

GRAND SYNERGY



Evan Tyler

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By Evan Tyler



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For Emily and Cooper

"It's hard to get enough of something that almost works."

Vincent Felitti, M.D.

Following Instructions

I'm driving down Queen St. West in Toronto with my friend Marvin in his new white Lamborghini. I am empowered with a sense of bravado and swagger while Marvin is comfortably leaning back in the bucket seat beside me. He asks me to stop the car just before the Dufferin intersection, which is a very inconvenient place to stop a car, but I did it anyway because he seemed to be concealing some urgency. Marvin then hops out of the car, leans in and asks me to take care with my driving and instructs me to meet him at King and Church later that day. I drive away turning up the volume of some indistinguishable bland music that is playing. Marvin's trust in my ability to manoeuvre his luxury vehicle is one part flattering and one part frightening.

After driving around aimlessly, night had fallen and I found myself in the Sherbourne and Dundas area to search for drugs. I pull over to the curb and I let a sketchy, toothless man in the Lamborghini, which sparkles and gleams a bright white in the darkest, dirtiest corner of downtown. The drug dealer instructs me to drive up the street, which I do. He hands me a little plastic bag full of kimchi and prescription painkillers. I think this is a wonderful score. Just then I glimpse flashing red and blue lights behind us. "It's the police!" I yelp in an alarmed and loud manner. The toothless stranger then instructs me to jump out of the car while it is moving, and roll into the bushes. He is now, of course, driving the car. I follow his instructions exactly. Moments later as I'm crouching undetected and concealed by some bushes, I watch the police cruiser speed by me. I let out a "Phew" sound and wiped the sweat off my forehead. I was very relieved that I didn't get busted with the drugs, and then subsequently I was filled with anxiety and despair for losing Marvin's new Lamborghini that he so sincerely entrusted with me.

I make my way to the nearest Lamborghini car dealership in the hope of replacing the lost luxury vehicle. The car dealer just happened to have the exact model of car in the showroom, and he says to me: "You should buy this car for a bit over the asking price because my child has Lupus". I do this, paying on a credit card that I pulled out of a jockstrap that for some reason I was now wearing. I was fearful of the thousands of dollars that I was spending that I did not actually have in my credit limit. I had a lucid moment as I tried to discern if there was a lesson, or some meaning, or a moral in all of this, but nothing surfaced.

Later at King and Church, I parked the Lamborghini and I made my way into a simply designed, brick-clad high-rise condo. I shared an elevator ride with a professorial looking older gentleman who was wearing a burgundy and forest green, tweed ensemble. He was smoking a fragrant tobacco pipe in the elevator, but was oddly clutching a dumpy, red Shopper's Drug Mart bag full of cigarette butts, coupons, various chachki, and flyers. We stood together enveloped in an awkward silence before I got off on my floor with the smell of the pipe tobacco lingering on my clothing.

I find Marvin inside the condo, dressed in pyjamas while watching the movie *My Private Idaho* while eating a bowl of Swedish Fish gummies, his legs stretched out on the coffee table. I proudly announce that the car is fine and that I took good care of it. Marvin looks at me and responds: "I am over that car now – you can have it." I took the drugs and kimchi that I bought out of my pocket and immediately consumed it all. I sat down next to Marvin and started weeping. He comforted me with a pat on the back and then I heard the opening theme music to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Marvin asks me to make some popcorn and I leave the room to make it. I hear a refrain in the distance – *'you might just make it after all!* I think to myself that I have finally arrived at a release or a catharsis, but deep inside I had an unsettling feeling that I had not.

GRAND SYNERGY

The model shop was the place where I first experienced a struggle of my internal landscape. Hobby Craft Models Ltd. I was working there with my buddy, Shane, selling model car kits, anything from a Corvette Stingray to a Ford pick-up truck, model airplanes, even vintage Second World War bombers and army tanks, model tractors, and we even had model grain elevators. Hell, we even expanded our range to include a few model Super Heroes – Spiderman, The Thing, The Hulk. I figured we were the leading model and model accessory business in Regina, and maybe even a contender for all of Saskatchewan. We were located up on Henderson Drive, prime storefront real estate in the industrial area of the Queen City. The year was 1988, the year the ‘white birch’ was adopted as the official tree of Saskatchewan. I was happy about that as there are always so many suckers and trees rooting from the seed pods of elm trees that were planted by settlers to green up the prairies. This proves that we are so much more than just elm trees.

Well anyway, I was making good on the local model supply circuit – a top dude, a spearhead, a confidence man. I had a bungalow in the south end, and I was making mortgage payments on time – easy. I drove a compact Datsun truck – paid for. I was going to Bregg Cleaners at least once a week to keep myself looking smooth and well turned out, sometimes twice a week if I was driving down to Oxbow or over to Swift Current to talk shop with the big players in the model car industry. Once a year we’d all get together for an annual “model car salesmen and distributor conference” in Yorkton, hit the casino for a few nights, hit the slopes, if you know what I mean. I was gettin’ it and I figured I had life by the balls. I really did.

My buddy Shane, from the model shop, he had the hots for another co-worker, Julie, and they were friends for years before he decided to put it all on the line and reveal his true feelings for her. Well, that my friends, turned out to be a classic story of unrequited love. Julie didn’t feel the same way and Shane took it hard. He quit his job, and well, he became a seriously thirsty individual. He’s in the “program” now – almost a year sober. Anyway, there I was, flying solo in the model shop industry, without Shane; but I was payin’ my bills, gettin’ it done, a one-man crew, having a couple of little things on the side, shoot from the hip, and all of that. Yeah, I had success, but I felt the tides shifting within my internal landscape, beckoning me, telling me that a renewed personhood was in order. One morning I woke up at the Travelodge Hotel on Albert Street south after a big company banquet. I was a real mess. I walked over to the mirror and saw the face of a man, 25 years old and already burned out. Came up too fast, ate with the pitbulls and now he had too much time on his hands – climbed the ladder too quickly. I mean, I was basically eating at the Diplomat every second Friday every month. I met John Candy there once, no lie. Last year the Riders were only 4th in the West and didn’t make the semi-finals. Twelve losses, man they need to shake things up. They got some good

players for sure – Kent Austin, Ridgeway is such a great kicker, and Don Narcisse. They got to get it together. Anyway, I digress. My point is that when I looked in that mirror I saw a shell of a man, fragmented and no longer a whole person. Something was missing. Here is where my true journey began, when I realized that I wasn't living up to my full potential. But what was my potential, I wondered. I had to find out.

After a long, hot shower and a shave, I'm downstairs in the coffee shop drinking my java, alternating with water to counter the acidity of my sour stomach, and reading the *Java Jabber*. Three poached eggs, white toast, home fries, 5 strips of bacon and a side of sausages, and I'm coming back to life. I look across the room and there's a man staring at me. I notice he was wearing a nice beige suit, modern cut, and shiny black shoes – this was a major dude I thought. I could tell. He gets up and walks over to my table.

"You like my suit?" he asks. Now he's sitting across from me, sipping a cup of tea that he brought with him.

I look puzzled and he said: "I apologize for not introducing myself properly. My name is Chet Collins – pleased to meet you". He extends his arm and I shake his soft, clammy hand. He asks again: "Do you like my suit? I notice that you were checking it out".

I gaze at Chet Collins' rectangular-shaped, pink head and permed dirty blonde curls. He's slick all right and I think he has something to tell me. "Yes I sure do like your suit", I answered. "Linen isn't it?" Of course I could see that his suit was top drawer, his sleeves pushed up his forearms, and while leaning back in the chair with his hands in his pants pocket pulling back his jacket, I noticed his red suspenders. He then bent forward and said, "Yup it's linen all right". He then reached into his inner jacket pocket and handed me a business card. I nodded and thanked him, but I didn't look at it and he didn't say anything more. I put it down on the table beside my plate and set to finish my breakfast. He got up and gave me a small salute and left.

Later that day I pulled the card out of my pocket and read: "*Midas Gold Mining Development, Inc., Flin Flon, Manitoba*. Chet Collins' name was at the bottom: *Chester (Chet) K. Collins, Public Relations Representative*. So, Chet Collins offered me a stock tip. He could see that I was a potential player too and he was trying to draw me into the game, only he upped the ante – a stock tip in a gold mine. I carefully placed the card in my wallet for safekeeping.

I could sense the world was changing along with my internal landscape and I was caught in the middle of that change. If I was going to be a contender, then I knew that I would have to shift with the shifting sands. One thing I vowed to do was to know more about the bigger stage, learn more about world events. I made a set plan to watch the morning news while I enjoy my first cup of instant Maxwell House – 2 scoops of Coffee-Mate. I should be more informed, you know, maybe learn something about the stock market – read up on the TSX and find out what it was all about. My ego swelled as I envisioned a new possibility of taking myself to a whole new level on the proverbial corporate ladder.

Back at home and sitting on my couch, I found myself admiring the gleaming brass and glass coffee table in front of me. It was one of my big splurges. I was thinking of my future life and as I promised myself, I began to pay attention to the news and I understood something like the stock market collapsed last year but now it was on its way up again. Okay, maybe Chet Collins had something here. I could almost feel something big was going to happen and maybe I could be part of it. Also in the news, there was a story about a televangelist, Jimmy Swaggart who confessed to having an affair with a known prostitute. Every news station was reporting all the details about the scandal. The bigger they get, the harder they fall, I thought. I mean geez, after that Jim Bakker and his wife Tammy Faye scandal and now he's in jail. They had it all, their own television show, popularity, success and money... Well they got greedy... I guess.

I had a dream of getting rich and I thought about it a lot. I carefully removed Chet Collins' card from my wallet one evening and sat beside the telephone, working up the courage to call and find out more about Midas Mines. I noticed in the section of the paper listing the TSX stocks that the mining company was legitimate and it was trading at about 90 cents to \$1.00 per share. I needed to know more. After several false starts, I finally dialed Chet's number and got his answering machine. He's probably out somewhere wheeling and dealing, I thought. I left my name and phone number. I wondered if he had his own cellular telephone like I saw Sonny Crockett using in an episode on *Miami Vice*.

One evening as I was settling in for a night of football and a few beers, the phone rang. It was Chet Collins and he was going to be in Regina on the weekend and wanted to meet with me. I agreed to a breakfast meeting at the Travelodge where we had our first encounter. I was excited and scared at the same time. We met as arranged and he introduced me to a couple of "stock brokers", one from Florida and the other one worked at a Regina brokerage firm, a French name -- "L E V E S Q U E A N D B E - A U B I E N Securities". I was listening closely as the conversation flowed around gold prices having risen 25 percent and how this little mining company was going to make investors very rich. The guy from Florida whose name was James Oliver, said he had been in the business for 20 years. He looked rich, wore a diamond and gold pinky ring and a chalk-like pin-striped suit with a red tie. His hair was combed straight back and he had a smooth-shaven face and a strong chin. I knew I was at the pinnacle of the financial world and I was hooked. The stockbroker from Regina, Bobby Farris, encouraged me to participate if I could and finally I opened up and told them that I didn't have any savings, and the only equity I had was in my house. After some discussion, I agreed to invest \$30,000, the whole of my home equity into Midas Gold Mining Development, Inc. The adrenalin was just pumping through my system -- I couldn't believe my luck.

Now that I was a player in the gold mining stock market, I felt a real sense of purpose when I opened up the *Leader Post* to the financial page. I was constantly checking to see how my investment was making out -- tracking my stock holdings on the TSX. I was all set to sit back and get rich quick. I was elated to see the stock rising over the course of

the next six months, and I even got a free weekend trip to Flin Flon to take a tour of the mine and its operations. I quit my job in fit of optimism. Anyway, I was ill-prepared for what happened next.

Chet Collins and Bobby Farris stopped calling me, and I was horrified when the mining shares plummeted. In fact, it seemed the problem was that there wasn't enough gold to continue working the mine. The shares that I held were worthless. I tried calling James Oliver in Florida, but his phone was disconnected. Well, long story short, I lost my home and sold my truck. Nothing I could do. So I packed my duffel bag and boarded a Greyhound bus to Winnipeg, hungry for the "Winnipeg Dream". Regina was fading from sight in the smudged rear-view mirror of the bus. While bone-shaking along the highway, my thoughts turned once again to discovering my true potential. I hadn't thought of my internal landscape at all since playing the high stakes stock market. But first I had to get a job.

I arrive in Winnipeg and get a temporary place to stay at the YMCA. I get a job right away at the "Big Z" – Zellers. I'm stocking shelves and putting stuffed gorillas in the bargain bins and the new Warrant album with the tapes. It's a humble position and a real drop from the fast lane of the model kit and model accessory industry and the dizzying heights of the stock market business. No more weekday warrior, no more pitbull, just me, myself and I. One dimensional Evan. You'll never believe it though – I end up connecting with Shane again. I was at the lunch counter at Zellers, having a morning coffee break when I see Shane coming in for the Early Bird Breakfast Special. "Hey Shane Kinderchuk!" I yell. He breaks into a big smile and suddenly I don't feel so all alone. He's living in 'The Peg' and has his own apartment. He hangs out with these real interesting folks who hold spiritual ceremonies with candles, animal blood, stones and pot pourri. I went to a couple of their events – they were colourful but a bit 'out there' for my simple prairie boy taste. I mean, being there dead sober, listening to the chanting and watching the ceremonies, like drinking blood was just tense. It was literally tense!

One night, out of boredom, I decided to attend another one of these events and a guy named Eric told me to drop the LSD like everyone else. It was in the animal blood which was passed around in a shiny black goblet with inlaid sparkling purple gemstones. That night I drank the acid blood and everything was okay for awhile. Then the screaming and chanting grew louder and louder and I started thinking really bad things. I remember having a bit of a tantrum. Okay, maybe a total freak-out. In my mind, I was convinced that I had not locked the door when I left Zellers at the end of the day. I became fixated on the idea of needing to go back to Zellers to protect the store from imminent danger. I couldn't take my fixation any longer and I head over to the store, and well, that's when the story takes a nosedive, and my life fell apart. Hell, that's the first time I ever experienced the penal system. I'm going to cut a corner here in my story – some of the details should be left out, but I can tell you that by March, 1990, after they released me from the Rossland Mental Health Facility, I basically decided to uproot again and go

somewhere I could rebuild my life. Shane was still hanging out with the devil acid people and I still hadn't reached my full potential, and I did not feel I had made any progress trying. Was Winnipeg the problem? I wondered. I had to get out.

Fast forward to September, 1990. I now live in Toronto, at Dupont and Brunswick. All I can say about living here is that nobody knows me and I have a chance to start again. I have never let go of the idea of wanting to reach my full potential. Now I am ready.

I got a job through an Unemployment Insurance posting – a request for carpentry skills. I wanted something that would keep my hands busy – you know what they say: idle hands do the devil's work. I was always pretty good putting models together and I could build things, so I was lucky enough to get a contract job for a group of art galleries, building frames for art works and installing exhibitions, and I'm talking elaborate installations of all types. You should see some of the things that are called art today. I mean I am really learning some new things about the art scene and meeting some interesting people.

Anyway, after my stint in the model kit and model accessory field, and all that followed, the art community in Toronto in the early 1990s wasn't much of a big deal to me, not much to write home about, but it paid the bills, and the gallery folks really appreciated my carpentry skills and that I'm reliable. I'm making a niche for myself and getting back into the groove of things. I enjoy some of the finer things in life once again, a little Ontario red with my dinner and a few thumbs of upper shelf whisky now and again. I rescued a couple of cats, bought some ferns to decorate my apartment, and I splurged on a painting that I bought from a Yorkville cafe – it's abstract and looks like a Pollock. I feel like I'm really developing a sophisticated urban groove and I'm even hip to all the best smooth jazz albums, like Kenny G, Sade, The Rippingtons. I don't know much about art, but I listen very carefully at some of the art openings. Mostly I go to be of service, make sure everything is running smoothly. I'm also thinking of art and how to use it to express emotions, and how it can fit into my internal landscape on my journey of discovering my true potential.

One chilly evening when I was leaving an art show at Mercer Union, feeling quite tipsy, my life was about to suffer a setback. It was October, 1991, and I had been working overtime to install some large-scale drawings in the east gallery for an artist -- Carel Moiseiwitsch. It was a difficult installation, but it was quite eye-catching. I had been recruited to serve as bartender for the evening, so I was sucking on gallery beers. I had a cold thirty, maybe thirty-five chips in tips. Not bad for a kid from Regina. I was feeling loose so I picked up some hashish from a pusher near Queen and Lansdowne. After making the score, I was crossing the street half-cut, and that's when I got hit by a van, a light blue Astro van. I recall looking up at the shiny Astro logo. A guy jumped out and he was real shook up. He asked if I was okay and I told him to fuck off. I could get awfully abusive when I had my glow on with liquor. He shrugged his shoulders and got back in his van and drove off, even before I had time to get up. When I attempted

to stand up, I felt a sharp pain and I couldn't put any pressure on my foot. Long story short, I'm in Toronto Western with a real twisted up ankle and a couple of cracked ribs. The doctor prescribed me some opiates for the pain, something called hydromorphone. Anyway, that was it – the first time I swallowed those suckers I felt like I'd been kissed on the dick by God. Now I know that drugs don't make people addicted, the addiction is in the person. And I know that most people who take strong painkillers don't go on to be hardcore substance abusers, but some do. And that's what happened to me. I kid you not. Within three months after the doc cut me off from further prescriptions, I was snorting heroin in the darkest corners of Toronto. I could never do the needle thing – I was always squeamish about the whole rig. The other junkies would make fun of me, called me “tar nose” as they wrapped tourniquets around their arms. Eventually my psychosis got so bad that I created this ritual of sitting in Withrow Park every Friday night with raw fish meat on my chest, high on heroin, drinking a cocktail mix from a thermos, half-believing that I had reached my full potential. Deep down though, I suspected I had not.

Now it's easy to feel good if you're on a roll. The real test is making yourself feel good when you feel bad, or better yet, finding how to feel good in feeling bad. I don't know – I'm just working this out in my head. Emotions are necessary survival tools and it's important to be able to confront and breathe through all of them, often, several times a day. As I stood on the Dupont train track, snorting my last heroin lines off my smooth jazz cassettes that I was intending to pawn for drug money, I had a caldron of emotions swirling around deep in my internal landscape. I was lost. It still didn't feel at all like I was meeting my full potential, whatever that was. Was Toronto the problem? NO! It couldn't be, nor was it Winnipeg or Regina. A geographical cure clearly wasn't the answer. I was the common denominator in all my conflicts of self-definition. It was time for a change. I mean a real, visceral change.

The next thing I did after I finished the last of the drugs was head down to the local detox center to get myself straight. I won't go into all the details of my withdrawal; it was two weeks of violent anxiety and physical sickness. When I was finally able to eat and sleep a bit again, the detox center was sizing me up for discharge. There I was, just newly sober, sitting sheepishly in a room full of addicts and the cancelled, waiting to get thrown back on the cruel streets again, and still perplexed as to the nature of my full potential. I scanned the bulletin board filled with pamphlets, advertisements for therapies for a number of things like quitting smoking, addiction counselling and night school courses. Then my eye caught a poster that read: “DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A LIFE COACH?” Underneath it stated: “Earn the income you deserve”. Something inside me woke up. I remember what my friend Shane once told me at the model shop: “In order to master your craft, teach it!” He used to hold model kit workshops in the evening and they were in great demand, people building their dream car, models of nostalgia, models of place – like grain elevators, models of super-human strength – like super heroes. I figured I had so much colourful life experience that now it was time to reach out and talk about

my life purpose and the journey that brought me to this point so that I could help others meet their full potential and discover their true purpose, vision and goals. I felt that I was now making an inspiring life transformation – life is my craft and I would perfect it by teaching others the strategies of something I will call “GRAND SYNERGY”.

I took all the money from selling everything I had of any value, even my painting that resembled a Pollock, and with the last cheque I earned from installing art shows, I enrolled in the advertised two-week course – a cool 600 bucks. Of course I had to downgrade my apartment – I’m in a basement bachelor suite at Wellesley and Jarvis, but it was 110 percent no hesitation, no second thoughts, no regret – the right decision.

I earned my Certified Professional Life Coach Certificate (CPC) and my instructors told me I’m a “natural”. Today I can say with confidence that I now live a life filled with purpose. A life of compassion. I AM SO JAZZED ABOUT TAKING THE MESSAGE OF GRAND SYNERGY TO THE WORLD!

- I will help you explore your internal landscape and discover your true potential through my registered art therapy workshops. I will facilitate a way for you to open up and express your feelings, resolve conflicts, reduce stress, and so much more.
- Smooth jazz will provide the soundtrack for your transformation into a new and happy life, enveloping you with calmness when you need it.
- Positive affirmation meditation and yoga will guide you through difficult times. Cultivate Body/Soul/Balance!
- You will discover that you too, can obtain the highest level of dynamic energy as you move into your life filled with happiness with a sense of your true purpose.

These are only a few principles and virtues of “GRAND SYNERGY”. My program will absolutely work and I’m here to guide my fellow beings to self-actualization. I just get goosebumps when I say the words: GRAND SYNERGY.

Now I have one small problem. After I attained my CPC Certificate, I wrote a memoir. It synthesizes the ideas within my internal landscape that recounts my journey of life and discovering my true purpose to become a life coach. Now I realize that every good life coach needs to find a way to promote his services, let people know who I am and what I do. This is a whole new area that I am just learning about and that is how to take “GRAND SYNERGY” to the marketplace.

I can envision it all now – promoting and signing my book. I’ll market smooth jazz tapes for relaxation, as well as guided meditation cassettes. My daytimer will be filled with engagements, presentations, talk shows, radio interviews, and maybe I could even write an affirmation or positive message in a newspaper column. I would even put together a “daily instructional booklet”. So much to consider and where to begin?

Tony Robbins has a whole set of VHS tapes available – selling like hotcakes. Likewise, it’s my plan is to promote my own VHS tape, but first I need to film it. My friend Michael, who

I met at one of the art openings – he’s an installer too -- well he works at the Danforth Music Hall on stage tech, and so he has access to the stage. I told him I was strapped for cash and I needed to record a demo tape to promote my career as a certified life coach. He agreed to help me out so I’m going to shoot my first life coach video there. Michael seems as pumped as I am, so we’re good to go. And there’s more good news! I was selected to write a weekly column for the *Regina Java Jabber*. Well it’s more like a weekly inspirational quote, but nonetheless, my first writing gig! I’m a bit of a hometown celebrity, I guess.

I’m standing on the edge of a new life, a new world, connecting to an infinite field that is the universe. We have an amazing potential to transform ourselves through art, music and vulnerability. Well, time to do a dry run – a dress rehearsal for my first ever promotional video.

Lights!

Cameras!

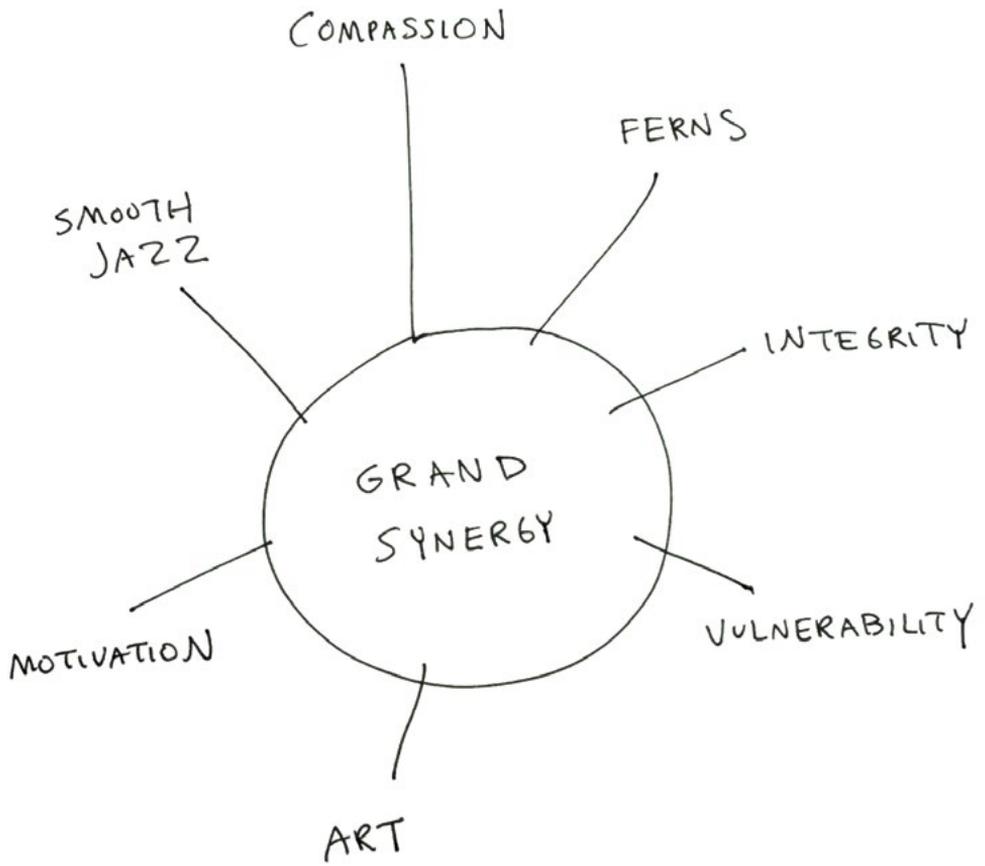
Activate smoke machines....

Action!

I emerge from the shadows and walk out on the stage...

I say:

“Ladies and Gentlemen – My name is Evan Tyler and I am here to awaken you to your true potential. I give you GRAND SYNERGY!”



Two Ferns Discussing Smooth Jazz

I once knew two ferns named David and Glen. I first met them when I moved into the corner office of Dudley and Lowe Chartered Accountants located at the South Pointe Plaza on Gordon Road in the city of Regina. The year was 1992 and I was working as Assistant Office Manager with an up and coming firm. The strip mall where we were located had a few amenities like 'The Brown Derby' for an occasional luncheon, and across the strip was "Z's" Confectionery for an odd pack of Juicy Fruit gum. I was drinking lots of sub-par office coffee, always black. In retrospect, I had mal-odorous coffee breath – I can say that with more clarity and insight now. Sometimes I think my moustache still smells like the coffee I was drinking during that crazy time. But I digress.

What I remember most about David and Glen, was their spirited, often controversial and sometimes oppositional discussions about the role of the fern in contemporary times. David would pontificate about how the fern played no real economic role of importance. He became embittered by his own fern-hood and self-invalidating tendencies. For David, life was just something to get through. Glen, on the other hand, was a proud fern, always offering positive insights and meditations on becoming fern, accepting fern, re-imagining fern. Glen's self-actualized approach pushed against David's heaviness. Glen would say things like: "Historically, ferns have played a significant role in mythology and art" or he would articulate some greater idea like: "The universe works in a vascular fashion – energy being transmitted from one psychic location to another. As ferns, we are vascular in nature... just imagine that the universe is one big nervous system and we are the connectors. Timelines are so rhizomatic. We matter! We are enough! David, you are enough..." Glen had embraced many alternative treatments and therapies for his anxiety disorder and therefore was attuned to some special rhetoric that David found hard to connect with.

I was on cup three of the standard office brew on a Tuesday morning in early December listening to my Z99 radio program when I was distracted by a very interesting conversation between David and Glen, and one that seemed to be quite a pleasant exchange. The two of them were discussing smooth jazz politics:

Glen: "I think it's fine that more radio stations are featuring more adult contemporary artists into the programming alongside traditional smooth jazz music. The listeners of smooth jazz programs have declined, so naturally we have to move with the times instead of against the inevitable."

David: "I agree with you 100 percent. I mean I am always down for some Paul Hardcastle or Phil Denny, but to attract the younger listeners, you need to throw in some Luther Vandross, Sade and maybe even some smooth jazz pop covers... *Billy Jean*, a little John Lennon *Imagine*."

Glen enthused: "Jazz Café is such a great smooth jazz station!"

David: "Yeah, Dave Koz's program is almost as solid as Lucas Gillain on 92.5."

Glen: "Hey – I heard The Rippingtons are going to be in Winnipeg next weekend. You wanna go?"

David: "Are you kidding me? Of course I'll go! I mean, I'll have to run it by Stephanie, but I'm sure she'll be cool with it. Imagine us -- just two ferns in the "Peg" takin' in a smooth jazz concert. Golden."

It was in that moment while listening to two ferns discussing smooth jazz in such an agreeable manner, that my own life changed. I decided to give smooth jazz another chance, because I too, like many others, had been disconnected from what was happening in the smooth jazz and adult contemporary world. I mean I went to school on it. Smooth jazz is a source man. It'll change your life, I swear to God.



The Early Bird Catches the Worm

5:00-7:00 a.m.: Shake on the couch upstairs, back and forth, back and forth. My face on the cushion is hot. I turn over. My legs become cold so I put on a sweat pants. I haven't slept at all. My cat is in the room; I can hear her licking herself. I get up briefly and glance toward the window and notice one lone light from a nearby house. Someone else was up early, or late, or maybe withdrawing from Oxycodone like me. Probably not. Back on the couch. The best chance I have of dozing off is by lying on my back and breathing deeply, meditatively – in, out – in, out. One, two – one two, count the same two numbers until I slip away from consciousness. It doesn't work and scenes from my recent drug sickness Netflix binge plough through my mind overflowing with scrambled thoughts and vivid images in a schizophrenic movie reel. It's impossible to think clearly as thoughts rollercoaster along sounding like dancing skeletons with dusty, pale yellow, rattling bones. Oh God, I'm so very sick from trying to withdraw from opiates. Two days without – I thought I was going to make it. The withdrawal started with a vengeance yesterday. Today was hell. Must get to Day Three.

9:12 a.m.: Johnny texts me: "Early bird catches the worm, my friend."

This phrase implied one thing: the earlier I arrived at the five corners, the best deal I could get on the scripts – 80 mg. Oxys, Percs, and even some Adderall. The thought of getting the pills was floating through my mind like a canoe that wanted to desperately pass by my peripheral vision, but the canoe burns with electric fire, all so visible. The greenish-blue Oxy, going down with a Cola and Filet-O-Fish I would buy at McDonald's while waiting for Johnny to bring the drugs. The beer I would drink on the TTC on my way there. When you're an addict, everything is a ritual. Every move, every thought, idea and presence is connected to a set of ritual practices that inhabit me and constitute this sick, tailored narrative. I would go so far as to say that even the drug sickness is a ritual. You spend months on the pills – constantly trying to outrun the withdrawals, scheming for money, trying to live a productive life on the outside of the chemical prison you inhabit on the inside. But it's hard. And it's good sometimes ... really good. But it's mostly evil. Addiction to opiates is a road that will take you into the darkest anxiety and most unraveled version of yourself, and eventually you will have to feel the death trance. It's the kind of sick that makes you want to die, and sometimes this thought makes a little plan in your imagination. Even if it's not a serious plan that you actually act on, at least the blueprints are there. It's a dark, small comfort that I hold within myself.

Feeling very sick twice a month now. Then it's every weekend, when you try to spend time with your family. You're off your rocker all week, and by Sunday night the sickness is back: extreme fatigue, cancelled eyes, dithering, soaring anxiety, sand baggy crawling skin, sweating profusely, loss of appetite, loss of libido, endless cigarettes ... so many cigarettes.

So the early bird catches the worm. When you can't bear the sickness anymore, you speed your ass down to Queen and Roncesvalles to find the guy who knows the guy who has the stuff. I'm looking for Johnny who is connected to Hal. Hal has a monopoly on the scripts. He hangs out at a dive bar every day where he runs his operation, while drinking beer from noon to nine like clockwork. I've never seen Hal, but Johnny has described him to me: "A crusty old fucker. Wears a cowboy hat, loves soccer. Crusty son of a bitch." Johnny has been on Methadone for years, his liquid handcuffs. He gets a small commission off the deal. I spend 300 and he gets 40. I get just enough Oxy to get me to at least feel normal for one... maybe two days. After that, it's the dope sickness, and the cycle begins again, scheming for money, and a determination to fulfill my next fix. Every time with the intention that this will be my last, and then do the hard thing and walk (and then crawl) through the withdrawals. It's becoming more and more discouraging how many times that doesn't happen.

The early bird catches the worm. I repeat this in my swelling, fatigued mind like a mantra as I start layering up to go out for a smoke. Waiting for ten o'clock when the beer store opens. This is always the longest hour of my life.

9:57 am.: Standing outside of the beer store at Girard and Logan. There are three Asian women and a guy who bikes in the winter, all waiting alongside me. I observe the cashier fussing around in the store, a minute before they open. The store opens right on time. The key unlocks the sliding chain wall, and in walk the customers. I feel perversely pleased with myself for not rushing in. Instead I generously help one of the Asian women carry in a bag that appears to be heavy. Surely this kind of good deed warrants one more dance with drugs – I deserve it. I buy Labatt Blue tall cans of beer – three of them. Planned: one beer in Withrow Park on the way to TTC, another on the TTC, and the last triumphant one on the streetcar ride home from five corners.

The early bird catches the worm. I hate worms. They're gross. I'm gross.

Johnny is ten minutes late. I've gone into the McDonald's bathroom to masturbate to kill time, but more importantly, to distract myself from my own sickness and the ruthless anxiety that I might not score the drugs right away. That is the absolute worst! That is, when you have made a commitment to do the drugs, had a couple of drinks which lubricate you for the experience, taken what money you have left from the ATM, made the long and tiresome trek to the location, and then there's nothing for you. Hal might be out – he might not be there, and there you are left feeling shapeless.

11:06 a.m.: Waiting for Johnny. His varicose veins snaking over his legs and toothless mouth are horrid and gross to me. However, at the sight of him walking up the block is like seeing an angel. It's the first sign that the drugs might be close. Johnny takes my money, and heads toward the dive bar. I go back into McDonald's to wait. I squirm in my seat like a dirty worm. Johnny's the bird, and he was up early enough to catch me.

Meat Bundles

I enter the butcher shop.

"Hello, what can I do for you today?" asks the butcher.

I can't help but notice his blood-streaked apron tied tightly around his wide girth.

"Um...well, I was wondering what your specials are today?"

"Well now..." He rubs his hands together. "We have two specials on today. We have some freshly ground beef ground up right here in our store, but if you want to spend a little more, we are featuring Canadian Black Angus ribeye steaks at a very reasonable price, anywheres from \$6.00 to \$10.00 per steak, depending on the thickness".

I run my finger over the cool glass of the deli case, perusing the Italian deli meat – prosciutto, mortadella, genoa salami. I glance up at the butcher block with its boning knives and meat hook. The meat slicer gleams with a half-roll of Blue Ribbon bologna sitting on the edge of the cutter. I shake my head and ask: "What grade is the Angus steaks?"

"Triple A beef, that's what I got here."

"Well, I thought maybe I would buy some ground lamb for burgers, but I was also thinking of marinating some flank steak because it's leaner and less expensive".

"Oh well, the only ground lamb I got is frozen, but if you want it, I can get some from the freezer. You know what...let me just double check if we have any fresh lamb in the back – I haven't checked my delivery this morning yet."

The butcher disappears into the back room. I watch him as he searches the meat locker for fresh lamb. The humming of the fluorescent lights resonates and then begins to magnify in my brain and I feel anxiously stimulated by the sensation.

After a few more turns of his head and placing his hands on his hips, the butcher returns with a rather neutral expression on his face. "I'm sorry but you will have to come back Tuesday for fresh lamb unless you want the frozen. As for the other cuts of beef, well I don't have any flank steak today. Then, while looking up toward the ceiling, with a finger on his chin, he continues: "I have some fresh offerings in the back – 16 ounce T-bones that are well-marbled – very tasty – but if you're looking for lean, well I do have some New York strip loins that I can cut for ya', half-inch or inch steaks."

"Hmmm," I muse and then ask him: "Do you ever offer bison?"

"Well yes," he replies, "every Monday I get ground bison, sirloin steaks and roasts too. Sometimes I get bison tenderloin, but I have a waiting list for 'em – popular cut with some customers, that's for sure".

"I'd like to buy some bison. I'll come back next Tuesday for both the ground lamb and bison if you could hold three steaks for me."

"Sure, now what can I get for you today?"

"Just bag me up about three of those strip loins, and I'll take about a dozen slices of that honey-glazed back bacon, and I'll be back on Tuesday for the rest."

"Okay, comin' up."

The butcher divides the meat and weighs it on the scale. The buzzing from the freezers and humming of the lights are still heavy in the room, penetrating my consciousness as I watch the glistening red and pink meat cuts packaged into little paper envelopes, taped up, and given back to me as bundles, my precious meat bundles. He stares at me while I fish out two twenty dollar bills out of my pocket and hand them to him. He then cracks a subtle smile, his eyes looking down. He places the bills in the register and then gives me back some change. I pocket the change, never taking my eyes from his face.

"Thanks for your help," I say to him. The butcher's eyes become fixated on mine, and I turn to exit the shop. He says nothing but I feel his eyes continuing to stare at my back as I step through the door.

I feel an overwhelming nervous energy from this encounter. I cross the street to where my car is parked along 11th Avenue. My car key is troubling me. The plastic shell around the metal key that acts as the lock/panic/unlock unit is busted up around the sides leaving the key vulnerable to contort sideways. Also, the battery inside the unit is dead rendering the device useless and forcing me to manually open the car using the key. This is problematic due to the sensitive nature of the key device – one wrong move and you have yourself a bent, broken and useless key. I fear this is my fate as I approach my car, feeling around for my keys deep in my pants pocket. To my surprise and delight, with just enough care and precision I open the door and start the ignition without any complications. I set my groceries on the seat beside me and grapple around in my glove compartment for a tape to listen to. I come across Steely Dan's *The Royal Scam*. As I slip the tape into the deck, I pay close attention to the physical and sensory feeling of the tape as I transport it into place as it informs me of its correct position with a "click". Everything feels so amplified in my mind as I hear the "click" and everything after that seems different. The tape begins playing halfway through the song "Green Earrings". The melody and words are intoxicating and I listen closely to the lyrics:

"Greek medallion,

Sparkles when you smile,

Sorry, angel, I get hungry like a child"

As I glance at the clock in the car I notice that it reads 3:22 p.m. The clock is actually seven minutes slow so the real time is 3:29 p.m. The drive home is unsettling. Heading south

I light a cigarette somewhere between Hill and 24th Avenue. I manage to hit every red light possible on the way back to my apartment and this provides me with plenty of stop and go movement to the point where I feel car-sick. I tend to get car-sick anyway – it's a problem I have had since grade school. I begin to notice things around my car – the dust on the dashboard, a dried up French fry on the floormat, some gum stuck to a napkin on the beverage holder. These properties catapult me further into a downward spiral of sickness. I try to keep my bearings but I break out in a cold sweat on my forehead. My windows will not roll down and it's hot inside the car.

I am undeniably anxious about returning to my apartment. I begin to think about my guests. They are probably wondering where I am by now. The closer I get to my apartment, the more uneasy I become. I think to myself: "Is this really what I want to be doing with my life?" I feel hollow all of a sudden, like an empty vessel navigating familiar pathways through the city. The retched presence of bacteria and the cigarette I smoked leaves my taste buds scorned and soured. Only now do I really begin to feel the effects of the last night's drinking – I am parched, dry, thirsty and I feel sick. I heard somewhere that alcohol deprives the brain of oxygen and inevitably shrinks it. As I take a left on Gordon Road, I anticipate getting out of my car and liberating myself from the constraints of the seat belt, simultaneously dreading entering my apartment building.

I pull into my parking space and quickly release the seatbelt and stumble out of the car. Immediately I vomit a beige and green display all over the ground. The puddle of vomit looks crude, vile, grotesque and yet helplessly vulnerable. I can see half-digested green beans and creamed corn bubbling on the surface like something out of an alien movie. I take a moment to compose myself. After only a few seconds of relief, I begin to feel the anxiety set in again as I make my way through the parking lot to the front of the building.

As I enter through the doors, the stairs appear steep and impossible. My hands are shaking and I tighten my grip on the grocery bag. I visualize myself vomiting again and I try to gain control. I put one foot in front of the other and drag myself up each stair. Things become increasingly disorienting and unstable on the way up. The experience is incommensurable. There is no standard or measure to describe the torture that I feel on this jolting, nightmarish journey up the stairs. I cling to the railing for support and I hear the sound of my knee accidentally hitting the brass crosshatched metal bar along the side of the staircase. The resulting sound throws an electrifying vibration through my system – a sensory pain so deep it is almost pleasurable. My eyes tear a bit as I approach the top. I wipe the sweat from my forehead, realizing that I am still breathing.

At the top of the stairs I see a silhouette of a figure from down the hall. As I gradually prepare to make my way to Suite 14 where my guests wait, the figure reveals itself as Mrs. Saunders, my elderly neighbour. Mrs. Saunders is a woman in her late 60s and she is somewhat eccentric and sociable. She parted ways with her husband Tom about two years ago, and I know that she loves Chinese food. I know this because I often notice it being delivered to her place and sometimes the delivery man comes to my suite

by accident. Usually we greet each other with a quick hello and exchange of polite acknowledgement of the weather or some other social nicety, but never anything on a subject that would be too energetic or time-consuming. Today, strangely enough, she stops me in the hallway to tell me that the branches from the trees are rubbing against the windows on the east side of the building where both of our suites are located. The frustration caused by her conversation tests my ability to remain even mildly composed. I reach deep down within myself and search for a social interchange and then it surfaces. The conversation went like this. "Hi Mrs. Saunders."

"Oh hello – how are we today?"

"Doin' all right I suppose." I try to sound relaxed and casual.

After just these first few words, my stomach feels like cottage cheese on a hot plate. Dreadfully I watch as she puts down her heavy bags to speak to me with a sigh. Putting the bags down is a bad thing – when they hit the floor they sound like a baseball bat hitting a row of metal high school lockers, though slowed down considerably. My stomach is bubbling something fierce.

"I've been meaning to ask you." She pauses.

"What's that?"

She answers immediately. "Do you hear the branches from the trees scraping against your window at night?"

"No, I don't think I have, I..."

She cuts me off. "Well I'll tell you I always hear the branches against my windows at night making this really screechy noise, but only at night though. It keeps me up and it's just such an annoying thing, you know."

"Well, maybe..."

She cuts me off again. "I'm going to have to talk to Murray about it because I just haven't been able to sleep very well. I suppose maybe the winds pick up a bit..." her voice trails off.

I take another breath and prepare to respond, and before I can let it out, she cuts me off again.

"Because I just don't know..."

I force out the words: "Yes, well I'm really sorry to hear that. I'm sure Murray could talk to maintenance or go up on the ladder and trim the branches".

"Yes, well, I'll have to talk to him. Well then, I don't want to keep you. You have a nice day."

"Bye, Mrs. Saunders," and I turn to leave.

"Oh wait," she says.

I feel like turning around and screaming in her face, and then she quickly responds:

“Oh never mind. I thought I had something else to say. Take care now.” She walks slowly down the hallway with a slow measured gait, and the scent of flowery perfume lingers after her and it makes me vomit a little inside of my own mouth. I force myself to swallow the few chunks back into my stomach, having nowhere to discard them. I take a really deep breath and feel the oxygen enter my body. With a last attempt to collect myself, I take one more even deeper breath and head towards Suite 14. As I rattle around for my keys I detect an absence of noise from inside. I turn the handle of the door and enter cautiously and I still hear nothing.

I take off my shoes and make my way to the kitchen. I pass a dispersion of shoes, carelessly scattered along the hardwood floor. Although I anticipate seeing them, I also feel anxious and unnerved when I catch sight of three individuals who remain tied to chairs with gags in their mouths, ropes binding their wrists and ankles, and blindfolds over their eyes.

Following routine, I don't say a word. I head toward the kitchen counter and place the plastic bags containing my meat bundles next to the stove. All the cooking utensils and ingredients are already set in place. I sense a major tension between my guests and me. Something feels odd. They remain quiet as my toiling and kitchen noises ricochet off the yellow walls of my apartment, creating volume to the previously silent space.

After I unfold the butcher's neatly taped-up packages to reveal my portions of meat, I reach for a large clove of garlic. I place it on the cutting board and begin to remove the outer skin; I then proceed to cut the ends off. Eventually when I have four gleaming, smooth pieces of garlic, I begin to slice them up into fine pieces. I pour in half a tablespoon of glistening gold cooking oil into the frying pan. As the heat from the element increases, I stare over toward my guests. There is the man with the dark hair, a woman with blonde hair and the tall fellow with the fancy sweatshirt.

I begin to peel an onion and dice it up into fine pieces. The process is painful and pleasurable -- sharp tears sting my eyes but it takes my mind off my roiling stomach pains. The intoxicating smell of chopped up raw onions elevates my consciousness to a state of euphoria. I toss them into the heated frying pan and stir them around with garlic for a few minutes. As these ingredients synthesize into a powerful and seductive aroma, I toss three juicy, dark red strip loins into the pan. As soon as the meat touches the surface, a sound so sharp and unforgiving, demands the attention of everyone in the apartment. The meat looks so handsome bunched together in the frying pan. I make sure to smother the meat with a pat of juicy yellow butter. I observe that I have captured the attention of my guests and they are now all sitting up straight as pencils, appearing tense with a sense of anticipation. I let the meat soak up the flavours, periodically nudging it, pressing the garlic and onion onto the surface of my exquisite, dancing meat hunks. All of my guests are sweating quite profusely. As I catch a reflection of myself

on the door of my broken microwave, I notice that I too am experiencing perspiration, my forehead glistening with beads of sweat.

The scent of body odour is potent and synthesizes with the smell of cooking, and I am forced back into a state of sickness. The bubbling in my stomach begins again. Staring down at the shiny dancing flesh cuts, I fear that I may have another vomiting episode.

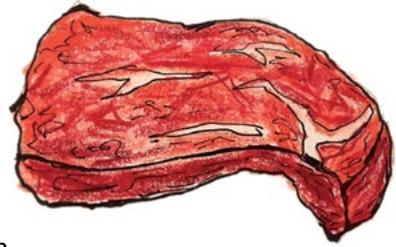
I grab my stomach and pray for this to be over. It feels like the worst carsickness combined with a horrible hangover and increasingly mixed with a considerable mounting paranoia. I stare at the red sizzling, gradually-browning meat cuts embellished with savoury flavours. As a sharp crackle of oil spits up toward my arm, I feel an urge to run to the bathroom, but I fear I won't make it. My hands begin to shake again and just before I attempt to exit the kitchen, my alarm clock goes off.

"Beeeeeeeeep."

The feeling of sickness subsides and I feel relief at last. A few silent moments pass while I catch my breath and gather my thoughts. I rise on my toes to pick up a mask from the top of the fridge and I put it on. I speak aloud to my guests: "That's all the time for today. I will untie you and then you must leave my apartment immediately. If you want to book another appointment, please do it by phone or secure email. Each person nods politely. The tall man with the fancy sweatshirt responds: "Okay." His voice is muffled from the gag.

I make my way over to stand behind where they are seated. As I untie them, I can smell the excitement on their necks. I pay close attention to the way it feels to loosen the rope on the wrists of the man with the dark hair. Each person remains quiet as I loosen the bonds and feed my fingers through the rope knots. The smell of cooked meat and strong garlic and onions drift through the apartment. Soon I am watching them rise to their feet, put on their shoes and make their way toward the exit. One by one, my guests quietly leave my home. I stand in the hallway for several moments after they leave. I anxiously looked forward to getting this over with so I could be alone in my space. Now that I am alone, I feel like a ghost of a ghost. I stare at the empty chairs and the loose and scattered rope and bindings on the floor. I feel as if I could walk through my kitchen wall and disappear. No one would ever know that I lived here. As I clean up the kitchen, I peer outside of the window and notice a young couple walking side by side, holding hands. This reinforces my sense of isolation. The sun will soon be setting and the day has met its plateau. I light a cigarette and open a bottle of ale. I cannot even remember the last time I drank a glass of water. After my smoke, I walk over to the chalkboard to make note of the groceries that I would require for my next client.

I smell awful. I walk into my bedroom and stand still for just a moment. The room is very humid. I notice my precious red blanket sprawled across the bed. I pick it up and crawl underneath. As I vanish within its folds, I wrap myself into my own fleece bundle.



My Yoga

My yoga is about coming to terms with my non-exotic anxieties around the human condition.

My yoga is about the feeling I get when I hear my own heartbeat and I become hyper-aware of my own delicate mortality.

My yoga is about the language of letting go, but it is also the expression of attachment to my lifestyle narrative.

My yoga is about 1990s ambient music playlists on YouTube.

My yoga is about my cats walking under the bridge of my “downward dog”.

My yoga is about the floor mirror in front of my mat that reflects the wishful, romantic, complete fantasy of myself back at my “tree pose”.

My yoga is about the dreaded anxiety that I feel when “savasana pose” is approaching and I have to be in my own head for a few minutes.

My yoga is about the peeling sound of my sticky back lifting up off the mat as I rise from “savasana pose”.

My yoga is about the feeling of being completely engrossed in my own self-compassion as a soft ray of light from the window creates a light shape that overlaps my yoga mat, my cats girth and my left leg.

My yoga is about visualizing all the bad things I have done, exiting me through a prolonged exhale.

My yoga is about breathing in fragile optimism.

My yoga is about setting “feel good intentions” and fighting off my dirty cynicism to make room for an almost reachable quality of sincerity that assists in believing intentions as well as the intentions behind my intentions.

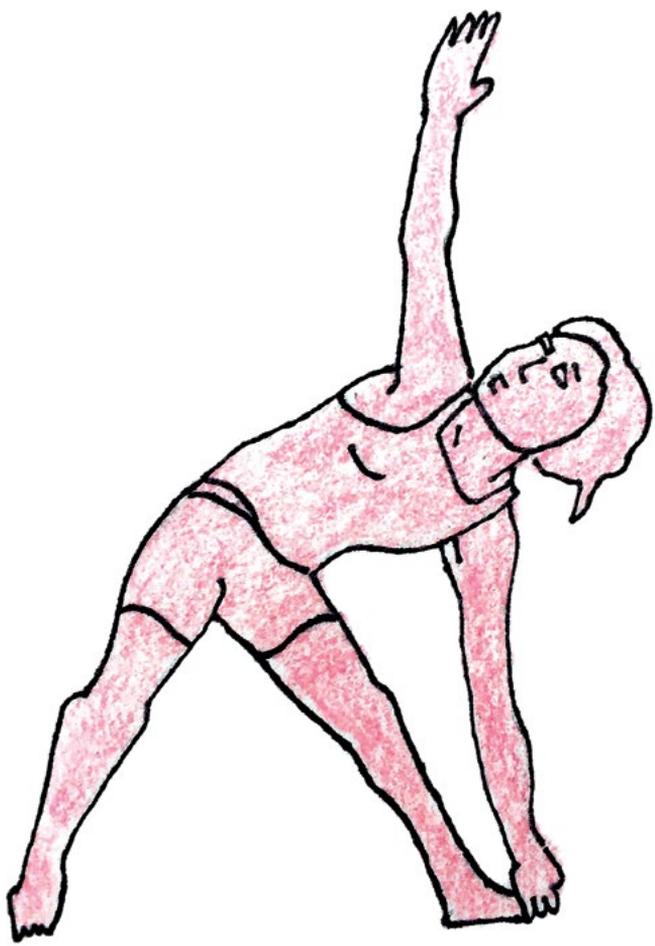
My yoga is about validating myself.

My yoga is about filling a void.

My yoga is about predictability.

My yoga is about the geometry in my head.

My yoga is about an investment in repetition.



Amateur Rehab Acupuncture

It was a fluorescent lit, sterile, grey and taupe boardroom, the usual corporate aesthetic that exists everywhere and anywhere. This rehab facility seemed grim and desolate at first glance, and it had none of the posh country club atmosphere of the place I attended during my last stint on the west coast. It's my first day here; I'm on the receiving end of a cacophony of institutional sounds as I sit in the reception office – the steady humming of fluorescent lights, a door slamming, distant footsteps down a hallway, laughter issuing from somewhere remote, and finally, a team of people walk into the room to greet me. Firm handshakes are exchanged and polite introductions follow. One man stepped forward and said to me: "Welcome brother. You're in the right place, dude. Stick with this program and it will change your life. It saved mine." A pat on my shoulder...

I got in at noon and participated in a somewhat grueling and invasive intake process followed by a hot meal. The word on the first floor is that acupuncture is being offered upstairs by one of the counsellors. Having used acupuncture in the past, I was enthused about this and I made my way up to the boardroom on the next floor. I found myself sitting in an awkward silence with one other client, feeling isolated and sensitized to the alien sounds of a new environment. I sank down into a standard, wooden office chair like a soggy slug, my arms limp and hanging over the wooden arms.

After twenty minutes or so, a young-looking counsellor walked into the room and introduced himself. He was short in stature with a pale complexion, and he sported a goatee that I surmised was a foil to hide his boyish features. He appeared to affect a mature demeanour although I detected a certain lack of confidence from his quick and jerky body movements, and his rapid speech had a somewhat tight tonal quality. He rubbed his hands together and said: "Alright guys. Um – this is my first actual applied session as an acupuncturist, and uh, I just finished training on Tuesday. Well. Uh. Let's get started then...".

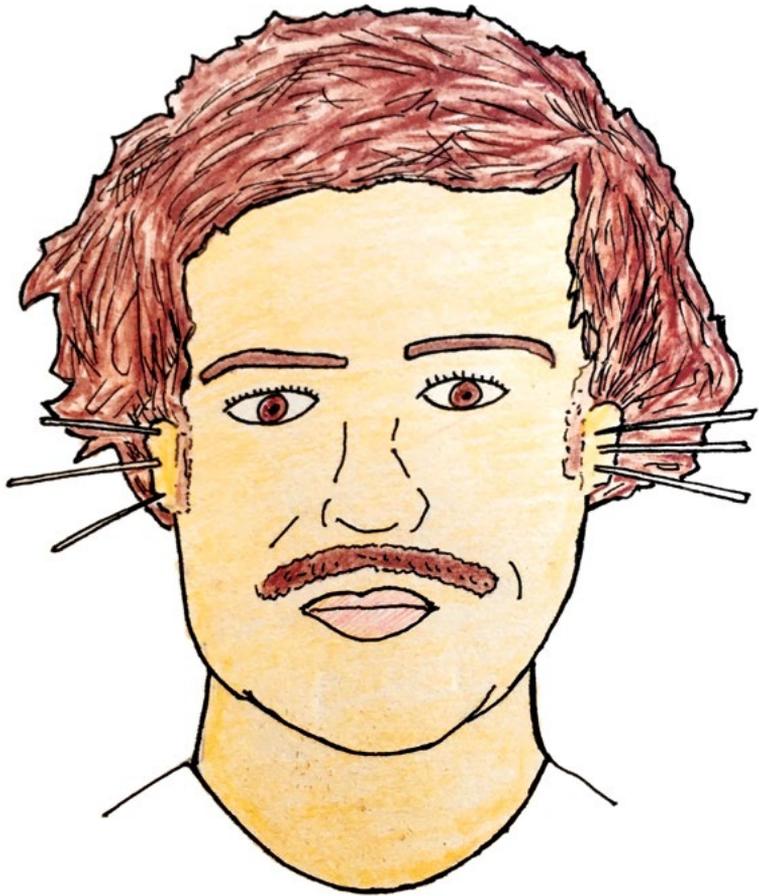
"Fuck", I thought. "Am I his guinea pig? Am I supposed to feel reassured?"

The next twenty minutes or so were spent observing the counsellor and would-be acupuncturist struggling to establish an internet connection so that he could set the mood with a "Zen Meditation YouTube mix". His visibly stressful attempt to diagnose and fix the internet issue contaminated my own experience further with more stress. Finally, after sitting silently for a period of time, I explained to him that I didn't need a "YouTube mix" for an acupuncture treatment. He finally shrugged his shoulders and gave up. Just as he reached for his kit of needles pulling out some gauze and a pair of rubber gloves, he suddenly remembered that there was a CD of meditation music he could play on the PA system in the boardroom as an alternative. I now wonder if this is more for him than for me. He made it clear at this point that it was not the best mix. "I prefer the sounds of nature", he said.

Flute sounds issued forth accompanied by gentle guitar music. The sound of a light breeze was added for ambience. The music reminded me of something a wealthy, middle-aged mother would play as she sat at her potter's wheel, fashioning earth-toned urns for her Rosedale garden. I imagine a scenario in her studio where notes fill the air with tranquility, while her husband sits in the next room, a remote in one hand and a ice-filled glass that clinks with every sip of an 18 year old Chivas Regal, while her two young teenage sons secretly vape marijuana and watch porn on their iphones as they crouch under the Rosedale Bridge. This CD really means a great deal to my imagined mom as a way for her to relax and contemplate her work. For me, however, I was too aware of its functional nature to create simulated inner peace. It wasn't cynicism – it was circumstance.

The pins were inserted into my ears, and the counsellor explained that this will stimulate my heart, spleen, liver and kidneys. Ow, man, this hurts, I thought. I've done a lot of acupuncture before and I never experienced this kind of sharp pain. Was I really so toxic that I would react to a subtle prick of a needle? Or, was the counsellor so much of an amateur that he did not really know how to administer the needles properly.

He then turned off the lights and the music played on. He said in a hushed tone: "Okay, now close your eyes and embrace the moment. Please remain seated at all times. Remain in your body – in this calming moment for the entire duration of this forty minute session". Then he left the room, closing the door quietly behind him, and I heard him whistling a spritely tune while walking down the hallway. The other client and I were left sitting alone in the dark, listening to my imagined mom's tranquil meditation music. It took a few disconcerting minutes but eventually I began to relax into the moment. I was feeling more present and optimistic. And just then the CD began to skip with a repeat of a musical note of the flute and a whoosh in a loop. It did not let up for the duration of the session.



The Promenade

Part I:

Dale rubbed his eyes with his clammy, clenched fists. As he pressed his back with some force against the lumbar support of his office chair, he shifted his eyes away from his laptop for the first time in many hours and gazed upon the sunrise with watery, pink-tinged eyes. There were two shades of colour that were most visible to him - the first, an inky blackness that began variegating into grayish multi-hues that had not yet allowed the blue of the sky to penetrate its celestial skin. The second tone gradually revealed itself with the rising sun, exploding into one exhilarating burst upon the sky – oh sweet, rich, vibrant brilliant Syracuse orange!

Dale Bruce had been a professor at Syracuse University since 2008. It was a planned career move for him after marrying his wife Kathryn, and they agreed it was a reasonable, promising and well calculated professional trajectory. In the early days of their idyllic romance, they dreamed of starting a family within a couple of years after Dale could secure a professorship. It took much longer than that. After several years of paying down student loans and establishing their new home, Dale wasn't convinced that they had put down strong enough roots, or saved enough money, or had developed themselves professionally enough to consider having a child. Consequently, as time passed, Kathryn unhappily continued to work in an administration department at a local law firm and Dale taught Political Science and Economics at university. He quickly became a well-respected member of the academic community that began with his eager participation within the faculty. His youth, energy and willingness to make himself accessible to students, made him a popular figure on campus.

However, after a few years, Kathryn grew tired of waiting for Dale to agree that they were ready to begin a family, and she felt unfulfilled and bored with her tedious clerical job. Her emotional inner turmoil cycled like a full rotation of a spinning wheel that set out with slow, tired bitterness that turned quickly into anger. She slowed down to a quiet passive aggression but when this didn't net any results, she stopped and dissolved into a shadow world of depression. At times of introspection her depression quickly escalated into a full-blown anxiety that ultimately circled back into tired bitterness. Every time the wheel made a complete rotation, she had exhausted a full range of emotions. Dale, who always prided himself on his ability to rationally understand people and to apply logic and reason to all aspects of his life, grew tired of trying to apply logic to Kathryn's maternal longings, and he finally agreed. Their daughter, Patricia, was born one year later.

After the birth of their child, the challenging dynamics between Dale and Kathryn subsided for a time and they united in their delight and wonder of their own progeny. Their daughter was such a pretty child with soft curling auburn ringlets and wide blue

eyes. She was alert and curious and every sound she gurgled, every smile she made, or every imagined coordinated hand movement, was a subject of animated discussion between them. Dale would occasionally bring some small toy home to amuse her, and one day he went to the campus bookstore and bought a baby-sized bunny-hug emblazoned with the "Syracuse University" logo. The color was "Syracuse orange" and this, of course, was Dale's favourite colour. He loved the hue so much he felt it was part of his own DNA and he took pleasure that it was the official colour of Syracuse University. Now I'll explain here that Dale was a person who was deeply invested into his career and he would stop at nothing to defend and protect the integrity of an institution he believed in, and to this end, his convictions were unparalleled. Since he began his professorship, Dale had served on every committee he could join and it took up a great deal of his time and energy. He promised Kathryn that he would cut back on his extracurricular scholarly activities after the birth of Patricia, and to his credit he did his best to downsize several of the lesser appointments and volunteer activities. He was still over-committed and engaged with a variety of boards, panels, course meetings, councils and occasionally, the esteemed university Senate. This caused some tension in their marriage, but Kathryn was willing to overlook much of his continuing absence, focusing instead on the joy of first-time motherhood. So it was that she resigned herself to a reduced relationship with her husband, and accepted with a quiet disappointment, the little time that they did spend together at the end of each day.

Dale turned away from the now gleaming sunrise and regained his focus on the letter that he had been crafting the night long. When sloppy school politics and poor planning were underfoot, Dale could not resist writing a protracted treatise that flowed from his sharpened intelligence and academic mind. As he was thinking and working throughout the night, he felt a pent-up anger toward Kathryn over a dispute they had regarding the competency of Patricia's pediatrician. Kathryn felt the doctor wasn't doing a thorough diagnosis of their child's chronic stomach pains. The doctor's suggestion that Patricia was mildly "colicky" and a prescription of gripe water was needed, did not sit well with Kathryn. She imagined the problem was of a more serious nature that required further investigation. In a tense, animated tone, she told Dale that perhaps it was "parasites or worse"! Dale, on the other hand, thought his wife was overreacting and protective and told her that her imaginings were somewhat paranoid thinking and not based on rational thought. He suggested that she should just try the gripe water for a time and see if things improve. Most of all, he didn't like her assuming this and assuming that. Dale hated assuming anything. Their fight escalated to an uncomfortable plateau over dinner the previous night, and if there was one thing that Dale hated more than assuming things, it was feeling unreasonably uncomfortable. He thought his wife was often emotionally charged and therefore this was hindering her own access to logical thought. He gathered his personal frustrations and distress and injected it into the letter he was composing to the Faculty Committee, the Senate, the Board of Governors, and the President of the Student Union with the intent to halt the construction of a promenade

at Syracuse University – an agenda item poorly conceived and most recently proposed by the newly-appointed Chancellor, Arthur Kendall. The promenade issue began to consume his every free thought.

“To Whom It May Concern: (the letter began)

Then he looked up and mused ...

One could see the letter sitting beneath the weight of at least 80 faculty emails in the “cc bar” in the draft file. The content to follow included links to the “Minutes of Meetings” that were conducted between the Senate, the Chancellor and the student body. The hard documentation and evidence of poorly conducted “fast foolish forward politics” (one of Dale’s home-grown phrases that poked fun at the Chancellor’s “Fast Forward Initiative” with its top priority to build an extravagant promenade), formed the basis of his letter. Yes, it was convincing, justifiable, and beyond everything else, it was reasonable. It was a despatch scripted fierce in its purpose, yet was thorough in its logic and facts – a bullet soaked in Hennessy now burning a hole in Dale’s inbox drafts. If there was one thing you would not want in university politics, it was an academic like Dale out there with an axe to grind. The Chancellor was an arch enemy, an adversary of the democratic majority, and most certainly his nemesis. Maybe Dale didn’t have a complete awareness of the dynamic, but he undeniably thrived on having an oppositional opponent. His intent was honourable and just, and the issues he laid out were to endorse equity, fairness and transparency. He believed passionately that he possessed leadership ability and this principled crusade needed his direction. He and only he offered a counterbalance to the absence of rational thought in a large university administration and its systems of governance.

He slowly nodded his head affirmatively as he contemplated his course of action and felt secure in the fact that it was solidly supported by faculty, students and even community-minded citizens. It was empowering for him to take the reins and there was no doubt that the dispute gave him purpose. He had always wished for such a cause. For many years, he had searched and waited, and perhaps even subconsciously hoped for an injustice at Syracuse U that was big enough for him to imprint upon. Dale had fought some small time-time battles: defending the autonomy of the Student Union, promoting the “Effective Committees Toolkit” as a model for conducting effective board meetings, investigating and negotiating department budget allocations, and all of that was well and good, but he had yet to catch a big whale of an injustice or cause. He felt that he was destined to encounter the kind of conflict that would make front-page headlines, and not just in the student newspaper, *The Syracuse Orange*, but smack dab in the *Syracuse Daily News*! National news agencies would take the story, and...well, people all over the country would witness Chancellor Kendall’s misallocation of donations and university funds for the construction of an absurd, purposeless spectacle conceived as a legacy to be named after himself, and cunningly wrapped in the guise of “beautifying and creating recreational space on the campus”.

He read his carefully crafted letter again and again to scrutinize absolutely every angle of his strategy and felt perversely pleased with himself.

Dale thought to himself that this informative letter and call to arms would bring dissenters together to organize a protest rally. "Newly appointed Chancellor Arthur Kendall doesn't have a chance," he thought with smug satisfaction. He inhaled deeply and slowly, and when he exhaled, he pressed "send", allowing for a rare release after a night of scripting, that in his estimation, was a masterful letter of dissent.

Dale opened a second window on his laptop and finished watching, for the fourth time, the movie *47 Ronin* starring Keanu Reeves. The Hollywood adaptation had become a little guilty pleasure. The film was loosely adapted from a legendary account called "The Ako Incident" that took place in medieval Japan. It was a story that resonated with him and he became fixated on the "samurai code of honour". He had read extensively the historical accounts about the legend. It was just coming up to the part where the 47 Ronin take their lives and restore their honour by engaging in ritual suicide. Dale thought excitedly, "here comes the scene" -- the Ronin drop to their knees... (Dale's eyes widened) and then one by one, each plunge a sword deeply into their chests, and the movie faded to black. "Oh God", he whispered. "Dramatic. Shocking!" The movie never failed to elicit a response from deep within Dale. Despite the morbid ending, such a pledge to a code of honour was admirable to his passionate sense of justice. Such fearlessness, boldness and courage! He thought Keanu Reeves played a fairly believable Ronin.

"Ahhh!" He sat back as he softly quoted a passage from A.B. Mitford's *Tales of Old Japan*: "*In the midst of a nest of venerable trees in Takanawa, a suburb of Vedo, is hidden Sengakuji, or the Spring-Hill Temple, renowned throughout the length and breadth of the land for its cemetery, which contains the graves of Forty-Seven Ronin.*"

Dale rubbed his eyes and suddenly realized that he had to be in class in just a couple of hours and he hadn't slept. He decided to quietly shower and make himself a pot of coffee, and hopefully he wouldn't wake up Kathryn. She appeared like an apparition in the kitchen doorway after hearing him fussing with the coffee maker.

"You were up all night! What's the matter with you?" she asked with gentle concern.

Dale looked at her, somewhat defensive and still irritated over their last argument. He felt an emotional let-down with her confrontation after a night of important strategizing. He answered: "For your information I crafted an incredibly detailed letter of protest to Arthur Kendall and a notice urging faculty and students to join in a rally to demonstrate against the construction of a promenade." His voice slightly escalated with excitement. "We're going to take down Arthur Kendall and his enormous ego, along with his self-serving, neo-conservative, authoritarian regime."

Kathryn was not interested and she only wanted to talk about the health of their daughter. She felt that Dale hadn't invested enough time with the family, and she began to plead with him.

"Dale, please listen to me. Patricia's stomach pains are getting worse. She screams most of the day and I am at a loss. I must go back to work in a month and I need you to help me explore our options. Dr. Gerrard continues to insist that nothing of significance has showed up in her tests. I can't do this alone. Please Dale. Remember how happy we were when our little girl was born?"

Dale adopted a more tender-hearted approach, and responded to her pleas. "Kathryn, once this rally is over and the plan for the promenade has been halted, I promise I will give this matter my full attention. But you know, I have to do this. There is nobody else who can."

Kathryn shed one bulbous, salty tear that slid down her cheek with dramatic gravity. She knew Dale's mind was made up. She turned away and headed back to the bedroom, cloaked in bitter silence, each step amplifying the coldness of her bare feet against the laminate flooring of the hallway. The sound of the bedroom door closing echoed in Dale's head, even though Kathryn only applied a fragile force.

Part 2:

The morning of the protest rally offered clear blue skies with only a few white wisps on the horizon. Dale felt intoxicated with excitement and filled with conviction that the construction of the proposed promenade would now be halted. He had an overwhelming public response of support for his effort and he was feeling satisfied with himself and how things were unfolding.

He walked along University Boulevard and crossed the road where the proposed promenade would be constructed. At present, it was a busy thoroughfare that provided access to the University Campus from all directions, and there was also a well-placed bus stop for easy access to the main building. Dale found it incredibly unreasonable that, not only was there a misallocation of funds for such a project, but the access to the school would have to be relocated to another area of the campus, creating high density traffic in other already congested areas. In addition, the re-routing of traffic to another area of the campus would add to the expense providing no efficiency or functionality of the space. "And for what?!" he thought. "Just so Chancellor Kendall's legacy would live on as a vanity project?" He shuddered in horror at the imagined debacle named "The Arthur F. Kendall Promenade" gleaming in solid brass letters styled in the traditional Canterbury font and embossed on an official plaque.

Dale meandered around the campus grounds, which was unusual for him. He rarely walked anywhere without a direct and purposeful intent. As he strolled along, contemplating the day, he found himself standing on a small green space below the "Schine Student Center", not too far from the Chancellor's building. There were a few students about, and one of his students greeted him in passing.

"Hi Professor Bruce!"

It was Susan Everett, a smart young woman who attended one of his seminars. She smiled broadly at him in a casual way intended to cloak her deep admiration for him. It is more common than not for a student to develop an idealistic and passionate tendency toward a professor. In Susan's case, theirs was a strictly professional relationship. She viewed Dale as a mentor and a leader. His values, politics and convictions aligned with her own, and, she mused to herself, that perhaps in another lifetime they would have made a great pair. In the current climate of campus politics, however, they were both invested in bringing to light a transparency of issues, corruption and sloppy politics. She approached him directly, swinging her woven satchel over her shoulder, while holding in her hand a copy of author, Naomi Klein's book, *No Logo*.

"Hey, that's a modern classic", said Dale when he caught sight of the book.

"Yes, Klein is one of my heroes. I've read it once already, and now I am writing an essay on biopsychological theories, so I thought I would brush up on some of her research", Susan explained.

Dale was impressed and he looked at her with a renewed respect. He thought she was rather pretty. He responded, "You know, Naomi Klein is scheduled for a round-table discussion here on campus next semester. I attended her lecture in Toronto last year. She was articulate and fearless". He paused and added, "committed – that's how I would describe her – committed and brilliant. I'm glad you're digging in, Susan."

"Thanks, yeah. I can't wait to see her if possible. She's done so much incredible research. Speaking of commitment, though, I wanted to commend you on yours for rallying against the proposed promenade. I've never witnessed the student body organizing so quickly to support a cause, thanks to you! You have really helped to amp up the protest. I'm sure we're going to make an impact here today. Is there anything I can do to help?"

Dale looked at Susan's eager face and wondered why this kind of support and understanding was absent in his marriage. Somewhere hovering between conscious and unconscious thought, Dale wished his wife, Kathryn, would adopt some of his own altruism and dedication that Susan was complimenting him for, and offering support with unquestionable sincerity. He recalled the audible flashback moments from the last argument with Kathryn, and he recalled her saying: "It's a fucking sidewalk, Dale. Get over it!"

"It's more than that, Kathryn. It will ruin easy accessibility to the university. It's the Chancellor pulling the wool over our eyes. That money should be allocated to academic betterment, not a useless promenade."

In his flashbacks, Dale imagined that he was shouting louder at his wife than he actually did in reality. Truthfully, Dale rarely raised his voice at all. Why succumb to emotional distress, he logically asked himself. He could only shout at his wife in his fantasies that belied his true desire to be heard and esteemed.

His attention returned and he smiled at Susan and said, "Your high regard of me is flattering. Thank you. You know, Susan, your support for this issue shows a great deal of character and vision. See you at the rally at noon."

Dale wanted to say more, in fact, he would have liked to express a deeper, more visceral attraction for her character, her words and her commitment for the cause. Of course, this was highly unreasonable and not a proper expression for a professor of his stature. He would keep things collegial and light between them, and he offered her a wider than average smile. In response, Susan smiled back and tapped him gently on his left shoulder as she took her leave. This modest physical contact ignited a raw, electric wave of pleasure that pulsated through Dale's entire being. Though brief, this minor intimacy had impacted him more than any other physical gesture he had ever experienced with his wife. The fleeting moment left him feeling gratified and wanting more. Instead of acknowledging this new and challenging emotion swirling inside of him, Dale struggled to regain his rational self. Surely this attraction would dissipate with denial, and instead he told himself that he would focus on the job at hand. This was a time for war, and there was no room for personal feelings of this nature. Besides, he countered, emotions were often misleading, confusing and often full of whimsical fantasies.

Dale looked up at several waving banners celebrating the football team known as "The Syracuse Orange Warriors". The flush of his favourite colour, Syracuse Orange, brought him clarity when he needed it most. He was ready for combat with the Chancellor. He stepped off the roadway and stood on the ground just a few feet away from the proposed promenade at ground zero. He dropped to one knee and scooped up a handful of dirt and let it trickle slowly through his loosely clenched fist. He then peered at the Chancellor's office window feeling self assured. "This rally will put a halt to this", he thought. "I know it will. I can feel it."

Part 3:

The protest rally brought much satisfaction to Professor Dale Bruce. It was well attended and there was a momentous feeling of solidarity. The crowd chanted, bullhorns sounded, speeches were given, and petitions were signed. However, here's the kicker: Chancellor Kendall refused to leave his office to defend his proposed project. Dale believed that despite his cowardly refuge within the walls of the brutalist-style, orange and brown cube, he could not escape the riotous noises of the demonstration. Throughout the rally, Dale felt that this was his finest hour and he enjoyed imagining the Chancellor's frantic and tortured reaction to the occupation of a section of University Boulevard. He thought that now any illusions the Chancellor personally held to build a vanity project in his name, would now wither and die. He had absolutely no doubt in his mind that the 1,300 or more signatures on a petition would end the Chancellor's "Fast Forward Initiative" dead in its tracks. Dale felt strongly about the effort and he reminded himself that he did not do this for personal glory. No. He did it as a revolt against injustice and for academic progress. He did it for the spirit of "Syracuse Orange".

In the short week since the rally took place, home life for Dale and Kathryn improved. Dale followed through with his promise to be more present and helpful as a husband and father to Patricia. He gave his full attention to his family as if nothing else mattered. In the back of his mind he was thinking there would be a waiting period before he would learn of the fate of the promenade project, but he felt self-assured that no reasonable governance would continue with an action that had generated such public outrage. All he had to do now was to sit back, relax and wait for an announcement that he had been victorious. He thought of the “Syracuse Orange Warriors” as they form an organized convoy on the field before the start of each game. They played to win, and Dale wanted to win. Although no official statement had been issued by the Senate, Dale intuitively felt he already knew the outcome.

One afternoon Dale and Kathryn sat in the waiting room of Dr. Gerrard’s office. He was prepared to assert their request for the doctor to investigate a more detailed analysis of Patricia’s stomach spasms. The momentum that he gained from the success of the promenade rally left some residue of confidence and zest in his personhood. He sat with his right arm around Patricia, holding her on his knee, and he put his other arm as if to comfort Kathryn. They looked like a picture-perfect family, waiting patiently to see the doctor. Kathryn gazed at her husband with renewed appreciation and respect for his character, his sense of justice, and his passion for community involvement. Perhaps she should have been more supportive and understanding of the promenade controversy. Maybe she failed him by not supporting him as ardently as she could have. She gave him a pat to his thigh to let him know that she was proud of him. There was even an article covering the rally in the local section of the Syracuse Daily News and it featured a picture of Dale holding a bullhorn.

As the Bruce family prepared to confront their physician with some vigour, Dale felt a buzzing coming from a pocket in his pants. Seemingly un-phased by the buzzing signal of an incoming email, he calmly and casually retrieved his iphone from his pocket. His eyes lit up when the subject line read: “Promenade Update”. Both excited and nervous at the same time, Dale inhaled a reasonably deep breath and opened the email message. To his utter horror the first line read:

“Promenade project will continue despite recent controversy.”

It went on: “Our goal in beautifying our campus has been in motion since the appointment of Dean Kendall as Chancellor last spring. It is our hope to use recent criticisms regarding communication within the University Senate to provide future instances of transparency and respectful...”

Dale dropped his phone and it ricocheted off the ground and hit Kathryn’s foot. She stared at Dale, at first assuming the worst – perhaps a death in the family, an illness, but deep down she knew that this was a missive regarding the promenade. Perversely she almost wished it was a death rather than a disappointment of Dale’s passionate

undertaking and crushing defeat that she knew Dale would have to absorb. Dale muttered something under his breath, just audible to those close to him:

“Placating bureaucrats...”

His cancelled eyes just stared. Dale turned to Kathryn and said: “I’ve failed in preventing the construction of the promenade.” He said it in a well-paced monotone, and his breathing became somewhat laboured. Kathryn stared at Dale with an expression of repulsion. It was a look that was one part empathetic toward how overridden and damaged a person could become by an obsession, and one part angry toward the degree of neglect and ignorance she had to absorb for a silly illusion and an inflated importance of a promenade. The strained look lasted a moment when Dale gave Patricia a hollow kiss on the forehead and faced Kathryn and said:

“I’m sorry – I wish I could stay. I have to go now. I’ll call you in about an hour.”

As Kathryn watched Dale walk out of the waiting room, she ignored his promise of a phone call. She half hoped it would never be placed.

Back at the university campus, Dale was deep in thought as he stood on University Boulevard. He had forsaken his own code of conduct. He had assumed that his efforts, the rally, the factions he gathered to protest the construction of the promenade were enough. If only he had remained detached, diligent and sharp, and if nothing else, logical, then he would more easily have maintained his composure. A sense of failure and self-hatred echoed throughout his being. Finally, when he could take it no longer, he started toward Chancellor Kendall’s office. Each step he took carried a heavy gravity – a special brand of failure reserved for only those who are committed so passionately to their convictions.

Inside the brutalist fortress that housed Dean Kendall’s office, Professor Dale Bruce approached the receptionist’s desk. He carried himself with all the grace he could muster, but the pain of failure was not easily hidden.

“Hello”, he said. “I would like to speak to Chancellor Kendall.”

The receptionist was an aging woman with dyed red hair in an almost trendy style, and she stared at him with almost trendy eyeglass frames. She wore a black blouse that shimmered with shades of darkness - a silver pendant hung down from her neck. She looked up and asked: “Do you have an appointment with the Chancellor?”

Dale resented the prestige of the Chancellor’s precious and carefully guarded schedule protected by this gatekeeper.

“I do not”, he responded with an air of dignity.

“Okay. The Chancellor is in a meeting and he should be out shortly. Have a seat and he might be able to see you. May I have your name?”

Dale stood expressionless and just stared at the receptionist's reasonably organized desk. Her stationery was neatly stacked, a container held an assortment of pens; there was a green stapler, paper clips in a dispenser, a box of Kleenex, a stack of mail -- some opened, some not. Next to the letters lay a long, gleaming pointed gold letter opener that reflected a faint hue of Syracuse Orange from a flag waving outside the window. Dale gave her a forced half smile before turning around to abide by her perfectly reasonable request to take a chair and wait.

Just as he turned his body to face the waiting room chairs, he turned back and faced her like a highly-charged mechanism. He stepped back up to her desk and picked up her gilded letter opener. The hard, strong point of it gleamed in his grasp. The receptionist was startled and said, "Excuse me sir, what are you..." but her sentence stopped in dead air as she watched bewildered when Dale dropped to his knees in front of the Chancellor's office door. Without hesitation, he plunged the blade of the letter opener into his own heart, now spurting blood onto the taupe carpet. Dale's expression was at first one of shock as he plunged the sharp object deeper penetrating into his chest and puncturing an artery. As his gaze turned downward, his breath began to slow and sounded like distant sighs. He lowered his gaze to the starburst of orange he imagined was reflecting in the pool of red blood flowing from his chest. When the starburst began to fade, Dale formed a full and blissful smile as he reflected on his colour -- the essence of Syracuse Orange intermingling with the red hues of his own blood. Honour. Code of honour. His mind fought for a conscious thought. "Yes. Ahhh..." Dale fell forward.

"In the midst of a nest of venerable trees... in... Takanawa, a suburb of...of...

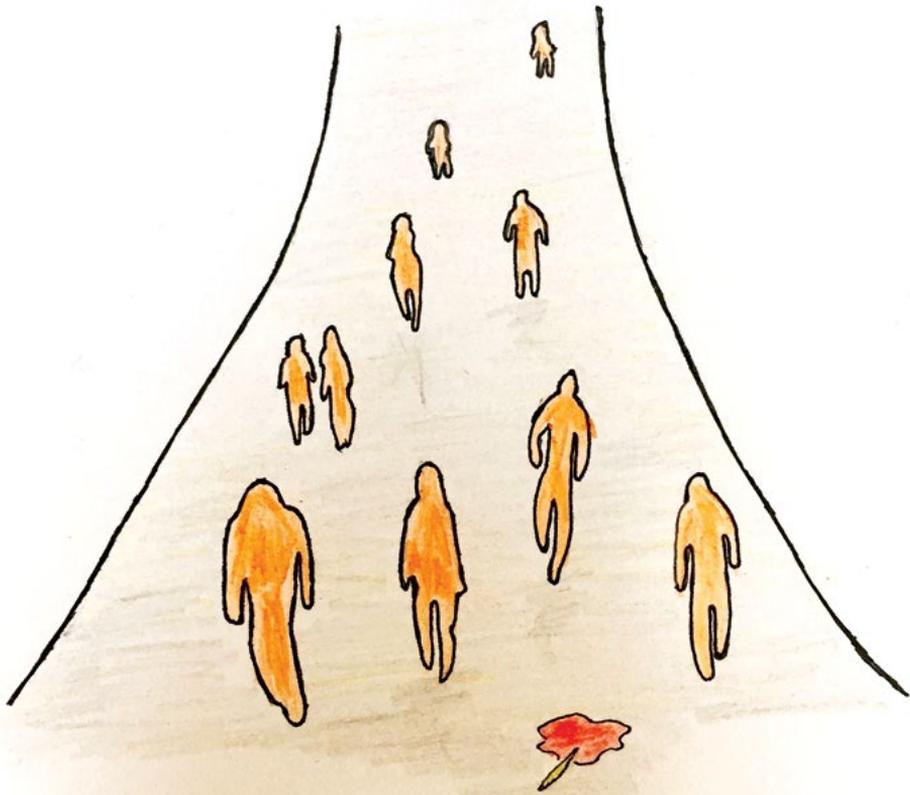
Vedo....hidden...length...breadth...of... Dale felt cold as ice. Fading to black.

Author's Note:

In case you are wondering what a "laptop" is, or the movie *47 Ronin* starring Keanu Reeves, let me assure you that this is a creative story that I wrote to support in the healing of a personal struggle in my life, and to this end, I took a few creative liberties.

I had a dream that later in the 1990s, people would have these small, personalized computer screens on which they could view movies. I call them "laptops" because they can rest on one's lap. Similarly, I had another dream of even smaller, hand-held computers that function as mobile phones. They were agents of electronic communication and they were called "Blackberry".

I also dreamed that Keanu Reeves became an expert in Kung Fu and he would go on to direct and star in a series of medium-whelming martial art films. I've suffered from insomnia for years and I have been taking the prescribed sleep aid, Trazodone. Sometimes it gives me whacky, unorthodox imaginings and dreams filled with flights of fancy and imagined realities.



GRAND SYNERGY, Part 2: Blueprint for an Adequate Personhood

You are astonishing by way of the veracity, resilience and compassion that is within your personhood.

You have persevered through times of adversity and complex life challenges.

The integrity and self-regulation that you demonstrate on a moment-to-moment basis projects radiant light into your social relationships and your intimate sense of self.

Your intimate sense of self is precise and intransigent, but also spirited.

Your ability to exist in between the margins of curious experimentation and the rational mind have contributed to the balanced, dynamic, and poised existence that you have achieved and continue to build.

You have postured yourself within your community as a patient and persistent friend to others, without sacrificing your own wellbeing.

Your openness to the ups and downs of the human condition as it relates to your subjectivity and the subjectivities of others has gifted you a strong quality of empathy.

Your ability to be vulnerable permits visibility where you can see others and be seen by others.

You have acknowledged the beautifully complicated nature of the human spirit, the social consent regarding the pursuit of happiness, and the multi-dimensional and undefinable nature of this pursuit.

You understand the rhizomatic reality of human thought and the human experience.

You challenge patterns of thinking in yourself and in the world around you.

Your challenges and adversities have provided valuable life lessons that have led to transformational processes resulting in further reflection, introspection, self-analysis, self-love, self-regulation, conscious living, mindfulness, personal inventory, and a life narrative driven by the acceptance of further, perpetual and unending life lessons.

You are compassionate with yourself and others and do not expect perpetual happiness.

Your life is structured and balanced, although you recognize when to embrace the chaos when it is needed in the spectrum of growth.

You afford yourself fortitude and genuine confidence.

December 30, 2016

Dear Keanu Reeves,

I am writing to you from a residential rehab facility located near Toronto, Ontario. It's cold and a bit dismal up here, but beautifully silent. Having been born in Canada yourself, I'm sure you can appreciate the nature of the landscape.

I was watching *My Own Private Idaho* last night and a few of the more rural clients made fun of me for "liking gay stuff". They asked me: "What? Are you gay or something?" I simply responded: "Why? See something you like?" I thought I was being clever, and I imagined that if you were here with me, you might have cracked a smile. Interesting factoid: When I was only 8 years old, I watched *My Private Idaho*, and I didn't really understand it at all. I was a big fan of all your movies, especially *Point Break*. The one indelible moment that stayed with me had nothing to do with the script, but it was a colour. In the scene where River Phoenix is role-playing and cleaning his John's house, the colour of the grapefruit pink room stayed within my consciousness for many years. When I was old enough to move downstairs to an enhanced space in our home – at around 13 years old, my parents let me do whatever I wanted in my living space. I painted one of the rooms that same grapefruit pink. I was so proud to bring that colour into my reality.

My real reason for contacting you is to ask you something. I know that you have experienced a lot of tragedy in your life, and you seem to have circumvented the typical Hollywood addiction subterfuge. I was hoping you could send me some tips on how you survived your difficult times. I'm not a Hollywood actor, but I have suffering and pain in my life and I think hearing something from you would probably help.

Warmly,
Evan Tyler





About the Author

Evan Tyler is a life coach, artist and spiritual psychiatrist. He lives and works in Toronto, Canada and maintains a special connection to his hometown of Regina, Saskatchewan. Through his public oratorical speeches, writings, artworks and therapies, he brings to his audience a message of compassion, integrity, vulnerability, creativity and resilience. These are just a few ingredients that makeup the composite of what Evan Tyler refers to as "GRAND SYNERGY".

