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The Terminally  
Distracted

From Sandbox Saint to Bedroom Sins

## Introduction:

After years of relentless chaos, endless searches for lost items, and constantly drifting from one thought to another (even while reading the very sentence you're reading right now), I finally decided it was high time to put my experiences with ADHD down on paper.

Not because I believed my stories would magically improve anyone's life—no, that would be far too much credit for my scrambled brain.

But I thought, “Why not use a bit of humor to navigate the chaos of life?”

After everything I've been through, I can honestly say that humor was the only way I managed to stay upright—without bouncing off the walls of my own house while on yet another sock-hunt.

This book is not a self-help book.

Let me repeat that: not a self-help book.

Although, if you happen to feel a little better after reading about my dramatic crimes against logic, well, that's a bonus.

What you're getting here is an autobiography—but one that feels more like a wild ride with your eyes closed and your hands in the air.

A ride you never asked for, and one you're not quite sure you can get off.

It's a collection of chaos, self-deprecating humor, and unexpected moments that have quite literally (and figuratively) taken me from one surprise to the next.

The title, *The terminally distracted* is a fitting summary of how my focus works.

Or rather: how it *doesn't* work.

My focus is like a dove vanishing from a magician's sleeve—one moment it's there, the next it's gone, and I'm left standing with a blank stare and my hands in the air, trying to grasp something that makes absolutely no sense.

And if there's one thing I excel at, it's making my attention disappear.

Think of the most mysterious magic trick you've ever seen—but without the flair, without the skill, and without even that slight sense of urgency a magician is supposed to have.

In my case, it's just a constant, subtle state of panic the moment I realize I can't find my keys... *oh right, and I've lost them again!*

In this book, I mainly want to describe situations that are familiar to me—and hopefully to you as well.

I'm an expert in the fine art of sudden, explosive outbursts of anger, in impulsiveness that throws everything around me into disarray, and in the never-ending quest for a moment of peace in a world that seems to be screaming in my ear nonstop.

And then there's the endless repetition of everything:

- A joke that gets told again and again,
- The same question asked (and answered) a hundred times,
- And that eternal loop of thoughts spinning in your head like a hamster on a treadmill.

I plan to set all of this on fire with a generous dose of humor and self-mockery—because believe me, if I couldn't laugh at myself, this would be one hell of a long ride.

On top of that, I simply can't deny you the daily struggle I have with the urge to explain *everything* in excruciating detail.

Everything always has to be analyzed, dissected, and narrated to whoever happens to be nearby—regardless of whether they're already nodding off mid-sentence.

And while I'm telling these stories, there's always that little voice in my head whispering: "You *do* know you're repeating yourself, right?"

And instead of ignoring it, I just say: "Yes, I know—but I can't help it."

Repetition is like an old friend who keeps showing up, even though you haven't really needed his company in years.

I was only diagnosed with ADHD later in life, and I have to admit—it was a relief.

No more looks of confusion, no more baffled comments about being "lazy" or "just not that interested."

No, I finally had something solid to point to, something that gave me legitimate explanations for my own chaos.

It was as if someone had finally mapped out the mess in my head and said:  
“Yes, it’s perfectly normal that you don’t know where you are—because *no one*  
knows where they are on this map!”

And let’s be honest: if there’s one thing I truly excel at, it’s not knowing where I am—  
no matter which room I’m standing in.

I’m an expert at finding objects I’m absolutely *not* looking for (until I suddenly *am*  
looking for them), and the only thing that’s ever really kept me upright is that  
persistent sense of humor that somehow always got me through the walls.

So no, this book won’t improve your life.

But it might make you laugh at my countless blunders—or help you realize that you’re  
not the only one living in a constant state of “Where the hell am I again?”

If you read this book, I hope you find a little comfort in it—or at the very least,  
permission to embrace your own chaos.

Because trust me, if I can learn to accept it all with a smile, then so can you.

And yes, of course: if laughter truly is the best medicine, then consider this at least  
half a dose of fun.

It won’t cure everything, but it might offer a bit of relief.

Although fair warning: if you’re not careful, you might just get as lost in here as I do—  
with a grin on your face—and a brain scan proving I’m not as crazy as I look.

## Chapter 1: My Toddler Years

As a child, I was a walking advertisement for cuteness:

Long, wavy white-blond hair that sparkled in the sunlight like a Sacred Heart statue at a disco, and an angelic face that would make even the Mona Lisa blush.

But, like so many beautiful things, it was too good to last.

By the time hormones made their grand entrance, my flowing locks had been replaced by unruly reddish-brown springs that defied every attempt at styling.

The only style that ever worked was ‘controlled disaster.’

A photo of me as a toddler would immediately make you consider adoption.

That is, until you spent five minutes in the same room with me.

That was usually just enough time to realize that silence was severely underrated.

Even as a preschooler, I was a multitasking tornado.

I’d enthusiastically start building a Lego house, but before the roof was even close to finished, I was already working on a puzzle and half-coloring a drawing.

My attention span was shorter than the fuse of a firecracker, and within twenty minutes, the next “project” would be fished out of the toy bin.

Now, I didn’t just have regular toy bins.

No, my parents had the budget-friendly idea of converting twenty-kilo laundry detergent barrels into toy containers.

These impressive tubs were packed with Lego bricks, wheels, and other building bits—most of which my younger brothers would try to eat on sight.

I suspect Lego was still cheap back then, because with six kids in the house and a father with a military mindset, everything had to be done on a tight budget.

My building projects always started with great hope: a solid foundation, neat exterior walls... but then came the doors and windows.

I’d always mess up the symmetry, or something wouldn’t fit right.

As soon as I realized my masterpiece was an aesthetic disaster, flinging the masterpiece into orbit around the barrel like a deranged astronaut.

Then I’d run to my mother to demand justice for the cruel injustice that had befallen me, while my little brothers kept a safe distance.

After a moment of comfort and a glass of fruit squash, I would usually move on to the kitchen table with colored pencils and a coloring book.

But even that came with its challenges.

Half of the pencils were blunt—a direct result of my earlier creative bursts—and the sharpener had vanished like a magician’s assistant—without applause.

As soon as I discovered that, my inner drama queen reared its glittery head.

The coloring book was ripped to shreds, and the pencils flew through the kitchen like tiny missiles.

As punishment, I was sent to the kitchen corner, where I stared wide-eyed at the peeling wallpaper and quietly plotted my comeback.

And that usually came in the form of a puppet show.

With my puppet theatre and its three stars—Kasper, Nele, and the Devil—my chaotic holy trinity.

The story always started sweetly: Kasper and Nele declaring their love for each other.

But the moment the Devil entered the stage, things quickly spiraled into chaos.

The puppet show turned into an all-out brawl, and poor Nele was always forgotten—mainly because I only had two hands.

My mother, my only audience, would occasionally look up from the mountain of laundry she was ironing.

I only truly captured her attention when the Devil swung in with a dramatic “Goddammit!”

At that point, the iron would fly up, and my mother would stand up and firmly march me back to the kitchen corner.

And so I stood there again, staring at the same flaky wallpaper, silently promising myself that my *next* project—whatever it would be—was going to be even grander.

I actually remember quite a bit from those toddler years.

I can still see that apartment as clearly as if it were printed on the inside of my eyelids.

And not from photos—this was the sixties, after all.

Developing expensive prints of your living space wasn’t exactly a thing.

I still remember the red lampshade, the oak cabinet with leaded glass and yellow curtains inside, and the brown velour couch.

According to my mother, they bought completely new furniture after we moved when I turned five.

At that time, we were living in Siegen (Germany), in a region under Belgian military occupation.

My father was in the military, so we lived in a military neighborhood—tiny village-like communities with rows of identical apartments and little houses.

It was a hilly area, perfect for sledding down in the winter.

Most of the time, I was walking hand-in-hand with my (older) sister, who—if necessary—had no problem smacking me if I tried to run off.

Some names of childhood friends still linger in my memory:

There was *Peter Parcel* (whom I was convinced for years was actually called *Parsley Pete*), *Kathleen Chickens*, and some kid named *Booger*—to this day, I have no idea what his real name was.

There are moments from my childhood that are etched into my brain like the scribbles of a caffeinated ghostwriter on deadline.

Take, for example, the incident with the German neighborhood kids.

Why we, as mini-vandals, decided that throwing rocks at “the Germans” was a great pastime—I honestly can’t recall.

Maybe it was because their footballs were always better, or because their bikes never squeaked.

Whatever the reason, it ended with a perfectly aimed rock to my forehead and an impressive amount of blood.

My sister carried me home like a half-dead gladiator, where my mother took one look at me, turned ghostly pale, and nearly passed out herself.

I later learned I had transformed the couch and half the carpet runner into a horror movie set, with giant blood stains dripping like lava across the surface.

And then there was that bizarre moment in the playground, when my oldest brother found me and the neighbor girl completely naked.

To this day, I don’t know why we thought nudist sprinting was a solid plan. It probably seemed like a brilliant idea at the time.

The naked truth is that I was sent to bed crying, without dinner, howling about the injustice of the world loud enough to rattle the walls.

Meanwhile, downstairs, my parents and brother were in stitches, laughing themselves silly over my “adventure.”

Tragic *and* embarrassing—like so much of my youth.

Some memories are so absurdly vivid, you couldn’t make them up if you tried. Like that time I snuck into an apartment building with a friend...

Our brilliant plan?

To climb onto the roof and survey the whole neighborhood as if we were tiny conquerors.

It was a typical afternoon in the neighborhood.

The sun wasn’t too bright, the birds weren’t particularly loud, and the sky was such a bland shade of blue that you’d never notice it unless you paused in perfect silence—and of course, it’s always in those moments of calm that trouble brews.

My mother, had the brilliant idea of making herself a cup of coffee while eavesdropping on a *rumor* that the neighborhood police officer was nearby.

You know the type—he always shoved his hands into his pockets so obviously that you had to wonder: was he hiding some magical skeleton key for breaking and entering, or did he just really hate washing his hands?

I, the ever-so-innocent five-year-old adventurer (read: toddler who lost all brain function at the thought of adventure), had already hatched a near-suicidal plan earlier that morning.

My friend Tom and I had decided that the world simply wasn’t *complete* without seeing it from above.

And so, armed with a death wish disguised as curiosity, we decided to climb to the rooftop of our apartment building.

And now?

Now I was hiding under the kitchen table, eavesdropping on a deep and meaningful conversation between my mother and the hypnotized neighborhood officer, who apparently had had his eyes on us the entire time.

They weren’t standing on the porch, no.

They weren’t waving signs that said “Heavy Fines” or “Dangerous Heights.”

Oh no—this was far more theatrical: an endless debate about “natural behavior” and “parental responsibility.”

Apparently, the officer had been talking about “monitoring the small enterprises of the village,” when my mother, with her signature flair, attempted to wrap him in her web of maternal charm and shameless excuses.

“Officer,” she began, and you should’ve heard her speak.

She had *that* voice—you know, the kind that makes you feel like someone’s gently wrapping you in a warm blanket while asking where you hid the evidence.

“What on earth do you think that boy was feeling up there?

Don’t you think he might have felt like an explorer—standing tall, seeing the world from a new angle? Shouldn’t that be something to be proud of?”

The officer glanced uncertainly toward the kitchen.

“Well, ma’am, I believe it was more dangerous than anything to be proud of... I mean, two toddlers on a rooftop—that’s hardly what I’d call a playground.”

Ah, of course!

The neighborhood officer—the weary enforcer of the law—probably couldn’t stand kids who wanted to leave their own mark on society.

But, as always, my mother, with her masterful command of human interaction, launched her next attack.

“Certainly,” she said, “but imagine this: they were pushing their boundaries!

Maybe they even developed a better understanding of gravity.

Don’t you think the next time they see another kid climbing a tree, they’ll think: ‘Nah, I’m going higher!’”

She said it with such dazzling conviction, you’d almost believe she had tried it herself (which she hadn’t, but she definitely gave off the vibe that she had and just wasn’t telling).

The officer rubbed his face, possibly trying to shake off the mental image of two toddlers armed with dangerous ideas.

“Well... it was definitely a unique kind of exploration,” he admitted begrudgingly.

“Still, I’d say it’s less than ideal for a five-year-old to plan his own rooftop expedition.”

There I sat, silently under the table—just like Tom, who was probably at home on his couch with a big grin and a stick in his hand, ready for his next grand adventure. We both knew what was going on: that officer had seen us.

He had seen how we, tiny survivors, had built our confidence up in the clouds.

And my mother—explaining every detail of my “entrepreneurial behavior” with the finesse of a seasoned diplomat—was our negotiator.

She hadn’t said it outright, but he knew: we were two little fearless explorers, just out there “exploring,” without any concept of safety.

But hey, who does think about that when you’re five years old and the roof looks like a much cooler playground than the sandbox?

“I assume this is all over now, right?” asked the officer, his tone bordering on conciliatory.

“Yes,” my mother replied, in the soft voice of someone perfectly aware of her own innocence.

“But believe me, if you’d ever seen that view, you’d understand why he longed so much to escape his little world—just for a moment.”

She turned toward me and smiled.

“Right, little one?”

I froze under the table, but my eyes gave me away—it was obvious I wasn’t particularly worried about “getting away with it,” as long as there was no punishment involved.

The conversation ended in an awkward silence, during which the neighborhood officer probably decided he should focus more on *actual* crime than on the rooftop antics of two little men with big dreams.

My mother wrapped up her brilliant defense by assuring him that “a light correction” might be in order, but that there was no need to sound any alarms—toddlers would be toddlers, and the roof was now officially *off-limits*.

As the officer left, my mother gave me a secretive smile.

“That was quite the adventure, wasn’t it?” she said.

I nodded, still trying to understand why I hadn’t become at least *a little* famous for a stunt like that.

And so, without ever saying it out loud, we all knew what had happened.

It became a little secret shared between a toddler, his mother, and a cop—one no one would ever truly reveal.

My mother had a photo album in which our family had been immortalized, and flipping through it felt like a cringeworthy trip down memory lane.

Take, for instance, that school photo where we all stood neatly in blue V-neck sweaters, wearing fake shirt fronts and bright red bowties underneath.

Yes, fake shirts.

Just a collar and a patch of fabric to make it *look* like you were wearing a full button-up.

I suspect this fashion nightmare was invented by a seamstress who deeply hated children.

My father was the opposite of all this chaos.

In my eyes, he was half a superhero.

He did high jump and long jump in the army, and we were often allowed to tag along to his competitions and barracks visits.

His trophy cabinet was filled with pewter plates and gleaming cups that left us in awe—though it was really his *ultimate stunt* that left us speechless:

He claimed he could jump across the roof of our house.

And he organized this feat with military precision.

We kids had to stand out in front while he got a running start.

Then we'd sprint through the house to the backyard... to catch him landing.

The only problem was my mother, who *invariably* walked in with a grocery bag at exactly the wrong moment—ruining our perfect timing every single time.

By the time we got to the backyard, all we ever saw was the landing.

There stood my father, hands on hips, grinning like a general who had just won a glorious battle.

My childhood was a chaotic string of drama and hilarity.

But as my mother once said: “You can laugh about it now, but back then, I wanted to paste you behind the wallpaper.”

Luckily, she never actually did—because that peeling wallpaper in our kitchen corner would never have been able to contain my childish brilliance.

Our trips to *Kaufhof* were some of the best memories I had.

The candy aisle with *Kinder Chocolate*, *Brause* (that foaming stuff that made you look like you were having a seizure), and *Nimm 2* (those rock-hard lemon candies).

And all of that stuff still exists, by the way.

I was in Aachen recently and left the store with a shopping cart full of childhood memories.

My mother was the sweetest woman you could imagine.

She had the patience of a saint and a smile that could calm a hurricane—but she had a secret: she was actually a master multitasker.

Her greatest talent?

Dragging all six of us around—usually by bus—on errands to the city.

No problem, she figured. Just park them in a corner with a book and some toys, and voilà! Hours of peace and quiet.

Well—everyone except little Stefan.

Because the moment my feet hit the ground, I was no longer a boy.  
No—I was *The Flash*.

It took all of twenty seconds before I was zooming around the store, touching everything, flipping things over, and destroying anything not bolted to the floor.

Everything from the latest gadgets to the most delicate stacks of brochures passed lovingly through my hands like a whirlwind.

The endpoint of these escapades?

Usually, I’d already be clutching my mother’s arm like a spinning top, twisting and turning in a desperate attempt to escape my own energy.

Back then, there was no such thing as an ADHD diagnosis.

I was simply labeled “that annoying little brat.”

But there *were* benefits: everywhere I went, I was welcomed with cookies, candy, and toys—all in a desperate attempt to keep my hyperactivity under control.

It worked for about five minutes.

*Maximum.*

My extended family had a very different view of my visits.

They admitted that whenever they saw my parents approaching in the distance—with *me*—they would go into a full-blown panic and hide all valuables in the cupboards. I had that effect.

“Oh no, here he comes! Hide everything!”

Maybe it was the way my eyes sparkled.

Maybe it was the speed at which I took over a room.

Who knows?

And then there were the mood swings.

Oh, those were legendary—going from zero to rage or tears in seconds, often for no reason at all.

Sometimes simply because I couldn’t find my own socks.

Even at the playground, kids would instinctively take a step back when I showed up. I was their first introduction to the concept of *stress*.

If there had ever been a school for “emotional disasters,” I would’ve graduated with honors.

I was also the *enfant terrible* of the neighborhood.

In the middle of winter, you’d see me running outside with no coat, no hat, nothing.

And then, on a school day, I once realized I had stepped onto the bus still wearing my pajama pants.

A few more times, I wandered dreamily off the schoolyard only to discover I had missed my bus home.

Which meant hours of waiting until my father finished work and came to pick me up—followed, of course, by a proper scolding.

I could recite those by heart.

One thing I remember clearly is riding our tricycles to a field with a friend—a field so vast, all you could see was the horizon.

And we?

We were absolutely convinced the world *ended* there.

Because when you're small, the world seems enormous—and your subconscious tricks you into believing the most bizarre things.

All those adventures.

All that chaos.

And yet, looking back, I have enormous respect for my parents, who weathered the storm with so much patience and gave me a loving childhood—without ever raising a hand to me.

That might have been their greatest achievement of all.

Thankfully, the hyperactive phase faded around age six—though I suspect my mother quietly lost a few nerves along the way.

## Chapter 2: My Childhood Years

It was the era of the *flower power* revolution—the groovy seventies—when everyone thought the world could be changed with a little love, some flowers in your hair, and a couple of joints.

You wandered around with your feet in sandals that hadn't seen soap in three months, and your hair looked like it had auditioned for a fried snack commercial..

It was the time of *Love and Peace*, and at the same time, the golden age of head lice.

We had more of them than an unwashed sheep in a cage.

And if you were really unlucky, your school years were “enriched” by having your head shaved by the school nurse—who apparently thought you were part of some spiritual cult, rather than just a casualty of a particularly itchy epidemic.

During this glorious period, the study of mental disorders wasn't exactly front-page news.

What was high on the scientific agenda?

Experimenting with psychedelics.

Your parents had never heard of ADHD, let alone considered sticking a label on you just because you had trouble sitting still.

Back then, they called it “hyperkinetic syndrome” or “minimal brain dysfunction.”

What a beautiful euphemism!

They simply saw it as a lack of movement and an excess of impulsivity—and that was that.

If you were really having a hard time, people might quietly mutter that you had “bad parents.”

Seriously—I still remember how my parents were looked at as if they had personally invented chaos, simply because I had a knack for overenthusiastic, impulsive behavior.

But sadly for me, no one ever thought about calming me down—in fact, no one saw it as anything serious.

That's when the real adventure began: "*real*" school.

Endless hours of sitting upright at a desk—those soul-crushing stretches of time where you had no clue why you were there, other than the fact that you *had* to be and were supposed to "pay attention."

And believe me, paying attention was not exactly my greatest talent.

When the teacher asked a question, it felt like I was trying to swim to the bottom of the ocean.

And while I sat there, lost deep inside my own brain, I thought, "If I just tighten my shoes a little more, maybe I'll disappear."

And I'm not joking, folks.

If there's one sentence in my life that rings completely true, it's this: "I wished the ground would open up and swallow me."

In my case, I didn't just sink—I plunged straight to the earth's core.

Honestly, if I could bottle that feeling and sell it, I'd be a millionaire.

And then there were the bathroom breaks.

Oh yes, you read that right—I simply didn't dare to ask if I could go to the toilet.

So when I finally did—always the last kid to leave the room—it was usually with wet pants and a yellow puddle left behind under my chair, proof that I was fighting a guerrilla war against my own bladder.

But in the midst of all that school misery, there was a sanctuary: comic books.

My mother used to say, "A bomb could go off next to you and you still wouldn't notice!"

And honestly, that was a spot-on assessment of my concentration span.

Every Saturday, when we went shopping, there was one mission: getting to the newsstand to buy the latest *Beetle Baily* comic with my pocket money.

Within ten minutes in the car, I'd finished the whole thing.

And once the adventure was over, my soul felt *deeply* disappointed.

It was a real celebration when a new *Spike and Suzy* came out—but that only happened once a month *if you were lucky*.

And then there was the “Comic newspaper”—the holy grail of cheap entertainment: a newspaper full of comic strips that could keep you busy for hours.

But don’t get me wrong—I was also an outdoor kid.

What does that mean in practice?

I was a walking daydream, constantly on the lookout for fairies and gnomes in the woods, wearing shorts (even when it was freezing), armed with a scarf and sometimes even my dad’s military gear.

It was all part of my grand plan to escape the grey, boring reality and send my mind off of grand adventures.

The only time I was truly calm was when I was wandering around inside my own head, and the world around me simply ceased to exist.

Peter was my neighbor and, as you can imagine, a walking catastrophe with a big smile.

His hair was pure white—you’d think he was a failed albino who had spent too much time in the sun.

But no, his nickname was simply “*Whitey*”, because when he stood in the sunlight, you’d honestly start to wonder whether your eyelids had simply disappeared from all that glare.

What I lacked in self-confidence, Peter made up for—double, no, triple.

It was as if he’d been born in the body of a boy, but with the egos of five men who were all convinced they were Michael Jordan.

Together, we were a perfect match, like a superhero duo: me, the shy little mouse, and him, the elephant in the room who had no concept of personal space.

My introverted nature was tested daily by Peter.

Without him, I’d never have learned how to start a conversation—  
or worse: how to function in a group without freezing like a fridge that just realized the door was open.

Thanks to *Whitey*, I was *forced* into social interaction, even though I often just wanted to sit in a corner and stare at a flower.

We lived in the Kempen—a wooded region with everything you could ask for in an ideal childhood: trees, lakes, meadows, and... fire hazards.

Peter's dad was a carpenter, which meant he had unlimited access to wood, nails, and other dangerous tools.

With that power, we built our forest huts—which, like our youthful imagination, amounted to little more than a few sticks and a hammer.

But that didn't bother us.

We were artists, we thought.

The kind of artists who lit entire forests on fire with matches—because fire was our god.

And then there were those *roof nails*—a terrifying invention that must have come from a desperate plumber with poor impulse control.

We thought it was genius to hammer those long metal pins into trees so we could climb them like jungle explorers.

What could possibly go wrong?

Well, I'll tell you: *everything*.

One day I slipped off one of those nails and started tumbling toward the ground like a rubber bouncy ball from hell.

I hit more body parts on the way down than a soggy newspaper slamming into wet pavement on a rainy day.

When I finally stopped falling, I discovered that my upper arm was no longer pointing in the expected direction.

Instead, my bone had decided to treat me to a bonus anatomy lesson—showing me things like yellow fat and actual veins.

Lovely.

Peter, of course, made the brilliant decision to run off in blind panic to tell my mother I had just performed the legendary fall of the century.

When she arrived—sobbing, hysterical, flapping around like a headless chicken—I was calmly staring at my open arm.

I observed the wound with the same kind of fascination you have when watching a new TV show: you know it's going nowhere, but you keep watching anyway.

“This is pretty interesting,” I thought.

My mother probably assumed her son was either dead or at least partially dismembered, but I wasn’t scared at all.

As usual in situations where normal people would freeze in terror, I instead entered super-focus mode.

No panic, no drama, just... “Huh. That’s a really nice-looking piece of bone.”

Every Sunday, the saga continued: Peter and I, the dynamic duo of the Kempen, would go to the Scouts.

And not just *any* Scouts—we were cubs: the crème de la crème of the youth movement.

We were greener than a cactus in the rain, dressed in outfits that would make even baby commandos blush.

Green sweater, brown shorts, a green cap with golden trim (because obviously, we needed to stand out in the woods), a scarf so green it probably had a higher gold-to-fabric ratio than actual treasure, and a belt buckle so shiny you could use it as a mirror to reflect your shame.

Our leader was *Akela*, the only person who apparently never realized that “jungle” and “Scouts” were two completely different concepts.

All the other leaders had names from *The Jungle Book*, which made us feel like we were off on an adventure with Tarzan and his crew—minus the wild animals or the cool monkeys.

But hey, you had to do it for something—and that *something* was the glorious badge you got after mastering a few completely useless skills, like “tying knots” or “pretending to do a good deed by giving someone your candy so they’d shut up.”

Those badges made everything worth it.

Earning one felt like graduating from university—at least, that’s what I thought while proudly admiring the buttons on my uniform.

What we did was essentially the perfect recipe for a gloriously pointless childhood: we went on forest quests, made pancakes (and of course, ate them), joined the carnival parade, and sang like the Three Wise Men in exchange for cake.

And whoever found the little bean in their slice was crowned king—which, in our world, was the equivalent of earning half a star on your glowing youth movement résumé.

But the highlight of the year?

Camp!

Three weeks of sleeping in a tent, cooking your own food, swimming in ponds that were probably sponsored by the local frog enthusiast club,

fishing with a homemade line (which usually ended with me hooking my own finger), and long expeditions that were really just attempts to find hiding places far away from the leaders, who had already labeled me “that crazy kid.”

Until Peter’s ‘brilliant’ brain kicked into action again.

After lunch—which always tasted like “I really hope this isn’t old shoe leather”—we’d get a few hours of free time.

Naturally, Peter and I would head off into the forest—toward the nearby village.

Peter, however, had other plans.

Plans that could have immediately filled the first few chapters of a book called *How to Start the Biggest Criminal Enterprise of Your Life*.

“Let’s race!” he said, pointing at a small house with a scooter parked in front.

A scooter without a lock—which was already a terrible sign, but to Peter, it was like a glowing invitation straight out of a low-budget crime film.

“Stay here. This cannot possibly end well!” I warned.

But Peter had already decided that life was far more interesting on the forbidden path.

Before I knew it, he was up the driveway and had his hands on the scooter.

“Wait a minute—that thing is old, ugly, and half the tires are flat!” I shouted.

But Peter was already straddling the handlebars, pushing that miserable Zündapp like he was aiming for 100 km/h—or a spontaneous engine explosion.

When the engine finally coughed to life (I still don’t know if it was the motor or just our nerves backfiring), Peter shouted: “Hop on!”

And I did what any rational person would do in a moment like that:  
I jumped on, convinced this was going to be my final ride on Earth.

Peter took off like a lunatic—tires screeching and at a speed I usually only associate with Formula One tracks.

“You’re going to get us killed!” I screamed, mentally tying my will to the soles of my shoes.

But Peter was relentless.

“No brakes!” he suddenly shouted, as we hurtled toward a tree at a speed more suited to a stuntman than a boy scout.

With a scream that sounded suspiciously like a chicken being yanked from the fridge, he yanked the scooter sideways.

We slid across the gravel, and I could literally feel the rocks slicing through my clothes like a knife through butter.

When the chaos finally settled, we assessed the damage: the scooter was now nothing more than a rusted heap, the chain had popped off, and gasoline was dripping from the tank.

My clothes?

Shredded.

As ready for the trash as my hopes of surviving the ride.

But Peter, ever the pragmatic optimist, came up with a brilliant idea: “Let’s just say we fell out of a tree.”

Genius, right?

Unfortunately for us, *Ake/a* was already waiting—radiating the fury of a jungle leader who’d just missed lunch—flanked by a squad of group leaders ready to send us home.

That very same day, our parents were called to pick us up.

What an adventure.

What a scout experience.