

# no need to read

A Chunky Memoir of San Francisco Circa 1991

By Chris Read

## ACT 1

### Preface

SF Writers Grotto Co-Founder And Chill Wizard Ethan Watters

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Teaches That Good Writing Requires Creating "The Need To Read".

...

I Make No Such Promises.

### Intro

IN THE EARLY 90S

AN ASPIRING SCREENWRITER

FOLLOWS A DREAM

TO LIVE A LAZY WRITER'S LIFE

IN A CALIFORNIA PARADISE

### 1 – Valencialand

The Mission, San Francisco, 1992

The streets are braided with grated youth

Rot iron teeth clasp cigarettes with ash dashing toward the tip

Spackled soot's snuffed under foot up and down the sidewalk

A rusted toothpick crosses the street, led astray,

Attempts to crush a city bird with his cart then scuffles for a curbside

scrap In the wings, a Kool cigarette ad's sun-bleached skin peels

downward

I was just cruising through the solar igloo of Valencialand.

As I sped through red, hearing blue, looking for Violet,

I found pierced tangerine heads and rotten banana arms

Carrying shopping bags of stuffing

They're lined up against the theater front

Beyond, the bloody drive is blotted with banks and starving babies

Strollers wheel around garbage steaming like cooked spinach  
One tot's outfit reeks of vomit unwashed for weeks  
And scrambles with whiffs of cracked nuts and greasy eggs

I'm pricked a head turns from a silver Beetle  
Speeds by, says hi...as a kite  
Laughs with overkill and tosses a tissue out the window  
Nose-blown and crumpled  
Someone picks it up and pockets it

I'm kinda pissed off about these sulfur bags stalled in incubation  
But I keep returning to this land of misfits  
Where somehow I feel fit  
— Wise Me

## 2 – Pre-Cali: Chasing the Dream Greenwich, Connecticut, July 1989

That summer in '89, we were serving many a wine spritzer and scotch at Belle Haven Club. After clocking out, a few co-workers and I would down a few shots then race my dad's speedboat across the Sound. At full throttle, a couple crazy kids would jump over the boat side. They called it Doofus or Moron Overboard. Something like that.

I was also pumping gas during this gap semester and obsessed with writing late into the night while nothing else mattered. My great aunt screeched at me over the phone for disrupting my college trajectory. "You want to be a writer? You can't even write a letter!" Mm. I had a couple choice letters for her. One of them was U.

The Shell station owner also sold hibiscus and ficus trees in the parking lot. I purchased one for my dad and stepmother worth practically a whole paycheck. I placed it on the deck and gave them watering instructions. They were like, "Great, another mouth to feed."

"I just wanted to say thanks for letting me live at home as I figure out this writing thing." But I was running out of time. A conversation surfaced at dinner. "Kids normally leave the nest when they graduate college," she said. Believe me, I didn't need the nudge, just a few more classes.

And then a familiar goofy face pulled up in a white Jetta at the station one day. Doug MacElwee was the guy in high school who'd dress up in drag and pretend he was Miss America. Anything for the laugh really.

He was also a restless spirit. "Hey, I'm goin' to California in a couple weeks. You wanna go?"

Cue the Led Zeppelin. Rev the electric guitars. I inhaled deeply a few times, peered far west, letting the gas fumes fully circulate.

"Hell, yeah."

I raced home after work and called every friend in my address book with a Cali zip code - all two of them - best friends from high school: Zack was film-immersed in L.A. and Heath was surfing in Santa Cruz.

The seeds of California Dreaming were planted in my head and immediately began to burrow.

### 3 – Hitchhiking the Southwest

Pasadena, Calif., August 19, 1989

It's early Saturday morning. I'm nestled in my sleeping bag on Zack's front lawn after four long rides from Albuquerque. Never stood on the highway's shoulder for more than five minutes. I'm just that popular.

At one exit ramp, two college women drove by slowly in their car stuffed with luggage. They checked me out, pointed to the roof, then floored it down the on-ramp.

The first guy who picked me up was this outlaw. His vehicle was this piece of trash pickup. Abbey Road was blasting from a cassette player somewhere between the dashboard and a beer chest while the old goat divulged that he's being chased by his ex-wife's husband in a Trans-Am. He kept looking back. After a while I started seeing Trans-Ams too.

The next driver assured me I would live to see another day. Nice guy of Mexican descent, a mobile-home mover. We drove through Taco Bell and ate 59-cent tacos. Real proud of his state's beauty. He took me through the rain. Never told me his name. Didn't expect anything in return.

The next guy had intentions. Dressed in fine fabrics and a silk scarf, the gray beard said he was a hippie who'd been living off his father's trust fund his whole life.

"You ever get high? I just smoked a bone before I picked you up. But I'm going to meet a fella on the other side of town. He's a good guy and gives head for 5 dollars - real cheap. Different strokes for different folks." He kept rambling as I plotted my escape.

The final driver wanted to split expenses. He wore a samurai bandana and explained the whole Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung power struggle. A few hours later I was driving the beat-up Monte Carlo through the Mojave Desert as he slept in the back seat – grateful to be approaching the final destination.

Around 12:45 a.m. I was dropped at a gas station, just a mile's hike from Zack's home.

Some guy was spazzing because no gas was coming out of the nozzle. He yelled obscenities. "You gotta lift the lever." And real calmly the guy replied, "What?...Oh." Totally bipolar. We laughed and the sensei said, "This is L.A. This is why people get killed. They just freak out like that with a gun in their hand." His parting advice was, "Get out of L.A. as fast as you can."

But I just got here. And I must explore.

#### 4 – Pep Talk

Pasadena, Calif., Aug. 20, 1989

"Chris Read's on my front lawn!" Zack laughs and yells his welcome.

I didn't want to wake you guys, I replied sheepishly.

I'd given him a 3-day window for my arrival. Since I was hitching and there were no pay-phones on the highway, I couldn't really narrow the timeframe. I'd told him, "Your guess is as good as mine brother."

It's great to see one of my best friends from high school. We're at this crossroads in life where we haven't a clue what's next.

Zack wants to be a movie director. Way to keep it real, man.

The next day after a viewing of sex, lies and videotape, we discuss occupations.

I want to write screenplays. "No doubt. You can be whatever kind of writer you want. I don't know any other way," he says. "You just do it. "

His words flowed so effortlessly. He's got creative fire that could raise the dead though and supportive parents with deep pockets. You could say he's prepared for glory. And you'd be right.

Me though? As a student and vagabond, my mind's on survival...Yet, I don't want to just survive. I wanna freakin shoot the moon!

After a few days of mentally sitting in a Pasadena Community College classroom and writing for the local rag, I'm bored and conclude this is not the Hollywood dream. I didn't hoof it 3,000 miles for this. My dream was bigger. My dream was lazier. My vision entailed:

- Drinking in bars and cafes.
- Interacting with interesting people.
- Observing and recording witty dialog.
- Strolling the sunny coast at a leisurely pace headed nowhere, accountable to nobody.
- Selling a script that pays the bills. Then starting over again a few years later.

I don't envision that happening anytime soon in L.A. So I head north to see what's brewing with Heath in Santa Cruz.

## 5 – Crunchy Town Gets Crunched

Santa Cruz, Cali, October 1989

I land a job at the local newspaper as I finish my schooling at UC Santa Cruz. On the best days I'm driving around town delivering proofs to advertisers, pounding a mint chip milkshake from Polar Bear Ice Cream, absorbing the salty mist on my face cruising West Cliff Drive, or writing from the University's cow pasture perched above the the eucalyptus groves and beyond a serene Monterey Bay.

The people are a little crunchy. They smell earthy. Recycling is constantly in your face. Women don't shave their armpits. Tye-dyes and hacky sacks are commonplace. I don't mind the throwback. What's bothersome though is when Heath's roommate bugs me about letting the water faucet pour as I brush my teeth. "We're in a drought man. You can't let that shit run."

Five weeks into the Santa Cruz experiment, a mongo earthquake rocks the town.

I'm on my late shift break, eating a sandwich, reading the paper on the downtown outdoor mall while the As and Giants are swinging away for the Battle by the Bay. When it happens.

My table shakes like it's possessed by the devil.  
Storefront glass shatters down the outdoor mall, like a chain reaction.  
Car tires bounce like basketballs, rocking the frames from side to side.  
Second floors collapse on either side of me.  
The earth does not split down the middle of the street, as expected.  
An hour after the first rattle, I realize I'm still clenching a napkin.  
I check in at the Sentinel and my employer calls it a night. Tells me to go home.

I walk through the town like I'm on a Universal Studio tour. Cars are lined up motionless. People stare stunned into the air, crying. I climb the hill to the UC campus where the sun is falling and drum circles are circulating some cosmic energy. Students are dancing and chanting in a tribal way. One imagines chaos, anarchy, Lord of the Flies.

Streams of smoke stripe the coastline like an industrial-era painting. It's clear we're all without power as far as the eye can see. Pins of starlight brighten and grow as a curtain of darkness engulfs us.

I miraculously run into a roommate who's driving home to Bonny Doon, if we can just maneuver around the rock slides.

My dad eventually reaches me by phone and asks if I'm ready to come home now. I declare I am not. But I question all that the demolished sleepy surf town has to offer this writer with a fire in his belly.

## 6 – Ice Cream Amour

San Francisco 1991

After earning my diploma and becoming entranced watching public broadcasting documentaries, I conclude I must migrate even further north to tap the film and television industry. It'll be an even tougher start, but I'll live off credit cards for a few months until I gain experience through internships. At least that's the plan. I'll scoop ice cream for some extra cash.

On my mind - all the youngsters selling 6-figure movie scripts. Jeffrey Jacob Abrams, a fellow Gen-Xer, writes and collects a reported \$450k for *Regarding Henry* starring Harrison Ford.

Critics wonder how a 23-year-old can write with such maturity. Who does this guy JJ think he is? Probably a flash in the pan. I mean I can do that. I'm envious of his financial cushion. He's set for the rest of his writing life. That luxury is my holy grail.

Rent's due again and Pacific Heights is no bargain sleepover, even with 4 roommates. One of my ice cream colleagues does phone sex on the side. She's from Lenox, Mass. Sara recognizes an occasional Boston accent in me (probably when I'm cursing) and says she makes upwards of \$50/hr on the phone.

She plays many roles — obese, busty, ethnic, dominatrix — whatever the caller's asking for. She's a Harvard graduate paying off student debt and saving for law school. She won't last here long. Even on a good night of tips, you walk home with maybe 40 bucks.

Even then, to earn top dollar you have to denigrate yourself. Some lunch rush hours you have to engage with those Rory calls the "yogurt bitches" - the middle-aged housewives in jogging suits who challenge your expertly measured non-fat frozen mixture. "Is that really three ounces? Give me more." When they're super pushy I recall how I rescued a floating roach inside the cooling machine earlier that day, but only after they've eaten a bite or two.

The Rory's shop closest to me was on Fillmore street, north of Geary, adjacent mostly to high-end boutiques and shit nobody needs to buy. One of the perks was that every night you could take home a pint of I-scream. I often chose Mud Pie - a silky espresso buzzing treat with pockets of fudge and crushed Oreo. Devoured typically in one sitting.

The mad flavor scientist? Lehua. She's a chain smoker with a Cheshire grin and a platinum flapper bob. Tom Waits weighs heavy on her playlist and she's known to eat raw garlic for breakfast. We find out recently she's quit heroin. Who knew? Just don't quit your day job I say. Keep making that dairy addiction. Love you Lehua.

## 7 - Paradise

San Francisco, December 1991

Two years after the westward migration, I settle on San Fran, and Green Day lays down the welcome mat (even though the song's inspiration is West Oakland):

For some strange reason it's now feelin like my home  
& I'm never never gonna go  
Pay attention to the cracked streets & the broken homes  
Some call it slums, some call it nice  
I wanna take you through a wasteland I like to call my home  
Welcome to paradise

– Billie Joe Armstrong

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## ACT 2

### 8 – Italians at the Greco

San Francisco, Early 1992

It was a sleepy Sunday morning when I stumbled into Caffè Greco. Despite the overpriced mochas and tourist treatment, they still serve a sweet caffeine punch in a private observatory that overlooks the lively Columbus Ave.

On this day though, it was early, too early for the masses. Even the Chinese grocers hand-trucking their goods through the streets were out of sight.

A few steps up and I entered the still cafe, lulled by Italian opera, there...there sat a film family dynasty, like a DaVinci painting, as if the cafe was their god-damned living room.

Let me say, I stood stunned. First there was Francis. My eye brows rose. Then his wife Eleanor. As my eyes continued clockwise, there was hey, "Yo Adrian!" echoed in my head. Okay I know she's done other stuff besides Rocky, but her name escaped me at the moment. (Talia Shire!)

All six of the family members buried their heads in a section of the New York Times. It was a sight to behold. I was about to barge in and disturb the peace.

"You're a great inspiration to aspiring filmmakers." The grizzly stood up and took my hand in his giant bear paw and shook. Thanked me.

Mind you, I had recently watched Eleanor's documentary about Francis and the making of Apocalypse Now.

What I wanted to tell the couple was how I loved the scene in Hearts of Darkness where Francis is standing on the helicopter's landing skids. How he continued to give directions as the chopper rose. He was so consumed in the moment, full of conviction, that his mind was elsewhere, totally unaware of his safety. They would have appreciated that observation. It was genuine and still an intimate detail.

Instead I vocalized some nonsense that lingered in the air. I don't recall exactly what I said, but I'm certain it was cringe-worthy. That's just par for my celebrity interactions.

Like the time I ambushed Michael J. Fox on the streets of Manhattan across from my office in the Citicorp building. I told him, "You're beautiful!" (metaphorically speaking of course) as I



slipped him an invitation to go on my father's boat later that weekend. I just imagined we'd chill, throw back some beers on the Sound, and recount hilarious outtakes from Family Ties or Back to the Future. No pressure. Just behind-the-scene stuff that nobody else knows about.

After a few breaths, the second-hand started moving again. I politely acknowledged every one of the Coppolas with a nod, then let them continue reading. I ordered my mocha and banged my head on the counter in disbelief.

## 9 – Harmonica Lady

San Francisco Subway, October 30, 1992

You know the Harmonica Lady in the subway with the Jack-o-lantern smile who scowls and grumbles to herself sometimes in between sets? Well today she wore a pumpkin outfit with green tights in honor of Halloween. I nearly fell over in hysterics.

BART commuters just passed her by, the way they do every day, ignoring her amateur tunes. I was reaching into my pockets to scrape up something for her efforts when some stiff holiday competition lured me away.

Three violinists and a cellist were playing Pachelbel's Canon in D. Except for the two notes near the end, these guys sounded like a professional recording. Wow, a live freaking performance and I'm 1 of 3 audience members. Front row standing. Felt like a symphony. My George Washington bill piled high on top of the others.

Reminded me of the good old NYC days and the aspiring musician in the train tunnels. Let's see what was his name?

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December 21, 1986 | VIRGINIA BYRNE | Associated Press

NEW YORK — Classical violinist James Everett Graseck cradled his 100-year-old Bellini under his chin and began playing Bach's "Fugue in G Minor" to harried commuters waiting for a subway in the heart of Manhattan.

He played with an intensity that bordered on ecstasy... "I haven't counted how many trains I've missed. I've been here for 50 minutes," said one listener, Alan Horowitz. "It's a humanizing factor in the subway system."

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Me too, I let many trains pass in the summers of '86 and '87 enraptured by this subway musician. His passion was contagious. I'd shuffle in late to work. So fire me, was my attitude. I bet your commute was dull. Mine was just genius and I'd do it again.

## 10 – Flirtation

North Beach, August 6, 1992

The short blonde next to me claimed to be friends with the Virgil poet performer who just bombed at the North Beach Open Mic. She says, "Don't they clap where you come from?" That would be a sign of encouragement, I say. "You clap only when you like it?" I patted my palms together methodically. She pursed her lips and shook her head.

We continue to poke remarks at performances and others in the room. She pinches one guy's ass who's passing by then says, "Oh excuse me," in the crowded room. I couldn't stop snickering.

What's your gig? I ask.

Ballet.

The stage is a little tiny, but I'd like to see your act.

I'm not dancing up there, she says with a sly smile.

Just adorable. We finish our beers and part without complication.

Oakland, September 21, 1992

People who combine foods on their plate, such as meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and peas, might be a different kind of people from those who eat one food group at a time.

Christine's a colleague and yells across a party room to Lana that I'm a screenwriter. I wish I had that confidence. Christine has a way about her though.

Going home on the crowded elevator, as if she's speaking in some secret morse code, Christine whispers loudly, "Lana...you need...to be..HAD." The sea of strangers shift their eyes to Lana without moving their heads. I'm petrified, poker faced. Nobody says another word.

So how did we do? Well, I doubt the public humiliation really helped. As you can see, I did not HAVE Lana or anyone. Instead, I'm home alone scribbling ink on your pulpy ass.

## 11 – The Legal Grind

November 9, 1992 – Oakland

So I write a letter to Amadeus and Unbearable Lightness of Being producer Saul Zaentz and ask for a job as a writer. He's not hiring, evidently. In fact, he's not answering unsolicited letters from 20-something nobodys. Go figure.

The next natural step is to sign up with a temp agency. My government degree attracts law firm work...but not the kind that uses a college education. My task is to code dozens of banker boxes of documents piled to the ceiling in a conference room for three months with Craig, Arleen, Jeremiah and sometimes Frederica. Monotony crushes motivation.

I list my inexcusable excuses for slacking at the firm:

I can't talk and code at the same time.

I can't code for eight hours every day for three months without some mental stimulation. I'm not a robot. Frequent crossword puzzles, logic riddles, and snack breaks must be employed with occasional eyelid closure.

My proficiency is tied to my happiness. Or as my colleague Craig from Stanford says, — "I'm going to nap now, so that I can be more proficient later." Motto embraced.

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I fished this bumper sticker out of a cereal box at an age when my entire arm could fit in the box. I must have thought it was hilarious because I permanently affixed it to my summer camp trunk. Cap'n Crunch is riding a little clown car and the tagline reads, "You're so slow, you're going backwards." Hey that's like my career. What an ironic foreshadowing. Not so funny now though. Just cruel.

## 12 – By-Gone Beatniks

November 19, 1992 – North Beach

From my upstairs corner perch at Vesuvios, I spy a mute man on the corner of Kerrouac and Columbus slouching against City Lights with two forms of i.d. According to his ink-scribbled cardboard, he "Will work for food." According to his French-embroidered book bag, he is also the "Crème de la Crème." He tries waving off a scraggly dude moving in on his turf. It's pretty good begging real estate.

The waitress at Vesuvio's expects me to say, "Keep the change." But I need to be in charge of my fractions. This bombed chickadee behind me who sings Billie Holliday and Patsy Cline with the house, slurs louder than everyone else and sneaks in a comment while her boyfriend's at the bathroom. "Can I sleep at your place tonight?"

Slightly intrigued by her appearance until she swerves into somebody's table spilling a drink on a lady. Let's just say no. No, you're going to have to find a sofa and a vomit pail somewhere else tonight. You can't bang beauty. If you could, it might be good for something.

The convo behind me turns to sex. She likes penises. “They fit so nice.” Why she was brought another beer, I don’t know. She adds, “Everybody forgot that women like to dance.”

As I head home a little foggy, a young body fronting one of the strip joints extends her virtual shepherd’s crook, “Why don’t you come inside?” Nice line. I have a knee-jerk reply. “I’m already oversexed.” That makes no sense you idiot. She yells back – “This is the safest sex you’ll find!”

### 13 – Love-Locked

November 28, 1992, North Beach cafe

STEPS OF ROME. A man and woman (I know very well) are sitting at a café – practically nose-to-nose. Glassy eyes entranced. Expressions rally from eyes, to smiles, to eyes. Real love. Right?

But then these gorgeous legs wrapped in a skirt walk down Columbus Ave. The man’s eyes divert.

WOMAN: I think we’re made for each other. We have this special connection.

MAN: Wha' do ya mean?

WOMAN: I don’t know. It’s like whenever we’re apart, we’re still together.

A low-cut waitress bends to pick up a bill that has fluttered off her tray.

MAN: (observes every movement of the pick-up) Yeh, I guess so.

WOMAN: That was such a great trip.

MAN: That’s what journeys are meant to be. TOTAL adventure.

WOMAN: Making love in the woods. Sharing summer camp stories.

A couple is rubbing each other’s arms. MAN notices and imitates with WOMAN.

WOMAN: You’re an incredible inspiration to me. I think we work together so well because we have this spiritual connection. You have this playfulness and openness just like me that is this spark for life

MAN nods. WOMAN’s eyes are glued on him.

A couple stops in front of the open picture window. They sit and make out. Bundled in winter coats. The sun is setting behind them. The couple are engaged in a marathon kiss. As he’s watching, MAN’s tongue just sits on his bottom lip, dead, as he stares. MAN’s not listening to one word WOMAN’s saying now. Silverware falls off a table and clangs on the tile floor.

MAN: I'm sorry I wasn't listening to a word you were saying.

WOMAN: Just now?

MAN: Yeh, I was off in space.

WOMAN: I didn't say anything.

MAN: Oh.

Sad but true story.

#### 14 – Guerillas in the Midst

Late Autumn 1992, San Francisco

Awoke at 3:30 a.m. with the writing bug. Swan Dive is now Guerillas on HoHos. Croissant at Puccini's, shortly after gray light diffused the morning darkness. Straightened room, shined shoes. And made it to work on time. Huh. Imagine that.

Excerpt from Guerillas:

(Melissa and Mike are riding the bus)

Mel: How's your day at work?

Mike: Great!

Mel: You always say that man. You type data entry!

Mike: Yeh, but I had a 1,000 ideas for my screenplay...

#### 15 – Fredi at the Firm

November 1992, Oakland

Classic Fredi. She enters the conference room and stops in her tracks. "It smells like men in here...Barf!"

Fredi's got a Santa's list of men waiting to sleep with her. She's so vain that she submitted a photo with her law-school application. Bleach-blonde.

They don't teach manners in Piedmont evidently. Overheard at various times: "You're ugly... You're a pig saddling up to a trough...You're losing your hair. That's why you don't wash it."

Who says these things...as an adult? I suppose a princess. She's far from perfect, a little stiff actually. One time she asked in disbelief –

“How can you go home and write at night? Don't you get sick from writing all day at the job?”

“No...Sometimes I type.” Ha-ha.

“I fail to see the humor.”

Larger ha-ha's!

Frozen stare.

We have this Moonlighting sexual tension thing going on.

## 16 – Spin Cycle

December 1992, San Francisco

As I descend on the BART escalator, I hear noise. The lady who plays harmonica, (remember the pumpkin suit musician at Halloween?), was trying to spread some Christmas cheer. Only she was in, "playing," Joy to the World — a version that made me hate it even more than usual. Slow-fast slow-fast, like a solar-powered car with a dying battery.

How do I worry, let me count the ways.

Women are playing pool in tight jeans after-hours at the Euro laundry café. Peggy Lee's Fever plays overhead. I'm insecure and broke while they serve Becks on tap. Hmmm. Sainte Etienne's eerie hollowness would not be out of order here. A sort of Ed Hopper diner meets Twin Peaks vibe.

Overwhelmed by the career search. I'm getting nowhere fast. Defeatist attitude: Diligence does not pay off. Madonna chimes in now with garbage dance grooves. You'll never reach the goals you pursue or desire. I'm not my best coach.

Damn I'm awful at pinball. When will these clothes ever dry?

## 17 – Taunting the Dream

December 1992, Long Beach

Heading to Tinsel Town to meet my sisters for the holiday. The Southwest Airlines captain announces: “Flight attendants please clear the aisle so we can see while backing up.” Joker.

Entering the movie-making mecca, I'm scanned up and down, and judged. I'm in L.A. Our waitress wears a very tight strip of fabric around her waist. Lots o' leg. She forgets my dinner salad. I'm forgiving. But I speak up for Bridget who asked for her sandwich withOUT bacon.

She growls, "I can take care of myself."

The trades paint this place as a magic kingdom surrounded by barbed wire. Bridget confirms in a single swath: "They're all ego scumbags." I'm not intimidated. I'm just visiting this cinema capital and not sure how to fit in. I want to be a player, but not with their rules. Chill.

Gorgeous L.A. day. Tomorrow's Jesus' birthday. Upper 70s, shorts and cotton tee. Snow-capped mountains clearly viewed. Stars and celebrity muck are out of town for the holidays. Taken the gridlock and exhaust with them.

My buddy Hebo (aka Heath) and I are ejected from Qs pool hall. Collar required. Tough town.

For Christmas, Beth gifts me a chilli-willi penguin to keep my soda cans cool. I can not think of a more useless gift...bound for recycling. Bridget makes a one-stop shop at her Disney Channel workplace – digging through the marketing bin – I get a red Mickey Mouse turtleneck, Mickey Mouse watch, Mickey Mouse baseball cap, Goofy doll.

Gotta love them all the same.

#### Screenwriting Coin

Pigs are walking around L.A. on a leash. Bridget got worked up passing the pet store. Screeching puppies. She'd buy the entire lot if she could and free them all, probably. I had to investigate. She stood outside the entrance refusing to be swept with emotion and peered off into the distance, smoking a butt.

I fantasize aloud about selling a screenplay for six figures.

Bridget bites back. "You're not going to make 500 grand so you don't have to worry about it."

Whoops, there goes your 100.

"I wouldn't be that generous. I'd give you guys 10. Give most to charities and travel."

Very tough town.

Looking to '93 my desires are pretty simple — switch the hours I spend working, with the hours I spend playing — writing creative stuff — the writer's life I dreamed of.

## 18 – Condom Bus

January 6, 1993 – San Francisco

A man in his bathrobe, on a freezing wet day, in a North Beach alley, digs himself out, where 8 barrels of trash, were dumped.

Later the same day...Kids ride the bus.

11-year-olds.

A condom packet fumbles to the floor.

The kids scramble for their treasure and say, “Shit this, shit that, \*\*#&#”

A baby is standing on the seat looking back, facing the kids, watching wide-eyed, while mom faces forward.

Baby absorbs the curses.

Kids laugh at the baby watching them.

Baby laughs at their laughter.

And round and round it goes...

Eventually someone grows up.

We just don't find out who it is during this short bus ride.

## 19 – Stop Shaking Sense

January 19, 1993, North Beach

An earthquake shook for 5 seconds at Liz's house during White Men Can't Jump last Friday night. 5.1. California numbers. And the Niners lost the championship football game to the Cowboys. And we bombed Hussein's ass some more this weekend.

I've made plans to vacate Union Street. North Beach has been a writer's fantasy, but the reality is a tad sobering.

I dreamt of romping in the paths of the Beatniks. So pulling in \$400 a week from the firm with a mountain of debt, I found the most affordable space in the neighborhood – literally a kitchen pantry for \$260/mo. Three walls were windows, looking out at the Golden Gate and over rooftops. My folded futon topped a palette-raised platform, while my clothes fit underneath.



You had to traipse through my room to drag down the garbage, and the din of the constant dinner parties cut into my sleeping life. But it goes with the dream.

As my visiting preppie sister put it, “You live in a real dump.” Between the piles of newspapers in the living room, pot-smoke drenched furniture, motorcycle helmets, splayed golf clubs, and the overflowing unkempt kitchen, well, yes, you put it that way. I see the light.

Now I seek order, space and...emptiness. Heading to the nob (Nob Hill) for new perspective.

## 20 – Time Stamp

February 2, 1993, North Beach

A kid got detention for having a gun in class. Liz’s roommate Esther says, “You used to get sent home for having your shirt untucked!”

I think she went to Catholic school.

They get it wrong at the Oscars. If you win, it’s a chance to say ‘screw you’ to those who didn’t believe in you. My aunt tops the list. This insight gives me new motivation.

February 5, 1993

I’m nobody, neither famous nor wealthy, genius nor phenomenal talent. I’m not a speedy beer guzzler, fashionable dresser, fancy dancer, side-splitting joker, or social dynamo. I’m not even a catchy chain-smoker. I’m not much of anything, but I’m at Specs, where people not much of anything hang out. I’m a writer. Well, I write.

February 9, 1993 – Carmel

Bill Murray threw an old lady in a sand trap. The Monterey Herald awkwardly wrote it this way: “At the end of his third round, Murray had taken Monterey resident Kitty Ragsdale and, after hoisting her on his shoulders, the two ended up landing in the greenside bunker on No. 18 at Pebble Beach.”

## 21 – Camp Sundays

The stained fringes and inscriptions inside my green Bible purchased for camp transport me to another era...

To a grassy spot where Long Lake laps up to a birch tree in Harrison Maine, and I’m wearing the Sunday uniform shirt with a v-collar and listening to a counselor evangelize us group of 10-year-olds.

The German-measles spread that year. Kate and I are among those quarantined to the infirmary. It wasn't so bad.

At the Newfound shore, where our female counterparts bunked, you could hear a high-pitched congregation singing hymns of "Easter gladness" in a lodge, while the sun gleamed and the day just open for exploration.

Those were camp Sundays. Pine needles in your khaki pants. Brushing teeth and clipping nails for inspection; oh ya, and combing your hair.

A lunchtime feast, along the lines of meatloaf and mashed potatoes, was prepared by the gracious, ever-smiling Clauses. They'd push through the swinging door, like royalty greeting their subjects and wave to a cheering throng after they were summoned by a table-pounding roar of, "We, Want, the Cooks! We, Want, the Cooks!"

At age 13, during the longest hour of the day, known as Rest Hour, some campers wore headphones to zone out as we were relegated to our cabins to digest.

One rest hour, Zack and Glenn read from Richard Bach's Illusions, convincing the cabin that a messiah passage picked at random from this book had relevance to your life, and in particular, to a current challenge you were quizzed to share.

Then there was Alex who had a talent for blurting out perverted remarks without prompting. His bush of curly hair would bounce as he'd laugh uncontrollably at his own jokes.

When the evening moon rises, you can hear crickets chirping mad-dog through the crisp air as we prepare to nestle under the wool blankets and required clean sheets. Going to bed on Sundays was special, even though you heard the same bugle-blowing taps as every night.

Sunday night felt like the completion of a week, a true accomplishment. You didn't think much of schedules or bills, the way you do as an adult. Instead you rested with a sigh and heavy head, reminded that this was a satisfying week. And if there will be another one, well that's fine too.

Owatonna Sundays are delightfully unforgettable. I wonder where those care-free eternal Sundays have gone. (Check out Scott Coolidge's website for more camp imagery)

## 22 – Saving E.T.

April 1993

Phone home. I've had this recurring dream, over a span of several years. My mission is to save Melissa Mathison's favorite extraterrestrial character - E.T.

The conflict pits me vs. all evil industrial, medical, and corporate empires combined. I'm out to save the quintessential love — love of environment and humanity.

E.T. observes, points, waddles, rides in a bike basket. He hurts no one. He humors with his other-worldly talents.

In my dream, I scream like Elliott - "No! You can't do that!" But they do. I'm vindictive. Dedicated. Passionate. My fists are clenched tight and shaking. Gripping. Intense. Righteous.

I doubt this dream will ever end.

## 23 – Seeking a Hit

May 93 – Multimedia Gulch, San Francisco

Multimedia is causing a frenzy at SF State University's downtown campus. The halls are buzzing in the hub of this latest craze.

I enroll in an Interactive Writing class – a non-linear game-like approach to storytelling. Sounds simple enough. New York has publishing. LA has filmmaking. Silicon Valley has technology. SF wants to cross-breed and cultivate this new industry in the city's cradle south of Market Street, coined as...multimedia gulch.

My dad says, "I think this is it for you Chris." I believe him. Everyone wants a "this is it." As Dennis Hopper once said in Premiere mag about the movie "Colors" he directed, – "Yeh man. Bob (Duvall) needs a hit. I need a hit. Hey man, we all need a hit."

Grunt work weighs on me. No one's asking you to be passionate about shelving books or making sandwiches or bagging groceries. Sometimes you just do what you can to keep the lights on.

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When the lights dim and you look at the stars, do you see action? The motion? Can you capture time? I don't think so. All you get is light speed, warp speed and a zillion things zooming past you.

Maybe you get lost in time during space travel or age a hundred years. Perhaps you encounter another planet of creatures with whom you can communicate. And maybe you lose all sense of place because everything out there is relative, and everything in here (thumps chest) is absolute. That's the freakin' universe!

And yet all we stumble through and see is the day-to-day, barely what's in front of us. Do we really examine other cultures, other species, other worlds? No, we're cooped up in this self-absorbed futility. A wasteland of limited knowledge and experience. We're not explorers. We'll never find extraterrestrials. They will find us, before we have a clue what hit us.

Come what may.

## 24 – Offers on Polk Street

May 93, San Francisco

“Three dollars and 10 cents short!” a man foams at the mouth in rage on Polk Street. I just wanted to give him, maybe a \$5 bill, even though I have \$49 in all my accounts, owe May rent (today’s May 3rd), and swim in thousands of debt.

No one should be that mad about anything, especially money. But I don’t know what that man needs – \$, care, attention, drugs.

It doesn’t seem wise to enter that angry space unless I’m focused about what I’m offering.

So I step into a Reading Room...to better understand my connection. Upon exiting, the guy was still there two doors down, calmly sitting on the sidewalk. I asked if he wanted some money. He nodded and then I saw his smiling crooked teeth.

“It’s all I have.” I handed 42 cents.

My fear was removed due to my studies. He looked surprised that I had asked. My eyes watered walking home filled with compassion toward everyone.

## 25 – Nuts and Brats

May 1993, San Francisco and Mill Valley

Pretty frickin' funny how this woman throws coins at some children’s feet and says, “You dropped a dime... You dropped a penny.” As if she was tossing crumbs to pigeons.

She tells me on the bus about a grizzly bear taller than all these trees transformed into 8 pumas after disappearing. Pumas 6 feet tall. I guess the era of hallucinogenics hasn’t totally faded from the San Francisco scene. It sometimes drifts away from Haight Street and onto public transit.

Meanwhile, in Mill Valley at the Depot square, brats lie on the sidewalk, spit and smoke – some with model beauty and 14-year-old authenticity. They draw on the brick with colored chalk. They dream and spread out like they’re sprawled on a California King bed. They remain oblivious of the pedestrians they’re blocking.

Perhaps they just want to be noticed. Perhaps mommy’s having an affair and daddy’s getting hammered in the middle of the day. I feel pity for a second, but snake through them more concerned about their eventual contribution to society.

(Who wouldn't like to just lie in the middle of nowhere whenever and not care what others think?)

Well, I hope they enjoy it while they can and grow up with a sense of responsibility one day.

## 26 – Pastels

June 1993, North Beach

I'm outside sipping SF's best mocha at Puccini's where opera swoons from the jukebox. The sunshine is painting pastel summer stripes behind the silhouetting chapels. The Italian restaurants' neon signs are illuminating.

A woman backs her '76 Corolla into a sidewalk chair seated by an ancient native of Little Italy as she departs. Coffee buddies applaud the next parker due to their collision-free maneuvering.

At the corner bank on Columbus, a couple women basking in attention are swaying to the rhythm of soul singers who make the sidewalks their bed.

I'm wearing my No. Beach writing cap (Vive la révolution!) and I'm enthralled with the vivre – the same enthusiasm I had at the height of my enamor for this town. Beauty and vibrance. Vitality. Color. Creativity.

Looks wimpy ordering decaf from Cafe Trieste, but I'm still buzzing from my first few bevs at Puccini. God it's beautiful out. Allowing more sidewalk seating is about the most cherished legislation the city council ever enacted.

It's light-sweatshirt weather now after 9 p.m. with the glow of daylight skulking in the sidelines. How sweet it is. The days endure.

Art and theater discussion bound and rebound in accents – urban and transcontinental. I'm inspired by the indie filmmakers who maintain control, like Hartley and Sayles and Campion.

The tourist (polo shirt and shorts) offers a hand to a Chinese man unloading a refrigerator from his pick-up truck. The gift of community. Universalism. I love this town. It happens here. Time to wander. Breathe.

## 27 – Supportive Words

June 93

Bridget made a kind comment on the phone the other night regarding dad's criticism that I needed to get a writing job. She said something about feeling good about the stability right now

and taking the time to get where you're going and watching where you're going. Wow, sisters can be so supportive – cutting through the doldrums.

Universal love. That mocha. That hand with the fridge. That applause over parking. That tip of the hat to the counter person and street dweller.

I wrote a fantastic statement once – the universe is too immense to confine our ways of learning and responding to our human nature...something to that effect.

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I used to envy Zack b/c he was going somewhere quickly (and for other reasons I suppose). But I realize he's just being himself. And that's why he's confident of his work and of me in mine, b/c we are ourselves and have fun with that first and foremost.

What we do is an arena to express who we are. Fix the focus. See yourself as an expression, an infinite creative idea, and what to do becomes so easy. Don't focus on what to do but rather who you are. Got it.

## 28 – Help or Harm

Catherine is pursuing work at the Marine Mammal Center. Today she observed a seal's flipper wound being treated. He was looking directly at Catherine as they gave him a shot. At one point he had a towel over his head to reduce the stress, and she cried b/c of the fear in his eyes. The eyes told her – He didn't know whether he was being helped or harmed. She bawled. She read all that. She's a Virgo.

# no need to read

A Chunky Memoir Of San Francisco Circa 1991

## ACT 3 - The Final Act

October – December 1993

### Misfit

Something tells me there's more...While I'm pretty sure there's not. Enough of logic. Follow your bliss. Embrace the unknown. Wave to the man on the corner. Be friendly and truthful in the city.

Wear high heels and splash around in the rain. Devour your dessert first. Invite a stranger to lunch. Offer a poem to those who beg. Wear a bodysuit to the beach. Eat fried rice and chocolate Jiminy crickets. Jump up and down when someone beckons. Follow your bliss. Follow your bliss.

I reckon it's Tuesday, b/c yesterday I wore a different oxford shirt – meaning, it's not Monday. It's not Wednesday b/c I don't believe I had enough clean laundry for 3 working days.

What I find is that I'm not an established writer, or any kind of writer, or a filmmaker, or a graphic designer or coder. I don't really fit any mold.

### Flourishing Art

Guerilla art. Art needs to be entwined with public life. Mime should be breaking out in a restaurant center. Ballet bursting onto a basketball court. Whistling on an elevator. Poetry dribbling at an ATM machine or on the outer hull of a ship. In lines, while waiting for movie tickets or a restroom or for table service or while killing time on the train and bus.

Art must infiltrate. Break out of the studios, the museums, the galleries, the theaters, the "art centers." Art must spread everywhere. The possibilities are limitless. Let's break out.

Art may flourish if it's planted.

### Castro Scene

It's around noon in the Duboce Triangle at Noe and 15th. A bare-chested man wearing an open leather vest, a jester hat, and felt-leopard pants sits in a director's chair listening to low volume classical music. The jester sells flowers. Next to him, a nipple-pierced man stretches, laid out on the sidewalk bench.

Another barefoot dude in a red sweatshirt and baggy cuffed jeans smokes a butt standing on the corner across the street. Then a teenager pulls right over the curb in a red Ford Probe. Two Asian seniors climb precariously into the car as it peels away.

## Jordan Retires

October 6, 1993

Some days I just want to get lost at an arcade forever. Inspiration is nothing more than a moment's erection. It doesn't last.

I guess good ideas last. I guess it's just me. I go down. Blame it on REM. Most depressing song ever – Everybody Hurts. Haven't been the same since.

It's a sad day in the sports world. Jordan's retired #23. "The desire to play is not there anymore." He says he has nothing left to prove. My throat dries as my breath stops and my mouth holds agape.

I write from somewhere central, as if an invisible axis runs through the center of my body. Through this pole, all my energy and feelings are channeled onto the page.

I had a similar experience viewing Jim Seibert's film at the Art Institute. He took the viewer through a wind tunnel that seemed to excavate my body. Inexplicable. Experimental film. (shrug)

Cloudless day, heavy cotton T-shirt temperature, mild hair-ruffling breeze. Girlfriend ends her period today or tomorrow. Much unwritten lately. The typical questions arise I s'pose: What do I want to do? What should I be doing? What will I be doing?

I know I should be enjoying the present, but MORE always seems to hover over me and peck at my neck.

## Love Haight Party

Leah throws a party on Pierce Street, across from the Full House park. In the hallway, a dude is lying on the floor as a woman lifts up her dress and dances in bikini underwear over him. Others are feeling each other up.

A guy is licking a woman's hands and feet until he's slapped away. People are passed out under the bed. Kegs and cases are emptied as fast as they're received. Bras have vanished. Belly buttons are exposed. Provocative outfits prevail.

## Celebrity Deaths

November 1, 1993

Welcome to Nob Hill Cafe. A beautiful dame waits in the doorway. I have nothing to say but can't look away. So we just smile.



Affected by death of River Phoenix and Federico Fellini in one day – double whammie. Damn.

Guy was yelling at a boy in the street just now; he never listens, evidently.

### Vesuvio's

Smokers' haven – Vesuvios. Relentless attack on clean clothing. Drugs found in River Phoenix during autopsy: heroin, morphine, valium, coke and an over-the-counter antihistamine. Did he have allergies? Fuck an A, River! Beyond Len Bias.

My Hurricane is neither weak nor delicious. I figured she wouldn't know the ingredients. Kind of like a paralegal not knowing what an affidavit is. Not easy, but it's your job to know what you serve. No? So recalled rum, vodka, and grapefruit – blaaa!! I know she's going to screw it up.

The story I want to tell, the script I want to shoot is nowhere in sight. One booth ahead sits anorexia in a Greenpeace sweatshirt. She funnels Sweet-n-Low into her latte through the straw, then sucks it back up and repeats for every sip.

### Guerillas In Action

Posted a flyer at NYU film department bulletin for my Guerillas on HoHo's script. Awaiting reply from local rags on No. Beach piece. At work, accumulating interest in my writings. Guerilla compositions in action – posting in men's bathroom and circulating at select offices.

### Dad Advice

Dad called. Wants to send me religious articles. "I think you're like me. I think you want to do something meaningful and help the world. Am I right in saying that?"

"Dad, (Connecticut Congressman) Chris Shays once told me a plumber's work is meaningful. It's not what you do that's meaningful. It's how you do it. It's about excelling at what interests you. It's about being the best you."

I think this reply threw him off his train of thought.

Pretty guerilla-consumed lately. I don't know what that means except that I'm searching more and more for alternative ways, socially accepted or not. It's a way of life really.

### The Screenplay

November

Theme of HoHos – It's who you are, not what you do. This realization doesn't really bring relief when you're wasting away in the workplace. As much as I feel like I'm somebody first, I feel my wings are clipped while shuffling docs at the firm.

## A Fight About Perfection or Something

Last week Liz and I fought on our anniversary. We screamed at each other how much we loved each other.

Liz had been making imperatives: "I want you to change the message on your machine." And, "I want a hug in bed," after I was already up and heading out the door.

Me: "Whatever I do is never enough. You're always pushing for some perfect ideal."

Liz: "I'm tired of feeling like I have to constantly prove to you that you fulfill me completely. If I'm such a perfectionist, then you must be perfect."

She pops my brainfart as I pause to decode what's been said...

Liz: "Because I'm with YOU. You must be perfect, because I like being with you, I love you!"

Meanwhile tears fill the room.

Me: "Well, I like being with you too but not when you make demands on me. I won't stand for it. I resist. I resist demanding behavior. I'm just saying, the more you demand, the more I'll continue resisting... Maybe I just have to be more in the moment and not worry about whether you're pleased or not. I just shouldn't care about you...No, that doesn't sound right."

She stares at the Golden Grahams box throughout my monolog as if she's thoroughly reading every ingredient and kid trivia question during our now silent breakfast.

As she butters her toast, I remark, "I thought you didn't want buttered toast."

"No, I just didn't want yours. I'm mad at you."

## Mad at the World

December, 1993

I adore, the screaming lunatic on the highway bridge in Hal Hartley's Trust. My whole, my whole life is pent up emotion and expression like that. You wouldn't know that, but given the routine employment structure and the discomfort with society...go figure.

## Boogie in Blue

This bar is hopping. Place is a hole where locals dance with their cigarettes in hand and stamp them out on the floor. Bigger butts hog the dance floor where one guy swings with every gal who waits their turn.

Where conservative women let loose in their dance movements. Where trashed sophomores are still yelling over the hush in between songs.

Stray Cats influence. Boogie in blue fun.

Where the brightest light in the house is the Genuine Draft Miller sign. Where some tire belly dip, overdips his date, breaking her back.

Where drunkards make a scene of themselves delivering sick lines, pointing at people. Where women relish in diabolic pleasure of rejecting men from proceeding on to the dance floor.

Where White Russians cream a layer of ooze on the brain allowing the Kahlua to slide around on top.

Where the men outnumber the women 20:9 to see a band called the Bachelors. In North Beach. Where a girl gives her friend a dollar, like in church, to tip the cuuuuuute bassist.

Where are we? Where else? The Saloon on Grant Avenue.

## Parting Thought

Architect and new hero Christopher Alexander looks at his purpose this way: "It's just a question of whether you can in a way hand somebody a present and because of that thing they start to feel their own humanity and they feel more connected to everything."

-CSR