

## Appendix: Guru Studies, Origin Stories and Aha Moments

I always say I'm an orphan, though I'm probably not. My dad is probably still alive, but I haven't seen him since I was a baby. So he's pretty much dead to me. My mom is proper dead. She died when I was 11 from a drug overdose. I was moved into a group home, and this would have been a very Kafka-esque experience but I hadn't read Kafka yet. So, it was just life. I'd been there for a few weeks. In group situations -- as with Zombie invasions -- movement is life, so I was about to do something that would set a pattern for the rest of my life: Run away. But I prefer to call it *escaping*.

I left one day and didn't go back. The weather was good and the county fair had just opened, so I decided to go hide out at the fairgrounds. Sort of, lay low, you know, until the heat blew over. I didn't have any money, but there was food everywhere. On tables, overflowing from trash bins, under the bleachers. Doughnuts, elephant ears, churros. I was living high on the hog.

I was also learning that it was difficult to run away in a very small town. So many people seemed to be staring at me, even though I was trying very hard to act naturally. I was pretty sure that my cover had been blown. I think everyone probably knew where I was and they were just waiting for me to learn a lesson. And the fair was closing soon. I figured my case worker would show up soon, maybe with the cops.

But I had decided that I wasn't going back. Not because it was such a bad place, but just because, you know. Just because. You have to draw a line, sometimes, or else you never learn the valuable lessons. This was a small wheat farming town, so jumping on a train was a very real option. But with no money things would get pretty bleak once I left town. Would I turn to a life of crime? So young? I put a bag of food together and stashed it away behind a stage. I was going to go all *Boxcar Children* on them. I saw no other alternative. I wasn't going back. It was ego, I guess.

I went to watch the Shriner's circus again. The Shriners are sort of the American Knights of the Templar; high ranking Freemasons who wear fezzes. They sponsored a circus as a fundraiser for their hospital programs. I was watching the circus, but with my eyes closed, because I'd already seen it about a dozen times. And I was just trying to think of some better option than learning a valuable lesson, but nothing came to mind. I remember sitting there listening to the force, mass, and acceleration of the circus, just thinking over and over 'somebody help me' 'somebody help me.'

This is where things get strange, because from behind me, I heard the voice of my best friend -- Jason -- say, 'come stay with me.' I thought this was very strange because I hadn't said anything out loud so how could he have known what I was thinking? Here things get even stranger, because I opened my eyes and turned around and there was nothing there except some random people giving me the 'what are you looking at face?'

Then I heard his voice again, as loudly as if he was talking into my ear, and he said, 'I'm at the corndog stand... come stay at my place.' So, I thought, 'oh great. Now I'm hearing voices.' I was only 11 but I had heard about that. But I guess I figured, madness or not, I may as well see this thing through, so I went to the corndog stand. And there was Jason and his parents; corn dogs in hand.

Looking back you'd think I would have been shocked by this, but at the time, I remember, it just seemed so natural. Like it was just the way things worked. His parents asked me a few questions: who are you here with? No one. Where are you living now? Here. And then Jason said, in the voice and words I had just heard, 'Come stay at my place.'

His parents said 'sure' and that they'd tell my case worker that I was with them. And I stayed with them for 5 years, until I turned 16 and emancipated myself with the state. I took a job as a volunteer firefighter cadet and moved into the fire station. But that's another story.

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When I turned 17 I joined the Marines. I took a test called the defense language aptitude battery that consisted of code breaking and pattern recognition and I scored highly and was offered a spot in intelligence. But I wasn't joining the Marines for a desk job, and so I turned down the offer and joined the infantry. Of the many many stupid things I've done, that may be the stupidest.

But the universe works in mysterious ways and that's about the only thing you can depend on. When I was a volunteer firefighter I had been trained as an EMT. and because of that, in the Marines I was called the witch doctor. It was 1998. We were stationed in the middle of nowhere, but I can't say where, because technically we were never there.

I remember being really cold, though it was hot out, and drinking Kool-aid out of a metal canteen cup that felt so metallic and so bitterly cold. A sergeant I barely knew came sprinting over to me. *Dean?* Yeah, why? *EMT?* Yes. *Come with me.* We sprinted 100 meters to where a guy was laying on the ground passed out not breathing. I knew him. We'd done some training together and he was one of the really good guys I'd met there. It turns out that a lot of people in the infantry were there because a judge gave them a choice to go to jail or join the Marines. The things you don't know until it's too late, right?

Anyway, this guy Robicieu, was a mama's boy from New Orleans, and once I listened to a surreal conversation borne out of sheer boredom about which squad member would be the best to eat, and Kyle Robicieu was the winner because of the way that his fat and muscle were perfectly marbled together. He was a great specimen of a man and a very sweet guy. And now I was looking at him lying there and everyone else was looking at me. What happened? *Don't know, just found him this way.* How long has he been here? *Hard to say.*

He wasn't breathing. His pulse was weak. So I said 'you better get him med-evac'ed' and started doing CPR while the sergeant called for a helicopter. While I was doing CPR, I said out loud, and for no obvious reason, 'what's wrong with you Kyle?' And then he said to me 'I'm choking on a candy.' He said it to me. As specifically and clearly as that. But he didn't say it out loud because he was choking to death.

So I said, 'he's choking on a candy.' And I sat him upright and started to Heimlich him. I've mentioned that he was a big hunk of man. So here the unstoppable force met the immovable object. He made a half gasp and then nothing. I kept going. I heard his ribs crack. I kept going. Everyone staring at me. This went on forever. And then a butterscotch candy shot out of his mouth. Like a bullet. So, for all of

my stupidity, my decision to join the infantry had saved Kyle Robiceau's life. And he was a man worth saving. But no good deed goes unpunished.

A Captain had arrived on the scene and watched everything go down. And he said to me, 'how'd you know he was choking?' And stupidly I said, I could hear him thinking it. *You could hear him thinking?* Yes sir, I can do that sometimes... And I learned something that day. I learned the value of keeping secrets. By the time the helicopter arrived, Kyle was recovered, aside from some cracked ribs, and you would have thought they called the helicopter in for me. The Captain wrote a note and gave it to the medics. He told me to get in and report for a psych evaluation. And I said, 'oh, no way, come on!' Well, that's disobeying an order and that's against the law in the Marines.

The funny thing about M-16 rifles is that the butt of the rifle is a piece of rubber made by the toy company Mattel. The word Mattel was stamped right there on the butt of the rifle. I always thought that was ironic. Well, this irony was about to smash me in the face, quite literally, as the Captain drove the butt of an M-16 into my chin. An unstoppable force. A very movable object.

In the helicopter, they put stitches in my chin, and my hands into handcuffs. Kyle was next to me. He's doing fine. But confused. I say I'm sorry about his ribs. It's cool. He's cool. He was a very sweet guy. The pilot had some tunes cranked really loud. It's something I hadn't heard before. It's a totally new sound. It's the best thing I've ever heard. I shout to the pilot, 'what are you listening to?' He shouts back, 'Nirvana.' I had seen their T-shirts, but never heard their music until now.

The universe works in mysterious ways and that's about the only thing you can really depend on. I had saved someone's life and I was being rewarded for it now. I was listening to *Smells Like Teen Spirit* for the first time. And it was good. Maybe I knew that in a few hours I would be accused of malingering, labelled as psychologically unfit for service, and go AWOL; running once again. Or maybe it was just the music. But as I lay there in handcuffs next to Kyle with his broken ribs, with stitches in my chin, a throbbing jaw, listening to Nirvana, I wanted that helicopter ride to last forever.

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In the Marines they say there are no ex-Marines, only former Marines. once a Marine, always a Marine. Well, I'm happy enough to be an ex-Marine. The few. The proud. The ex-Marines. Whatever you call it, I was finished with the Marines. But I wasn't finished with warzones.

I signed on as a UN peacekeeper in Kosovo in '99 just after the NATO bombings. I was based in a barbed wire enclosed refugee camp for Serbs and Gypsies built at the base of a coal burning power plant. Ironically, the camp was often without electricity. It was almost Christmas and the snow was literally black with soot. We were putting together a Christmas party for the kids and we needed a Christmas tree. And not a little Charlie Brown Christmas tree, but a big shiny one that really fit the modern spirit! But finding a Christmas tree in the Muslim ethnic Albanian territory was not exactly taking candy from a baby.

I had seen some pine trees near a lake a few months earlier. I don't know why I noticed them, but I vaguely recalled seeing them and I thought we should start there. So, I volunteered. And so did Sanda.

Now, Sanda was an old school punk from Croatia who turned me on to the band Jawbreaker. She had big eyes. Made chocolate cakes from scratch. And rolled her own cigarettes. Cool chick. Sounded like a party, so I grabbed an axe and checked the maps and charts on the wall while Sanda fired up the old Lada Niva with the UNiCeF stickers. Movement is life. Never is that more clear than when you're in a car putting distance between you and a refugee camp.

This was before GPS smartphones, so we were just going off of piss, vinegar, and instinct. Which works better than smartphones, sometimes. Because there was the lake and there were the trees. The access road by the lake was marked as safe. This matters because off the main road, landmines were a very real issue. So we hit the access road. The virgin snow getting deeper and deeper. The winds were strong and kicking up a blizzard of flurries. The Lada Niva was doing its thing... the windshield wipers cranked... the heater cranked... the tunes cranked... *You're not Punk, and I'm tellin' everyone...* And then Sanda stopped the car. She was always smarter than me. We might have drifted off the access road. Too much snow to tell where the road was. Only one thing to do. Get out and leg it. With the snow and ice we could possibly step on a landmine and not even know it. But the Lada Niva wouldn't be so lucky.

Now, every once in a while, it's my time to shine... And my moment was coming. It was my idea – and I want that on the record – that if we walked on the frozen lake – which was a solid sheet of ice – we wouldn't have to worry about the mines. We could cross straight to the patch of trees. Cut one down. Walk back across the lake. Back the car out along our tracks. And Bob's your uncle. Home in time for dinner. My genius idea worked, which is how you know it was genius. We found a tree. I cut it down. Damn! Look at Paul Bunyun over here. I'm too good! I'm a lumberjack and I'm OK. *Shining steel tempered in the fire...*

I am carrying a pine tree on my shoulder. An axe in the other hand. Across a frozen lake. To avoid the landmines. If ever once in my life I felt like a real man... It was these shining seconds. I hadn't yet considered that carrying a tree made me considerably heavier than I was when I crossed the lake without a tree... The blizzard was wooshing around us, in long sustained whooshes... whooooooosh... whooooooosh... We couldn't see more than 2 meters in front of us, and the wind had destroyed our foot prints. But, in theory, we were heading in the general direction of the car. But there was this other sound too, a sort of quicker splooshing sound. Sploosh, sploosh, sploosh. So Sanda stops. Damn it. She is *always* smarter than me. Yeah. It's coming from below us. We look down... Just some snow. I scrape away the snow with the head of my axe, and there's the ice, thin ice, about 1 cm thick, and below it, the water sloshing against it. Slosh, slosh, slosh.

You know how when people check over a car, for some reason, they like to kick the tires. Just to make sure it's not a hologram or something. Maybe they think, well, it's definitely a solid object, so... For some reason – I guess it was my manly instinct – I decided to just sort of – tap – the ice with the handle of the axe, just sort of gently, you know, -- tap – the ice. Just to make sure it's not a hologram... I don't know why I did it, but I know it was man instinct, because I did it completely without thinking. If I'd been thinking, I wouldn't have done it. That's how you know its man instinct. Just a little – tap – just to reassure myself that this ice could hold us...

And the handle of the axe passed through the ice like a sword through a lady at a magic show. Just melted through like a laser through butter. Thankfully, it did not open an entire chasm into what would surely have been a hypothermic drowning death. Because once we hit the water, the current would have moved us away from the hole in the ice and the edges of the hole – if we found it – would be too

fragile to climb out on. I have had 15 years to think about the physics and thermodynamics of this situation, and no, I would not like to take my chance on surviving that plunge. One step further and we probably would have gone straight in the drink. Of all the Charlie Brown's I know, I'm the Charlie Browniest... *One, two, three, four, who's punk what's the score?*

Better to take our chances with the landmines. Life's a gamble. Bet it all at one. Nothing to do but backward. Our tracks already obliterated. Just go what feels backward. Instincts, right? So just keep moving. Movement is life. Backward is better than freezing to death on a frozen lake in a blizzard. And you can't get there from here. Every now and then I'd scrape the snow away to see if we were standing on ice or ground. Gently. It was ground. It was a scary situation, but we're giggling the whole time like we're drunk. It's Kosovo in 1999. It's what you make of it.

We're no longer on the lake but God knows where the car is. I'm still carrying a Christmas tree like its a life support machine. I'll be damned if somebody's going to be left behind. The idea now is just to get to the main road and then find the access road. Follow the car tracks to the car. Then back up along the tracks. And Bob's your uncle. it's gonna be the *Best Christmas Pageant Ever*.

We found a marker which gave us our location, but I had no idea where the mines were. I hadn't looked at this part of the mine chart, which was, rather inconveniently tacked to the wall behind Bobby's desk. No cell phone signal. We had a radio which was allegedly connected to K-FOR the NATO force... but we never got it to work. We just carried it to intimidate locals who threatened us. Sanda was trying to get the radio to work.. I'm not even sure if the battery was charged.

She's doing that, I just start thinking to myself. *Where are the landmines? Searching my memory? Maybe I have a photographic memory... Where are the landmines? Think!* By this point in my life, I sometimes tried to use telepathy, because... can't hurt. I was thinking, *Bobby, look at the landmine chart. Look at the landmine chart.* We stand there for some time, Sanda and I. Her with her broken radio and me with my mental radio. *Bobby. Just look at the goddam chart. Turn around and look at the goddam chart.* All I know at that time is that we're not moving, and we haven't moved in a while, and frostbite is setting in. But I have a sudden feeling of clarity. I know where we are. I know where the mines are. And I know which way we need to go... So, I lie to Sanda and I say, Okay. I remember, I lied. I studied the chart, I lied. I remember, I lied. This way, I lied.

And so we navigated through, what we later determined to be, an active minefield. In retrospect, we did it as if we knew exactly where the mines were. We found the main road. The tree wasn't so much heavy as it was sharp. And I was starting to ache all over like I'd been pricked in the face and neck by a million needles. Acupuncture in a blizzard. Somewhere someone is probably paying good money for that right now... But that's not my thing. But we were home for dinner and it was the best Christmas party ever!

The strange part? Bobby said that while we were out he started worrying about us, and started wondering what the mine situation was like near the lake. He said he got up and turned around and studied the map for a good five minutes before thinking, 'ah... I'm sure they'll be fine if they stay on the access road.' I didn't look at my watch and neither did he. But it would have been around the same time. And as for me and Sanda... Well, I saw her in Paris a few years ago. We saw Mad Max Fury Road together. She lives in New York with her husband now. She just had a baby.