

## My Memories Notebooks

April 3

I turned 50 today. I'm still unsure about how I feel about it. Isn't it odd how we have to "accept" our age at some point in life? You live your life day in and day out and time passes with little reflection then all of a sudden, BOOM, you've lived half your life...hopefully. I've been thinking a lot about life lately. Thinking about where I've been and where I am now. I've experienced more than some and less than others. I've had success and felt failure. I've loved and I've lost. I've seen much of the world yet not nearly enough. I've had a six-figure bank balance and I've had multiple overdrafts as well. It's been a roller coaster for sure but I imagine it is for most of us.

I've been journaling for over 35 years on and off now and I think back to that 14-year-old kid and his dreams and desires. It's been such a long time I can hardly remember him. I remember hating the cold. My cousin had moved to Los Angeles and when I'd hear about him swimming in a pool in his apartment complex, I'd get so jealous being stuck in a brutal Chicago winter. This is one of the first catalysts that ultimately landed me in Los Angeles a month before my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I didn't have much direction when I was young. I remember that. I can't recall any specific career ambitions which is probably why I've worked in 10 different industries in my life. I didn't get ambitious until my late 20s. It's hard to say how 14-year-old me would feel about the life we've experienced so far. I'm not famous for anything and I haven't made some major contribution to the world but I don't think he'd be disappointed.

35 years of journaling and I've never gone back and read my entries as a whole. I'd usually only read a bit of my previous entries when I would restart the habit just to catch myself up a bit. I guess I did believe my life would be worthy enough of keeping a journal of my early years. That ultimately turned into this lifelong habit but so far nobody's requested my life story. Now that I'm at the half century mark, I may as well give it a real read. I've got close to 30 books to go through, some full, some not. The one thing they all have in common is the word "Memories" on the cover. It's funny how the entries are written as thoughts and feelings about a day's events and aren't actually memories until they've been read. Whatever perspective taken, I'm excited to dive into these books.

April 4

I browsed briefly through some of the early journals and I wish I could say my entries were captivating but the life of a teen, although dramatic to the individual, is boring and mundane. Wow, the things we worried about as kids!!! My teenage years were typical...friends, crushes, fights, testing the boundaries of authority, grand ideas of the future. There are some stand out moments that brought some big smiles to my face though. It makes me excited to continue.

April 5

Wow what an incredible dream I had last night!! I can only occasionally recall bits and pieces of a dream but last night was different. I feel like I was awake and conscious but I was a kid again.

...It's the first week of summer break in between freshman and sophomore year. It's late and we've been hanging in Ferd's basement tonight but I need to get home and so does James. We're only a 10-minute walk from our homes. A walk we've made without incident dozens of times, the past 5 nights consecutively as a matter of fact. This night the suffocating summer humidity barely relented even hours after the sun took its leave. This warranted a leisurely pace which seemed to destine us to cross paths with Booth and his gang of shitheads. As we walked down the sleeping Ardmore Street Booth's car turns the corner and it looks full. They're all 3 years older than James and I and that's a world of difference at our age. They've spotted us and if you've ever seen a cat lock onto a target, you'd recognize the look. We were prey to this car full of predators. I realized I was running well after my legs started their furious work. James had scattered in a different direction and Booth took me for an easier target. I was caught pretty quickly and they surrounded me in a semi-circle with a tall wood fence to my back and tell me to face the fence. My heart was pounding so fast my ears felt like they were pulsating, emitting the beats of my fear. I turn around and hear Booth ask why we ran and I said I don't know and BANG, he sucker punches me. He hits me hard enough to get a grunt of pain before I shut up again. I wait and prepare myself for another punch but it doesn't come. Booth tells his friends "Let's find the other one." He tells me "Don't run next time bitch" but it's said almost obligatory, likes he's only acting tough. Then and there I was outnumbered, outweighed and too afraid to fight back but a few days later I realized something. Booth likely expected to knock me down with that one swing and the fact that my knees didn't even buckle pulled the confidence right from under his feet...

...A day at the ballpark and I'm 15 again. It's me, Tom, James, and Donovan and we're halfway between 3<sup>rd</sup> and home about 20 rows up. These aren't our seats. Our seats are upper deck and by the foul pole but nobody was using these so we decided to guard them for their owners until they arrived. This was the second set of seats we've switched to but it's the 4<sup>th</sup> inning and looks like we'll be keeping these for the rest of the game. This was standard operating procedure when we caught a game. The air is filled with the smell of hot dogs and beer and peanuts and the sounds of the crowd reverberate through the concrete cathedral. It's a beautiful summer day, warm with just the slightest breeze to tickle your skin. Perfect baseball weather! It was always an adventure when we'd go to a game and the big cheesy grins lining our faces were a testament to the magic of the sport. A magic I'd feel throughout my life even when my love for

the game itself started to wane. The crack of the bat signals us to the pop-up foul and we watch its ascent realizing it's heading our way. We've all got our mitts in our laps but they're not easily accessible as they're doubling as trays for our hot dogs and popcorn and nachos and cokes. As the ball crept its way upward, white and red turning black against the blue sky, any excitement is quickly washed away as we assess its earthbound trajectory. Seasoned spectators that we were, we could tell the ball would fall around 5 rows in front of us. We all look at each other and no words need to be spoken. The feeling is mutual for us all. Bummed we didn't get to catch a ball but relieved we didn't lose all our food and drinks. There's no doubt among us that if the ball had been reachable our lunches would've been casualties. Smiles turn to giggles turn to big laughs...an extraordinary moment on an ordinary day...

...It's almost the end of summer break and we're sitting on the grass lawn of an office complex down the road from Lincolnwood Country Club. Our bikes are scattered all about as we kick back in a circle. The lawn is well groomed yet the grass is sharp and prickly but we were in the shadow of the building. The summer sun was baking above and we found a small hiding place. Tom and Ferdinand had just finished their morning caddie jobs and we were trying to figure out the day. James, Donovan and myself rode to the course to meet them and this was our first pit stop because Tom scored a pack of cigarettes from one of the older caddies. We start talking about a couple girls in the neighborhood and somehow the conversation winds its way to how would we fare in prehistoric times dealing with dinosaurs and that, naturally, leads into how we'd raise our imaginary future sons. By no means is this a conversation for the ages. That is, to any other than the five of us. We sat there for most of that afternoon hitting on 20 different subjects. We were just learning the ways of the world and our minds were still lively and imaginative. We didn't realize it at the time but we were starting to vocalize and form our individual opinions. A pivot point in our lives. The laughs we had that afternoon would keep us high through the rest of the day. It's hard to beat the friendships you have at such an age. You know you'll be friends forever but think it'll always be like this. The ignorance of youth is a blessing to the youth however. Youth doesn't know that 1 of us will be gone before he's 30 and another before he's 40. Youth doesn't know that in 6 years he'll be a stranger in a city 2,000 miles from home with the country under attack. Youth basks in the bliss of ignorance while it still can...

April 6

I've completed reading through my teenage years and it's amazing how much of my youth I've forgotten. There was a whole summer fling I haven't thought about until I saw her name in the journal. What a pleasant, welcome surprise too! Lily was smart and funny and pretty. She was only around for a few weeks before college began again and she'd have to leave so I never considered it a relationship. As I think back now, having read the younger me talk about her I realize she had a bigger impact on me than I intended. I wonder what kind of impact I had on her and how distant a memory I am. I often wonder how I've impacted many people I've known.

There's not much difference from that young man and who I presently am. He cared deeply for his friends and he could make friends with anyone. He was pragmatic, could often

see the bigger picture and was both book and street smart. He had confidence, charisma and humor. That young man had already learned many harsh realities of life at a young age but he had much to learn still. "Adulthood" isn't on his radar yet. How envious I am!

April 7

Ok, something's going on here that I can't really explain. I went to bed last night and I know I fell asleep so what I experienced had to be a dream. The problem is it felt real. I felt like a spectator in my body, I could feel and smell and taste but I didn't have control. It was like how a director watches the star act out their scene through a monitor except I'm the director and the star.

...I'm 17 again. It's a Friday night and we're all hanging out at Sasha's. Through the radio waves, Chris Cornell and Soundgarden are requesting to "follow him into the desert". Jerry and Pete are having an epic Super Smash Bros. Battle with Jerry's Kirby currently putting a smackdown on Pete's Yoshi while Jim, Cathy and Rob cheer on waiting to get their turn. I find myself entwined on the couch with Sasha's friend Lily. She's leaning her back against the armrest with her legs draped over my thighs while I've slid my upper body as close to hers as I could, my left arm curled around her lower back while the fingers of my right hand slide up and down her thin pale legs. We sat discussing which bands we were into and why and cracking up over silly jokes and voices. The two of us were intoxicated on each other...

...we're on the couch of a darkened living room. The muted TV offering the only light to a scene of 2 kids awkwardly testing how far they can explore, lips learning the topography of each other's face and neck, hands slowly gliding into new zones, our eyes meet and a moment becomes eternal...

...We're at the theater watching an Adam Sandler movie except Lily is mostly watching a man a few rows up and I'm mostly watching her watch him and it's a wonderful memory to relive, this chain of smiles. The guy a few rows up was absolutely loving the movie, howling his big hearty laugh which triggered Lily to smile from ear to ear saying how much she loved his pure joy and I sat admiring that smile that would cause her to slim her eyes just barely as she herself let out a soft giggle. The smell of movie theater popcorn and Cool Water cologne, a scent of my adolescence fills the air...

...an afternoon in the park, sitting distant on a bench. An ominous feeling. I remember this is our last time together. She's off to the East coast tomorrow to start her 2<sup>nd</sup> year of college. It's not love but we're both hurting that this has to end. As I look away from her with tears welling up my vision blurs. I blink the tears away to end up...

...in my room a few weeks after that day in the park. A letter arrived from her today. It's late summer and the humidity is smothering. I'm in my room, window open, fan on high and still I'm overwhelmed by the heat. It's hard to discern whether the heat or the contents of the letter are the reason for this lethargy. The letter is full of kind thoughts and words yet they deflate me all the same. It's funny how positive intentions can have negative impact. I lay there on my bed, sulking that teenage sulk. Woe is me...

April 8

I've gone through two thirds of the books now and I wish I hadn't relaxed so much on the journaling as I got older. There are large spans of time where I had taken a hiatus from the habit. A lot of growth undocumented. Reading through my life has been stirring up so many emotions it's caused incredibly vivid dreams. Dreams that feel real as when they first happened. There's a big difference between reading and thinking about these times compared to these dreams of the same event. When I read I remember the feeling of being afraid or coy. In my dreams, I can feel my heart pounding. I can taste and smell and feel. This is affecting me more than I imagined it would. The verdict is still out on how I feel about it all.

April 9

Another set of moments relived last night. Another night of "bar hopping" my life and this morning, a heartbreak hangover.

...Me and a girl, shooting pool and dipping our toes into new emotions in a dimly lit bar down the road from LAX. Here the seeds of love are unknowingly being planted by way of a joke of our billiard skills or a quick glance that says more than words can. The monstrous sounds of the commercial jets occasionally overheard when there's a lull in between jukebox plays. A mile down the road, planes taking people all over the world and I couldn't be more content to be where I am...

...We're sitting in the sand at the beach. It's cloudy and every so often the wind gusts enough to draw her into my lap and wrap her arms around me and as we nuzzle into each other she whispers "I'm in love with you". I respond "I'm in love with you too". There's nothing in the human experience that will ever rival the pure satiation one feels when they hear those words for the first time. It's a hunger we didn't know we had until our bellies were full with it and as I sat with her, the sound of the Pacific filling my ears, I let the words nourish my soul...

...Sitting on the patio of a beachfront hotel, enjoying breakfast by the marina on a lazy weekend morning. The sun doing its job and burning off the morning mist to kick off another beautiful LA day. A scene not out of the ordinary for us but on this particular morning as we're planning out the day, I say something that causes her to give me that "you think you're so funny" look. One of her signature looks I love so much. One I deliberately drew out of her because it made me genuinely laugh and smile whenever she made that face. It hit me there that I had never felt so intimately connected with someone like I had with her. There was "her" and there was "me" separate and great by themselves, but our "us" was marvelous. It was the type of connection you'd read about in stories. You read them and think it's easier to lasso a cloud than find someone who could make you feel that way. That day I was a cowboy of the skies and wrangled my cloud...

...I come home to a scattering of half full boxes all over the living room. She's moving out this weekend. This one hurts a lot but maybe it'll be easier with her gone. The last 2 weeks she's basically lived in the bedroom and we only speak when necessary. I can hear her in the other room, likely packing but I don't dare check. My living room is a death scene as I come to accept this relationship has reached the clearing at the end of the path...

...We're sitting in a restaurant in what will undoubtedly be our last time seeing each other. I'm leaving LA and we agreed to have a friendly goodbye meal. We chat about the last 3 months of our new lives and any onlookers who may have shot a glance our way would think we're having a nice time, both of us smiling and laughing. That's what I looked like on the outside but inside I felt as if I were shriveling up like a raisin. There was still so much love for her and to know it wasn't desired or reciprocated pained me so much. How do you let go of love? How do you give up breathing? As I sat across from her, I knew my broken heart, if it were to ever heal, would bear deep scars...

April 10

I decided to test whether I could relive a specific entry so today I browsed through what I had previously read. Tonight, when I go to sleep, I will think of this entry alone. Let's see what happens!

April 11

I was able to relive the entry I focused on last night! It's one of few holiday entries and that makes me sad to think of all the family moments I would love to happen again. I got to hear Mom's voice though! It makes me smile and hurts at the same time.

...Christmas back home at Mom's house. It's our last night before flying back to LA and me, Helen, Martin and Mom have been playing spades for the last 2 hours. Helen and I have beat them 2 games to 1. It's close to midnight and we have a 7am flight. We should be waking in almost 4 hours but we're having a blast and nobody is slightly tired. We decide as a group to just stay up. Mom and Martin could sleep in the next day and we could sleep on the plane. Conversation and play stayed level until around 3am when sleepiness started to make it's tugs more noticeable. It's like laughing gas was slowly being pumped into the room, we were enveloped in a fog of giddiness. It took twice as long to play a card now and this was after someone had to call your name and say it's your play. Martin started mocking a commercial playing on the TV in the background and we all crack up, next commercial Helen makes a joke and we start that group laugh again. Over the next 2 hours, as we got sleepier, the company of each other made us giddier. We were cracking jokes at everything on TV, it didn't matter the content. We couldn't help ourselves and we wouldn't have wanted to anyway. It was a magical night. It was a night you'd want to relive...

April 12

I wish I would've kept more entries of Mom. I wish I had more entries of a lot of the people who have stepped into my life. There are people who impacted me substantially that don't even show up in any entries. There are moments I can remember that I would love to relive but can't. It would be great to enjoy more moments with Mom but I'll cherish the few I do have.

...I'm sitting with my mother as we play another game of backgammon. She's beat me once in our last 4 games and only twice in the dozen times we've played the last few days. I've come to spend a few weeks visiting her and this is one of her favorite ways for us to spend time even though she hates losing so much. Her health has been poor these past few years and while she

has been the definition of strength and resilience to me through my life, I know these visits are numbered. She's telling me a story about my grandpa and her first car. She's told me this story before but I love hearing her tell it. We never give much thought to the fact that our parents were once young and carefree, it's like some alien history you're aware happened but that's about it. So, when my mother would offer commentary on her growing up, I would relish the tales. She could tell a story too, a gift for making you feel you were there. A strong gust of wind wobbles the windows on this overcast October afternoon in Kentucky. The trees outside, bare of leaves, sway with the wind. It's one of those days where you look out and know you just don't want to leave the house. I suggest we order out for tonight. I grab the dice and 2 more men come off the board...

April 13

I've caught up to about 10 years ago. Since leaving Los Angeles 12 years ago I've gone through my biggest changes and much of it is due to my 25 months of solo global travel. I had personal issues that I addressed far too late and my world had been completely scrambled because of it. I needed a change of scenery so I sold, donated or trashed 99% of my belongings and left a rich social life to go see the world. What was to be a 12 month break in-between phases of life turned into something bigger. It was its own life in a way. I visited places people dreamed their whole lives of visiting. I made friends with people all over the planet. I grew personally and learned a lot about myself. I gained a lot from that experience but I lost much too. Close friends became digital acquaintances, my professional network cooled and twice I lost someone close. I should write about that time. It would make a good book.

...It's late evening, early morning in Krabi, Thailand. I've been deep in conversation with a young Colombian woman for hours. We met on a tour earlier that evening where we were swimming with bioluminescent plankton which was followed by a fire dancing show. We started talking and it wasn't until the van stopped during its drop offs that we realized we were staying at the same place. She was a few years out of school and working as a lawyer. Work had been so overwhelming for her this was her first holiday in over 2 years and it was only 5 days. She was considering a career change and much of our conversation revolved around major changes in life. We spoke of boldness and bravery and realities and responsibilities. It was a great talk but we need to call it a night and as she and I head to our respective rooms I say good night. I give her a hug and as I do, she lays a small kiss on my lips. There's no sexual desire in the kiss nor is it a sign of a love connection but the moment seemed to call for it, a small moment of unexpected intimacy to close a wonderful evening...

...I'm alone in a rented apartment in Tirana, Albania on my 6th day of a 10-day quarantine. The world has been in a pandemic for 9 months and this is my 2<sup>nd</sup> positive Covid diagnosis. In fact, this is the 16<sup>th</sup> day of quarantine in the past 27 days. My first 10-day stint I was completely without symptoms and so far this go around is the same. The same can't be said for my mother. She had caught it a few days ago and it was just too much for her. Across the world she lay in a hospital where she fought her final fight. My brother is there with her as they take her off all the machines. He said it was peaceful and for his sake I hope it was. I've never felt so alone. I'm half a world away from home and can't even leave the apartment I'm in. I haven't seen a

familiar face in 13 months and she was the most important person in my life. We had had what would be our last phone conversation 2 days before her diagnosis. I told her I was waiting the necessary 2 weeks I needed in Albania before I headed to Egypt. I suggested I could come back to the states for a visit since Christmas was about 2 weeks away but she said I should stay traveling. She wanted to see pictures of me at The Great Pyramids and The Sphynx. Of all the countries I had visited or planned on, Egypt was the one she was most excited about. There's nothing to be excited about now. The next 4 days were going to be hard...

...mid-afternoon in Alexandria, Egypt and I'm at a seaside café. Although it's fairly busy I'm able to score a table along the waterline. It's hot today but the breeze is strong and cooling and I'm hidden under the table umbrella. I've been walking the shore the past hour and decided a break of coffee and cigarettes would be perfect. The sounds of the street, my fellow patrons and the Mediterranean are barely noticed as I'm fully engaged in an audiobook. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> time I've read or listened to this particular book and I've come upon one of my favorite parts of the story. It hits on ideas about our existence and the universe, about size and perception, about life and death. There's nothing new about this part of the story but my reaction is unexpected. I'm crying. I'm not bawling or anything like that, just a few tears escaping from the corners of my eyes. Not tears of sadness, although I am still emotionally rattled since Mom's passing is so recent. I'm crying because I have never felt such a level of peace and serenity. It's hard to articulate the depths of this moment. I've never considered myself especially spiritual, to the contrary I tend to be cynical when I hear people relate such a story to me but it's undeniable. For the briefest of moments, I'm not only void of any negative feelings I'm overwhelmed with positivity. There is no past. There is no future. There is only now. It's the only thing to latch onto but nothing has ever felt so right. It's something I doubt I'll ever experience again but I'll never forget this feeling...

April 14

These last 10 days have been surreal. Like most, there have been times I wish I could relive but we usually want to do something different. We want to correct a mistake or say something we wish we would've said the first time. I would say the past can't be changed but 2 weeks ago I'd have said the same about reliving the past. I can say that whether it's a good or bad memory, I'm lucky to have them as a reality at my fingertips. Lucky to hear voices I thought I'd never hear again. Lucky to see smiling faces again. Lucky to hug my mother again.

When I started reading my journals, I wasn't sure if my younger self would be impressed with my life. It hasn't been the typical story but it's far from extraordinary. I wouldn't change it if I could though. I wouldn't give up a single memory. I hope I have another 35 years of journaling ahead of me. I don't know if there's more major moments but these past few weeks have taught me any moment has the potential of being a major moment. For now, it's time to create new future moments to relive through my "Memories" notebooks.