.
Our Roderick is grotesque and it's meant to harm me
A nation on the verge of men like MR. Trump, creating an army.
Riots at debates and people getting away with petty and cheap jabs
And for those who don't fight—
The cops are still locking up our ass!
So this one for all my homies getting shaded off them trees,
To the point where they're so high they're living a dream with in a dream.
Now that inception for ya (uh)
Cuz cold winds are often wrapped in pain and often hell bent,
Pretending that as a people, we don't have selfish intents...
Like we don't know the difference between our Black and white friends.
Or the fact that as long as we continue to lynch our minds,
I will never be equal to them!
Thanks to privilege I'm not the best for their daughters even with my degrees
Not unless I dance for ya master, and start I jugg from my knees.
See because if I don't I am less than someone, I am less that whole
Even though I'm an exceptional, I'm professional, and even with all the waves I'm make, I
still
Kept the flow...so

I pray there's hope for a nigga like me....

I pray there's hope for a nigga like me....
I pray there's hope for a nigga like me....

So They got me...

Low I'm self-esteem
This world wasn't made for me.
Do they dislike what they see? Do They—
Hate me? Most definitely...
See, if they had their way, I would probably—
Dead (dead)

Low I'm self-esteem
This world wasn't made for me.
Do they, dislike what they see? Do they—
hate me? Most definitely...
See, if they had their way, I would probably—
Dead (dead)

Blue Moon (Poetic Song)

I Feel like it's getting hard to think of rhythms
Even though I know these words are heated and my mind acts as the pines
Synaptic fire, vocal pyre, grown up in Afro vines
They try to hold me back but I somehow slip through my mind
I'm....
Just fucking playing, see I just wanted to rhyme with rhyme.
So funny how My words are universal.
& YES, my thoughts are filled with good intentions but I still say shit just to hurt you
They used to know me as Steven Q. Urkel but now I Stephan with the purple
My limbic is getting nervous and my emotions feel deserted
Cuz I once flirted with the devil.
She had a slim waist, phat ass, Money green eyes, and some red stiletto's—
But only on the bottoms tho, shiiiiit!
I guess it's true what I've been told cuz life really is bitch tho!
But still she chokes a when she deep throat.
My shit is pungent, it's too potent
All you smell is dank, getting whiffs of that Ambrosia
Damn, I'm swinging in these verses-
Sipping whiskey with my ninjas

My Nina to my right, smiling for the flashes, taking pictures and posting that shit all on my wall with such relevant descriptions
So the word on road Must be-
"Ummm, well does she love me"?
But I'm not going to sing that tired old song
So now I'm chilling with the moms
Blasé, Blasé with my charms
How creative, how amazing is the way I can connect all this shit?
Like night when I was 5 & I pissed all on my walls.
My right hand is still clutched to my balls and dances with my fingers like a slutty Girlfriend
See I just let my thoughts seep out from the curves of my pen
It's like my mind just keeps on spraying on friends.
I go "Conan the Barbarian"!
Nah, Homie I'm just Richard scaring them
And yes that was a play on Richard scary cuz I live in a busy world-
With roman sunsets and hip hop quartets!
I'm talking peaches n that cream
N only my ninjas know exactly what I mean
Cuz they know about all those house parties in the basement
Getting high as a Mother Fucker...so chilled out & too damn complacent.
Shit homie let's just face it, I'm just Drake'in this cuz I'm the type to kill the meek
While others are so uncouth they just pray on the weak.
So with a few skilled lines I've sent you bitches to the slaughter and what's funny about this shit is that I didn't even have to speak!
Cuz this is beautifully written with such power diction & still you want more like dope fends; you stay itching.
Oooooooh they say I'm a dreamer because these fairy tales play in my head
So I get head from ballerina's in floral pashminas
So I call them joints my Daisy's cuz I'm kind of backwards with this Daydream lovin'.
The older I get the younger I feel, pipe game is like Benjamin Button!
Fell a slept with the Godiva and woke up to the benz.
I know that joke was kind of corny but I will never be a herb with this Pen.
Ahhh-
This is me just busting a lil move
Went off the grain with this poem and made it seem so smooth
Feel like I only write for me
When the frost in my lungs is at full bloom.
See I only get like this
When my past year has finally met its own doom,
So I funny how I can only be the realist—
Every once in a blue moon.

Morphine Dreams (Poetic Song)

Last night I did my last line
Because it was just something I needed to do
That's why there's a girl asking me for more while her friend's knocking at my door?
"Jaye, do you think that I'm a whore?"
Oh darling, I don't know.
See I am no better than you. I feel nothing inside of me due to all this morphine and weed
And sadly this feeling isn't new.
I can't feel my face and while I think that it is cool
I know how stupid I look when I start to drool
And my finger tips are all blue.

But you don't wanna be high like me
Never really knowing why like me
You don't ever wanna step off that roller coaster and be all alone
You don't wanna ride the bus like this
Never knowing who to trust like this
You don't wanna be stuck up on that stage singing
Stuck up on that stage singing
All I know are sad songs, sad songs
Darling, all I know are sad songs, sad songs

I'm just nigger
Even though I'm really not
Because I spent money on unnecessary shit like Jordan's even though I don't have a job
I still get women though because I play them all for chumps
See that's why they all have a pretty face and really slim waist
But eventually they dead me because until it's on paper, I am not one to open up
My sisters call me an asshole
Because of all that I have got.
They think my mom's loves me more just because I'm a boy and I'm favorited by my
pops

But you don't wanna be high like me
Never really knowing why like me
You don't ever wanna step off that roller coaster and be all alone
You don't wanna ride the bus like this
Never knowing who to trust like this
You don't wanna be stuck up on that stage singing
Stuck up on that stage singing
All I know are sad songs, sad songs

Darling, all I know are sad songs, sad songs

So for that I get high even though it's probably bad for my sickle cell
But it's better than this life because I do is fight about what I am and what I am not
Maybe I'm just fool (oh)
Because I've been foolish quite a lot
I let fear consume me instead letting myself free and becoming all that I could be
So this is why I had to stop.
So I took my last pill, I blew my last line
Now I'm confident with the rhymes cause now I know I'm doing fine
I'll let you know what's on my mind.

But you don't wanna be high like me
Never really knowing why like me
You don't ever wanna step off that roller coaster and be all alone
You don't wanna ride the bus like this
Never knowing who to trust like this
You don't wanna be stuck up on that stage singing
Stuck up on that stage singing
All I know are sad songs, sad songs
Darling, all I know are sad songs, sad songs

Never knew I would love like this
I don't need pills to find my bliss
And now I'm not stuck up on that stage; all alone
Never knew I would flip it like this and I finally got true loves kiss
But still I will give you a sad song, sad songs.
All I know are sad songs, sad songs
Darling, all I know are sad songs, sad songs...

See now I know that—
“Cupid’s arrow will never hit is its mark
If you don’t aim for the center,
Aim for the heart,
Then you’ve wasted your life, you’ve the of art...”

Nineteen 88 (Poetic Song)

I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88
I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88

I—
Was break dancing in the waters like hello new world!
Stomping till I made the damn break—
You, you were yelling to my father like "*this is it boy, We're about to have another you!
No, we can't repeat all of our mistakes, we cannot seal this young man's fate*".
So—
let's crown him a new, give him a new name. Something from whence the clouds once
sang.
From the heavens! From the stars that smile above of us, a warriors claim.
Nigga, I still I hate you but this is our love, he'll know his place.
This is our drug; this is our son—
Our saving grace

Who could have known I'd...?
Ever live a life like this? (aye)
Who could have known I'd...?
Ever get to bump this shit? (yea)
Who could have known that I'd every sit and write like this? (Aye)
Only God could have known (yea)
Only God could of know (aye, yea)!
I said who could have known? (Yea)
There was no way to know (yea)
But I still killed it (yea)!

I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88
I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88

He said, "*I'm happy to announce that you, you two have a son*".
So I choked and then I spoke some, I whined, I cried, I choked another one.
Then God hit rewind and I saw your eyes; it was love at-first-sight.

Then people jumped and all the guys they all high 5'ed,
I was finally part of this world! I was finally alive!
So that night I slept and dreamed for the first time. I dreamed that I would one day I'd be
here. (I knew that I would finally get here) See I've slept for years trying to face my fears
but I've kept my self-alive!
And all I did was write...
So that night I slept and dreamed for the first time. I dreamed that I would one day I'd be
here. (I knew that I would finally get here)

I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you—back 2
Nine-nineteen 88
I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you—back 2
Nine-nineteen 88

I was in the crib like “these bars are too close”.
So I worked at the zoo to learned that being caged was a “no-no”,
Born with a sick flow, another sickle cell episode, Dick of the gods but 4am the master of
the old commode.
Can't be the shit if I can't flow and I can't stand straight. Went from gritz to the
cornflakes,
And saw adventure as my escape.
Became the master my own fate, had to master love, and then do the same with hate.
A little Buddha baby, Milly Rockin' all these blessin' off life's plate.
But still it's my birth that I'm trying to erase—
Since the moment I was given life my soul has been at the knife because if I do do it
right, they will talk shit ight.
because while some see me as a gift to fam
Some don't really give a damn
So in moments when I'm feeling low, I just sit and write some more.
I think about how all of this began...I'll fly a plan and get high again. (yea)

I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88—

Born a chip off the block!
But I went out and did my shit (yea)
I was a boy from the block and I went out and did my shit (yea)
Now I moved up the block, it got it got me feeling like the Jefferson's (yea)
And you know I stay high because when you live a life like this (yea)
Ya foot prints are on the moon So Shy can't be the limit (yea)

I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88—
I want 2! (A one, two!)
A take you--back 2
Nine-nineteen 88—

Fallacy of Foolz (Poetic Song)

Wood grain under my hands,
The wind blows just as I laugh. I'm forgetting your voice in my head.
Daisy's dance in tall grass and the sun it scorches my eyes,
So I guess I'll throw shade once again.
Please know that I love you, my intentions not to hurt you.
Why would I kill off my best friend?
Fireflies and moonlight,
Fire pits and some bud wise, maybe tomorrow we could do this again?
I once danced alone and I made Lucifer moan just so I could see angels make the sky
bend—
So good night friends.

Without you I'm low and left in a world I don't know...
Oh your making a ruin of me.
I get left behind on a quest trying to find
All the secretes you hide but I won't let this go...
So Like that kid on the stool, no
You won't make a fool of me.

Rolled myself a paper plane
Leaned my head back and then I sang—
"No, I won't do this again".
I cannot lose my heart if I follow the stars, my path to sal-vation.

I know some nights I get scared and run away from fears but I can't keep letting them win! So if I wrote you haikus Then would you love me
Would you kiss, Oh, Kiss me again?
But my death was my own fault but I know that you had this planned
That's why, all of me will break down like the Tin man and is legs (down)
I'm feel like I've froze up again.
My road yes its winding but I still see gold behind me so roll with me just cruise once again!

Without you I'm low and left in a world I don't know...
Oh you're making a ruin of me.
I get left behind on a quest trying to find
All the secretes you hide but I won't let this go...
So Like that kid on the stool, no
You won't make a fool of me.
I tip toe and I stumble and all my emotions crumble
My foundation it splits in my head.
Still, I just keep on fighting and I just keep on driving
I move just like a lion—
I'm hunting our love once again.
Because all of me you take down. You stop, you beat, you break down.
So this is all I can say now—
All the secretes you hide no, they won't take over my life.
So I won't let this go, no you won't make a fool of me.

Without you I'm low and left in a world I don't know...
Oh your making a ruin of me.
I get left behind on a quest trying to find
All the secretes you hide but I won't let this go...

So Like that kid on the stool, no
You won't make a fool of me.

“Remember my son, no matter what you do in this live just do me one favor...when backs against the wall of life, don't give up. Never let them see you sweat kid. Eat those hits and stand tall. Show them you can't be broken. Show them you're Ford tough. Show them that you don't quit. That they'll eventually admire, show them what you're about my son, my son...” (Gary Ford).

Notes:

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19. Alpha Epsilon Pi-Zeta Pi Chapter, University of Vermont, est. 2001.
20. Ford, Jared. "Abstract concepts in the afternoon", summer 2014.
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