

Foreword

Shortly after I became twenty five years old, lying in bed staring at the roof as one does, I had a '*what the fuck do i do with myself*' moment. I was lucky. It meant I accepted at some level my life could be about more than just survival. But it felt horrible. The nice thing about living for survival is that it makes your priorities crystal clear. Why eat? Survival. Why talk to people? Survival. Why get up in the morning? Survival. Without it I did not know what to do.

Making the journey from that point to a life where I do know why I get out of bed in the morning was - and is - hard. In this book I have attempted to capture this journey into the shape of a hundred steps I took.

Comparing one's struggle with that of others is a game that only knows losers. But along the way I met kindred souls, some of which you'll meet as you walk with me in the coming pages. They, like me, spent a lot of time surviving. Despite all the misery life saw fit to throw at them they are each kind, loving and funny people in their own way. And that fact, after thirty years, made me finally believe the road might be worth it.

I dedicate this book to my friends and all those like us finding their way later in life.

Introduction

Hello dear reader,

Even though I was never hungry and always had a roof over my head as a kid, I felt very lost growing up. I started discovering how I could live at twenty five and started really connecting with myself at thirty.

For those finding themselves relating to this book, I strongly recommend taking baby steps as an adult. I know how it feels when you judge yourself and see only failure. I learned to pop a zit at eighteen, I still don't know how to use a mop and at work I perpetually feel like the most uneducated person in the room. But the only thing that'll happen when you try to run to make up for a false start is a painful fall.

This book is not written in chronological order. It is meant as an emotional journey.

In an ideal world we discover and experience life as a child, but no matter the age, we start life by taking steps not leaps.

This book is structured as a child learns to walk. In the beginning with small wobbly steps, falls and mistakes included, and finally at the end are the great strides made with confidence. It is intended for you to feel as if you are on the road with me. For a little while.

Table of Contents — *100 Babysteps to My Life*

Chapter 1: The Pit

1. I went to McDonald's
 2. I threw a glass of Bacardi down the kitchen sink
 3. I threw away a piece of the past
 4. Leaving the city I grew up in
 5. Moving in with students five years younger than me
 6. Being unemployed for a few months
 7. On videogames and internet strangers
 8. On meeting the weirdo
 9. Getting my first ever adult job by myself
 10. After getting pushed into a date with a cutie by Ikrzy
 11. Moving to live alone
 12. Timeskip
 13. Sending a seven page 'I love you'-story to the weirdo
-

Chapter 2: Small Victories

14. I said hello to a bridge
 15. Making a sandwich
 16. Putting new salt in my dishwasher
 17. Picking up the phone when called by a kind soul
 18. Buying a blender that blends and cooks
 19. Said hello to a trashcan (on a walk)
 20. Cooking a meal out of a pre-made mealbox
 21. Getting a cat
 22. Deleting social media
 23. Listening to my favorite cartoons theme song for an hour with ice cream for breakfast
 24. Calling my mother and telling her I was not okay
-

Chapter 3: Back in the World

25. Getting back into the workforce and meeting my friend Marshmallow
 26. I took a spinning class
 27. Fighting with my sister over Christmas gift game
 28. Finding my way in the new job
 29. Going out for weekly drinks with my new colleagues
 30. Why i'm more comfortable speaking to an audience than a person
 31. On meeting the Queen
 32. Taking space with the straight brigade
 33. A vacation weekend alone to Lille France
 34. Going on a date with someone when I wasn't ready
 35. Thinking up the silliest cat names to annoy a friend
 36. Getting to know Marshmallow
 37. Learning what to appreciate in Yaoi (adult entertainment) from the Queen
 38. Spontaneously joining a writing class for the (seemingly) elderly
 39. Realizing why my ex is my ex
-

Chapter 4: Discovering who I am

40. I even cheated my way through primary school
 41. Turning my apartment into a home (Ikea)
 42. My cat sitting on a pizza box
 43. Having five minutes of fame at work
 44. Poorly assembling a cat tower
 45. Playing weekly role playing games / DnD with a group
 46. Telling someone I care about I dislike something about them
 47. Going on a date that was fine
 48. Coming out of the closet to myself
 49. Making friends with an angel
 50. Hosting someone over for dinner that's not my ex
 51. Acknowledging I had feelings for my videogame partner Ikrzy
 52. Talking about my lack of a sex life with my therapist
 53. When I learned not all autistic people crave the familiar
 54. Having a woman I'm attracted to sleepover at my apartment spontaneously
 55. Taking partnered ballroom dancing lessons alone
 56. The Queen's kindness
-

Chapter 5: With Open Eyes

- 57. Mirrors suck
 - 58. Realizing I never cared about money
 - 59. Understanding old anger by feeling it
 - 60. Understanding my grandparents
 - 61. Writing a love letter to a mentor that annoyed me immensely
 - 62. Seeing physical progress in my own body
 - 63. Going on a date with a man
 - 64. Politics with The Queen
 - 65. Hitting my stride in the city of my birth
 - 66. A goodbye phone call with my ex
 - 67. Visiting my old hometown
 - 68. How to be a man?
 - 69. Not found.
-

Chapter 6: Becoming

- 70. Embracing myself
 - 71. Dramatically drooling at a male dancer with the straight brigade
 - 72. Listening to poetry about a ladybug during a funeral long ago
 - 73. Visiting my queer cousin in Porto
 - 74. Marshmallow wanted me physically close
 - 75. Taking an erotic writing class
 - 76. Breaking up with a really sweet man
 - 77. Taking the Columbus training at the Corinor with my new 'tribe'
 - 78. Declaring my love for my best friend
 - 79. Having dinner with myself at a restaurant
 - 80. Becoming an uncle
 - 81. Telling my mother how I feel about her
 - 82. Playing host the morning after a fun night with Marshmallow
 - 83. Tickels became an adult
 - 84. Arranging an expensive goodbye gift for a teacher being fired unfairly
 - 85. Being someone else's safety person
 - 86. Speaking at the funeral of both my grandparents and being able to say out loud to them what I never could in life.
 - 87. The father and his shadow
 - 88. On pushing myself beyond exhaustion in social situations
 - 89. Consequences
-

Chapter 7: Me

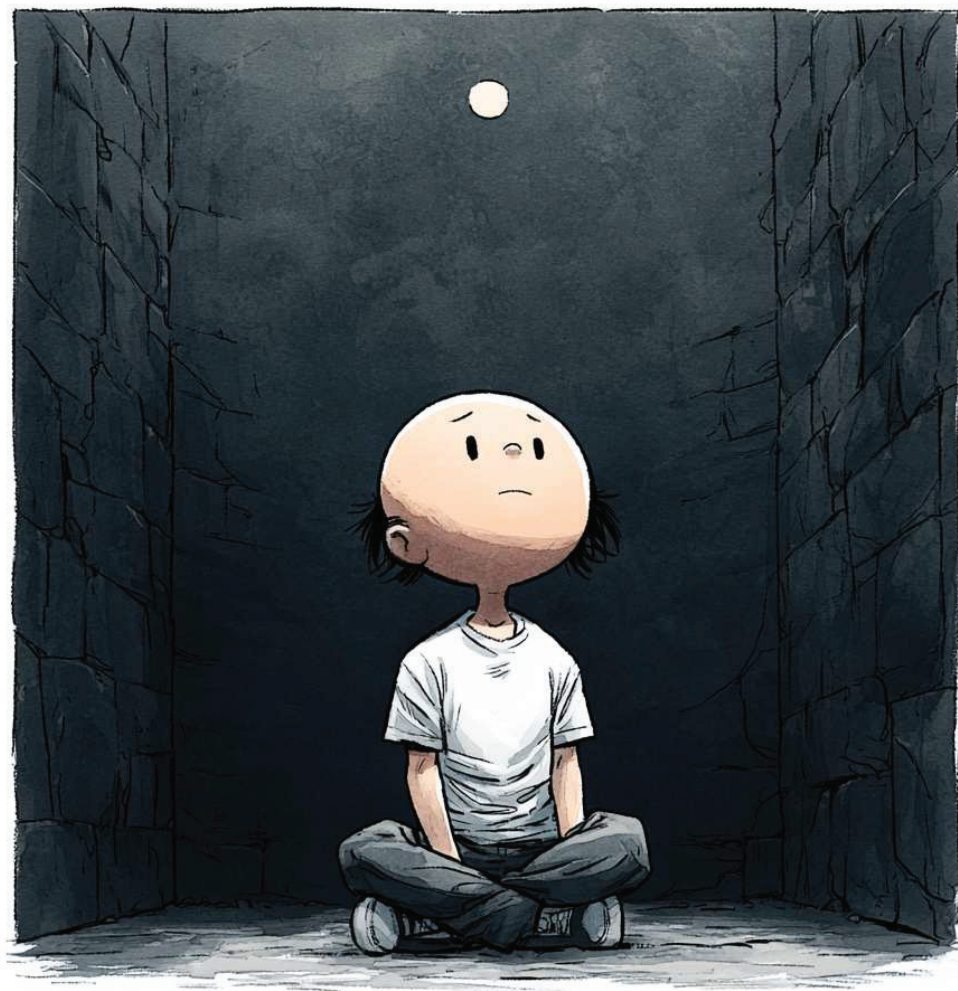
- 90. Performing stand-up comedy in front of 100 strangers with a no filter personal set
- 91. Seeing my parents grow up
- 92. Saying goodbye to Marshmallow
- 93. Confrontation with me, my Mother and Sister
- 94. I experienced physical attraction to a stranger
- 95. Building my own video game Formless
- 96. On my people and the gifts they gave me
- 97. Realizing I didn't write a book to make a friend smile
- 98. Realizing I have no answer
- 99. On the scarcity of safety in my life
- 100. ?

Chapter 1

The Pit

No mind to think. No will to break. No voice to cry out in suffering.

- *The Hollow Knight*



o. Exposition

At twenty years of age, I had not made a single choice for myself. I wished only to not feel like a disappointment to all those people that ever had any expectations of me.

For many years I had defined myself as a would be lawyer, and yet I had quit school.

I attempted to work for my redemption having been given a job I did not deserve, by my father. I trapped myself in the delusion that I could make up for twenty years of failure if only I worked hard enough for one year.

At twenty-one I had no academic, financial or social achievements of note. I existed and was continuing to exist by sheer inertia. My sole ways of spending time were resenting the world, indulging in one of my many unhealthy coping mechanisms such as video games or alcohol and I felt my biggest problem were my hardwired biological survival instincts.

I saw no way forward, but one day I made a choice. I kept making choices during the many days that came after. A child does not worry about when they can run a marathon before they have taken their first step. Neither would I.



1. I went to McDonald's

I wonder if anyone expected my first step in my life to be eating at McDonald's, hahah. Neither did I. Out in public I always felt I had to wear a mask but the social expectations of someone eating chicken nuggets felt manageable, even then. After a walk of less than ten minutes in a dirty shirt and jogging pants, there I was every day. Coffee and chicken nuggets breakfast at two in the afternoon was what I did to start my journey on the road.

Healthiest thing I ever did, though my toilet might disagree.



2. I threw a glass of Bacardi down the kitchen sink

I never had the 'bad kind of alcoholism' is what I like to tell myself, but I know it was close. A couple of beers a day was nothing back then. At night, in the afternoon or even in the morning. On bad days, especially, I needed an escape. On one of them I reached into the fridge for a beer but found none. Instead I grabbed a bottle of leftover Bacardi from a night of partying. Pouring myself an impolite amount in a dirty cocktail glass, I realized what I was holding in my hand: a choice. Was this going to be a step backward or forward? And I chose.



3. I threw away a piece of the past

Puberty was rough. It felt like holding my breath because a predator was nearby that would kill me if I drew their attention. For years. One place - a fancy grocery store - I could draw breath was critical to making it. I made orange juice for four hours there every Saturday afternoon because I was considered too stupid to cut potatoes unassisted.

It was the only place I was able to cry, to the consternation of some customers, and had a father figure in a grumpy old man who managed me. When I was fired around twenty one I stole my work uniform. As a teenager in that store I was seen as someone meant for bigger things, full of potential. I could cry, or be angry and those around me would just talk to me and continue to treat me as one of them. It felt *safe*, I needed physical proof of that.

One of the things you'll find out about me: I am clingy. And safety? That feels nice. But if we cling onto something for too long it tends to turn to poison. It took me a couple years after I left that job behind before I could let go. In throwing away the uniform, I illegally kept for years, I was signalling to myself it was time to find safety somewhere else.

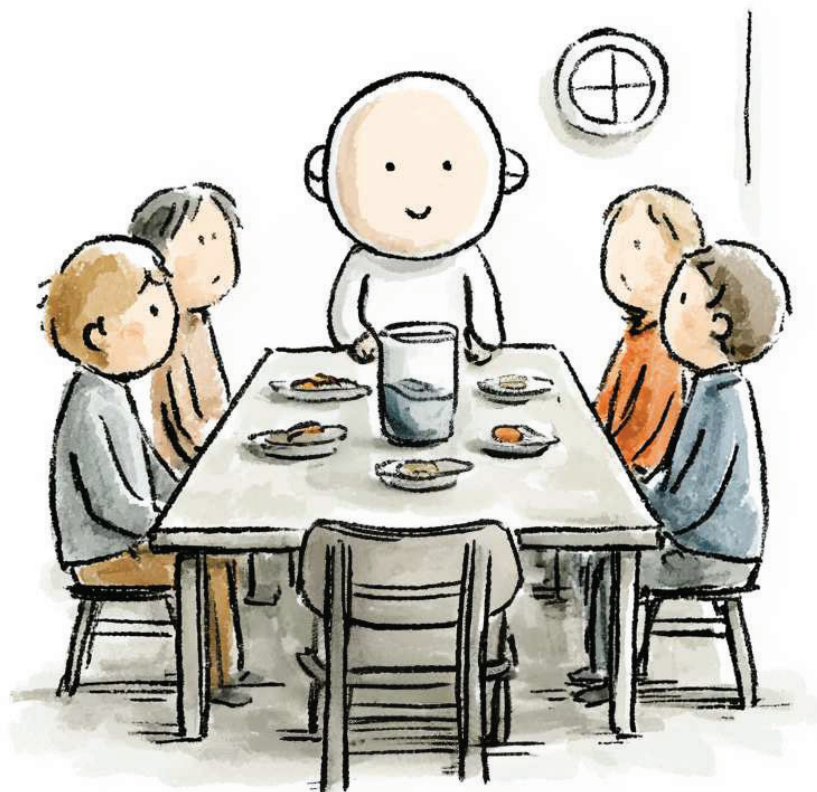


4. Leaving the city I grew up in

The city I grew up in was starting to feel like a bandage that has been on too long. Once home, at nineteen it was drowning me. The shadow of my father was everywhere, and the pressure I put on myself to be someone I was not, was crippling to the point I couldn't even drag myself to the grocery store anymore. Any and all quiet time was horror. That inertia pushing me forwards? It had run out.

Moving out of the city wasn't a planned move, it was an escape. I don't even remember if I was running from the city, myself or an actual demon but there was no hesitation. Choosing the bad option when the other is worse can be your best move.

I knew the city wasn't the problem. But pretending helped for a while. And that's okay. Sometimes a temporary solution is what we need.

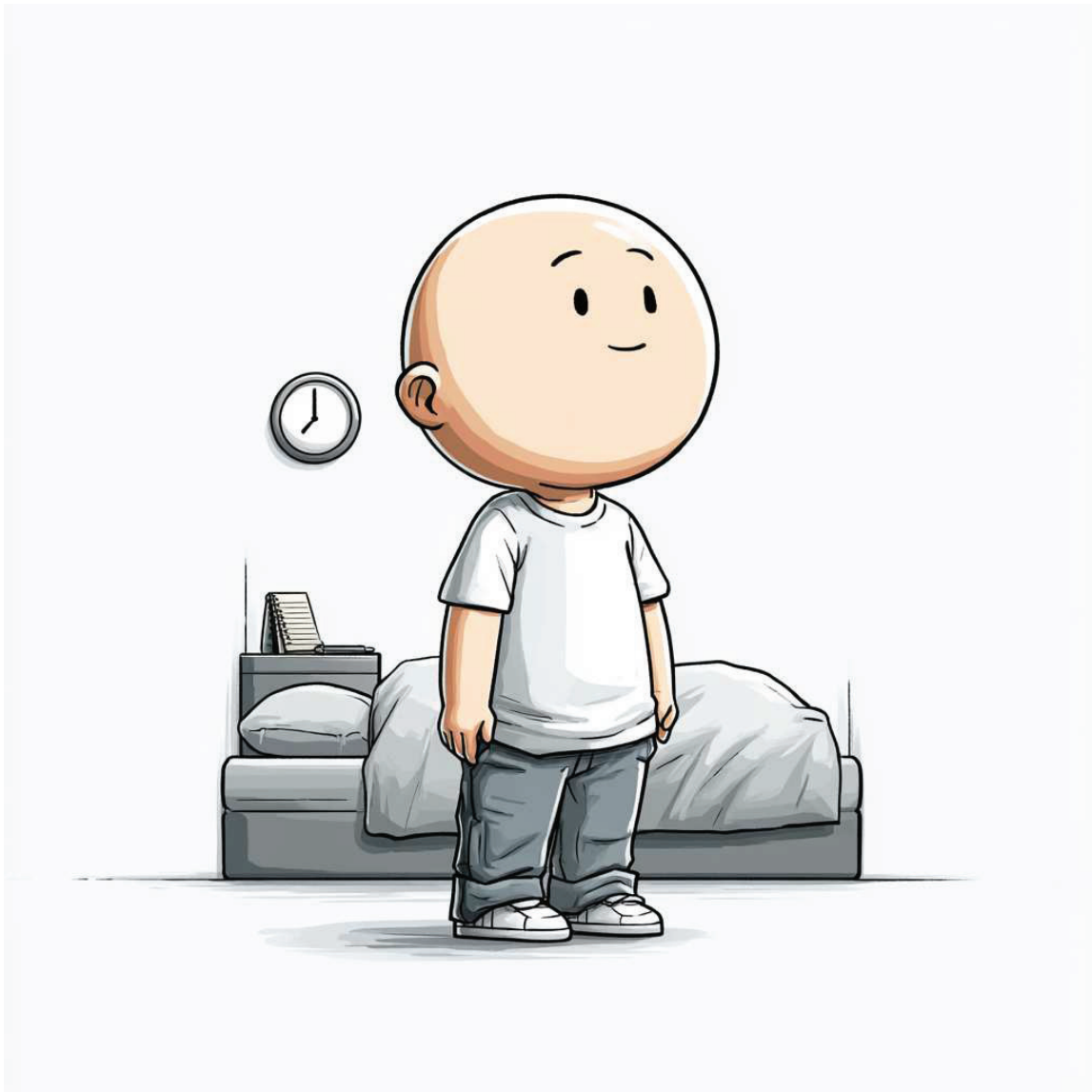


5. Moving in with students five years younger than me

Living like a digital nomad felt natural to me at this point. As I had moved too many times and had no close friends in my life, it was easy to move to an unfamiliar city. As long as I had the internet I would be fine is what I felt.

I moved into a mixed student house, the cleanest place I stayed in since I stopped living with my mother at seventeen, two boys and two girls early in their studies. Most of them were from the same region in the east. They were living as one should; happily travelling their own road and dealing with life's ups and downs. They embraced me.

A chore wheel, shared dinners and an occasional adventure: I loved how normal my life became with them. I had never experienced life this way, I was used to something always being *wrong*. I am so incredibly grateful to have gotten to spend a couple months with these people.



6. Being unemployed for a few months

After having left the town I grew up in to see the sun, I needed a bit of time to find my feet. I got the opportunity to take the time as the Netherlands is a very nice country to live in. You get unemployment benefits and time to figure yourself out, no questions asked. Three months of waking up to no obligations, no manager to project a father figure onto, no bus to take and no goal. After having defined myself for twenty-two years by what I could be, I enjoyed immensely just *being*.

New city, new people and a literal pile of garbage left behind. Everything seemed possible, even easy! Eating three meals a day? Done! Make up an entire workout regimen I was definitely gonna stick with for the long haul? Yeppers. Totally “seriously” applying for jobs to collect my unemployment benefits? Did I actually use this as an excuse to not feel bad for recovering?

For legal reasons I cannot confirm or deny.

