

## Engaging the Past

In a few weeks, I plan to start typing in my journal from the years from 1991 to roughly 1994. I have wanted to enter these notes for a long time, but it wasn't till now that I found the motivation. The main motivation now is that I wrote these exactly two decades ago. I don't expect that anyone but myself could possibly be interested in this little experiment, so I plan to enter these and comment on these as notes to myself. In a way, I see these as engaging with the past. Before I begin, however, I would like to reflect on what kind of person I expect to find in these notes. I also want to reflect on issues that I have nineteen years on with growing older, compromising, and losing my soul.

### *How These Journals Came to Be*

From the time I was 9 until I was 18, I lived in a Children's Home. The best way to describe this place was as an orphanage for kids whose parents were poor. All in all, the place provided us with a fairly middle class childhood.

The Home (as we called it) was funded mostly by churches and businesses. Many of these churches wanted us to come visit, and we would regularly travel to show people where their money was going. As a consequence, every child in the Home was expected to sing in the "children's home choir" when we visited other churches. For one of these trips, we traveled to Chilhowie, Virginia and spent the weekend staying with families of one of the churches that supported the Home. Another child and I were placed with the Combs family.

For some reason, the family and I hit it off really well, and we ultimately began a correspondence. For the next year, we wrote back and forth, called, and they came to my graduation the following summer.

After graduation, I left the Home. At first, I went to live with my father, his wife and step-children in a trailer overflowing with both people and animals. While the situation was horrible, I assumed it was only for a few weeks until I went to college. I worked two minimum wage and fairly crappy jobs (at a movie theatre and a Dell Taco) to just get out of the house and make some money. During the summer, my father and I had a major falling out, and I moved from there to stay with my mother.

This move took me out of the frying pan and into the fryer. To be honest, both of my parents still lived as they had before I was placed in the Home. That is to say that they were both very poor. For some reason, however, my mother's place felt even more depressing. I worked a seasonal stocking job, and came home to a dirty, foodless apartment. In one of my memories, I was so hungry one day that I cooked and ate an entire box of store brand noodles and cheese. My mother got mad because it was all we had. One payday, I took her to Ryan's. You would have thought it was Ruth's Chris.

On any account, after months of this, the Combs asked me if I wanted to come live with them. After much going back and forth, I left my mother's at the end of October and moved to Chilhowie. At this point, moving from where I had been raised, and moving in with people I barely knew in a town I had only visited twice, I decided to start my journal.

### *What I Expect to Find*

I like to fancy that I was a smart and sensitive teenager. I guess the words I would use to describe myself would have been smart, brooding, sensitive, poetic. I tended to read a lot of stuff on Eastern religions. For a long while, I read a great deal of the philosopher Krishnamurti. While my plan now is to type the entries as they are, I am not sure that I am ready to enter my poetry. Truth be told, there are so many levels of embarrassment with those I am not sure where to start. Which is worse, that I wrote it or that I actually gave it to women?

I know I wanted to be a psychologist, even then. I remember my brother had a roommate and he was studying psychology. We talked and I told him I was interested in psychology. The truth is that I knew very little psychology and most of what I knew was influenced by Wayne Dyer or Leo Buscaglia.

I am worried, however, that the 38 year old will think the 19 year old was stupid, and the 19 year old will think the 38 year old has given up. I don't mean that I've totally given up, but given up in pieces. I worry that I've lost the fire that I remember myself having as a 19 year old.

It's interesting to think back over the past twenty years, pondering how much I've changed and how much the world has changed around me. Every day would be a miracle to the 18 year old me. As I type this, I am sitting in an Arby's on a laptop. Back then, I saved my poems and letters on 5.5 inch floppies, then 3.5 inch floppies, then zip drives, recordable CDs, and now USB drives. I have a USB drive on my keychain that has one hundred times more memory than my first computer. I have an iPod that holds all my songs, whereas then everything had to be on tape or CD. Hell, I remember driving an hour to the nearest big town (that would be Bristol, TN) to go to the mall and get tapes. We now all have cell phones, DVD players, web pages, the internet, and iTunes.

In thinking about women at this time, the truth is that I was painfully naïve. To tell the truth, I had no clue what to do. Any ex-girlfriend is free to confirm this naivety. My friends who know me well joke about "white rose" girl. I dated one girl for several years through high school, but even with her I really was too much in my own world to even begin to understand hers. I still have fond memories of visiting her at work and drinking tea, chaste dates if there ever were any.

It is also interesting to look back on these with the realization that I know how these relationships will turn out. All of this makes me wonder if in 20 years, the 58 year old me will look back on the 38 year old me with the same mixed sense of embarrassment at how stupid I am now and worry that I lost my way again.

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