

"A manual and call-to-action for awakened patriots."

— SARAH PALIN

"Brash, funny, fiery, and irreverent."

— RUSH LIMBAUGH

★ **RIGHTEOUS** ★
INDIGNATION

EXCUSE ME WHILE I SAVE THE WORLD!



ANDREW BREITBART

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Righteous Indignation

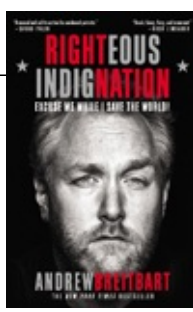
*Excuse Me
While I Save the World!*

ANDREW BREITBART



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*To my dad, Gerald Breitbart, and Clarence Thomas—both decent men who
inspired me to act*

From Little ACORNs Grow...

In June 2009, I didn't know much about the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). My attitude toward it was a generic conservative's attitude: I knew that the lack of interest the mainstream media were showing in ACORN—especially with all the accusations leveled against it regarding its illegal voter fraud and ties with the Democratic Party—meant that there had to be something really, truly horrific about it. Whenever there's smoke and the leftist media aren't calling 911, that means there's a huge fire raging out of control somewhere.

But beyond that, I had read only what everyone else had read every election cycle. I had read that ACORN acted as a kind of street army on behalf of Progressive interests, working to get Democrats registered for voting, working to get people on public assistance in the name of “social justice”—and I had read that because of its goals, ACORN was granted absolute protection under the cover of law and the media's willful blindness. I knew that Barack Obama had put ACORN in charge of large swaths of the Census. My e-mail tip box was always filled with questions from readers asking, “What are we going to do about ACORN's Census involvement?”

In 2010, the White House announced that for the 2010 Census, ACORN would recruit 1.4 million workers to go door-to-door counting every person in the country. This in spite of the fact that ACORN had been linked with severe voter fraud in states ranging from Washington to Pennsylvania.¹

So people were worried. But ACORN was not my number one target by any stretch of the imagination.

Then a young man named James O'Keefe walked into my office.

He showed me a set of videos.

My jaw dropped.

After I watched the videos, there was silence. Then he turned to me and said, “We're going to take down ACORN.”

“No,” I replied. “We're going to take down the media.”

The September 10, 2009, launch of BigGovernment.com did something President Obama couldn't: it created the first and only bipartisan vote of consequence of his presidency—the congressional defunding of ACORN, a “social and economic justice” advocacy organization key to the electoral infrastructure of the Progressive wing of the Democratic Party and a menacing and destructive “community organizing” group central to Barack Obama's post-Harvard Law years. Within a week of an unorthodox, strategically crafted, staggered release of a series of five videos depicting ACORN workers aiding and abetting a fake pimp and prostitute trying to set up an elaborate sex slave operation, Congress voted unanimously to defund ACORN.

That momentous week changed my life forever. And I believe it helped instigate a winnable New Media war against the Progressive movement and its standard-bearer, President Obama, as well as the

vast left-wing media apparatus that rigs the national narrative in the pursuit of partisan politics.

The incredibly courageous work of James O'Keefe ("The Pimp"), then a twenty-five-year-old investigative journalist-cum-Borat of the right, and Hannah Giles, not yet twenty-one at the point of launching the caper, acted as a catalyst for a demoralized conservative movement.

The Hope and Change had begun to wear off in the latter part of the summer of '09, and the Tea Party movement had already begun. But the conservative movement lacked a clear victory to rally the troops around. The ACORN videos became the rallying point of a resurgent conservatism and served as a wake-up call to millions of patriotic Americans that individuals can make a huge difference, especially now with an empowered, media-savvy, Internet army.

That's right, an army.

Make no mistake: America is in a media war. It is an extension of the Cold War that never ended but shifted to an electronic front. The war between freedom and statism ended geographically when the Berlin Wall fell. But the existential battle never ceased.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the battle simply took a different form. Instead of missiles the new weapon was language and education, and the international left had successfully constructed a global infrastructure to get its message out.

Schools. Newspapers. Network news. Art. Music. Film. Television.

For decades the left understood the importance of education, art, and messaging.

Oprah Winfrey gets it. David Geffen gets it. Bono gets it. President Barack Obama gets it. Even Corey Feldman gets it.

But the right doesn't. For decades the right felt the Pentagon and the political class and simple common sense could win the day. They were wrong.

The left does not win its battles in debate. It doesn't have to. In the twenty-first century, media is everything. The left wins because it controls the narrative. The narrative is controlled by the media. The left is the media. Narrative is everything.

I call it the Democrat-Media Complex—and I am at war to gain back control of the American narrative.

I have allies, veterans who have helped pave the way. Rush Limbaugh and the phenomenon of conservative talk radio are only twenty years old. So desperate was the right for an outlet to express itself that tens of millions now get their information from what was the formerly moribund AM dial.

Please understand that Rush Limbaugh is reviled less for what he says than because he shot the first shot of the New Media war over twenty years ago when he turned AM into the meeting place for America's massive conservative underground. Because of Rush there are countless imitators influencing large amounts of people across America in a billion-dollar talk-radio industry that didn't exist a generation ago.

Matt Drudge and the Drudge Report were met with relentless attacks from the mainstream media class and the political left during the Clinton years—not because Matt was an aggregator of news stories or a conservative muckraker, but because he created a new front in the long-standing culture war—the Internet. History will look upon Matt Drudge as the Internet's true media visionary. Millions of so-called bloggers write, report, upload their stories online, and influence the national and international political landscape because of the advent of the very liberating and democratic World Wide Web.

And Fox News and its visionary creator Roger Ailes are relentlessly attacked by the same forces—not because Fox News reports the other side of the story, but because it showed that the other side of the story reflects the point of view of more people than CNN.

The constellation of AM talk radio, the Internet (Drudge Report, plus countless bloggers), and Fox News represent the successful, ~~better-late-than-never~~ counterattack against the left's unchallenged control of the culture of a center-right nation. And this counterattack needs field generals, platoon leaders, and foot soldiers ready to storm every hill on the battlefield. To not yield an inch of ground to the ruthless, relentless, shameless enemy we face.

I volunteered to fight in this war. I have risen through the ranks and now find myself on the front lines with an army of New Media warriors following me into the fray. It is no longer a choice to fight. I am *compelled* to fight. The election of Barack Obama, facilitated by the Democrat-Media Complex that was aligned to usher him into his “rightful and deserved” place in the Oval Office, was the tipping point for my full and unyielding commitment to this war. Why? Because I saw early on that his was literally a made-for-television candidacy.

I knew the fix was in when Oprah Winfrey featured Obama twice on her mega-influential daytime show. One appearance on *Oprah* is enough to make a person a household name. This former state senator and “community organizer” was being given the star treatment as a junior senator from Illinois. For a Democratic Party plagued with sad clown Al Gore in the 2000 election cycle and the ghoulish John Kerry in 2004, charm, youth, and charisma were the obvious components that the next Democratic presidential candidate needed to have.

On the most superficial media level, Barack Obama was a godsend.

Plus he was black. For better, America needed to elect a black president. And the party that elected him or her would forever be granted that historical credit. But also, any criticism of Obama, with his thin résumé and shadowy past, could be framed by a like-minded media class as racism, cowering dissent.

A lifetime of work putting together a media and cultural system to affirm liberal narratives granted Obama a megacatapult to launch him in a way that no Republican or conservative could ever experience.

With the press, the unions, academia, and Hollywood behind Barack Obama, and the American people wanting to get the race monkey off their backs, the Obama presidency was a *fait accompli*—even if no one really knew anything about him.

My assessment didn't make me popular where I live and raise my young family. Angelenos, especially of the West Los Angeles variety, especially those who work in the entertainment industry, don't take too kindly to dissent—if you are a conservative, that is.

But I was right.

Sure, then-Senator Obama was good-looking—and sleek!—and possessed an undeniable gift for effortless, meaningless gab. But all I could think about was how uninteresting he sounded. With all his power and that massive artificial smile, I couldn't envision wanting to have a beer with him. This was a power-hungry man who rose through the political ranks in corrupt Chicago and through the corrupt ranks of modern academia.

Without having held a real job, without a personal narrative of fulfilling the American Dream in the private sector—without having really *done* anything (achieving greatness only within the confines of political power doesn't cut it)—this man was selling the government, not the individual, as the be-all and end-all. This man was preprogrammed, and I knew what he was selling.

I knew I had to stop him. And the Internet was my battlefield of choice.

I live on the battlefield.

So, here I am. On a United Airlines Boeing 757, 35,000 feet above sea level sans Internet connection, U.S. airspace—my name is Andrew, and I am an Internet addict.

At this point in my 24/7 digital-Wi-Fi life—and, for better or worse, that’s what it has been since 1995—I must force myself to the mountains, to the jungle, to the middle of the sea, or to an airline that has yet to install in-flight wireless Internet in order to contemplate life and communicate in a nondigital mode.

And I must do so because I *have* to write this book. I feel it is a moral imperative and a patriotic duty.

It isn’t easy. With the thought that I must go off the grid for hours and days on end, my sleep pattern is affected. The waking hours are worse. Old school: there’s no other way to write a book. I’ve watched enough *Oprah* to recognize I must confess something big, embrace my inner victim to get prime network airtime. So bear with me. It all ties in.

I can only write books when truly compelled. The last time I wrote a book (cowrote, actually—*Hollywood, Interrupted*, with Mark Ebner), I had something that needed to be written. This book marks the first time since 2004 that I’ve felt compelled to communicate a set of ideas that couldn’t be related on Twitter or Facebook, on a blog, in a chat room, with AOL Instant Messenger, via Skype, or on Blog Talk Radio.

It’s almost unbearable. The Internet jones I’ve acquired feels like what I hear heroin or cigarette addiction is like. If I wanted it cured, I don’t think I would or could. It’s what I do. It’s now who I am. The flights between Los Angeles and New York and Washington, DC, are especially excruciating. The temporary withdrawals are something fierce. Acute boredom, something the Internet long ago cured, comes back in multiple dimensions. Episodic television, something I grew up on, now angers me. Why? Because I can’t control it. I want to go to the menu and delete the laugh track. The plots are plodding. It’s all so 1985. Reality TV comes closer to what I want. But I need to *be* Mark Burnett and Simon Cowell, not to live vicariously through them and the worlds they are creating. The best I can hope for in this Brave New Wired World is that in the future the Andrew Breitbart Center for Internet Addiction can help future generations of digital-heads.

For now, I embrace the sickness because it reaps great rewards. In the few dimensions in which I reside, my life could not be better. The war for the soul of a nation, and perhaps the world, is being fought in the New Media. And I am right in the middle of it. My “Big” Internet sites hit the ground running and are breaking the types of stories that major newspapers and networks broke in the past.

As long as I’m in confession mode, I’ll admit I am also addicted to breaking news stories—big, medium, and small. I don’t care whether you call me a journalist, a reporter, a muckraker, or a rabble-rouser, just give me the goods. Let’s get the story out there.

There is no greater high than watching cable news or listening to talk radio and seeing stories that five minutes before were in Microsoft Word format now playing themselves out, sometimes with major consequence, on the world stage.

My dual afflictions—addiction to the Internet and addiction to breaking stories—together constitute a New Media addiction. And as a New Media addict I am both junkie and supplier.

Big Hollywood contributor Patrick Courrielche, a brave Hollywood-based artist and media entrepreneur whose name and heroics will play out later in the book, broke the White House/National Endowment for the Arts scandal that led to a top NEA employee’s resignation. After things started to settle down, Patrick and I shared words about the fact that circumventing Old Media by using New Media, forcing them to cover the story and to shape, control, and even change narratives, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I felt like a New Media Sherpa. I took Patrick to the plateau and he saw what could be done. He continues to search for the next Big story. It will come. I know it. Patrick is but one in a growing stable of Big contributors to my Big group blog sites—sites that you’ll find out about later in this book—that are tapping into a renaissance of investigative journalism and participatory democracy.

The adrenaline that fuels my psyche is almost always in an optimal state. The excitement of the battle, the victories—they’re piling up. The enemy is not used to being attacked at foundational level. With every online victory, new recruits are joining the army. Things are too good right now to worry about something so trite as whether I’m frying my cerebral cortex.

The Internet has changed and is changing everything—including the way my brain works. Am I the only one? For this radical rewiring of everything there are pros and cons. Many industries are failing—newspapers, most obviously. But Knight Ridder and McClatchy’s loss is James O’Keefe’s, Hannah Giles’s, Matt Drudge’s, Jim Robinson’s (Free Republic), Lucianne Goldberg’s, Arianna Huffington’s and Andrew Breitbart’s gain.

If the newspapers weren’t so close to the situation, and the implosion of the Old Media didn’t involve the livelihoods of those covering the revolution, reporters and journalists would recognize the moment as the beginning of a massive global information awakening.

These are big times. The expansion of freedom in the digital world will lead to the expansion of freedom in the real world.

The people of the United States, with its First Amendment, are leading the way in combining free speech and technology. Just as Western rock and roll helped bring down the Eastern Bloc in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Internet is going to provide a similar impetus to the people of the world to grasp the possibilities of freedom.

In the entire history of the world, these are the most exciting times to live in.

If the political left weren’t so joyless, humorless, intrusive, taxing, overtaxing, anarchistic, controlling, rudderless, chaos-prone, pedantic, unrealistic, hypocritical, clueless, politically correct, angry, cruel, sanctimonious, retributive, redistributive, intolerant—and if the political left weren’t hell-bent on expansion of said unpleasantness into all aspects of my family’s life—the truth is, I would not be in your life.

If the Democratic Party were run by Joe Lieberman and Evan Bayh, if it had the slightest vestige of JFK and Henry “Scoop” Jackson, I wouldn’t be on the political map.

If the American media were run by biased but not evil Tim Russerts and David Brinkleys, I wouldn’t have joined the fight.

Except for about 3,213 people (friends, family, and former acquaintances), you would not know who I am.

You would not be reading this book—because I would not have written it.

If the college campus weren’t filled with tenured professors like 9/11 apologist Ward Churchill and bullshit departments like Queer Studies, and if the academic framework weren’t being planned out by domestic terrorists like Bill Ayers, I wouldn’t be expanding my Internet media empire to include Big Education.

If art wasn’t almost exclusively defined by degradation of cultural norms—unless when promoting an all-knowing “HOPE”-ful leftist leader, I wouldn’t be spraying my Jackson Pollock political/cultural musings on the American New Media cultural canvas.

If America’s pop-cultural ambassadors like Alec Baldwin and Janeane Garofalo didn’t come back

from their foreign trips to tell us how much they hate us, if my pay cable didn't highlight a comedy show every week that called me a racist for embracing constitutional principles and limited government, I wouldn't be at Tea Parties screaming my love for this great, charitable, and benevolent country.

The left made me do it! I swear!

I am a reluctant cultural warrior.

Lost in the Complex

Like millions of others of my (graying) generation, I spent my adolescence as a pop-culture-infused, wannabe hipster and mindless consumer. I was the ultimate Generation X slacker, not particularly political, and, in retrospect, a default liberal. I thought that going to four movies a week, knowing the network television grid, and spending hours at Tower Records were my American birthright. As a middle-class kid growing up in upper-middle-class Brentwood, my parents went overboard to provide me the highest standard of living. And I took advantage of their overwhelming generosity.

Brentwood is a high-end subsection of Los Angeles. While Brentwood holds a mythic place in the consciousness of the American people as *the* upscale suburb filled with celebrities and the wealthy, the Brentwood I grew up in was more like the neighborhood from *E.T.* or *The Brady Bunch*. Even though it was very much a keep-up-with-the-Joneses enclave, my parents seemed oblivious to all that. When the first sushi restaurant popped up in our neighborhood in the early 1980s, we had meat loaf that night.

I knew that Gerry and Arlene Breitbart, my parents, were Republicans only because when they would come back from Mount St. Mary's College, their local polling place, I would pry the information from them. I remember finding out that they voted for Ford in 1976, Bush in the 1980 Republican primaries against Reagan, and Reagan both times in the 1980 and 1984 national elections.

But at the same time, they never talked about their politics. They came from the Silent Generation. My mother existed as a perfect exemplar of that generation, as though she were destined to be a grandmother from birth. She spoke in aphorisms like "Children should be seen and not heard" and "Don't talk politics or religion at the dinner table." Whenever any form of contention arose at our dinner table, she'd awkwardly interject a non sequitur: "Your aunt Ethel makes the most perfect rhubarb pie!" I swear. Rhubarb pie.

My parents didn't speak their politics; they acted on them. Their attitudes toward the people around them living the Hollywood liberal lifestyle were grounded in a reality and a normalcy and a decency. My father ran a restaurant in Santa Monica; my mom worked at a bank. I would often ask my father, "Which famous people come into the restaurant?" For some odd, infuriating reason, he would always say, "All of my customers are the same. I don't care about those things." And he meant it. I would later force my mother to tell me that the Reagans and Broderick Crawford and Shirley Jones and the Cassidy family, among many, many others, were regulars at the English-style steakhouse called the Fox and Hounds. Not only did my father *not* put these people on a pedestal, but fifteen hours a day, seven days a week, he treated all his customers and employees as individuals and as human beings.

I've always felt that people reveal themselves in their vacation choices, a belief probably stemming from my childhood. While many of my friends' parents were gallivanting off to Europe and leaving their kids at home—for some reason, my parents considered this a form of child abuse—my parents opted to buy a thirty-three-foot motor home, the Executive, and took my sister and me on a

formative cross-country trip that I daydream about even now. It was my first real taste of the America that I defend to this day. My dad seemed like another human being on the road, and he engaged with every possible stranger he could—he even changed his Chicago Jewish accent and developed a twang as we entered the Wild West. It was so clear how much he liked people. When people wonder why I will talk to a lamppost, I point to my dad.

My parents granted me a brilliant middle-class life, one that didn't overwhelm and lavish spoils on me to the point of absurdity. The house was not filled with objects or celebrities that would cause my friends to envy me, wish they could live at my house, or hang out with our social circle. My parents were also about fifteen years older than some of my friends' parents, so while my mother was watching Lawrence Welk on television on Saturday nights, one of my friends' dads rented a limousine so he could hit the Rod Stewart and Bryan Ferry concerts in the same night. While my parents' house had a pool and four bedrooms and a scenic canyon view of West Los Angeles, it couldn't compete with the beachfront Malibu property that two of my friends at school occupied. And I'm ashamed to admit: those families existed in an ether that became growingly intoxicating to me.

Along with my friends' parents' elite addresses came original art, celebrity friends, and a very specific brand of liberal politics. Bobby Kennedy, to this crowd, did not just represent a political philosophy, but an aesthetic that started to lure me away from my parents' simple, grounded nature. That, and those pesky palpitations in my loins. Between the lure of a greater material life and my emerging sexual teen persona, my parents' chaste, safe haven became less and less appealing, other than as a place to catch some Zzzzs and get three free square meals. And in a gesture of trust, my parents granted me the independence to start becoming my own person. (I still cry myself to sleep wishing that they had fought harder to keep me in that protective cocoon!)

My lifestyle began to change as I hit puberty and high school. I recall those years as spent ignoring school as best as possible while spending weekends at the best beaches and private houses, behind gates and tall bushes. I took tennis lessons with Steve Morris, the top tennis pro in Malibu, the same guy who taught Farrah Fawcett, Bruce Jenner, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the entire tennis-playing Van Patten family (Joyce, Dick, Vince, Nels, and Jimmy). After one of those lessons, I vividly recall Schwarzenegger, before his ascent into megastardom, literally terrorizing me and my best friend, Larry Solov, by hitting ball after ball as hard as he could at us, to the point where we wailed in the corner and he cackled aloud. Yes, the Governator is one sadistic bastard. And, yes, I voted for him.

Another time, Farrah Fawcett asked me where Steve was. I led her on a fifteen-minute wild-goose chase looking for him just so I could hang out with her for a bit. I've never felt so cool, before or since.

But every time I came home from my tennis lessons or my elite private school or these exclusive beach houses, I would come home to the cold, stark reality that I was living someone else's lifestyle, not the one that my parents could afford or would have chosen for me. The closest my family got to the prestige of that world was that we once rented out our motor home to John Ritter from *Three's Company*. I bragged about it in school for weeks.

Then, the ultimate indignity. When I was sixteen years old, in order to keep up with my friends, I needed to supplement what my parents were willing to give me as an allowance. I needed to get a job.

Delivering pizza for Maria's was probably the greatest job I have ever had. During my last two years in high school, even during baseball and football season, after practice, I would make a small nightly fortune driving my dark gray Honda Prelude to some of the best real estate in America, to some of the most famous (and occasionally generous) people in the world. Listening to The Smiths while delivering a spinach calzone to Judge Reinhold in Westwood was bliss. I soon discovered that

having sixty or eighty tax-free dollars in my pocket after each shift only enhanced a growing sense of freedom, of independence. I thought I was becoming an adult. It was around this time that I met Mike.

You remember meeting these people as an adolescent. The ones who immediately intrigue you, who seem to intimate vast, unknown continents of knowledge and experience. Mike was one—a mysterious coworker two years my senior who went to school across town. Because we shared the same teenage passion for a very specific type of angst-driven British alt-rock—the The, New Order, The Jam, Paul Weller, The Style Council, Aztec Camera, Fun Boy Three, The Specials, The Cure, Depeche Mode—we became instant friends. He knew more about this brooding genre than even I did. But his greatest influence on me was his hyperinformed and deeply philosophical roots in left-wing politics.

Mike, like me, was working as a disinterested student, educating himself off curricula. Where I was self-taught by way of news media and pop culture, Mike was informed by the highbrow literary and philosophical tracts of obscure political philosophers. His vocal politics challenged the order that I had long taken for granted. After all, I had no problem with my life. In fact, I liked it a lot. But after years of going to concerts with Mike, and going to local coffee shops and visiting alternative bookstores with him, Mike, like a self-appointed mentor, adopted me as a project. And since I was an avowed C+ student and secretly felt I deserved Ds, Mike's intellectualism was the epitome of sexy to me. I not only started to read the works of Alan Watts and the ethereal musings of Richard Bach, I also delved into the *Utne Reader* and *LA Weekly*—both bastions of leftist thinking.

Needless to say, Mike was the exact opposite of my father. He was fascinating. He took the SATs for his friends at his high school. He even wrote papers for them. He got them into the best colleges. And where my father valued hard work above everything, Mike valued intellect above everything. My father had an innate moral compass; Mike had none. But his amoral righteousness was born of a contempt for the existing political and economic paradigms. Except for a self-made ethos of friendship, he reveled in being valueless.

Mike gave me a CliffsNotes version of the leftist point of view, a romanticized, James Dean-ish, moral-relativist, everything-is-pointless crash course on how thinking people should, in fact, think. I imbibed it without question. So when it came time for college, it was as if the professors in my freshman classes were speaking the exact same language he was. Through some form of osmosis, I considered myself a liberal. As a result, there would be no culture shock when I entered Tulane.

While skipping college was never a possibility, my decision-making process for choosing the right one was the exact opposite of all of my peers'. To quote the Red Hot Chili Peppers, I wanted to rock out with my cock out. After all, Mike had taught me that nothing mattered anyway. Might as well have fun in the meantime.

I put more effort into choosing the correct party school than I did into studying during my entire high-school career. And because I had older friends who went to state schools where beer bongs and the frat boy experience were as generic as it appears in the movies, I believed that I had to go to a higher place. I had to up the ante.

New Orleans.

There happens to be a school there called Tulane. When somebody said to me, "Oh, it's a respectable school"—bingo!

In one of the more popular college guidebooks, I recall Tulane described in terms of how many bars there were in the surrounding region. It said that you could go to a different bar every night

during your time at Tulane, and never repeat. That book was not lying. The first two weeks of Tulane reminded me of basic training scenes in films where the recruit doesn't seem like he is going to make it.

I thought I could drink when I came to Tulane. I had some hard-and-fast rules to prevent becoming an alcoholic, such as: don't drink during sunlight hours. By the end of my time at Tulane, I was going to bed so early in the morning and waking up so late in the afternoon that this rule was almost impossible to break. Thank God I wasn't developing a drinking problem.

Now, where I think I made a wrong turn was when I was taken under the wing of a very particular clique in my new fraternity, Delta Tau Delta. These guys were from the northeast tristate area: Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. And one from California—me. They wrongly assumed from the film portrayal of high-school life in the Hollywood of the 1980s (think *Less Than Zero*) that I was a hard-living, cocaine-fueled man of a thousand lovers.

Perhaps I led them on.

Because in no time, I was.

Any standards I had retained to this point, as well as that little thing I called my virginity, became objects in the rearview mirror very quickly. Not only were my new friends decadent, funny, and sick bastards, there was nothing resembling an adult authority figure in that godforsaken town. Moderation is just not in that city's DNA.

On a Tuesday night, for instance, one could find himself at a drinking establishment by the name F & M on Tchoupitoulas Street, dancing atop a pool table with twenty other denizens of New Orleans—black, white, and Creole; young, middle-aged, and old. Stumbling out of the bar, ready to head on to the next one, a police officer in uniform would stop anyone leaving with a bottle of beer—not to admonish the reveler but rather to helpfully remind him that he must transfer his beer into a plastic “Geaux cup.” I shamefully recall getting behind the wheel of my car with such a Geaux cup, lifting up the beer and giving an officer a cheer as I drove away, off to the Rendon Inn. Even the law enforcement in New Orleans reinforced the 24/7 debauchery.

Truth be told, I was at first horrified by the behavior around me. I do recall at one point musing about my choice of college, “This might've been a significant mistake.” But because I had my first serious girlfriend on campus, leaving was not an option.

So I distinctly chose to do as the Romans did.

With the passing of every drunken and debauched week, I could feel the acute sense of right and wrong that had been bestowed upon me by my parents fading further away. I started to see things in shades of gray. And the courses that I was supposedly taking, mostly in the Humanities department, seemed to jibe perfectly with this new outlook.

One day, I went to my campus mailbox and found a letter that informed me that I was months late in declaring my major. I had been avoiding the decision because not one professor or one class had sufficiently moved me like the young prep school stallions in *Dead Poets Society* had been. I would have been happy with Rodney Dangerfield from *Back to School*.

But no such luck. So as I walked out of the student union with that letter in hand, I marched up to an attractive group of blonde coeds with whom I was socially familiar. Part to make them laugh and part to finally make up my mind, I told them that by the end of our conversation, they would decide my major for me. After less than five minutes of discussing my academic interests or lack thereof, we decided upon American Studies. What a stud, huh?

The virtue of the ambiguous American Studies degree for a creative loafer like me was that it was both an interdisciplinary and an interdepartmental major. I recognized that I could play the different

department heads off of each other. To my English professors, I could say, “English is not my strong suit.” I also found out that this same tactic worked in the History and Philosophy departments as well.

American Studies etched my wayward trajectory in stone—it ensured I would accomplish nothing in the next few years. The visits back to my Los Angeles reality for Christmas and summer breaks became intrusions into my consciousness. I was becoming a dissolute Southern literary figure without the depth, character development, or literary output.

At this point, I was living in two worlds: my LA world and my New Orleans world. My LA friends and my New Orleans friends. My daytime, my nighttime. When I wasn’t busy loving my new life, I was horrified and self-loathing. There were only highs and lows. There were no mediums.

Around the beginning of my sophomore year, I made yet another excellent lifestyle choice and moved across the way from one of the country’s most notorious college bookies. So while my roommates were betting \$50 and \$100 per game on college football games on Saturday and pro games on Sunday (and of course, *Monday Night Football*), I opted to live vicariously through their wins and losses... for a while. And by “a while” I mean about a month.

I started to dabble in \$20 bets. There was no pizza delivery route in New Orleans. So my money, at this point, was the \$300 monthly stipend my parents were giving me. But as the cliché goes, that \$200 wasn’t enough action, and so I started getting into the \$50 and \$100 bets. I started gambling on backgammon, too (I’m not a bad player). This became another means of blowing money that I wasn’t earning. But thank God for my accelerating drinking problem—it cut down on the time I had to gamble.

My sleep patterns became so irregular that I started to resemble the characters in Anne Rice’s New Orleans-based works. The funny thing about sleeping—and this holds true to this day—is that as I would drift into sleep, that’s when the harrowing reminders of what my life had become would visit me. I knew that, at some point, I would have to do an about-face, to change everything. But I didn’t know how, and to be honest, the cons of this lifestyle had yet to outweigh the pros.

My favorite pastime during this four-year phase was to lure my high-school friends down to New Orleans for a weekend, preferably Mardi Gras or Halloween. During those two-to three-day forays, I would afford them the trip of a lifetime, showing them things that they couldn’t imagine, bewildering them with the euphoria of the 24/7 surreal New Orleans lifestyle. During these benders, I would try to convince myself I was having fun, too. But when I would take them to the airport to send them off, where they would thank me for the most spectacularly wild weekend of their lives, as they got on the plane, I’d feel the deepest despair. And under my breath, I’d say, “Take me with you.”

Did I mention that I liked a lot of the people that I was at school with? Some were funny. A couple of the ladies even let me be inside of them. So don’t get me wrong. My time was not completely misused. It just wasn’t productive in any way, shape, or form. And at heart, I knew it.

At one critical point in my sophomore year, I went to the head of my department to explain that I was in over my head, and to make matters worse, I had just been dumped by my girlfriend. And she, one of the only ostensible adults in my life in New Orleans, suggested that I take a semester off and go drop acid in New York. She really said that.

Good idea, Teach! So I went.

You don’t need to hear about it—you can guess. I came back from a semester in New York, where I spent \$23,500 that I had inherited from a great-aunt I didn’t really know... on nothing. Not to wax too philosophical, but beers in New York are twice as expensive as they are in New Orleans.

So with that valuable life lesson, I went back to New Orleans, \$23,500 poorer, entering what would have been my junior year with the number of credits an incoming sophomore would have.

Now, don't ask me how I did what came next. Even I don't know. But somehow, I made a commitment to myself to graduate with my class. I had no great epiphany. I did not have a transformation that one could see in a montage in a movie where I started to hit the books frantically. I just willed myself to do it. I think it was some atavistic self-preservation.

I needed to reach the finish line. I needed to get out of that place.

I also vowed to rid myself of this nasty little gambling habit—and attendant debt—I'd developed. The low point: taking my friend Scott into my walk-in closet, saying he could have whatever he wanted for fifty dollars. He took my leather jacket. So one day, I called my mother and divulged my bind. In an exceptionally calm manner, she gave me the stern maternal talking-to that I desperately needed. She then sent me a check to cover my debt. I paid it. And that was the last of my dealings with my bookie. Moms can do that to you.

By now, I knew that graduating was less about getting the degree than it was getting my release papers from New Orleans. Pushing myself through my credit quandary would take more than will—I would take finesse. I hadn't fulfilled my math requirement, mostly because it was the only course that had a mandatory attendance requirement. I had dropped it my first semester, my second semester, and my third semester. At the time, I remember thinking, *By the time I'm a senior, I'll have my act together, and I'll pay attention. I know I'll be a better student by my senior year.*

Yeah, right.

So the last semester, I had to take math. If my Humanities professors thought I was giving them short shrift, this poor Chinese grad student whose job it was to instill in me the basics of precalculus got no shrift. He went shriftless. Going into the final, my last week of class during senior year, I knew less than the day the class started. My test-taking strategy for this, my last test of my woeful college career, was figuring *I'm twenty-two years old. I've got to know more about this subject than the average fifteen-year-old high-school student.*

Wrong!

The test had twenty questions. As is customary, they required correct answers. And to make matters worse, apparently they wanted me to show my work. After a look through the twenty questions, I noticed that the first was the easiest, and each question was more difficult than the previous one, so that the last was the hardest. After I stared at question one for about fifteen minutes, hoping that I would be inspired, waiting for the math muse, I realized that today was not going to be my day.

I started to see my life passing before my eyes. I started to consider that maybe years of skating by recklessly expecting everything to work out, had been exactly the wrong approach to derivatives. It was a big moment for someone raised on—and among—the trusty happy endings of Hollywood. Apparently, I realized, sometimes it *doesn't* work out. Sometimes you have to *make* it work out. Which means: maybe values *do* matter. I took a deep breath, stood up, walked toward the teacher, as the rest of the class scribbled away—and asked that he join me outside the classroom.

I said, "Sir, I'm going to be frank with you here. I need to graduate. I have family and friends coming in from out of town tomorrow. We have reservations at Commander's Palace. Failing this class is not going to serve either of our needs. Now, the way I look at it, I'm not going into a career in science or math. I think we can agree upon that. I'm not asking for your answer right now. I just wanted to put this into your head. Perhaps you could see my flawed humanity and allow for me to move on with my life."

Even though English was not his first language, he got the message. I called the next day and he gave me a passing grade in the class (a C-, I believe). In the end, I graduated with just above a 2.0.

The next day, my parents and family friends, the Solovs, came to celebrate my graduation from Sodom and Gomorrah. At star chef Susan Spicer's Bayona restaurant (delicious!), my academic career was toasted.

Joanne Solov, my friend Larry's mother, asked me, "So what are you going to do now that you've graduated?"

With utter sincerity, I told the table, "Well, over the next year, I'm going to start trying to wake up before noon."

The next day was my flight back to Los Angeles, a Delta Airlines nonstop. And back then, they used to give a complimentary *USA Today*. I remember this because the above-the-fold headline was "Graduates Entering Worst Economy In Decade."

Terrific!

Thankfully, with this American Studies degree, I knew I would have a competitive edge.

As the plane took off, I envisioned myself, like the protagonist in a big-budget Simpson/Bruckheimer film, walking away from an exploding cityscape and not looking backward, not even for a second.

From the earliest age, I had always had a profound sense of right and wrong. During college, however, I saw the world through the prism of moral relativism and grays, and my own personal standards simply went away somewhere. Okay, fair enough. I was young. But now, I needed them back. I didn't consider this political, nor did I see this as theological. It just was my internal voice telling me I had to straighten up. Who knows where it came from—my parents, my solid upbringing, I'd guess. Perhaps coming back to Los Angeles, where my family and friends lived, I felt that I needed to return to the Andrew Breitbart that these people expected.

In addition to that, my parents did what they probably should have done as I entered college: they cut me off financially. It's hard to explain to the average person what upper-middle-class entitlement feels like, because when you no longer have it and you recognize how pathetic it is, it becomes a point of embarrassment. My work ethic in high school provided me goodies, the extras of life. Now I needed money to live. So I got a job waiting tables at Hal's in Venice.

When I got my first paycheck, when I got my first day's worth of tips while waiting at Hal's, and had to apply that to rent, to shoes, to rice, to the basic necessities of life, I was in shock. How on God's green earth did everybody do this?

But buying my first pair of shoes with my own money was an Emersonian epiphany. That was one of the first baby steps toward embracing adulthood and maturity, something that being on the easy parental dole could never provide. I felt like Andrew Carnegie in those shoes.

A second step toward self-actualization was the experience of waiting tables on friends from high school and college who happened in on my lowly afternoon wait shift. Twice, friends asked me with a look of great worry on their faces, "Why are you doing this?" The peer pressure that had defined so much of my high-school years in Brentwood and the mostly wealthy clique that I spent time with at Tulane meant that if I joined the club, I would be a member of the elite. To fall outside of the boundaries of that upper-middle-classness wasn't merely unacceptable; it simply wasn't an option. And here I was, waiting on my former peers hand and foot.

I'd spent many years in Brentwood and at Tulane scoffing at my friends who fretted about their futures. Now here I was, watching those same people in law school, medical school, or working in jobs in buildings that I didn't even know how to enter. Nothing like a dose of complete humiliation to

make you realize how completely full of shit you are.

But strangely, it felt good. I knew the only place to go was up.

Instead of being deflated by the realization that my friends had the answers and had figured out how to get respectable jobs right out of college, I was just happy with the expectation that somebody was waiting for me to do a job. *Baby steps*, I told myself. My years in New Orleans began to appear more and more ludicrous to me. I'd thought I was some sort of standard-bearer, stumbling home at daylight every morning. It felt significantly less maverick to be informing my childhood friends what the soup of the day was. I was beginning to understand that my self-worth was in direct proportion to how hard I applied myself to productive pursuits. My values were returning from exile.

Even as I was discovering the fulfillment I could derive from hard work, I was still a default liberal. Around this time, I watched the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings with the alacrity of a boxing fan at the Ali-Frazier fight. It was a major media event and a political heavyweight match. The way that the media had billed it, the Rocky Balboa was Anita Hill. She was the protagonist. The only people in Clarence Thomas's corner were members of the Republican Party. And to me, they were the scolds, the hypocrites, the town elders in *Footloose*, the people who represented the people who would give over their hard-earned money to Jim and Tammy Bakker in exchange for eternal salvation. My perspective on the political process was an inch deep. But my desire to see Clarence Thomas's blood was immense.

So when the opening bell rang, I was expecting Hill to deliver a relentless barrage of accusations and evidence about a man whose behavior around women was professionally unacceptable. I expected lurid details of intimidation, coercion, and harassment. But Hill and her allies described a workplace and a boss-employee relationship that seemed utterly unremarkable. To listen to the media commentators affirm the outrage of Democratic female harpies, parroting the overwrought cries of Anita as channeled by this driven core of Democratic officials, was infuriating—it was so obviously unjust. (Leading the questioning, by the way: Senators Howard Metzenbaum, Pat Leahy, Joe Biden, and Teddy Kennedy.)

Now I may have been a Democrat. I may have been a liberal. But I was not stupid. Something was very wrong here. The melodrama did not come close to matching the lack of evidence that was being presented. They were accusing Thomas of spotting a pubic hair on a soda can, of asking Hill on a date. There was no “there” there. It was ridiculous.

I was perfectly aware at the time that the Democrats were motivated by the abortion issue. And at the time, I was pro-choice. So when Thomas's inquisitors pierced the sanctity of the “right to privacy” that is the hallmark of left-wing constitutional rights, flaunting that they had discovered through illicit means that Thomas had rented pornography, my mental anguish turned physical. I writhed in agony and actually threw a shoe at the television set.

At the same time, it was impossible for me to not recognize that Clarence Thomas's being black was part of the story. How in hell could white Americans Leahy, Biden, and Metzenbaum, let alone former KKK grand pooh-bah Robert Byrd and Chappaquiddick's very own Ted Kennedy, so arrogantly excoriate this man whose personal narrative from sharecropper's grandson to Supreme Court nominee embodied the American dream? A narrative that would send a clear signal to African-Americans that anything is possible in this country? Why were so many white Democrats in the media and in the political class working in concert to assassinate this man's character and to stop that dream in its tracks?

During this media feeding frenzy my eyes were opened, perhaps for the first time, to the fact that something was awry in American political and media life. What secret bit did Kennedy and Biden know about the NAACP, ABC, NBC, and CBS that they could grill a black man on such weak charges and know that those politically correct entities would not savage them? If the tables were turned and Clarence Thomas were a liberal Democrat, the NAACP wouldn't have waited a second. Somehow, these white male senators of privilege knew that they could get away with it.

My sympathy for Thomas was utter and complete. I wanted to stop the hearings. I wanted him to be issued public, formal apologies. I naïvely expected that the press would do the job of forcing those apologies. I could understand how the mainstream media could accept Anita Hill and Congresswoman Pat Schroeder at their word. But even if the accusations were true, they amounted to nothing. Certainly a hell of a lot less than what Senator Kennedy likely did to his female staff on any given Washington workday. This was, as Clarence Thomas perfectly stated, an electronic lynching.

And the media aided and abetted it.

Please note that I did not leave the Clarence Thomas hearings a Republican. I did not leave the hearings an originalist. But I did leave the hearings deeply cynical of media that I had thought were neutral and a Democratic Party that I'd believed was guided by principle. This was the beginning of the end of the self-deception that I was like everyone else around me. It would take a few more years to get there—to discover that I was a conservative—but this was the exact point where I realized that it was not just that I disagreed with the Democratic Party but, more important, that the media were its dominant partner in crime. The national disgrace that was the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, for me, changed everything.

This is not the point in the story where we cue the montage of success.

Based on the available evidence—that the only tangible skill set I had was that I could make people laugh, and that I was in Los Angeles—I took the first available job in Hollywood with the hope that I'd eventually become a comedy writer.

Hollywood is anything but a meritocracy. So I thought I'd try to leverage some old friends to insert myself into the world that was the backdrop of my childhood. Through a friend, I got a runner position at a low-budget movie production company in Santa Monica. Over a period of a year, I put 22,000 miles on the Saab convertible that I'd bought when I graduated college. Its quality was a constant and painful reminder that I hadn't earned the money for it, but in the exceptionally shallow town that is Hollywood, my boss took an immediate liking to me based on his false perception that I was of his status. With the \$230 that he was paying me per week, I couldn't afford my own car payments, let alone running around with his Hollywood crowd. But I learned that that was exactly what I had to do in order to get ahead in that business.

For a year I delivered scripts around town, entering every single Hollywood office of note, including Michael Ovitz's, Jeffrey Katzenberg's, and Michael Eisner's. It wasn't long before I saw clearly what made Hollywood run. I realized that the town was about relationships, about ass-kissing, about groupthink, about looking over the shoulder of the person you're having a conversation with to see if there's somebody more important in the room that you should be speaking to. I just as quickly realized that this was not my world. I had spent the last four years of my life in college subordinating myself to a system that ran against my better instincts. I was not going to make that mistake again.

So while the producer was incentivizing me to become production staff—he even gave me control over a project, *Valley Girl 2* (thank God that was never made)—I did everything in my power to stay

in my car doing the lowly runner job because I didn't want to get sucked in further.

And in my car was AM radio.

My habit came about accidentally. My devotion to KROQ FM and San Diego's 91X, trailblazing alternative rock stations, began to fade with the invasion of the grunge rock movement. Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains, Mudhoney, Blind Melon, Screaming Trees were replacing The Cure, New Order, The English Beat, Echo and the Bunnymen. It was like watching your youth get cancelled. And my hatred of grunge was visceral. The forced thrift-shop flannel look belied Los Angeles's temperate weather. Who were these whiny, suicidal freaks? I didn't want to know, I just wanted them off my car radio.

So in an act of absolute and pure desperation, I flipped the dial to AM.

As a social animal, I abhor sitting in a room by myself. I love the exchange of ideas. And in listening to talk radio, there was an artificial sensation that I was part of a conversation. I quickly discovered that I would do anything to listen to talk radio. When I would deliver a script out in Burbank at Disney Studios, I developed a technique where I could put an AM Sports Walkman on my ears in my car while I was listening to the radio, so that when I got out of the car to do my five- to ten-minute delivery, I could remain part of the conversation. I went out of my way to avoid underground parking. I even started jogging because it gave me an excuse to listen more. I listened to so much talk radio I was actually able to run in the 1994 Los Angeles Marathon. Four hours, for those wondering.

My first forays into embracing a specific host were Jim Rome and Howard Stern. Both of them clearly used humor and strong opinion to engage their listeners. But it was during the 1992 election cycle that so much of the conversation on the AM dial was built around politics.

In 1992, I certainly still considered myself a Democrat. Jerry Brown was my candidate in the primaries, and he really hooked me on his criticism of Gov. William Jefferson Clinton of Arkansas. People talk about the vast right-wing conspiracy being the origins of anti-Clinton rhetoric. But Brown's campaign was the prototype. He was talking Whitewater and pointing to the fact that this was a typical Arkansas Democratic machine, a political force, not a political reformer. I had experienced the colorful yet corrupt politics of Louisiana for four years—including the proudly corrupt politics of Gov. Edwin Edwards—so putting the chief executive of Arkansas, a state with a similar MO, in charge seemed to me an unwise choice.

While working at this Roger Corman-esque production company, I was getting quite serious with my now wife, Susie. Not only was I working in Hollywood, I was dating the daughter of Orson Bean, an actor, comedian, and raconteur. Spending time at his house on the Venice canals (which to this day I still call Dennis Kucinich Bumper Sticker Country—where Clinton, Kerry, and Obama aren't left enough), I perused his bookshelves. Not only was I attracted to Susie, I was attracted to Orson's wit and depth of knowledge of *everything*. This guy had appeared on the *Tonight Show* couch seventhmost of any guest. His opinion mattered to me.

One day I asked him why he had Rush Limbaugh's book *The Way Things Ought to Be* on his shelf. I asked him, "Why would you have a book by this guy?"

And Orson said, "Have you ever listened to him?"

I said yes, of course, even though I never had. I was convinced to the core of my being that Rush Limbaugh was a Nazi, anti-black, anti-Jewish, and anti—all things decent. Without berating me for disagreeing with him, Orson simply suggested that I listen to him again.

While I was listening to Jim Rome and Howard Stern, the intensity of the 1992 election cycle warranted that I switch the frequency over to hearing about the horse race.

This is where my rendezvous with destiny begins.

I turned on KFI 640 AM to listen to evil personified from 9 a.m. to noon. Indeed, my goal was to derive pleasure from the degree of evil I found in Rush Limbaugh. I was looking forward to a jovial discussion with Orson to confirm how right I was. One hour turned into three. One listening session into a week's worth. And next thing I knew, I was starting to doubt my preprogrammed self. I was still a Democrat. I was still a liberal.

But after listening for months while putting thousands of miles on my car, I couldn't believe that I once thought this man was a Nazi or anything close. While I couldn't yet accept the premise that he was speaking my language, I marveled at how he could take a breaking news story and offer an entertaining and clear analysis that was like nothing I had ever seen on television, especially the Sunday morning shows, which had been my previous one-stop shop for my political opinions.

Most important, though, Limbaugh, like the professor I always wanted but never had the privilege to study under, created a vivid mental picture of the architecture of a world that I resided in but couldn't see completely: the Democrat-Media Complex. Embedded in Limbaugh's analysis of politics was always a tandem discussion on the media. Each segment relentlessly pointed to collusion between the media and the Democratic Party. If the Clarence Thomas hearings showed me that something was wrong, the ensuing years of listening to Limbaugh and Dennis Prager—who at the time was also undergoing a political transformation from the Democratic to the Republican Party—explained to me with eerie precision what exactly was wrong. I swallowed hard and conceded to Orson that he was right.

And so it began.

The default labels of liberal and Democrat—labels that were necessary cultural accessories in my Hollywood and Venice worlds—were becoming ill-fitting.

I still had a natural disdain for the religious right, which had been the ultimate 1980s-era bogeyman, so I was looking for some neutral ground while I tried to figure things out. If you met me in 1992, for some odd reason, I would have told you I was a libertarian, and I voted for Ross Perot. The only awkward memory that haunts me more is my roller-disco period.

While Professor Limbaugh provided me an understanding of the architecture of how politics and media relate, Professor Prager provided me articulation of the ethical framework my parents had lived out. I saw that my parents were fundamentally right and that those ecstatically exuberant and audaciously fun New Orleans years came at a great cost. I knew that I was estranged from my parents' belief system and that a permanently libertine lifestyle was no substitute for a clean conscience, work that felt satisfying, and a decent night's rest.

These revelations rendered certain aspects of my life uncomfortable. I was beginning to recognize that my ethical framework did not jibe in any way, shape, or form with the Hollywood world into which I had sought entry. I knew now why I had no desire to be promoted. I even remember trying to visualize where I would be in twenty years. I remember thinking, *I don't want an Oscar. I don't want an Emmy. And I don't want a Grammy. If you don't want to be the best at something, what's the point?*

I was also discovering through my boss's relationship with the Democratic Party that Hollywood, much like the media, was part of the same architecture that Rush Limbaugh described. This boss, who shall remain nameless, was not an inherently moral individual. Everything that he did—*everything*—was about business. His devotion to wining and dining top elected Democratic officials was no exception.

Meanwhile, for the first time, through my autodidactic cycle of talk radio and books, I began to

feel like an engaged adult. The homework that I abhorred in college—the dreary books, the nihilistic musings of dead critical theorists that had me embracing an anti-intellectual lifestyle—was being replaced by a new world of books and authors of whom I'd never heard.

My AM professors taught me to ask questions, to use the Socratic method. And I started to ask everyone around me some basic questions, but they didn't want to engage or couldn't engage in basic civil debate. The person that made this new pursuit of intellectual engagement invigorating and sexy was Camille Paglia. Her book, *Sexual Personae*, made me realize how little I really had learned in college. Her articles and assorted writings began to open my mind up to the fraud that is higher education in America. The origins of the problems in the media and in Hollywood begin in the sacrosanct, stultifyingly politically correct world of academia. It seemed to me that while Professor Limbaugh was focusing on the corrupt relationship between politics and the media and Professor Paglia was focusing on the corrupt relationship between politics and academia, I was beginning to hyperfocus, as we ADD types are apt to do, on the corrupt relationship between Hollywood and politics, and how academia, the media, and the political class conspicuously either ignore or denigrate all the ideas, authors, and voices that were now my lifeblood.

I was taking ownership of my own education. Words cannot describe the emancipation I felt to discard those confusing works and philosophers that my gut instinct had told me to reject. Nihilism, after all, is never a comforting companion. I had known it was garbage, but I felt that I couldn't tell a Harvard Ph.D. that I thought it was garbage. Surely my professors had known something I didn't. No, I was realizing that just wasn't true.

I guess it was inevitable that my relationship with my friend/high-IQ political guru, Mike, was bound for the rocks. Mike was someone else I had long believed must have known something I didn't. Around this time, Susie and I ran into him at Aron's Records in Hollywood one night. He was disoriented, confused, and incomprehensible. I followed him around the store trying to get his story before finally discovering that he was on mushrooms. This was when I recognized the distance that now separated us. What the hell is a grown man doing on a weeknight all by himself taking hallucinogenic drugs? I guess you can do that when you don't have a job.

Not long thereafter, when I would see Mike, I began to challenge him. I began to ask him questions. And I began to see that my Yoda was a bullshit artist, had been all along. That he wasn't *borrowing* my CDs to tape them; he was taking them to the record store to sell to buy drugs. His philosophy, his poses, his trite, utopian, disapproving pronouncements—they were just boring. I stopped calling him, actually avoided him. And one day I got a phone call from a mutual friend who said Mike had been found murdered.

To this day, I hold great guilt that I did not cry when I heard the news. I didn't step through the normal Kübler-Ross stages of grief. But in Mike's life and in his death, I have ascribed to him an importance—he is my reminder, my personal cautionary tale. Mike's arrogant, elitist approach toward conservatism was laziness covered in pseudo-intellectualism. If I hadn't gotten out of New Orleans, I would have been Mike. He was the bullet I dodged, in every sense.

The world that I was now inhabiting demanded thinking, because it demanded results. My paycheck was a result. Susie's happiness was a result. Sleeping eight hours when it was actually dark out was a result. Paying my bills was a result. And buying the shoes that I worked in was a symbol that I had come so far in such a short period of time. I was becoming what my father, through his actions, taught me to become. I was becoming self-reliant and—gulp!—I was starting to come to the difficult revelation that I was a conservative... with the concurrent revelation that I wanted out of Hollywood. I was no longer going to four movies a week. I was no longer laughing the laugh track.

One day, without giving notice, I just walked out the door of my job and never went back.

Not long after, I was driving eastbound on Wilshire Boulevard at around Centinela one evening. I was overcome with the frustration that came from three excruciating years of postcollegiate learning—of trial and error, of a political and philosophical transformation in which something remained missing. I was twenty-five years old, had walked out on my only career prospect, and I had no friggin' idea what I was going to do with the rest of my life.

I'm not the most religious guy. In fact, at the time, I considered myself an atheist. But that pent-up frustration caused me to say aloud, in my car, "Please, God, give me something to do that I'm passionate about. Please give me a mission."

Thank God for the Internet

I first heard of the Internet from a close high-school friend, Seth Jacobsen.

Over the years in prep school and college, my greatest coping mechanism was aligning myself with straitlaced, smart guys. Before a test I hadn't prepped for, they could always be relied upon to give up a quick view of their notes, which would push me into the C category. At the time, that was enough. Now here I was, after college, looking for the crib notes for life.

Seth was an Astrophysics major at Harvard (yes, he's that smart), and when I visited him for a brief weekend in 1989, I found out that some people actually studied at college. So when Seth came to my apartment in 1992 to tell me of a pending technological revolution, I was uniquely, perhaps pathetically, positioned to listen.

Seth said eight words to me that changed my life: "I've seen your future and it's the Internet."

I answered as any normal person would have in 1992. "What's the Internet?"

He started to explain to me what the Internet was, what HTML was, and why it was all a perfect fit for my ADHD. He made the World Wide Web sound like the Wild West in outer space, a romantic new frontier. I was fascinated. It was like I had just been shown the road map to my life. The only problem was that I had no idea how to read the map.

At that point, I had AOL and Prodigy and Compuserve. I was instinctively drawn toward these new services, even though I didn't know their endgame. But I knew I could get sports scores and make my own travel arrangements—basically, it just felt edgy and cool to be part of a medium where you could interact on a computer.

Around 1993, another friend, Dave White, lent me a copy of *Wired* magazine, which had just come onto the market. He had learned from *Wired* how to hook his computer up to the Internet, and he had started messing around with online groups like the Well. These were online communities, the precursors to chat groups. I was living below Dave in an apartment complex and working with my primitive technology, and I would visit Dave and watch his forays into the Internet's earliest incarnations and think to myself, *That's it. That's what Seth was talking about. And I'm eventually going to go there.*

In those days, it was complicated to get onto the Internet. The technology was so raw, the interface required programming knowledge to interact. It was the days when you had to type in "RUN" and operate the computer through MS-DOS. Compared to now, it was like using an abacus to do your tax forms.

But it was cool and exciting just the same. Seth had planted the seed, and I knew that for me, this was it. I'm only grateful now that I somehow realized it.

It wasn't until I was living in Austin, Texas, in 1994 (don't ask) that I finally sought out an Internet service provider (ISP) called Illuminati Online. Illuminati was somewhat famous at the time for a civil liberties case that it had fought and won. I tried to hook up to it, but had no luck—it was crazily complicated to try to get my computer to relate to my modem in order to connect to the Internet. The

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