



SCREAM WITH ME

a manuscript version

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INTRODUCTION

Hi. I'm Jaymes.

This is my book.

I have been circling around this particular formulation of ideas for a few years now, and suddenly in a moment of desperation while I was hiding at a friend's house in Salt Lake City, it became a little more clear.

At times I have been known to be abrasive and hella opinionated. But please know that everything here is coming from a desperate desire to be a better person...and maybe some day...to be able to have some fun with this life.

Also, I am really excited that one of the homies, Samantha (aka Little Calamity Photography) agreed to be a part of this and provide the visual elements. She and I have a strong connection due to our constant navigation of what we refer to as the "Dark Place" and our mutual admiration...

...ok...

...obsession...

...with the band, Brand New.

I hope you are as moved and inspired by her art as I have been.

(...only available in hardcopy form...stay tuned.)

Through-out this book you are going to come across some instances where you see this...

[. . .]

...PLEASE...feel free to fill in the blank.

(Let's be real here...this is now your book, so you should feel free to do whatever the fuck you like with it...including set it on fire.)

(...this may be more difficult in the pdf form...unless you don't mind destroying whatever device you're reading this on.)

I wanted to give you a chance to interact with me and my fucked up little head and this is what I came up with.

Oh...ps...I like to swear. A fucking lot. I've tried to keep it at a minimum, but you've been warned.

(#explicitcontentadvisory)

K. Well I think that's about it. See you at the end of this adventure.

jaymes

“ISN’T IT WONDERFUL?

IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO KNOW...

...THERE’S SOMEONE ELSE SCREAMING ALONGSIDE OF YOU.”

SUSAN HOWATCH

“Absolute Truths”

1. STORYTELLING

The renowned author Joan Didion once said,

“What’s so hard about the first sentence is that you’re stuck with it. Everything else is going to flow from that sentence. And by the time you’ve laid down the first two sentences...

....your options are all gone.”

To be blunt, art is a practice in learning you only have one shot.

When you approach any creative endeavor, the possibilities of what that creation will manifest itself as are endless. But when you make that first practical application of artistry you are, slowly and surely, eliminating the possibility of what it will become.

So why do we start here?

Why do we start with a statement about written narrative when what we are talking about is life?

Simple...

EVERYTHING WE DO...

...REVOLVES AROUND THE STORIES WE TELL.

...and storytelling is an art...

...and art is a practice in elimination.

The first sentence...

...of every thing we do...

...is going to dictate the flow of our life.

Think about it this way...

...take a moment and bring to the forefront of your mind the absolute favorite parts of your life. All the...

PLACES

EXPERIENCES

ENTERTAINMENT

PEOPLE...

...whatever they are...but those little happy things we all have...

“I AM A DIE-HARD [. . .]!”

REALLY? WHY WOULD YOU DIE FOR [. . .]?

“[. . .] IS THE GREATEST EVER!”

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER [. . .]?

“I HAVE [. . .], [. . .] A MILLION TIMES!”

WHY YOU HAVE [. . .], [. . .] A MILLION TIMES?

“MY FAVORITE [. . .] WAS/IS [. . .] FROM/OF [. . .]!”

WHAT MADE [. . .] STAND OUT IN YOUR MIND?

“I ALWAYS GO TO [. . .].”

TELL ME ABOUT THE FIRST TIME YOU EXPERIENCED [. . .]?

“YOU HAVE NOT LIVED, UNTIL YOU HAVE EATEN AT...”

...speaking of brunch.

My mom and dad love Guy Fieri. I'm serious. There is an autographed headshot of the dude hanging in my parents kitchen from when my dad totally freaked out cause they were coincidentally standing at the same baggage claim. After a brief conversation and my dad sharing my parents' affinity for the show, Guy just whips out the headshot from his carry-on...(like ya do)...and signs it for my dad to bring back to my mom.

(#browniepoints)

When it was announced to my parents that I would be moving to Boulder, Colorado it quickly turned into several months of being told...

"Jimbo, there is a restaurant in Boulder...it's called Foolish Craig's."

I'm fairly certain that my parents were just excited over the fact that now they had a legitimate excuse to visit a city where a restaurant had been featured on Diner's, Drive-In's and Dives. Because they would not stop hassling me about going and trying the food there. Seriously...they even recruited friends of theirs' to message me on fucking Facebook about the gawddamn crepes at this place.

So finally, out of sheer exhaustion of being berated by my family and their army of Facebook cohorts, I suggested my boss and I try this place for breakfast...

GOOD
GAWD
DAMN

Then I went back.

And then I went back again...and again...and again...

...and then I ended up eating there...

...everyday for...

**NINE
FUCKING
MONTHS**

...in a row.

(That is not an exaggeration...we did the math.)

I didn't care who you were, if you were hanging out with me, there was a 99.99999% chance we were going to Foolish Craig's for dinner. I was such a regular there, the head chef and several of the sous-chefs would come greet me at the bar and ask if they could make me something special they had dreamed up.

There was a spirit there. A soul. Granted, it was just a block down from the piercing studio I worked at, and considering that I am a self-diagnosed workaholic, it would be easy to say it was just convenient for me to walk down there everyday for dinner...and breakfast. But the food was amazing. It was like someone put drugs in it.

(Ok. Yes it's Colorado, so it could have been the drugs...
...but damn it was good.)

I was there so much, I brought in so many of my friends and coworkers, that the last holiday I spent in Boulder, my whole fucking crew was invited to their private work holiday party, so of course we went.

But how did that whole crazy love-affair start?

“Jimbo, there is a restaurant in Boulder...”

Everything we do...

...revolves around the stories we tell.

2. ADJUST THE FILTERS

So let's talk about stories. When it comes to story-time, there are a lot of different genres, and people have all kinds of preferences on what they like. But when you really get down to it, every story falls into one of two categories.

1. Happy.

2. Not happy.

And let's be real here...we live at an unprecedented time. There is a massive spectral difference between stories of futility, anger and paranoia that elicit the deepest desires to start stock-piling guns, grenades, water and military rations, all the way to the heart-warming, "I'm not crying...just sweating from eyes" feel-good, videos of youtube, and rounded out by the lavish, self-indulgent, self-glorified, stroke-fest that is basically every reality show and "celebrity" Instagram account.

(#internetfamous)

In the span of a few thumb swipes on a screen you can be subjected to any given number of stories, reciting tales of appalling horror...but then immediately confronted with the

"Top 10 - Stop Whatever the Fuck You're Doing - Most Lit - Fire - Dope - Up'n Coming - Genre Bending - Web Produced - Club Bangers - You NEED to Hear - Right da fukz now"!

And since the powers that be know the only way to make every one happy is to pander to personal preference...we've been given options!

Are the stories too depressing?

Just adjust the filters...

UNFRIEND [. . .].

STOP FOLLOWING [. . .].

BLOCK [. . .].

DON'T WATCH [. . .].

...JUST PRETEND IT'S NOT THERE.

But maybe...

...the stories are too indifferent to the plight of humanity.

Just adjust the filters...

UNFRIEND [. . .].

STOP FOLLOWING [. . .].

BLOCK [. . .].

DON'T WATCH [. . .].

...JUST PRETEND IT'S NOT THERE.

What's incredibly sad to realize, is that we now think we can just keep adjusting the filters, to be able to keep the party going. But at some point, reality comes crashing through the door, puts a 12g buckshot through the our new Amazon Echo and when we finally have the courage to ask,

“who the fuck are you?!?!”

it simply replies,

“I'm da party pooper!”

(#schwarzeneggerreference)

You and I both know, we can only live in the filters for so long, before we realize...

...I HAVE TO GROW UP EVENTUALLY.

...THE MONEY JUST ISN'T THERE.

...I'M OVER QUALIFIED.

...I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH EXPERIENCE.

...THEY STILL DO NOT NOTICE ME.

...THERE IS ONLY SO MUCH THE DOCTORS CAN DO.

...THEY JUST DON'T LOVE ME ANYMORE.

...I JUST DON'T LOVE THEM ANYMORE.

...MY GRADES ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

...THEY WANT TO BUILD A WALL.

...I HAVE TO USE THIS BATHROOM.

...I STILL GET PAID LESS.

...I'M MORE LIKELY TO GET PULLED OVER.

...THEY'RE NOT COMING HOME.

...I'M NOT WELCOME HERE.

...I WAS [. . .].

...I WAS ALWAYS CALLED A [. . .].

...THEY DID [. . .] TO ME.

...I FOUND OUT THEY [. . .].

...I AM [. . .].

So what happens?

What happens when a person...

**A
LIVING
BREATHING
BLEEDING
HUMAN**

...suddenly has the filters reset?

Because at some point, somewhere along the line, we all have a story like this.

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY WE HAD BEEN PROMISED IF WE
JUST DID OR HAD [. . .]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

And this happens to...

**EACH
AND
EVERY
ONE
OF
US.**

Which means these experiences of pain and fear are intensely personal...but also...at the same time...

...universally recognizable.

It is something we individually endure...

...but collectively experience.

And here is where I tumbled down a rabbit-hole that would change everything.

If the soul...

...unique to each individual...

...but found in every individual...

...is inherently linked to the physicality of our bodies...

...than what better way to express the inner cry for help and solidarity...

...then on the external surface we use to interpret each other?

3. A HUMAN EXPERIENCE

On September 9th, 1991, Erika and Helmut Simon were hiking in the southern Tyrol mountains. It was on this day in the mountain border between Austria and Italy when these German tourists come across a body that was frozen in the ice. And I have one question...

...what was that conversation like?

Cause it honestly looked like it was either the start of some really shitty wilderness zombie movie or an episode of CSI; Anchorage Alaska.

“NO BODY CONTAMINATE THE CRIME SCENE! WE’RE GONNA CSI THE SHIT OUT OF THIS MOUNTAIN SIDE!”

(#whoooooooooareyou)

This turns out to be a radical discovery. After examining the corpse, scientists estimate that this dude was 5,300 years old. Making him the oldest, *intact*, human body ever found.

And they called him Otzi.

Let me give you some context for how long ago this guy died.

He ceased to exist **ONE THOUSAND YEARS...BEFORE...**

**THE
PYRAMIDS
ARE
BUILT
IN
EGYPT**

His untimely demise is a full century **B E F O R E** the invention of...

**THE
FUCKING
WHEEL**

Suffice to say, homeboy is the og of og's.

After using...check this out...**multispectral photographic image techniques**...

(and yes, I did have to google what that was)

...scientists say this individual has 61 primitive forms of tattooing. They say that the application of these marks were a result of rubbing charcoal into intentional wounds and most theories suggest some relation to a perceived medicinal value for having them.

The truth is they have no idea why Otzi had these or if these marks were self-inflicted or performed by someone else.

But that's not really the point, is it?

People have literally been “modifying” their bodies since the dawn of time.

The purpose for modifying the physical appearance may be given meaning from the culture it is practiced in, but it has always existed in the human experience.

So what if body modification is a human experience?

Something that is hardwired into the fabric of the human DNA, that is then defined by a culture?

If that's the case, there is still a question that needs to be answered...

WHY?

Why do we, would we or should we, modify our bodies?

Because, let's be real here...

...body modification does not fit the current normative description of "fun past-time."

In my experience (and trust me, I have a lot of experience here), there are two predominate emotional occurrences on the front side...

**WHAT
THE HELL
AM
I
DOING
WITH
MY LIFE?**

FUCK

**THAT
HURTS**

Maybe I'm just being a baby about this...but I have done a lot of stupid shit to my body...
and, real talk here, it all hurt.

And I cannot tell you how many times I have heard,

“ewwwwwwww”

or

“ugh...that grosses me out”

when I have described some of the things I have put myself through.

When I move to Boulder, Colorado I consciously decide that this is going to be a time where I begin to focus on myself and, ya know, do those things I've always said I would get around to...like...

...get my neck and throat tattooed.

(#imakegoodchoices)

Soon after moving, I am introduced to my friend Lance, who owns one of the oldest tattoo studios in Boulder. I get myself on the books for my tattoo, and the day of my appointment finally arrives.

Now...Bolder Ink is on the second floor of this shopping plaza. There are two different flights of stairs that you can use to reach their front door. And as I make my way up the back set of steps, I am chain-smoking, and the pit in my stomach, that started to develop the night before, has gotten so heavy I barely am able to pull myself up the final step. As I finally grasp the door handle to let myself in, the only thought running through my head is...

YOU..ARE A FUCKING IDIOT.

**THIS IS HANDS-DOWN, THE SINGULAR, WORST IDEA
YOU HAVE EVER HAD IN THE ENTIRETY OF YOUR
STUPID PATHETIC LIFE.**

**YOU THOUGHT IT WAS A BAD IDEA GIVING UP YOUR
VIRGINITY TO A GIRL WHOSE NICKNAME WAS**

‘COCAINE KATY’

**AND YOUR NECK AND THROAT IS OVER HERE LIKE,
HOLD MY BEER.**

No matter what, there is always fear and always pain involved.

There are two predominate questions asked to me before I perform almost every body piercing...

...IS THIS GOING TO HURT?

or

...HOW BAD IS THIS GOING TO HURT?

When you think about it...at their core, these are the

**PRIMAL
AND
FUNDAMENTAL**

human questions about life.

...AM I STRONG ENOUGH?

...AM I BRAVE ENOUGH?

...DO I POSSESS THE PHYSICAL FORTITUDE?

...WHAT WILL MOM AND DAD REALLY THINK?

...IS WORK GOING TO BE OK WITH THIS?

...AM I CUTE ENOUGH TO PULL IT OFF?

...AM I [. . .]?

There is this component to body modification that is, at the very least, minimally counter-intuitive to our human instinct of pleasure and comfort. And it is important to realize that in spite of our disposition to fill our lives with activities that which tend to focus on the removal of discomfort...people are embracing modification like never before.

Because there is another side of the ethereal experience...when the participant receiving this change to their physical appearance hears the words...

“OK...YOU’RE DONE.”

...and then there is a moment...

...this glorious, transcendent moment...when that person gets the first real look...

...the goosebumps that runs over the skin...

...that euphoria that hits so hard, sometimes it takes your breath away.

...when suddenly all the...

ANXIETY

TREPIDATION

NERVOUSNESS

FEAR

DISCOMFORT

PAIN

...all becomes worth it. And something suddenly clicks.

It is the realization, that despite what we are constantly told...

...life is not always about overcoming the fear and pain...

...but instead realizing...

**YOU
DID
LIVE
THROUGH
IT**

4. ANNIE

Lauren comes into the studio one afternoon, walks up to the counter and says,

“I’m here to get my septum pierced and I want that pretty gold ring.”

And Lauren had been saving her money for 3 months just so she could get that piece. And the reason Lauren knew about that piece of jewelry was because, a few months earlier, she got her ear pierced. And the reason that Lauren was getting her ear pierced, was because her good friend, Annie, was getting her ear pierced, and Annie had said,

“Lauren...you need to come meet my new friends...you need to see this place...let’s go get bestie piercings.”

And the reason that Annie drags Lauren in for an impromptu piercing, is because months before that, Annie comes into the studio one afternoon, walks up to the counter and says...

I NEED A PIERCING.

I immediately start to channel my best “piercer” personality...

“I’m gonna do this dope double cartilage piercing, then this girl’s gonna pick out some dope jewelry, then I’m gonna take a dope photo, and post it on my Instagram. And then...the piercing world will finally recognize me for the god of piercing that I am!!!!”

(#piercerfamous)

And in the midst of this internal daydream of piercer-glory, out of polite conversation, I say,

“So Annie, you having a good week?”

Annie, looks at my reflection in the mirror and says...

HONESTLY?
IT'S BEEN REALLY BAD.

This becomes one of the few moments where I have been granted a clarity to realize

**THE
STORY
IS
CHANGING.**

I being to talk with Annie about rituals, and rites of passage, and how for some people, in certain moments, the simple act of body piercing can be incredibly therapeutic...and if she was interested, I would be happy to create that experience for her. She looks at me and says,

“You know, I’d really like that...

...but I have to go...

...I’m supposed to meet a friend for coffee...

...I’ll be back in an hour.”

And she leaves.

And for most of us, who have worked in this industry long enough, that typically means,

“Thanks...but no thanks!”

But an hour later, Annie, comes back.

And this time she has a notebook with her.

And in this notebook is a ziplock bag with dried and wilted flowers.

The same flowers her mother bought...

...three weeks earlier...

...on the day that she committed suicide.

And these flowers,
are being used to book mark the page,
where this young girl had written the eulogy...
...she read at her mother's funeral.

And in that moment...

...Annie is indifferent to how beautiful the studio is.

...Annie is indifferent to how the jewelry is displayed.

...Annie is indifferent to the fact that I am a member of the association of professional piercers.

for Annie...

...IN THAT MOMENT...

...THE ONLY STORY IS...

three weeks ago...
...I did not get to say goodbye to my mother...
...and I am looking for any and every outlet to be ok with that...

...I NEED A PIERCING.

...CAN YOU HELP?

...DO YOU GET IT?

**...I NEED TO KNOW THAT
SOMEONE ELSE UNDERSTANDS.**

Or this email I get from a young person the day after I pierced them...

“Yesterday was an extremely rough day for me. I am not sure if you are one to keep up with the news, but yesterday marked two months since one of my closest friends was murdered by her ex boyfriend. That being said, I am so grateful for your advice about living through pain,

**BECAUSE I AM CURRENTLY TRYING TO LIVE
THROUGH A LOT OF IT.”**

Or this time I finish doing a piercing for a young person who sits up exclaims,

“I DID IT!”

and while they are admiring their new piercing in the mirror I casually say,

“See, you’re just like everyone else...we all have to face the fear and pain eventually.”

And this person begins to cry so hard that they collapse to the floor...

...and in between their sobbing say...

“My dad died last week...and for the last week I felt like no one understood what I was going through...thank you for reminding me...”

...THAT WE ARE ALL THE SAME.”

5. BLURRY

I am a fairly “modified” person. The entirety of my arms, including my hands and knuckles are tattooed. I have a fucking huge bird tattooed on my neck and throat, and my ears are stretched to approximately 42mm...which loosely translates to,

DAMN, DEM BIG.

What I am trying to say is, I stand out.

And considering the currently popularity of tattooing, and the growing popularity of body piercing, on occasion I get stopped by people who are inquisitive about the work I carry with me every where I go.

Now...when you are a “trained professional”...

(as I have sometimes been referred to as)

...it sometimes...ok, a lot of the time...annoys the living fuck out of me...to hear something like,

“HOW GAUGED R UR GAUGES BRO?!?!?!”

“BRO, UR TATS R LIT, FAM.”

And then inevitably I am shown a “dope as fuck” tattoo...

(typically a hatchet man)

...and then told how their cousin did it in the kitchen of their mobile home, and how they are learning how to do dope tats too.

(ps...stop calling them fucking “tats”)

Now...you may be reading this and thinking,

“damn...jaymes just went from 0 - 100 real quick.”

(#drakereference)

And yeah, I can see how you would think that a book about inclusion, suddenly taking a hard, left turn into “don’t stop me in public, you don’t know what the fuck you are talking about, and I could care less about your shitty scratcher tats” ...

(...that is the only acceptable occasion to use the word “tat”)

...can be a bit off-putting. Hell, you may even have a hatchet man tattoo and be thinking,

“fuck you dude...I like what my cousin did.”

And honestly, you should think that. That’s kind of my point here.

You see, I have spent a lot of time learning all kinds of technical things about the technical execution of body modification. I could run down a list of accolades I have achieved, accomplished and received during those years of being a body piercer. And honestly, it's easy for me to get wrapped up in how awesome I think I am, and want to pop-off and show you just how much better I am than everyone else. And all that proves is that I'm just like everyone else...

...I like knowing who can't sit with us.

(#meangirlsreference)

But suddenly...one day...it hits me like a freight train...

...here's what's really happening when I get stopped in public...

YOU!

YOU GET IT!

YOU UNDERSTAND!

YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE!

Sometimes, for a very brief moment, the lines get blurred, and it's nice to know that someone else has had to endure a little bit of pain and come out on the other side.

Here is where we discover, that the very thing we've been using to...

**DETERMINE WHERE A PERSON CAN SIT ON A BUS,
JUSTIFY BUILDING WALLS,
DEFINE WHICH BATHROOM SHOULD BE USED,
DETERMINE WHO GETS TO EXPERIENCE SANCTITY OF
MARRIAGE,
EXCUSE STOP AND FRISK PROCEDURES,
VALIDATE ASKING TO HAVE SOMEONE REMOVED
FROM A PLANE,
DEFEND MAKING MORE MONEY THAN SOMEONE ELSE,**

...could actually be the one thing to remind us that underneath it all...

**WE'RE
NOT AS
DIFFERENT
AS WE'D
LIKE
TO
THINK.**

6. THE 21ST CENTURY

The truth is that we all struggle to derive any remote sense of meaning from these experiences. Because we do not have any respect for fear and pain. We live in the age of consumer-driven, image-everything, post-whatever society that keeps trying to eliminate all the fear and pain.

And we have to point that out. We have to talk about this side of things.

We live in a time when everything is predicated on possession...rather than purpose.

**THE IDEA IS THAT IF I POSSESS [. . .],
I WILL NOW HAVE FINALLY OBTAINED [. . .].**

I mean just look at what we have been told...

“IMPOSSIBLE IS NOTHING”

- ADIDAS

“THINK DIFFERENT”

- APPLE

“THINK BIG”

- IMAX

“THINK SMALL”

- VOLKSWAGON

“BECAUSE YOU’RE WORTH IT” - L’OREAL

“BE ALL YOU CAN BE” - UNITED STATES ARMY

“BE LIKE MIKE” - GATORADE

“BECAUSE THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE” - PORSCHE

“THERE’S SOME THINGS MONEY CAN’T BUY..FOR EVERYTHING ELSE, THERE’S MASTER CARD.”

- MASTER CARD

“THE BEST A MAN CAN GET” - GILLETTE

“JUST ASK THE MAN WHO OWNS ONE” - PACKARD

“POWER, BEAUTY, AND SOUL” - ASHTON MARTIN

“IT COULD BE YOU” - THE NATIONAL LOTTERY

“A LITTLE DAB’LL DO YA.” - BRYLCREEM

“MAYBE SHE’S BORN WITH IT..MAYBE IT’S MAYBELLIN.”

- MAYBELLIN

“I’M LOVING IT” - MCDONALDS

“JUST BELIEVE” - SONY

**“LIVE IN YOUR WORLD...PLAY IN OURS” -
PLAYSTATION**

“IT’S THE REAL THING” - COCA COLA

“IT’S THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH” - DISNEYLAND

“DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE, DOUBLE YOUR FUN” - WRIGLEY’S DOUBLEMINT

“IT’S EVERYWHERE YOU WANT TO BE.” - VISA

“WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?” - MICROSOFT

“HAVE IT YOUR WAY” - BURGER KING

“BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS” - WHEATIES

“OBEY YOUR THIRST” - SPRITE

“JUST DO IT.” - NIKE

“SHARE THE FANTASY” - CHANEL

**“KEEPS GOING AND GOING AND
GOING.” - ENERGIZER**

In 1925, Listerine began an ad campaign that said,

**“OFTEN A BRIDESMAID...
...NEVER A BRIDE.”**

Let that shit sink in for a long, serious second.

Just consider for a moment the current conversations we as people are finally having in regards to how the male species has treated women, and then try and put yourself in the position of a woman in

1925

and what this slogan for fucking

M O U T H W A S H

is alluding to.

You want to know the only message in advertising?

**“UNLESS YOU HAVE/USE [. . .],
YOU WILL ALWAYS BE A LOSER.”**

OVERCOME.

ESCAPE.

IGNORE.

YOU DESERVE.

YOU EARNED.

That's the society I grew up in.

But the glass house is cracking.

And we are realizing we have spent all our physical and emotional energy attempting to manufacture and live up to whatever our own self-perceived facade of

**SUCCESSFUL
BEAUTIFUL
PEACEFUL
NIRVANIC
CONTENT
UTOPIAN
HUMAN IS.**

And despite this euphoric ideology that we are all equally entitled to a life free of all suffering and sorrow we are more acutely aware than ever that it's not always that way.

We can attach all kinds of hope to anything we think might give us a sense of comfort and security but in a split moment we are confronted with the reality that people are still capable of being

SELFISH

GREEDY

ARROGANT

INDIFFERENT

VIOLENT

AND JUDGMENTAL.

There are still people who will judge...

YOUR WEIGHT
YOUR SPEECH
YOUR AMOUNT OF MONEY IN THE BANK
YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS
YOUR POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS
YOUR SPORTS TEAMS
YOUR FASHION SENSE
YOUR HAIRCUT
YOUR BIRTH PLACE
YOUR ENTERTAINMENT CHOICES
YOUR FAMILY
YOUR LACK OF FAMILY
YOUR MODE OF TRANSPORTATION
YOUR ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE
YOUR DIETARY HABITS
YOUR SHOPPING HABITS
YOUR SENSITIVITIES
YOUR PAST TIMES
YOUR SEXUAL PROCLIVITIES
YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER(S)
YOUR SKIN COLOR
YOUR GENDER
YOUR [. . .].

There are people who are still...

RACIST

SEXIST

MISOGYNSTIC

HOMOPHOBIC

TRANSPHOBIC

XENOPHOBIC

**ANY
KIND
OF
FUCKING
PHOBIC**

And we realize that despite all of these great accomplishments and achievements of humanity in developing a world of lavish joy and amenity...

...WE HAVEN'T OVERCOME A SINGLE THING...

**...AND WOULDN'T IT BE NICE IF THERE WAS
SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTOOD?**

This is the era of post-structural everything...

...where there is no truth...

...but everything is truthful if you can do the right google search.

But there is one reality, that is both intimately personal and inclusively transcendent...

WE
ALL
BLEED
AND
BREATHE
THE SAME.

...and therefore each and every single one of us knows what it is like to

**LIVE
THROUGH
FEAR
AND
PAIN.**

And because this is true...

...then there is hope that someday...

...we might be able to finally scream together...

**RATHER
THAN
AT
EACH
OTHER.**

7. ME

In 2003, I am 19 years old and I am enrolled in a small bible college in a suburb of Grand Rapids, Michigan. I am also volunteering at a church which every Sunday, had 12,000 weekly attendees. My role was as the high school music leader. Which basically meant that 600-700 high school students would show up for a service with the expectation that my little christian rock band and I had prepared a collection of songs that affirm, encourage and remind us of the promise we ascribe to.

One week, we set out these small boxes, and during the music portion of the service, the students were encouraged to use these as a depository for prayer requests, which we as leaders would then incorporate into our daily prayer life.

The morning after the service, I wake up in my college dorm and sure enough, in my inbox is the email. I don't remember too much of the first handful of requests...I recall them being fairly typical prayer requests from high school students...

“I have a really important test coming up, please pray that god helps me do well.”

“Please pray that jesus keeps my dad safe while he is traveling for work.”

But there is one that I do remember.

It was an anonymous prayer request and all it said was...

WHY DOESN'T

GOD

MAKE THE

SEXUAL ABUSE

STOP

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [JESUS]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

It wasn't working for this student and the reality immediately sets in...

...it's not working for me.

Shortly after this, I stop going to church. Like literally just stopped showing up. A week before finals, my senior year of college, I drop out. And then, shortly after my 22nd birthday, the girl I had been dating has to rush to my apartment, force her way in, and drag me out, just to keep me from taking the kitchen knife out of the sink and attempting to end my life. For the next several days, I am bounced around friends' houses while they take turns making sure I am never by myself. Not too much longer after this experience, I start to drink...a lot.

For a long time I chase the bottom of any and every bottle I can get my hands on, which would eventually lead to sustaining myself on a 30 pack and a fifth, every two days, all while smoking a pack - two packs of cigarettes a day.

After a short stint of couch surfing and sleeping in the back of my car, I end up spending several months in Salem, Oregon, living in the double-wide mobile home my parents had moved into. Then one evening, rather than returning right back to the mobile home after work, I had adventured over to a friend's apartment. While I'm there my phone starts blowing up. It's my parents...and they are not happy. There really was no particular reason they were upset that particular night. It was just the boiling point of general disappointment in their adult son failing to see his short-comings in life and they were ready to serve me an ultimatum. And I was ready to deliver mine.

It really just needed to happen...

..and it did.

I came back and my parents were waiting for me, with the dogs caged off in my dad's make-shift office.

(...you know it's going to be bad when people preemptively lock up the pets.)

It wasn't long before walls were shaking from the screaming, I'm throwing whatever I could fit into a laundry hamper and I finally look at my father and say,

“FUCK YOU. DON'T YOU EVER FUCKING TALK TO ME AGAIN.”

And I walked out.

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [MY PARENTS]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

8 weeks later, I pack up my car with whatever I had left, and drove straight back to Grand Rapids. I was sleeping on the couch of a friend and managed to get hired on as a line-cook at one particular fast-food place and as a host at a franchised chain restaurant. Not too long after that I got my first job at a tattoo and piercing shop. That started a solid year of my life that is a really big blur. But somehow I made it through a piercing apprenticeship and started a piercing career.

Then, I met a girl...with two kids...and who was married. Like the real-deal married...not the “oh we’re taking a break” married.

And I became the lightning rod for a nasty, shitty divorce that found these two children right smack in the middle of all the chaos. When the dust had finally settled, the papers were all signed, custody had been agreed to, she reciprocated my “devotion” to her, with the same “devotion” she had demonstrated for her now ex-husband.

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [WHAT I WANTED]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

I realize that maybe I should reconsider my life choices. So I decide body piercing isn't for me, and I'm gonna move to Seattle and sing songs about how [jesus] had (again) become my boyfriend. Cause yeah, that seems like a great idea. I manage to quit drinking and smoking weed for a bit. Packed up my shit. Sent them in boxes via FedEx, chucked up the deuces and hopped on a plane to the great pacific northwest!

But then I needed a job...because apparently singing songs for [jesus] doesn't pay the bills .

(...unless your this one really popular church I know about. #religionisacult)

And considering my stellar academic record, I was relegated to coming out of piercing retirement and giving it a solid last chance.

Begin alcohol, drug-induced blurry-fuzzy phase part deux.

Eventually I am cocktailing whiskey, weed and Ambien, to the point where I could barely function.

It reaches such a low, that my parents (who I am now talking to again) start to consider driving up and having me committed just to keep me from sticking the barrel of my roommate's shot-gun in my mouth.

Eventually it all just kind of erupts.

I find enough strength to get myself clean of the weed and pills, and some friends come racing up from Oregon and swoop me up while I try and get everything cleared out in my head. Then I get the offer to move to Salt Lake City. I try to exit from my job gracefully and professionally, but it all goes to shit.

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [MADE IT IN SEATTLE]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

I then end up in Salt Lake City and after a brief but difficult adjustment period, I begin to really find myself in body piercing. And I actually start to feel like I am building a life. My job starts to really pay off, I have an amazing girlfriend and for the first time in a few years, I'm actually making friends.

But then my girlfriend, who was a bartender at one of the more popular dives in SLC, sits me down a few days after a drunken night I had at her place of employment and says,

*“Listen...you did absolutely nothing wrong. You were having fun, you were laughing..but..
...I just looked in your eyes...and your soul was gone.”*

And if anyone could have ever told me something like that and I believed them, it was her. Cause I loved this woman. Like, seriously, put a ring on it type of love.

(Did I put a ring on it? No. Cause I'm a fucking idiot.)

But that message would only sink in a few months later. One day, we had a bit of an “off” day, like every couple does. And she told me not to bother her or come by her work that night. So what do I do? I hit up the homie, and we go tie one on. To the point where I get kicked out of a bar, walk an hour and a half in the snow, piss on someone’s fence during my winter adventure, finally get home, start calling her phone...

(yes, she is still at work)

...proceed to get in a screaming match with her and she hangs up and turns her phone off because I kept calling...

63 TIMES.

I wake the next morning and worse than the hangover that is ravaging every part of my body, is the disgust and shame over how I behaved.

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [ANOTHER DRINK]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

So I quit drinking.

A few days later, after making me sit and wallow in the fear that she would never talk to me again, she calls me and we have that heart-to-heart, I will love you always talk that we all hope for. We eventually end up moving in together, and I'll admit, there were definitely struggles, but I knew I loved her and her family. Then one day my boss shows up and is like...

“yo...you're doing great...wanna run the Boulder, Colorado studio when it opens?”

...and I'm all like,

“yo...outside of legal weed...why would anyone move to Colorado?”

...and he's all like,

“truth fam...but what if that reason involved Chicago...”

...and I'm all like,

“...you mean the place of the greatest pizza in the world...the place of the six time world championship team that Michael Jordan played on...the place with the greatest worst baseball team ever...the third largest city in the great United States...the one place on the planet I have always wanted to live...

...when do I pack my bags?”

To be fair, it wasn't like I just rolled home that day and said,

“deuces!”

The truth is I actually really agonized over this decision. I have a small circle of homies, three of them to be exact, that live all over the country, and when big life decisions happen, they get the phone call. I then talked with my business coach about it. Fuck, I even talked with my mom and dad about it. And that was really it, the battle between what could be and a girl.

And in the end, the promise of my career and a destination won out over a woman that I said I wanted to marry one day. She was really supportive at first, and we agreed we were going to try the long distance thing. But it just kept getting worse. And then it happened.

A week before I am supposed to leave, we are sitting on the back porch. Me in one of the beat to shit camping chairs, her on the steps leading up to the back door. I remember looking at her through all the cigarette smoke and saying...

“you’re not ok with this are you?”

She just replies with,

“you’re not coming back...are you?”

There is a silence...

...

“No.”

...

“Yeah...I figured. Guess there’s no reason to drag this out anymore.”

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [HER]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

When I had first arrived in SLC, I was on one of my hiatus from weed...until those last couple weeks. Now we could make the joke that I was trying to prepare myself for Colorado...but let's be honest...I was breaking...and I was relapsing.

And then...I was gone...September 1st, 2014. Four days before our anniversary. Outside of a few brief (and weird) conversations the following summer, and then a drunken text message that I sent on the night of my birthday, we haven't talked.

So Colorado...

...let's just put it this way...

...snoop dogg would be impressed.

If I wasn't at work (or eating at Foolish Craig's) I was hiding in my 300 square foot studio apartment...high as a goddamn motherfucker. That it's. That's all there really was for me in Colorado.

Work.

Weed.

All I knew is that I was going to get to Chicago.

And goddamn it I was working hard to make that happen. And I was killing it. The studio was pop'n all the time and within six months, we were ready to start scouting locations in Chicago. I was invited to lecture for the first time at the annual Association of Professional Piercers' conference, which then led to the production and release of *"Modify Your Story"* and then being invited to lecture at even more classes the following year at the conference.

I mean really, on the surface, I had it made. My career was soaring and Chicago was looming closer everyday.

And then, it finally happened.

On December 1st, 2016, me and one of the homies who drove us 18 fucking hours...
(#kennyisamachine)

...rolled up to my apartment, directly above the new Chicago Studio.

Then on January 15th, we threw a huge-ass party and the next day...

B O O M

...showtime motherfuckers.

And the truth is, I was working so much and too fucking stoned always to realize I was hating it.

I had adamantly made the case that I wanted to be open 7 days a week even though it was just me working...and I did it.

Literally almost everyday, by myself...for six months.

Wake up.

SMOKE LOTS OF WEED AND CIGARETTES.

Walk down the stairs and work.

SMOKE LOTS OF CIGARETTES.

Walk up the stairs.

SMOKE LOTS OF WEED AND CIGARETTES.

REPEAT EVERYDAY.

But things were starting to slip.

For almost three years, every single part of my existence revolved around the work. And I had lost myself in it to the point where any sort of “normalcy” no longer existed in my life. If it wasn’t about the job or the purpose to my job, it didn’t matter. I impose a literal solitary confinement on my life. I hid in my apartment when I wasn’t at work, and when I was at work, I hid in the back storage room. I just stopped answering my phone, I wouldn’t even bother reading text messages. Romantic connections were simply my preferred porn star of the week. In the moments when I would bring myself to go out for food, if the restaurant even appeared busy, I wouldn’t bother. I started just randomly closing to try and keep myself sane and somehow I make it to summer time and things are still “functioning”. But the hatred, depression and isolation are really kicking in.

Then one night, I walk out of the restaurant just below my apartment in Chicago, light a cigarette, take that glorious slow drag...and I start coughing...and I can’t stop. I’m gagging and choking on the one constant that has been there for me through every brilliant and brutal moment since I started smoking when I was 20 years old. And the thought hits me square in my chest...

WHY???

WHY ARE YOU STILL DOING THIS TO YOURSELF?!?!

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

**...ALL THE SECURITY I HAD BEEN PROMISED IF I JUST
DID OR HAD [ANOTHER CIGARETTE]...**

**STOPPED
WORKING**

Then a few days later, I decide that I need to really “clear my head”. And after three years of daily, constant dependency on marijuana, I throw out my pipe, my grinder, all my rolling papers, and dump the remainder of my weed out, walk the trash bag to the dumpster and for the first time there is

NOTHING THERE.

After almost 13 years, any and every coping mechanism is gone.

There is nothing left...

GOD(S)
RELATIONSHIPS
WEED
ALCOHOL
CIGARETTES
FAMILY
FRIENDS
HOBBIES
HER...

...all of it is actually gone.

Reality crashed my party.

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

...I'M HOLDING A LOADED HANDGUN TO MY HEAD...

AND SUDDENLY...

...AND VIOLENTLY...

...I'M LOOKING IN THE MIRROR IN MY LIVING ROOM...

...and for the first time, in a long time...

I SEE MYSELF.

ALONE

BROKEN

SCARED

DESPERATE

BUT ALIVE.

And I see it in my eyes...

MY SOUL.

**I HAVE BEEN TOLD I WAS A FAILURE.
I HAVE BEEN TOLD I WAS A DISGRACE.
I HAVE BEEN TOLD I WAS GOING TO HELL.
I HAVE BEEN TOLD I WAS NOT LOVED ANYMORE.
I HAVE BEEN TOLD I WAS NOT NEEDED ANYMORE.
I HAVE BEEN TOLD I WOULD NOT MAKE IT.
I HAVE BEEN CHEATED ON.
I HAVE BEEN THE CHEATER.
I HAVE BEEN LIED TO.
I HAVE BEEN THE ONE TELLING LIES.
I HAVE BEEN [. . .].**

**I AM AN ALCOHOLIC.
I AM AN ADDICT.
I AM DEPRESSED.
I AM SUICIDAL.
I AM [. . .].**

**I HAVE LIVED
THROUGH IT...**

**AND I AM
STILL
LIVING
THROUGH IT ALL.**

And while I realize that I can be

**ANGRY,
VENGEFUL,
SELFISH,
ARROGANT,
BELLIGERENT,
IGNORANT,
BROKEN,
LONELY,
DEPRESSED,
SUICIDAL,
TERRIFIED,
CYNICAL,
ENTITLED,
PRIVILEGED,
ADDICTED,
AND MOST TIMES JUST A FUCKING ASSHOLE..**

...I AM ALSO LEARNING...I CAN BE BETTER.

Because I have made it to this moment.

This brilliant, glorious moment.

And if I can make it to this moment...

...I can make it to the next one, and the one after that.

....and if you made it all the way to this page...

**THAT MEANS
YOU CAN
TOO**

8. THE POINT

So why do I tell you all this?

To be honest, I don't know.

I actually don't have any answers.

I don't know why we endure pain.

I don't know why we get scared.

I don't know why we hurt each other.

I don't know why we are scared of each other.

I have been stuck with a lot of first sentences in my story.

...some were written for me

...others I wrote myself.

I have eliminated a lot of different possibilities of what this creation called my life could be.

And trust me, from the very depth of my fragile heart, I wish I had an answer.

But until that moment of zen...how about this...

“What is a poet?”

A sad man, whose heart is tormented by secret sufferings...but whose lips are so formed, that when the sighs and the cries escape it...

...they sound like beautiful music.”

- Søren Kierkegaard

The only thing that I have to offer is that if you are someone who is desperately looking for anyone who might just get it...

...hopefully my sighs and cries can sound like beautiful music to you.

Because while we run around this crazy shit-show called life telling our story...

...it's nice to look around and realize, that sometimes...

...the only thing life needs to say...

“ISN’T IT WONDERFUL?

IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO KNOW...

...THERE’S SOMEONE ELSE SCREAMING ALONGSIDE OF YOU.”

**THANK YOU
FOR
SCREAMING
ALONGSIDE
OF
ME**

SHOUT-OUTS

To the ride or die homies; in the darkest shadows and the brightest lights, you have all in some way been there with me. Whether it is Jordan discussing the philosophies of faith; Levi letting me invade your home when I am having mental breakdowns and teaching me to love pinball; Carter, for dropping acid with me, watching me come off the rails and then Julie having to sit on the floor holding my hands and telling me that everything is going to be ok; Samantha putting up with my shit and me flipping her off during photo shoots; Heather for leaving work early to come take the bullets from my gun; the Red-Shoe-Adventure-Crew and burger challenges; Sarah my eternal weed-witch; Jimmy and the crew at Foolish Craig's; Emily and Cecille at Sugarhouse Coffee for the free caffeine and dinners when I visit; Lauren and Kamree; Annie for letting me scream with her; The Laughing Goat for always stocking glass bottles of Pellegrino; Titan Gym in Chicago for letting me hit and kick shit; ...you have all had a part in saving me.

Jesse; this never would have even happened if you had not been understanding of what I was going through and forced me to escape Chicago for a bit. Thank you for valuing my life when I couldn't.

The IRIS Crew; You peoples. Damn. Chelsie, you you're awesome, especially since you've been nice to me even though I get angry and slam doors. KenKen...you're a cheapass dum dum...and the Cubs are better than the Dodgers...but damn can you drive a truck! Samantha, thank you for reminding that sometimes it's ok to not be a piercer. Lisa, thank you for holding my hair back that one night, I'm sorry I wouldn't get in the Lyft. And to everyone that works day in and day out at any of the IRIS Studios.

Lyn Christian & SoulSalt; thank you for constantly pushing me to find creative outlets for the chaotic nature of my brain. (...and letting me cry and/or scream and swear in your office.)

Mom and Dad; I love you. I know this isn't what either of you saw for me, but please know that this is the best thing that could have happened. ...and thank you for still loving me in spite of it.

To those in the trenches of professional body piercing; #teampiercingindustry
To my clients, especially the kids; thank you for reminding me what bravery looks like.

JAY-Z; thank you for providing the soundtrack to my life. #throwyourdiamondsup

Art & Fear; Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking, is my bible.

SHADE-THROWS

My Dark Place.

FUCK YOU

...you're a bitch.

See you when I see you.

RECOVERY IS A PROCESS...

...NOT A PRIZE.

