

# MISCELLANY



Essays by Young(ish) American Voices  
(From the Fringe)

## MEXICO

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It was the year 2000.

People usually think I'm younger, but I'm not. I was born in 1980, then later on failed kindergarten, which put me a year behind.

I grew up in a field. To the people living there, they would never see the fieldness of their lives, but it was a field. In Ohio, the trees, the forest are everywhere. Europeans came several hundred years ago to Ohio, they cut down the trees, they made steel mills, golf courses, spaces for malls, and places for houses. I guess the people that came to Ohio hundreds of years ago did not like trees. To me, the spaces between the trees are fields. Because an open space with grass and not trees isn't a meadow, man-created open spaces are fields.

I grew up in a field surrounded by other field people. We weren't forest people, we didn't use the forest for food or to build our houses. Like most of America, we imported our food and building materials.

On a sunny Friday in the May of 2000 I graduated high school. On Sunday morning, I left in a 1989 Caprice across America to live at the Grand Canyon. It was a rainy morning, it rained all the way to St. Louis. After I crossed the Mississippi River the rain ceased, the sky became blue, the clouds soft and white. I took that as an omen.

In a bathroom in Nebraska, it said "lost in America" on the wall of a bathroom stall. I stared at it, I felt really happy. I wanted to be lost in America, I wanted America. It is weird, I like to think about myself as a patriot; I've been to 40 states, to many National Parks, read a lot of American literature, I've taken classes on U.S. Constitutional Law, I can name probably all the presidents, I can name many Supreme Court Justices, I love George Jones and Sam Cooke and Selena, but according to right-wing people I'm not a patriot

because I don't drive a truck, shoot guns, or have a dog. I don't give a shit what they say, I am America as fuck.

My good friend Jake Levine, who lives in South Korea and translates Korean literature, when he was my young, he wasn't dying to discover America, but the world. He took off for England and Spain at the age of 20. I don't know why he chose that, and I don't know why I chose what I did. It never occurred to be visit other faraway countries in a serious way until my 30s.

In the year 2000 I was really into Jack Kerouac; but I don't remember how I found Jack Kerouac. I don't have any memory of the first time I bought *On the Road* or the initial reading, or how I felt. But I must have felt something, because it really got into me. The adventures of Sal and Dean, I wanted that. I wanted to know what it felt like to drive a car across Kansas and Utah and Arizona, to feel the wind hitting me. To see the restaurants of small towns, with their small town people serving and cooking. I would put the map of America on the floor and stare at it, figuring out how to crisscross my country in a way to see awesome unforgettable things. I wanted the unbelievable; at the age of 19 I wanted to create a life that couldn't be believed, and I wanted to live that unbelievable life. I imagined someone giving my eulogy in 2050 saying "I don't know how Noah did what he did, but it happened, and it was awesome."

When I encounter young people nowadays they are filled full of hope about going to college or vocational school, then attaining a job, then working hard and starting a family. But I didn't have thoughts like that when I was 19. I didn't have hope of having a good life; I knew the world didn't like me, and there was nothing I could do about that. The weird thing was I felt okay with the world and its people, I didn't turn into an enraged punk rocker (I just remembered that in 2000 there were still hippies. There was this Phish-Grateful Dead fanbase that hated society and thought doing as many drugs as possible would somehow be their war against society. They are gone. I saw some in

Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2011, but when I went to Oregon in 2014 I didn't even see any there; the hippy has become extinct on the American landscape. I saw some "hippy types" in Salt Lake City in 2015, but they seemed different, like they had moved on and created a new sense of identity.)

There was no hope for a great picket fence life for me, I believed in Don Quixote, there were windmills to attack and many Dulcineas out there in the world, who would run through the night with me.

My life didn't turn out well at the Grand Canyon; after working there for a month I got fired for drinking on the job. I didn't know what to do, I still had \$2,500 and that was a lot of money in 2000. I met a guy from New Zealand at the Grand Canyon and went to San Diego to live in a small apartment with him. We got a tiny room in a boarding house on Tenth Street called the Buckner Hotel, a hostel now. We had to share a bathroom, everyone in the Buckner Hotel was nuts. At one point a middle-aged black man and white woman offered me money to have sex with them. There was an older white man that would stay up all night writing theology. The guy who ran the Buckner Hotel would sit in his room all night watching VHS porn loudly. And there was a Muslim black woman from the East Coast who would pray on the roof in front of me while I drank beer and smoked cigarettes. She was also involved in a polygamist marriage, but her husband lived with his first wife across town. He paid for her to have a small room, where she did nothing all day but hang around the Buckner Hotel talking to anyone that would talk to her.

I got a job working as a front-desk clerk in a hotel in downtown San Diego; it was called The Maryland Hotel, it is closed now. The hotel was about 100 years old and was full of ghosts and people living off social security. It was so old it had this mezzanine area where people could sit and drink coffee. No one ever drank coffee there. I stood in that area once and it felt creepy.

I remember there was a woman that get up everyday and sat on the couch and watched the sunrise, she told me she survived cancer and thought everyday was precious, which meant she had to see the sunrise.

I met a guy in the hotel and he told he me he knew about Tijuana and he could show me what real life was like there. I told him, okay.

The first thing we did was go to a brothel on Revolution Street. Revolution is the main tourist street and was absurd in 2000 in terms of crap they would sell to Americans. I don't know what it is like now. We went into a bar, I picked out a girl and went to a small hotel nearby. I don't remember what this person looked like, but I was very attracted to her, she had beautiful black hair, and was wearing tight pants. We went into the hotel, I gave her the money. She went into the bathroom and took her clothes off, she might have given me a blowjob, I don't remember. Eventually we started having sex and I noticed she kept covering her crotch with her hand. I remembered Brian saying that a lot of the hookers were "jotes," pronounced something like "hota." I'm not sure if this is the word; when I googled I came up with nothing. Well, the prostitute turned out to be transgendered. The word "transgendered" did not exist in 2000, if it did, it wasn't in my vocabulary. We had imperfect ways of describing people back then.

I told the girl "Me gusta jotes" which means "I like transgendered prostitutes." The girl took her hand off her penis and revealed an uncircumcised penis. I sucked it. I remember thinking "This is like a chicken wing." I was having really stupid thoughts. Then I had sex with the lady and cummed, then the lady had sex with me. It was the only time in my life there was a penis in my butt. I must have not enjoyed it very much because I never sought it out again.

After it was over, I left.

Then Brian and me went and bought meth. This is the moment, I have a lot of problems with. I had never really done drugs, I had

never cared about doing meth. But I was like “okay.” We went to this hooker hotel and bought a room. I remember the room being extremely blue, like this pale weird light color of blue. The walls were bare, the bed was hard, I was covered with sweat. I seriously doubt there was air-conditioning. Brian left and brought back meth. Then he removed the light bulb from the bathroom ceiling and broke it in this really coordinated way with a knife I bought on the street.

We smoked meth.

Why was I smoking meth?

I don't remember going to sleep, I think it was the next day, we went to an apartment complex. It was fucked to me. Everything was broken, the whole apartment complex was in shambles. I can still remember standing on the second story, the walkways to the apartments were outside, not sure how to explain it. I remember children running around, the noise of children never ended.

I don't know what we were doing at this apartment complex.

This is what my memory can maintain:

We met another jote named Boly Goma; she was about 30 and was also on meth. She was dating this little dude, who at one point got beat up. I was fascinated by Boly Goma. How did this meth addicted jote prostitute exist? How did her tiny boyfriend exist? Were they existing the whole time I was existing in Ohio? That my whole timeline coincides with their timeline on this earth. And now I wonder, is Boly Goma still in Mexico? Is Boly Goma still alive? Is her little boyfriend still alive? One time Boly Goma came out of the bathroom naked, with her penis tucked between her legs and she said “Look I am a woman.” I looked at her standing there.

At one point it was the middle of the night, I was in an abandoned apartment, with other meth heads. For real, I know this sounds insane, but they had candles lit. We were smoking meth by candle.

At some point I should have felt afraid, but I didn't. I think, at that point in my life, I did not know what danger was; I was just sheltered, maybe I thought my privilege would save me.

At one point I was left alone in a hotel room with a 20-year-old man, about the same age as me. A Mexican kid also into meth, but in a non-voyeuristic fashion. He attacked me for some reason, I don't remember why. I doubt I provoked it. He had no fighting skills. When people have no fighting skills they just kind of roll around hoping for the best, and he was probably malnourished also. I grabbed a light bulb and hit him with it on the head, then opened the door and ran away. I got into a taxi and went to a different neighborhood. I didn't have a t-shirt on, which is fucked; I bought a t-shirt at a convenient store.

Later on I noticed I had a horrible bruise cut thing on my body. I think that guy tried to stab me or I horribly bumped myself while high. I have never figured out which.

I don't know what happened next, but I think I ended up in a hotel room in a tourist part of town.

I remember sitting in the dark of the hotel room, the meth wore off and I realized I had been fired from my job and that I would have to go back to Ohio. It felt really terrible; I had failed at the grand canyon and then I failed in San Diego.

I sat in the dark hotel room holding my switchblade to my stomach. I wanted to kill myself via seppuku. I should win an award for that, achieving that level of fucked.

I decided to stand up, put the switchblade down and walk back to America. I found some Americans walking back, they gave me a ride through the border. Then they dropped me off somewhere in San Diego, but I wasn't home. I hitchhiked in the middle of the night. A beautiful 25-year-old woman picked me up; she was so kind, she told me she had lived in Mexico and understood what had happened.

Imagine me, covered in old sweat, year 2000, sitting in her car in a dirty white t-shirt, my eyes bloodshot, like a scared bunny rabbit.

The whole thing seems wild to me. I don't feel like I did that, because I never did anything like that before, and I have never done anything like that after.

I'm seriously sitting in this Starbucks with my hand on my chin staring in a trance, trying to come up with some answer to all this. Like did it change me? Did I actually want to die? Who was the woman who picked me up hitchhiking? Is Boly Goma still alive?

Postscript:

I recently went to Chihuahua City, Mexico for a literary event. Everything was fine, the city was beautiful, clean, the beds and pillows soft. I wonder if the Tijuana I just described even existed, or if it was my sheltered mind projecting things on it.