Best of Quora

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Why is it safe to eat the mold in bleu cheese?

Yoav Perry, Artisan cheesemaker

Generally speaking, the aversion from mold in foods comes from the cognition that mold on fresh foods clearly indicates that they are no longer fresh. We also assume that food would not taste the same because a fermentation has began to take place, usually accompanied by change in appearance, texture, and aroma of the food in question. Many molds simply taste unpleasant, yet are not problematic to our bodies. Dangerous molds are those which produce mycotoxins and aflatoxins. These toxins may effect our respiratory system and in some cases even act as carcinogens. Not all molds produce these toxins.

Penicillium Roqueforti and **Penicillium Glaucum**, which are the blue molds used for cheese, cannot produce these toxins in cheese. The combination of acidity, salinity, moisture, density, temperature, and oxygen flow creates an environment that is far outside the envelope of toxin production range for these molds. In fact, this is true for almost all molds in cheese, which is the reason that cheese has been considered a safe moldy food to eat over the past 9,000 years. Not only is it safe, but it can also be healthy (P.Roqueforti and P.Glaucum

have natural antibacterial properties and ability to over-take pathogens. Moreover, our bodies use a variety of wild flora for digestion, development and immune systems).

Unfortunately, mass food manufacturers have run relentless campaigns over the previous few generations to cause consumers to conclude (beyond their 9,000 years of wisdom) that plastics looking bright-colored food-like substances with homogenous texture, in a vacuum-pack and big brand logo equal controlled/safe products. Anything moldy, rustic, irregular, inconsistent, or natural equals unsanitary conditions, primitive family farming, or uncontrolled production. Today, we understand that this is not the case as we go back to traditional and artisan foods… and stay away from highly processed industrial food replacements.

Blue Molds have a particularly unique effect on cheese. They accelerate two processes dramatically: **Proteolysis** (breakdown of proteins), which causes the cheese to take on extra-creamy texture (especially in proximity to the blue mold veins), and **lipolysis** (breakdown of fats), which makes up the tangy, spicy, sharp and strong flavor. The creamy texture stand up to the sharp flavor and together they bring upon an exciting flavor/texture/aroma profile, which is often further balanced against sweet/nutty milk and lots of salt (blue cheeses typically contain twice the salt of other cheeses). This combination is so unique; it is unlike any other food!

THE PROCESS

Before going into the second part of the question (*"Can one "bleu-ify" other cheeses at home?"*) let's just understand the process in a nutshell:

- Blue mold grows only during a specific time frame within the aging period. It needs a balanced acidity, so it can't grow on the cheese if is too young and still acidic. It also relies on nutrients that are still readily available in the cheese, so it can't be too late when the cheese is already aged.

- The mold spores are highly contagious to other cheeses, so blue cheeses typically would not share aging space with other cheeses during this sensitive period.

- The cheese is usually pierced with a thick needle first so that oxygen will flow into its crevices and kickstart the growth. The cheesemaker would repeat this process every seven to fourteen days until sufficient growth of blue has taken place.

- At this point, the cheese is wrapped in foil to prevent the blue from growing out of control. The cheese is then immediately moved to cooler temperature and aged for the remaining period, allowing the processes of proteolysis and lipolysis to take place and develop deep and complex texture, flavor, and aroma. In some cases, this last stage could take up several months past the development and stoppage of the blue mold.

BLUING CHEESE AT HOME

Trying to blue an unsuspecting cheese at home may prove difficult. The cheese you purchase is often already aged, ripe, and stable. It lacks sufficient nutrients to support the growth of new blue mold. Competition from other well-established molds and yeasts in the rind may be too much for the blue to overcome at such late stage.

Having said that, this is not an impossible experiment. One just needs to find a cheese that is very young and has little or no rind. It must be moist enough to support the growth of this mold, yet it firm enough to enable the puncture a hole through it with a knitting needle. To "blue" it, one would need blue mold (can be purchased or scraped off moldy rye bread or another blue cheese, or simply pulverize a piece of blue cheese in a blender with a little bit of water and a pinch of salt). The procedure would be to sanitize a knitting needle or metal skewer and dip it in the mold to "contaminate" it with blue. Use it to pierce the cheese through from both ends to assure ample mold seeding and clear air passages. Set the cheese on its side so air can flow through it. It is best to start it at about 55ºF or 13ºC (temperature of a wine cooler) with high humidity (90%–95%). When the growth of blue is sufficient (one to three weeks) wrap with foil and move to the fridge for a few more weeks or months. In theory this should work but blue cheese are finicky and tricky to get right. Many

variables may still fail it.

FOOD INDUSTRY

How do supermarkets dispose of expired food?

Brian Lee, Student

During my time working in both management and part-time capacities at a large supermarket, I can tell you that the evolution of what happens with food past its sell by date has been pretty fascinating. There is a distinction to note that there are generally several dates associated with food. There is a sell by date, a best by date, and an expiration date.

The short answer to your question is, yes, a lot of food gets thrown out.

The long answer is that most supermarkets do a very good job of minimizing this waste. Almost all departments, especially ones with perishable items, order to sell out and should come very close to running out before their next order arrives. Think about that the next time your supermarket is out of fresh wild salmon. Would they really bring in one extra twenty pound case just to sell you an eight ounce fillet at 8PM the night before fresh fish arrives? Depends on the market and how aggressively the store wants to capture sales, but mostly, no.

The blanket rule for food past its expiration date is this: if it is unsafe in any way, shape, or form, it gets thrown out. They find a way to use almost everything else.

Produce – Fruits and vegetables don't come with clear expiration dates. I will tell you that you will probably never see a banana that's turning brown on the racks in the produce department. If some produce isn't sell-able, it usually gets shopped around the store. A department that handles any type of prepared foods will use these items to make items for hot bars,

salad bars, soups, etc. The same goes for meat and seafood that is past its sell by date but still within its best by date.

Composting seems like the natural answer for all the other produce that can't be used. This issue has been explored and explored at our supermarket, and there are two major roadblocks to seeing it in action.

1. *Storage* – Most farms are generally further away from urbanized (or suburbanized) stores. Because produce deteriorates rather quickly farms would have to pick up compostable produce on a daily basis. Storage at the market is not an option because a large, rotting pile of fruit would attract all sorts of unwanted pests to the store. Daily pickup is difficult, and would the extra monetary and green cost of the freight and labor make up for the produce that would be picked up? The logistics of the operation are more involved than one might initially think.

2. *Recalls* – Unfortunately, recalls due to contaminated fruits and vegetables do happen. Many of them happen after the produce has been in the store for some time. If the store composts melons, and those same melons are recalled two days later due to a possible salmonella contamination, then you have potentially deadly compost making its way around your local farms. I am neither an expert in foodborne illness nor composting, so I don't know if there is any validity to this concern, but I do know it sounds scary. And that's enough to put the issue on the back burner.

Bakery – Almost all old baked goods get donated to the local food bank, which disperses it to not for profit agencies in the area. Every morning, a big shopping cart of old muffins, donuts, and bread makes its way to the back dock, and every morning at 10AM, a van rolls around and picks it up.

Meat and Seafood – Lately, within the past couple of months, they've been testing out freezing meats that have just passed sell by date and donating these to the local soup kitchens. Again, this is still in its infancy, and some issues have arisen that have taken the logistics of this back to the drawing board. The main issue becomes, and always comes back to, safety. Just because a product makes it to its final consumer in a

frozen state doesn't mean it's 100% safe. What happened to the product in the mean time? Traceability is of paramount importance until it gets to the store, but the cost involved with continuing that traceability until it reaches donations is economically unfeasible.

Grocery and Dairy – Unfortunately, for the same reasons Meat and Seafood can't be donated, many refrigerated, expired dairy products don't make the list. The good news is that very few items get thrown out. Longer shelf lives, higher demand, and tight orders ensure that the only dairy products that really get thrown out are the damaged ones that aren't safe for consumption anyways.

Grocery items are given to food banks. I'm sure some smaller markets donate directly. At our store, everything expired is packed and freighted to headquarters, and they distribute the goods evenly among the communities that our supermarkets are located in. The extra freight may seem wasteful, but I am assuming they record their donations for tax deduction purposes.

I've had the good fortune to spend some time volunteering at food banks. They have different expiration dates for products, which I assume are regulated by some sort of government agency. For example, (I'm just using an arbitrary example, I don't remember the exact dates and figures) canned beans may be okay for two years past the date on the can, whereas boxed pasta is good for six months past the date on the box. The majority of my volunteer time at the food banks was spent sorting through the mountains of canned goods and checking expiration dates to see what was still deemed safe and what wasn't.

So basically, if it's safe, it gets donated. If it's not, it gets thrown out. Definitely some food for thought.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-brian-lee

If there were ten commandments in cooking what would they be?

Jonas M Luster, trimethylxanthine addict

1. Honor what you use. For every piece of food, every ingredient, every vegetable, slice of meat, herb, or spice, someone had to work, an animal had to die, trucks, vans, trains, and boats had to move. Every celery stalk and every pork loin has made a permanent impression on this planet. Honor the men and women who worked for your food, the animals who had to die for it, by giving everything the best treatment, thinking about how you can make it better, and by not wasting or throwing away food items.

2. Don't lose touch with your food. Tongs and other contraptions only serve to keep you away from it. Losing touch, figuratively and literally, yields worse dishes. Touch your steaks, your salad, everything. Learn how it feels, smells, looks, and tastes.

3. Try something new every month. Follow foreign cultures and preparations. Your life will be richer and your food better, even when you're preparing common staples.

4. Before you use the tool, learn to do it with your own hands. Buying a julienne peeler is nice and can save you hours over the course of a lifetime. But only by learning how to cut, mash, grind, sear, saute, and whisk with your hands will you keep touch with your food and get the best results.

5. Cook for others. Enough said.

6. Use fresh where possible, canned where necessary, and frozen when desperate.

7. Taste everything. Repeatedly.

8. Let your food items come to room temperature before throwing them into pans.

9. Work clean and clean as you go.

10. When cooking, taste. When baking, measure.

   http://www.quora.com/l/boq-jonas-m-luster

Why do American winemakers produce mostly varietals, while French winemakers produce blends?

Madeline Puckette, Certified Sommelier at winefolly.com

This is not true. This is a marketing misconception.

There are a lot of well-known blended varietals in France such as Cotes du Rhone and Bordeaux wines. However, there is also a ton-load of 100% chardonnay, pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, and mourvedre that pours out of France as well.

In America, single varietal wines are extremely well marketed, and the drinking public is more familiar with buying a wine called "merlot" than buying a wine called "California Red Wine," however, red blends are extremely successful in the American Market as well. Here's how I suppose this argument:

- In the American AVA system, a minimum of 75% of that single varietal, which allows a huge amount of wiggle room to perfect a *blend*, is named after a varietal. You can bet wineries are doing this, especially if it adds dynamic flavor (which it usually does, in the case of a pinot noir/syrah blend) and it's also CHEAPER. That's why there is a huge variable of range between producers.

- In Washington State, winemakers have been championing red blends and rightly so, the blend such as a GSM (grenache syrah mourvedre) and a CMS (cab, merlot, syrah) have been growing in popularity.

- Entry level wines are almost always a blended wine. Visualize these labels "mad housewife" or "apothic red" or "house wine," and now you see how common this is.

To conclude, the American public will have to get more educated about what's in their wine, possibly through stricter labeling laws, more readily available information about wine in general, and most importantly... they'll need to drink more and pay attention!

See a neat infographic on the majority of wine that comes out of the Burgundy region here 100% Chardonnay: http://winefolly.com/update/burgundy-wine-statistics/.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-madeline-puckette

CHOCOLATE

Why are the chocolate chips in chocolate chip ice cream generally "chocolate-flavored chips"?

Andrew Roberts, Food Scientist

Chocolate chips for many frozen applications might be 'chocolate flavored' products.

The amazing property of cocoa butter, which makes chocolate melt in your mouth (not your ___), is the very steep melting profile. Since all fatty foods are made up of a variety of fatty acids, they melt over a temperature range, as each class of molecules has its own melting point. Think about butter melting on a hot day: there is always a pool of liquid (the shortest/most unsaturated fatty acids, with the lowest melting points) and some soft, solid butter (the longer ones), holding onto its shape. These two phases represent the different melting points of the fatty acids which make up butter.

Cocoa butter behaves differently. Think about the cases where chocolate looks solid, but is very soft. In this case, none of it has started to drip or pool even though it is dangerously close to its melting point. This is a reason real chocolate is so

great and pleasurable, it all melts at once, intensifying the melting experience.

Freezing real chocolate somewhat screws up the melting experience. Freezing it in ice cream really screws up this experience.

Frozen chocolate chips will be very cold, and therefore take time to heat up and melt in your mouth. They will feel chalky at first, but eventually melt if you have a nice warm mouth, providing you with that great sensation. When you have a mouthful of ice cream, your mouth will not be warm enough to melt these chips. They will feel chalky and not melt until well after all the ice cream is gone, which most people won't wait for. When you bite into them, they will crack and taste/feel chalky, brittle, and generally bad.

So, some ingredient company realized there is a market for specialty frozen applications chocolate chips. They solved this problem by adding some lower melting point fats and oils to their product. These might be hydrogenated vegetable oils, but now are probably palm oil or fractionated (separated by melting point) palm. Lower melting point oils are generally healthier, if that is any consolation. What they have achieved is a chip that acts somewhat like chocolate when you eat it with a relatively cold mouth, full of ice-cream, because it will melt at a lower temperature than chocolate.

Luckily, someone is out there protecting us from food-fraud. In many countries, government enforced standards exist for foods. These are basically minimum requirements that must be met before you can use a name like Chocolate, Bacon, Fruit Juice, etc.

These products are likely outside of the Chocolate standard because they are no longer >35% cocoa solids after the sugar and added oils. After this, it is just up to the firm making them to choose a non-misleading name for their product. Voila, chocolate-flavored chips. This also applies to the liquid used for dipped-cones at Dairy Queen and most other frozen chocolate you have as part of a commercially produced ice-cream product.

Mmmmmm?

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-andrew-roberts

EDUCATION

What is one thing that you regret learning in medical school?

Jae Won Joh, sleepy medical student ^__^

Where to begin…

1. How *colossally* broken the U.S. healthcare system is.

- How *monumentally* undereducated/misguided about health/medicine/ethics the people legislating healthcare are.

- How *desperately* most physicians avoid thinking about the problem; indeed, how many actively contribute to it in order to chase "patient satisfaction," the end-all-be-all these days in the highly political hospital world.

- How *mercilessly* this hurts patients, particularly the underserved.

2. How *uninvested* most patients are in their own health.

- How *lazily* most people would rather take a pill to control their obesity or cholesterol instead of watching less TV and getting up to go do some exercise.

- How *massively* undereducated people are about basic nutrition facts that didn't have to be explained to their ancestors just a few generations ago.

3. How *uncertain* the practice of "the standard of care" is.

- How *traditionally* defined practices that legitimately may negatively affect patient care still survive. "This is how I was taught" is something I've heard way too often.

- How *forcefully* evidence-based medicine struggles to make the rounds, as many have relatively little experience analyzing a study and how it should or should not affect their practice.

- How *tremendously* difficult it really is to actually prove something of clinical value, namely due to the fact that ethically, experimentation on humans is seen as horrifyingly unethical… but at a certain point, you have to wonder if it's not just as unethical to keep up practices that we're not really sure are beneficial to the patient.

4. How *minimally* the process of educating a clinician has changed to adapt to modern times. Indeed, one wonders if we aren't going backwards somewhat.

- How *ancient* the system is, expecting every medical student to take the same courses/rotations for three years and then somehow differentiate themselves into the one hundred and forty five different medical specialties. This originates from a time when it was legitimately possible to know just about everything in the field of medicine with enough time/study.

- How *favoring* the system is to subservience, now that we have the hierarchy of attending physician, fellow, resident, medical student.

- How *frightening* it is that we emphasize memorizing and spewing out answers on tests instead of looking at ways to test actual clinical competence.

- How *poorly* the art of the physical exam is taught, in favor of far more expensive tests and imaging.

All that said, I still love what I do. There is much I would change if I had the power, but simply put, I do not; nor, I suspect, will I ever. So I do what good I can, when I can, where I

can. We'll see if any of this changes in the years to come.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-jae-won-joh

How does a star engineering high school student choose amongst MIT, Caltech, Stanford, and Harvard?

Melinda T. Owens, Neuroscience PhD and all-around geek

Ah, this question brings me back to the days I used to be smart.

The answer to the question both complicated and, in some sense, is very simple. You will be happy with any of these schools, because there are amazing people and opportunities at all of them. Your happiness and success in life has a lot more to do with how you leverage your own abilities and take advantage of these opportunities than which school you go to.

That said, there are substantial differences between these schools too. First, you should look at how strong each school is in your specific areas of interest, both with respect to classes and research opportunities. For example, the Harvard math department is reputed to be better than the one at Caltech, but if you want to design space robots, Caltech has a close relationship with JPL. When you do your campus visits (you absolutely shouldn't skip those), try to find some senior students in your major and ask if a lot of the class is involved in research activities.

Second, figure out how much learning about humanities and social science stuff is important to you. You can get a much more well-rounded education at Harvard and Stanford than at MIT or, especially, Caltech. Also, at the former two schools, you will be around more humanities majors and may even have to do things like room with them. Of course there are high-quality humanities classes at even Caltech (I thor-

oughly enjoyed mine there), but the breadth was limited.

Third, figure out what kind of social scene you like. If you identify as a "normal" person, you are going to stand out at Caltech (and maybe MIT, although I think that's less of an issue there). If you identify as a "nerd," though, you might find it harder to find a good social circle at Harvard or Stanford. Read the signs posted on the billboards of the campus — those are the activities that students actually like to do.

Fourth, just walk around the campuses of each of these schools on your own, and look at the scenery and architecture, and soak in the ambiance. Are there lots of people and cars scurrying around? Do the environs affect you emotionally (and remember, gray in summer is going to be ten times worse in cold and snow)? Is the campus too small or too big? We're supposed to be intellectuals and not care about the physical environment, but small things like sunshine and flowers can make a surprisingly big difference when the going gets tough.

Fifth, read the Quora pages addressing the downsides of each school and talk to students who self-identify as being unhappy at the schools. That will identify any deal-breakers.

Sixth, check your mail and look at your scholarship offers and financial aid. Caltech, unlike Harvard and I believe Stanford and MIT, offers merit-based scholarships. Student loan debt may be an abstract thing to you now, but it's a real burden if you want to do anything in life that doesn't involve making lots of money.

Congratulations on your acceptances (otherwise, stop counting chickens before they hatch). When you make a choice, embrace it and don't look back.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-melinda-t-owens

Are general requirements in college a waste of time?

Joshua Engel, Polymath

Here's the way I think of it: nobody wants to pay you to program a computer.

Programming, in and of itself, is pointless. It's a bunch of bits, a bunch of electrical potentials. Nobody cares.

People want you to program the computer to do stuff. They want it to play Angry Birds or show them what their friends are doing or help them write a memo. These are things that people do, not what computers do. The computer is the tool. The human beings are the client.

The point of the general requirements is to introduce you to people: what they think, what they do, what they want. This is where you make money.

Computer people fetishize the programs that they write for other computer people, where the computer is the domain as well as the tool: the Linux kernel, the Apache server, the graphics blitting engines. These are tiny domains, tools for other toolmakers. Computer people would rather write code that writes code than write code.

There is, without doubt, a place for the pure research: the pure mathematics, the high-energy physics, the computer science that's actually computer science rather than a training hub for programmers. These are important domains that are removed from applications, though even there, there's a case for understanding the eventual context that your work will fit into. Your "customers" aren't the papers you write, but the people who will read them. Your coworkers will also be people, and your social connection to them makes you work better, even when what you talk about has nothing to do with pharmacokinetics or Galois fields or whatever "pure" field you're working in. You have to write proposals, and well-written proposals are going to pay your salary better than poorly-written ones, no matter solid the technical points.

But a larger percentage of STEM graduates are going

to do work for actual people, and you'll do better at it as an actual person yourself. The great video games tell stories, and you'd better be familiar with some great stories yourself. The ergonomics and interfaces of the device you engineer aren't going to be glopped on top of your brilliant contraption like some kind of awesome sauce. They're built into it from the bottom up.

The humanities are not another collection of facts to memorize. They are the introduction, the foundation on which your own journey into what it means to be human is built. If there's a problem with the humanities requirements, it's that you're allowed to get away with a few freshman and sophomore level classes under the impression that you've mastered the topics. You wouldn't consider yourself an expert in engine design just because you took freshman engineering.

These classes are supposed to give you the tools to continue the study on your own. If all you do is get through them and forget them, then you really have wasted your time.

If I could wave a magic wand, I'd make every STEM student double-major in some humanities area. That might begin to make them qualified to actually do something with their STEM knowledge, something that people want. STEM graduates are supposed to be the cream of the crop, and they're supposed to find the humanities easy. I'd love to see all of them learn music, or history, or Indonesian literature in real depth. Who knows what kind of wonderful applications would come out of it?

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-joshua-engel

INTERNATIONAL

Is Iraq a safer place now compared to what it was like during Saddam Hussein's regime?

Wael Al-Sallami, born and raised in Iraq, moved to Texas recently.

I'm an Iraqi native. I was born in 1988, just four months before the end of the Iraq-Iran war, then survived the Iraq-Kuwait one, and the American attack as a three-year-old. I lived through the US-enforced sanctions that did absolutely nothing to Saddam, while severely harming the Iraqi people in so many ways. I then survived yet another war in 2003 and went through the horrific times that took the lives of so many good people.

But was it really safer back then? Did the Americans really help Iraqis? Was it worse before 2003?! I think those are all misguided questions, and here's why:

Iraq was a really wealthy country back in the 1980s, and even though it went through an eight-year long war against Iran, its economy wasn't affected that much, and Saddam was able to rebuild much of what was destroyed in a matter of months. But then Kuwait was lowering oil prices to harm the Iraqi economy in a time we needed money most (post-1988) and Iraq/Saddam tried to talk them out of it on several occa-

sions, but they didn't back out. So Saddam came up with the idea that Kuwait was historically a part of Iraq, and that he should claim it back!

While that claim *is* historically true, it wasn't exactly right to just go and invade Kuwait and kill a lot of its people! But he did it anyways. The result was that the US attacked Iraq, killing many of innocent people in the process. The Iraqi people fought back, and the US finally backed out. They later enforced the sanctions that left Iraq cut out from the rest of the world and slowly killed the Iraqis!

At the time, my father was a Biology Ph.D student, and my mother was a teacher. I had a little sister and an older brother. And since my father was teaching in college before his Ph.D, the government paid him while he studied. They paid him 8000 Dinars/month, the equivalent of $4. My mother's salary was 3000 Dinars, the equivalent of $1.50. A family of five people was living off of $5.50/month, and that was the case for pretty much all low-level government employees during the 1990s.

It took my father four years to finish his Ph.D in 1998. Those four years were by far the worst I've lived, and I've lived through some serious shit, trust me.

After 1998, things started to go just a little bit better. Saddam was sensing his end, and so he tried to make a few improvements in salaries and services. He even tried to introduce a controlled-version of satellite TV as well as wireless cellphones. But he didn't have time to finish, because in 2003, America struck again. This time with the intention of removing Saddam from power, and yet again, killed thousands of innocent people in the process. But there was a particular difference this time, the Iraqi people weren't willing to fight back. They just sat back while the US Army took over.

And this is why this, and all similar questions, are misguided. Iraq was safer and much wealthier back in the 1980s; it was the United States that made it so poor and horrible through the 1991 attack and the sanctions. And then, it came back in 2003 to *save* the Iraqi people from what they've done themselves after they (the Iraqi people) have grown to hate their way of life so much that they were OK with anyone coming in to change it!

And that, my friend, was the most hypocritical move in modern history! To add insult to injury, the 2003 war didn't change things much. It actually made matters worse! Instead of people living really safely but extremely poor, the picture flipped, and people became somewhat wealthy, but safety was gone with the wind. People had one Saddam to be afraid of, now they have hundreds! They used to live safely by keeping their mouth shut, now they can't even if they do. Iraqis were being killed for having the wrong religion, the wrong place of birth, and a lot of the time, the wrong *name*. 2006 was worse than 1991 and 2003 combined. Militias took over, and it was chaos.

After 2007, things started to get a little better. Babylon, the city I live in, was getting much safer, but Baghdad and a few other cities were still dangerous. It took some time for them to become relatively safe. But every now and then, we still get a few car bombings, suicide bombings, or at least a few kidnappings here and there.

My father now makes about $3000/month, my mother about a quarter of that, and we live really comfortably financially. But so far, my brother has survived one car bombing, and I about *four*, and that's only because we live in a safe city. Chances are I would have already lost a family member if we lived in Baghdad.

It might seem that I think the US forces backed down in 1991 because the Iraqis fought back. Please note that I'm not suggesting that, but rather stating the Iraqis' readiness to fight back then in contrast with what happened in 2003.

So, there's your answer. I worked remotely with a start-up in NYC, I visited the US for three months in 2010, and I've now come back to the US on a scholarship to pursue an MSCS at Texas A&M. I have so many good friends here, and I know how Americans are sorry and ashamed for what their country did to mine. So I personally don't blame the American *people* for all what I and other Iraqis have been through, but facts remain facts, and a lot of Iraqi people really hate the Americans for what they did.

I find it sad that no one can see that the American people aren't really to blame, or at least find it in themselves to forgive them, because it's always the leadership that does all of

this, just like our leadership (Saddam) caused the death of so many Kuwaitis back in 1991.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-wael-al-sallami

Is Islam misogynistic?

Anon User

As an Arab American woman raised in a conservative Muslim family, I would say that yes, Islam is a misogynistic religion.

The messages about gender that I received from my parents, extended family, family friends, religious teachers, and so on ranged from subtle to extreme. I was told, among other things, that

- women can't speak during prayer to correct an Imam (men can) because their voices are too "distracting" (This is based on the hadith, see http://www.alahazrat.net/islam/the-mode-of-prayer-(salaat)-for-women.php)

- women should lower their eyes in the presence of men (http://quran.com/24/30-31, to be fair the stuff about lowering one's gaze is also directed towards men, not the other stuff though. This surah is significant in that it is often cited as evidence that hijab is a requirement of Islam, which is a subject of debate within the religion.)

- women shouldn't wear tampons to preserve their "purity" (No quotes from the Qur'an on this as tampons weren't around in those days, this is another topic of debate and from my understanding, people outside of Islam also debate the issue. So I have only anecdotal comments here in that every Muslim woman I've known has been told something to this effect, and on a personal level, when my mom discovered I was using tampons, she completely freaked out, started screaming, and threatened to take me to the doctor and have them check to see if my hymen was still intact, which seems to be not infrequent behavior — a

Muslim friend of mine who was caught skipping class had her parents ask the doctor to check her hymen. But again, this is anecdotal, and I'm just mentioning this as a qualitative "data point", as it were.)

- passages in the Qur'an that advocate beating disobedient wives (see http://www.bible.ca/islam/islam-wife-beating-koran-4-34.htm, https://perfectquran.com/surah/4/ayah/34, and this paragraph from http://www.sillyallah.com/2007/11/violent-sexism-and-wife-beating-in.html *"In fact, the word in the Quran in 4:34 used for "beat" is "idreb." It is a conjugate of the word "daraba," which primarily means "to beat, strike, to hit" – Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, page 538.")*

- polygamy is legal and practiced in many Muslim countries and permitted by the Qur'an (see https://perfectquran.com/surah/4/ayah/3 and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy_in_Islam)

and so on and so forth; honestly it would take me hours (and probably lots of therapy) to be able to cogently list all of the misogynistic aspects of this religion and the cultures that have flourished from it. Maybe some of the aforementioned things seem minor, but in my mind they're not negligible, and taken together so many things have made me feel like my religion hated women.

It's ridiculous to me to hear qualifying statements that Islam is "paternalistic, but not misogynistic." Believe me, as a young woman growing up and struggling in Islam, there is little to no distinction between the two.

I'm not saying by any means that these characteristics are unique to Islam. But the question was not "Is Islam more misogynistic than other religions?" but rather "Is Islam misogynistic?"

Some have mentioned that there is a distinction between culture and religion in Muslim countries. I would argue that that's not really true, at least not in the way that it is in the West. Islam is integrated into Arab cultures in a way that's probably unthinkable to many in Western countries. With the exception of the occasional very small Christian minority, virtually everyone in Arab countries is Muslim and this basically

dominates the culture; public newscasters casually attribute occurrences to Allah without any controversy, domestic airlines recite surahs from the Qur'an over the intercom during flights, and so on.

Muslim countries touted as being more liberal, such as Turkey, are such because they are not as strictly and fanatically religious as countries like Saudi Arabia, where the laws and regulations are for the most part drawn from edicts in the Qur'an and where "religious police" (note that they aren't called the cultural police) patrol the streets, harassing women for showing their ankles, preventing women from driving, enforcing the laws that prevent women from working, or traveling without permission from a male guardian, and oh, don't forget "beating young girls" to prevent them from escaping a fire because they weren't wearing proper religious dress (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1874471.stm).

I understand, respect, and appreciate people outside of Islam trying to be open-minded about this religion. But to be honest, sometimes it bothers me, and I think people can try too hard to be "politically correct," for lack of a better expression, about this topic and overlook the reality of life in Islam.

I'd like to reassert my argument that Muslim countries heralded as being more liberal are not following Islam as strictly. Any Muslim country that affords, for example, a woman's testimony in court the same worth as a man's testimony, is not actually following the Qur'an: one male witness = two female witnesses (http://quran.com/2/282). The same holds true for countries where polygamy is illegal, and in most cases for any Muslim who affords a female heir the same inheritance as a male heir (http://www.irf.net/).

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user

Do the Chinese people currently consider Mao Zedong to be evil or a hero?

Kaiser Kuo, Dabbler in history

"The Chinese people" are not, of course, of one mind on the legacy of Mao. There's a range of viewpoints, from the unreconstructed Mao worshippers who'd like nothing more than to bring back the days of the Cultural Revolution and who believe unequivocally that Mao was a hero to those who believe he was an unalloyed villain, a murderous monster.

Mao takes his place in Chinese history alongside characters like Ying Zheng, better known as Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of the Qin dynasty (221-209 BCE), who unified China after the long centuries of internecine strife of the Warring States period. Like Mao, Qin Shi Huang was ruthless and monomaniacal, but he did unify the country. Mao saw himself very much in this role and embraced the archetype. Other individuals who sought to unify China through force of will and an amoral, single-minded focus would include Cao Cao, the ruler of Wei during the Three Kingdoms period that followed the collapse of the Han Dynasty. All three — Qin Shi Huang, Cao Cao, and Mao — are viewed generally with the same mixture of admiration and contempt.

If I were forced to say there's a dominant view of Mao among mainlanders, it would be that Mao was "good" up until the very early 1950s — before the Anti-Rightist Campaign got into full swing, and before he set China on a course toward collectivization. Whether or not these beliefs can be supported by fact, it's widely believed among Chinese that Mao led the Communist Party and its Red Army in effective resistance against the Japanese invaders; that they represented a morally superior vision over that offered by the Guomindang (the Nationalist Party), a vision that championed egalitarianism, feminism, anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, and nationalism; and that they allowed China to "stand up" after a century of

abject humiliation beginning with the Opium War. After 1949, land redistribution and the Marriage Law (which was, by any measure, a very progressive piece of legislation) won them plaudits too.

But then, this "common" view I'm positing would suggest Mao became out of touch with reality, power-mad, and dictatorial. Collectivization, the calamity of the Great Leap Forward, the death of tens of millions of Chinese during the "Three Bad Years" resulting from the folly of the Great Leap Forward, the nearly suicidal break with the Soviet Union, and of course the insanity and crazed personality cult of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution all count on the opposite side of the ledger.

Officially — this was the formula handed down by Deng in the early 1980s — Mao was "70 percent good, 30 percent bad." I think for most Chinese — and almost certainly for most urban, educated Chinese — the proportion of bad to good is probably higher than that, perhaps even the reverse.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-kaiser-kuo

Why do so many Chinese learners seem to hate Dashan (Mark Rowswell)?

Mark Rowswell, AKA Dashan 大山

This question has come up many times in my twenty plus year career in the Chinese media.

Very early on, only a few months after my first television appearance in 1988, I was in the university cafeteria line-up when two American students in front of me started joking to each other by saying, "Hey, are you Dashan?" and "Your Chinese is almost as good as Dashan," etc. I laughed along and explained, "Yeah, I actually get that one myself a lot, really annoying."

"YOU think it's annoying? Hey, at least you ARE Dashan! Imagine how annoying it is for us?" the American student exclaimed. I realized he was right.

There has always been something of a Mr. Rogers quality to the Dashan character – he's such a nice guy you sometimes wish he'd make a cameo appearance in a horror movie just so you could watch him get ripped to shreds and then replay it over and over on YouTube.

I often say that being a celebrity or a public figure is not who I am, it's just what I do. So it's important to be able to stand aside and analyse your public image as objectively as possible. That's why I often speak of Dashan in the third person; he is me, yet he isn't.

In short, the reasons seem to be as follows:

1. **Overuse** – People are sick and tired of hearing the name "Dashan;"

2. **Resentment (Part A)** – Dashan's not the only Westerner who speaks Chinese fluently;

3. **Resentment (Part B)** – Being a foreign resident in China is not easy, and Dashan gets all the breaks;

4. **Political/Cultural** – People wish Dashan had more of an edge;

5. **Stereotyping** – The assumption that Dashan is a performing monkey.

For a more detailed discussion:

OVERUSE

The number one reason seems to be simply the frequency with which Dashan's name is brought up when it comes to the subjects of Canada-China relations, or Westerners learning Chinese, etc.

There is a parallel here with the mention of Canada in general in China, and Dr. Norman Bethune, a Canadian surgeon who died serving the Communist Revolution in China and was later memorialized by Chairman Mao. For decades now, every time Canada is mentioned in China, the memory of Dr. Bethune is sure to be raised. Frankly, many Canadians

in China are sick and tired of hearing about Bethune. The fact is, especially in the early years of formal diplomatic relations, the '70s and '80s, most Chinese had never heard of any Canadians other than Dr. Bethune. In the early '90s, the Canadian ambassador to China told me: "The best thing about Dashan is that finally, thank God, we have a second topic to discuss during all those endless banquets!"

I think Canadians probably now wish there was a third topic to discuss, other than Bethune and Dashan…

Small talk in China tends to be very ritualized, and Dashan has become one of those "standard topics" that is safe and culturally acceptable to discuss whenever the topics such as Canada, Westerners in China, or Westerners learning Chinese are discussed. In some senses, it's a formality that has worn thin and, through gross overuse, has become annoying for many Westerners. For example, having a taxi driver mention Dashan simply because you have given directions in Chinese.

Furthermore, there is a lack of other similar comparisons, leading to an overuse of Dashan as a role model.

When it comes to the subject of Canada, most Chinese still cannot name many famous Canadians. Those that are famous in China, from Celine Dion to Avril Lavigne, are not necessarily known first and foremost as being Canadian – they are international celebrities that happen to come from Canada. With Dashan, being Canadian has always been an integral part of the public image. So, even in 2012, the first two names that pop up when one mentions Canada are usually Bethune and Dashan.

When it comes to discussing Chinese language acquisition, Dashan seems to almost monopolize the category of "successful role models" in public discussion. Perhaps it wouldn't be so annoying if every time a Westerner opened his/her mouth and spoke Chinese they were then compared to one of a dozen different role models rather than just Dashan. The fact is, if you ran a poll and asked people to say the first name that pops into their head when you mention "a Westerner who speaks Chinese," chances are "Dashan" would be well into the 90% range.

I'm going to discuss the reasons for this further, but let

me add a note here to say that the fact my name is frequently raised in public discussion is clearly a sign of my success as a performer and public figure, and not something I should feel ashamed of or try in any way to correct.

RESENTMENT (PART A)

Dashan's not the only Westerner who speaks Chinese fluently.

That's clearly true and I have never personally claimed to be the best. I didn't start learning Chinese until I was nineteen and still only have a B.A. in Chinese Studies. There are a great deal of Westerners that either acquired Chinese at an earlier age than I did, or went on to acquire much more substantial academic and professional qualifications than I have.

That being said, a reputation has been built up around Dashan that is hard to beat. In fact, I have to work damn hard myself to live up to it. The basis for this reputation is fairly simple, but multi-faceted:

a) Dashan is on television. There are many Westerners who speak excellent Chinese, but they haven't had as much mass media exposure as Dashan has.

b) Dashan has been on television for over twenty-three years and counting. It doesn't really matter how many Westerners appear on television speaking Chinese nowadays, or how well they do, they will always be compared to Dashan because he was there in the "Ed Sullivan days" of Chinese television, when everyone watched the same shows (because there was practically no other choice) and because he stuck at it. There is a certain stability to the reputation that comes from longevity, and that is very difficult to exceed in the much more diverse mass media environment of today.

c) Dashan does *xiangsheng* 相声, or at least that's what he became famous for. Whether the reputation is deserved or not is debatable, but *xiangsheng* is known as "the art of language" and considered beyond the ability of most native speakers, much less a foreigner who learned Chinese as a second language.

Furthermore, Dashan became famous for doing *xiangsheng* with some of the leading performing artists of the day, and for consistently showing them up. The standard comedic set-up for these performances pitted Dashan, the foreign stu-

dent, against XXX, the senior Chinese master who was going to show Dashan "the glories of Chinese civilization" and yet over the course of the skit, the master was revealed to be a blustering buffoon who knew less about Chinese language and culture than his foreign student. After exploiting this comedic theme N times, it's quite natural that Dashan would gain the reputation for being a master of all things Chinese, 无所不知无所不晓. It's one of the reasons I eventually turned away from *xiangsheng* – you can only exceed people's expectations a certain number of times before you've raised the bar too high even for these highly scripted and polished performances.

d) Dashan does comedy. Comedy, like the arts in general, is something that touches people somewhere very deeply. It doesn't matter how fluent you are unless you say something people remember, and there is no easier way to be remembered (at least in a good way) than to stand up and tell a good joke. I've done a lot of different work over the years, and at the end of a long year of hard work, you often realize that the only thing people will remember is one line you said in one particular skit, because it was funny. That's the power of comedy.

e) Dashan represents or symbolizes something very powerful to a Chinese audience. I don't want to get too deeply into this, because my answer is already running too long, but let me say this: Chinese have a very complex and conflicting view of themselves and the world at large. They have a very strong self-identity and sense of pride, and this leads to a strong sense of "us vs. them" and of being misunderstood and misaligned by the rest of the world, or the West in particular, as well as a strong sense that they are gradually losing their language and culture in the process of globalization. In the face of this, Dashan represents a Westerner who appreciates and respects China, who has learned the language and understands the culture, and has even become "more Chinese than the Chinese." It's a very powerful and reassuring image that appeals to very deep-rooted emotions.

So it doesn't really matter how fluently one speaks Chinese, because in the end it's not a language competition. Skill is rational, but Dashan also relates to the audience on an emo-

tional level.

RESENTMENT (PART B)

Being a foreign resident in China is not easy, and Dashan gets all the breaks.

This is true too. From my perspective, I wouldn't say that I've gotten all the breaks and everything has been easy for me, but I understand the perception. Chinese tend to think that foreigners get such preferential treatment in China, what could they possibly complain about? But it is true: it is difficult day-in, day-out to be a long-term foreign resident of China. It is also exceedingly difficult to make a living as a foreigner in the Chinese media, as an actor, television host, or whatever. I've done pretty well on balance.

Part of this resentment also comes from the perception that Dashan has raised the Chinese language bar too high. No matter how hard you work over how many years, you just never get to the top. Believe me, I understand this completely because I've raised the bar too far for myself. That being said, I think I will use the rest of my career to see if I can push it a bit higher.

POLITICAL/CULTURAL

People wish Dashan had more of an edge. This one is more complicated. In general, Westerners (and particularly Americans) tend to prefer celebrities (and especially comedians) who have an edge. Admittedly, there are no sharp edges to the Dashan character.

Part of this delves into the political realm, where resentment stems from the wish that Dashan used his public person to be more politically active.

Let me deal with both aspects.

Culturally, the Dashan character does tend to be quite Canadian. We're just not as aggressive in general as Americans. The adjective most used to describe Canadians is "nice." How dull and boring can you get?

Although Canada and America are very close culturally, there are some fundamental differences. Primarily, Canadians never consider themselves to be number one in anything apart from hockey. And although we are both relatively young

nations built by successive waves of immigration, Canadians have a much weaker self-identity than Americans. We don't have a strong mainstream culture of our own, which I think makes us more malleable culturally. When Canadians come to China, we don't do things "the Canadian way" because nobody has the slightest idea what "the Canadian way" is. So we tend to adapt pretty well to different cultures.

Secondly, I work within Chinese cultural norms – the limits of what is culturally acceptable to a Chinese audience. That doesn't necessarily mean you pander. You can challenge the norms and push limits here and there, and I believe I have done and continue to do that, but in large part you work within culturally acceptable limits. Chinese don't go for shock humor, nor do they tend to accept what is commonly accepted in the West – that it's OK to be offensive as long as you are offensive on an equal opportunity basis. That's just not part of the Chinese comedy or media scenes.

Also, in many instances what would be acceptable for a Chinese performer to say is not considered acceptable for a foreign performer, especially when it comes to social or political satire. Even in a comedic exchange between individuals, you have to be aware that the audience may not perceive this as Character A making fun of Character B, but instead as Foreign Character making fun of Chinese Character, which goes over like a ton of bricks.

So, I work within cultural norms. This spills over into the political realm, because, to be honest, Chinese cultural acceptance of foreign political criticism is almost nil. In short, I don't have to worry about what government censors might say because Chinese audiences would never let me get that far anyway.

I could make a short public statement like that of Christian Bale recently or Björk a few years ago. It's very easy to do and ensures you get very good coverage in the Western media. You go home and everyone thinks you are a person of moral conviction who stood up to the great Chinese monster. But the fact is that these kinds of statements elicit almost no sympathy whatsoever from ordinary Chinese citizens. They simply are not culturally acceptable to the broad Chinese audience. And it's very difficult to see what impact they have other

than to further convince ordinary Chinese people that China is misunderstood and that the Western world is antagonistic towards China and resentful of China's development. What use is that?

As someone commented, "Looking at western media and literature, we see a trend for the most subversive and anti-China stances being the most popular." That is true. I would say that Dashan is a pop culture figure, not an underground artist I work in the mass media, like all pop culture figures in China do. If that means Dashan doesn't suit this trend in the western media, that's too bad.

STEREOTYPING

The assumption that Dashan is a performing monkey. Peter Hessler is one of my favorite American writer of books on China, but he did a real hatchet job on Dashan in his book "River Town" where in the same passage he admits that he's never seen any appearances, but then concludes that Dashan is a performing monkey. There was no justification or explanation given.

I do understand where this perception comes from, and it's closely linked to the comedic formula I described in **part 2c**. Successive comedic skits in which Dashan consistently "showed up" his Chinese teacher led us to explore more and more ways in which my character could exceed the teacher's (and hence the audience's) expectations. This led to a formula under which Dashan was constantly being tested for his knowledge of Chinese culture or skill in the Chinese language, and typically ends with the same conclusion: Teacher says, "Wow, I can't believe it," and the audience applauds.

However, I think to label this as being a "performing monkey" is an oversimplification that reflects a particularly Western bias and that doesn't stand up to serious analysis.

The bottom line is that the performances are designed for a Chinese audience. To be a successful comedian, you have to have a clear understanding of audience perception, even if you are making an ass of yourself. You have to understand why audiences are responding to your material. In over twenty years of performing, I have never felt that the Chinese audience's approach to Dashan is: "This guy is a funny monkey;

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let's make him dance." That's just not how Chinese audiences see the character. The "performing monkey" label is something that comes exclusively from Westerners.

This even borders on racism in more extreme cases. The logic seems to go like this: white guy – speaks Chinese – Chinese people laugh – he must be making an ass of himself. Of course, the only way a white guy could possibly entertain a Chinese audience would be to be a complete buffoon.

In some cases, this perception again seems to be based on resentment. Dashan is perceived as being successful. Others may be prone to ask: "Why him and not me?" The natural conclusion: Dashan must have sold out and stooped to all sorts of things that I would never do. It's a psychological reaction that doesn't require any evidence or serious analysis, and appeals most strongly to those foreigners who have been the least successful in China.

TYPICAL FOREIGNER? POSTER BOY?

Several comments mention Dashan as representing Chinese people's perception of the "typical foreigner." I don't think that's true either.

All cultures have their own stereotype of the stupid, bumbling foreigner. (Manuel in "Fawlty Towers" is my favorite example.) No matter where you come from, foreigners are often perceived as speaking your native language poorly, as being out-of-touch, clueless, and inept. That's certainly not Chinese people's perception of Dashan.

In fact, one way of explaining the Dashan character is that it's the flip-side of this universal stereotype: at first glance he was seen as the typical foreigner, but over time developed the reputation for being "more Chinese than the Chinese are." That's the whole root of the comedy.

This may have developed into a new stereotype of its own, the typical China Hand or "Friend of China," but you can't claim that Dashan represents the stereotypical token foreigner, or the stereotypical foreigner in general. If that were true, how on Earth would Dashan ever be differentiated from the multitude of token foreigners and stereotyped role players that appear in the Chinese media?

I think in general, a lot of the anti-Dashan sentiment

stems from the fact that Dashan is by far the most famous Westerner in the Chinese media, and as such is often perceived as the poster boy for this group in general.

For my part, all I can say is that I do my own thing and take responsibility for that. Nobody forces me to do anything, and I have a lot of control over what I will and will not do. So judge me on my own record. I don't represent anybody but Dashan. I'm open to criticism or a critical discussion about Dashan, but it should be based on what I've actually done, not just some vague and uninformed perception of what people think Dashan might have or must have done.

A long answer, but I think I covered the main reasons and offered my own personal defense.

And, no, I don't eat children (human children, at least).

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-mark-rowswell

How do Indians feel when they go back to live in India after living in US for 5+ years?

Navin Kabra, Returned to India after 8 years in the US.

(Quick background: I grew up in India, went to US at twenty-one to study. Spent eight years there, including three years working. Moved back to Pune, Maharashtra, India in 2001, and have been here ever since.)

A lot of how you feel depends upon the attitude. Some things are going to be as bad as you remember them, some things are going to be worse than you remember, and some things are going to be surprisingly better. The right attitude is to focus on what is good and try to ignore the bad. Some people fail miserably at this, and move back to the US after about an year. Others succeed in this and love being here.

Here are the things you might notice, conveniently categorized:

- Yes, it is dirty, and dusty. People litter and spit and urinate in public. It was always like this, so you shouldn't let it bother you. If this is going to irritate you, don't come back.

- Yes, there is corruption. But if you're going to be doing a job (as opposed to doing your own business), you will not be exposed to much of it.

- Most vendors and service providers are unreliable. They won't come on time. They will not deliver on time. Quality will be lacking. Some will disappear without warning you. This continues to bother me, even after ten years here.

- However, note that consumer-oriented business works far more efficiently now than it used to ten to fifteen years ago. When I first landed up in Pune, Maharashtra, India in 2001, I had nothing other than a passport. No friends, no family, no address proof, no ration card. No place to stay, no vehicle. I managed to get a rental apartment, a ration card, a landline phone, a mobile phone, two "gas" cylinders, a computer, two internet connections, a car, all household appliances, and start a full-time home office in two weeks. I would not have thought that it was possible to get this done in India so fast. See footnote[1] for a illustrative anecdote.

- Getting domestic help is ridiculously cheap, so expect to have a person to do the dishes, someone else to do the cleaning and the laundry, and a cook, and a driver. In the last ten years, I've probably done dishes, or the laundry less than five times. My wife and I cook only when we're in the mood for cooking, otherwise we don't have to. I know that some people are thinking: "I like doing all the chores. There is a satisfaction in being self-sufficient." But the fact is that I have not seen anybody hold on to such a resolve in the face of easily available domestic help. (Note: Driving is an exception. People who like to drive often will make do without a driver. I like to drive, so did not use a driver for the longest time. But these days, if I need to go some-

where that's more than twenty minutes away, I take the driver along, so I can get some work done along the way.)

- In general, you will be comfortably well off in India. Your Indian salary will be much lower than your US salary in dollar terms, but will be pretty good in terms of purchasing power parity. Some things will seem very expensive relative to your salary, and other things ridiculously cheap.

- Expect to be shocked by real estate prices. Houses/Flats (aka "condos") in the better localities (i.e. the kinds of places NRIs like to live in) can be more expensive than houses in the US (of course, if you're not from the Bay Area). A major chunk of your salary will go towards the EMI for your home loan.

- iPads, laptops, latest flat screen TVs will seem a little expensive to you. The prices in India are just a little higher than US prices, (and many people buy in the US), but your salary will be lower.

- Food, eating out, domestic help, and in general everything else will be much cheaper.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Roads/Traffic/Electricity/Water is an area that I view with a bit of a concern. Depending on where exactly you're living, one or more of these might be an irritant already, and the problem is likely to get worse.

- Power cuts are a problem in some cities (mostly during the daytime). This is not an issue for employees of large companies, because of generator backups, but it has begun hurting smaller companies. Sometimes, you end up losing a few hours of work on one day of the week because the load-shedding extended farther than your UPS and laptop batteries could last.

- While water is theoretically a problem, most of you are likely to live in apartment complexes which buy water by

the tanker to make up for any shortages, so you're unlikely to notice this much.

- Traffic and commute times are becoming problems for some people in some cities — but then people who've lived in the US would not be strangers to long commutes and rush hour traffic jams.

- Phone coverage and internet bandwidth is not really a problem. While the average "home" broadband network might not be as fast as what you're used to in the US, and there are sporadic reliability issues, quality, and speed are available at a cost if you really want them. And I'm willing to bet that mobile network coverage is better than what AT&T has in the US.

RECREATION

- As far as shopping is concerned, (almost) everything is available here. Electronics goods are maybe a little more expensive than in the US, but there is nothing that is difficult to get.

- If you're in a metro, or even Pune, there is now lots of international cuisine. Of course, not as much as in the US, but certainly much more than was available five or ten years ago. Italian, Korean, Japanese, Mediterranean, French, Thai are all available in Pune, for example. McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Subway, California Pizza Kitchen, are all here too. And the Indian food here is far better than the Indian food in the US.

- Multiplexes have mushroomed and have improved the movie-going experience, but they still remain a little more crowded than what I'd like.

- Many "western" activities are now available here. Bowling, Paintball, Pool, Hard-Rock Cafe, and Microbreweries are all available. Quality is lower than ideal, and there are only one or two of each per city.

- Schools are getting better. There are now lots of options available. The old-style, regimented convent schools continue to go strong, but in addition now there are lots of newer schools who are willing to experiment with teaching methods. So there are lots of choices (but be prepared to spend a little).

- Lots of options for co-curricular and extra curricular activities. All kinds of classes are available at reasonable rates.

- If you have teenage kids, remember that social mores and standards of what is acceptable and permissible behavior are changing rapidly. So if you're coming back to India because "my kids will grow up in a more conservative culture," you're in for a surprise. Don't say I did not warn you. Dealing with teenagers doesn't become any easier just because you're in India.

CAREER

- If you are a techie in the IT industry, and if you want to be an individual contributor, then you will certainly not get as good work here as you would in the US. There are some companies doing interesting stuff, but as your seniority increases, your options decrease. Since most of the customers are in the US, there is definitely a glass ceiling.

- If you're a manager, then India is a great place to be. The numbers of people and projects to manage keep increasing, the challenges interesting and varied. This is an exciting place to be.

- If you are the entrepreneur type, then India is like the Wild West. Very challenging, high chances of failure, but very exciting.

- For non-IT folks, I don't know the answer. Sorry.

- As with shifting to any new place, expect to find yourself suddenly friendless and lonely for the first few years. It takes time to make good friends.

- "Involvement" of family, and extended family in your life will be higher than you expected. To anyone who has spent over five years in the US, this will seem like an intrusion of privacy. This will bother you, (especially the wife, if you're a couple). US is a nice safe distance away from the in-laws. Coming back to India removes that layer of protection. This can be the biggest change in lifestyle. Takes at least two or three years to get used to.

OPINION

- Overall, I find that life here is more varied and more interesting. I found life in the US to be too cut and dry, too regimented — all cities are similar (compared to how different Indian cities are). Most interactions follow set patterns. (Maybe it simply boils down to the fact that I grew up here, and hence I'll be most comfortable with this way of life.) In any case, I'm very happy with the decision of moving here.

FOOTNOTE 1

This is a little anecdote to give an idea of how India works efficiently in some areas. On my second day in Pune, I went to a random shop down the street looking to buy a mobile phone (instrument + service). The shop-owner told me that I need a proof-of-residence, which I obviously did not have. He did not want to let go of a customer for such a minor reason, so he started exploring options:

> *Do you have parents who live here?*
> No.
> *Do you have any other relatives, an uncle perhaps?*
> No, but mother-in-law's brother does live here.
> *Ok, will he be willing to give an affidavit to the effect that he knows you and vouches for you?*

Yes, he will but neither I nor he have the time or the expertise to get an affidavit.

No, Sir, don't worry. My man will get the affidavit ready, will go to your uncle's home, get his signature and finish the paper work.

So, I bought the phone instrument right away. I called up the uncle-in-law and told him to expect a guy to show up with an affidavit to sign, and I left. By that evening, all of this had been taken care of, and my mobile phone service had started.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-navin-kabra

Is it safe for a single American woman to travel in India?

Adrianna Tan, I'm a fake desi

Absolutely. Many women do. I have traveled alone to India over twenty times. To all parts.

I used to always stay in $2 rooms alone and also traveled sleeper class in long train journeys alone.

You need to have your wits about you, more so as a lone woman, but this is true of all places if you have traveled alone before.

I'm not saying nothing untoward will ever happen, just that the most I have seen has been verbal harassment, which was quite easy to disarm. And that this did not happen significantly more than other places I have traveled to alone, and I will include Yemen, Bangladesh, some parts of western Europe in that list. You will have some trouble traveling alone anywhere — I don't think India is a special case in any sense.

Someone told me, very early on when I first started exploring India alone, when in doubt, talk to a woman. I thought he was nuts, but then I tried it whenever I felt unsafe anywhere (this has happened just a handful of times). People in India are super friendly, so don't be afraid to ask. It should not be too hard to find English-speaking local women who can help, as they deal with much worse on their own. I realized this

person was absolutely right: Indian women got me out of situations with calm ferocity, each and every time. They would tell the guy(s) to f*** off and made sure they delivered me to safety. This has happened across India, and I urge you to consider this if shit ever hits the fan (it shouldn't).

Some things to note, from anecdotal experiences (all of this has happened to me):

- A generalization: you will probably find South India very safe compared to North India. If interested, ask some locals on their opinions on why that is. My experience is just that in south India people are more reserved and less taken by the idea of anything foreign.

- Many people in India are unable to comprehend why you should want to do that. Many of my friends there who come from privileged backgrounds are not even given the opportunity to travel alone the same way I did. Most of their parents thought I was mad, and thought their country extremely unsafe. I think as a foreigner, one is held to a different set of standards, and you can see India in a completely different way. Don't be put off or scared by stories of other people's opinions. Discover India for yourself and never be afraid of her. There's a lot to learn.

- You will be asked endless questions about your personal life. What is your good name, what is your country, how old are you, are you married, how many children do you have, do you like India, what is your native place, how much money you make, and can you help them get a job in your native place. Be friendly, be open to making stuff up ("the correct/expected answers") if you like. It doesn't really matter. But do not take this personally: this stuff is expected, considered good form, and not intrusive at all. They will also want you to send their regards to your parents, who they haven't and will never meet, just keep it all in good faith. Friendliness takes you far in India.

- An unpleasant quirk of traveling as a lone female: this is a strange, not very nice thing but you will find out that in some places, some local men will assume because you are a foreigner, you are willing and able to have sex with them

because all foreign women are not Indian and therefore impure and loose by definition. You won't hear this said, but it is thought by many. I have found this attitude more pervasive in the north than anywhere else. I have seen and heard and experienced this behavior personally from lowly educated men and highly educated men alike. Remember, most local men are GREAT. It's a couple of bad eggs that spoil it, as always. Just remember this terrible idea comes from watching tv and never having interacted properly with foreigners and believing in the myth that all white (and foreign women) are interested in alcohol and sex (and necessarily with them). Many people also won't be able to understand why your husband or boyfriend is okay with you traveling alone.

- In general, the "holier" the place, the more shit you will get as a single lone female. The negative stuff I've experienced have come exclusively from the touristy and/or holy cities/towns. No problems at all outside these parts. There's a crap ton of hypocrisy in the so-called holy places. All the sexual harassment I have ever faced has come from weird men in "holy" places. Luckily, none of it was ever dangerous, just annoying.

So, be on your guard but make sure you don't let any kind of fear cripple your trip either.

I mean, I have more than survived India alone, and I also have a lot of female friends who have traveled India alone many times over the way I do. Their experiences more or less corroborate with mine.

The assumption is that you will dress appropriately and be sensitive to local customs. You will be fine. More than fine. Make plans before hand to meet some prominent local people in major cities, especially if they are in a similar field of work or working in an area you are interested in finding out about. I've learned a lot from talking to journalists, artists, tech types. They can teach you a bit about their city, and they will also watch out for you as you are a guest of Mother India's after all!

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-adrianna-tan

If developing countries are growing faster than developed countries, why wouldn't you invest most of your money there?

Yair Livne, Econ PhD from Stanford GSB

Investing in developing countries carries some specific risks that may deter the average investor from allocating the majority of their portfolio to investments in those countries. These risks translate into lower risk-adjusted ROI than what the country's growth rate might suggest, which explain why these kind of assets do not make up majority of most recommended portfolios. This is a partial list:

Regulatory risk - in many developing countries investment carries risks relating to government and the rule of law. This can take many forms:

- **Nationalizing foreign investment**: countries like Venezuela have nationalized foreign investments in their countries, or severely tax those. This can virtually wipe out an investment overnight.

- **Arbitrary or unexpected taxation**: for example, the Indian government just last week proposed a retroactive tax on foreign takeovers of Indian assets, mainly targeting Vodafone which has been in dispute with the government. This specific move may not be directly related to personal investment in developing markets, but is a good example of how unpredictable the tax environment can be in such markets.

- **Corruption**: governments and related bureaucracies may be very corrupt, requiring bribes to allow business to operate smoothly. This will take a toll on the investment, just like a tax.

- **Weak or biased legal system**: say the target of your investment cheats you as an investor or you end up involved in

a legal procedure as investor. Often, your position is there is very different than what you would expect form a court in a developed country. It may be much easier for the local firm to avoid compensating you, disappear with your money etc.

Instability - beyond mere regulatory risks, many developing countries live in unstable areas, or are still actively involved in internal and external conflict. Revolutions, coups, and wars can and will happen in some of these countries over the lifetime of your investment, which will take a toll on returns.

Underdeveloped financial markets - in many developing countries the available portfolio of investment (as the question suggests) is not necessarily representative of the country's economy. This is often due to economies where most companies are not public (or even government-owned). This makes an investor's ability to track an economy's growth difficult.

Lack of information/Weak regulatory environment - even when financial markets exist, they might often be underregulated or misregulated and may not resemble ones in developed countries. Accounting standards may be weak, fraud prevalent, or like in China's case, the government might be actively encouraging firms to hide negative information about their performance. All of these hinder an investor's ability to construct a reasonable portfolio.

High-correlation across markets - despite the seemingly diverse geographical location of fast-growing developing economies, the reality in today's ultra-linked markets is that returns are highly correlated across economies. Thus, much of the diversification that such investments used to offer is no longer there.

FOREX risk - any investment in a foreign market exposes you not only to risks associated with that particular investment but also to the risk coming from investing in another currency. Assuming that you want your returns in US dollars, you are essentially also betting on the exchange rate when investing in a foreign company. This risk is dramatically higher when the investment is in a developing economy. Hedges can be used to limit exposure to this risk, but that insurance costs

money, and cuts into returns from the investment.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-yair-livne

What is it like to visit North Korea?

Ryan Romanchuk, I have bowed before Kim Il Sung

North Korea does not identify with the terms North Korea and South Korea, and they find it offensive when referred to this way. When talking about the conflict with Seoul, they refer to them as "the South." The South is essentially still part of Kim Il Sung's DPRK but have been occupied by the US Imperialists.

I want to leave my opinions out of this. Probably impossible to do, but I thought a more ethnographic approach would be more interesting. I'm not saying you should stop calling North Koreans, North Koreans. My purpose of the above was to explain why I use DPRK in context of being inside of North Korea as a guest, not as an apologist or a demand for the west to start yielding to North Korea's feelings.

I recently got back from a trip to the North Korea. To be honest, it makes me uncomfortable to even answer this question for a couple of reasons. I had an amazing experience and our guides were fantastic people. It makes me a bit nervous to openly discuss this publicly in fear of "bad mouthing" their job and their country.

I entered on official tourism for three nights four days flying Air Koryo on the extremely limited schedule in Beijing. For Americans, the only options for entering the DPRK are by air only through China and Vladivostok, Russia, which only operates one flight on Thursdays. Citizens from other countries are allowed to take various train routes as well. You can only get approved for a visa four days before your departure. This means essentially flying to China and crossing your fingers. It is very rare for the average person to get de-

nied. The things that can get you denied include living in the "southern" part of Korea or being a journalist. It's interesting to note that there is no record of me ever going to the DPRK in my American passport; they provided their own booklet.

THINGS THAT STOOD OUT

I figured our guides would be the elites of Pyongyang and basically have been trained on how to deal with "Westerners." I also thought this means they would essentially know everything that we knew to better "accommodate" our needs. I assumed that they knew about the opinions we held and had access to the same information outlets.

I was very wrong. I was probably right that they in fact are elites in Pyongyang, and they have the best grasp of the English language. However, they only receive news once a week. The week I was there, they heard about the US Imperialists in Libya (they had no idea Gaddafi was dead) and that a bunch of wild animals got loose and were all shot. It was pretty obvious that although we had BBC in our rooms, not even our guides had access to this channel. I'm not exactly sure how they controlled this from internal hotel staff. During my trip, I was a firm believer the more comfortable our guides felt with us, the better our trip would be. We *only* asked vanilla questions, always asked permission before taking photos, etc. It was pretty easy to get answers without having to ask our own questions. I remember when my guide asked me, "Have you ever had pizza before?"

Part of the custom of visiting the DPRK is bringing a gift for your guides from your home country. I thought it would be really cool to bring my guide an iPod shuffle with music that represented America. I debated what I should put on it (What would be the most valuable type of music to a DPRK guide in Pyongyang?) and ended up with the top 100 Billboard hits. Turns out my guide had never heard any other type of music besides Korean and a little music from some of the American movies she saw. She didn't know the titles of what she has seen, but one of them was about a "girl who would sing and dance on top of the bar." (*Coyote Ugly?*)

I spent a good part of the three-hour drive to the Network DMZs explaining some of the genres like country, rap, and

rock that were included in her mix. We shared earbuds as I blew her mind with the latest Eminem and Lady Gaga hits of 2010. I was pretty sad when she asked me to turn the volume down on multiple occasions.

After the first day, our guides were asking us most of the questions. This was actually the most stressful part of the trip. Some of the questions were extremely direct and impossible to answer honestly. "Do you have the gays in the US?" "Why would Gadafi's people try to kill him?" "How many countries have you been to?" We immediately tried to dodge these questions and ask something about a statue we were looking at or an aspect of Juche idea. I feel guilty for doing this because they started catching on to our diversions, and I could sense their disappointment that we weren't being very open.

I think one of the biggest mistakes I made was going to sleep instead of accepting an invite to go bowling with my guide and their friends at the hotel 'off the clock.' It was probably one of the best opportunities I had to honestly interact with my guides after a few drinks. We were so tired after the DMZ that we crashed hard as soon as we got back to the hotel.

The only car on the street was our own. Driving outside of Pyongyang requires constant checkpoints. There are military soldiers just standing along the road the entire way to our trip to Kaesong near the DMZ.

THEY REALLY HATE THE U.S.

By and large one of the biggest themes in DPRK is the universal hatred for the United States. On billboards, on monuments, EVERYWHERE. This is not a hyperbole. Watching the informational video on the USS Pueblo (the US spy ship) ended with "…and that's why we must annihilate the US Imperialists." Awwwwkward.

The fact that we were Americans visiting the DPRK on friendly terms made us "rebels," and we were the "crazy ones" who came on a fact-finding mission to seek the truth about North Korea. All of the Koreans we interacted with (not once did I interact with a civilian) seemed to really appreciate this fact and were thrilled to teach us about the DPRK.

According to our guides, reunification was something both the "South" and "North" wanted, but is prevented because of US Imperialist aggression. From what I could tell, citizens in Pyongyang believe that life in Seoul is not different from life in Pyongyang, and this horrible situation is due to US aggression.

Outside of Kaesong, we were taken to a military lookout point so we could see the concrete wall that the US Imperialists built to prevent reunification. Below is a painting of said concrete wall. The legend on the right has a bunch of facts basically representing the amount of resources used for this anti-reunification wall. The military officer explained how said resources could have have been used by the Korean people productively, which is ironic after seeing large concrete/marble structures dedicated to Kim Il Sung.

He is everywhere. He's on the wall, he's on the ground, he's in the air, he's on (is) the statues, the papers, the TV. This is one aspect of the DPRK that Westerners get wrong or have a general misunderstanding about. We hear a lot about Kim Jong Il in the west, and we mistakenly refer to him as the Dear Leader. The "Dear Leader" refers to the eternal president of the DPRK: Kim Il Sung. His son (and his son) can never be president. They are "military generals" while Kim Il Sung will forever remain president of the DPRK. I noticed Wikipedia refers to Kim Jung Il as the Dear Leader, but impression I got from my guide was that he is simply the general.

We visited the Kim Il Sung mausoleum, the single most sacred place in all of DPRK. The procedure for this place was nuts. We were taken to a waiting house which we then walked at least a mile underground — going up elevators, going down elevators. Formal dress was required and absolutely NOTHING electronic was allowed. They searched for memory cards, cameras, everything. After a few more elevators, we walked through an "air blower" to remove dust and whatnot. We then got to this giant marble hallway with a GIANT statue of Sung. We lined up five across, walked up to to the Eternal President, paused for ten seconds and bowed. We then walked into the next room where the body of Kim Il Sung was resting and bowed in the same formation from the south,

west, and east sides of the Eternal President.

FOOD

They fed us so much food I almost delivered a kimchi baby by the fourth day. We had a variety of Korean food including Korean BBQ, bipbimbap, hot pot, and a local specialty called "Pyongyang cold noodles." Our meals usually included many courses, and most of the time brought out by candlelight as we experienced blackouts almost every night when we had a meal planned outside of the hotel. It was also probably the best service I have had in the world. We usually had about three people waiting on us to make sure our glass of beer was filled to the top.

MISC. ODDITIES

Probably the most controversial stories I have about my trip happened in the very beginning and at the very end. The first thing I did after arriving Pyongyang was to take the metro for one stop. It was just the end of a busy work day and the metro was packed with Koreans going home for the day. The station was beautiful — reminded me a lot of a typical Moscow metro station. After a few trains went by, we found seats on a less-then-full car. As we sat down, there was a very, very young Korean girl singing and reading music across the seat from where I sat. It was a very special experience.

On the plane back to Beijing, my friend Adam sat next to another American who was there the same time we were. He said he was a US Air Marshal and then proceeded to show Adam pictures he took of alleged listening devices he discovered in his hotel room. I read a lot of discussions about this sort of thing before going, and it's probably pretty easy to speculate anything just to make things feel more interesting. I just thought of it as *very* high-touch customer service. Think Zappos, with less privacy. I think there would be less speculation if the fifth floor on the elevator wasn't missing at the hotel. People find their way to the floor... and, well... you can judge for yourself.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ryan-romanchuk

66

IRISH PEOPLE

What are some common stereotypes about Irish people that are largely untrue?

Domhnall O'Huigin, Irish native.

Unfortunately, as regards the most common stereotypes, I must challenge the premise of the question; that *any* of these are 'largely untrue'.

1. Common stereotype: The Irish are all drunks!
The reality: No, we're not! No, we're not! Er… **at least not compared to those dipsos, the Austrians and Estonians!** [1]. *Crazy* for the hooch those guys.

"But Ireland has the highest proportion of non-drinkers per capita!"

Find me a single *recent* study to support this oft-quoted contention. Please, I'm begging you: I want to shove it down peoples' throats too. But if it was once true, it isn't any longer. Possibly fueling the longevity of this urban legend is the fact that the Catholic alcohol abstinence movement, **The Pioneers** (not to be confused with various youth organisations in former Communist countries, well, not much at any rate), was formed in Ireland [2].

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence conducted through the lens of the bottom of my pint glass tells me that even when other, larger countries (e.g. France) drank more than us (in 2000 for example), their *pattern* of drinking was completely different. To continue with France as an example, French adults would typically drink alcohol every day, but this is a glass of wine with lunch, another with dinner and so on. Irish people may not, as a rule, drink every day, but we 'save up' and go mental at the weekend or special occasions. This accounts for the 'paradox' of how some countries can approach our level of consumption without our reputation for excess — they drink as a civilised, adult pleasure, to be enjoyed in moderation; we drink like it was going out of fashion.

Don't believe me? Want more citations? Here are some public Dublin webcams [3]. Log on to any of them, *any* of them at, say, 03:00 on a Friday night/Saturday morning and watch the mayhem and madness.

Verdict: TRUE.

2. Common stereotype: The Fighting ("foightin'") Irish.

The reality: Ireland is a remarkably violent country. For example, the U.S. has a violent crime rate of 429.4 per capita [4]. Ireland has an assault rate of 347.9 for the same period [5]. "But that's great! Almost ten points less violent than the U.S.! Well done, the Irish!" Yeah. Until you consider the following two facts:

i. No guns (or very, very few) in private ownership in Ireland.

ii. The Irish figure above is for assault *only*, whereas the U.S. figure is for all violent crime (e.g. including homicides, excluded from the Irish figure) — the two countries simply do not record crimes in the same way, due to different legislation in each jurisdiction.

Anecdotal supporting evidence:

The [old fashioned] U.S. slang for a brawl is called a "Donnybrook" [6], after the location in Dublin [7] where faction fights took place in the 19th century.

> Donnybrook was once the location of <u>Donnybrook Fair</u>, a fair held from the time of King John onwards, which became notorious for drunkenness and violent disorder.

Spotting a theme here perhaps?

Anecdotal supporting evidence II: This Time It's Serious.

The common theme is of course alcoholic excess+violence. The inter-relationship here is well established, especially in Ireland, somewhat the "patient zero" for researchers in this field [8].

- 76% of all rape defendants had been drinking at the time of the alleged offence.

- Alcohol has been identified as a contributory factor in 97% of public order offenses as recorded under the Garda PULSE system.

- One in eleven, or approximately 318,000 of the full adult population, said that they or a family member were assaulted by someone under the influence of alcohol in the past year.

- Almost half of the perpetrators of homicide were intoxicated when the crime was committed.

So the question remains, are we violent when we *aren't* pissed? This is more difficult to answer, and not only because I don't remember (because I was pissed). Well... we've been fighting for our nationhood for 800+ years, although that was hardly our fault. It is remarkable to note however that when we ran out of foreign invaders to fight we had a *civil* war [9]. If we'd run out of Irish people to fight, I firmly believe we would have started fights with rocks, the ocean, the sun, and anything else that was looking at us funny.

   Verdict: TRUE.

3. Common stereotype: The Irish all have red hair.
   Top of the mornin' to ye, faith and begorrah etc. etc. etc.
The reality: Ok, obviously we don't **all** have red hair.

   But an estimated 10% of the population [10] have some variety of the hair that is called 'red,' way above the average. And the highest is Scotland at 13%, and while Scotland is absolutely its own nation with a proud and unique heritage, the fact is there isn't a lick of difference between the Scots and the Irish; not in culture, ethnicity, etc. So in short, yes: noticeably more red-heads than lesser countries. So come over, bring your anti-redhead prejudices too, so we can practice stereotype #2 on them, which is to say; you.

   Verdict: TRUE.

4. Common stereotype: Irish people are all fabulously articulate, skilled wordsmiths and poets; just generally wonderful with language basically.
   "It's a bunch of bloody rocks."
   "Oh Oscar, how witty and wonderful with words you are!".
The reality: out of all of the stereotypes in this answer, this is probably the most ambiguous as regards its truth.

   On the one hand: Oscar Wilde, Brendan Behan, Samuel

Beckett, Edmund Burke, George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats, Patrick Kavanagh, Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, James Joyce, R.B. Sheridan, Flann O'Brien, Sean O'Casey, Oliver Goldsmith, Jonathan Swift etc. etc. etc. etc. [11], [12].

It is also a fact that as the underdog, and/or new immigrant to a new land, and/or being denied **by law** our language and education [13], we took a bardic tradition of fluency and story telling and gave it even more importance in our society, one that survives to this day. Fluency, verbal dexterity, and wit are premium qualities in Irish society in the 21st Century as much perhaps as they were in the 1st.

On the other:

> 1 in 4 Irish adults has difficulty with reading, writing, and maths. [14].

That is a pretty damning (and damn scary), not to say shaming, national statistic. Fine, so they are including numeracy there but still. So don't expect the red-haired, drunken Irish yob who attacks you to always be able to delight you with his lyrical language gymnastics while doing so, as you have a 25% chance of getting the other kind.

Verdict: HMMMM.

Well all the Irish people you have *heard of* are pretty good with words, true but it isn't part of our DNA or anything — you can be Irish and be rubbish with language — you don't have your citizenship revoked.

In summary, I started answering this question fully intending to debunk all these ridiculous and offensive or lazy stereotypes, and I found out while researching the answer that they were mostly true, so I changed my mind and my answer and decided to challenge the premise instead (admittedly this assumes **my** common stereotypes are the ones the questioner had in mind — always a dangerous assumption but one I am willing to volunteer you for).

Don't let them put you off us or our country though, please. We really aren't drunk all the time (I'm only half-cut right now, for example), and we usually fight with each other instead of strangers — we pride ourselves on our hospitality (another cliché that is true: the Irish really are welcoming).

Just leave your prejudice against red-heads at home when doing so and indulge us in our ways.

Sure we're harmless really:

> The whole race is war-mad, says Strabo, high-spirited and quick to fight, but **otherwise straightforward and not at all of evil character. [15]**

My emphasis.

> "For the Great Gaels of Ireland
> Are the men that God made mad,
> For all their wars are merry
> And all their songs are sad." [16]

See? (Feel free to disagree — we love an argument!)

[1] http://www.finfacts.ie/Private/bestprice/alcoholdrink-consumptionpriceseurope.htm

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_Total_Abstinence_Association

[3] http://my.liveireland.com/page/webcams-1

[4] http://www.dublinci.com/webcam.php

[5] http://www.earthcam.com/search/ft_search.php?s1=1&term=Dublin%2C+IRELAND&x=0&y=0

[6] Source: Wolfram Alpha (search for "most violent country"): http://www.wolframalpha.com/

[7] Table 3.4b: http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/crimejustice/2010/gardacrimestats_2010.pdf

[8] http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-don1.htm

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donnybrook,_Dublin

[10] http://alcoholireland.ie/alcohol-facts/case-studies-kids/

[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Civil_War

[12] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_hair

[13] http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/country/Ireland/Irish_poets.html

[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_poetry

[15] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_Laws_(Ireland)

[16] http://www.nala.ie/

[17] http://www.isle-of-skye.org.uk/celtic-encyclopaedia/celt_
c3.htm

[18] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ballad_of_the_
White_Horse

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-domhnall-ohuigin

IRISH PEOPLE

Do Irish immigrants to the Bay Area feel guilty for living in such an amazing place?

Patrick Collison, I lived in Ireland for 17 years.

The Irish are certainly a race somewhat predisposed to feeling guilt and compassion for just about anything[1] — and I find it interesting that this question is asked of *Irish* people. I'd love to know what the various Chinese, Indian, Russian, etc., immigrants to the Bay Area would say. (Is the question less pondered?)

We also have a bit of a tendency towards doleful solipsism. I don't know if the person who asked this question is in fact Irish, but it'd be quite Irish to feel guilty for *the other Irish*, and not, say, the 94% of the world's population that lives in a country with a lower GDP per capita than Ireland.

Admittedly, though, that kind of humanist objectivism only extends so far. Of course almost all Irish emigrants (myself included) feel an attachment and fondness for our home country. And of course we're affected and saddened more by tribulations in Ireland than, say, Senegal.

But even allowing for that, Ireland remains a staggeringly successful country with, by global standards, an extraordi-

narily high standard of living. Ireland is well-run, well-edu-
cated, rich, socially cohesive, well-located, English-speaking,
and welcoming of outsiders. Seven years ago, *The Economist*
rated Ireland the best place in the world to live.[2] This was
based on a raft of criteria:

> The main factor is income, but other things are also important:
> health, freedom, unemployment, family life, climate, political
> stability and security, gender equality, and family and commu-
> nity life. We feed the factors into the equation, measuring them
> using forecasts for 2005 where possible (in four cases) and latest
> data for slower-changing indicators, such as family life and
> political freedom.

Income and unemployment have obviously worsened since
then, but not much else has changed. And even looking at
the economic situation, things are hardly a basket-case: in the
first quarter of 2011, Ireland's economy grew at an annualized
1.3%, which was the highest rate since 2007, and 3x the rate
of GDP growth in the US in the same period. The country is
exporting more than it was before the crisis, it won't have to
borrow before 2014, and credit default swaps on Irish debt are
falling fast. Just a few days ago, the *Financial Times* wrote
about "Ireland's Unexpected Economic Comeback"[3]. (Die
Welt has noticed too.[4])

And so the question arguably displays a third distinctly
Irish trait: pessimism.

As can probably be inferred from the above, I don't think
most Irish emigrants in the Bay Area feel particularly guilty.
And although doubts over the relative severity of the plight in
Ireland are no doubt part of the reason, I think there are at
least two more.

The first is that where to live is *mostly* a lifestyle choice
(bureaucratic visa misery notwithstanding), not a condemna-
tion. People in many countries in the world are too poor or
too unskilled to have many options for improving their situ-
ation. *They're* the ones for whom we should presumably feel
guilt. The Irish, on the other hand, can move to any other EU
country with almost no paperwork at all, and there are very
few places on earth out of reach for someone truly dissatisfied
— Silicon Valley included. (The Irish people based in the Bay

Area weren't handpicked by fate, they just moved here.)

The second is that a significant fraction of the Irish I meet out here not only display the dutiful fondness for Ireland, but actively think about how to improve it. It seems that almost all my conversations with Irish emigrants eventually turn to "So — what could we do to make it better back home?"

More often than not (and as befits the Valley, I guess), they've already tried a bunch of things, are working on a couple of projects to bring some favored aspect of the US to Ireland. They tend to retain much of their Irish identity. They openly talk about the Irish background, return home frequently, bring visitors to Ireland, hire Irish interns, keep their headquarters in Ireland, prod government ministers to change such-and-such a policy. Far from detaching themselves, as you might expect a guilty emigrant to do, they tend to proudly involve themselves in the day-to-day ups-and-downs of the country.

There's a long history of this, from Chuck Feeney (trivia: he's responsible for both Bayside Village in San Francisco and much of the university infrastructure in Ireland) to the guys behind things like Funconf and F.ounders.

I think this is a very worthy and surprisingly universal trait, and probably more useful than guilt.

[1] http://www.independent.ie/national-news/hyde-and-de-valera-offered-condolences-on-hitlers-death-228426.html

[2] http://www.economist.com/node/3372495

[3] http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4c8b2a44-c823-11e0-9852-00144feabdc0.html – If you get their paywall, just Google the URL, and click through with a google.com referrer.

[4] http://www.worldcrunch.com/ireland-model-how-west-can-recover/3566

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-patrick-collison

LAW

How valid is the implied legal advice in Jay-Z's "99 Problems"?

Ryan Lackey, Mostly harmless.

Fairly valid, although it depends on the state; I'm not familiar with the laws of 1994, and the location is unspecified, but from the video, possibly Brooklyn, NY.

Here's my take on the song:

The year is ninety-four, in my trunk is raw
In my rear-view mirror is the motherfuckin' law
Got two choices y'all, pull over the car or (hmm)
bounce on the Devil, put the pedal to the floor
And I ain't tryin' to see no highway chase with Jake
Plus I got a few dollars, I can fight the case

Not running from the police seems like excellent advice.

So I, pull over to the side of the road
"Son, do you know why I'm stoppin' you for?"
Cause I'm young and I'm black and my hat's real low
Or do I look like a mindreader, sir? I don't know
Am I under arrest or should I guess some more?

In general, not volunteering information at a traffic stop is great advice.

> "Well you was doin fifty-five in the fifty-four;
> license and registration and step out of the car –
> are you carryin a weapon on you? I know a lot of you are"
> I ain't steppin out of shit, all my papers legit

Unless the cop can testify to reasonable suspicion [RS] that the defendant is armed — in which case he can search the driver and immediate vicinity for weapons for self protection — you shouldn't need to get out of the car. Pushing back on this makes sense, if only to ensure whatever RS grounds would be documented, so they can get the case thrown out later. If the RS was invalid or not present, all evidence coming after that is "fruit of the poisoned tree" and discarded.

> "Well do you mind if I look around the car a little bit?"
> Well my glove compartment is locked,
> So is the trunk in the back,
> And I know my rights, so you gon' need a warrant for that

Consenting to a voluntary search is never a good idea, especially if you have felony weight on you. The standard to search the glove compartment is actually fairly low in California, since it's accessible to the driver. Even though it is locked, the tenth circuit court of appeals has found that during a protective search of the vehicle (i.e., looking for weapons with RS), the glove box can be searched since it being locked may not prevent the driver from gaining control of a weapon. [1] The trunk can be opened if the car is impounded, for inventory reasons, which is a common way to get evidence. However, a locked case inside the trunk will not be opened (depends on the state).

> "Aren't you sharp as a tack! You some type of lawyer or somethin, somebody important or somethin?"
> Child I ain't passed the bar, but I know a little bit
> Enough that you won't illegally search my shit
> "Well we'll see how smart you are when the canine comes"

A canine can only be used during a routine traffic stop if it doesn't unduly delay the driver — it's reasonable to walk back to your cruiser to get a dog, but you can't wait to call one in. This all goes out the window if reasonable suspicion is developed.

I got 99 problems, but a bitch ain't one
Hit me!

[1] US v. Palmer, 360 F. 3d 1243 - Court of Appeals, 10th Circuit 2004

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ryan-lackey

IRON MAN

In the movie *Iron Man*, could investors sue Tony Stark for acting against the interest of the shareholders?

Ani Ravi, JD

An investor could probably sue, but it'd be a pretty tough fight because of demand requirements and the business judgment rule.

I have seen the two Iron Man movies and The Avengers, but in none of them is a 10-K for Stark Industries displayed – therefore, I'll make some assumptions about Stark Industries (that will also help to make this answer more generalizable). Let's assume that Stark Industries is a publicly-traded and US-listed company, headquartered in Delaware. Let's also assume that the Board of Directors of Stark Industries authorized or ratified Tony Stark's decision to stop manufacturing and selling weapons. Let's further assume that a shareholder vote to stop selling weapons was not required by the Stark Industries Charter or applicable law. And finally, let's assume that the stock of Stark Industries dropped 20% the day after Tony's announcement (so that our hypothetical litigious investor has a better case) [1].

If this happened, an investor could certainly try to sue Tony, claiming that he breached his fiduciary duties to the shareholders by exiting the weapons business. This is an uphill battle, though. Assuming that an investor were even al-

lowed to bring a suit [2], he would then need to demonstrate either that Tony Stark's actions were not protected by the Business Judgment Rule, or that even if they were, that Tony's actions were so colossally bad that they constituted waste [3]. There are many good reasons to exit a profitable business or decline to pursue a profitable opportunity, and it is fairly easy to claim that an action was taken with a view towards long-term profit. In the case of weapons manufacture, this seems a pretty easy case. More egregious examples have been upheld, including a baseball stadium choosing not to install lights because the owner thought that night games spoiled the purity of the sport [4].

The other way to get around the business judgment rule is to allege that the corporation engaged in self-dealing — i.e., that the bad business decision benefited some of the directors and officers personally. When this is alleged, a court will look at the transaction closely, and if the transaction seems unfair, will reverse it or compensate shareholders. I don't think there's any suggestion of self-dealing in Iron Man though, unless you consider the pretty attenuated theory that Tony as Iron Man benefits by a dearth of weapons supplied to other parties.

I am assuming that "stop manufacturing weapons" doesn't mean immediately fire all employees, destroy all inventory, and destroy all weapons manufacturing and research facilities — I'm assuming that Stark Industries would divest the weapons business in a competitive auction (if it's a separable business), or reallocate resources over time to other manufacturing areas (if it's not). Shutting down a profitable business in a value-destructive way might constitute waste if it's done poorly enough.

As above, I think that this would be a pretty hard fight for an investor to win [5], but it is a fact-dependent inquiry, and we really don't have enough information from the movies to tell. If someone wants to write a sequel, *Iron Man 3: Stark Industries Derivative Litigation*, it'd be worth fleshing out the corporate governance structure of Stark Industries, the business units of the company, and its financials and how diversified they are.

[1] First assumption because it seems most likely and be-

cause it's more interesting for a US audience. Second one because it's much less interesting if Tony Stark makes a public announcement, and two days later the Board reverses it; you have no reason for an investor to sue. Third, like second, because it's not interesting if the decision isn't authorized (and because I doubt that many US companies would require a shareholder vote for a divestiture). Fourth because if there's no harm, there's no reason to sue.

[2] This is complicated - in general when suing for breach of fiduciary duty, you don't sue in your own capacity, but rather you sue on behalf of the corporation (a *derivative* suit). To do that, you need to demand that the Board bring the suit first, and if they don't want to, you're out of luck. Or, you can demonstrate with your suit that the Board is interested in the subject matter of the suit — i.e., you'd need to essentially prove that the Board engaged in an improper transaction before you could even get into court. The other option, which generally isn't available, is that you might be able to sue Tony Stark on your own behalf (a *direct* suit), but this would require that Tony was a majority shareholder, or if not one, someone who as a practical matter controlled the company (this is probably true), and you'd have to demonstrate that you suffered some particularized harm that the other shareholders of the corporation did not suffer (this probably isn't true).

[3] If you're the CEO of a real estate development company, it'd be an exercise of your business judgment to decide to paint all the houses in your new residential sub-division bright green (however stupid); it'd be waste to burn them all down. It's pretty hard to commit waste unless you're trying.

[4] *Shlensky v. Wrigley,* 95 Ill.App. 268, 237 N.E.2d 776 (Ill.App. 1 Dist. 1968).

[5] Though it would certainly be undertaken — every time the stock price of a company drops, plaintiff's lawyers in Delaware rush to the court house to file a derivative suit on contingency, which is usually settled for pennies.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ani-ravi

Is it true that in China, you can hire someone to serve your prison sentence?

Ti Zhao, Born and partially raised here

The short answer is: Yes, you could hire someone to serve your prison sentence. It's illegal and not that common, but happens enough that we have a term for it: 顶罪 (ding zui: to take blame for someone else's crime). While there are documented cases of body-doubles serving crimes, there is also a lot of speculation. As with many things, the full story is more complex than meets the eye.

The most common questions that arise around this topic are:

1. What kind of justice is this?

2. Why would anyone be willing to give up their freedom in exchange for monetary compensation?

It's not justice, any way you slice it. It's a sad reflection of the reality of power abuse, corruption, and the things that the wealthy and powerful can get away with. Ding zui is illegal, but corruption runs deep, and many in the judicial system (with enough bribery) simply turn a blind eye.

The practice of standing in for others' crimes goes way back. The rationale ran like this:

- Crimes call for punishments.

- Punishments are partly a display to warn other potential criminals against the repercussions of committing said crime.

- The criminal, by paying for a stand-in, is — quite literally — "paying for his crime."

Stand-in punishments have also been, at times, an act of self-sacrifice. Examples include:

1. A parent serving a child's sentence, and thus allowing the child to have a better future.

2. A child serving a parent's crime, in order to provide a comfortable life for the parent.

3. A family member serving someone else's sentence in exchange for monetary compensation for their family.

These altruistic motives can still be seen today. For example, people sometimes take the blame for a family member's drunk-driving incident, since the punishment for a deadly accident is far more severe if the driver was intoxicated. This means that overall, the family spends less time is prison.

In other cases, there are people who willingly stand-in in exchange for money for their family (owing to the large income gap in China, this amount of money can often be very small). The family then can afford to live a life that is better than the one they were facing previously.

There is nothing just about the wealthy paying their way out of a crime. Everyone knows that, and cases of power-abuse are often accompanied by massive public outrage, such as with the case of Li Qiming, who drunkenly ran over two girls on the campus of Hebei University. When he was finally stopped by security guards, his response was "Sue me if you dare. My father is Li Gang." "My Father is Li Gang" quickly became a bitter inside joke that's used to dodge responsibility in anything and everything. A contest was even started around incorporating the phrase "My father is Li Gang" into classic Chinese poems.

Much of this is a reflection of a society where people emphasize power over individual liberty. The sad reality is that, at least for now, it can be easy for the wealthy and powerful to get away with things that they really shouldn't be able to.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ti-zhao

Why are lawyers so expensive even with the excess supply of lawyers?

Antone Johnson, I am one, and have worked with, above, below, and across from hundreds of them over the past 15+ years.

As an economics major, as well as a lawyer who's worked in many different areas of the profession over the past decade and a half, let me take a crack at this one.

- **"Sticky" wages.** Who likes to get their salary cut? Nobody. Historically, most companies (both in and out of the legal profession) will do anything to avoid cutting salaries, even if that means layoffs. That's changed somewhat in recent years, particularly in highly volatile industries like tech and finance, but the legal profession is one of the slowest to change. This leads to:

- **"Sticky" billing rates.** Law firm billing rates only go one of two directions: Up or sideways. They <u>never</u> go down. This is insane from an economics perspective. When demand for something evaporates as a result of, for example, the housing meltdown or the dot-com crash, basic microeconomics principles tell us that the price <u>must</u> drop to restore equilibrium (supply = demand). When prices are sticky, this doesn't happen, so you end up with a gap between supply and demand: overpriced lawyers sitting around doing nothing, and clients not getting served because they can't afford those rates. Classic "lose-lose" situation.

- **Limited discounting.** Most other industries don't like to cut prices either, in good times or bad. Thing is, if you're Cisco selling routers and switches to corporate clients, and demand plummets with the economy, you can authorize your sales force to offer deeper discounts to the highest-volume customers. In enterprise software and hardware deals, I'm used to seeing discounts as high as 30%, 40%, even 50% on occasion to get/keep the ongoing business of

the most desirable customers. That is totally unheard of in the world of business law, where the deepest I've ever seen discounts go is 15-20%. Not nearly enough for the Great Recession. Why is this?

- **Obsession with prestige and rankings**. Lawyers tend to be hyper-competitive personalities. That helps win cases and negotiate tough deals, but it spells trouble when it leads to irrational decisions. The top large business law firms ("Am Law 100" or "NLJ 250") are perennially obsessed with their respective positions in the pecking order, including the most common metrics (profits per partner, revenue per lawyer, year-over-year growth), as well as qualitative factors (hiring the "best" law school graduates, recruiting the most famous partners). How do they do this?

- **Money is viewed as a proxy for prestige**. A handful of century-old "white shoe" firms in New York, Boston, and DC used to dominate the business law world, but that changed radically in the postwar years as aggressive, entrepreneurial upstarts (often Jewish graduates of top law schools who were marginalized by anti-Semitism at the old firms) started grabbing market share and ultimately became some of the most profitable practices around. Regional firms from other cities also entered the fray, rebranding as "national" firms. How to recruit the most renowned, rainmaking partners? Make your firm as profitable as possible to attract them. How to hire the very best associates? Pay the highest starting salary.

- **Associate salaries are not an efficient, free market.** The top tier of large law firms is an oligopoly within each regional market. For many years leading up to 1996, when I graduated law school, all of the large New York firms payed exactly $83,000 starting salary, all of the LA firms paid $70,000, and so forth. One of a handful of the largest firms would decide when the time finally came to raise associate salaries (often Cravath or Skadden in New York), and once the new figure was announced, every other firm that wanted to be considered "top-tier" would move swiftly to match. As the most profitable legal market in the country, New York led these changes for decades, until…

- **The dot-com boom changed everything.** There was a severe shortage of corporate lawyers in Silicon Valley in the late 1990s as the amount of deal work exploded, with record IPO, M&A and VC activity, as well as every other type of deal you can imagine. At the same time, the cost of living in the Bay Area was spiraling upward. To compound the situation, there was an exodus of lawyers (including myself) from top-tier law firms to grab in-house opportunities at Internet companies, lured by potential stock option riches as well as other factors. Firms in SF/SV, as well as LA and other markets outside NY, decided they needed to increase associate pay. It started incrementally, with regional offices matching NY starting salaries ($90-95K), until the "shot heard round the legal world" was fired in early 2000. The name **Bob Gunderson** became legendary among grateful associates as his Silicon Valley firm, **Gunderson Dettmer**, pushed through dramatic increases in the entire associate pay scale, beginning with $125K starting salaries (up from $95K the year before), plus bonuses. The herd followed, with all of the major SF/SV/LA firms quickly matching the new pay scale, and of course New York couldn't allow the West Coast upstarts to pay the highest salaries, so the Gunderson scale became the nationwide pay scale for top-tier law firms. Who do you supposed paid for those huge salary increases?

- **Law firm overhead consists mostly of compensation.** Well, that plus expensive office space in prestigious buildings, lavish summer associate programs, and many other little things that generally reflect an attitude of operating in a "costless" environment. Naturally, partners weren't about to let their profits plummet as a result of higher associate pay. So billing rates went up and up and up, passing on the higher cost of doing business to clients. Billing rates roughly <u>doubled</u> at big SF/SV/LA firms between 2000 and 2010, for the same people doing the same work. See my related blog post at http://bll.la/55 (itself a good read, in my humble opinion).

- **Back to Econ 101.** What happens when you double the price of something? Demand for it decreases. At the

margin, buyers seek substitutes, or choose to do less, do it themselves, hire more in-house staff, outsource labor-intensive work to India, etc. Well, not necessarily; in an inflationary period, you might need to increase *nominal* billing rates to keep the *real* cost of things constant. But 2000-2010 wasn't exactly a boom period overall, with inflation hovering around 3%.

In any event, why didn't things just implode at big law firms after 2000?

- **Things sucked for a couple years, but another bubble came along.** The dot-coms died a grisly death, but the housing bubble was ready to take investors for a similar ride; we all know how that turned out. During those years, there was plenty of corporate work for the big firms to do, especially in New York, securitizing mortgages, creating all kinds of funky new derivatives, and so forth. In good times, investment bankers basically pay whatever bill the law firm throws their way, so in the mid-2000's housing boom years, it was raining money in those areas. Bankruptcies of the Enron-WorldCom nature also kept large numbers of lawyers busy in the early-mid-2000s, as well as a boom in IP litigation corresponding with the rise of the patent troll industry. Only after the housing crash and the related carnage on Wall Street did things really cool off for big law firms. The deep freeze began around 2008.

- **At large law firms, salaries and billing rates are the same across departments.** As a matter of morale, prestige, and camaraderie, this makes sense. As a matter of economics, it's nuts. Again, thinking of efficient markets, when demand for something (e.g., securitization of sub-prime mortgages) dries up, the price charged for that work should drop. When demand for something soars (e.g., corporate bankruptcy), rates for that work should rise. Nope. For the most part, a 4th-year associate in every practice area bills out at the 4th-year associate rate, and so forth. Again, why does this matter? Go back to the points about sticky billing rates and sticky salaries. Both are likely to go only one direction — up — as long as any major area of the firm is doing well and can afford to raise rates along with

demand. This works out pretty well for the firm, because different practice areas are cyclical or counter-cyclical and that helps stabilize their finances, but it's not so great for the clients.

So where does this leave us? I've addressed the question of why (large, top-tier) law firm billing rates are so high: Enormous overhead, sticky billing rates and salaries, and a general institutional insensitivity to costs until clients kick and scream about them. But what about that bimodal distribution and all of those out-of-work lawyers?

- **In placement, law schools and students focus on the large, top-tier firms to the exclusion of most other opportunities**. This is because they pay the highest starting salaries and are prestigious names to have on the resume at the beginning of a legal career (see "obsession with prestige and rankings"). This isn't just about greed and status; student loan burdens can be huge (another subject) and recent graduates are rightly concerned about earning enough to pay them off. Particularly at top-tier law schools, there's a big push to land jobs at the big firms, and in good times, a large proportion of each class gets those jobs. (In bubble times, there's a bidding war over a fixed supply of perceived "top students" — as they say, only ten schools can be in the Top Ten, and only 25% of the class can be in the top quarter of their class.) It's always been the case that smaller firms, government jobs, judicial clerkships, and public interest jobs for lawyers pay much less than the big firms. But with demand shriveling up for new grads to staff the big, top-tier firms (perhaps related to the fact that said firms seem to think it makes sense to bill out rookie lawyers at $250+ an hour), that pushes everyone down the pecking order. Small and mid-sized firms usually hire a small number of associates, particularly at the junior level. They hire only when necessary, based on immediate needs, vs. planning ahead for whole "classes" of new associates as the big firms do.

- **The middle is missing**. There used to be a class of mid-sized regional firms with billing rates and salaries significantly lower than the big national/coastal firms, but

significantly higher than most small firms. That's mostly gone now, as during the good years, many of those firms merged with megafirms as part of the pursuit of ever-higher profits (justified by the need to keep those profits growing to attract/retain the best partners).

- **People are catching on.** None of this is new in 2011. The legendary, late Craig Johnson (no relation) founded Virtual Law Partners in 2008 based on the idea that law firms could do top-tier work for corporate clients at significantly lower rates by cutting overhead and operating more efficiently. (Shocking, I know.) As Craig famously said in an interview:

  "The thing that makes it almost a slam dunk is the incredible price umbrella from the big firms," Johnson said. "When you charge $400 an hour and have clients think it's a bargain, how could you not succeed?"

See http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1202423014334 for the whole story, which is worth reading. So before stepping down off the soapbox, here's the upshot:

- **The legal industry is in the midst of a once-in-a-generation disruption.** From the perspective of one who has served as a general counsel in recent years, paying $3 million a year in outside law firm bills, we (or "they" now that I've switched teams) are fed up with large firms' endlessly escalating billing rates and cost insensitivity. With many talented, experienced lawyers having left big firms (voluntarily or involuntarily), and technology making it easier than ever to set up shop as a new solo practice or small firm, Craig's point is compelling. I started my own firm, **Bottom Line Law Group**, with a similar philosophy of low overhead and an awareness of clients' cost sensitivity, in large part because I want to serve early stage startups and other clients who couldn't afford me if my billing rate were $650/hour. (See http://bll.la/55 for a manifesto of sorts.) Firms like mine, and those founded by many of my colleagues in the last couple years, are the wave of the future. It's such an obvious win-win — or slam dunk, as Craig said — that I think it's inevitable. In much the same

way that startups seize opportunities that large corporations aren't nimble enough to pursue, "startup" law firms will rush to meet the market need that's currently unmet. The only way I see that not happening is if the megafirms move to slash overhead (meaning compensation, not layoffs) and billing rates. With all of the incentives and institutional traits that I've described above, I think the probability of that happening in the near future is near zero.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-antone-johnson

LIFE ADVICE

What are some stupid things that smart people do?

Lee Semel, http://leesemel.com

Wow, there are so many. Here are but a few of my favorite stupid things smart people tend to do:

- **Ignoring the importance of design and style** - When the iPod originally came out, technical people complained about its lack of features and perceived high price ("Ooh, who cares about another MP3 player; I can go buy one at Best Buy for $50." In the meantime, it was so cool and easy to use that normal people went out in droves to buy it.

- **Using terrible tools, and taking pride in their awfulness** - Especially common with programmers, who take pride in using programming languages and text editors that have been designed by programmers, not updated since the 1970s, and never touched by anyone with a modicum of design sense. They believe that mastering arcane, over-complicated commands and processes are a mark of pride, rather than a waste of time. I will refrain from singling out specific programming languages and tools here, because smart people also like to get caught up in pointless flame wars about this sort of thing.

- **Following the pack** - Many smart people often seem to be followers, probably because they grow up spending so much time pleasing others via academic and extracurricular achievement that they never figure out what they really like to work on or try anything unique. Smart people from top schools tend to flock into the same few elite fields, as they try to keep on achieving what other people think they should achieve, rather than figuring out whatever it is they intrinsically want to do.

- **Failing to develop social skills** - Some smart people focus exclusively on their narrow area of interest and never realize that everything important in life is accomplished through other people. They never try to improve their social skills, learn to network, or self-promote, and often denigrate people who excel in these areas. If you are already a good engineer, you are going to get 10x the return on time spent improving how you relate to other people compared to learning the next cool tool.

- **Focusing on being right above all else** - Many smart people act as if being right trumps all else, and go around bluntly letting people know when they are wrong, as if this will somehow endear others to them. They also believe that they can change other people's minds through argument and facts, ignoring how emotional and irrational people actually are when it comes to making decisions or adopting beliefs.

- **Letting success in one area lead to overconfidence in others** - Smart people sometimes think that just because they are expert in their field, they are automatically qualified in areas about which they know nothing. For instance, doctors have a reputation as being bad investors.

- **Underrating effort and practice** - For smart people, many things come easily without much effort. They're constantly praised for "being smart" whenever they do anything well. The danger is that they become so reliant on feeling smart and having people praise them, that they avoid doing anything that they're not immediately great at. They start to believe that if you're not good at something from

the beginning, you're destined to always be terrible at it, and the thing isn't worth doing. These smart people fail to further develop their natural talents and eventually fall behind others who, while less initially talented, weren't as invested in "being smart" and instead spent more time practicing.

- **Engaging in zero sum competitions with other smart people** - Many smart people tend to flock to fields which are already saturated with other smart people. Only a limited number of people can become a top investment banker, law partner, Fortune 500 CEO, humanities professor, or Jeopardy champion. Yet smart people let themselves be funneled into these fields and relentlessly compete with each other for limited slots. They all but ignore other areas where they could be successful, and that are less overrun by super-smart people. Instead of thinking outside the box, smart people often think well within a box, a very competitive box that has been set up by other people and institutions to further someone else's interests at the expense of the smart person.

- **Excessively focusing on comparing their achievements with others** - Smart people who have been raised in a typical achievement-focused family or school can get anxious about achievement to the point of ridiculousness. This leads to people earnestly asking questions like: "If I haven't succeeded in my mid 20s, could I be successful in the rest of my life?" and "Are you a failure if you are not a billionaire by age 30? What about 40?"

- **Ignoring diminishing returns on information** - Smart people are often voracious readers and can absorb huge quantities of information on any subject. They get caught up in reading every last bit of information on subjects that interest them, like investing, lifehacking, or tech specs of products they're planning on buying. While some information is useful in making a decision, poring through the vast amount of information available online can be a waste of time. They end up spending a lot of time gathering information without taking action.

- **Elitism** - Smart people often use smartness as measure of the entire worth of a person. They fail to see the value in or even relate with people who are different. This is illustrated by the Yale professor who doesn't have the slightest idea what to say to his plumber.

  http://www.quora.com/l/boq-lee-semel

What are the disadvantages of dating highly intelligent men?

Kat Li, ♥

As usual, a preface: I love highly intelligent men. All of my serious relationships have been with very smart people whom I respect a lot. However, I have noticed a few not great things that often seem to come with high intelligence (correlation not causation?):

- **Over-competitiveness.** They know they're intelligent, and they want you to know it too. Sometimes, they'll argue the most inane things with you for hours on end because they can't stand losing a point. This can be problematic, because one needs to willingly concede a point (even when you know you're right) for the good of interpersonal relations sometimes. Relatedly…

- **Egos.** They are used to succeeding, and so, dealing with a loss can be hard for them. Sulking and/or moping are not unheard of.

- **Lack of manual skills.** Because they've emphasized the brain all their lives, sometimes the brawn is lacking. They won't know how to change the oil of a car or build anything with their hands (that does not become a computer).

- **Single-mindedness.** Similarly to the last point, sometimes highly intelligent people are so intent on their one area of specialization that they forget how interesting the rest of

the world is. Although they have differentiation, they lack a broader intellectual curiosity.

- **Bad teachers.** Being a good significant other, you may become interested in their area of expertise. You may think learning about it from your partner is ideal. However, be forewarned: sometimes, the better one is at something, the harder it is to explain it. As an expert, it's easy to forget how hard it is in the beginning or at which points an amateur may get stuck. This can lead to frustration on both the part of the teacher and the student.

- **Snobbery.** If you are not knowledgeable in their area, they can inadvertently make hurtful comments that reflect a disdain for your area of expertise. Watch out for this. Before you embark upon a serious relationship with this person, make sure they really respect you and what you do.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-kat-li

LOVE

How do you know if you've found "the one"?

Alison Stone, that's me. Just me.

This is advice I gave a younger person who said she knew she wanted to marry her boyfriend because she "loved him." She thought that being "in love" meant she had found "the one."

Are you a loving person? Because loving people are capable of loving *lots* of people in their lifetimes. You are likely to find many people pleasant, agreeable, exciting, and enjoyable. That doesn't mean you need to *marry* any of these people.

At some point, you may find yourself loving a person who is particularly compatible with you. You find your ways of thinking work well together. You have similar values in life. You have similar goals for your future.

Congratulations! You have found *a potential life-mate*. Not "**the** one" by any means, but **a really good** one.

Does that person feel the same way? Do you both display equal commitment to long-term relationships? Does your history together cover a wide range of experiences? Do you have a realistic idea of life together? Now you have a decision to make.

Many people phrase their decision-making like this:

"This must be the right choice because I'll never find anyone else as ＿＿ (good, special, wonderful) as this again."

OR

"This must be the right choice because I've never found anyone else as ＿＿ (good, special, wonderful) as this before."

Statements like this are setting you up for disappointment! Instead, consider this:

- You're likely to find other people to love.

- You're likely to be compatible with some of them.

- Some of them will possibly hold even greater potential than the person you are with now.

Ask this question instead: is your current relationship good enough that you are willing to take a pass on all future "potentially better" loves?

Take some time to think about this. Rest on it, pray, meditate. Picture eating breakfast with that face (aging, sagging, wrinkling) across the table for the rest of your life.

If the answer is still a solid "yes!" then go for it. But if you have niggling doubts… give it more time.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-alison-stone

How do I convince my girlfriend (possibly future wife) that a diamond engagement ring is a waste of money?

Dave Cheng, Happily married as of 8/2010.

Culture is not static. Desires are fleeting.

I realize you love this woman and place her desires above the wants, perhaps even needs, of others, but valuing pretty little stones above human death and suffering is just plain selfish. **I'm sure there were people in the 1800s who thought, "This whole slavery thing is kind of screwed up, but, well, everyone else is doing it, life would be a lot tougher without it, and gee golly what would all the neighbors say if we were the only silly geese on the block who didn't own slaves? Guess we might as well."**

People used to think the world was flat. Blatant racism, segregation, eugenics, voodoo, leeching, and a thousand other ignorant and harmful practices all used to be the norm. Don't be one of the sheep. If she asked you to jump off a bridge to prove your love because that's what all her friends' husbands did, would you?

Here is how I suggest trying to convince her:

First, in an objective, non-argumentative way (e.g., something along the lines of "Honey, I did a little research while shopping for an engagement ring and came across some horrible, disturbing statistics"), give her **the facts**:

- Conflict, aka "blood", diamonds have directly caused the deaths of millions;

- Indirectly, such diamonds have i) caused the death and suffering of hundreds of millions, ii) contributed to worldwide poverty and inequality, and iii) furthered political and economic instability in parts of the world that are already desperately poor and desperately unstable;

- From the perspective of economic development, rich countries' demand and subsequent exploitation of the third world for natural resources is so toxic to such regions that in every economics class I've ever taken, we were taught that natural resources are a "bad" thing to have for a country lacking in basic infrastructure and political institutions. *A third world country discovering a diamond mine is like a homeless, uneducated drug addict discovering a bag of money on the street*;

- The tradition of diamond engagement rings was cooked up by the same kinds of people who cooked up the gift giving rituals for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Secretary's Day, Christmas, etc. with one huge difference: they did so while knowing and perpetuating the facts above;

- No matter how much any diamond seller claims otherwise, there is no way for you to be absolutely sure the diamond you are buying is not a conflict diamond;

- Even if what you buy is not a conflict diamond, by paying thousands of dollars for it, you still fuel the market demand that created and continues to create such "conflicts;" and

- Science has advanced to the point where man-made diamonds are not only indistinguishable from the real thing, they are better. One of the red flags for a fake is if a stone doesn't have any imperfections.

Next appeal to her **on a personal level**:

- Explain to her that you love her very much, and it is because of this love that you do not wish to engage with her in something that is morally reprehensible and utterly indefensible.

- Pre-buy: If you decide to buy a diamond, given how expensive it is, you will do your research on the valuation criteria (the 4 C's and so on) and will shop around quite a bit. You will go from not being able to tell the difference between $5,000 and $10,000 rocks to being able to distinguish a $8,000 stone from a $12,000 one. Due to a combination

of why she wants one in the first place, your love for her, societal and cultural expectations, and the sales pitches of the various oily merchants you deal with while shopping around, you will not only end up buying a diamond near the top of your spending range, your "range" will likely get higher during the process.

- Post-buy: Sadly, after the wedding and the initial giddiness die down, the chances of her continuing to wear and appreciate the ring years later are quite slim. If nothing else, wearing a huge and valuable rock on your finger every day to work or wherever else is kind of a pain. Eventually, when it comes time to buy a house or have a kid, she'll realize spending so much on a diamond was a stupid and impractical decision.

- Tell her you are willing to spend just as much, if not more, on a better way to express your love and commitment: investments in her name, the start towards a down payment on a house, a trust fund for the college education of your future child(ren), an extension of your honeymoon, or even some other trivial, meaningless, superficial piece of shit — just one that isn't brought about by the suffering of others.

If all of that fails to sway her and if she is not even willing to listen, I would reconsider your engagement, and then if you have to, get her a zirconian and order fake Tiffany's boxes online to put it in. She'll never know the difference.

I bought my wife a diamond engagement ring because she wanted one and her friends and family all expected one. At the time, I didn't give it much thought — it was the least of the requisites for winning her hand. I spent a lot more than the two of us originally decided to. She was of course dazzled and delighted by my impulsive heart winning over my rational mind. Today however, she hardly ever wears it and readily admits it was a waste of money. I've bought a lot of useless crap over the years but none that I regret more than this…

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-dave-cheng

How do boys feel about girls who don't expend much effort on appearances (e.g., clothes, makeup)?

Lex Cooke

When I was about five years old, I used to like eating tuna fish salad for lunch. I didn't know how to make tuna salad; my mom had always made it for me, and I had always enjoyed it. One day, I had a babysitter looking after me. It was lunch time; she asked me what I wanted and I said, "tuna." It was a fair enough request, so she began gathering ingredients. She asked me what I wanted in my tuna salad, and I told her that I liked it plain.

This is when things started to get weird.

"So no celery or anything?" She asked.

"No, just plain."

She was a little puzzled but went along. "So just the mayo and tuna?"

At this point, I didn't understand what she wasn't getting about my request; it seemed pretty simple to me. "No, literally just the tuna on a plate is fine," I told her (*probably didn't use the word "literally" at age five, but just go with it*).

Now she was really confused. "So, you want the tuna, straight out of the can… like a cat?"

At this point, I just stared at her, blankly, for a moment. I had never owned a cat. I had no idea what they ate. I knew *I* certainly wasn't a cat. And what was this business about a can? I just wanted lunch. "Err, uhh, yeah… that sounds right."

She shook her head a little and then proceeded to dump a can of tuna fish onto a plate and placed it in front of me on the kitchen table. I looked down at my lunch. It looked disgusting. I looked up at her. She looked back at me with a mix of curiosity and bewilderment.

For better or worse, it was in this moment that my mom got home and walked into the kitchen. I won't take you

through the dialogue that ensued because this introduction is getting ridiculous but my mom was really confused as to why the babysitter had basically given me cat food for lunch, I was confused as to what horrible things my babysitter had done to make the tuna so disgusting and unappealing, and the babysitter probably thought that my mom and I were pulling some bizarre, psychological prank on her. It was a disaster. I don't think my mom ever hired her again, but years later we got to the bottom of what had happened when I randomly helped my mom make tuna salad one time.

The point is, I liked tuna salad a certain way, but I had absolutely no idea what kind of preparation was required to reach the outcome that I enjoyed. I couldn't see the individual ingredients and hadn't actually put much thought into how it was prepared, so I just sort of assumed that the tuna I liked was the norm, the baseline, the unadulterated way that it came. You could dress it up more if you wanted but I didn't like dressing it up. I liked it "plain."

I think most guys think about about girls putting time into their appearance the same way my five-year-old self thought about the preparation of tuna fish salad. It's something that we, frankly, don't put much thought into and when we do, our understanding of what needs to be done to achieve the outcomes that we are most fond of is so profoundly lacking that it is basically useless for us to give our opinions on the level of preparation that we prefer.

But if you're still reading, this is the actual answer I wrote in response to this question before remembering the tuna fish incident. Enjoy.

Most guys don't spend much time thinking about a girl's clothes or makeup. If something about your appearance makes us think about either of those things, you're probably doing something wrong.

Scenario 1: If I see a girl and think, "She must put a lot of time into her appearance," it's probably because she's trying way too hard to pull off an outfit that just doesn't work and/or she caked on way too much makeup in an unskilled manner.

Scenario 2: I see a girl and think, "Yikes, that girl should've put a little more effort in this morning." She might look okay; she might even look pretty good, all things considered, but if

that was my first thought when I saw her, chances are she is not looking her personal best.

Scenario 3: I see a girl and think, "Wow, she's hot." I can tell you one thing that I absolutely, positively have never, and will NEVER think as my next thought; "I'd really like to find out exactly how much effort this girl expends in order to achieve this appearance so I can compare it to the effort expended by comparably attractive women because that will be a factor in deciding whether or not I want to have anything to do with her." To reiterate, that has never crossed my mind.

The point is, if you look good, you look good. Guys generally don't know (even if they think they do) or care much about how much effort was expended to achieve the outcome, they just focus on the outcome. If the outcome makes a guy think about the preparation process, there is probably something that can be done to change the process such that it will improve the outcome.

And remember, a guy who says he likes girls who don't put too much effort into their appearance is like a five-year-old kid asking for plain tuna fish. Nod and smile, but whatever you do in response to this statement, do not stop wearing flattering clothing, using appropriate amounts of makeup (if that's your thing), etc., and please, please, please, DO NOT serve cat food to a five-year-old, no matter what he says. You will lose your babysitting job. I guarantee it.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-lex-cooke

SECURITY

What should you do if you suspect a car has been following you?

Brandon Gregg, Does living in a surveillance van count?

During my counterintelligence training, I learned a few great tips to confirm if being followed by a vehicle, here are three easy ones to remember:

1. Climbing Stairs - Make four right or left turns. The probability that another vehicle who just happens to make the same 360 turn as you is slim to none. You might both make one or even two turns, but anything more means you might have a tail.

2. On, Off - While driving on the highway, take an off ramp and then get right back on the highway. Like the above probability, not many people get off the highway and right back on. The tail is assuming you are exiting and exits with you but quickly is burned when they follow you right back on the highway.

    Beware this doesn't always work against large teams. A good surveillance team knows this trick too and will actually exit the highway the proper way (turn around later). The first almost burned vehicle (Car A) drops being the lead and radios back for another vehicle (Car B) to continue on the highway (without exiting) to take the eye. A few minutes/seconds later Car A is back on the road, out of sight as secondary eye.

3. To fool the above, skip exiting the highway all together. Stay on the highway and every few miles pull over to the side of the road to "smoke" or "make a cell call." Both the lead tail (Car A) and any secondary surveillance vehicles (Car B, C, D) won't make a stop on the freeway; this is way too obvious and they will be forced to drive by you. At the next exit, they could be waiting for you to pass though, so beware.

As for the posted scenario, just call the police. If it's a local police surveillance, dispatch will put the call out and the undercover unit will cancel it and move along for now. If it's feds/state police, they most likely did not tell their brothers in blue about their surveillance and local PD will roll up on the vehicle. Watch them run the plates and then back off. If its a PI or stalker, local PD will light them up, tell them to move along or even let the reporting party know what is going on.

Big picture question — does it make sense to burn the surveillance team? My personal belief is yes. Think of it like calling their bluff and will make them back off. It really comes down to why you are being tracked. Surveillances, especially

mobile surveillances, are not common or easy and only used for important investigations. So if you show your skills at counter surveillance during a basic drug surveillance, they will arrest you or back off. They aren't going to use resources over and over again just to be burned.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-brandon-gregg

MOTHERHOOD

What is some advice every new mother should know?

Alecia Li Morgan, Mother to a small posse of little boys

Every new mother should know a few things:

- **This baby is yours** (and your partner's, if applicable), whether you adopted her, conceived him naturally, had an egg donor, had a sperm donor, had an everything-donor, etc. **You are this baby's.** Therefore, you are irreplaceable. Sometimes, in my moments of feeling down and subpar, I'll wonder if my boys would have been better off with a BLANK-er, more BLANK mother. But then I remember… these are mine, and I am theirs. Whatever happened to bring this baby to your arms, it happened for a reason, and **you are just right**.

- **Your life will be simpler and happier if you work hard, day and night, to avoid falling into the comparison trap.** It took me three kids to get it, finally, but now that I have, I can tell you how much happier and more content I am as a parent. Worrying about X's baby who is crawling months before yours, comparing your child to Z's baby, who sleeps through the night, etc, all these things are unnecessary — and sometimes, they're just part of our culture and habits. Fight it. Seriously. Track development and be in tune with your child for anything that may need extra attention and TLC (or even intervention), but don't compare.

- **Opt out of the Mommy wars.** Although the parenting community should by definition be one of mutual respect, love, support, and caring, many times, it can turn vicious and ugly. Judgements are flung from all sides. You'll feel like everything you do is wrong to one side or another. Opt out. Surround yourself with friends and family who support you. Discuss parenting differences with an open mind and a loving intent. Avoid people and conversations who strive to compare, to criticize, and to prove They Are Right, Other Ideas Are Wrong.

- **Take care of yourself.** Make sure you don't lose yourself to this new role. It's easy to let things like time for yourself, a shower (alone, without baby!), or a nap every now and then slide. But the more rundown you let yourself get, the tougher mothering will seem. Don't be too hard on yourself. You're learning, and so is baby.

- **Don't be afraid to keep learning and evolving your parenting style.** Just don't do it because militant this-or-that-ers say you should/must. Do it because it feels right and natural for you, your partner, and your child.

- Make the most of this time. Cherish and love your child. **Ask yourself, when you're trying to make a decision, what will you want to have chosen five years from now?** Will you be more glad you decided to do this, or that? What feels right? For example, we decided that we did not want to try any sort of cry-it-out method for our children. And four years after my first baby, I am very glad we didn't. For us, it was right not to.

- **Write letters to your child.** Daily, weekly, monthly, whatever. Write about how you feel about him/her right this moment. What things does he do that you love? What things do you think about while you're holding her? You lose these thoughts as time passes, and it's so beautiful to read over what you wrote, and to have that for your child.

- **Enjoy this.** Seriously, enjoy it. Although it will be hard work, and some days, it may seem daunting, thankless, and tiresome, remind yourself of the beauty of it. Take a time-out to just hold your baby and cuddle. In a year, you'll

forget about the day you did no dishes or laundry and it all piled up, but you'll remember all the hours you snuggled and cuddled with your infant. In five years, those dishes won't matter, but those snuggles always will.

- And, beautifully, wonderfully, **You are not alone.** Even if you live in the wilderness, hundreds of miles from other people, in this day and age, if you're reading this, you are not alone. What a wonderful gift. I have greatly appreciated, loved, and felt blessed by the amazing communities I've found both online and out and about as a parent. Find your communities, wherever they may lie, and enjoy them. You are not alone.

PARENTING

My kids have started learning chess. Is it a good idea to let them beat me sometimes to encourage them?

Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia founder and Wikia cofounder

Here's what I do. Before we play, I ask my daughter if she wants to play "the teaching way" or straight. "The teaching way" means that after each of her moves, I help her analyze it and suggest improvements and point out any errors that I see. Such games tend to be very closely matched since, after all, it ends up being her+me against just me.

But she also enjoys playing straight sometimes, and then what's fair is fair.

I think it's absolutely a bad idea to let a kid win falsely to boost their confidence — it's false confidence. But I also don't agree with a hardcore "never let them win until they force it." I have found my hybrid "teaching way" to allow me to teach her the game more quickly.

I should point out that she's a lot smarter than I am, and so I'm only hastening the time of my own doom.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-jimmy-wales

ECONOMICS

How would you explain to a five-year-old that higher taxes on the rich don't fix everything?

Matt Dotson, Fascinated by economics

So say that your five-year-old can make money by doing things around the house.

- $5 for making their bed
- $5 for putting away their toys
- $5 for putting their dirty clothes in the laundry room
- $5 for going to bed on time
- They can do any or all of these chores.
- Dad is the government.

For the first $5 you earn, dad will take $1 and you keep $4. Dad will give this $1 to Grandpa, because Grandpa used to do a lot of stuff around the house (social security). So if you do one chore, you get $4 and pay $1 in taxes.

For the second $5 you earn, dad will take $2 more and you keep $3. Dad will use $1 to buy food for your baby sister (food stamps). And will give $1 to your brother who doesn't do any chores (welfare). If you do two chores you get $7 and pay $3 in taxes.

For the third $5 you earn, dad will take $3 more and you keep $2. Dad will use this money to buy a new crib for your baby sister (infrastructure spending). So, if you do three chores you get to keep $9 and pay $6 in taxes.

For the fourth $5 you earn, dad will take $4 more and you

keep $1. Dad will use this money to buy some new locks for the doors (defense spending). So if you do 4 chores, you get to keep $10 and pay $10 in taxes.

You get to make the decision on how much money to make, and how to spend it. Let's say you're a rich person and will do 3-4 chores. Here are your options:

1. You can decide that all this sounds fair and do all your chores for $10.

2. You can do some of your chores because it's not worth going to bed on time for just $1.

3. You can vote for Mom to be the Government at the next family meeting because she promises that if you do 4 chores you'll get to keep $12.

4. You can give $1 to your aunt (who's an accountant) because she knows a special family rule about children who do all their chores. She says you'll get to keep $13, pay $6 in taxes, and give her $1.

5. You can give $3 to your uncle (who's a lobbyist) because he can convince your Dad to not tax you for your 3rd and 4th chores. He says you'll get to keep $14, pay $3 in taxes, and give him $3.

Raising taxes on the rich doesn't work as well as we think it will because rich people find ways to not pay the higher taxes.

Hopefully this example teaches about graduated tax rates (how we try to make rich people pay more), how rich people try to avoid paying taxes, and some of the ways the government spends the taxes it collects. Maybe it also teaches about democracy and why Government (Dad) can't make up bad rules or you'll vote for Mom. Maybe it also makes the five-year-old ask why his/her brother gets $1 for doing nothing.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-matt-dotson

When should someone be finished grieving?

Andy Johns, I lost a parent as a child

My mom died when I was ten years old. Now I'm a twenty-nine-year-old man. Having dealt with her loss for nearly twenty years, I can tell you that grief does not go away. The intensity of grief may change over time and the characteristics of grief you experience change as well. Yet grief rooted in the death of a loved one never away, and that is a good thing.

Grieving is not about making it end as quickly as possible. Grieving is an essential human process and it should be embraced, not ignored or expedited. As Steve Jobs said, "Death is very likely the single greatest invention of life." It's life's change-agent and you should think about grief as the environment in which change happens. For example, read about Dashrath Majhi. After the death of his wife, this man spent twenty-two years single-handedly cutting a path through a nearby mountain range so that other villagers could access local medical help more easily. From the loss of his wife, this man changed the lives of others. I'm sure that every time he picked up his tools, he felt grief, yet he was transformed through that process into a humanitarian.

My point isn't that everyone will respond in a similarly monumental fashion. But death changes us, and grief is the environment in which that change happens. With that being said I would encourage you to ask the question differently. Don't ask about how quickly you can end the grief. Instead you should ask, "When can I start and what might I experience along the way?"

If I were to describe the nature of grief I would describe grief with these words: **seasonal, imperceptible yet influential, interminable.**

Seasonal - from what I've experienced, I can say that grief has a periodicity to it. The seasonality of grief during the Holidays is a common example. For many people, the Holidays means spending time with the people you love and that

is true even for those that aren't physically here anymore. The seasonality of grief can also set in when the date of that person's death comes up or when their birthday rolls around. The seasonality of grief also exists in larger intervals that tend to be defined by major developmental periods in your life. For example, my grief at the loss of my mom when I was ten to twelve years old was very different than the grief I experience as a nearly thirty-year-old man.

As a kid, my grief happened in the absence of having an adult relationship with my mom and an adult understanding of what death and dying means. All you know is the anguish of loss and the separation anxiety that comes with it. As an adult, I experience grief in a different way. When I think about having a family of my own someday, I think about how I wish she could have been around to meet them. I think about what she might say to me as a grown man at times when I could use motherly advice. In other words, I've come to realize that she is still parenting me, even in death. And as I reach certain pivot points in my life (changing a job, buying my first place, having serious relationships), the grief of her loss makes a contribution to the decisions I make and that will continue to be the case as I go through each major transition in my life.

Imperceptible yet influential - grief will be most acute early on. The pain will subside as time goes and the grief itself may momentarily pass. Yet the loss and grief you experienced will continue to influence who you are and what you do imperceptibly in the future. In my case, grief influenced me in the form of achievement. The loss was too much for me to handle as a kid, so at one point my mind made the decision that it was going to turn off the grief switch and turn on the achievement switch, and I went on to spend the next nineteen years trying to accomplish everything I could. I did not make the mind shift intentionally. It just sort of happened.

I became a competitive athlete in every sport I played. I graduated high school with a 4.32 GPA. I graduated from UCLA in just under 3.5 years while paying my way through college. I started running marathons. I got bored with that. Then I started running ultra marathons. In recent years I had a full-time job but managed to start my own company based

out of New Zealand during my free time on nights and weekends. I sold that. Then I started looking for more to do.

All those things are good things. I'm proud of them! But at some point you need to be able to sit back, relax, do less, and be completely content with yourself because if you don't, you'll burn out since that's too much pressure for anyone to place on themselves. It took me nearly twenty years to realize that I was doing these things because of the imperceptible influence of the ongoing grief associated with my mom's death. I was trying to live a meaningful life since my mom's life was cut short, and I wasn't going to die without making mine remarkable. I've felt that way since I was ten years old but couldn't really put it into words until now.

Interminable - pretty much everyone on this thread has said it, including myself, but I'll say it again. The grief will not go away entirely. It will become much more manageable with time and with effort. Expect that the grief will disappear and reappear throughout your life. That's the natural state of things. People are meant to form close bonds with one another and have loving relationships. We're built for it whether you want to call it a divine gift or biological evolution. So along with love, you should expect grief. It's a part of the human condition.

For me, I've gone through two distinct periods of intense grieving at the loss of my mom. The first period took place when I was ten to twelve years old. The change it created made my life better. I grew closer with my older brothers, and today they are my best friends, I succeeded in school, sports, and having a social life and that led me to loving my time in high school and college. I've been very fortunate with my career at this point having worked for a handful of great companies. I've been able to travel and do some epic things like run a marathon in Florence, Italy and a fifty mile ultra marathon most recently.

About a year ago, I entered the second stage of grieving (and it wasn't easy!) but I approached it aggressively and constructively and it's already starting to produce returns. I'm now living in my own place and more comfortable being by myself than I've ever been. I'm developing a more grounded approach to life in that I don't feel as pressured to always be

succeeding (it wears you down!), and I can feel that I'm emotionally maturing to a point that will set me up for meeting someone and starting a family of my own someday. I'm even evaluating what I want to do with my career and find myself fascinated with figuring out how over the next couple of years I can invest more of my work into helping others. In short, I'm thinking about what I want my life's work to be and helping others seems to be at the core of it. That is a very healthy process and the sort of change that you can expect by proactively approaching the grieving process.

Almost certainly, I'll enter more phases of grieving later in life, but I know that with each cycle things get better after a period of things getting worse. So I'll reiterate by saying that you should think of grieving differently than the way the question was asked. Don't think about how quickly you can get the grief over with and don't think you can avoid it either. Grief will surface one way or another. It is best that you approach grief as a healthy process and one that produces change that prepares you for the next phase in your life.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-andy-johns

How can you overcome your envy of people who are your age but are far more successful than you?

Matthew Manning, Middle-Aged Soul

Emphatically stop giving a shit.

1. You have ZERO idea what their personal lives are actually like, or if their outward appearance of success is total bullshit.

2. Stop focusing outward, focus inward. A preoccupation with the success of others is taking time away from tending your own internal garden.

3. Believing in common measures of success (money, position, family) is believing in a ready-made lunch box of meaning that society is opening up and shoving down your throat. WHO CARES. Figure out what success is for yourself and then just focus on pursuing that.

4. You are in your twenties, so be prepared to witness some epic personal collapses of those whom you are currently envious of.

5. You can't do anything besides what you can do. If you're giving it your all and staying focused on your values, then your life is progressing exactly as it should be. Did you hear that? EXACTLY AS IT SHOULD BE.

6. When you have an episode of crippling self-doubt, picture each doubt as a single sheet of paper. Then crunch all of them together and throw them into the toilet of your mind. Now angrily kick-flush that toilet with your foot.

7. Actively work to express gratitude for what you do have every morning. The happiest people I know are full of gratitude, and they are profoundly in touch with their innate talents.

8. Before you read number nine, think of at least one person who thinks you're awesome. Try to think of yourself as that person does.

9. Isn't the universe so vast, so deep, so incredibly amazing? Who could possibly worry about a thirty two hundred dollar difference in salary when there are stars supernova-ing right this very minute?

10. It's a marathon, not a sprint. Near the finish line, you'll realize you've only been racing against yourself.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-matthew-manning

LITERATURE

What book should I read to make girls think I'm smart in a hot way?

Cristina Hartmann, I may be addicted to books. Is there a program for that?

I suppose that I'm in the target demographic. I'm (1) a girl, (2) book-lover, and (3) a humanities major. I have a feeling that the first factor is the most critical one of them all. I'm afraid that my tastes aren't highbrow enough for you, but I'll do my very best to help you in your noble quest.

Before we proceed, I need to point out a contradiction. You say that you want to sound smart in a hot *and* a douchey intellectual way. I'm afraid these two things are mutually exclusive. Douchey intellectuals aren't hot or necessarily smart. In fact, it may be a turn-off to have someone throw around book titles to sound like their pants are just full of smarties. Just sayin'.

If you're determined to stay on the douchey side of the spectrum, it takes more than just reading fancy books. It's about the *attitude*. A few tips:

- *Tone* - try to keep your tone as condescending as possible. For example, you should disparage all obvious metaphors such as, "The metaphor of water in *The Great Gatsby* is just too utterly obvious. It's about the boat."

- *Language - if* the book was written in a non-English language, use its original title and pronounce it correctly. For example, use *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* instead of *Dangerous Liaisons*. Extra douche points if you read these books and quote passages in their original language.

- *Age* - put down newer books in favor of older, incredibly difficult to read books. This isn't a hard and fast rule though, thanks to David Foster Wallace. But *always, always* turn up your nose at popular fiction. *The Hunger Games*? Shockingly bad!

- *Discussion points* - stories, plots, character development? How pedestrian. Talk about the beauty of Henry James' and Borges' writing. You don't even need to read them, just say that their prose reminds us of our fragile humanity (whatever that means).

If you want to be a hot literary nerd, all you need to do is to tell the girl what you actually thought of the book.

With this list, you'll be able to go either way: hot nerd or douchey intellectual… It's all about the tone.

- *Ulysses* (James Joyce): they teach entire college courses devoted to this book. You can't beat an eye-patched author for panache!

- *Infinite Jest* (David Foster Wallace): fractals! How could a girl *not* swoon about a book that combines philosophy, mathematics and humor?

- Anything by **Jorge Luis Borges**: I'm not even sure Borges understood his books either. So, you can say whatever you want about them, it'll sound plausible.

- Anything by **Jane Austen**: not only will she think you smart, but she'll think you a hot sensitive hunk who *understands women*. Just don't compare the girl with Fanny Price.

- Major philosophical works of **Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir**, and **Rene Descartes:** I'd start with *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre, at least that one is fun to read (and short).

- Major tragedies by **William Shakespeare:** no *Tempest* for you, they teach that in middle school, for goodness' sake! It's about the epic tragedies: *King Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet*, et cetera. These tragedies will allow you to be emotive, intellectual, and hot all at once. (*Romeo and Juliet* is cheating though.)

Of course, I'm just scratching the surface here, but being a douchey intellectual is *work*. Postscript: beware of going too obscure. A girl won't be impressed by something that she has never heard of.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-cristina-hartmann

Which Jane Austen heroine most embodies feminist principles?

Stephanie Vardavas, is too generous to trifle with you

What a great question! It's important to remember that these are very young women, mostly seventeen to twenty years old, most of whom had no realistic choice for a life path other than marriage, so perhaps it's unfair to judge them too severely, but let's take a look and see what we find.

I should begin by saying that it is a terrible shame that Austen never lived to complete either *Sanditon* or *The Watsons*, because the heroines of both those fragments, **Charlotte Heywood** and **Emma Watson** (same name as the actress who played Hermione Granger), show great potential for being independent-minded, spunky young women who might have become proto-feminists. But we'll never know for sure. One cannot rely on completions by other writers.

So remaining in our universe of potential proto-feminists we have:

- Fanny Price
- Catherine Morland

- Emma Woodhouse

- Elinor Dashwood

- Anne Elliot

- Elizabeth Bennet

Let's dispose of them one at a time.

Fanny Price has always annoyed me a little because she's such a self-effacing, virtuous, goody-two-shoes little wuss. Compared to her reckless cousins Maria and Julia Bertram that's not such a bad thing, but it has never endeared her to me. Having said that, she does exhibit some proto-feminist principles: once she has used her own judgment to decide on what is the right thing to do, she does not allow herself to be swayed by anyone, for any reason. This extends to the point of steadfastly refusing a very advantageous marriage, because she does not respect — and suspects the sincerity of — her suitor. She's probably wrong about his sincerity, but ultimately she's right about him as a person. She falls in love with, and marries, her cousin Edmund, who might as well love her, because in almost every way she is his creation. He has been her most caring friend and even her tutor for many years. Not a protagonist most feminists would immediately embrace as one of their own.

Catherine Morland is, frankly, just a silly girl. She is of fundamentally good character but she cares for little beyond her family, a nice muslin, and a juicy Gothic novel. She does have the good sense to reject the arrogant blowhard John Thorpe in favor of the lively metrosexual Henry Tilney, but I don't detect any burgeoning feminist principles in Catherine.

Emma Woodhouse takes herself very seriously, even though in some ways she is just a willful teenager, and states openly that she fully expects to remain unmarried, obviously in part because she has the means and ability to live independently. In fact, **Emma is the only one of Austen's heroines who is wealthy enough in her own right to claim a serious level of independence**. Her older sister is married and she has no brothers. Her father dotes on her and she stands to inherit considerable money and property. Her friend Harriet, who has neither Emma's economic independence nor her stiff-

backed stubbornness, is a little bit scandalized, but Emma is serious, or thinks she is. She is perfectly ready to debate and disagree with those around her, especially family friend and neighbor George Knightley. She is horrified when her matchmaking efforts go awry and result in a proposal to her instead of one to Harriet, not only because she's a terrible snob, but because she doesn't like it when the human chess pieces on her board refuse to move into the squares she has determined for them. She is not very good at admitting when she is wrong, and she's wrong a lot. But she is confident and strong-willed, although she ends up marrying Knightley, the only man in her life who ever scolds her. So I'm not prepared to induct her into the proto-feminist hall of fame just yet.

Elinor Dashwood is a different kind of creature. She is not much older than Catherine, but silly is the last word I'd use to describe her. She is very serious about money and the other realities of life, and becomes essentially the business manager for her mother and sisters when her half-brother and his loathsome wife turn them out of their estate after the death of her father. It is Elinor who keeps track of how much they can afford, reminds her sister Marianne and their mother to be practical, and who relentlessly represses her own attachment to Edward Ferrars because she fears she is doomed to disappointment. Finally Edward calls on the Dashwoods and, awkwardly, they learn that he not in fact married to another, but free.

> Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease. Edward, who had till then looked any where, rather than at her, saw her hurry away, and perhaps saw–or even heard, her emotion; for immediately afterwards he fell into a reverie, which no remarks, no inquiries, no affectionate address of Mrs. Dashwood could penetrate, and at last, without saying a word, quitted the room, and walked out towards the village – leaving the others in the greatest astonishment and perplexity on a change in his situation, so wonderful and so sudden; a perplexity which they had no means of lessening but by their own conjectures.

I would say that **Elinor does exhibit some sound feminist**

principles. She is realistic about money, not obsessed with romance, and determined to protect her family's independence.

Poor **Anne Elliot**. Anne is a sensible woman of about twenty-seven who, as a young woman of nineteen, was overly influenced (to break off her engagement to a young naval officer, Frederick Wentworth, because he was not her social equal) by those around her. And what a group they are! She has a silly, vain, snobbish father who happens to be a baronet; a silly, vain, snobbish sister, Elizabeth; and a silly, hypochondriacal, self-centered sister, Mary. Her snobbish godmother, Lady Russell, is the only person in her life who truly loves her, and yet even Lady Russell is such a snob that following her advice caused Anne to deprive herself of the deepest happiness by following it. But Anne has had eight long years to reflect on her regret, and while she is too insecure and ladylike to *pursue* the man she still loves when he returns to her orbit, she has learned a valuable lesson or two about being her own woman. We find Anne engaging in intellectual discussions about books and poetry with male acquaintances in Wentworth's circles, and on one notable occasion debating politely but with some disagreement — in Wentworth's hearing — about the relative capacities of men and women for total devotion in extreme circumstances.

> "Oh!" cried Anne eagerly, "I hope I do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures! I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by woman.
>
> No, **I believe you capable of everything great and good in your married lives. I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as if I may be allowed the expression so long as you have an object. I mean while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one; you need not covet it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone."** She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed.

Anne also exhibits some sound feminist principles by the end of the novel. She is determined to trust only her own best judgment in deciding whom to trust and what will make her happy, and she does. She marries Wentworth, who has become wealthy in the Navy by way of prize money for capturing French ships, and he buys her an estate by the sea.

Saving the best (or at least the best beloved) for last, we move on to **Elizabeth Bennet**. Everyone adores Elizabeth Bennet, and even her creator considered her "as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print." She's the second of five daughters of a minor landowner whose estate, Longbourn, is entailed away from the female line.

Austen was never much for physical descriptions, but she tells us that Elizabeth is highly intelligent, witty, clever, has a pretty face with beautiful dark eyes, and a pleasing figure. She is well read, plays the piano and sings, and is a loyal and caring friend and sister. She is especially devoted to her older sister Jane. She knows that because of the entail, she cannot have an independent future: either she will marry, or live as an old maid in the home of her sister. She is determined to marry, if at all, only for love. In the service of this ideal, she turns down the first two marriage proposals that come her way, one from William Collins, the inane male cousin who stands to inherit Longbourn upon the death of Mr. Bennet, and the other from Fitzwilliam Darcy, possibly the richest man in Derbyshire and certainly one of the most eligible bachelors in England, in both cases because she does not like or respect them. After she learns that she has been badly prejudiced and misinformed about Darcy's character and personal qualities, she searches her soul and judges herself harshly. She and Darcy are thrown together one more time, and this time they find their way to a happy ending.

Elizabeth truly is an interesting character. She's a romantic. Her fierce determination to marry only for love collides with her equally fierce loyalty to her family in the moment when Collins proposes to her. She could, by accepting him, ensure that her family is never turned out of Longbourn. But she never hesitates. She does not love him, or even particularly like him, and she has too much self-respect to accept him (as her friend Charlotte does, less than twenty four hours lat-

er). She holds firm to her principles and eventually she figures out that she has misjudged Darcy, and that in fact she loves him. She then marries for love, having providentially chosen a man so wealthy that her family will always be provided for.

Even though Elizabeth is caught up in societal strictures that basically force her to make her way in the world by marrying, she does it on her own terms. Although she marries a very rich man, she cannot be accused of avarice, or even excessive practicality, because if she were marrying for money, she would have accepted Darcy the first time.

While Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood, each in their own way, exhibit some strong feminist principles, Elizabeth Bennet exhibits the most modern feminist sensibility of all Austen's heroines.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-stephanie-vardavas

What is so great about Jane Austen?

Shan Kothari, not nearly as well-read as I'd like to think.

I'm going to focus on just one aspect in which Austen has been pioneering in the art of writing: Narration.

There's a narrative technique called free indirect discourse (FID) which blends third-person narration with a direct, first-person view into a character's mind. Wikipedia gives as an example this sentence: "He laid down his bundle and thought of his misfortune. And just what pleasure had he found, since he came into this world?" Even though the second sentence is clearly coming from the "He" identified in the first sentence, rather than the booming voice of God, the second sentence lacks any of the marks of quoted or reported speech, like "he said" or "he thought." Used properly, this can make the transition into the character's mind more fluid and less intrusive.

Here's an example from *Persuasion*: "How Anne's more rigid requisitions might have been taken, is of little conse-

quence. Lady Russell's had no success at all–could not be put up with–were not to be borne." (FID is useful in *Persuasion* because of how much thinking Anne does; it is much of what makes Anne feel like a real person, despite the fact that she doesn't do much at all.)

Austen is widely recognized as one of the first writers to ever use FID. (Sometimes Goethe is also cited, but I wouldn't know about him.) Citing critics like Dorrit Cohn and David Lodge, David Gunn writes that "Jane Austen is generally acknowledged to be the first English novelist to make sustained use of free indirect discourse in the representation of figural speech and thought."

But other people have used free indirect discourse, right? So what does it matter that she was the first?

I like the way Gunn dissects this passage from Emma:

> Later in the morning, and just as the girls were going to separate in preparation for the regular four o'clock dinner, the hero of this inimitable charade walked in again. Harriet turned away; but Emma could receive him with the usual smile, and her quick eye soon discerned in his the consciousness of having made a push—of having thrown a die; and she imagined he was come to see how it might turn up. His ostensible reason, however, was to ask whether Mr. Woodhouse's party could be made up in the evening without him, or whether he should be in the smallest degree necessary at Hartfield. If he were, every thing else must give way; but otherwise his friend Cole had been saying so much about his dining with him—had made such a point of it, that he had promised him conditionally to come.

Here we have an external report transitioning into the mockery of "the hero of this inimitable charade" (Mr. Elton), then more external reports until "having thrown a die" — which in its use of a particular phrase, puts us into the mind of Emma. More FID begins with "His ostensible reason," and by the end of that sentence, with "whether he should be in the smallest degree necessary," Austen is imitating Mr. Elton's speech patterns, putting the reader into Mr. Elton's mind in such a way that the reader may not be aware of the transition at all. The next sentence is all Mr. Elton's thoughts, but note that it never once says "Mr. Elton thought." It doesn't need to; that

would be overkill.

Now, this narrative style looks pretty standard in today's literature. But in Austen's time, *nobody* was doing this. Fifty years earlier, Laurence Sterne was messing around with unreliable narrators in *Tristram Shandy*, but until Austen started writing, it was difficult to maintain the power of seeing into a character's thoughts while keeping narratorial authority. (Sterne was clearly not interested in narratorial authority.) Most narrators were still stupid blockheads like the titular Pamela of Samuel Richardson's famous epistolary novel. Austen's narration allows us to get into her character's heads in a way that is all the more powerful precisely because it doesn't feel forced.

So really, it's the way she uses FID and other techniques with such sheer *attitude* that makes it impressive. The fluid shifts of perspective it allows is part of what gives her books such satirical force. And it still holds up against the best narration in today's novels.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-shan-kothari

HARRY POTTER

Toward the end of *Harry Potter: Order of the Phoenix*, why don't the kids just gang up on and overpower Umbridge?

Danielle Maurer, Slytherin Prefect

There are a number of reasons why this is so. Let's start with:

1. Umbridge is not just one woman. As the question states, she has Filch and her squad of Slytherin enforcers. And while normally the students would not be afraid to be defiant of Filch and some Slytherins, Umbridge has given new meaning to the word "punishment." The Slytherins are entitled to use magic against other students (I think) and can take House points away, in addition to assigning detention. And on the

subject of detention, I think we've seen just how sadistic Umbridge can be with that. Filch has been given permission to use the chains and manacles he's always been so fond of, and surely no students wants to suffer through that. And then, this is bigger than just Umbridge, leading to my next point, that…

2. Umbridge is from the Ministry of Magic. And that means a hell of a lot. Should a full-blown student revolution start, Umbridge can call in all kinds of hell, in the form of the Magical Law Enforcement Squad, Aurors, and maybe even dementors (again). I'm sure nobody wants to open that can of worms. Even if the students decided to go against the Ministry, what would happen if they lost? There's a good chance they'd be tried in court, a farce that they would surely lose, and their wands would be snapped. They might even get sent to Azkaban. That would be the end of it. And with that as a potential consequence, it puts a damper on any defiance that the students might want to try. There are special cases too, like with the Weasleys. Umbridge's influence could get their father fired in retaliation. As someone has already said, even Dumbledore did not try to push her aside; he was aware of these ties as much as anybody, and unseating her would have to go through the system. Additionally, we are fairly certain that…

3. Umbridge is not working for Voldemort. As Sirius says in Order of the Phoenix, the world is not divided into good people and Death Eaters. Umbridge may be evil, but she's not the real enemy here. There's a difference between her oppression of students at Hogwarts and the oppression of the Carrows in Deathly Hallows. In Deathly Hallows, the students strike back where they can, to the point of Neville being on the run inside the school, and they aren't afraid to do so. *But the stakes are higher against the Carrows because they work for Voldemort*. Umbridge doesn't. The drive to rebel against her is much less, despite what she's done in terms of rules and driving out Dumbledore.

4. Umbridge has the population of Hogwarts sufficiently downtrodden already. She was slow and insidious and it worked to her advantage. No student was going to rebel while Dumbledore was still Headmaster, and by the time he fled,

Umbridge had already managed to squash the spirit out of the student body. She created the right kind of atmosphere where it sapped the energy and strength of the student body. Introducing things like student informers helped with that — because if you can't confide in your fellows students, how can you start a rebellion? It's hopeless, right? So why not just give up? Harry and his friends are a small core of students that trust each other implicitly; that's how they are able to resist, by feeding off each other's attitudes and skills. But the majority of the student body doesn't have that. And look what happens to Dumbledore's Army because of misplaced trust. And lastly…

5. There is an implied level of skill difference. Harry and Co. are all, for the most part, great at various disruptive spells and jinxes, hexes and curses. And they're practicing because they know they're going to be fighting Voldemort in the end. But the rest of the school — well, most of them believe the Ministry. Voldemort isn't back, so who cares? They're probably still focused on learning other things, which may or may not make them useless in a fight. And even if the whole student body rose up, how many of them would be good against what Umbridge could call in? How many could produce a Patronus against dozens of dementors? Or successfully duel any adult wizard from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement? I'd say 1st-3rd years are out, and maybe fourth years too. That severely cuts down the amount of potentially useful fighters you've got.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-danielle-maurer

Is *The Hunger Games* a pro-girl / pro-woman story, the way *Brave* is?

Tyler Borchers, journalist

I haven't read *The Hunger Games*, but my best friend and English major Spencer Smith has. Spencer was more than

happy to collaborate with me to answer this question. Here's what he had to say about *The Hunger Games*:

> First of all, my answer will be limited because I have only read the first book in Suzanne Collins's series. Katniss is one of the strongest female characters I have read in young adult literature. However, that isn't saying much in a genre that is often criticized for placing weak female characters in tired plot structures involving romance, romance, and perhaps more romance.

Evidence that *The Hunger Games* is pro-girl

Katniss is independent, almost to a fault. She's often criticized by other characters for not asking for help. Haymitch, for instance, finds Katniss almost uncoachable. When he is instructing her prior to the nationally broadcasted interview, he says, "I give up, sweetheart. Just answer the questions and try not to let the audience see how openly you despise them" (118). But this independence is precisely the key to Katniss's success. It leads her to each triumph and heroic moment — providing food for her family, going as tribute in place of her sister, impressing the Gamemakers, destroying the Career Tributes' provisions, providing a ceremony to commemorate Rue's death, going back to the Cornucopia to get medicine for Peeta, and ultimately deciding to defy the Capitol in the end. In other words, almost every single plot point is brought about by an independent choice made by Katniss.

The other characters are extremely aware of Katniss's ferocious independence. When Gale is introduced in the very beginning, Katniss tells us explicitly that "There's never been anything romantic between Gale and me" (10). While it's possible that Katniss is not totally reliable here; it's clear that Gale and Katniss are equal partners and not stereotypical lovers. There's a scene in the first chapter where Katniss and Gale discuss "their kids" when talking about their siblings. The juxtaposition of the nuclear family with their predicament here is strong. In the Katniss-Gale nuclear family, ravished by poverty, both mother and father are providers. Gale is acutely aware of Katniss's abilities, telling her, "We could [run away and live in the woods], you know" (9). The implication is that Katniss, unlike other women from District 12, is able to fend for herself and has the

requisite skills to survive.

Gale is not the only male character to recognize Katniss's strength. Peeta does as well. In fact, Peeta is so sure of Katniss that he ties his fate to hers in the broadcasted interview by professing his love for her. This scene, of course, is an inversion of the typical chivalrous relationship, in which the man professes his love in order to *save*. In this case, the man professes his love in order to *be saved*. This gives Katniss power in their relationship. And Peeta is exactly right. His declaration results in his life being saved multiple times.

Evidence that *The Hunger Games* is ambivalent about feminism

The romantic relationship between Katniss and Peeta is ambiguous. In one reading of the novel, the relationship (at least on Katniss's end) is completely constructed for victory in the Hunger Games. In another reading, the romantic relationship happens naturally and coincidentally benefits Katniss and Peeta. This ambiguity is supported by the end of the novel. Peeta accuses Katniss of faking everything for the Games. She responds that not all of her actions were faked, implying that much of them were. The last sentence of the book, though, reads, "I take [Peeta's] hand, holding on tightly, preparing for the cameras, and dreading the moment when I will finally have to let go" (374). I'm not sure what we are supposed to make of this. If the Peeta-Katniss relationship is completely artificial, then it strengthens the novel's feminist tilt. Katniss is always in control. She recognizes the banality of traditional gender roles and feels free to manipulate them in order to subversively achieve desired outcomes.

Unfortunately, I don't think this is what most of the novel's audience takes from the book. I taught *The Hunger Games* to a group of ninth graders this summer. If I hadn't read the book myself and my only knowledge of the book came from my students' summaries, I would have thought Peeta and Katniss's romance was a centerpiece of the plot. Even when encouraged to consider the authenticity of the relationship, most of my students characterized Katniss's confusion as a case of her lying to herself rather than actually conflicting emotions.

Evidence that *The Hunger Games* is not pro-girl

> If *The Hunger Games* was to be judged only on Katniss, I think it would be easy to characterize it as pro-girl. However, *The Hunger Games* exists in a post-apocalyptic universe in which other female characters exist. Basically all of these characters fall into gendered stereotypes. Katniss's mother, for instance, has a mental breakdown when her husband dies. Effie is overly cheery, materialistic and is constantly concerned about Katniss's lack of lady-like qualities. Rue seems to only be female as a contrast to Katniss's younger sister. Foxface, while being extremely important to the plot (she finishes fourth in the Games, losing to Katniss, Peeta, and Cato), never receives a real name. Thus, the only other strong female character in the book is accused of being manipulative and sly like a fox and is given a corresponding nickname.

First, let's draw a distinction between settings. *The Hunger Games*' dystopia is penned in heavy ink, yet gender issues must compete on each page with myriad other social critiques. It is more pessimistic, but also broader in its pessimism.

The world of *Brave* is foremost a patriarchy. This is clear from the beginning. Merida's incompatibility with the patriarchy, too, is more a premise than a plot. *Brave*'s critique is often understated. If you don't recognize patriarchies in the real world, you might not in *Brave* either. Just skim a few movie reviews and you'll find many critics thought *Brave* was too safe a story for Pixar and featured a conflict driven principally by teenage angst. As is often the case with criticism, *Brave* is told using a language in which we're all variably fluent. That is certainly a weakness, but I would argue it's also a strength. A muted message is more true to the experiences of women living under patriarchy, who are often told that the oppression they encounter is imagined. Dramatizing those experiences into a dystopia that everyone can see misrepresents the many women living in covert dystopias across the globe.

Their plots can be distinguished using similar logic. In both stories, the protagonists are the only female characters who challenge gender norms in any serious way. In *Brave*, this is necessary. It is a story about a young girl defying patriarchy. The patriarchy is a character. It needs to exist onscreen. And

remember, that doesn't just mean men ruling over women — it refers to an ideology that any person can promote, regardless of gender. When Merida's mother enforces the gender code and her father seems indifferent or even unaware of it, *Brave* accurately reflects a situation commonly described by feminists. Because *The Hunger Games* isn't about patriarchy, it doesn't demand female stereotypes in the same way. Frankly, I'm not convinced that Katniss' femaleness is even required. With a few tweaks to her character, I think *The Hunger Games* could be essentially salvaged. Turn Merida into a boy and her story unravels.

Katniss' deviance from the gender norm was initially learned, then necessary for her survival. Her deviant behavior persists due to personal preference, but Merida is concerned with her own autonomy from beginning to end. According to her, she should be able to do what she wants as an end in itself, not as a means to survival or because someone else instilled her with the skills and passion necessary. Where *The Hunger Games* gives reasons for Katniss' deviance, *Brave* boldly declines to *explain* why Merida is different. She just is.

Regardless of how genuine Katniss' relationship with Peeta is, it's constructed to fit neatly into a gendered box. *Brave* alludes to these boxes as reference points from which its audience might understand Merida. But they offer no protection from being discredited by men. Katniss is stigmatized for refusing her gender role, while Merida is deemed an unreliable source of information. Both of these phenomena are well-documented in feminist literature and by Hollywood. When this conflict appears on the big screen, it's normally resolved by having the woman retain her flair of independence while ultimately conforming to the master narrative: falling in love with and marrying a man. *Brave* lives up to its name by setting up a convenient compromise, then doubling down anyway. Merida could *defy* by convincing the clans that she should get to choose who she marries and then *conform* by choosing. Instead, she is totally defiant, claiming her right to not choose.

I'll follow Merida's example and claim that right too. Neither Spencer nor I can say *The Hunger Games* is a progirl story the way *Brave* is. Each story contains pro-girl sen-

timent, and each story expresses that sentiment in different ways. Hopefully the ideas we've shared here can help you answer that question for yourself.

THE HUNGER GAMES

Does race or ethnicity play a role in *The Hunger Games* series? If so, how?

Monika Kothari, abecedarian

Whether or not Panem is a post-racial society, the United States in the present — that is, the time, place, and audience for which Suzanne Collins is writing — is not. It's possible to write a book in which race is not a major theme, of course, or for individual readers to dismiss race as an important factor, but we live in a society that's *obsessed* with race. *Our* world is not post-racial, and in critical analysis, race can't be treated as irrelevant… especially in a bestselling YA series — even a futuristic science fiction one. So while race doesn't have to be central to every aspect of our culture, and it's probably healthier if we don't obsess over it as we do, it will remain an important issue for as long as racism remains a real problem.

When writing characters, it's almost impossible *not* to take race into consideration. Even if race is not significant in Panem, Collins made conscious decisions to make some characters white (e.g. Peeta), some characters black (e.g. Rue), and some characters ambiguous (e.g. Katniss). **These racial distinctions can't have been arbitrary choices; no race is "neutral" even if we've been acculturated to believe that white is the norm.** Why should we assume that a character is white unless explicitly described otherwise? Unless Rue and Thresh are just token minorities designed to satisfy the terms of political correctness in our society, which is a whole other issue in itself, there must be some logic behind their depiction

as black.

(*Aside*: White and black aren't the only races, but no characters in particular are identified as Asian, Native American, etc. But it's also important to remember that **in a post-apocalyptic world where "Asia," the "United States," "Latin America," the "Middle East," and other regions don't exist in the same way, race can't be discussed in the same terms**. It wouldn't make sense for Katniss to refer to Rue as "African American" — as Collins does in an interview — if "Africa" and "America" don't mean anything. However, Rue is explicitly described as having dark skin, and Collins does confirm that she and Thresh, and most of District 11, are black. Of course, that didn't prevent a storm of fanger over the casting of a black actor as Rue, who apparently should be "blond" and "white" to "look like Prim." It seems like some so-called "fans" believe that people of color shouldn't even have minor roles to disrupt the pure whiteness of their imagined Panem — so never mind the storm of hatred that would've resulted if Katniss had been cast as anything other than white.)

Katniss' ambiguous coloring is intentional. Her mother and sister are clearly fair-skinned and blonde-haired, while Katniss is "olive"-skinned and black-haired. She's specifically described in contrast to her mother and sister, and resembles her miner father rather than the fair merchant class that her mother represents. Her skin tone can't be environmentally determined — she's never worked in the mines, and her mother and sister, who live in the same environment, don't share her coloring or hair. We can assume that it's inherited, and because her father, Gale, and Haymitch are described with similar terms, we can also assume that this darker skin and hair is prevalent throughout the Seam.

In contrast, the town is mostly fair and blonde, like Peeta, Madge, Prim, and Katniss's mother. This is quite a sharp distinction in appearance — even if it doesn't amount to "racial" difference, **there's some kind of class-color divide here**. It may not be an explicit statement on race, if you as a reader don't want it to be, and it's a distinction that's probably been exacerbated by social separation, but its a noted difference nonetheless. Likewise, District 11, one of the poorest Districts if not *the* poorest, is mostly black, while the entire ruling elite

in the Capitol, and all of the tributes from the Career Districts appear to be white. Personally, I think there is a deeper level to having District 11 as a primarily black District, as the presence of Rue, Thresh, Seeder, Chaff, and their families indicate. District 11 is:

1. A large, agricultural District (orchards, grains, cotton);

2. Probably in the Deep South;

3. Where residents do backbreaking work night and day;

4. Where residents sing as they work;

5. Where poverty and hunger are prevalent;

6. Heavily patrolled by Peacekeepers;

7. One of the most unhappy and rebellious, even among the poor Districts.

Does this sound familiar to anyone? Plantation life, slavery, and the antebellum South, perhaps? Or post-Reconstruction sharecropping? I don't think this is a coincidence. **District 11 has clear and intentional parallels to the historical treatment of black people in the United States**, which only further serves to highlight the dystopic reality of Panem. Does race matter in Panem? Maybe not, but I think that this parallel is an important comment on institutional racism of the past and present in *our* United States. A reader could easily miss or dismiss the reference, but I think it's there for a reason.

(*Aside*: Likewise, District 12 reflects the history of mining conditions, poverty, and labor relations in Appalachia, which have also been, and continue to be, appalling at times. I think it's pretty cool that Katniss, as an Appalachian character, will be portrayed by an actor from that general region of the country — Jennifer Lawrence is from Louisville, Kentucky.)

Moving beyond District 11, the Capitol rules over all of Panem from a distance, with enforcers ("Peacekeepers") in every region. Due to geography and industry, some Districts are more closely watched than others. The Capitol citizens live in luxury from the industries of the Districts, with cosmetic surgery, bingeing and purging, etc. This whole setup has, from my point of view, **colonial undertones that parallel historical imperialism**, which usually had racial implications

of white Europeans occupying and claiming the resources of non-white peoples. Again, this doesn't explicitly bring race into the equation, and indeed you can ignore the race/ethnicity all together without losing an appreciation for the series, but it's yet another aspect to think about among the other themes.

So all this time, I've been arguing that whether or not race matters in Panem is less important than whether race matters to the *audience* when determining whether or not it plays a role in the series. A clear example of this is **the casting of Lenny Kravitz as Cinna**, the firestorm that resulted. All I remember from the book was that Cinna was described as having short, dark hair and looking "normal" relative to the rest of the Capitol citizens. How does this description reveal anything about race? **Does he have to be explicitly described as black to be black — is "white" the only "normal"?** I think that the casting controversy here reveals that even if race isn't important in Panem, *The Hunger Games* still forces us to think about and confront race in our own society. It's one thing to be upset the Kravitz isn't your ideal "physical type" for Cinna, and it's another to be flipping out over his race. Check out some of the bizarre comments about it:

- *Isn't Cinna flamboyant? Not black.*

- *i imagined him as a gay white guy with brown and is skinny… he better act gay!*

- *Ew, since when was he black?*

Source: http://www.racialicious.com/2011/11/15/yes-there-are-black-people-in-your-hunger-games-the-strange-case-of-rue-cinna/

Admittedly, I picked some of the worst comments of the lot, but you get the point. Furthermore, the fanbase has scrutinized Kravitz's acting abilities much more than any of the other characters' actors, even though his is only a supporting role next to the white leads, Jennifer Lawrence and Josh Hutcherson. (Plus, whether or not Kravitz's body type looks the part, he just exudes *cool*, I mean really…) By the way, this would make Cinna the only major supporting character of unambiguous color in the series (if you accept the films

as canon), as Rue, Thresh, Seeder, and Chaff all appear in only one book, and all are from the "farming" District. (Yes, I know it's the Hunger Games and that lots of people have to die… but the fact that no characters that are described as brown-skinned actually survive the series is something to think about.)

Finally, I think that blogger Alexiel makes a lot of controversial but interesting points about the premise of the series as a metaphor about people of color:

• Looking at the world today, most oppressive dictatorships exist in countries with non-white peoples. Furthermore many of these people have, in recent years, begun to organize and rebel against their regimes. Suzanne Collins was inspired to write the series after watching footage of the invasion of Iraq.

• Either as a localized revolution against a dictator in the Global South, or as a global analogy related to the wealth and power of the North, the Hunger Games is one large metaphor for people of color rising up against oppression.

• Katniss Everdeen – coming out of impoverished, desperate conditions to unwittingly end up in a revolution to overthrow the regime that keeps her people down – could be any one of the many people of color coming out of analogous situations who frequently lack the power to overthrow an entire government or economic world order.

• Collins is telling us: people will rebel against oppression; brown-skinned people do want political power; it is wrong for rich, excessive cultures to benefit from the desperate, oppressive conditions of "others".

• If this metaphor doesn't exist, and I completely made it up, then I'll admit it: I have no idea what the Hunger Games could possibly be about besides sensationalism and reality TV with some glorified child-soldiering thrown in.

• In other words, if Katniss is white, the metaphor that makes the trilogy meaningful social commentary and inspirational to the would-be revolutionaries of color in the world is lost. It's just an appropriation of struggles. It is

a re-writing of history that erases us, erases our struggles and our victories.

Source: http://xalexiel.blogspot.com/2011/03/why-katniss-everdeen-is-woman-of-color.html

I'm not saying that Alexiel is more correct in her interpretation than any of us (and it is a *total and complete* interpretation, unlike anything I've seen discussed — and worth reading). But her perspective is compelling, at least to me, and it goes to show how subjective the reader's experience is. To a white reader, or even a non-white reader, this series may not be about race — race may not even occur to him/her as an issue to think about. But to this particular Guyanese blogger, it absolutely is! Her position is extreme, and one I don't share, but I don't think that her analysis is entirely wrong. **There's definitely a place for interpreting a racial or ethnic meaning into the series. If you don't see it at all, that's fine, but you could be missing out on some interesting perspectives.**

We live in a world where race matters. Whether you have a cast of characters that's all white, all black, all Asian, etc. or a mixture… Whether you employ racial archetypes or stereotypes or avoid/subvert them… Whether you describe the characters' races explicitly or ambiguously… There's almost always some comment to be made about what this means for our social reality. Whenever *The Hunger Games* takes place — and it could be hundreds of years in the future where race is irrelevant — **it's a very contemporary work of fiction with contemporary implications**.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-monika-kothari

MUSIC

What is so great about Jay-Z?

Aaron Ellis, Former Music Critic with Artist Farm

One of the singles from Jay-Z's now classic debut album, *Reasonable Doubt*, was a song called "Can't Knock The Hustle." While there are many interpretations about the exact meaning of the song, I have always felt that the phrase "can't knock the hustle" means that there is no substitute for hard work; that hard work always yields respect and success. To me, this is why Jay-Z is great. He is a hustler in the truest sense of the word, and his hardcore work ethic has brought him success in every arena in which he has applied himself.

- **Early Business Acumen** - A real hustler is someone who can discover alternative ways of doing things. When Jay-Z was an unsigned rapper, he sold his tapes from the trunk of his car while trying to get a record deal. All of the major labels refused to sign him. He finally scored a deal with Payday Records, but after seeing how amateur their operations were, he realized something that became very critical to his success: **they didn't do anything for him that he couldn't do for himself**. All the promotion and marketing they did for him were things that he could do on his own and probably better. So Jay struck out on his own and used his own money towards forming Roc-A-Fella Records

with Dame Dash and Biggs Burke. Jay-Z initially set out to become a rapper. But seeking a new way to put out his product, he ended up becoming an entrepreneur.

- **Rapping Ability** - Jay-Z is the most talented rapper alive. Back in the 1990s, he became known as "The Master of All Flows," a title only bestowed upon an extremely exclusive group of elite rappers. While most rappers only have one flow style, Jay-Z has mastered every flow in existence. Fast. Slow. Syncopated. Straightforward. Poetic. Narrative. He can do it all. He is a rapper's rapper, which is to say, he's a guy who other rappers (such as Kanye West) idolize. This is not just natural ability. This is the sign of someone who is a tireless perfectionist when it comes to his craft. Beyond his flow, Jay is just a great lyricist. He is a great storyteller and can flip clever metaphors and puns better than anyone. He can make comfortable party music like "Big Pimpin" or serious message music like "Minority Report," a powerful song about Hurricane Katrina. On record, Jay can do anything. For further proof, watch his episode of *Storytellers*, where he performs in front of an audience and shares the full meaning behind the lyrics of the key songs from his excellent *American Gangster* album. The amount of thought that went into every bar is astounding. It will make you re-examine everything about that album and all others he has made.

- **Studio Hustle** - Jay-Z has a reputation for having an extreme work ethic. He doesn't write down his lyrics; he has everything memorized in his head. Seriously. Unlike other rappers, who use notebooks, notepads, or even Blackberries to pen a song, Jay-Z has every bar and every verse of his songs etched in his brain. When he enters the studio to record a track, he is always over-prepared. Because his lyrics are already memorized, he needs very few takes to record an entire track. Anyone who wants to collaborate with Jay-Z must be prepared for the fact that he moves at a very fast pace with incredible attention to detail. The added bonus of the studio hustle is that it he cuts costs on production. Rather than wasting money on studio fees for

doing multiple takes of a song, he gets maximum production on minimal time. Jay-Z is a model of efficiency.

- **Album Consistency** - A byproduct of being a consummate professional in the studio, Jay-Z has an unusually high rate of productivity. *Reasonable Doubt* came out in 1996, which means that he has been rapping as a professional for sixteen years. If you count his collaborative albums with R.Kelly, Linkin Park, and Kanye West, Jay-Z has released fifteen albums. This neither includes the dozens of guest appearances he has made on other's songs nor *Jay-Z*: *Unplugged*, his live album with The Roots. Also, bear in mind that he briefly retired from rap in 2004-05. So really, he has made fifteen albums in roughly fifteen years, a solid 1:1 album-to-year ratio. I can honestly say that all of his solo albums are at least good, but most are great. Depending on who you ask, at least two of his albums are classics. By this standard, Jay-Z is arguably the most prolific modern musician of the moment.

- **Stage Hustle** - A ticket to a Jay-Z concert anywhere in the world is a hot item. He doesn't just sell out Madison Square Garden; he can sell out any venue on the globe. But Jay-Z has a rabid following for more reasons than just his name and music. It's because he is an exceptional performer. Talk to anyone who has ever been to a Jay-Z concert and they will confirm this. More than just a guy reciting lyrics on stage, he knows how to engage with an audience and get them involved with the music. He is a true showman. Tickets to his concerts may be pricey, but he makes the experience worth every penny.

- **Expanding Roc-A-Fella** - Being the co-founder and CEO of Roc-A-Fella Records, as well as being The Roc's top-selling artist, brought Jay-Z immense wealth. But rather than just enjoy the money, he pushed the envelope. He transformed Roc-A-Fella from a label into a brand. Roc-A-Fella signed an impressive roster of rappers and did a masterful job marketing them. They branched out into fashion with Rocawear and film with ROC films. If it could turn a profit, they got involved with it.

- **Continued Business Acumen** - It's one thing to make good business decisions within the context of a company, but it's another thing to make good business decisions on one's own. As an individual businessman outside of Roc-A-Fella, Jay-Z is brilliant. Successful club owner (no small feat considering how difficult it is to own a club or restaurant). Former President of Def Jam Records. Part-owner of the Brooklyn Nets, and a significant figure in moving the Nets from New Jersey to his hometown. Co-Brand Director for Budweiser Select. He chooses his ventures wisely and brings the same hustle to those as he does his music.

- **Public Opinions** - It is said that opinions are bad for business, which is why many celebrities avoid being vocal about certain topics. But Jay-Z is no stranger to controversial opinions, and he has bumped heads with some powerful people. He called for boycott against Cristal when managing director Frederic Rouzaud made a disrespectful comment about the hip-hop community consuming the product. He challenged Noel Gallagher of Oasis and other rockers when Gallagher opposed Jay-Z performing at Glastonbury. He boycotted the Grammy's in 1998 because DMX wasn't nominated for Best Rap Album. Yet in Jay-Z's case, these controversies only improved his stature. Why? Because he stood up for something important. In each occasion, he voiced his opinions in defense of hip hop music. Against Cristal, he defended an attack on the hip-hop community. Against Noel Gallagher, he defended the right of hip hop musicians to perform alongside rock musicians. Against the Grammy's, he defended a rapper who was perhaps viewed as too hardcore. His willingness to stand up for the art form makes him a true ambassador of hip-hop.

- **Philanthropy** - Lots of hustlers talk about giving back to the community once they have made their fortune, but Jay-Z actually does it. Visits to Africa. Meeting with the United Nations. Donating to the Red Cross during Hurricane Katrina. Performing free of charge in voter-drive concerts. Donating to charities such as The Boys & Girls

Clubs of America, Artists for Peace and Justice, The Grammy Foundation, and many other organizations. Jay gives a lot, and this is just what is public knowledge.

- **Undercover Hustle** - In the first verse of "Ride or Die," Jay-Z boasts, "S. Carter, Ghost writer/ And for the right price, I can even make yo sh*t tighter/" This track revealed what few people knew at the time and many still don't know: Jay-Z is a prolific ghost writer. From hip hop to pop, he has penned a lot of songs for others, many of which have become hits. From Dr. Dre to Foxy Brown, he gets paid a lot of money for his work. He also has some low-key production credits on a few albums. Check out the liner notes for some of the popular rap and R&B albums in the last decade and a half. You might be surprised how many times the name "Shawn Carter" or "S. Carter" appears in the song credits.

Jay-Z has a famous quote in "Diamonds Are Forever (Remix);" "Difficult takes a day, impossible takes a week." That statement is precisely what makes him great. He is a high-school dropout, but he is intelligent and driven in ways that cannot be quantified. All of his success comes from his ability to accomplish goals with smarts, effort, and persistence, even against the odds. What he says is true. You can't knock the hustle.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-aaron-ellis

MUSIC

Is it possible at this stage of human culture to create a new genre of music?

Josh Siegle, PhD student at MIT

At the risk of sounding incredibly foolish one day, I'm gonna go with "no" on this one.

Others have answered with a resounding "YES." Some

have based their responses on historical precedent: there are genres today that didn't exist in the past, so there will be genres in the future that don't exist today. Others have offered specific examples —folktronica, dubstep, garage — that evolved out of previous genres, but now seem to stand by themselves. Some have even suggested that asking the question in the first place betrays a lack of faith in humanity.

I would like to argue for the opposite position: **all the genres of music that will ever be created already exist in some form.** All future music will be classifiable as a subclass or a hybrid of present-day genres.

Clearly this perspective will be controversial, so let me start out with some disclaimers. First of all, the answer to this question hinges on how we define the word "genre." If it's nothing more than a label applied to a group of musicians with similar styles or goals, then obviously there will be uncountably many more genres in the future. People love to categorize and classify music, and everyone wants to be the first to lay claim to the "next big thing" by naming a genre of their own. But if we define "genre" as a collection of music that contains ideas, attitudes, or sounds that stand apart from anything produced previously, the question at hand is no longer inane, but profound.

Secondly, although I believe it's right, I sincerely hope that my response is wrong. I hope that the boundaries of music will continue to expand, and that we will see as many new, wholly unique genres in the next century as we have in the last. However, I think there are logical reasons to believe that this won't happen.

There have been two developments in recent music history that justify the claim that no new genres are forthcoming. Taken together, these two mutually exclusive occurrences signal that we have, in a way, reached the end of music history:

1. THE RISE OF CONCEPTUAL MUSIC

By conceptual music, I mean music that places greater weight on ideas than on pleasing rhythms, harmonies, or melodies. Examples of this include the work of Arnold Schoenberg, John Cage, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and styles such as free jazz, noise rock, and musique concrète. The reason this

development is crucial is that it extended the boundaries of music as far as they can possibly go — up to the border of meaningless sound. After conceptual music gained traction, literally anything could be called music, including a performer going onstage and playing nothing at all, as in Cage's infamous "4'33"." There was no longer an aesthetic difference between music and pure sound; rather, music could only be distinguished by a difference in intention.

This echoes the ideas that philosopher Arthur Danto had about visual art: after Andy Warhol produced art objects that were indistinguishable from their everyday counterparts, any purely formal distinction between art and non-art was impossible. I think the same is true of music; once *any* sound can be classified as art, there are no more sonic boundaries to be broken. Indeed, it seems that every end of the aural spectrum has already been reached. From silence to grating noise, mindless drone to pure randomness, street sounds to re-recorded music, every extreme of musical possibility has been covered. What's more, contemporary music now reaches every corner of the *attitude* spectrum. Music can be reverent or impudent, rational or illogical, transcendental or mundane. It's true that these ideas have existed in music throughout history, but they haven't been taken to their logical extremes like they have in the past century. If the boundaries of music have been expanded as far as they can go, the question, then, is can we find something new somewhere in the middle?

2. THE ABILITY TO DIGITALLY SYNTHESIZE SOUNDS

The birth of new genres often coincides with the discovery of new sonic possibilities. The most iconic example is the invention of the electric guitar leading to rock'n'roll. An even more radical departure occurred in the 1970s when the ability to synthesize tones out of pure electricity was democratized. This enabled the proliferation of electronic music, which sounded radically different than anything that came before it. But analog synthesis was limited in many ways; the real endpoint of sonic possibility came with the invention and subsequent perfection of digital sound synthesis.

People typically think of computer-generated music as cold and calculated, but the fact of the matter is that most of the

backing tracks for today's popular music are created entirely with computers. Digital music workstations dominate the industry because they are affordable, versatile, and, in most cases, indistinguishable from analog ones. Purists will always claim that analog still sounds better, which is undeniable in certain instances, but today's best algorithms for modeling pianos, organs, and even guitars inside a computer are just about perfect. Of course, we could make perfect piano sounds before the rise of computers. The real advantage of computers is that they can produce sounds that were *impossible to make before*. You can simulate the actions of any instrument while tweaking parameters in fanciful ways. You can run any waveform through any filter, turn it into a loop, stretch it, slice it, and pump it through a vintage amplifier, all in the same piece of software. For the first time in history, it's possible to create any sound imaginable, which means pretty much any sound.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

If music has used up all its big ideas, and no new sounds will be created that can't be created today, what do we have in store? Just new permutations of sounds and ideas. Thankfully, this leaves us with practically limitless musical possibilities. But I don't think there will be new genres that stand entirely apart from those that currently exist. One can quibble about where to draw today's musical boundaries, but the ubiquity of conceptual music and digital synthesis guarantee that any music of the future will live within or across the same boundaries.

Like I said before, I hope I'm wrong about this. But I can't imagine any radically new ideas or sounds coming into the music world, given the arguments outlined above.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-josh-siegle

Why don't cell phones work at music festivals?

Mark Rogowsky, Entrepreneur, raconteur, @maxrogo

Here's the problem with lots of people using cell phones in a crowded space: there's actually remarkably little spectrum available for mobile-phone use, only a few hundred MHz total in any one part of the world, and that's usually parceled out among a few carriers and not typically shared unless your carrier's spectrum is literally out of range, as opposed to merely overcrowded.

IT'S HARD TO PROVIDE COVERAGE AT ALL

The reason why cell phones work at all in a place like New York or Chicago — or the much harder challenges of say Beijing or Mexico City — is that the spectrum is re-used over and over and over by having multiple cell sites use the same frequencies. Now, there are limitations to this. You can't simply place two sites next to each other and re-use the frequencies. In fact, typically, if you *did* place two radios adjacent to one another, you might do something like put channels A, C, and E on one and B, D, and F on the other one. Offset them by a few degrees and then do the same thing in the opposite direction. What this would do is allow you to re-use channel A fairly cleverly, especially with *sector antennas* which broadcast the channel in a pie-piece shaped pattern as opposed to out in all directions. Basically, sector antennas are essential to channel/frequency re-use.

Now, at Coachella or the equivalent, a company like AT&T might literally bring in some extra micro-cell sites to try to get some frequency re-use, but the idea there's are going to bring perfect re-use is silly. The big sites atop buildings or mountains go through sophisticated engineering studies to ensure the maximal re-use without overlapping the channel areas [1]. The little sites they drop in at Coachella, well, they

are dropped in by smart techs who attempt to figure out where they'll do the most good using spectrum analyzers, judgment of the physical obstacles and guesses at where people will be congregating — the more people in one place, the more challenging to offer them reliable service.

NETWORKS ARE INEFFICIENT TODAY BY NATURE

So we mentioned that networks use a carrier's own spectrum and can't use another carrier's (with some rare exceptions). But it gets worse. AT&T has a fair amount of spectrum and let's say all the spectrum at 850MHz is overloaded with voice calls and they want to just offload some to their excellent 700MHz spectrum (lower frequencies travel farther, penetrate walls better, etc.). Oops. No go. That spectrum is locked into the 4G LTE network and can't be repurposed on the fly. And, really, your phone has no radio that allows for a current-generation voice call to be placed on it anyway.

There is some clear spectrum at 1900 MHz, maybe, that your call could complete on, but that spectrum is higher frequency, and it isn't getting through the metal cage that is forming the structure you're in. Alas. Your call has dropped.

Now, someday, this will change. First of all, voice will migrate to something called Voice Over LTE. That will mean that all calls will be data, like VOIP calls today (e.g. Skype, Vonage, etc.). They will be frequency agile wherever the 4G network is on whatever bands. However, that nirvana is years away because today's AT&T (or Verizon or T-Mobile or really anyway) is a hodgepodge of chunks of bandwidth locked into specific purposes. Some of those purposes are somewhat agile. For example, AT&T's original 3G W-CDMA/UMTS can share spectrum with its HSPDA 3G+/quasi 4G network. But those can't share spectrum with the true 4G network, which can't share spectrum with the voice network, etc. etc. [2]

Furthermore, we are entering a period where Qualcomm (and eventually others) are just shipping second-generation LTE silicon for handsets. That silicon is still not capable of supporting the dozen or so frequency bands that use LTE in the world. But a generation or two more, and it likely will be. A fully frequency agile solution [3] has implications not just for individual carriers, but for roaming and for what the FCC

hopes is a very different future in the U.S.

"IT'S MY SPECTRUM, BUT . . . "

A lot of spectrum in the U.S. belongs to branches of the government — most notably DoD — and other entities that don't use said spectrum very often. Wouldn't it be nice if they could loan it out to others who could use it and then grab it back in real time when they needed it? Well, the FCC sure thinks so. The agency envisions that smart folks can develop *cognitive radios* that will be able to ask if the spectrum is free, use it when it is, and leave it behind when the licensee needs it. This might well happen over the next decade.

Similarly, this technology should allow devices like cell phones to also query unlicensed bands like WiFi's 802.11 a and b/g bands to see if they can be used — all in real time [4].

OH, AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR QUESTION?

- *SMS, aka your text messages:* They are tiny amounts of data, but the network by default also gives them the lowest possible priority. They are likely to get through, but if a network is truly slammed, they might fall below real-time delivery. It's worth noting that as texting has become so ubiquitous it seems carriers have done a bit of work to avoid the delays of old and keep texting useful even under load. Why? Because when calls aren't going through this keeps customers happy. But I add this last thought anecdotally; I'm not sure if they are actually increasing traffic prioritization.

- *Voice calls:* Most networks try to avoid even completing these if the call won't work. "I tried you and it went straight to voice mail." That happens sometimes because the network doesn't believe you — the recipient — will be able to hear or talk to the other person. "Believe" here is not some AI, but rather, the network doesn't find you with sufficient signal strength or it doesn't have the bandwidth on voice channels to make the call work.

- *Data:* On Verizon, in my experience, data never goes down. But it can get really, really, really slow. In fact, it can kick me from the 3G network to the old 1X network

which — even when clear — is slow enough to be unusable for a lot of activities. I'm not sure how it works on AT&T, but I'd bet it's similar. The thing about data is that cellular data really closely resembles the way the internet itself works: Everything is packetized and your "connection" is constantly opening and closing. For this reason — and unlike a voice call — it's hard to be completely shut out from joining the network, but it's quite possible for the network to become really overcrowded.

[1] There's a gigantic caveat here which is that technically, your calls and data usage are always in overlapping coverage zones. Why? Because you might be in a moving vehicle or the area you are in might suddenly become overloaded. This handoff from one cell tower to another is part of the magic that separates cell service when its precursor, radiotelephone service, which led to some really bad AT&T/ McKinsey decision-making at the time of the 1983 AT&T divestiture... But I digress...

[2] To be honest, this is probably worse than I can imagine. But at least it's better than when half the spectrum was tied up in spectrally inefficient analog, which is mostly (entirely?) gone in the U.S. The move away from analog is proof the networks can get better... And they will keep getting better.

[1] Hard defined here, not software-defined radio, which would be even better, but might be one of those technologies that is always "five years away."

[2] Your smartphone already kind of does this for data use if it finds a friendly WiFi network. In the future, so-called "WiFi on Steroids" in the old UHF TV bands might greatly expand the available of wide-area WiFi networks, however, and this technology becomes exponentially more interesting to carriers as a complement to their networks.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-mark-rogowsky

How do you know when to switch positions on the violin?

Jess Lin, violinist in the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra

There is no single correct place to shift, but when deciding on whether to shift — and more generally, when deciding on fingerings — you should think about the following things (some of which are interrelated):

DO YOU WANT TO SHIFT?

- **Sound quality:** Do you want a brighter sound or a thicker, richer sound? You get the richness in higher positions. One common example of when you'd consider sound quality is in deciding whether to use an open string or to use the fingered equivalent on a lower string. (While you may not have to shift to reach this note — it's a fourth finger, first position — this comparison gives you the idea. Play it for yourself.) When considering sound quality, you also want to think about consistency. If you're playing a phrase in which all the notes are on one string except for the last one, that last note will stand out. This is especially true on higher-pitched strings.

- **String crossings:** Sometimes, shifting will prevent you from making string crossings. This could be nice if there are, say, a line of fast (and especially repetitive) running notes that could be played easily on one string if you just move up a position or two. But sometimes, we *want* repetitive string crossings for an effect (e.g. think waves, water) — this comes up more often in music for ensembles (orchestral, chamber music).

- **Necessity:** For notes higher than first position on the E string, you have no other option. Also, sometimes composers specify that a passage should be played on a particular string, which may force you to shift.

- **Distance between the notes of a shift:** Typically, you may have better accuracy if you shift between notes that are closer together (e.g. half steps rather than whole steps). This is a heuristic and not a hard and fast rule, though, and I violate this heuristic all the time. Sometimes there's an alternative that just feels more natural in my hand.

- **Location in the music:** Generally, it's easier to hide a shift in between phrases or slurs, rather than in the middle of one.

- **Making your life easier:** Related to the above. Sometimes shifting in one place makes playing the passage that follows it easier.

- **Slides:** Sometimes, for musical reasons, you don't want to hide the shift, and want to emphasize the transition between two notes with a little *schmeer* (just made that word up, btw). This consideration also affects whether or not to do the shift in the first place.

GENERAL CONCERNS

- **Comfort/physical limitation:** Different shifts and fingerings just feel better for different people, either due to things you've practiced, the size of your hand, etc. Pick whatever feels best for you. Sometimes you can shift to use a stronger finger instead of the weaker pinky.

- **Your skill level:** All of this advice is nice in theory, but it's a different story in practice (ha). For instance, you do in theory get a nice thick sound in a higher position, but it's also much harder to produce a good tone quality in a higher position. It takes years of practice to get a feel for it. If you're not there yet and want to perform a piece, you may opt for not shifting up (though you should practice the shift up anyway to improve your skills).

- Professionals play the first nineteen bars of the second movement of the Brahms Violin Sonata No. 3 entirely on the G string, even though in first position the notes would range over the G, D, and A strings. You want that chocolatey richness of the G string, you want consistency of the sound quality, and you want to stay on the same string to make it easier to smooth out the phrase.

- The first two notes of the second movement of the Strauss Violin Sonata (an *E-flat* and then a *C*) could be played in first position on the D and A strings, but everyone shifts up on the D string for that *C*. You can hear that desirable little *schmeer* as Sarah Chang makes that E-flat just *reach up for* that C.

Also, I was just looking at the second violin part for Dvorak's "American" String Quartet [1], and just the first few measures are perfect for illustrating some of the points above.

- Let's look at the third measure. You certainly do not want to play that with an open A string in first position — the A would be too bright **[sound quality]**, and there would be an awful lot of **string crossings**, which are too bumpy for the desired texture here. So, you could play this in first position with your fourth and second fingers (i.e. pinky and middle finger). But many people prefer to swap out the weaker fourth for the stronger third **[comfort/physical limitation]**. So, I suspect most people play that passage in second position. But then, you have to get there... Given what comes before, this means you want to be on the D string already. So you would shift right at the start of the first measure, in order to have a natural shift down to second position. (Actually, you wouldn't want to play the first measure in first position anyway, to avoid the open A string **[sound quality]**.) Notice that this part has a "2" at the start — so, this person has chosen to use the second finger and "weaker" fourth finger — but this only lasts for two measures, so it's not too bad. The notes starting at the third measure go on for eight measures, though, so that's why you might chose to do a "3-1" instead.

- Okay, one more example. Look at the fourth line, third measure. You know you have to shift up to third position *somewhere* because of that high D **[necessity]**, but you risk schmeering the shift if you do it in the middle of those slurred sixteenth notes (and a schmeer is a bad thing, here, because you want clarity) **[location in the music]**. So, shift before. Note that there's a "1" written on that first D, so you're already in third position at the start of that measure. The musician who put in fingerings for this part actually decides to go up to third position in the first measure of the fourth line — see that "2" — and that's a nice way to do it.

[1] http://conquest.imslp.infofiles/imglnks/usimg/e/e4/IMSLP31430-PMLP28526-quatuor_americain_op_96_N6__VIOLON_II_.pdf

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-jess-lin

Why is U2 so popular?

Daniel Rosenthal, Concerts Attended: Wembley '97, Oakland '11

Answer summary:

- Big market
- Product market fit
- Usability

BIG MARKET

Imagine you're a middle-aged, upper-middle-class male. You live in a large metropolitan area. You have a good job. Your wife does Pilates. Your oldest just started kindergarten. Yes, you're an adult, but you're still cool! Your jeans cost one hundred and twenty five dollars. Sometimes, you wear sneakers

with a blazer!

You like the idea of being a guy who's into live music, but the last few concerts you've been to were (a) too loud, (b) too crowded, (c) too foreign (you were lucky if you recognized one song). You'll snap a few photos with your smartphone and tell your bros about it to get some street cred, but let's face it: you didn't enjoy yourself. There are millions of you. And you're willing to drop cash to have a concert make you feel cool again.

PRODUCT MARKET FIT

Then you learn that U2 is coming to town — U2! Earnest, melodic, Oprah-endorsed U2! $200 a ticket? No problem. You get a sitter. Your wife is excited — this is going to be great! You invite some friends from college to join you.

On the way, you listen to the "early stuff." *The Joshua Tree* pumps through the speakers of your Lexus SUV (no judgment — you have two kids!). The harmonies soothe. The lyrics are straightforward. You recall a simpler time before car seats and prostate exams. The nostalgia is so thick you have to wipe it from your face. You haven't looked at your phone in nearly eleven minutes.

You arrive at the show and see yourself everywhere. Tasteful North Face and Patagonia jackets abound. The stands are awash in earth tones. No one is shoving. No one has a nose ring. These are your people.

USABILITY

The band begins with A SONG YOU RECOGNIZE! You're on your feet. You're drinking "craft" beer. Everyone is singing terribly.

And the best part — YOU CAN DANCE HERE! Eighty thousand people surround you and there's not a coordinated movement in sight. Even the band sets a low bar. Bono doesn't so much dance as lunge and bounce. The other guys seem content to nod and rock. All around you, middle-aged people are rocking and lunging and bouncing and singing badly. Is that guy wearing Tod's loafers and a Barbour jacket? Yes, he is. And he's in the zone.

The set is basically a greatest hits playlist. The band gra-

ciously performs two new songs that no one recognizes to give you a few minutes to use the john and grab another IPA. They might as well flash an intermission sign.

Even the political statements go down smooth: "Democracy!" "Fight AIDS!" How could you possibly disagree? You're not only dancing and reminiscing — you're spreading freedom and reasonably-priced medicines to distant lands!

And the kicker: not one, but TWO encores, the ones you know best — the ones you first heard that summer you painted houses or kissed Katie at the beach party. You're closing your eyes now. This is sad and sweet. You put your arm around your wife. You're wondering if Katie ever got married. A third of the crowd departs after the first encore. It's no big deal; some of us have work in the morning! Anyway, the traffic will be better if everyone doesn't leave at once.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-daniel-rosenthal

PROFESSIONS & CAREERS

SNIPERS

What is it like to be a sniper?

Michael Janke, Author, Navy SEAL Sniper, CEO, Privacy Advocate, Philospher

Not an easy question to answer — almost uncomfortable for me. I am not quite sure how to address such a personal question... I recognize the fascination that the public has with this strange profession & skill — both morbid and sensationalized at the same time. So here goes.

As a 12-year SEAL and Sniper, I spent the better part of my adult life learning, using, refining, and living this skill, yet I find it difficult to put into words "what it is like to be a sniper". In the Teams, older snipers and team leaders look for more "solitary and quiet" individuals that have focus and a "quiet" about them. Some individuals have a "comfortable knack" and a natural feel for navigating any environment unseen — the training takes this "knack" to a whole new level. An additional skill that is sought-out, honed, and refined is something we call "Bubble Compartmentalization" — or the ability to block everything else out for long periods of time, except specific visual and observation skills — basically the ability to sit still, observe, and calculate without losing your mind.

There is nothing glorious or sexy about the job. It is very hard on your body — and it's not something you would want

to chat about at a cocktail party. In my experience, people already have a formed opinion of what type of person you must be, what morals you have, and that you must be a little "off," long before you even meet them. You spend days crawling, climbing, slinking, stinking, getting bitten by every bug, scratched by every thicket, attempting to relieve yourself while laying on your side, looking through night vision or scopes for endless hours, sleeping in fifteen minute bursts, just to get to a "target area." Once on the target area, you do the business of a sniper, usually in support of a SEAL assault team that comes in fast and hard in helicopters, then fastrope down onto the target, take it down, then board and fly away. Now your work begins again, exfiltration, the art of getting out of the target area (sometimes with some very angry enemies running around trying to figure out what happened).

There are so many different skill sets that need to be constantly refined as Sniper tactics, equipment, weather, enemy and ballistic trajectories change dramatically in an Urban-Sniper role. It is one thing to be able to hide in a jungle with vast areas of cover and concealment, it is an entirely other thing to be an effective sniper in a City or Urban Warfare environment. The difficulty factor goes way up. The amount of practice, study, and hours spent mastering every type of environment (shooting from buildings, helicopters, ships, shooting thru glass, walls, different mathematical calculations for temperature, humidity, altitude, load, etc... it is a non-stop learning game in addition to your other SEAL missions.

When I tell people that there are many complementary skill sets as a Sniper and a CEO of a company, they think I am absolutely crazy, but there are many. A good CEO is there to "support" his team and help make them look good. Not the other way around. To defer attention... and not be a jackass. The ability to focus on getting from A to B without being distracted, the ability to operate and maintain a company's focus through constant changes, and adapting rather than causing panic. The ability to not have an ego in the game at hand and not make the mission, goal, or success "about me," but rather about everyone else. To use your power only when the moment is required, not flaunting it for all to see.

I apologize if this long-winded answer in the end does not

give you the "meat and potatoes" of how it feels to be a sniper, but I find it extremely hard to clearly articulate something so personal and yet job-oriented. There are many good books out there that do a hell of a job telling specific stories and giving blow-by-blow accounts of combat sniping missions. I was trained on the 50-caliber McMillian and Barrett Sniper Rifle by Carlos Hathcock. He was a guest instructor to my sniper class, he was a good man and a great teacher. His book is a good book to start.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-michael-janke

What have you learned as a police officer about life and society that most people don't know or underestimate?

Tim Dees, Retired cop and criminal justice professor, now writing on applications of technology in law enforcement and corrections.

- One of the things my upbringing did not prepare me for was the complete lack of civility that some people have. I didn't think of myself as having been sheltered from evil as a child, but I did not learn that some people have absolutely no regard for the welfare of anyone but themselves, and they lash out at anyone who tries to make them aware they are not the only people on the planet.

- Everyone has a "hot button." Calm and even-tempered as you might be, there is some topic that will set you off, especially if it's referenced to you personally. It might be your height, your weight, your sexuality, your education, how much money you have, your mom, whatever. Rational people can become maniacs if someone pushes their buttons.

- Although they may not know it, there are people who find these hot buttons instinctively, and they live to push them.

- Never underestimate what people will do for sex, money, and/or power. That applies to everyone, from the basest criminal to the most saint-like person you know.

- People can be sexually aroused by almost anything.

- There are practices people engage in for sexual reasons that you will find baffling and utterly disgusting. You can gain some limited insight here by going to a reasonably-well-stocked adult bookstore and examining the diversity of the materials. If your thing is watching overweight Asian women give each other enemas, there are not just other people who enjoy the same thing, there is probably a regular magazine and series of videos devoted to it.

- No matter how bizarre you find other folks' sexual preferences, you have to be at peace with knowing that what consenting adults do in private is their business alone. If they decide to take it public or engage people who either don't consent or are too young to do so, you can get involved.

- Law enforcement is a very stressful occupation, but most of the stress comes from the political interactions and power games within each law enforcement agency. The stuff on the street can be stressful, but you learn to deal with that quickly or you get out. About half of the people who become law enforcement officers leave before they have five years on the job. Some get fired for unsuitability, incompetence, or misconduct, but others find out it's just not for them.

- High-speed chases look like fun because they are.

- Once you become a cop, very few of your non-cop friends will ever again treat you the same way. You will be introduced by your profession for the rest of your life. People are never going to be comfortable with the group charged with detecting and making them accountable for their bad conduct.

- Many criminals can be reformed, and eventually do come to the point in their lives that a criminal lifestyle is more trouble than it's worth to them. Unfortunately, by the time some of them do that, they have incurred a prison sentence that will keep them behind bars until they die.

- Criminals who do not fit into the above category are mostly predators and should be locked up permanently.

- Never say, "Now I've seen it all." There will always be innovators.

- Take away alcohol and stupid, and the world would require about 90% fewer cops.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-tim-dees

What's the best way to escape the police in a high-speed car chase?

Justin Freeman, Former Patrol Officer

Simple: **Elude law enforcement in a jurisdiction with a strict pursuit policy.** In my department, unless a suspect vehicle was an obvious DWI (swerving white line to white line, erratic speed changes) or had committed a violent felony, vehicle pursuits got cancelled by a commander almost instantly. There is so much liability at play in a pursuit situation that many departments are getting very conservative in their response protocols to situations like this.

As far as maneuvering tactics when they're actually pursuing you, there's really no sense diving in — you've got too many things going against you:

- *Communication.* Every involved officer, as well as their supervisors and their supervisors' supervisors, have radios, both in-car and portable on their person. Can you dial your cell phone and drive with one hand at 120 mph while

you coordinate with accomplices miles down the road? Probably not.

- *Collaboration.* If a pursuit has been sanctioned, the longer it goes on, the more officers are going to be in on the hunt. And if you stray toward the boundary of a jurisdiction (city limit, county border, and so on), you're going to get mutual aid response from other agencies, who may be even less restricted than your original pursuers. Have fun with that.

- *Convergence.* You can go in one direction at a time, but law enforcement response to your location will be omnidirectional. You're going to have LEOs swarming your vehicle from 360 degrees and, if a helicopter gets tossed in the mix, three dimensions. You simply cannot go fast enough to counter this. Even if you were trying to elude the North Dakota Highway Patrol on I-94 in an Italian supercar, you've still got a lot of variables to buck regarding interagency cooperation.

- *Contraptions.* Hope you've got solid rubber tires, because if the agency gets a lock on your direction of flight, you're getting spiked — and if you hit spikes, you're hosed. You'll drive for a while, because spike strips are designed to puncture tires so they slowly deflate as opposed to blowing out. But once they're flat, driving on them will make them disintegrate; then you're driving on rims. Now you're limited to fifteen to twenty miles per hour, and you're in danger of your vehicle catching fire from the spraying sparks. Meanwhile, the agency is moving the K-9 unit to point position so when you shoulder your smoldering jalopy and make a run for it, Cujo's got less ground to cover before he eats your forearm. Did you think to wear chain mail?

- *Concentration.* How often do you drive in this manner? Unless you're running because you're on parole, this is likely your first dance. Sure, you've driven fast before — for a while. Then, for whatever reason, you got uncomfortable and backed off. Maybe your car made a sound you got concerned about, maybe you caught a glint you thought might be a trooper's windshield, maybe you thought you

heard the faintest pulses of a siren. Whatever it was, it weakened your resolve, and you slowed down. You have no such luxury here. And while this is fresh for you, this is, to many of the people pursuing you, another day another dollar. They've trained for this in training scenarios and have been involved in pursuits in the field. They run code multiple times a week. Even if one of your pursuers was a rookie who got eaten up by the stress, there will be a dozen vets to take his place.

- *Cognizance.* Unless you've lived around and driven on your path of flight for decades, I can almost guarantee you do not know it as well as your pursuers. I drove a hundred miles a night, four nights a week, on the same few dozen streets in my beat. I knew every pothole and curbstone, every back alley and shortcut. Plus, supplementing my knowledge was dispatch, who had a real time, God's eye view of the situation, and who could foreshadow upcoming turns based on officers' GPS and current road conditions.

- *Conveyances.* Your chosen city of flight may have the rattiest squad cars in the country, but they have the distinct benefit of redundancy. Your escape vehicle is precious, because there is only one. Nuke a tire from hitting spikes or a pothole, and you're roasted. If a patrol car has a blowout, that unit will fall out and be replaced by another. If you think your car can outrun and outlast what will effectively be an infinite number of responding unit vehicles (when you account for interagency involvement), have at it; otherwise, you may need to rethink your day.

- *Control.* What is your flight plan — are you going to rely on top end speed on the open highway? Or are you going to try to lose responding officers in an intricate series of turns? You've got a tall order ahead either way.

- First, if you've got something in your hands that can outperform Crown Victoria and Charger interceptors on the interstate, you're going to be relatively easy to spot — you won't be doing this in a stock Toyota. Second, you've got Little Brother to worry about — if you wax someone's

doors at double the speed limit, they're probably going to call the police. Instant update to last known location and direction of travel, which allows retriangulation if you managed to create space. You probably haven't, though, because even with vehicles *capable* of impressive top end speed, there comes a point where the vehicle is so functionally light you can no longer safely operate it in real world driving conditions. My top speed running code in a Crown Vic was 134 mph, which was frankly stupid — the suspension was floating so badly that driving over a heads-up penny probably would have sent me into a terminal fishtail. This all means that while you may maintain some semblance of distance between yourself and the point car, you're very unlikely to be completely leaving them in your sonic wake.

- Alternately, if you're banking on turns (you got me, pun intended), you're going to have to keep your head about you. Stress has a tendency to get the better of your attempts at rational thought. *Was that three lefts or four? This looks familiar, I'd better go the other way … was that a school crossing sign or a dead end sign? Is Main Street continuous this far south? Which side of the tracks am I on? Ah, now we're cooking with — what? Since when is there a cul-de-sac here?* Game over — whether that consists of walking backward at gunpoint or feeling Cujo getting his *nom nom nom* on.

As you may have gathered, I am of the opinion that there is no right answer to this question. Vehicle pursuits never end well — I've never seen an authorized pursuit go down and then heard a commander say, "Gee, that was tidy." If the pursuit is terminated by a supervisor, it's bad because the suspect got away. If it gets authorized, it's not going to have a pretty ending, most likely. The vast majority of the time, the suspect ends up needing medical attention by the time it's over. It might be for something minor, like flushing pepper spray out of your eyes, pulling TASER barbs out of your flesh, or treating a dog bite. It might be something major, like pronouncing you and your two passengers dead after your car hits an oak tree at 107 mph (seen it — decidedly unpretty). Take all the

liberties you want with your own life and death — but running from the police puts scores of people in harm's way, even for a short pursuit.

No matter the charge or the perceived consequences, *never run from the police.*

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-justin-freeman

POKER

What is it like to earn a living through poker?

Michael Shinzaki, Professional Poker Player

I have played poker on the professional level for the past seven years as my only source of income. In that time, I have ridden extravagant highs and abysmal lows, financially, emotionally. I have gotten to live through a vast range of unique life experiences, fun times, odd situations. Playing poker for a living is a roller coaster for sure. There is no set wage. The level of difficulty of the game itself can run the gamut from seemingly impossible to Midas touch. You can make a year's worth of rent in a few hours, or you can go months of full-time play and break even, or even lose.

When I began, I never expected to make a livelihood out of it. For me, it was a challenging game with an intriguing strategy behind it, and I enjoyed the competitiveness and the creativity required to play well, just like Scrabble or chess or a reasonably fun video game. Back then, that's all it was: just simply a game. Eventually, after losing small sums here and there, I eventually started making a concerted effort to learn from my mistakes (going to Borders and reading poker strategy books, watching poker on ESPN, looking at hands I played and really trying to figure out how/why/where I was fucking up). After several $100 deposits into online poker with my debit card, and many sleepless nights just encapsulated with the game and playing for hours on end, I found myself suddenly doing well. It felt like when you string together a few

sessions at the driving range and your swing starts shaping back up. Of course, this was after countless days failing miserably on the virtual felt, with no clue what I was doing wrong or how I should be playing differently.

Eventually I started winning, and so with the boost in confidence and a curiosity in how far I could progress, I dedicated more hours and energy to improving and moving up in stakes. When I was nineteen, I approached a six-figure annual salary playing less than full-time hours per week. At that point I was juggling university life with what was transforming into a full-fledged career. When my higher education was complete, I had to decide between taking an entry-level job, at a severe pay cut, or continue forth with the poker venture. I decided that the opportunity was too unique and invigorating to pass up and that I wanted to ride it out as long as I felt competitive and enjoyed the game. It was really fascinating, and a $40k/year job in a cubicle didn't seem very appealing when I was making several hundred dollars an hour playing online poker in my pajamas from home in between rounds of golf, episodes of Entourage on Netflix, and happy hours with pals. For the most part, I focused on cash games, as they are a more consistent influx of winnings than are tournaments, which are volatile in results and are laden with variance. I focused on cash games for many years, playing when I felt like it, and not playing when I didn't feel like it.

This was one of the most amazing benefits of playing poker professionally, no set hours. Some days I would wake up and want to play all day, and so I did. Other times, I would go a week without wanting to get dealt even one hand. Similarly, I could play for a few hours, go to the gym or grab a bite or hang out with some friends, then play again with later down time. Also, when on a downswing, I could take a few days off and purposely not think about poker at all, so that I could come back refreshed and play a better game upon my return. And of course, I could craft my personal schedule however I deemed necessary.

I personally began using this flexibility to start traveling, since I could play online poker from anywhere with internet. I started following live poker tournament stops throughout the world, places such as Auckland, Melbourne, Las Vegas, Van-

couver, and many other cities. As my income rose, so too did my expenditures across the board. I updated my wardrobe. I traveled to more places (three dozen countries in three years). I bought a car and paid it off. I treated my friends well and ate at nice places. Sometimes, poker winnings didn't always feel 'earned' (even though I was cognizant of the work I had put in to become a world-class player and knew the earnings to be in fact earned) and so spending was easier because it didn't feel like parting away with hard-earned money at times.

Most poker players are quick to accentuate or focus on their wins but rarely talk about their losses. Even when I was at the peak of my career, playing my absolute best, putting the most time and focus into it, playing the highest stakes, I still had many horrendous downswings. I had countless break-even months. I would win $40k in a week and then drop it the next week. My worst session was six hours and I dropped $25k. I remember it to this day. I went to grab sushi with a friend that night and she lamented that the bill was $40. I abstained from describing the poker doom session I had endured earlier that afternoon.

Times like those can be very testing. Most people can only relate to what it feels like to lose ten bucks on a hand of blackjack. But it's not just the money factor, although it is a big one. It's just simply the constant scrutiny and constant setbacks. Most people's jobs don't involve constant failure where you just get kicked to the curb over and over, but if you are to accept the long-run nature of poker statistics, you are going to lose all the time if you play a lot. And all I can say is there is no other feeling than to play poker as your job and lose an exorbitant sum here and there or suffer prolonged downswings. You feel like a piece of shit. You question your skills and merit. You start to question everything. It is very disheartening and discouraging and you start to think about all the things you could have bought for yourself or others with the money you just lost playing a game of cards. Mostly, you actually occasionally envy the people who can just clock in and clock out of work and take on no responsibility and suffer no duress and receive the same paycheck each week.

Of course, that is the inherent trap, because this is absolutely the wrong way to approach the game mentally. And

so people who cannot harness their emotions usually end up having a tough time coping with the downs in poker and ultimately do fail. Poker as a profession is not for people who need constant reassurance or encouragement. You really have to be brutally honest with your performance and nobody is there to help you but yourself. You have to be very hard on yourself, and you have to grow calloused to the constant cutthroat nature you voluntarily step into. Someone mentioned an estimate that 80% lose in the long run in poker, but I think, and have heard, a more accurate statistical guess that only 5% win at poker in the long-run, and out of those, only 5% of them can live off their winnings. Moral of the story is that very, very, very, VERY few people have shown the ability to beat poker over a large sample size. It takes exorbitant mental determination to persist through the trials and tribulations and taxing nature of poker.

At its best though, poker as a profession is unbeatable. There is no better profession in terms of the capacity to bolster your quality of living with the least sacrifice or downside. Literally unbeatable, aside from inheriting a fortune or something, and even then there is the argument that poker is better because you are feeling competitive and can focus on something. Many poker players are jaded and unhappy individuals, but many too are not. Using your life situation (of which income and time are variables, but not the entire equation) is a skill entirely separate from card playing. If you are good, though, there are endless seas of money just waiting to be had. You can make a LOT of money playing poker, but yet have the time and capability to do unique things with your life. You have to realize that most people in this world are condemned to pretty mundane lives. Countless millions of people will have to work retail, customer service, things like that for meager salaries for their entire lives with two weeks off a year, and even those individuals are luckier than a proverbial infinite amount of others. Poker is not a cake walk, and it's not a dream life devoid of any concerns, but it can catalyze at a reasonable frequency a life that most people can only dream of (me included when I began).

The flexibility is the best part. You can be wherever you want for the most part. You can make time for your friends

and family. You can sleep in. You can craft your schedule around your hobbies and outside interests. You can travel and take vacations whenever you want. These things are HUGE in the grand scheme of life and happiness and are things that most people in the workforce can only wonder about as some lofty conjured pipe dream that is unattainable. At its best, poker as a career didn't always feel like real life. It felt unfair, like some cosmic loophole that nobody else was seeing. I once made $109k in one day, when I was twenty-one years old. Some people never make half that in a year. And what did I do to deserve that? Just some study here and there in a pedestrian game of cards. My previous job before poker was at Baskin Robbins where I made $6.75+tips/hour. Suddenly, I found myself jetting all over the world for tournaments, meeting interesting people, staying at nice hotels, eating at nice places, wearing nice clothes, and more importantly being able to pursue my hobbies and interests on the side, such as blogging, acting school, and various sports.

The only downside to poker is a lack of fulfillment when it comes to feeling constructive and productive. Anybody who can battle the competitive arena of poker and come out ahead has to have some inherent creativity, creative energy, or just mental wherewithal in general and there has to be something or some way in this world for that to be channeled for something bigger and greater than being good at a game. This last reason/caveat is precisely the reason that my poker career is now over and I am looking on to the next chapter of life. But, when it lasted, and at its highs, poker taught me a ton of life skills, things I will keep with me forever. It forced me to grow up at a young age and be involved with stressful, marginal decisions involving a lot of money against opponents who would leave me for dead if it was their choice. I am more attuned to social cues and ebbs and flows due to poker. I am more analytical and methodical when making decisions due to poker. Poker as a job was stressful but it prepared me to move forth, and while it lasted, allowed me to fashion an extravagant and unique start to my adult life and have an exorbitant, unbelievable amount of fun.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-michael-shinzaki

Why does it seem most doctors are not compassionate?

Lou Davis, Ever such a long time in ED

One Sunday a few years ago, one of my colleagues Dan was dealing with trauma in our resuscitation room. It had been a terrible week, as the summer was coming to an end and the leaves on the trees were beginning to turn brown, we had already dealt with three fatalities from motorcycle accidents.

By some quirk of 'fate,' Dan (at that time probably twenty-seven years old) had dealt with all of these individuals. All of them under forty years of age. Dan was (is) a deeply compassionate man, caring and helpful. So, after he had tried to save these lives, and failed, he insisted on going to inform the families himself.

There was a woman with two young children, a younger brother of another. He sat quietly and told these families that he had been unsuccessful, that their loved one had died, suddenly, tragically. Each time he walked from the room, he looked less like Dan, he started to look 'haunted.'

Death is the ultimate 'insult' in many ways to those of us who choose to specialize in Emergency Medicine. Dan had been challenged, and in his eyes, he had failed.

Sunday awakened, crystal clear blue skies. The slight smell of wood smoke in the air. The last gasp of summer. And we knew that the week wasn't over when we heard the insistent bell of our 'red phone.' Another motorcyclist, taking advantage of the wonderful day.

Dan swung into action, confident, capable. When I say that he wouldn't have worked harder for one of his own family, I mean it. He was determined. The patient died, as he put it to the man's wife some minutes later 'despite our best efforts.'

He was to say it twice more that day. Two more families to add to the total that Dan had already dealt with during that bleak week. We sat together that evening, Dan weeping with sorrow, with frustration, at what he felt was his failure, his impotence.

There were many more occasions when Dan had to break bad news, had to tell people that they had something terribly wrong with them, or with their relative.

I have seen him change, he is still the 'Dan' I know and love, but he is different. He is different because he has to protect himself.

It isn't that he lacks compassion, not at all. He genuinely feels pain and sadness but he has built a 'shell' around himself because our job is hard. In many ways, it is the hardest job.

Dan became a Doctor because he cares about people, he wants to help, he wants to alleviate suffering but, when all is said and done, he is human — as I am, as all of our colleagues are. We may all 'appear' to lack compassion, we may seem 'hard,' 'uncaring,' 'unfeeling.' I can assure you, that in MOST cases that is not true. We have to learn how to cope with seeing and hearing things that, hopefully, most people would not be able to conceive.

I cry frequently, occasionally I will cry with families of patients, often I cry at home, at night, in the dark. I have seen suffering. I care, Dan cares but we have to do this so often that we develop a way which allows us to cope, to carry on.

This perhaps is not the answer that others will give, I would say 'walk a mile in our shoes,' we are not perfect, we have a long way to go but we do this job BECAUSE we care and we are only human.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-lou-davis

What is it like to be the commanding officer of an Aircraft Carrier?

Yank Rutherford, RADM U.S. Navy (ret)

Carriers are a unique representation of national strength. As they operate around the globe in response to the National

Command Authority, they are often the most visible manifestation of America's military power, technology, and the resolve and talent of our people. Worldwide, our friends and foes fully appreciate the impact a carrier's war-fighting capability has on the balance of power during conflict — from minor contingency operations to major theater-level combat. The multi-billion dollar carrier, its complement of multi-million dollar aircraft, and a crew of more than five thousand Sailors and Marines represent a large investment of our national treasure. Officers given the responsibility for that investment are carefully selected. There are many times in a twenty-four hour day when the captain's training, skill, and judgment are fundamental in safely and effectively conducting the carrier's mission and successfully reaching the nation's goals. In recognition for his singular role as the commanding officer, the crew refers to him simply as "the captain." There are several other O-6 grade officers on the ship, but there is no ambiguity when a crew member refers to "the captain." The respect between the captain and his crew is mutual. There are no finer examples of our young men and women than those who man our carriers. Very young Americans in a stressful and dangerous environment are entrusted with a level of authority and accountability that is unique in our society, and their performance always exceeds expectations. If you want to renew your faith in our latest generation, visit a deployed carrier and observe the crew.

My experience with aircraft carriers goes back to 1976 on USS Franklin D. Roosevelt (CV 42), an old Midway-class carrier in service since the end of World War II. I was a Navy lieutenant junior grade, flying the F-4N Phantom on my first deployment to the Mediterranean Sea with the Fighter Squadron 111 "Sundowners." I later transitioned to the F-14 Tomcat with that squadron and made a second deployment on USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) to the Western Pacific and Indian oceans. I made seven more carrier deployments to the Mediterranean Sea, North Atlantic, and the Arabian Gulf. One of those deployments was with USS America (CV 66), supporting the 1986 Operation Eldorado Canyon strikes in Libya. I later served as the Executive Officer and Commanding Officer of Fighter Squadron 142, deploying in 1988 with

USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69). In 1991, I deployed with USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) as the Strike Group Air Operations Officer for Operation Desert Storm. While deployed, I was selected to attend the Navy Nuclear Power School and started what is referred to in the Navy as the "nuclear pipeline," which can ultimately lead to carrier command. From school, now a captain, I was assigned to CVN 71 as the Executive Officer. We deployed during my tour, but this time we went to the Adriatic and supported U.S. efforts in Bosnia/Kosovo. After "deep draft" command of a Fast Combat Stores ship, USS Seattle (AOE 3), I served as the Commanding Officer of USS George Washington (CVN 73) from 1997-2000. We deployed to the Arabian Gulf, supporting U.S. contingency efforts supporting weapons inspections in Iraq. My last job in the Navy was Commander, Carrier Strike Group Four, from 2002-2004. During that tour, my job was to train carrier battle groups as they prepared for deployment. After the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, my group trained every East Coast Carrier Strike Group that deployed through 2004 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

A convenient way to begin answering the posed question might be to start with some background information about aircraft carrier captains. They are senior naval aviators with about twenty five years of experience in naval aviation communities that operate fixed-wing or rotary-wing aircraft from carriers. The captain's background would include multiple deployments on carriers in a variety of leadership positions. Prior to selection for carrier command, captains must serve as the commanding officer of a carrier-based aircraft squadron, complete Navy Nuclear Power training, and serve as a carrier executive officer. Carrier captains must also command a "deep draft" naval vessel prior to being assigned to command a carrier.

Modern carriers have about five thousand personnel embarked when deployed in a "combat-ready" status. A flag officer is embarked on the carrier as the Strike Group Commander and is responsible for the overall operations of all the ships in the Strike Group. The carrier captain is responsible for providing the platform, aviation assets, and services

required to support missions assigned by the Strike Group Commander. He shares this responsibility with the Carrier Air Group (CAG) Commander, who is also a Navy captain with a similar aviation background. The relationship between these two senior aviators is complex and largely beyond the scope of the question asked, but basically, the CAG is responsible for leadership of the individual squadrons which make up the ship's air wing and for execution of the missions those aircraft perform once launched from the carrier. The ship's captain is responsible for the condition and safety of the ship and for providing most of the material, facilities, and services required to prepare the aircraft and pilots for those missions.

The aircraft carrier is frequently described as a small city, and the comparison may provide a common perspective for discussing the captain's responsibilities. Like the mayor in this analogy, the captain provides the leadership and organizational structure necessary to operate the "city." The Navy's modern, 95,000-ton displacement aircraft carrier includes about 75 aircraft, a 4.5-acre airfield, catapults and arresting gear to launch and recover aircraft, large magazines and storage facilities for ammunition, fuel and aircraft parts, as well as high-tech maintenance activities that provide all the services and supplies necessary to keep well-maintained aircraft ready for mission assignment. For the crew, the carrier provides galleys, berthing areas, laundry services, medical, surgical and dental facilities, and myriad activities necessary to ensure the health and well-being of the assigned personnel. Like a city, the ship has a fire and emergency response capability and its own security organization, including security forces, legal services, brig and a process by which the captain enforces good order and discipline. In addition to aircraft maintenance, the ship has several other maintenance organizations that keep the ship's propulsion systems, radars, and thousands of electronic systems operating. The ship generates and distributes its own power, provides and maintains sanitation, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, and makes several hundred thousand gallons of water every day from sea water. This description just summarizes the high-level capabilities of the ship. The next layer includes a variety of additional services and activities: radio and television studios,

machine shops, carpentry shops, automatic teller systems, recreation facilities, chapels, libraries, athletic facilities, and the list goes on.

The captain leads a cadre of senior naval officers in the operation of the ship. These very experienced officers, called department heads, lead the various departments providing products and services required to complete the ship's mission. Each of the department heads is an expert in one of the major ship departmental functions: Ship Operations, Intelligence, Propulsion, Engineering, Combat Systems, Weapons, Supply, Air Operations, Aircraft Maintenance, Safety, Training, Navigation, Religious Ministries, and Medical. If the Captain is the mayor, the ship's executive officer is the city manager. With a background similar to the captain's and heir apparent for his job, he provides the day-to-day leadership necessary to keep all the departments operating efficiently and effectively.

As a naval line officer, the commanding officer of a carrier is given broad responsibility for his ship. He is accountable for all aspects of his ship's performance, and that of the crew, and is given broad authority commensurate with those responsibilities. He is ultimately the final decision authority for his command. The concept of a ship's captain having such broad responsibilities and ultimate accountability goes back to the earliest days of command-at-sea where the ship and its crew were largely cut off from any higher authority for long periods of time, and the ship's captain was singularly charged with the safety and success of his command. Today's technology allows a modern carrier to be closely connected with higher authority, but the captain's responsibilities for his crew, the ship, and the mission have changed little.

Carriers never sleep, and therefore carrier captains seldom do either. Important activities go on throughout the day and night. Moving, assembling, and testing ordnance, purifying and storing fuel, organizing the flight deck, mission planning, safely navigating the ship, preparing food, training and performing maintenance on important ship and aircraft systems go on around the clock. During flight operations, the captain can normally be found on the bridge directly involved in the mechanics of positioning and preparing the ship for launch and recovery of aircraft, ensuring the safe navigation

of the ship, and overseeing flight deck operations. Before and after flight operations, he will likely be meeting with department heads, participating in daily briefings with the embarked flag officer and the CAG, and completing numerous administrative responsibilities generated by a command as large as the carrier. Flight operations normally consume twelve hours per day, and with these additional responsibilities, the captain's day is routinely eighteen to twenty hours long; however, numerous special evolutions typically consume even more of the captain's time. He is on the bridge for any special evolution that presents increased risk to the ship. Early morning underway replenishments alongside a fleet oiler, navigation of straits or other areas that restrict the carrier's ability to maneuver, and entering or leaving ports are all frequently occurring evolutions requiring the captain's presence on the bridge. Because of the "around the clock" nature of carrier operations, captains become masters at catching sleep whenever they can find a few minutes to do so.

Commanding a carrier is one of the most demanding jobs in the Navy. On any given day, only eleven officers have these responsibilities in the U.S. Navy, and in the hundred year history of carrier operations, only a few of many thousands of naval aviators have served as carrier commanders. While it is a physically demanding job, requiring broad aviation experience, several unique qualifying duty assignments and very specialized training, it remains one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs in the Navy.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-yank-rutherford

HOTELS

How do good hotels always feel so clean and fresh?

Michael Forrest Jones, Beechmont Hotels Corporation

Housekeeping. You may think your own home is nice and clean, but even if you're an obsessive-compulsive neat freak,

hotels play it at an entirely different level. We have to.

For example, do you change and launder your sheets every day? No? But you put fresh sheets on the bed if you're expecting house guests for a few days, on any bed intended for their use, right? And you supply them with fresh towels, not one you used yourself once already. And even then — well, when was the last time you steamed the carpet in your guestroom, or turned the mattress over?

All hotels deal with are house guests.

You might use one of your own towels at home once, and then be okay with saving it for another use the next time you take a shower: it is, after all, *your towel*. You can even use it over several days if you want. In a hotel, the next user of the towel in your room will be a total stranger. It needs to be so clean that you give no thought as you're using it to the fact that the *last* person who used it, unless it's a brand new towel, was also a total stranger — perhaps even someone that you wouldn't care to share a towel with.

Ideally, a hotel will keep three 'turns,' or 'par,' of sheets and towels — that is, enough to make every room in the hotel, three times over — in inventory (even more if it's a busy property with high occupancy). And we're always replacing them: any time one has a visible stain that didn't come out in the wash, it's retired. (If it's not too bad, we'll cut it up, dye it red or blue, and use it as a cleaning rag.) When the available supply in a hotel gets down to two and a half turns (again, not even that low if it's a busy property, but it's never a good idea to let it get any lower than that in any property), it's time to order more. During the course of a year, every sheet and towel in most hotels will be replaced: in a good hotel, you'll never use a sheet or a towel that's more than a year old.

All linens and terry in a hotel room — even those that do not appear to have been used by the guest — are replaced and laundered when the room is made following check-out, and before the next guest arrives. If it's a double room and only one bed appears to have been used, the other bed gets stripped and changed, too. A really good hotel will even do the blankets and bedspreads. Your washer at home would probably not tolerate temperature settings that are quite normal for the big ones used in the hotel laundry room, and the

chemicals are more heavy duty.

All solid surfaces are squirted down and wiped clean with a spray cleaner — disinfectant as appropriate, something with fewer chemicals on surfaces where that will suffice. The bathroom area is mopped, the carpet is vacuumed and sometimes treated with a powder for odor control. There's a balancing act involved — fresh means *fresh* — so we have to watch it with the chemicals, even disinfectants and deodorizers. A disinfectant or excessive perfume smell in a room goes over almost as badly as a musty or locker-room smell. You *want* a hospital or clinic to have just a little bit of a disinfectant smell, but you shouldn't smell *anything* in a hotel room when you check in, whether good or bad, whether pleasant or unpleasant, whether fragrant or stinky, whether indicative of neglect or indicative of recent disinfection.

Smokers will not likely notice a smoke odor left by a previous guest if the room is properly ventilated. Non-smokers will notice a lingering smoke odor even if it's been days or weeks since the room was last smoked in, unless the room has been treated with an ozone generator or a fogger chemical to break it down. (Sometimes, if a smoker occupied the room for several days, not even that is enough: we have to deep-clean the room.) Hence, smoking and non-smoking rooms are separate room types and assigned by desk clerks accordingly.

None other than hotel-issue items should be left in a room for the next guest to find. If the coffeemaker has been used, it will be switched out with another, clean one, and the old one will be taken out for cleaning. We go through the refrigerator, the microwave, and all the drawers and any cupboards, removing anything left behind by the last guest and doing any cleaning or dusting, as appropriate.

Underpaid room attendants might take shortcuts, but ideally all this is done every day. In any event, it's like shaving or mowing your lawn: even if you miss a spot one time, if you do it again promptly the next time it needs doing, chances are you'll catch that spot next time; and in the meanwhile, you can always hope it's not too noticeable. Even so, when an expert like Anthony Melchiorri on *Hotel Impossible* — given the caliber of hotels that he's managed prior to getting his own TV show — over and again suggests always bringing your

own can of Lysol, and spraying down things in your room as soon as you check in, starting with the telephone on the nightstand; how much more real can we make it that your housekeepers are human like everyone else?

Additionally, a good housekeeping manager or supervisor will add a one or two 'job of the day'-type tasks to the assignment sheets — things that are easy to not check and to let get bad, but on this day, each of the room attendants will check it and apply any necessary fix. One day, it will be 'dust the top of the picture frames.' Another, it will be 'make sure the Gideon Bible and the telephone directory is where it's supposed to be in the nightstand, with no marks or damage, check the material on the dresser display, and repair or replace as necessary.' The next day, it'll be something else: 'check the iron and make sure that it works, and make sure the ironing board cover isn't scorched, torn or otherwise in need of replacement,' or 'check the phone, make sure it works, and go over it with an alcohol wipe and beat Anthony Melchiorri to the punch if he ever shows up' — seemingly random things, but all things that has to be kept right, and the only way to do it is check them ever so often.

Our 'room rack,' our list of available rooms maintained at the front desk (in days of old, kept up on an actual metal display rack with a pocket for each room and indicator cards for each pocket; nowadays, kept up on a computer screen) has three settings — 'dirty,' 'clean,' and 'ready.' A room may be clean but not ready: we try to avoid renting it until it is cleaned *and* inspected, gone over by a manager or a person other than the room attendant who cleaned it, just to insure that nothing was missed.

Every three or four months max (it takes an entire day, give or take, with each room so we try to avoid having to do it during busy times when we know we can rent all the rooms), each room is scheduled for deep-cleaning. Mattresses are stripped of all linens and mattress covers, left to air for several hours, then flipped over (front to back in spring and fall, end to end in summer and winter) and left to air some more before the bed is again made, with a freshly laundered mattress cover in addition to fresh linens and bedspread. While that mattress is getting its much deserved rest, furniture is

removed and cleaned completely, the drapes are taken down and laundered, and the carpets are steamed cleaned. Carpet, drapes, and furniture in a room should be no more than ten years old, and *that's* pushing it. After five years, we start scrutinizing it more carefully than usual: we might not *wait* for them to get that old before replacing them. Mattresses have a life expectancy of maybe five years, even if they are flipped regularly.

How often do you do your own housecleaning — and replacement of furniture and other articles — at that intensity? Not very often, right?

Then again, it — or more, if not all of it — might be doable if you had a maid.

We have several. A good hotel that stays pretty busy will have one for every ten to fourteen rooms.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-michael-forrest-jones

What is the worst part of being a VC?

Anon User

I have been a VC general partner for nearly ten years at a large brand name fund. Have had several successful exits.

Am on the exact kind of career and portfolio trajectory I wanted to be on — and am extremely thankful for it and wake up thanking my lucky stars every morning.

There are **lots of great parts** of the job — especially watching young and small teams create new products, calendar control, and the fact that the pay is pretty good — even without carried interest — which very few funds in the past decade have shown.

The average Silicon Valley partner at a mid-sized to large fund ($300+M) on fund three or above makes five hundred thousand to two million dollars per year, and the most senior partners make four to ten million dollars **per year**!

So with that in mind, it's really hard to complain about any parts of the job when it is really the greatest job on earth.

But if forced to pick, the worst parts of the job are:

1. DEALING WITH YOUR PARTNERS

At a large fund, there are lots of partners. And what it takes to become a partner at a big fund and stay there for years is often a high asshole factor, ability and desire to deal with firm politics, and internal jockeying for power.

Don't get me wrong. There are some great great partners. But I think two thirds of the people in the GP ranks at big firms have massive egos (as one LP put it, "VCs have more ego per dollar of return than any asset class we know of").

The way this asshole factor manifests itself is in several ways:

- **Multiple tiers of "partners"** - many are partners in name only and have no control of the firm's decisions — see a great post here: http://jtangovc.com/vc-economics-and-control-unveiled-on-the-web/. Never have I more felt like a second class citizen than when I (and several other "partners") were not invited to certain meetings around firm governance. Also no transparency into the firm's hiring/firing/financials.

- **Crazy Back Room Politics**: "You vote for my deal at a Monday meeting and I will vote for yours" – this is subtle but insidious and leads to mediocre and median returns in an industry where the "median" money manager has lost money for fifteen years.

- **Multi-office VC firms** often also have a geographic issue where decision making becomes all that much harder because partners at the remote offices often feel… remote.

- **Senior partners** who are well past medicare age will rarely leave. More often than not, they are forced out — that dynamic lays itself out over and over again. With the egos in mind, that is not a surprise.

Take the asshole-factor above and apply it to companies where there are often two to four VCs on the board — each with their own agendas and egos — often not agendas that are focused on what is best for the company and often stuck around issues like fund reserves, fund life, etc, which most GPs will never admit to in a board meeting but *absolutely do* impact their perspective.

Also related to the first one, the inability for some "partners" to actually speak on behalf of their partnerships at the board level when re-financings and other big decisions happen.

3. IT'S LONELY.

Yes, you have your raft of five to ten companies, CEOs who you speak to daily/weekly, boards, portfolio recruiting, partner meetings, etc. But at the core of it, **this is an individual sport**. There's lots of solo travel, solo time at a computer, solo meeting taking. If you like true team work — not the BS of VC firm websites — then VC is not a career for you. Related is the answer below about cheering from the sidelines vs. being in the game.

The job of a great VC is to **be a coach and not a player**. Many former CEOs who become VCs have trouble with this and get stuck in the weeds trying to do the CEO's job for them but taking none of the blame (boy could I tell some stories…).

4. THE UPS AND DOWNS

When things aren't going well at the portfolio companies (which often tends to happen at the same time), you just feel bad about yourself and your ability to pick good teams, companies, etc. You are stuck in these companies for three to ten years and the hardest decision to make is to not finance a company's next round due to performance. This rarely happens in venture. It should happen more.

I am convinced this is one of the reasons VC has bad returns as an asset class. Sure companies do pivot, but on the whole, you know in the first eighteen months if the company will be a screaming winner (5x+) or just OK (or worse!).

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There are some brilliant LPs for sure. But as a whole most LPs are bean counters, asset allocators and will always select the shitty Brand Fund raising its seventh fund vs. a great emerging manager with a better track record.

LPs are the lagging-most indicators in the entire economy. I have had LPs tell me recently that they are really focused on finding new "social media funds" — really now? After so much of the value has been created? LPs are herd thinkers extraordinaire. They rarely ask GPs the hard questions like:

- How do you divide voting and economic control of the LLC entity that owns the management company?

- How are junior people compensated? And then isolate junior people to ask them.

- How has the firm done vs public market benchmarks?

- Are the GPs really working or do they take the summer off, spring break two weeks off, December off etc? What am I buying with my 2.5% fee?

- Show me your investment themes for the past year? Or your investment memos and diligence packs for your biggest three deals.

- Lack of creativity with fee and carry structures (ie, lower fee, higher carry)

LPs like to "buy IBM" — that hurts this industry and creates hard conditions for new VCs from existing funds to start their own funds. There is no seeder community like there is in the hedge world. And so there is very limited job mobility in all fact.

6. ECONOMICS

The salary is great. But then you back out the 1% to 5% that GPs have to pay in to the fund and for the younger partners making closer to five hundred thousand dollars per year and having to pay in their percentage of that GP commit, the economics do start to look markedly worse. I am just seeing my first carried interest checks now — after ten years in the industry! And like I said, this is a brand name very "successful"

fund.

Note: all of the above are from the perspective of a large, multi-sector firm — with fund sizes over three hundred to five hundred million dollars. I'm sure it's very different in a smaller fund with fewer partners.

Finally, notice I did not mention that "**saying no**" was a hard part of the job — it's just part of the job — and that is the trite answer you will see a VC give on a panel when asked what the hardest part of the job is. But you actually get used to that part of it.

In conclusion, I am very thankful for the job. But there are many days where I ask myself why I chose this path and daydream about being in a portfolio company as a senior exec. The problem is that the longer I stay in VC, the harder it is to get out and to do anything more useful.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-2

What are some things that airline pilots won't tell you?

Anon User

I'm an airline pilot flying domestically under the banner of a major airline. Most people are unaware of how much of their flying is done by a "regional" airline. Regional airlines today fly a huge percentage of the actual seat miles flown for their Major airline partner (Delta, United, US Air, etc.). However we are paid a fraction of what the major airline pilots are paid, and even these major airline pilots are paid significantly less than their counterparts several years ago.

Many regional airline first officers make the same as your friendly pizza delivery driver. (It is typical for most of them to make no more than sixteen thousand dollars a year the first year.)

Here are a few things we won't tell you:

- Don't drink the coffee. The potable water the aircraft is serviced with is absolutely disgusting. Chemicals are inserted into the water tanks to prevent bad things from growing, but the bad taste of the coffee isn't the coffee — it's the chemicals…

- We don't know where we are most of the time… (kidding for the most part). In all actuality, there are much more sophisticated avionics units on most small general aviation aircraft. Those units display many aspects of geographic awareness where most of ours simply display the route that we programmed in the flight management computer before departure. We can tell you how far away we are from the next navigation facility and where we are in general terms, but aside from that and what we can see out the window, we typically only have a general idea of where we are when at cruise altitude. Of course we all carry maps, but not too many of us will open the map and follow our progress on a three hour flight. (That all changes as we begin descending toward the airport. Situational Awareness is extremely important then.)

- We forget about the fasten seatbelt sign all the time. When you look up at the sign (and disregard it typically) and it has been illuminated for the last forty five minutes in smooth air, we simply forgot. Lots of guys will leave it on all the time. However, sometimes we do have reports of choppy air ahead and will leave it on until we either experience it or take a wild guess that the air ahead will be smooth.

- Some of us carry guns. This is certainly public knowledge, but Federal Flight Deck Officers can carry a firearm in the cockpit. Lots of protocol exists to ensure that the training, concealment, and utilization is standardized.

Those are just a few. Happy flying.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-3

What's it like to be a drug dealer?

Anon User

In a single word, being a drug dealer was exhilarating. Immense rewards, more than I realized at the time, but also unbelievable stress, unavoidable paranoia, and most difficult of all, an existence in a world that does not "exist" by traditional standards.

I can't speak to what it's like peddling product on the street or life as a cartel kingpin. But I can tell you what my experience of being a mid-level trafficker was like. My entry into trafficking came about suddenly and ended just as quickly, turning those years into blazing memories, grandiose and traumatic. It's not easy to put into words and probably best said through experience.

Towards the end of my freshman year at a California college, I found out that you could successfully ship weed. But that was only part of the puzzle. What made this all possible was a friend at a prestigious Ivy League school on the East Coast.

We eventually scraped together enough money to buy a quarter pound before the end of the school year. Roughly twelve hundred dollars at the time, and I sent it to my counterpart. It was enjoyed by a small group of friends and that was it. While the profit margin on selling a QP wasn't bad, several hundred dollars, it wasn't enough to make clear that putting in the work to build the infrastructure could be more than worthwhile. It was one of the critical move that led to me and this best friend and partner spending the next few years of our lives fine-tuning our trafficking craft.

That summer, I spent in New York, where I was working for a prominent plaintiffs law firm. Already my third summer of working at a law firm, I was dedicated to going to law school and becoming an attorney. But another critical experience put me on the path towards trafficking. While out with my friends one night, we were hassled by police after a fight. Having weed on my person meant I would be spending the

night in NY's central lockup.

The only white person booked that night made for a lot of conversation. Mostly revolving around the unfortunate circumstances that led to our arrests. But more importantly, the discussions over weed prices in various states, sealed in my mind an opportunity too good to pass up.

Fast-forward two years; I had made enough connections that I was able to secure a "front." For those who don't know what that means: you give me a pound, I give you the money two weeks later. This is how most weed is sold, as small-time distributors or beginning traffickers don't usually have the cash to pay for product upfront.

While I now had the connection to get product without paying upfront, I still had to convince my friend that he could sell a pound. At that point, neither of us had any idea. And the idea of sending thirty five hundred dollars worth of weed, through the mail with no guarantee that it would get there or any guarantee that it would sell, was nerve-wracking to say the least. But I was young and foolish, eager to make money, and willing to take the risk.

With much relief, the pound arrived at our address back East, and while it took twice as long to sell as we expected, the profit margin was some 35% of the investment, giving us a taste of what was to come.

By junior year, my friend and I were basically supplying the entire school with our weed. We were selling three pounds a week minimum. But we were starting to exhaust our residential mailing addresses and struggling to return cash to California in a timely manner. Our sales were limited only by our trafficking infrastructure as opposed to our capital, because at this point, my connections were happy to supply the product.

Sometime around the end of the first semester junior year is when we started losing product. We lost our first package, a three pack worth roughly twelve grand, which was a substantial hit and easily cut our cash on hand in half. Common sense might have told us to quit while ahead. But we (by this point) were still willing to take astronomical risks because how else can two unemployed colleges students make three grand a week? So after letting any heat die down, we went

back to business.

Coming back to the second semester, we caught two fairly large breaks in both intelligence and connections. Not only did we find a way to pass commercial shipping security tests, we secured an "in" at the Law School mailroom where we could send literally any amount of packages, and for the next several years, we never lost product to this location.

Towards the end of our Junior year, we had solved a lot of our risk issues and had been able to increase our shipments to five pounds a week (sometimes more). Saving up enough cash so that our prices in California allowed us to make some two grand on average per pound.

We were eager to make the rest of the school year count and knew that several major events were coming up. This is when cocaine came into the picture. Mostly through luck, we had stumbled upon an excellent cocaine connection. Not only was the product top-notch, it was cheap as hell. It was however in Texas, not a convenient location but that didn't stop us from packing our bags and driving overnight to Texas to buy our first kilo.

That first purchase made for a risky investment, having to spend twenty two grand on a kilo of cocaine for only a few events we knew were prime for that product. Why risk didn't factor into the investment, I'm not really sure. We were so determined to squeeze every ounce of profit out of this school, we lost sight of what reasonable risk, even by drug dealing standards, was. We were on a path and there was no turning back. Once you'e in the game, there are no easy exits.

Buying the cocaine turned out to be a huge mistake. One, we didn't allow ourselves enough time to build a clientele or distribution. And on top of that, it tied up all our capital in product, meaning that we went back on front for weed and our prices suffered. We had to discount our cocaine just to move it before the end of the semester, meaning our investment didn't play out quite as we had expected. Caveat, Ivy leaguers buy a lot of coke before finals.

So while my friend, a finance major, for the investment, blinded by "potential" returns, reality played out quite differently. We made a scant profit on a twenty thousand dollar investment. Hardly worth the time or risk.

By the end of junior year, we had done well but made some critical mistakes. We had established a viable trafficking system but lost considerable product. Not a deal breaker, but substantial. Money packages had been replaced by expensive flights that were taking a toll on my health and academics.

We had built a distribution network and made our connections a lot of money, having moved upwards of a million dollars worth of product over the school year. We calculated that over one hundred thousand was spent cumulatively through living and business expenses mostly in the form of flights, shipping, and prepaid cell phones. But we had lived lavishly that year and were able to split some fifty plus grand going into the summer. I spent the first month of the summer working in a law firm, my last stint in the legal profession after some four summers. I spent the next two months in Bali.

When senior year rolled around, I was feeling ambivalent but still very committed. But stress was starting to take a toll, my grades were shit, and while I wasn't overly paranoid, the sight of a cop would make my heart skip a beat. I was twenty-three, and my hair was starting to turn grey.

None of those signs caused me to slow down though; our business was flowing smoothly, selling the usual five pounds a week, sent to the mailroom of course. We were sending a few additional pounds to various residential locations and had invested in a safe house where we kept cash and product.

We had finally established a distribution network for cocaine, and that quickly started to pay off. The business wasn't booming but it was turning more than 50% profit margin. But the toll of operating this business was really starting to add up. What started as a profitable hobby was turning into a full-time profession.

But our business wasn't without problems. We were losing too many of our cash packages, at a tune of ten grand apiece. Often times almost a week's worth of work. But our weed was still getting there no problem, so we moved more and more towards flights. My partner, who was a more serious student, was less willing to fly and more willing to lose cash, while I was the opposite.

Consequently, I spent a lot of time in the air. I'd travel to a location, pick up cash, and fly back with forty grand strapped

to my chest. I had already written off school as a determinant for my future and was disillusioned with education through my experiences trafficking, convinced in part, that I had a future as drug dealer for life.

I was living out of multiple locations around the Bay Area and had bought a new car for thirty grand, was spending money on friends and expensive dinners, lavish purchases, and non-business related travel. Life was good. So we expanded.

We started selling weed in Texas. The clientele was there, the market was there, but building the infrastructure was tricky. On a one way flight out of Texas, I was nearly stopped by a TSA agent, and then allowed to move forward only because the line was backing up. In retrospect, it was a very close call, I had a lot of cash strapped to my chest and legs.

Our business at school was going well, and as we moved through the second semester, we were poised to leverage any possible profits. On one successful weekend, over prominent school events, we sold a kilo of cocaine and seven pounds of weed. After a few sleepless days, I flew back to California with sixty grand on my person.

But as school started to wind down, so did our sales. Concerned about our ability to carry on our successfully operations past graduation, we moved into Texas more and more aggressively. Our market was unlimited but we were confined by our shipping limitations and our Texas connection's cash flow.

Luckily our connection in Texas had close ties with cartel members whose attention we had caught. They requested that we put together a small pack; the only problem, this was outside of our wheelhouse, and we did not have the personnel to transport large quantities of weed.

By now, the business was clearly taking a toll on my person. It was clear that I wouldn't be graduating this June, and what had started out as general stress had turned into unexpected and full-fledged panic attacks. I had trouble sleeping at night and started relying on over the counter sleep medication to rest.

After much deliberation, we did the unthinkable, putting together a plan to sell 50 pounds in Texas over spring break. The plan was not easy to execute. We had exactly one week

to make it happen. My partner flew to California with all the cash we had "out of state". The plan was to use his parents Jeep while they were away for the week to drive to Texas and drop off the product then he fly back to school while I would then fly to Texas and drive the car and cash back to California.

I greeted my friend at the airport and we went back to his house. Collecting our cash and heading up to Humboldt where I was meeting our California connection. After many hours, driving around looking at our options, we finally settled on product and spent two hours vacuum sealing the weed so that I could drive it back to the Bay Area. I left just before dark, for a seven hour drive after eating just an apple for the day.

I was unbelievably nervous. I had never driven that much weed before and the only way from Humboldt to the Bay Area is through a stretch of road called the Gauntlet which should speak for itself. I had one spotter driving in front, and another behind me. The hours passed slowly as I weaved through traffic in the dark, often losing my spotter and trailing car. I left my partner's house at seven that morning and finally returned at one in the morning the next day. But this was just the beginning. I spent the rest of the night and the next morning vacuum sealing the product and packing the car. Then my friend left for Texas.

A few nerve-wracking days later, he arrived at the location, where things got off to a bumpy start. Our connection lost a small amount of product in an unfortunate robbery situation, but the cartel purchased the rest of our product for just over two hundred grand. We were more than half way there. I arrived the next night in Texas at midnight. My friend picked me up at the airport, and we went back to a location outside of Houston. For the first time in my life, I held nearly a quarter million dollars in cash. A triumph to say the least: I was twenty three years old.

I left at four that morning without sleeping. There was not a single car on the road. Then out of nowhere, a car starts trailing me. Seconds later, lights flash and that car is pulled over. I can only assume that the cop pulling over the only other car on the road, in Texas, in the middle of the night, was coming

for my car with California license plates. Without an option, I pushed on rattled, knowing that I very well might have made one of the worse decisions of my life. I drove from Houston to the Bay Area in twenty seven hours. Stopping only to nap for an hour at a time, so exhausted and sleep deprived that when I would awake from a nap, it would take what seemed like an eternity to figure out where I was and what I was doing. Thinking about it still makes me nauseous to this day.

How did I get here? What was I doing? I do not know. The gravity of the situations I found myself in, the effort that went into planning our deals, was beyond anything I could have ever imagined. My partner and I found ourselves only a few deals away from supplying a major cartel with quality weed from California. There was some talk of turning back, some reflection into our futures, and then the determination that you don't come this far just to quit. Once you're in the game, there is no letting go, there are no easy exits.

I arrived in California much relieved and with two shoe-boxes full of cash, stashed safely in my parents house. Our business with the school had more or less ended, or wasn't worth the effort, and we settled in for a brief vacation. But we were poised to take over. We had a brief window of time before our California connection was leaving the country for several months. Anxious not to let the prospect die, we orchestrated an even bigger transaction, some hundred and fifty pounds for over half a million dollars.

But things had changed considerably, having survived our Texas trip, my friend and I refused to make the journey, arguing that as the main connections between California and Texas, we were too important to be transporting the product. Fortunately, our California connections were able to secure transport at a hefty but reasonable rate. It was getting late in the season and prices were less than favorable. But we were able to source product that made the deal worthwhile. And after investing two hundred grand of our hard earned money, the pack left California.

But somewhere along the border of Mexico, our driver was pulled over. Brandishing a California driver license in a car with Texas plates, he never stood a chance and is still serving time. My only regret is that we were confident enough to

put everything we had into the deal. You might say our luck had run out, and after getting one of the worst calls of my life, the deal was canceled. I was broke.

My trafficking business ended just as quickly as it started. Everything we had worked for over the past two years vanished suddenly. I was lost and scared. Having completely abandoned interest in a professional career or a real job, my resume hadn't been updated in two years. I was basically unemployable as we headed into a severe financial crisis.

I tried momentarily to rebuild our business, but was exhausted and emotionally depleted. It was more difficult for me to accept the finality of this situation than my friend, who was more apt for the professional world with good grades and a masters in finance. He had also been receiving considerable allowance from his parents while we had both been living off drug money, saving considerably over the past two years.

The next year, I claimed only five thousand dollars worth of income. But at the very least, I had bought enough toys to keep myself entertained, and I still had my car, for which I struggled to make the final payments, while I lived at my parent's house. Out of desperation, I confessed to my parents who somehow, had no idea.

What I found remarkable is what we were able to build through hard work and determination. What's it like to be a drug dealer? It means the things you see, people you encounter, and the life you lead have little foundation in reality. The risks are immense and the rewards, even greater.

We had reached a point, where we couldn't turn back and to this day, I don't know whether it was about the money or if it was the rush. After the first Texas trip, I realized that it wasn't just about money, drug dealing is gambling with your life, a most sadistic rush.

But selling drugs was the best preparation I could have asked for, entering the real world. Now equipped to handle situations that it takes others years to prepare for. More than anything, selling drugs taught me to believe in myself and what I'm capable of. It taught me to trust my instincts and how to make difficult decisions.

I was the kid in high school that teachers and good students wrote off. But looking back, even with my stint as a

drug dealer, few people in my past can compare successes to that which I have experienced. Of course, with that success came immense failure for better or for worse. And the toll it took on my health and psyche probably wasn't worth it. But had it not been for those experiences, I wouldn't be where I'm at now.

After some time, I was fortunate enough to land an excellent position at a startup in LA that suits my personality perfectly. My friend and I reminisce fondly, wondering what life would have been like had that one deal gone through.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-4

SCIENCE

If you injure a bug, should you kill it or let it live and not die?

Matan Shelomi, Entomologist

As far as entomologists are concerned, insects do not have pain receptors the way vertebrates do. They don't feel "pain," but may feel irritation and probably can sense if they are damaged. Even so, they certainly cannot suffer because they don't have emotions. If you heavily injure an insect, it will most likely die soon: either immediately because it will be unable to escape a predator, or slowly from infection or starvation. Ultimately this crippling will be more of an inconvenience to the insect than a torturous existence, so it has no "misery" to be put out of, but also no real purpose anymore. If it can't breed anymore, it has no reason to live.

In other words, I have not answered your question because, as far as the science is concerned, neither the insect nor the world will really care either way. Personally, though, I'd avoid doing more damage than you've already done. 1) Maybe the insect will recover, depending on how damaged it is. 2) Some faiths do forbid taking animal lives, so why go out of your way to kill? 3) You'll stain your shoe.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-matan-shelomi

What does it feel like to be bitten by a black widow spider?

Brad Porteus, She bit me.

It was a sunny Sunday morning in the summertime of 2006 in Redwood City, California, and the Mrs. was back East with her gal pals for a weekend of recharging her batteries and reconnecting with old friends.

I was holding down the fort with the munchkins (boys, four and one and three quarters), and in the interest of creating a morning diversion, we began to make preparations for a walk in the local hills. Sunscreen on, snacks loaded, water filled, stroller out — you know the drill.

I grabbed a pair of old shoes from the garage, and hastily threw them on over my bare feet, and continued my charge around the house to build momentum to get out the door. About a minute later, I realized that there was some wiggling in the toes of my right shoe, and just as I was about to take my shoe off, I felt a ***** on my second toe — not painful, but a bit annoying.

I took my shoe off on the outside steps, and dumped it out, discovering a jet black inky spider with a body the size of an engorged pea. I instructed my son to grab his bug-catcher, which was conveniently nearby, and I dumped the spider into the clear container for inspection.

Imagine my horror when I rotated the container and got a glimpse of a distinct reddish/brown hourglass figure on the belly of the black black spider. OK, I reasoned, I'd lived in those parts for the better part of nearly four decades, and I'd NEVER heard of anyone seeing (let alone getting bitten by) a black widow spider, so presumably this is just a copy-cat spider that is harmless.

Well, I suppose before heading out for a walk, I ought to be safe and call the urgent care and see what they think.

After being reassured that there was "no way" I had been bitten by a black widow, the attending physician confessed that she was looking at information on Google (!!!) and start-

ed to ask me questions about what it looked like.

After twenty minutes on the phone (with the boys starting to melt down), and getting on the Internet myself, I began to experience my first tell-tale symptom — a slight cramping in my lower right leg.

At this point, the doctor changed position entirely, and strongly recommended that I get medical attention immediately.

OK, kids, time to pile into the wagon. We're heading to the ER.

Ten minutes later, I walked through the doors at the ER at Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City, CA, with holding the hands of my two boys, along with the bug catcher.

"Thirty minutes ago, THIS spider, bit me on THIS toe, and now THIS leg is cramping."

The otherwise bored doctors and nurses who were numbed by their predictable flow of blunt trauma, heart palpitations, and other mundane dramas rapidly appeared out of the woodworks and collectively shouted a big "Yah!!!" This, they thought, was soooo cool.

Note: Capturing and bringing in the actual spider was by far the smartest thing I did all day, as it brought me instant celebrity and credibility, as the bite itself was completely and somewhat disappointingly unremarkable.

It was delicately but firmly suggested that I make some phone calls and line up some child-care, as soon I'd be all jacked up full of morphine and other things that would make me a less-than effective father.

I was able to get a hold of my neighbor friends, who gamely dropped what they were doing, and came to pick up my boys. We had a long discussion about how to orchestrate the movement of cars and carseats, including me driving their car home, which was completely naive given how F-d up I was about to become.

By now the cramping had migrated into my groin area, and I was beginning to wonder what was in store. I was told that an anti-venom does indeed exist, but it's kept in Arizona, and is highly toxic in and of itself, so they don't fly that in unless I was otherwise at risk (toddler, elderly, poor immune system). So, my fate was to get jacked up on opiates and survive

the onslaught of the neurotoxin from the spider that would otherwise cause tremendous pain and cramping for the next six hours.

At this point, I texted (SMS) my wife (who was on her way to the airport to come home from Boston): "Hey there. I'm in the ER. Got bitten by a black widow. Love ya." So much for a relaxing end to her fun getaway.

Several hours of mental bliss later, I was discharged from the ER, and picked up by my Dad, who took me to the pharmacy to pick up my meds (vicodin for pain, muscle relaxants). I was slurring words, and otherwise out of it, and happy to get home to relax.

The next forty-eight hours were literally a blur. I barely remember any of that time, and mentally, lost track of days and hours. It freaked my wife out when I said I thought my Mom had spent the night, so I guess I was hallucinating.

We assumed at the time, that the meds were the culprit, but now later, we're pretty sure the delirium was a byproduct of the neurotoxins.

The medical literature suggests that recovery happens within three to five days. Nights three and four and five were complete disasters for me. For some completely unknown reason, I was sweating profusely at night. As in, literally soaking through my sheets and changing my sheets three times on one night and twice the next. Wet, not damp.

Specifically, I was leaking sweat out of my legs. I'd wipe them off, and they'd bead up immediately. It was freaky, to say the least.

Also, I was having trouble concentrating, or being coherent for up to five days. Sleep was next to impossible, and I was getting worn down. I later learned my wife was doing her own Google searches to see what the risks were of permanent brain damage. And, I think my life insurance was promptly renewed shortly thereafter.

The doctors switched me over from vicodin to valium (one makes the pain go away, one makes you not care about the pain). Finally, I got a decent night sleep on Thursday, and a good one on Friday. I awoke on Saturday morning (day six) feeling like a human being for the first time, and proceeded to clean the garage like a freakin' maniac.

Upon further inspection of my shoe in question, I discovered that the spider was harboring an egg sac inside my shoe. How rude of me to put my foot in there. She was actually quite restrained in waiting so long to bite me, and it turns out that these deadly creatures are incredibly passive. This is why it's so rare that a bite happens, as in fact, I discovered, these spiders are everywhere in the area where I was living.

If this happens to you, hang in there, and ride it out. You will get better, but it takes some time.

When I returned to work, my co-workers had decorated my cubicle with all sorts of Spiderman memorabilia and delighted in my misery. All in good fun.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-brad-porteus

SPIDERS

How does a spider decide where to put up its web?

Marc Srour, Invertebrate palaeontologist, arthropod systematist, historian of biology.

The most important factor is **phylogeny**. Each spider family has its own characteristic arrangement of spinnerets (the organs used to spin the webs), and they decide what type of web can be built. And this shape is adapted to one specific type of habitat. Here's a small, general guide (exceptions abound, as usual):

- *Mygalomorphs* (e.g., trapdoor spiders): most can only construct simple lines of silk, which can act as detectors. They live in burrows, with these sensory silk lines radiating out of them. When the lines are cut, the spider knows that prey is nearby and comes out and ambushes it.

- *Sheet-web builders* (e.g., velvet spiders, funnel-web spiders): As the name says, their silk comes out in massive sheets. And the best place to put a sheet is, of course, on some vegetation under a tree, with insects dropping from

the tree being a good source of food. Funnel web builders have a bit more control over their webs, being able to connect a circular ("funnel shaped") burrow made out of silk in which the spider lives.

- *Space-web builders* (e.g., linyphiids, theridiids): These webs take up space. Linyphiid ones consist of a bowl made out of tangled threads, and attached to the lower branches of a tree. That way, anything falling from either the lower branches or the canopy will come into the bowl, and the spider (which stays on the underside the bowl) will just collect all the food easily. Theridiids (which are actually highly-derived orb weavers that build space webs, so I put them here) have slightly more refined webs, since they have specific combs on their legs allowing them to craft the silk into neat lines instead of a densely-packed bowl. To make up for the lack of catchment though, their silk is very sticky (like all orb-weavers) and they can also throw silk at their prey (kinda like Spiderman).

- *Orb weavers* have the most control over their webs. They're the typical meticulous geometric ones (they have their own classification, including radial webs and spiral webs, etc.). They're very finely-tuned to be as good as possible at catching prey. They show asymmetries depending on the specific tree/bit of vegetation they're at, so that each line is in the path of a flying insect; the spider will also use light cues and a gravity compass to make sure their web is in the best possible position. (The role of experience vs. genetic predisposition would make a cool study, if it hasn't been studied already…)

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-marc-srour

If I want to look smart, what do I need to know about the Higgs Boson discovery?

Jay Wacker, Faculty at Stanford/SLAC in theoretical physics.

You can take a few stories from the following list:

- The Higgs is a fundamentally new type of elementary particle that we have never seen before.

- Up until now, all particles have been fermions (spin 1/2 particles like the electron) or vectors (spin 1 particles like the photon).

- The Higgs boson is a spin 0 particle.

- This is the first elementary particle to be discovered since the tau neutrino in 2001. However, there was significantly less excitement about this particle, because it was the third neutrino, and we knew it had to be there (it wasn't a new type of particle).

- The last particle people got fairly excited about was the top quark, which happened in 1994, but again we sort of knew it had to be there. The top quark is the heaviest known elementary particle, so there was reason for some excitement. And the LHC is still discovering properties about the top quark. The real parallel was the discovery of the W and Z vector bosons, which was in 1983 at CERN. These were massive vector bosons, and we'd never seen them before. They'd been hypothesized by Steven Weinberg, Sheldon Glashow and Abdus Salam in the 1960s.

- It has been 30 years since the discovery of a particle of this magnitude.

- The Higgs boson isn't just a random particle. The Higgs boson is the excitation of a "field" (like the photon is the excitation of the electric and magnetic field).

- The Higgs field does something strange: throughout the entire Universe, it takes on a uniform, non-zero value.

- When the Higgs field does this, the interactions between the Higgs boson and other particles acquire their mass.

- If the Higgs field didn't do this, all particles would be massless (some small technicalities that I'm glossing over).

- The Standard Model of Particle Physics describes all the known properties of nature (with the exception of dark matter).

- To know how the Higgs boson behaves, you have to know the Higgs boson mass (i.e. the mass is not a prediction of the theory).

- The only thing you have to specify is the mass of the Higgs boson, after that, all interactions of the Standard Model are fixed, and you can make predictions to arbitrary accuracy (though it is very hard practically).

- Therefore, the searches for the Higgs boson always left the mass as a free parameter.

- Before July 4, 2012, the Higgs boson mass could only be in the 122 GeV to 130 GeV mass range (units where the proton mass is about 1 GeV, and the W and Z vector bosons are 80 GeV and 90 GeV, respectively). There was a small excess from the December 2011 results at 125 GeV. Many people suspected that the excess was the Higgs boson.

- On July 4, 2012, the experiments showed that this excess grew substantially with the additional data that was recorded in 2012.

- Each experiment reached the "5 sigma" discovery threshold, which means that if there wasn't something there, it would be a fluke that would occur 1 time in 3,000,000 chances.

- There are two general purpose experimental collaborations at the LHC, each of which has 3000 physicists working. They are called ATLAS and CMS.

- Both experiments saw the same Higgs mass (a small difference the masses), meaning that the chance that this is fluctuation is roughly 1 in $3,000,000^2$ (very bad statistics, here) Whether this excess is the Higgs boson will take more time because many of the predictions of the Standard Model need to be checked (remember there is no freedom to change predictions around once the mass is known).

- The rough properties of this particle agree with the Standard Model prediction, but there is roughly 50% uncertainty in all the measurements of the largest couplings.

- If this wasn't the Higgs boson, the couplings could have been different by a factor of 100 or more, so the fact that they agree to 50% is already telling.

- If the properties don't exactly agree with the predictions, it means that the Standard Model is incomplete.

- This doesn't mean that it isn't the Higgs boson, but more likely, the Standard Model is incomplete, and there are new particles and interactions for the Higgs boson that are changing the precise properties (but leaving the gross features intact).

- The LHC will accumulate at least 3 times as much data over the next 5 or 6 months, meaning that you'd guess that the properties of the Higgs boson will be known better by about 40%.

- There are many theoretical physicists who are associated with the Higgs boson.

- Most notably Peter Higgs, but also Francois Englert and Robert Brout (recently deceased).

- Additionally, there was a seminal paper by Tom Kibble, Gerry Guralnik, and Carl Hagen. There was earlier important work by Julian Schwinger, Philip Anderson, and Yoichiro Nambu (all previous Nobel Prize winners).

- The distinguishing feature of Peter Higgs' work is that he focused on the Higgs boson and not the Higgs mecha-

nism (which is the process that causes particles to acquire mass).

Hopefully this will get you through a cocktail party.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-jay-wacker

How has our understanding of the universe changed in the last 100 years?

Alia Caldwell, submerged in spring rain

IN 1912

- Physics is unified. Physicists reasonably assume that we are approaching a wrapping-up of physical knowledge about the Universe, with just a few 't's to cross and 'i's to dot for future generations to worry about.

- The laws of Thermodynamics are understood, fleshed out by Planck, Maxwell, Boltzmann, Gibbs, et al.

- Electromagnetic theory is also established by Maxwell, Gauss, Faraday, etc.

- Light is properly described by wave theory.

- Rutherford has established the notion of radioactive half-life and has created a useful model of an atom with a nucleus (though he has yet to split that atom).

- Einstein has presented his paper on Special Relativity (1905), which threw a cat among the pigeons by predicting matter-energy equivalence and unifying space and time, an audacious development on sacred Newton.

- In 1912 also, Vesto Slipher measures the first Doppler redshift to undermine the conventional view, but to science, the Universe is still in an eternal static state. (Later on, in

a particularly delicious irony, the Big Bang Theory is first proposed by a Roman Catholic Priest, Georges Lemaître (1927)).

- Physics has bifurcated into Astrophysics and Quantum Mechanics. Attempts to reunite them invoke multidimensional acrobatics like String Theory and Loop Quantum Gravity. We still wait to see if these two branches can actually be reunified by a provable esoteric uber-theory.

- The Universe is expanding from a Big Bang creation event 13.75 billion years ago. We are shuffling around the cooling detritus of this creation.

- Quantum Mechanics supplies us with a new physics that departs from classical physics at the subatomic level. It describes the interactions of energy and matter in counterintuitive ways. The two major interpretations of QM are equally absurd (yet strangely beautiful) — Copenhagen and Many Worlds Theory. Whichever, we are superimposed.

- Light and other particles have a dual particle/wave nature.

- Most of the Universe is now composed of unknown stuff: Dark Energy and Dark Matter, leaving just 4 percent over as stuff we have the vaguest clue about or tangible theories for.

- The Universe is a pretty scary place, filled with monsters and titans: Black Holes, Quasars, Gamma-Ray Bursters. Our maps again carry an inscription around the edges: *There be dragons*.

Fundamentally, we have gone from thinking we know most of the answers and riddles, to knowing we don't know very many at all. Hang onto your bat-belts, *junior bat-rangers*, I predict this century will be even more exciting.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-alia-caldwell

Would a lone adult wolf be able to take down an athletic adult human?

Oliver Starr, Studied ethology at CU Boulder

Let me stress that the chances of a healthy, wild wolf attacking a person are next to nil. This simply doesn't happen as wolves are very timid and are extremely fearful of people. That said...

Having survived a serious attack from a wolf that I cared for, I can tell you from personal experience that at best survival is probably a 75/25 proposition.

These animals are far stronger and far faster then you can possibly imagine. Even someone intimately familiar with wolves is at risk. First consider this, then I'll relate my own story for those that care to do the reading. There are plenty of accounts of individual wolves pulling down full grown elk. If you think a person could do that without some sort of weapon, you haven't spent enough time in the woods. There are even a few instances where individual wolves have taken a moose. This is almost impossible to imagine. The average bull elk weighs 550 pounds, a moose, up to 1400.

Now for my own experience. Incidentally I weigh about 180 pounds and have had a long career as an athlete. At the time of the attack, I was in excellent physical condition and was definitely much stronger than an average person of similar size since my job was to train. Please note this is pulled straight from my notes/diary at the time of the incident. Apologies that it reads a bit like a story — the facts and nature of the injuries should be clear enough.

It was ten below zero the day of the attack, and I was dressed for the weather. Good thing, too. Otherwise I might have lost my arms — literally.

Wolves only mate once a year, and when they're in season, they're uppity. I wouldn't make the same mistake today.

We'd been out in the forest shooting some pictures for a

wildlife magazine when we realized we'd lost the sun and needed to get off the mountain.

I'd already put a leash on Jake, who was a male that weighed roughly a hundred and twenty pounds. I'd been fostering him for about six months, but since he was an animal I hadn't raised myself, our relationship was a somewhat uneasy one. He clearly regarded me with a certain amount of suspicion.

His enclosure-mate, Jessa, (a spayed female) was still off-lead, and as we approached the road, I grew nervous that she might run ahead of us and onto the small mountain highway where we had parked our truck. Each time she'd run by us, I would try to grab her and miss, and with each attempt she thought the game was more interesting. She' d been with me her whole life — I'd literally helped deliver her — so I thought nothing of lunging for her as she shot past.

The problem was that Jake didn't think this was a game at all, and I was so focused on getting control of Jessa that I hadn't noticed how agitated he was growing with my attempts to capture his mate. Attempts I now realize he interpreted as aggression.

As Jessa shot by again, I pounced, grabbing a hold of her scruff so I could get her on a lead. As I did so, Jake attacked.

As luck would have it, he seized my arm that was nearer his face in what I immediately realized was an all-out attack.

Having been around wolves for about ten years at that point, I knew the last thing I wanted was to be in a tug of war with a wolf where my arm was the rope.

With my free arm I grabbed his head and threw my self on top of him, hoping that by rolling him to the ground, I could regain control of the situation.

The next forty-five seconds seemed like an eternity. It felt like I was in three places at once. I could hear my assistant screaming, I could feel the incredible pain of the bones in my forearm being crushed by Jake's jaws, and at the same time, there was a part of my conscious that was completely detached observing the situation with the cool analytical mind of a scientist.

I distinctly remember this scientist's mind thinking, "He's much, much stronger than I expected. The pressure is incredible."

Meanwhile back inside my body, I was in the fight of my life. I'd shoved my free hand into Jake's mouth to prevent him from fully cleaving my arm in two. Even with my fully gloved hand in his mouth, I could feel things inside my arm crackling and popping as muscle, tendon, and bone began to give way.

As this was happening, I recalled a time when, as a child, my younger brother had managed to get the front of an over-sized Wellington stuck between the treads of an escalator near the top of the flight. And like the escalator, Jake's mouth was relentless, merciless, efficient.

My brother was fortunate. The powerful machine sliced the front of the boot clean off, leaving his foot intact. I wasn't going to be so lucky.

The scientist's mind was already calculating how long I could last if I lost the arm so far from help.

Thankfully, I didn't need to find out. My assistant, a feisty calf-roper I called Frankie had been around animals all her life, and she did what she later claimed any ranch chick would do; she grabbed Jake by the balls and yanked hard.

Suddenly the pressure was gone. I leaped to my feet and Frankie lunged for the lead in an effort to get Jake under control.

She got hold of the rope but not before Jake hurled himself towards me going for my exposed throat. Thanks to Frankie, he came up just short, his teeth finding purchase in the bicep of my left arm. Even with all the layers of winter clothes, the damage was instant and severe. I immediately lost all feeling in my hand.

Fortunately for us, Jake's aggression was only directed towards me, and Frankie was able to pull him away and tie his leash to a nearby Aspen tree.

"Listen to me carefully," I said. "I'm not sure how badly I'm hurt, and I'm not going to try and find out now. I need to get myself off this mountain, and I need you to get the animals."

"First catch Jessa and leash her. Give me a five minute head start so we don't have any more issues with Jake. I'll either be in the truck or in the trail."

"No," Frankie said. "I'm going to go home get a gun and shoot Jake, he's too dangerous."

"You don't get it," I said. "It's ten below, we're two miles from

the car and an hour from a hospital. I'm bleeding. I know my forearm is broken, and I can't feel my hands. I don't have time for an argument. Just do what I told you."

I didn't wait for an answer. I was already getting very cold, and the lurking scientist in the back of my mind was coolly informing me I had about twenty minutes to get somewhere warm.

My recollection of the hike off the mountain is hazy. I felt like I was a robot programmed to keep walking. Clutching both arms to my chest, my balance was poor, and I stumbled and fell more times than I can remember. Somehow struggling back to my feet each time. Finally, I could see the black ribbon of icy asphalt below and for the first time since the attack I started to believe I might actually survive the ordeal.

At the hospital, I claimed I'd injured myself cutting firewood. They didn't believe me, but it didn't matter, the job was the same.

They cut my clothing off my arms and my gloves from my hands. There was surprisingly little blood externally, but beneath the surface of the skin it was another story. My right forearm had been nearly pulverized. The pressure of the bite had broken both bones in multiple places, the muscle sheaths were ruptured, and numerous tendons had been severed from the bite.

My right hand was also broken, apparently from my efforts to save my arm by stuffing my hand in Jake's mouth as we rolled on the ground. His final effort to get to my throat resulted in an eighty percent tear of my left bicep.

Initially the doctors weren't sure they'd be able to save my left hand, so extensive was the internal damage to the bone and tissue higher up, in my forearm.

Fortunately some of the world's best hand surgeons were a few hours up the road at the Steadman Hawkins clinic in Vail.

Unlike the doctors at the ER near my home, I gave them the full story. I felt they needed to understand the true nature of the injury if they were going to be able to treat it.

This turned out to be a stroke of luck. It's not every day a doctor gets to see the damage imparted by a wolf on the human body…

Ultimately, the doctors were able to mend the bone, re-

pair the ligaments, and reattach the tendons and I mostly healed. My left bicep still has a large chunk missing where the muscle never healed, and it's about 20% weaker than my right one. My right forearm still has bulges where the muscle sheath was ruptured and has never fully healed. I have normal strength in both hands, but chronic pain in the forearm that was broken.

In summary, without having someone with me, I am certain the animal would have killed me, and I had the advantage of knowing the animal and knowing about these animals. I'm pretty sure that an individual without these advantages stands little chance of surviving an all out attack.

I want to stress again that it is very important to keep in mind that wolves are generally fearful of people, and for this reason the chances of such an attack are near zero. In fact, I don't believe that wolves living freely that have not been habituated to people in at least some minimal way would attack an adult human unless the animal was sick or given no other option (for example if one was intentionally cornered).

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-oliver-starr

MIND HACKS

Does bouncing your leg improve cognition?

Nan Waldman, The education of children, people, and families is my calling.

If you accept as evidence the testimony of someone who has worked as a 1:1 tutor, education consultant, and parent counsel for the past twenty plus years, the short answer is a qualified 'yes'.

The long answer:

When reading about MRIs of students with ADHD, I realized that the more they moved, the more areas of their brains 'lit up' with activity. This was particularly true of upper arm movement, which was rhythmic. I got an idea… and

first implemented it experimentally years ago, while working as a reading specialist with students who have learning disabilities.

Parents of children who are not succeeding in school usually try "everything" they know of to help their children to learn. By the time they find me, their children are burned out by teachers and school, have low self-esteem, are two or more grade levels behind their peers in reading and/or math, have deficits in vocabulary and spelling, and are generally totally turned off, and/or are noted by school teachers to be behavior "problems." They come to me because their parents drag them to 'try once more.' And they're not happy.

What I notice is this: they want to move. They are not allowed to move in class. They are supposed to 'sit still' and 'be quiet' until it is 'their turn to talk.' And I also notice they are not usually very confident or physically fit (or they are very fit and can't stop fidgeting) — one or the other.

So I tell them that they are in control of their bodies and that I am going to move with them. I give them something to squeeze (a nerf ball or squish ball of some sort). I give them a peppermint (so they can suck on it). I do whatever it takes to engage their senses and energy so they can focus on text. They hold one side of the book, I hold the other. They move left, I move left.

Examples:

- A student I just taught this summer could not read unless we were lying on the floor on our stomachs with the book in front of us — and he was kicking both of his legs knee to ankle up and down, rhythmically. Thump! One foot hit the floor. It came back up and thump! The other foot hit the floor.

- Another kid leaned back in our tilt-and-turn rocking chairs, put his feet on the desk (above his head), and rocked back and forth, upside down, while holding his side of the book as I held mine, rocking in tandem beside him.

Both of these kids made astounding progress. *I think it was because they had the freedom to move as they needed to, as they were learning.*

Bouncing your leg rhythmically improves cognition if it keeps you focused on your material instead of wishing you could be elsewhere, moving in another way, and therefore distracting you from your text. Your focus on your text and processing that text contribute to improved cognition. Whatever helps — do it.

If you want to improve your cognition, start jumping rope. Aim to improve the number of times you skip rope without tripping the rope — and improve by at least one count every day. Keep a chart. You will see that as your jumprope ability increases, your cognitive ability will also increase. I don't know if it is a 1:1 correlation, or even a causation. I do know there is some correlation because I have seen it in every one of my students.

Bouncing your leg is a small way to improve focus, which improves cognition. But to really do it right, also have a jumprope handy and use it during every break in studying or working…

Matt Hastie adds an important link in his comment to this answer, and I am taking the liberty of quoting from him, here:

> *So why do kids with ADHD fidget and wiggle and run and jump and bounce and scream and play so much? Kids with ADHD are understimulated, which means that their thresholds are so high, that the stimuli in their environment does not cause them to release enough neurotransmitters to fit into all the necessary receptor sites. Messages don't pass from one neuron to another as easily as they do for those of us without ADHD. Their thresholds are high. Kids with ADHD fidget and squirm in order to provide extra stimulation, which translates into more keys fitting into more locks, and they can pass messages efficiently. Ever studied something intensely and then noticed that your leg was bouncing? Same thing. You were bouncing your leg to stimulate yourself and send a sufficient number of neurotransmitters into the synapse. When kids have to stimulate themselves, it can be hard on everyone around them, since this translates into bouncing off the walls.*

Yvonne Kao adds these three points in her comments, excerpted here:

> *1. Improved cognition associated with improved physical fitness and motor coordination. There's lots of research showing this*

correlation exists and it may drive the effect you observe with jumping rope.

2. Improved cognition because you are not wasting cognitive capacity inhibiting movement your body wants to make by default. Typical people do not naturally sit perfectly still all the time, much less an ADHD child.

3. Improved cognition because, having recently expended a bunch of physical energy, your body naturally wants to move less to compensate, and thus you don't have so much movement to inhibit to begin with, freeing up cognitive capacity for thinking.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-nan-waldman

NEUROSCIENCE

What is the neurological basis of curiosity?

Bradley Voytek, Ph.D. in neuroscience from the University of California, Berkeley and post-doctoral fellow at UCSF.

Well, gosh. My answer just got all long and philosophical and talky. This question (or rather, the sub-question) doesn't make sense, in a neuroscientific sense.

The question itself is of a type that is commonly asked in cognitive neuroscience: where is <vague behavior> in the brain?

But what does it even mean to ask where "curiosity" is in the brain? What would an answer look like?

According to one article:

> In study after study, scientists have found that the striatum lit up like an inferno of activity when people didn't know exactly what was going to happen next, when they were on the verge of solving their mystery and hoped to be rewarded — it was more active then, in fact, than when people received their reward and had their curiosity satisfied. (http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/wired_to_wonder/)

"So," you may ask, "what's wrong with that answer? That

seems reasonable and sound and very sciencey!"

You just got brain-mesmerized!

I can prove, with one statement, that this answer is wrong (if you're impatient, jump to point 2 at the bottom).

So what is wrong with this explanation (he says, finally getting to the damned point)? I'll break both of these points down in detail later.

1. The question is phrased in such a way that it presumes that "curiosity" is a singular thing.

2. The question presumes that a complex behavior or emotion can be localized to a brain region or regions. There are several philosophical pitfalls packaged into the answer, such as the ontological commitment to the narrative of cognitive neuroscience and the cerebral localization of function.

To be clear, what I'm not saying is that behaviors aren't in the brain. What I am saying is that the cerebral localization narrative is too simplistic.

Let me break down these points.

1. IS CURIOSITY A SINGULAR THING?

When you ask "where is curiosity in the brain," you assume that researchers can somehow isolate curiosity from other emotions and behaviors in a lab and dissect it apart. This is very, very difficult, if not impossible. Neuroimaging (almost always) relies on the notion of cognitive subtraction, which is a way of comparing your behavior or emotion of interest (curiosity) against some baseline state that is not curiosity.

Or, as I say in my book chapter from *The Mind and the Frontal Lobes*:

> The underlying assumption in these studies is that activity in brain networks alters in a task-dependent manner that becomes evident after averaging many event-related responses and comparing those against a baseline condition. Deviations from this baseline reflect a change in the neuronal processing demands required to perform the task of interest.

No, it cannot. Here's how I know: I've personally worked with people who have a severely damaged striatum. Know what? They still have curiostiy. If the striatum is where curiosity is in the brain, how can someone whose striata are gone still have curiosty? They cannot. Yet they do. Poof. Hypothesis disproved.

Imagine asking, "Where is video located in my computer?" That doesn't make any sense. Your monitor is required to see the video. Your graphics card is required to render the video. The software is required to generate the code for the video. But the "video" isn't located anywhere in the computer.

Now there's a subtlety here. It may be that people with damaged striata have curiosity impairments (whatever that means), which would agree with the fMRI study discussed in that link above, but it proves that the striatum is not where curiosity is in the brain. More technically: the striatum may be a critical part of a network of brain regions that support curiosity behaviors, but that is different from saying that the striatum is where curiosity is.

Or, as I say in my chapter:

> The cognitive subtraction method... provide[s] details of functional localization that can then be tested and corroborated using other methodologies, including lesion studies. The interpretation of these localization results is confounded, however, by a lack of clarity in what is meant for a "function" to be localized. For example, Young and colleagues (2000) noted that for a given function to be localizable, that function "must be capable of being considered both structurally and functionally discrete;" a property that the brain is incapable of assuming due to the intricate, large-scale neuronal interconnectivity.

> Thus, discussing behavioral functions outside of the context of the larger cortical and subcortical networks involved with that function is a poorly posed problem. Therefore, the scientific study of cognition requires detailed neuroanatomical and connectivity information to compliment functional activity findings.

Anyway, this prompted me to write a whole blog post with link to papers, etc. about this topic: http://blog.ketyov.

com/2011/01/how-to-be-neuroscientist.html.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-bradley-voytek

Why do living things die?

Paul King, Computational Neuroscientist, Software Entrepreneur

It's not that living things die; it's that multicellular organisms die. But why?

Every single-celled organism alive today has been in existence since life began over three billion years ago. This is because individual cells do not give birth, they divide. After cell division, the two cells that result are each as old as the single cell that preceded them. The cell does not become younger by dividing. (Although this may not be exactly true, see: [1].)

Thus every cell in your body is over three billion years old.

The strategy that multicellular organisms such as humans use to project themselves into the future is to create new cell colonies from a single undifferentiated cell rather than maintaining existing colonies indefinitely. The main reason is that reproduction is more flexible and robust than maintenance, and it provides a way of starting over with a "clean slate" and slightly different genes. Complex organisms accumulate billions of errors and problems over their lifetime. Most of these errors are fixed as fast as they happen, but life takes a toll and not all problems are reversible. Just as reinstalling Microsoft Windows every so often fixes accumulated system issues, so does generating a new organism every so often from a single cell.

Given that biology has selected this strategy, evolution has optimized for producing the most successful offspring. Once the individual has reproduced, its only evolutionary role is to support the success of its offspring. Aging longer is just not something evolution has had a reason to optimize. And in fact given limited environmental resources, the offspring often do

better if the older generation doesn't stay around forever competing with younger generations for scarce resources.

In terms of what happens physiologically, there are two main contributors to aging.

The first is the accumulation of biological defects. Viruses and disease take a toll even after healing; UV rays slowly but inevitably damage DNA; and proteins, cell structure, and the neurons which hold memories all degrade over time due to thermodynamic molecular disruptions and invasions by other species.

The second is the aging process itself. The organism develops to maturity and ages in stages according to a genetically determined life plan. Muscles atrophy, bones brittle, and metabolism changes. But the life plan has never run more than eighty years until recently, and evolution only ever optimized the first forty years or so. So humans are in new territory that is poorly understood, and which evolution has never had a reason to fine tune.

It may be possible to slow or stop some of the genetically determined aging processes. While this may not be good for an overpopulated planet, it is sure to be popular with those that can afford the medical intervention. Let's just hope the social security system holds out!

[1] There is evidence that even in "symmetric" cell division, one child cell may be slightly "younger" (less prone to death) than the other. See: Stewert EJ, et al (2005). Aging and death in an organism that reproduces by morphologically symmetric division. *PLoS Biology*. http://www.plos-biology.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pbio.0030045

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-paul-king

What are the economics of lying?

Ben Golub, Economics Ph.D., Stanford [GSB]

SUMMARY

Lying was one of the first issues to be studied by the founders of game theory — they focused on bluffing in one-shot poker as a basic model. The idea is that with some probability, you randomly play aggressively even though you have bad cards. With some positive probability, the other side folds when that happens, because you also play aggressively when you have good cards. This notion of **mixed strategies** as a way to create uncertainty in your opponent is a very fundamental notion in game theory.

- More modern theories have models of lying with **many periods** and can explain dynamic phenomena where an antagonistic type **imitates the good type** to "**build credibility**," then **burns that reputation** at an opportune time when he can benefit the most by deceiving the other player.

- Some innovative economic theorists believe that economists don't really have a good model of lying because **in classic game theory nobody is ever truly deceived**: they know the exact probability that the other side is not "telling the truth" and they just do the best they can under the circumstances. Modern research is trying to create models that involve "real deception," where people are genuinely led astray in their beliefs.

LONGER VERSION

This is a wonderful question because the issue of deception brings out some of the best successes and the greatest flaws in economic theory — particularly game theory, the area in which lying has been studied most.

The simplest and oldest notions of "deception" go back to the very beginnings of modern game theory. This paper

(http://www.math.ucla.edu/~tom/papers/poker1.pdf) discusses Borel's and von Neumann's models of two-person, zero-sum poker with bluffing, which were published in the 1930s. John Nash's 1950 dissertation (http://www.princeton. edu/mudd/news/faq/topics/Non-Cooperative_Games_Nash. pdf, scan of the original, page 32) contains a simple poker game in which agents can bluff, opening with some probability even when they have bad cards. Of course, there is nothing intrinsic in choosing to open that says, "I have good cards;" it is just an action in the game. And, in equilibrium, your opponent knows exactly what the probability is that you have a good hand when you "claim to." The reason that he can't completely disregard the claim is that you sometimes behave aggressively when you DO have a good hand. In these simple, static (one period) models of lying, the credibility of the bluff is supported by the possibility that it is not a bluff.

The more modern literature has focused on dynamic (multi-period) models, in which one can tell more elaborate stories about "building and destroying credibility." One standard approach can be illustrated by a classic model introduced by Joel Sobel in the article "A Theory of Credibility" [*Review of Economic Studies* (1985) 52(4) pp. 557-573]. There are two agents: a king and a spy. The king is unsure about the motivations of the spy, who might want to help the king or might be a double agent whose motivations are exactly opposed to those of the king. Every month, a diplomatic issue comes up with its own level of importance. The spy observes what would be best for the king and advises an action (say, A or B). After the action, the king learns whether it was the right action to take.

In equilibrium, a double agent builds credibility by giving the king good advice for a while. Then he advises the king to do the wrong thing for the king when a sufficiently important issue comes up. After that, the double agent has been outed, but has benefited in one high-stakes issue.

This illustrates many of the standard ingredients in economic models of deception:

- Asymmetric information: at least one agent's "type" or motivation is unknown to the other(s).

- Pooling: certain types (spies in the example) behave like other types ("pool on the same action"), making it impossible for the opposite side (the king) to figure out who is who until one type (usually the "bad" type) reveals himself.

- Building reputation (for credibility, e.g.) and then burning it at an opportune time.

The study of such models has become a very active area in game theory. An excellent scholarly monograph on this field is *Repeated Games and Reputations: Long Run Relationships* by George Mailath and Larry Sameulson (http://www.amazon.com/Repeated-Games-Reptions-Long-Run-Relationships/dp/0195300793/) — but note that this is an advanced graduate textbook with lots of math.

A final big-picture remark: in these game-theoretic models, nobody is actually being tricked. Agents have accurate beliefs about what the other side is doing (that's the definition of a Nash equilibrium) and are doing the best they can. Several innovative economic theorists at Stanford (Yossi Feinberg, Matt Jackson) have remarked that, for this reason, there isn't really a good model of lying in economics [1]. Real lying should involve the target being, at least potentially, an "unsuspecting victim" who really believes what he has been told. A recent paper that seems to move in this direction is by Ettinger and Jehiel ["A Theory of Deception", *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics* 2010, 2(1), pp. 1-20, http://www.enpc.fr/ceras/jehiel/deception.pdf].

[1] Note, for example, that a usual justification for accurate beliefs in equilibrium is that players have been playing this kind of game a lot, and have a sense for how often the truth matches the plain-language meaning of a particular statement. Maybe that's true when five people have been playing poker together for a long time. But important lies are often told "out of equilibrium," when there is no reason to believe that players have a good "read" of the likelihood that a claim is true.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ben-golub

What is it like to have an understanding of very advanced mathematics?

Anon User

- **You can answer many seemingly difficult questions quickly.** But you are not very impressed by what can look like magic, because you know the trick. The trick is that your brain can quickly decide if question is answerable by one of a few powerful general purpose "machines" (e.g., continuity arguments, the correspondences between geometric and algebraic objects, linear algebra, ways to reduce the infinite to the finite through various forms of compactness) combined with specific facts you have learned about your area. The number of fundamental ideas and techniques that people use to solve problems is, perhaps surprisingly, pretty small — see http://www.tricki.org/tricki/map for a partial list, maintained by Timothy Gowers.

- **You are often confident that something is true long before you have an airtight proof for it (this happens especially often in geometry).** The main reason is that you have a large catalogue of connections between concepts, and you can quickly intuit that if X were to be false, that would create tensions with other things you know to be true, so you are inclined to believe X is probably true to maintain the harmony of the conceptual space. It's not so much that you can imagine the situation perfectly, but you can quickly imagine many other things that are logically connected to it.

- **You are comfortable with feeling like you have no deep understanding of the problem you are studying.** Indeed, when you do have a deep understanding, you have solved the problem, and it is time to do something else. This makes the total time you spend in life reveling in your mastery of something quite brief. One of the main

skills of research scientists of any type is knowing how to work comfortably and productively in a state of confusion. More on this in the next few bullets.

- **Your intuitive thinking about a problem is productive and usefully structured, wasting little time on being aimlessly puzzled.** For example, when answering a question about a high-dimensional space (e.g., whether a certain kind of rotation of a five-dimensional object has a "fixed point" that does not move during the rotation), you do not spend much time straining to visualize those things that do not have obvious analogues in two and three dimensions. (Violating this principle is a huge source of frustration for beginning maths students who don't know that they shouldn't be straining to visualize things for which they don't seem to have the visualizing machinery.) Instead...

- **When trying to understand a new thing, you automatically focus on very simple examples that are easy to think about, and then you leverage intuition about the examples into more impressive insights.** For example, you might imagine two- and three-dimensional rotations that are analogous to the one you really care about, and think about whether they clearly do or don't have the desired property. Then you think about what was important to the examples and try to distill those ideas into symbols. Often, you see that the key idea in the symbolic manipulations doesn't depend on anything about two or three dimensions, and you know how to answer your hard question.

- As you get more mathematically advanced, the examples you consider easy are actually complex insights built up from many easier examples; the "simple case" you think about now took you two years to become comfortable with. But at any given stage, you do not strain to obtain a magical illumination about something intractable; you work to reduce it to the things that feel friendly.

- To me, the **biggest misconception that non-mathematicians have about how mathematicians think is that there is some mysterious mental faculty that is used to crack**

a problem all at once. In reality, one can ever think only a few moves ahead, trying out possible attacks from one's arsenal on simple examples relating to the problem, trying to establish partial results, or looking to make analogies with other ideas one understands. This is the same way that one solves problems in one's first real maths courses in university and in competitions. What happens as you get more advanced is simply that the arsenal grows larger, the thinking gets somewhat faster due to practice, and you have more examples to try, perhaps making better guesses about what is likely to yield progress. Sometimes, during this process, a sudden insight comes, but it would not be possible without the painstaking groundwork (http://terrytao.wordpress.com/career-advice/does-one-have-to-be-a-genius-to-do-maths/).

- Indeed, most of the bullet points here summarize feelings familiar to many serious students of mathematics who are in the middle of their undergraduate careers; as you learn more mathematics, these experiences apply to "bigger" things but have the same fundamental flavor.

- **You go up in abstraction, "higher and higher." The main object of study yesterday becomes just an example or a tiny part of what you are considering today.** For example, in calculus classes you think about functions or curves. In functional analysis or algebraic geometry, you think of spaces whose *points* are functions or curves — that is, you "zoom out" so that every function is just a point in a space, surrounded by many other "nearby" functions. Using this kind of zooming out technique, you can say very complex things in short sentences — things that, if unpacked and said at the zoomed-in level, would take up pages. Abstracting and compressing in this way allows you to consider extremely complicated issues while using your limited memory and processing power.

- **The particularly "abstract" or "technical" parts of many other subjects seem quite accessible because they boil down to maths you already know. You generally feel confident about your ability to learn most quantitative ideas and techniques.** A theoretical physicist friend likes

to say, only partly in jest, that there should be books titled "_____ for Mathematicians," where _____ is something generally believed to be difficult (quantum chemistry, general relativity, securities pricing, formal epistemology). Those books would be short and pithy, because many key concepts in those subjects are ones that mathematicians are well equipped to understand. Often, those parts can be explained more briefly and elegantly than they usually are if the explanation can assume a knowledge of maths and a facility with abstraction.

- Learning the domain-specific elements of a different field can still be hard — for instance, physical intuition and economic intuition seem to rely on tricks of the brain that are not learned through mathematical training alone. But the quantitative and logical techniques you sharpen as a mathematician allow you to take many shortcuts that make learning other fields easier, as long as you are willing to be humble and modify those mathematical habits that are not useful in the new field.

- **You move easily between multiple seemingly very different ways of representing a problem**. For example, most problems and concepts have more algebraic representations (closer in spirit to an algorithm) and more geometric ones (closer in spirit to a picture). You go back and forth between them naturally, using whichever one is more helpful at the moment.

- Indeed, some of the most powerful ideas in mathematics (e.g., duality, Galois theory, algebraic geometry, provide "dictionaries" for moving between "worlds" in ways that, *ex ante*, are very surprising. For example, Galois theory allows us to use our understanding of symmetries of shapes (e.g., rigid motions of an octagon) to understand why you can solve any fourth-degree polynomial equation in closed form, but not any fifth-degree polynomial equation. Once you know these threads between different parts of the universe, you can use them like wormholes to extricate yourself from a place where you would otherwise be stuck. The next two bullets expand on this.

- **Spoiled by the power of your best tools, you tend to shy away from messy calculations or long, case-by-case arguments unless they are absolutely unavoidable.** Mathematicians develop a powerful attachment to elegance and depth, which are in tension with, if not directly opposed to, mechanical calculation. Mathematicians will often spend days figuring out why a result follows easily from some very deep and general pattern that is already well-understood, rather than from a string of calculations. Indeed, you tend to choose problems *motivated* by how likely it is that there will be some "clean" insight in them, as opposed to a detailed but ultimately unenlightening proof by exhaustively enumerating a bunch of possibilities. (Nevertheless, detailed calculation of an example is often a crucial part of beginning to see what is really going on in a problem; and, depending on the field, *some* calculation often plays an essential role even in the best proof of a result.)

- In *A Mathematician's Apology,* (http://www.math.ualberta.ca/~mss/misc/A%20Mathematician's%20Apology.pdf, the most poetic book I know on what it is "like" to be a mathematician), G.H. Hardy wrote:

  "In both [these example] theorems (and in the theorems, of course, I include the proofs) there is a very high degree of unexpectedness, combined with inevitability and economy. The arguments take so odd and surprising a form; the weapons used seem so childishly simple when compared with the far-reaching results; but there is no escape from the conclusions. There are no complications of detail — one line of attack is enough in each case; and this is true too of the proofs of many much more difficult theorems, the full appreciation of which demands quite a high degree of technical proficiency. We do not want many 'variations' in the proof of a mathematical theorem: 'enumeration of cases', indeed, is one of the duller forms of mathematical argument. A mathematical proof should resemble a simple and clear-cut constellation, not a scattered cluster in the Milky Way."

  "…[A solution to a difficult chess problem] is quite genuine mathematics, and has its merits; but it is just that 'proof by enu-

meration of cases' (and of cases which do not, at bottom, differ at all profoundly) which a real mathematician tends to despise."

- **You develop a strong aesthetic preference for powerful and general ideas that connect hundreds of difficult questions, as opposed to resolutions of particular puzzles.** Mathematicians don't really care about "the answer" to any particular question; even the most sought-after theorems, like Fermat's Last Theorem http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fermat's_Last_Theorem, are only tantalizing because their difficulty tells us that we have to develop very good tools and understand very new things to have a shot at proving them. It is what we get in the process, and not the answer *per se*, that is the valuable thing. The accomplishment a mathematician seeks is finding a new dictionary or wormhole between different parts of the conceptual universe. As a result, many mathematicians do not focus on deriving the practical or computational implications of their studies (which can be a drawback of the hyper-abstract approach!); instead, they simply want to find the most powerful and general connections. Timothy Gowers has some interesting comments on this issue, and disagreements within the mathematical community about it (https://www.dpmms.cam.ac.uk/~wtg10/2cultures.pdf.

- **Understanding something abstract or proving that something is true becomes a task a lot like building something.** You think: "First I will lay this foundation, then I will build this framework using these familiar pieces, but leave the walls to fill in later, then I will test the beams…" All these steps have mathematical analogues, and structuring things in a modular way allows you to spend several days thinking about something you do not understand without feeling lost or frustrated. (I should say, "without feeling unbearably lost and frustrated; some amount of these feelings is inevitable, but the key is to reduce them to a tolerable degree.)

- Andrew Wiles, who proved Fermat's Last Theorem, used an "exploring" metaphor:

  "Perhaps I can best describe my experience of doing mathemat-

ics in terms of a journey through a dark unexplored mansion. You enter the first room of the mansion and it's completely dark. You stumble around bumping into the furniture, but gradually you learn where each piece of furniture is. Finally, after six months or so, you find the light switch, you turn it on, and suddenly it's all illuminated. You can see exactly where you were. Then you move into the next room and spend another six months in the dark. So each of these breakthroughs, while sometimes they're momentary, sometimes over a period of a day or two, they are the culmination of — and couldn't exist without — the many months of stumbling around in the dark that proceed them." (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/physics/andrew-wiles-fermat.html)

- **In listening to a seminar or while reading a paper, you don't get stuck as much as you used to** in youth because you are good at modularizing a conceptual space, taking certain calculations or arguments you don't understand as "black boxes," and considering their implications anyway. You can sometimes make statements you know are true and have good intuition for, without understanding all the details. You can often detect where the delicate or interesting part of something is based on only a very high-level explanation. (I first saw these phenomena highlighted by Ravi Vakil, who offers insightful advice on being a mathematics student: http://math.stanford.edu/~vakil/potentialstudents.html.)

- **You are good at generating your own definitions and your own questions in thinking about some new kind of abstraction.**

  One of the things one learns fairly late in a typical mathematical education (often only at the stage of starting to do research) is how to make good, useful definitions. Something I've reliably heard from people who know parts of mathematics well but never went on to be professional mathematicians (i.e., write articles about new mathematics for a living) is that they were good at proving difficult propositions that were stated in a textbook exercise, but would be lost if presented with a mathematical structure and asked to find and prove some interesting facts about

it. Concretely, the ability to do this amounts to being good at making definitions and, using the newly defined concepts, formulating precise results that other mathematicians find intriguing or enlightening.

- This kind of challenge is like being given a world and asked to find events in it that come together to form a good detective story. Unlike a more standard detective, you have to figure out what the "crime" (interesting question) might be; you'll you have to generate your own "clues" by building up deductively from the basic axioms. To do these things, you use analogies with other detective stories (mathematical theories) that you know and a taste for what is surprising or deep. How this process works is perhaps the most difficult aspect of mathematical work to describe precisely but also the thing that I would guess is the strongest thing that mathematicians have in common.

- **You are easily annoyed by imprecision in talking about the quantitative or logical.** This is mostly because you are trained to quickly think about counterexamples that make an imprecise claim seem obviously false.

- **On the other hand, you are very comfortable with intentional imprecision or "hand-waving" in areas you know, because you know how to fill in the details.** Terence Tao is very eloquent about this here (http://terrytao.wordpress.com/career-advice/there%E2%80%99s-more-to-mathematics-than-rigour-and-proofs/):

- "[After learning to think rigorously, comes the] 'post-rigorous' stage, in which one has grown comfortable with all the rigorous foundations of one's chosen field, and is now ready to revisit and refine one's pre-rigorous intuition on the subject, but this time with the intuition solidly buttressed by rigorous theory. (For instance, in this stage one would be able to quickly and accurately perform computations in vector calculus by using analogies with scalar calculus, or informal and semi-rigorous use of infinitesimals, big-O notation, and so forth, and be able to convert all such calculations into a rigorous argument whenever required.) The emphasis is now on applications, intuition,

and the 'big picture.' This stage usually occupies the late graduate years and beyond."

In particular, an idea that took hours to understand correctly the first time ("for any arbitrarily small epsilon I can find a small delta so that this statement is true") becomes such a basic element of your later thinking that you don't give it conscious thought.

- Before wrapping up, it is worth mentioning that mathematicians are not immune to the limitations faced by most others. They are not typically intellectual superheroes. For instance, they often become resistant to new ideas and uncomfortable with ways of thinking (even about mathematics) that are not their own. They can be defensive about intellectual turf, dismissive of others, or petty in their disputes. Above, I have tried to summarize how the mathematical way of thinking feels and works at its best, without focusing on personality flaws of mathematicians or on the politics of various mathematical fields. These issues are worthy of their own long answers!

- **You are humble about your knowledge because you are aware of how weak maths is, and you are comfortable with the fact that you can say nothing intelligent about most problems**. There are only very few mathematical questions to which we have reasonably insightful answers. There are even fewer questions, obviously, to which *any given* mathematician can give a good answer. After two or three years of a standard university curriculum, a good maths undergraduate can effortlessly write down hundreds of mathematical questions to which the very best mathematicians could not venture even a tentative answer. (The theoretical computer scientist Richard Lipton lists some examples of potentially "deep" ignorance here: http://rjlipton.wordpress.com/2009/12/26/mathematical-embarrassments/.) This makes it more comfortable to be stumped by most problems; a sense that you know roughly what questions are tractable and which are currently far beyond our abilities is humbling, but also frees you from being very intimidated, because you do know you are fa-

miliar with the most powerful apparatus we have for dealing with these kinds of problems.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-5

MOVIES & TELEVISION

Given our current technology and with the proper training, would it be possible for someone to become Batman?

Mark Hughes, Screenwriter, Forbes Blogger

I know everyone hates having a question answered with "it depends," but…

It depends. WHICH Batman, the one in the current film franchise, the one from the current monthlies, the one from the Justice League, etc etc?

I am going to make an assumption here, in order to best answer your question. We'll put aside the issue of Batman trained by ninjas in the films, or the question of whether in the comics Batman operates with sort-of-superpowers when interacting in stories alongside Superman and other such characters. By "become Batman," you mean the basic concept of Batman that we all could agree upon — a master of martial arts, of forensic and detective skills, of gymnastics, of science and chemistry, of history and geography, of the workings of organized crime, of criminal psychology and physiology, and a man with a suit offering protection against bullets and knives and electrocution but which allows him to move as fast as an

Olympian runner and acrobat.

The simple answer is, no. Unless you really boil Batman down to a very diluted level as just a really strong, fast, good fighter who can jump far and with good street smarts plus an education in crime and psychology, and who wears a lot of armor and a mask.

The genius of Batman is that it *pretends* to be realistic, it lets us convince ourselves that with enough money and training, *we* could become Batman, too. But it's still fantasy, it's just a fantasy that is more compelling and convincing and thus more fun.

If you joined the military and became something like a Delta Force commando of the highest quality, while studying nights to get a double-major in criminal justice and psychology (with a minor in chemistry), then you might *also* have time to take weekend courses in detective work and get a P.I. license. Then, after probably ten years to reach all of those levels combined, you might be twenty-eight (if you started right out of high school) and would then need to maintain your physical level while getting a job as a police officer in order to learn real crime-solving and detective work on the streets and at crime scenes, to get the experience it would really take to be a master. Let's say you are so good it only takes you perhaps three years to become a top detective and expert in these regards — now you are thirty-one, and you just finished the most basic level of preparation you need to be an expert in just some of the most obvious fields required to match Batman.

Now you have to quit the force, and develop a good cover story for yourself so nobody suspects that Batman might be the guy who is an expert in all of those fields Batman is a master at. You have to have made sure you lived your life never revealing your true feelings about crime and vigilantism etc, and in fact covering it up unless you want to be arrested as a suspect the first time Batman has been around town. You need to spend some time doing dry runs around town to find your way around rooftops and fire escapes, practice running around at night in the shadows and not being seen, and presumably start practicing using your ropes and grappling hooks and other equipment you need for nightly patrols. Do some dry runs, make final preparations in case of emergen-

cies, etc.

And you need to have been investing money and amassing a fortune the entire time, because the technology you'll need to even get close to a real-world version of Batman will cost millions of dollars. So you've done that, and now you start spending the money to get an armored suit full of electronics to communicate with assistants and have night vision and so on. You need a base of operations, so you buy one of those old used missile silos the military sells (yeah, they really do that, and it's pretty cool inside them) and turn it into a secret headquarters for the computers and monitoring equipment and car and bike and other equipment you need for your vigilante life.

Conservatively, you should probably be about thirty-two at this point. And you are only about to go out on your first night as Batman. Okay, it's taken longer than expected and been pretty hard, and honestly you are not quite as much a master of all fields as Batman, but at least you got the basics and are pretty well trained and smart and equipped. So off you go, looking to stop crime…

…and you're looking. And looking. Oh, wait, you hear police sirens or you get a transmission from picking up the police radio calls, there's a domestic disturbance in progress… well, that's not really what Batman does, so you let that one go to the cops. Then you get another call about a robbery, ah ha! Finally Batman is going into action! You run across those rooftops, swing across to another roof — whoa crap, that was a lot more dangerous than it looks in the comics! But you're booking it, running flat out and probably hitting, what, a good ten miles per hour? Maybe less actually because of having to dodge things and stop at the edge of the roof to swing down again.

Anyway, there you are, rooftop to rooftop, and it occurs to you that the cop cars are so far gone now that you barely hear the sirens. So you think, "Hmm, no wonder the real Batman has a car, this rooftop thing looks cool, but I'll never make it in time to stop a crime that isn't happening within a block or two."

And you don't — make it in time, that is. The first few nights, you keep showing up and the robberies or shootings

or whatever are already over, and you realize that this makes sense because most reports about crimes are only after it happens, not while it's taking place. And you also remember that as a cop, you almost never just walked up or drove up accidentally right where a crime happened to taking place. In fact, you were just one of several thousand cops in your city, and most of you never just stumbled right across a significant crime in progress.

By your second week, you are getting unhappy that 90% of the crimes you've even seen up-close are just pathetic junkies buying crack from another pathetic junkie selling drugs to support his/her own habit. And nothing makes you feel LESS like Batman than scaring sad homeless crackheads. You tried to chase down a kid who you saw punch a lady and take her purse, but you can't really pursue that kind of thing by running on rooftops, you gotta do it the hard way by chasing him on foot down the sidewalk… in your full Batman costume, where everybody can see you. People are taking photos on cell-phones, and yep, there's a cop car at the intersection and he saw you, and now he has his lights on and it's YOU he's after. Great, you have to let the kid go so you can run down an alley and climb up a fire escape to the roof to get away.

At last, week three, you get lucky — an armed robbery, right there across the street! You leap down onto the hood of their car, cape over the windshield just like in *The Dark Knight Returns*. And a teenage kid in the passenger seat fires a shotgun though the windshield in panic, blasting your torso.

You are wearing armor, though, haha! So it merely shreds your costume and knocks you off the car onto the street, but man that *hurts!* And it takes your breath away just long enough for the car to speed off. You get up, angry and just in time to see everyone taking your photo again and staring at your shredded outfit. Then the police come around the corner, and you run off again but this time you are injured because although the armor stopped the slug it still bruised you and broke a rib. You are fast, but not fast enough this time. The police draw their guns and order you to stop. You turn and grab for the smoke pellet on your belt to help hide your getaway, but unfortunately for you the cops see you reaching for something and open fire… and your suit's armor is already a

mess from the shotgun blast earlier. Uh oh.

When you wake up in the ICU, your mask and costume are gone, you're in a lot of pain, but the doctors successfully removed the bullets and re-inflated your lung. The downside is the set of handcuffs trapping you in the bed. As a master detective, you can of course easily pick the lock on the cuffs to escape, but on the other hand, the staph infection you caught after surgery is pretty bad and you feel like s**t. So you wait until night to sneak out — except you fall asleep on your pain meds, and wake up the next morning to the police coming to pick you up and take you to the infirmary at the state prison. Where you will spend a month recuperating until they can transfer you to the county jail for your first court appearance. During which your only comment to the judge is, "I guess it's not really possible to become Batman."

Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na-*na*! Bat*man*!

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-mark-hughes

In *The Dark Knight*, how did the Joker really get his scars?

Mac Booker, I watch movies, collect them in the ol' brain, and call on them when needed.

Whatever way he is claiming at any moment.

As in the comics, the Joker regards the past as a mutable medium, which only exists insofar as it is remembered, and the act of remembering and forgetting is, in fact, creation and destruction. Was the Joker the leader of the Red Hood gang? A failed stand-up comic forced into crime by the gang he appeared to be leading? Did his wife die in an accident? Was she murdered by a corrupt cop? Did she exist at all? Because the Joker is able to forget and remember at will, the truth is whatever version of his backstory that he is remembering at any moment, regardless of whether that history conflicts with what he remembered yesterday.

In the words of Nietzsche:

> [Beasts] do not remember; mankind does. Man is an historical animal, whose memories weigh down upon him. Happiness is forgetting, though remembering is what gives man the ability to utilize lessons from the past in the present.

In some sense, the Joker is a Nietzchian ideal: a man with total control over both remethmbering and forgetting.

This is what makes him a nemesis of the Batman: Bruce Wayne cannot forget anything. The deaths of his parents, of (in the comics) the second Robin, of (in the movie) his oldest friend, these memories and this history are the essential components of his character. Every action is motivated by memory and history he is unable or unwilling to escape.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-mac-booker

ACTORS AND ACTRESSES

How do actors' spouses feel about love scenes in film and TV?

Marcus Geduld, Artistic Director, Folding Chair Classical Theatre, NYC (foldingchairtheatre.org)

I'm a theatre director (with a tiny amount of experience in television), but I don't imagine the dynamics are much different in theatre than in film or television. Of course, different people feel differently, and there probably are some who get jealous. What I write here is based on my own experience and the experiences of the many couples I've worked with over the years.

My wife is an actress. I have watched her make out on stage many times. Some of those have been plays that I've directed, and I've had the odd experience (which doesn't feel odd to me, but I can see how it would seem odd to an outsider) of directing her to kiss another actor more passionately.

It's simply not a big deal, and I don't feel jealous. I remember feeling funny the first time, but the 900th time, in

rehearsal, you watch a kiss, it ceased to be very meaningful.

There are a lot of factors that tend to make this stuff no-big-deal. First of all, everyone in the business understands, going in, that it's part of the business. It's not a surprise or anything. I work with an ensemble of actors, and I think, by now, most of them have played sex scenes together. No one cares. We joke about it.

Second, it's almost never sexy. It's choreographed. You simply can't tell two actors to "go at it" and let them improvise. No one in the audience would see anything. Heads would be in the way, etc. It's even less romantic in the film world, where there are camera men in track suits and mics stuck all over the place. Even if the spouse wasn't there during rehearsal, he would know — just from being married to the actor — how unsexy this stuff is.

(Once, when I was acting — long before I was married — I got to make out with an actress I was very attracted to. I was excited beforehand, but in the end it turned out to be totally un-titillating. It was by-the-numbers. Turn head, count to three, press lips together...)

Added to this, most people in the business, if they stay in the business, are very professional and have a good sense of humor about this stuff. It's rare for anyone to "pull anything" or to try to take advantage of a sex scene. Actors do their work and then quit.

Which is not to say there isn't a fantasy element to it. If you're playing a bad guy, part of the fun is... getting to be the bad guy. To get to pretend you're blowing up the White House and have a blast doing it. And part of the fun of a sex scene is... making out with someone.

I am sure my wife has enjoyed making out with some of her co-stars (and I know that she's suffered through others). That's human nature, and it doesn't make me jealous or un-comfortable. It would be odd if she hated every minute of it, wouldn't it?

The final piece of the puzzle is that theatre and film folks tend to be very liberal and pretty easy-going about sexual matters. That isn't a coded way of saying, "We're all swingers." We're not. But we're very far from being prudes, we're very touchy feely in general, and very used to make believe. Some-

one uncomfortable with this stuff isn't likely to go into acting or be married to an actor.

I've noticed a lot of confusion between "actor" and "movie star." People are posting things suggesting that actors are willing to do all kinds of things for fame and money.

Actors — as a whole — don't generally receive either fame or lots of money. With a few exceptions, acting is not a lucrative field. Yes, Tom Cruise makes millions, but less than 1% of actors are stars. If there's a scene in which Cruise goes to Starbucks, the guy behind the counter is just as much an actor as Cruise.

If an actor is in the Screen Actor's Guild, and he's not famous, he's likely to earn union scale, which is about $800 a day. That's not bad, but note that most people in the union aren't working every day. There's a lot of competition, and too many people for the jobs available, so most actors spend a lot of time unemployed or working temp jobs between acting gigs.

They are also not, for the most part, famous. No one remembers what the guy-behind-the-counter looks like. They're focusing on Tom Cruise. No one recognizes most actors when they walk down the street.

(Actors can also make money from residuals — payments doled out each time, say, an episode of a TV show is aired. I have a friend who regularly appears on soaps and shows like "Law and Order." He's not a "background player." He has lines. He just posted on Facebook that he got four residual checks in the mail. Together, they total fifty cents.)

It is true that when actors are young and just starting out, a lot of them are hoping to become stars. And such folks might kiss or have simulated sex in the hopes it will eventually lead to fame and fortune. But once actors have been plying their trade for years, they pretty much know that (unless it's already happened), they're not likely to become stars. I spend most of my like hanging out with actors, and I can promise you they don't all talk about "the big break" they're hoping for.

Yet they still engage in screen kisses, and their spouses still watch them do this. My wife, for instance, is never likely to be rich or famous. She knows it. I know it. And yet I don't say, "If this isn't going to lead to you being a star, quit kissing

people!"

Kissing on stage or film can sometimes be fun, but as I and others have posted here, it's usually not. To make sure the audience sees everything, it has to be tightly choreographed, which takes all the spontaneity out of it. If you don't believe this, try the following experiment with your partner: work out a bit of kissing choreography that is really tightly controlled: the kiss must take place for such-and-such angle and last for exactly X amount of seconds. Etc. Now do it over and over, while a friend watches you and stops you every time you deviate a tiny bit from the plan.

So you might ask, if it's not going to lead to fame and fortune, and if it's not even all that much fun, why do people do it? And why do people's spouses put up with it?

Actors — the ones who have realized they're unlikely to get rich or famous — do it because they consider themselves to be artists. They love their work (which is telling stories), and they take that work very seriously. To NOT kiss someone when it says to do it in the script would be unprofessional, as would be kissing in a half-assed way. It would be like a doctor refusing to see a patient or a waiter refusing to serve a patron. Most actors I know (and in a couple of decades in the business, I've met thousands) take their craft extremely seriously.

(My wife was once in a show I was directing, and his character was supposed to be really attracted to hers, and yet he kept giving her these lame, chaste kisses. The entire cast and crew were pissed off at him. It felt as if he was letting us all down, making us all look bad by refusing to tell his part of the story.)

And most of their spouses are also in the business, so they get it. The spouses that aren't in the business tend to get it, too. (Or those marriages don't last.) They understand that their husbands and wives are working hard (and with great integrity) and pride, and they support their spouses in that effort. For some, it is disconcerting the first few times they see their husband or wife kiss a stranger. But people have an amazing capacity to adapt. The fiftieth time you see it, and note that your partner still stays with you, the kissing starts to seem pretty ordinary.

Yes, there are celebrity marriages that fall apart. (This

happens much less often to non-celebrity actors. For them, the divorce rate seems to be about average.) This has little to do with the fact that they kiss other celebrities on stage or screen. It has much more to do with the way celebrities live their lives in general, which tends to involve constant travel (time away from spouses) and excessive money and power.

PIXAR ANIMATION STUDIOS

Did Pixar accidentally delete *Toy Story 2* during production?

Oren Jacob, Associate Technical Director, TS2

I'm the Oren Jacob in the video about the lost footage (https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=EL_gotyaIeE). Hopefully, I can offer some first person color commentary about the video that might serve to answer the questions here. Note, after twenty years at the studio, I left Pixar last year to start ToyTalk (www.toytalk.com), so this answer hasn't gone through any PR filtering, it's straight from my foggy memory of those events back in the late 90s.

First, it wasn't multiple terabytes of information. Neither all the rendered frames, nor all the data necessary to render those frames in animation, model, shaders, set, and lighting data files were that size back then.

A week prior to driving across the bridge in a last ditch attempt to recover the show (depicted pretty accurately in the video) we had restored the film from backups within forty-eight hours of the /bin/rm -r -f *, run some validation tests, rendered frames, somehow got good pictures back and no errors, and invited the crew back to start working. It took another several days of the entire crew working on that initial restoral to really understand that the restoral was, in fact, incomplete and corrupt. Ack. At that point, we sent everyone home again and had the come-to-Jesus meeting where we all collectively realized that our backup software wasn't dishing

up errors properly (a full disk situation was masking them, if my memory serves), our validation software also wasn't dishing up errors properly (that was written very hastily, and without a clean state to start from, was missing several important error conditions), and several other factors were compounding our lack of concrete, verifiable information.

The only prospect then was to roll back about two months to the last full backup that we thought might work. In that meeting, Galyn mentioned she might have a copy at her house. So we went home to get that machine, and you can watch the video for how that went…

With Galyn's machine now back in the building, we duped that data immediately, then set about the task of trying to verify and validate this tree, which we thought might be about two weeks old. We compared Galyn's restoral with a much older one (from two months prior) and couldn't determine a clear winner, there were too many inconsistencies. So, instead, we set about the task of assembling what effectively amounted to a new source tree, by hand, one file at a time. The total number of files involved was well into the six figures, but we'll round down to 100,000 for the sake of the rest of this discussion to make the math easier.

We identified the files that hadn't changed between the two, and took those straight away. Then there were the files that were on Galyn's but not on the older one; we took Galyn's and assumed they were new. Then there were files that were on the older one but not on Galyn's; we put those in the "hand check" pile, since it is unusual for files to be deleted within a production source tree, and we were suspicious of those deletions. Then there were the files that were different across the two backups, those also went into the "hand check" pile along with any files that were touched more recently than Galyn's version.

Given that, we had something like 70,000 files that we felt good about, and we poured those into a new source tree. For the remaining 30,000 files, it was all hands on deck.

We checked things across three partially complete, partially correct trees… the two month old full backup (A), Galyn's (B, which we thought was the best one), and another cobbled together tree (C) from the stray files left around from

failed renders, backup directories on animator's machines, some heads of source history that were left untouched, verbose test renders, and other random stuff we could find via NFS elsewhere in the building.

We invited a select few members of the crew back to work straight from Friday to Monday morning. We took rolling shifts to sleep and eat and kept plowing through, file by file, comparing each of the files in the "to be checked" list from A, B, and C, doing the best to verify and validate them, one at a time, by looking at them in xdiff.

In the end, human eyes scanned, read, understood, looked for weirdness, and made a decision on something like 30,000 files that weekend.

Having taken our best guesses at those suspect files, we assembled a new master of Toy Story 2. Many source histories were lost as a result, but we had the best version we could pull together. We invited the crew back, and started working again. Every shot went through a test render, and surprisingly, only a dozen or so failed.

I know full well that the following statement will likely blow people's heads up, but the truth is that more than several percentage points of the show (as measured in numbers of files) were never recovered at all. So how could Toy Story 2 work at all? We don't know. The frames were rendering (other than that dozen shots), so we just carried on, fixed those shots, and charged ahead. At that point, there was nothing more that could be done.

And then, some months later, Pixar rewrote the film from almost the ground up, and we made Toy Story 2 again. That rewritten film was the one you saw in theatres and that you can watch now on BluRay.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-oren-jacob

How do directors conceive and think through monster and action scenes?

JJ Abrams, Writer-Director

Every scene has its own unique requirements. This is true whether it's a comedic scene, a still scene, or a busy scene, a scene that's all in-camera vs. one that requires visual effects and CGI. As you break down a scene with increasing resolution, the first thing to do is figure out what you want the sequence to be and how it serves the story. Once you figure out what the scene is supposed to do, your mind races trying to figure out what would be cool.

In a sequence with a creature, first and foremost you want to approach it from as visceral a place as possible. You need to figure out what the endgame of the sequence is. Once you figure that out and what you're going to do, then the fun becomes how you are going to do it. You often begin to come up with a sequence, but what you discover is that a dozen shots that you thought were critical are actually superfluous. Part of what works is sketching it out, either yourself or with a storyboard artist.

In terms of visual effects shots, you need to really be as practical as you are inspired. Which means you need to be able to tell the crew: what we need to build, what we're going to shoot live, what we're going to do in-camera, which scenes are going to be entirely CG, which are going to be filmed in CG, where we're going to create sets, where we're going to be creating a piece of the creature physically with special effects, etc.

A monster scene is like a magic trick; you're saying "I want to put a Testarossa on the stage, I want to cover it with a cloth, and I want to rip the cloth away, and I want there to be a '67 VW bug." Once you know what effect you are trying to achieve, then you start getting into the the mechanics and

working backwards, deconstructing the scene in your head.

THE GODFATHER, PART II

Why does one of the goons trying to kill Frank Pentangelli in the bar say, "Michael Corleone says, 'Hello'"?

Richard Stern, Curious

There are a lot of theories about that line.

One theory posits that that the entire murder was staged by Hyman Roth and the Rosatos to turn Frankie and deliver a star witness to the FBI.

Another supposes that Michael indeed did turn on Frankie and hand him over to the Rosatos, fearing that he would disrupt the deal with Hyman Roth by continuing to antagonize them.

Yet another maintains that it was simply a gaffe — and that the line should have been read "Tell Michael Corleone (WE or I) says, 'Hello'" meaning that the hitman believes Michael has already been assassinated or soon will be, and Frankie will say hello to him shortly in hell.

I find none of these particularly satisfying. They all feel a little too flimsy for such a meticulously crafted film.

Instead, I prefer to think that the goal of the Rosatos was to indeed kill Frankie. The line was delivered as a final insult. "Michael Corleone says, 'Hello'" is a taunt. The Rosatos believe Michael is a sap, easily being controlled by Hyman Roth, and by association, the Rosatos themselves. Michael is weak and easily manipulated in their eyes. He's in their pocket. Frankie's loyalty to Michael is misguided and now has cost him his life.

Frankie, by chance, survives the assassination attempt. He doesn't believe Michael tried to kill him literally, but he

believes Michael's lack of power has left him exposed on the street. As such, he turns to the FBI for protection. It is only when Michael arrives at the Senate hearing with Frankie's brother, Frankie recognizes that Michael not only has power, but is ruthless enough to use it. Not even the US government could protect Frankie (and his family) from Michael's vengeance.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-richard-stern

What is it like to be a contestant on *Jeopardy!*?

Neville Fogarty, Back-to-School Week contestant, 2000

Short answer: **A lot of fun!**

Long answer: Okay, I can't stress this enough — it is really a lot of fun. I was on *Jeopardy!* in 2000, and I'm writing this in 2011 — I'm nearly twice as old now as I was then, so my memory may be a little fuzzy. Also, remember that I was a kid, so your *Jeopardy!* experience may vary. I'm just going to tackle what I recall about my trip to Southern California — no audition remarks.

GO WEST

I was flown (coach) with my parents from Bush Intercontinental (Houston) to Los Angeles to stay at the magnificent Beverly Hilton Hotel. At the time, the hotel was owned by *Jeopardy!* creator Merv Griffin. There's a shot in the promo for the hotel at the end of each show (back then) with the hotel's swimming pool in it — I quickly discovered that everything looks bigger on TV. There was some star-studded gala taking place at the hotel in the evening. The most famous person I saw was some woman dressed up as Lucille Ball (in turn playing Lucy Ricardo) trying to get in and get autographs.

Each tape date, one week's worth of episodes are recorded in two sessions. The morning session is Monday – Wednesday; the afternoon is Thursday and Friday (this is true for other shows, too). The nine of us taping in the morning (plus the alternate) were picked up in a bus and brought to the Sony Pictures Studio where the show is filmed. We were taken to the green room, where there were snacks galore! We also met again with the casting team and some producers to go over some final legal business (mostly standards and practices stuff). We then went on a tour of the set, checking out the video wall, Alex's podium, and the contestant lecterns. Just like the hotel swimming pool, the set is much smaller than it looks on television. Fact: At the bottom of Alex's podium, there was a ball that looks like it's made of marble, but it was actually made of cardboard. I learned this by giving it a little kick and then being chastised.

MAKING A MOCKERY OF IT

We also played a mock game in order to get used to playing in the studio. The first players up (myself included) got to sign their names in and played the first half of a Jeopardy game with a contestant coordinator as the host. This gives you a fifteen clue chance to get used to the timing of the lockout system, picking clues off the board, and looking at the score readout. I explicitly remember a Comic Strip category in my part of the mock game, where you had to identify characters based on their pictures. I responded, "Who are Sally Brown and Linus van Pelt?" to one clue, and the producers seemed surprised that someone would add in their last names. Everyone else had a go, too, finishing up the game. We were then seated together on one side off the audience, away from our families (no cheating!) and told that we wouldn't learn who our opponents would be until right before our games.

FROM THE SIDELINES

They picked the first three contestants, and I wasn't one of them, so I stayed in the stands with the other kids. The first three contestants disappeared back to the green room, and the regular audience came out and filled in the studio. When

taping began, Alex & Johnny were there, live & in person. It's difficult to watch it all at once in person — you've got the clues, which are shown to the audience on monitors on the sides of the set, as well as Alex and the contestants to watch. It's right nice having it edited down when you watch it on TV! At commercial breaks, which are really taken to give everyone a little break in the action (water, bathroom, and the judges can review rulings) the contestants were quickly moved to director-type chairs on the set and had their make-up touched up. Alex would come answer questions from the audience. I can't stress the following enough: *Alex Trebek is a smart, nice, funny and humble guy.* (Or at least he was with us kids around.) We also played along in the audience — they read you the riot act about not shouting out answers (S&P again), but people were clearly whispering the correct responses — and not just us kids. They told us to stop once or twice, but didn't seem to really mind, because on stage, it's hard to hear the audience. We also found out that the second & third place parting gifts would be be computers, and that everyone — including the winners — would receive trips to Universal Studios Orlando. I was twelve — this was exciting! And in the blink of an eye, Monday's game was done.

MY TURN

They announced the second game's players — and I was included! We were off in a flash to have make-up done in the green room and to get ready to go on. Then everything was just like you saw it one YouTube. Almost. I'd like to share some things that you don't see at home that we see in the studio, as well as what was going through my mind while playing — spoilers ahead!

CONTESTANT'S CUT

Right out the gate, I was having a hard time ringing in. When you play along at home (make sure to follow the rules to watching Jeopardy with other people!), you can respond to every question you like. On the program, you are up against two really smart people — my game was no exception. As a general rule, all three contestants know the answer to the first three clues in most categories. (The exceptions tend to be the

arts and sport.) This means that you are fighting via buzzer alone against two contestants for more than half of the game. This gets really frustrating really fast.

In the commercial breaks, we shot "Hometown Howdies" to be aired on our local stations and took pictures with Alex — for promos and for keepsakes. Yes, I have a *Jeopardy!* picture frame.

Three clues stand out in my mind in this game. First is the clue delivered by Bill Nye, which involved the worst Schwarzenegger impression I've ever seen. It's no wonder none of us came up with the correct response of "What's the terminator?" Two other clues were things that I had actually discussed with my parents in the days preceding the show. In order to get to LA, we flew over Roswell, a correct response. Mom had also mentioned Prince William's birthday, and I had been all, "Who cares?" I should've.

For Final, you are given as much time as you like to make your wager; they even gave us pen and paper in case we needed it. I didn't — it was a moment of ballsiness and the knowledge that if you don't come in first, you don't keep your cash.

THE END?

Again, as quickly as it had started, it was over. I hardly remember the third game. When the second batch of kids arrived, we all took a photo together with Alex in front of the video wall. We also all got *Jeopardy!* prize packs (a copy of the home game & the like) that had also been awarded to audience members as door prizes. We headed back to the hotel, and that was that. There was a little sightseeing that evening (we ran into a girl from the first episode taped), but other than that, nothing crazy. It was a lot of fun, but it goes by really fast!

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-neville-fogarty

How do screenwriters feel about bad reviews, in particular claims of formulaic writing?

Sean Hood, Professional screenwriter and director (See wikipedia or IMDB). Graduate of USC's School of Cinematic Arts, and currently an instructor there.

Critics, being writers themselves, love to target the screenwriter when they write vicious reviews. I know that the original spec script for "Bad Teacher" was extremely well-received by readers, agents, and executives across Hollywood, but I can guarantee that Anthony Lane did not read that spec script and is basing his pan of the script on what he saw on screen. This can be very frustrating for the writer if s/he had much of their original script changed during production and post.

(For example, my brother, Brendan Hood, has had scathing reviews for a horror movie he wrote called *They*. Although he got sole credit for the film, *every single word was rewritten by a team of subsequent writers, producers, and even PA's on set*. The result was that he got called a "talentless screenwriter," based on a film that he actually didn't write.)

Though I am an avid reader of the New Yorker, I think Anthony Lane is an annoying critic. Every review of a Hollywood film he writes can be summarized as follows: *Here are all the numerous ways that I, Anthony Lane, am so, so, SO much more clever and sophisticated than the movie I am reviewing and the people who made it.*

What is frustrating for screenwriters and movie fans is not that this isn't true. Anthony Lane IS far more clever and sophisticated than the movies he reviews. But, why the hell is he reviewing "Bad Teacher" in the first place? Is it any surprise that "Bad Teacher" doesn't have a title worthy of Raymond Chandler? Or that some of the scenes are derivative and that these scenes are not as well executed as those in classics like "Cool Hand Luke?"

From a screenwriter and filmmaker's perspective, this

kind of review is lazy and self-indulgent. "Bad Teacher" will be reviewed by tens of thousands of people on the internet, and no reader of the New Yorker needs Mr. Lane to trash it, except to participate in intellectual and cinematic snobbery.

What Anthony Lane does well is find smaller films, independent and foreign films, like "The Names of Love," which he buries later in the article. This is the kind of movie that has no advertising budget, but is perfect for readers of the New Yorker, who may be interested in seeing a film with higher creative ambitions than "Bad Teacher." I think most screenwriters wish that professional critics would focus on finding these hidden gems, and use their platform to help them get seen. By highlighting mainstream films in reviews that do little more than state the obvious and blame the screenwriter, critics like Anthony Lane only make it harder for filmmakers and screenwriters to get quality scripts made.

As for myself, I have suffered numerous "bad reviews" for movies I've had my name on. For example:

- **Halloween: Resurrection** — "Screenwriters Larry Brand and Sean Hood churn out the cliches with such lifeless predictability you can practically hear the cogs grinding."

- **The Crow: Wicked Prayer** — "It is just like the first one — if the first one had been written by a room full of mean-spirited six-year-olds with a finger-paint budget of $12.00."

- **Fear Itself: Echoes** — "This entire episode must have extremely easy on the lazy screenwriter Sean Hood (whose previous credits include various installments of the Halloween, Cube, and The Crow franchises, plus an uncredited rewrite on Cursed, which, as one of the saddest werewolf movies in recent memory, hardly endears him to me) since all he had to do was write half of it and then copy and paste whole scenes and lines of dialogue and just change the character names… his writing has so little ambition behind it, it's sad."

Again, what's really frustrating for me, and many screenwriters, when we get reviews like this is that, from the point of view of the finished product, they are accurate. Those three projects turned out every bit as badly as the reviewers de-

scribed.

One wants to say, "But it was better in the script!" or say "They didn't shoot what I wrote!" or "I was just the script doctor! It's not my fault." But ultimately, as part of the "creative team" responsible for those turkeys, I have grin and bear it.

For my most recent film, Conan the Barbarian, I got some of the most deliciously bad reviews of my screenwriting career.

- "The few good elements are dwarfed by a generic, nonsensical plot and shoddy storytelling."

- "Non-stop blood-and-guts action aimed at game boys and emotionally stunted lovers of adolescent fantasy… There is no purpose to the film other than random blood splattering amid scenes of bondage, primitive savagery and S&M eroticism. It is empty of story or character."

- "The very fact no attempt is made to hide the over-acted performances and under-developed storyline will sit perfectly fine with fans of this kind of junk." (On Rotten Tomatoes, that was one of the "positive" reviews.)

So how do I "feel" about having worked on one of the most critically ridiculed movies of the year?

I had enormous fun working on Conan, and I've got a very thick skin. I'm confident enough in my own work to know that I write well, and I've accepted the fact that the filmmaking process is collaborative, frustrating, and often unfair: setting up the screenwriter to take the fall. That's okay. I can take the heat. It's worth it.

Ultimately, I get hired again and again to write movies based on the screenplays I've written that have gone unproduced. These scripts often get rave "reviews" from the executives and producers who read them, along with condolences, "too bad that didn't get made. It's just fantastic, but female leads, dramas and period films are just hard. They don't make their money back. But, we love your writing and we'd like to hire you to write Children of The Corn Part 36."

I have no delusions that I'm a screenwriting genius. I'm a "genre hack" (as chronicled in my blog genrehacks.com) and I'm an artsy, eccentric indie filmmaker. But when given

the opportunity, I write well-structured stories with complex characters who make surprising choices. What "bad reviews" remind me of, is that in Hollywood, I rarely get the opportunity.

To snarky and clever professional reviews, I say stop shooting fish in a barrel, and go find well-written, but smaller, films and direct people to them. To jaded, cynical fan boys, I say stop rewarding "formulaic" films by buying tickets to see them, and ignoring films that are far better. Search out and find those ambitious and well-written movies that may not have a big star or swollen digital effects budget.

Screenwriters want to get original, ambitious, and entertaining movies up on the screen. Help us do that! This is what I think about when I get bad reviews.

P.S. I can't imagine that Mr. Lane, himself read this, but I was pleased that on a week in which he could have trashed Conan, Spy Kids, or Fright Night, he chose to highlight the intriguing smaller film "Higher Ground." Let's hope he sticks to that pattern, and meanwhile I will daydream about a day I get to make more little movies more like this one: http://fortunatoprocopio.com/video02e.html.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-sean-hood

MOVIE MAKING

What determines whether an actor is cast in a part in Hollywood?

Ashton Kutcher, I'm an actor and producer of film and TV

Talent, experience, relationships, directors, awards, and financial risk reduction.

Talent is subjective (after all, I've been accused by some of having very little) but you have to have some level of showmanship. That being said, some of the best actors I know have a hard time finding work.

Experience is key. Back ground in theater, improv troops, and formal training is very helpful. The director and studio

want to know you you have a history of showing up and being good.

Relationships - Film making is a collaboration, and we all enjoy working with people we know and like. Catching a break is often times built on someone that knows you and believes in you giving you a shot.

Directors are key. The top directors in the business call the shots when it comes to casting. They either see you in the part or they don't. One shot with the right director in the right film can launch somebody. Agents sell hard based on whom you've worked with.

Awards - one role with recognition can be all it takes.

Finance - At the end of the day, it's show BUSINESS. Every studio has a list of actors based on Historical box office, domestic and foreign. Generally, they are trying to hedge their financial investment. There is a common model that is used where the studio or financier presell packages in foreign territories based on talent commitments. The more production budget they can offset the more confident they feel about moving forward. This is why some people who may not appear to be big stars in the states continue to work. They have big foreign value. It's all about B.O. HITS. You can be in a POS flick but if it makes money, you continue to work.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ashton-kutcher

POLITICS

How early do politicians and presidential political campaigns begin quietly promising/planning cabinet seats and vice president positions?

Jennifer Miller, Field Staffer, Vice Presidential Selection researcher, PA Deputy Press Secretary, Bill Clinton and Clinton/Gore (1992); NH Press Secretary, Clinton/Gore (1996); Vice Presidential Selection, Al Gore (2000); Senior Advisor to the Deputy Chair, Democratic National Committee (2000)

A few subjective thoughts, then my personal experiences:

- The percentage of time a presidential candidate spends planning his/her DC fantasy team is likely inversely proportionate to the odds of him/her ever having the opportunity to make those nominations.

- At least in modern times, candidates do not promise the VP nomination, BUT that does not mean that wannabe Veeps never HEAR a promise amid effusive praise soliciting their loyalty. (With her tenuous grasp of facts, can't

you imagine Michele Bachmann interpreting that she's been promised the slot?)

- It is likely that candidates (or their top aides) make vague overtures about (former) rivals serving in Cabinet-level posts, without committing to anything.

- Consideration is easier process-wise when a potential VP nominee has been a primary rival: the campaign already has amassed meticulous opposition research files. Likewise, when short-listed for VP, statewide officials usually turn over similarly cataloged materials about *themselves,* which would have been compiled to predict and combat negative campaigns at home.

In 1992, Bill Clinton's VP selection team formed in early May, about two months before his July 9 announcement with Al Gore (which came only a couple days after the formal ask, and one week before the Democratic National Convention). The process had several stages:

- Clinton publicly named three experienced leaders (Warren Christopher, Vernon Jordan, and Madeline Kunin) who oversaw the process, fielded input, and consulted with people who had advised previous Democratic nominees.

- When our research group first met, we received a pretty long list of potential nominees. At least half a dozen names came with assignments to write a five or six page memo, and the rest started with one or two page memos. (As the youngest person and only non-attorney, I did not write any of the the long memos, and mostly conducted research as assigned by other full-time team members.)

- Over the following weeks, names were added and deleted, and some moved up from the lower tier. Higher tier names called for deeper research from Lexis-Nexis (dial-up) and the Library of Congress. It was 1992.

- Once there was a serious short list, non-staff teams of attorneys joined the vetting process — interviews in the field, scanning of every document imaginable (including medical records), analysis of every public writing, and finally a one-on-one interview with Clinton.

- At least one potential short-lister declined consideration (and vetting), though we continued with some odd public record review in case the decision changed. At least one person wrongly told the press s/he was on the "short list," and we held interviews in the field out of respect.

- Our team had no leaks. To this day, I have never read a book or news article that got all of the facts right.

Two days after the general election (that is, Thursday, November 5), President-elect Clinton named Christopher and Jordan the heads of his transition team. They soon assigned the same group of us to Cabinet Selection, with two wonderful new leaders and a team which rapidly expanded. This time, I led a handful of non-lawyer researchers, managed the data and assignments, and organized the files and memos. I still have a copy of the (pre-WWW) research manual I created… and probably should not still have the all of the name tabs from the filing cabinet dividers. To answer the question more directly:

- No Cabinet assignment was pre-determined. Multiple people were considered for every position.

- Quite a few top White House positions and sub-Cabinet nominations were considered in the same process, and the same batches of memos.

- Soon-to-be Secretary of State Christopher did not know we were preparing materials about him until they were ready to go to President-elect Clinton (Thanksgiving weekend 1992). Nothing had been promised to him.

I worked on VP selection again in 2000, secretly and part-time while an associate at a DC law firm. (Yes, it killed my billable hours.) Unlike in 1992, there was no full-time research team, as Al Gore had more time to make a decision — the process began slowly in April 2000, and the Democratic National Convention did not take place until August. Many of the same people were involved as in 1992 (including selection process head Christopher and some of the short-list vetting team attorneys).

Some of my most memorable life experiences and impor-

tant personal relationships developed because of how seriously most potential presidents take decisions about running mates and Cabinet members.

That said, I cannot fathom how the McCain team approached VP selection in 2008. If they had a similar process in place, it must have been pushed aside by pressure from pollsters and political advisers. The Sarah Palin record/family/temperament surprises would have been known internally, and removed her from consideration when viewed as a complete picture.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-jennifer-miller

What's it like to fly on Air Force One?

Peter Marquez, Space policy geek.

It's awesome. I only got to fly on her once.

The staff is amazing, and after flying on AF1, you will NEVER want to fly commercial again.

The experience starts before you even get on the plane. You are transported from the White House to Andrews, and you get to drive right up to the airplane and leave the vehicle and walk up into the plane. (Only the president and his close staff get the Marine 1 transport to Andrews.)

It's very comfortable: huge seats, desks and tables for working. A full conference room with flat screens and video teleconferencing capability. There's a computer room with Internet access.

One of the greatest things about AF1 has nothing to do with the aircraft itself, it's the people that make AF1 run. All of the AF1 staff appear to really enjoy their jobs, and they take great pride in their work. It definitely appeared that none of them took this great opportunity for granted. They are also well-versed in the history of AF1 and can tell you stories about all the previous AF1s.

The trip I was on was very short. We were flying from DC to Kennedy Space Center for a speech President Obama was giving.

During the flight, I had been helping to work and rework a speech the President was about to give. He kept coming out of his cabin with more edits and changes. After another round of edits from the boss, an attendant looked at me and asked if I needed anything. I jokingly said, "Yes, a nice strong drink. Preferably a single malt," (it was about nine or ten in the morning). Without pausing the attendant asks, "What brand and what year?" I had to tell him I was joking.

In addition to my colleagues and a few members of Congress, we also had Buzz Aldrin on the flight. Dr. Aldrin was seated next to me at our table and he starts to get a bit fidgety, he looks around, and he says, "You wanna go take a look around?"

So I stop working for a minute and Dr. Aldrin and I start checking out AF1. We make it over to the stairs that lead to the upper deck and cockpit and one of the staff members asks if we want to head upstairs and check out the cockpit. Dr. Aldrin got a big smile on his face and looked at me. We were both smiling like little kids. Did we want to see the cockpit of AF1? Seriously? You have to ask?

So Dr. Aldrin and I make it up to the flight deck and all of the Air Force officers are in awe of this moon walker and here's Buzz Aldrin happy as a little kid because he's hanging out in the cockpit of AF1. Dr. Aldrin goes into the cockpit, and I stand outside of it with my head sticking through the doorway. So here I am, essentially a nobody and I'm hanging out in the cockpit of AF1, with the pilots, while AF1 is in flight, and I'm with Buzz Aldrin. Somewhere back in time, the ten year old version of me was saying, "You have got to be kidding me..."

It was way too short of a flight.

But just a couple of more interesting bits.

First, as we started to descend, I instinctively went back to my seat and buckled up. But I noticed a lot of the other "frequent flyers" were still up and walking around. So I asked one of them, "When are we supposed to sit down?" They just kind of laughed at my "noob question" and said something to the ef-

fect of "You don't really have to sit down at all, just watch how the pilot lands this thing." So people were still up and walking around as the plane landed. For someone who had only flown commercial, it was a fascinating to me for some reason. Sure enough, the pilot put her down like a feather and came to a gentle stop.

Second, we landed on the space shuttle runway. Another thing that blew my mind. Of course we were going to an event at Kennedy Space Center so the closest runway is the space shuttle runway, but landing in AF1 on the space shuttle runway was more mind blowing then not having to sit down during landing.

Finally, you get a bill for the food you eat on AF1 (this may be the only thing AF1 has in common with United). Since you are eating a meal on AF1 you are doing so at taxpayer expense. This means you have to reimburse the government for whatever you ate. That's completely fair and the right thing to do but it's something you wouldn't immediately consider when flying on AF1. So about a week after my AF1 flight, I got a bill sent to me for the lunch I ate on AF1. That bill made for a great souvenir.

So to paraphrase philosopher Ferris Bueller: "It is so choice. If you have the means, I highly recommend…"

I forgot one more thing, if you make a phone call from AF1, it's routed through a couple of operators who sit up on the flight deck. They make the outgoing call for you, and then they connect you to the person once they make the call. The cool part is that when they call person for you they say something to the effect of (my memory is a bit fuzzy here), "This is Air Force One, we have a call from <whatever your name is> can you hold while I connect you?" I think just receiving a call from AF1 would be amazing.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-peter-marquez

What if Richard Nixon had won the 1960 Presidential election? How would history have been different?

David Hood, If I were a fruit, I'd be a cookie

An interesting question for sure! This is the stuff that come to mind in no real order. But really after '76 all bets are off.

POSITIVES

- Vietnam would not have happened for the U.S., as Nixon would have continued the previous administrations policies that he was part of creating.

- Watergate would not have happened because Nixon would have been the standard barrier for the party. In the 70s, Reagan was in the wings and things were changing, feeding his paranoia.

- Perhaps connecting with China would have happened sooner, blunting some of the negative affects of China's rise because it would have been more staged.

- I don't think the Bay of Pigs would have happened at all, but rather just a continuation of trying to engage Cuba while slowly isolating it, which Nixon was instrumental in setting up in 1959.

- Reagan becomes president in '68 instead of '80, thanks to Ford/Nixon being out of the way. This makes his presidency drastically different due to a totally different set of circumstances and being in much better health with a much different group of people around him.

- Goldwater never happens in '64.

- The Democrats don't have a credible chance to take the White House until '76, but likely have considerable power in Congress if not outright majorities led by the Kenne-

dy's. Due to this, I think Nixon, and later Reagan, move forward with robust legislation on Civil Rights because it brings the Democrats to the table on other issues.

- Both Bobby and Jack Kennedy are never assassinated because they don't get into the position to be real targets during the turmoil of the era.

- The Bush dynasty is unlikely because if Reagan wins in '68 he likely picks a different VP, probably Rockefeller, to balance his ticket

- The Cold War ends sooner without all the proxy fights happening. I can see Nixon and later Reagan using China as a proxy to kill the USSR either via military action or economic action.

- The Supreme Court looks radically different today.

- There is never the political will to overturn our banking and investment regulations.

NEUTRAL

- Ford never becomes president, maybe Senator but not President.

- Due to a likely second term for Nixon, LBJ never becomes President either, as he would have been too ill in '68 to run.

- Our history is drastically different after '76, to the point that it is unrecognizable.

- Either Bobby or Ted Kennedy is elected president in '76 with either Carter or Jerry Brown as VP.

- Ross Perot possibly becomes president as a Republican in the 1980's.

- I think both Clinton and Gore still happen; just much differently.

- Jack Kennedy never becomes President and the country has to watch as he has to leave the Senate and die a horrible death from Addison's disease or complications from it.

- Marilyn Monroe never reaches the level of notoriety she had because there is no scandal with JFK and no "happy birthday" event. She probably still takes her own life at some point though.

- Both Medicaid and HMO's never happen, likely resulting in us being a backwater of medical science.

- Though there are many gains for civil rights, the Black Power movement is crushed, resulting in those gains not really meaning anything to average folks for a long time.

- We probably never go to the moon, space, yes... moon, no.

- Due to its more robust involvement in the Cold War, China rises and overshadows us faster, if not handled well, that could be very bad.

- Due to there being no Vietnam, we still have a draft that can be used at any time instead of the ghost of one that we have now.

- Because our banking and investment regulations stay mostly intact, the huge growth we saw in the 1990s is not possible.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-david-hood

Should highly skilled international students (including Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate) be given Green Cards?

Craig Montuori, Study it, live it, and love it.

The short answer is yes. Yes, we should grant more highly-skilled, highly-educated immigrants green cards.

For purely selfish American reasons, the answer is yes. Highly skilled immigrants are productive, net-positive members of American society, just like highly skilled Americans. This country has a certain median production per capita, and anything that increases that median means more economic growth for America. More economic growth means more and better opportunities for native-born Americans.

Take Amit Aharoni as an example; Israeli-born, Stanford GSB-education, StartupChile alumnus. By November '11, through his company Cruisewise, he had created nine jobs held by Americans in San Francisco, had raised over $1.6M in funding. His visa rejected, Amit left for Canada, continuing to run his SF-based company from Vancouver via Skype. ABC picked up his story and boom, Amit got a visa. Amit's Cruisewise is now up to sixteen employees in SF as the company continues to grow and prosper.

I'll leave the pure statistics to folks like the Kauffman Foundation or Vivek Wadhwa, but this set of immigrants contribute much more to America than they consume. By partnering with Americans to found and grow jobs-creating companies, the country benefits from their success. With a single missing founder — like Elon Musk of South Africa — PayPal might not have succeeded and grown into the success story it has.

Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook told a story last August about an extremely skilled developer from the UK. His visa application was denied, and since the developer was so talented, Facebook simply hired a team of ten in the UK to support

him. The office those people worked in needed to be cleaned, it needed office supplies. All of that secondary spending and all of those jobs were a direct loss to the American economy because that one visa was rejected.

The question becomes who decides what highly skilled means. Current proposals range from simply stapling a green card to the diploma of any foreign graduate to only for technical (STEM) PhDs. Many VCs who are facilitators for the success of entrepreneurs and interested in growing a stronger entrepreneurial community have spoken out in support:

- http://www.feld.com/wp/archives/2010/06/mr-feld-goes-to-dc-again-to-talk-about-innovation.html
- http://www.avc.com/a_vc/2011/06/the-chorus-for-immigration-reform-grows-louder.html

Some actual bills have been proposed in the US Congress containing STEM Green Card provisions; most require that the graduate get a job in a technical field rather than explicitly spelling out a path where jobs creators can also qualify:

- Startup Act (2.0), S.1965/S.3217
- SMART Jobs Act, S.3192
- STAR Act, S.3185
- STAPLE Act, H.R.399

Other proposals, like Startup Visa, require more initiative — separate from but usually correlated with higher education — to create something economically valuable to the country in order to qualify for the visa and convert it to a green card.

Whether through academic research, industrial manufacturing, or entrepreneurial disruption, these are the people who will work with highly-skilled, driven Americans to help create the future. There is no cap to success in a world where we acknowledge that we can grow the economic pie; more ingredients simply leads to more success.

And I'm a selfish guy. I want that success to be American; no matter her country of birth, if she's building the future, I want it to be built here.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-craig-montuori

What are the chances of a debt crisis on the scale of Greece hitting the United States?

Paul Ryan, Chairman, House Budget Committee

Ultimately, a Greek debt crisis is possible here in the U.S., although it's not imminent, but if we keep going down the path we're on, that kind of situation could come to this country.

As a country, we currently borrow forty two cents out of every dollar we spend and, left unchecked, this amount will only continue to grow until it becomes unsustainable. The goal of the Path to Prosperity, the House-passed budget proposal, is to solve our nation's fiscal challenges now, on our own terms, rather than confront them during a looming debt crisis like we currently see in Greece.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-paul-ryan

PRISON LIFE

MURDER

What does it feel like to murder someone?

Tommy Winfrey, inmate San Quentin State Prison

Without a doubt, this is probably the most personal question I think I could ever answer. This is a question I have been asking myself for a very long time now and just now coming to grips with the answers I have found. To say my answer is complex and that I am going to have difficulties expressing exactly how I have felt and still feel about murdering someone is an understatement.

I guess the beginning would be the best place to start. When I took another man's life, I was just nineteen years old. Looking back now, I can honestly say I felt immense peer pressure to go through with the murder. I felt like I would be seen as a weak punk if I let another man get over on me. I was a drug dealer, and I felt I had a reputation to uphold. I can see all this now, but at the time I could see none of this. I realize now I was in a very bad place in life back then. I was in the midst of a serious drug addiction. I felt worthless and unworthy of love, so in return, I placed little value on my life or on the life of anyone else. All of these feelings combined, made feel so powerless in life, I lashed out.

My lashing out cost another human his life. I am ashamed

to admit it, but at the time I felt a great weight was lifted off my shoulders when I pulled the trigger. I felt like I had finally stood up for myself. I was completely irrational. I realize now it is like my friend David Monroe always says, "Hurt people hurt people." I was really hurting, and I didn't know how to ask for help.

I continued to justify my actions for a long time, but somewhere deep inside, I have always known that there was never any justice in taking someone's life. Admitting to myself I was feeling scared, lonely, unworthy of love and respect was just too hard. Also, by admitting these feelings of mine, I would also have to come to grips with what I really did, and how I affected the world. This was a hard prospect for me, but I am finally there over fifteen years later.

Now I feel sadness over murdering someone. I feel I have robbed my victim's family of the most precious thing in life. I feel immense sorrow for this. I feel I have robbed my family out of truly ever knowing me. I feel like I have inspired fear in my community. I feel that I have done the world a great disservice, and that I owe a debt that I can never fully repay. I am full of guilt and shame over my actions.

Without a doubt, deciding to murder someone was the worst mistake of my life. I don't believe I even possess the right words to fully express how it feels to murder someone, but I can say, I never want anyone else to feel the way I do.

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http://www.quora.com/l/boq-tommy-winfrey

Do inmates in San Quentin have access to computers and the Internet? What kind of access?

James Houston, inmate San Quentin

I came to prison when Motorola's first flip phone was the phone to have. People still depended on land lines, and you could find a phone booth with no trouble. As you know, things have changed since then.

I remember laughing at a guy for burning some bologna in a microwave until I found out he had been incarcerated twenty years, and it was his first time using one. I have never been on the internet although I hear there is something for everyone on the internet. In San Quentin for an inmate, there is no legal access to the internet. If you work as a clerk, you can work on a computer for job related purposes. In the library, there are three computers designated for inmates to practice our typing skills. We can't print anything out, though. Then there are about five more computers for researching legal issues. These computers don't have internet access. The computers inmates are allowed to use are basically modern typewriters when it comes to what you can do on them. Then think about eight computers in a library that serves a population of around 2,500 men.

Most people can't imagine life without the internet or their mobile phones. I am trying to imagine life with them where I can send real-time messages, photos, my resume, and job applications. Thinking about all I have to learn can be overwhelming at times. Hopefully in the near future, this issue will be addressed. I think becoming computer literate can help lower the recidivism rate.

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http://www.quora.com/l/boq-james-houston

What does the first day of a 5+ year prison sentence feel like?

Kenyatta Leal, inmate San Quentin State Prison

I remember my first day because it was my worst day. I was sentenced to life in prison on September 25, 1995, and about a week later was transferred from the San Diego County Jail to RJ Donovan Prison for intake into the state prison system. The morning of my transfer, a deputy came to my cell and told me that I was "catching the chain" to the pen. I had just made it to sleep as my cellmate and I had stayed up late playing chess and talking. He was a nineteen-year-old first-termer headed to the joint with a life sentence, and every night he would ask me a gang of questions about prison life. I felt compelled to answer his questions in as much detail as possible, because I knew he didn't understand the danger he was headed into and he needed all the help he could get.

As I got myself together, my cellmate sat up on his bunk, wrapped his arms around his knees and watched me like a child would watch a parent. My heart went out to the little dude because he needed more guidance that I ever could give him. I started to remind him of some of the things we had talked about, but the deputy came back to get me. He told me to state my name and booking number, then turn around and cuff up. I complied and when I turned back around to cuff up, my cellmate was sitting there crying. I will never forget that look of hopelessness on his face, and I can only imagine the look on mine. I told him to keep his head up, and I walked down the stairs with the deputy. Right then I said a prayer for that kid, because as bad as my situation was, he was someone who had it far worse than me.

We got to the holding cell and there were about twenty others waiting to catch the chain also. They call it catching the chain because we're all chained together as we go to the pen. The single file chain of men made its way outside, and it felt good to walk around a bit and breathe in that crisp morning air. As we loaded onto the bus, the deputies unchained

us from each other, but we were left shackled at the waist and ankles. No one said a word on the bus, and my heart was beating so hard I could hear it. The ride to Donovan took all of twenty minutes as the prison is literally within eye sight of the county facility from which I was transferred. The sun was just coming up as we pulled into R&R (Receiving & Release) at Donovan.

I couldn't wait to get out of those handcuffs and leg irons; being shackled up like that is something I could never get used to. As soon as we walked into R&R, I saw someone I knew from the county jail and he was all smiles as he asked me how much time I had. When I told him twenty-five years to life, his eyes got big and he took a step back, as if I had some kind of virus he didn't want to catch. His response surprised me. First it made me feel nervous, then worried that everyone else would respond to me the same way. He didn't know what to say and neither did I. I tried to ease the awkwardness of the moment with small talk about my appeal but no matter what I said, I couldn't escape the growing despair in my gut; and that was only the first day.

We made it out of R&R around noon and got back on the bus to go to "four yard." We pulled up next to building 16 and unloaded straight into the dayroom. Once inside, we walked into a gauntlet of correctional officers who immediately started yelling and telling us to shut the f*** up and not ask them for anything because we had nothing coming. After an intense thirty minutes, we all had to sit and wait to be interviewed by the gang coordinator. While we waited, I heard familiar voices of people I knew who had caught the chain before me, asking if I needed anything. At that point, I was so depressed and downtrodden that I didn't respond verbally. I just shook my head.

After my interview, I walked upstairs to the cell where I'd spend the rest of the first day of a life sentence. I stepped inside and the sound of the cold steel door slamming behind me ricocheted around inside my skull, making me dizzy. I just stood there in shock. I remember wanting to scream but when I opened my mouth nothing but sobs came out. I was devastated. I heard people calling my name on the tier but I couldn't speak. I closed my eyes hoping to find some relief, but

what I saw in my mind's eye were all of the horrible choices I made and the faces of the people that I hurt in the process. I thought about the times when I coulda, woulda, shoulda taken action to stop this nightmare from happening, but it was way too late.

Looking back, it was as if I was on a runaway train to prison, and every choice I made accelerated my imminent arrival. When I finally opened my eyes and looked around the filthy cell, there was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. I felt like the most worthless piece of crap ever known to mankind. My life had just hit rock bottom and I couldn't see any way up or out. That was by far the worst moment of the worst day of my entire life.

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http://www.quora.com/l/boq-kenyatta-leal

INCARCERATION

What did it feel like when the gavel dropped in court with the verdict and how have you changed your life behind bars since then?

David Monroe, inmate San Quentin

So often, we waste our time trying to get even with those who have hurt us in some way, completely ignoring those who have helped us in some way. I had made this mistake so many times in my life that it became a normal function. I became so consumed by the negative things in my life that I disregarded anything positive. All I could think about was that I was poor, hurt, and didn't have a father. I forgot that I was smart, loved, and still had a mother.

I didn't realize this until I was sitting in juvenile court

waiting to hear whether or not I would be tried as an adult for murder. With my mother sitting behind me in the courtroom, I was shackled and forced to look straight ahead. I wanted so bad to look back and tell her that I loved her. They wouldn't let me. Reality started setting in that everything I had done was not just affecting me, but my family as well. Then the judge said, "Mr. Monroe, you are a cold-blooded murderer and have no remorse for human life. For that reason, I am trying you as an adult and sending you to prison for the rest of your life." My whole body went numb and I felt paralyzed with fear as the words vibrated off my eardrum. As horrific as these words were to me, the most terrifying thing I have ever heard in my life was not words at all. It was the scream that came out of my mother's mouth when she realized that she had lost her son.

I had spent my childhood convincing myself that my life was "f--- up" and that no one loved me. Yes, my life wasn't the best, but that scream came from her soul. That scream told me that she loved me so much that she would never be the same without me. That scream told me that I was loved and cared about more than I could ever know. That scream changed my life.

I knew that I had to change the things I was doing, my attitude, and the way I viewed things. This was not an easy thing to do! I was only fifteen years old and still very immature. Nevertheless, the seed was planted! I once read "The only people to get even with are those who've helped you." So despite all of the bad things in my life, for once I was going to get even with someone who was there for me and loved me unconditionally… my mom. There is no greater feeling in the world than making someone you love and care about proud of you! While I will never forget the terrifying sound of her scream, hearing her tell me, "I'm so proud of you son," has only motivated me to keep growing and doing amazing things despite my circumstances. And trust me, this place is full of people who will get on your nerves, push your buttons, and tempt you to throw all of your hard work away. But none of them are more important than me going home to my family and being free.

It is extremely hard for me to write about stuff like this

because it means that I have to relive the pain and fear all over again. However, I do it so that just one of you may reflect on and rethink the direction of your life or the things you may be doing so that you don't have to make the same mistakes. I ask you, are ten negative things more important than one positive? Are ten haters more important than one friend or family member that loves and supports you?

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SPORTS

What is it like to be an Olympic athlete after winning (or not winning) the Olympics?

Peter Cipollone, 2004 champ.

I competed in rowing as the coxswain of the USA men's eight-oared crew in Sydney (2000) and Athens (2004). Because rowing is held during the first week of the Games, rowers have the entire second week to experience the fun part of the Olympics. Having a medal, or not, makes a big difference in how that goes.

In 2000, we were heavily favored to win. We imploded and finished 5th. That second week was very difficult. We were like ghosts haunting the greatest celebration of amateur sport on earth. We would go to parties — at least the ones where we could get in — and watch what seemed like absolutely everyone else having the time of their lives. We quietly wondered what might have been. We slept a lot and scrapped for tickets to other events. Grown men cried.

That was the worst moment of my sports career. For years afterward, our meltdown in Sydney was the the last thing I thought about before I fell asleep and the first thing on my mind when I got up. Thinking about it now still stings. My teammates are also my closest friends. For some, that was

their last chance. We will never get that back, and we all live with it every day.

In 2004, we were a dark horse, but by then, my mindset on racing had changed quite a bit. I wanted to finish my career with a personal best performance. If I could do that, the medal would take care of itself. In our medal race, we absolutely nailed it and won the gold.

From the moment we crossed the finish line, the difference between Athens and Sydney could not have been more stark. We had just achieved the dream of our youth, accompanied by all the expected things: going to the medal stand, seeing our flag go up, singing our national anthem, fighting back a tear or two, celebrating with our families and friends, getting back to our house and finding 200 emails waiting with subjects like, "CONGRATULATIONS!!!!!" and "OMG", even though it was not yet 6 am back home.

And then the second week began. NBC called. They wanted us on the Today Show. They liked us and invited us back later in the week. The Wall Street Journal asked if I would write an article about the experience. We did a top-ten list for Letterman. While we were waiting for the cameramen, wrestler Rulon Gardner picked me up with one hand.

We did not even need to be on the lists for parties. We skipped the line and flashed our medals at the door. Huge entourage wants to come in, too? No problem. Feel like jumping up on the stage with the band? Do it! Stage dive the crowd? That's cool, too. Global sponsors called to ask if we might attend a breakfast and answer a few questions for a fat honorarium. With pleasure. We were just getting back from a party somewhere and breakfast with people genuinely excited about the Olympics sounded fun.

Everywhere we went, it was a celebration. An official who looked quite like me introduced himself with stories of how random people were congratulating him and asking for his autograph. We got a picture together with him wearing the medal. People on the street would stop us and ask if their children could see the medal. That was the best.

With two days to go, I stopped sleeping. I had total fear of missing out. I visited with my friends from other countries. Who knew if we would ever see one another again? We just

tried to experience as much of it as possible. We were not ghosts anymore.

In the years since Athens, that medal has changed my life in ways too numerous to count. And they are all good.

http:// www.quora.com/l/boq-peter-cipollone

Do Olympic or competitive swimmers ever pee in the pool?

Carly Geehr, former USA Swimming National Team Member

Disclaimer: This is about to get into TMI territory, but hey, I'm just answering the question…

Nearly 100% of elite competitive swimmers pee in the pool. Regularly. Some deny it, some proudly embrace it, but everyone does.

The more interesting question is *when* does said peeing happen?

- Just about the only time you can get away with peeing during a race is during a breaststroke pullout. You spend enough time gliding that if you really gotta go, you probably could. Otherwise, you're too tense and too, well, busy to even think about peeing.

- Before a race is an interesting time. It depends on the meet and to some extent the color of the pool deck. I kid you not. You always try to pee before you swim, but sometimes your body defies logic and finds a way to refill your bladder just to spite you. Adrenaline and nerves wreak havoc on your system, and I knew tons of other swimmers that always, regardless of prior planning, had to pee right before a race. What to do if you're desperate? Well, it's not uncommon to splash yourself before you climb up on the blocks, so that extra liquid on yourself and the pool deck

affords you an interesting opportunity. (I'll let you finish the rest of that thought.)

- Warmup/practice - totally free reign. As a swimmer, you just have to accept that you're swimming in pee. I had a teammate that would sit on the wall and announce "I'm peeing!" which was… disgusting… but at least she warned us. I'm sure I've swum directly behind people who were just letting it all out.

As to the underwater cameras catching it — even if Olympic swimmers peed during their races, which they don't — there's just no way. The only way you can really tell if someone's peeing in the pool is if they announce it to you or they're really dehydrated/sitting in one spot while they go. It diffuses pretty quickly, and if you're moving, it diffuses even faster. (Never been in a pool where they use those chemicals that makes pee turn bright colors, but have always wondered…)

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-carly-geehr

Why is Jeremy Lin so turnover-prone and how can he fix this?

Daryl Morey, GM Houston Rockets

- Many of Jeremy's turnovers are charges. These are the best turnovers to have, as not only do charges mean that you are being aggressive as a player (when good things often happen), but also turnover charges are not "live ball" turnovers where teams get a higher expected value possession the other way. For example, in our opening Detroit game, Jeremy had no "bad pass" turnovers. They were all charges or off the dribble. Compare his lack of any bad pass turnovers to his twelve "high quality" passes in the game (passes he made that set up high percentage offense for others).

- This leads into my next point, which is that Jeremy's passes were the best in the league last year in the percentage that led to high quality offense. This is a fancy way of saying that when he makes a risky pass, it is usually for a high reward, so his bad pass turnovers, when he has them, are not as bad as for other guards, as his average possession efficiency remains higher.

- Finally, most young guards who are going to be very good start as high turnover players in college and in their early seasons in the pros and get better throughout their career.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-daryl-morey

What's it like to play on the same basketball team as Jeremy Lin?

Drew Housman, Guard, Harvard Basketball, Class of 2009

Up until about halfway through the 08-09 season, it was like having any other teammate. Then we played BC a few days after they had upset North Carolina, the number one team in the country at the time. No one thought we had a chance. The only other time I played BC was my freshman year, and we got blasted by 30.

We showed up at BC feeling confident as a team, but I think Jeremy was feeling a little something extra. He torched them from start to finish. It felt like he stole every pass and hit every jumper. They simply had no answer for him. The team played well as a whole, but Jeremy was clearly the reason we won the game. We were chanting his name on the shuttle ride home, never imagining that a sold out Madison Square Garden would be doing the same thing a few years later.

He had been the best player on our team for a while, but that game was the first time he showed that he could have been the best player on an ACC team. That is kind of amazing for an Ivy League guy.

Overall, he is the best teammate you could ask for. Humble, works hard and plays hard. I can't say I'm that surprised to see what he is doing in the league. His ability to rise to the occasion is uncanny. He did it in high school, winning the state championship over the favored Mater Dei by making big plays in the 4th, he did it in college whenever he played a BCS school (except for Stanford his sophomore year, but that was a disaster across the board), and he is now doing it at the highest level possible. He might have a rough night against Columbia, but against UConn on national TV? 30 points in a near upset. It is really impressive when someone raises his level of play every time the pressure mounts.

Also, during the 4th quarter of the Nets game, the announcer kept saying that Jeremy looked exhausted. What he doesn't know is that Jeremy always looks like that. He would appear to be dead tired after five minutes of warmups. No one really knew why, but no one really cared because he would always come out and put in work for forty minutes.

- I have a distinct memory of the first real action he saw as a freshman. He found our big guy for a layup by throwing a no-look pass that I would never have attempted. His first year was rocky, but he showed flashes of potential.

- He became exceptional at elevating for his jump shot, noticing that the opposing bigs had turned their backs, and firing a pass to our big guy for a layup. It got to the point where opposing forwards would be more worried about that pass than getting into rebounding position.

- He is not "deceptively" quick like people keep saying. He is just super quick, straight up. And athleticism is not just about your bench press and your vertical. He has more than enough lateral quickness, coordination, body control, and instincts to make up for what he might lack in the more traditional athletic categories.

- I was always more of a Madden guy, but from limited experience and word of mouth I gathered he was excellent at Halo.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-drew-housman

What makes the Spanish national football team so dominant right now?

Hung Lee, Cultural Anthropologist & Startup Recruiter

They have invented a new way of playing the game.

Tiki-taka isn't just a pleasing-to-the-eye brand of attacking football, it is so radical an evolution of the possession game that it's turned into a *revolutionary* way to play it.

Here are a few key concepts about this Spanish team that most commentators — at least English pundits — don't seem to understand.

1. SPAIN DEFENDS BY KEEPING THE BALL.

The defensive statistics of this Spanish team are incredible — they conceded only one goal in Euro 2012 and only a total of six across the last three major tournaments — that's nineteen tournament games in total. This is an unheard of achievement that even the most renowned defensive sides in history have not come close to. And yet Spain has very few genuinely destructive players, or even players whose primary role in the team is to defend — to tackle, to head, to block. The Spanish have simply worked out that there is only one ball on the pitch, and if you have it, then only your team can score. And so they have ball players throughout the side, even to the extent of playing six midfielders, and defenders who were once midfielders, in defensive positions. They do not carry a single player who cannot play with the ball to his feet and be part of a network that can be trusted to circulate the ball and utterly dominate possession. Spain regularly 'out possesses' their opponents at unheard of ratios as high as 60–70%. This means that the opposition routinely has less than half the game to score and win.

2. SPAIN DOES NOT PLAY THE CONTESTED BALL.

An English commentator exclaimed during the recent tourna-

ment 'it's almost as if Spain does not want corners!' He could not quite believe his own words, as corners are perceived by almost every other football team in the world (apart from Barcelona, naturally) as an excellent offensive opportunity. But what the commentator said was actually true. Spain does indeed not want corners because they see not an opportunity to score a goal but rather a threat to something they prize more — possession of the ball. Just as you cannot concede a goal when you have the ball, Spain has understood that you can only score one when you do have it. So they keep the ball at all costs, even if that means foregoing a (poor) goal scoring opportunity.

In a corner situation, the most obvious outcome is a contested ball — players from both teams would rise to meet it, and either side, depending on the timing of the jump, has a reasonable chance of getting the ball. For Spain, these odds are not good enough, and they would prefer to retain possession in order to create another chance with better odds in a later phase.

This results in the Spanish often being accused of wanting to 'walk the ball' into the net, an accusation based on the assumption that Spanish team are populated purely by artists who want to score only aesthetically pleasing goals. This is a wrong characterization. Spain is populated by mathematicians, who have worked out, as professional gamblers at any casino might, how to play the percentages, and that you'll actually win more games by taking less chances. You simply need better chances.

3. SPAIN DOES NOT SHOOT UNLESS THEY HAVE A VERY GOOD CHANCE OF SCORING THE GOAL.

Spain often wins 1-0. They do not do this, as the Italians might, by scoring first and expertly defending a lead, or as the English might, by battling through ninety minutes of constant turnover and winning it through superior morale. They do it by selecting only great opportunities to attempt to score. You will rarely see Spain score a goal from a long distance shot, and they actually take very few shots from outside the eighteen yard box. This is because a low percentage shot is just another way of losing possession of the ball. Even as the

Spanish are tiki-taka-ing their way in your penalty box, their primary concern is thinking about possession and not to lose it, rather than to necessarily score a goal in that phase of play. Spain would happily make dozens of short passes to get into the penalty box, only to take another dozen to leave it again, if it mean't retaining the ball and being patient for the right opportunity to score. The English — and to be fair, almost everyone else — would 'force' it if given a similar situation, and maybe or maybe not score, maybe or maybe not lose possession in the attempt of doing so. Spain simply does not tolerate this element of chance.

Let's be clear: this is a remarkable Spanish team but there is more science behind what they do than people realise. They have simply realised a truth that every other nation seems to have forgotten — that there is only one ball on the pitch, and if you have it, you *cannot* lose. And so they have geared their entire team around possessing the ball to the extent of selecting personnel whose predominant ability is passing and possessing it, irrespective of what position they nominally play on the field.

> http://www.quora.com/l/boq-hung-lee

NFL

How effective would sumo wrestlers be as NFL linemen?

John DeMarchi, Have intensely followed the draft for 25 years; have attended 16 NFL Drafts; longtime football fan.

Fascinating question, and a good one.

Only forty two sumos on the globe can compete at *makuuchi* level — sumo's top level. The rest of sumo works sort of like baseball, with a minor league system featuring six tiers and a total of about six hundred and thirty wrestlers.

So to be a sumo "pro," you can't be a slug. You have to be a huge, powerful, explosive, low-center-of-gravity athlete,

with exceptional balance and short-area quickness, and rare toughness. Every one of those skills/attributes is a positive for an NFL offensive or defensive lineman. It's also why some college heavyweight wrestlers succeed as NFL lineman — the skill set translates.

Let's take the top forty two sumos (*makuuchi*). Could any of them make it as an NFL lineman?

Could a sumo make it as an NFL Defensive End? No chance — they would lack the top end speed to succeed. Though a sumo could absolutely sink butt, stack the point, and anchor against the run, I'd have to question whether any sumo would have the speed and lateral mobility necessary to burst upfield, dip his shoulder and redirect to a quarterback as a DE needs to do thirty to forty times a game. I'd question whether a sumo could consistently counter and string moves together in open space at NFL speed. Endurance is also a huge problem for the sumo; a typical DE needs to play sixty to seventy downs per game. I doubt a four to five hundred pound sumo could handle that workload. A sumo is NOT going to be J.J. Watt, who plays three-technique DE (between offensive guard and tackle, or five-technique DE (outside offensive tackle's outside shoulder) like say, Mario Williams. Can't see it.

But at defensive tackle, *especially nose tackle*, my answer is… maybe. The job of a nose tackle is to tie up two offensive blockers (usually the guard and center); the ability to be an immovable object who occupies space sounds a lot like… key attributes of a sumo. One can debate whether a sumo would have the upper body strength necessary to play nose tackle — I'm not sure sumos bench press upwards of four hundred and fifty pounds — but for quickness, size and lower body power, it's possible a sumo could play the nose. Plus, most nose tackles are two-down players, who come off the field in obvious passing situations. That means, the sumo would need to survive thirty to forty snaps a game. That could be doable.

As a 4-3 defensive tackle, I'd say no, since one-gappers in that scheme need much more speed and mobility than sumos have.

In other words, with top strength training, could a sumo be Ted Washington, Kris Jenkins, or Paul Soloai type player?

Maybe. But a penetrating 4-3 tackle like a Warren Sapp or Kyle Williams? No way.

On offense, I can't see a sumo offensive tackle — definitely not a blindside left tackle, but not even a right tackle, either. There is way too much space to cover for an NFL tackle against speedy pass rushing DEs and OLBs, and the sumo simply lacks the top end speed and frankly, height in many cases (the average NFL offensive tackle is 6-5), to succeed.

Put it this way — if DeMarcus Ware comes off the corner, can a sumo block him? If JPP bursts upfield then counters back inside, can a sumo jam him? I cannot see that happening.

But at offensive guard or center, again, girth, power in space, and lower body explosion would be huge attributes. No, I can't see a four hundred pound sumo pulling guard; yes, I could see a four hundred pound sumo drive-blocking guard. Again, he would need top-strength training, but essentially, a sumo COULD be a bigger (Niners OG) Mike Iupati-type player — a mauler. The key issue isn't so much run blocking on the first level (vs. defensive line); it's whether the sumo could get to the second level and block linebackers in the run game, and whether the sumo has the mobility and quickness to handle speed rushers in the passing game. Again, the other issue is that an offensive lineman typically plays 95-100% of the offensive snaps. Could a sumo survive that, from a pure endurance standpoint? Questionable — since that's not what a sumo trains for, typically.

For example, Nate Newton — a multiple Pro Bowler for Dallas at OG — had a sumo type physique. But he also had rare feet and the ability to locate and crush people in space. I can't see a Larry Allen-type sumo — none of them would be that fluid in space — but could a sumo's understanding of balance and leverage enable him to succeed at NFL guard or center? Maybe. Mike Williams of the Redskins is around a three hundred fifty five pound guard, so it isn't unprecedented.

The three biggest lies in the NFL are height, weight, and speed. But it is RARE for players over three hundred and seventy five pounds to be drafted and productive in the NFL. The heaviest player drafted in NFL history was Buffalo seventh rounder Leslie Michael Jasper, three hundred and ninety four

pounds, two years ago — he is now in Arena football. OG Jamie Nails was drafted at three hundred eighty seven pounds by the Bills about fifteen years ago, and he played decent ball for Buffalo and Miami — but only after slimming down to three hundred and fifty five pounds. OT Aaron Gibson went around three hundred and eighty pounds when the Lions drafted him in the 1990s, but he ate his way out of the league. OT Mike Williams of the Bills was in the three hundred and sixty five to seventy five pound range; he bombed as a tackle, and played guard at thirty six, eventually. OT Leonard Davis tipped the scales at around three hundred and seventy pounds on draft day; he also had to move inside to guard to make it in the NFL.

Most NFL plays take three to four seconds. I have no doubt a sumo could gain leverage, and maybe even win the initial one to two seconds on a confrontation; the challenge is, could he sustain, and deal with counter-move (especially lateral one) and the speed on the NFL game after his initial strike? Unclear.

On defense, the big men always play inside; occasionally, a guy like Ted ("Mount") Washington plays really well at a listed weight of three hundred and thirty five pounds, and actual weight of around four hundred pounds, but it is not common. Fridge Perry was listed at three hundred and sixty pounds — he also played in the three hundred and seventy five to four hundred range for a lot of his career. But typically, DTs are in the three hundred to three hundred and thirty pound range, and nose tackle go three hundred and twenty to three hundred and sixty or so.

Here is where I DO think a sumo could make it — as a situational (max fifteen to twenty downs a game) two-gap, nose tackle who could not be moved in the run game. Granted, the sumo is not going to have any pass rush skills, save maybe a bull rush. But because of the sumo's understanding of leverage, his mass, his balance, and his explosive lower body power, he would be a load to move inside for any offensive lineman (assuming again, the sumo committed to an upper-body weight regimen training typical for the NFL).

Five more points.

- Don't underrate the sumo's ability to use his hands — especially to hold — which, though illegal, is vitally important to offensive line success. For those unfamiliar with sumo moves, there is a list of sixty moves sumos have used to end matches since 2000, about twelve of which are the key sumo moves — http://www.sumotalk.com/rules.htm. Hand punch is a big deal in sumo — just as it is in the NFL.

- Don't underrate the sumo's ability to train, and the rigorous discipline and drive it takes to succeed at the elite sumo level. A pro sumo would likely be VERY coachable, and could probably pick up NFL blocking or run-stuffing techniques pretty quickly. You give a *makuuchi* to say, Dallas OL coach Hudson Houck for one to two years, and I would not bet against that guy being at least a useful situation player. Sumos pick up technique astonishingly well.

- Don't underrate the sumo's balance. Consider that to win a sumo grappling match, a wrestler must force his opponent to step out of the ring, OR force his opponent to touch the ground with any part of his body other than the bottom of his feet. Sumos are exceptional athletes at leverage; that is a crucial skill for NFL intterior lineman.

- Don't underrate the sumo's toughness. These are four to five hundred pound men who pummel and slam into each other at speed WITHOUT PADDING OR EQUIPMENT. That toughness translates exceptionally well to NFL positional requirements. Rugby players have made it in the NFL (albeit primarily as kickers so far). Why not sumos?

- Sumos are athletes; they are not just big, fat guys. These athletes have great quickness, especially on initial strikes and blows; that also translates well to the type of interior line contact they would see in the NFL.

Overall, I don't think a four hundred plus pound sumo could make it in the NFL as an every-down player. But as a situational player (goal line; short yardage; etc.), I could absolutely see it. Anyone who remembers three hundred and sixty plus pound William "Refrigerator" Perry scoring in Su-

per Bowl XX will know what I am saying.

Could a three hundred and fifty to four hundred pound sumo make it as a full-time guard, or nose tackle? Would love to see one of the *makuuchi* try it.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-john-demarchi

Is wrestling fake?

Anon User

THINGS THAT ARE PREDETERMINED OR FAKE

The match duration, main moves, finishing moves and outcome are predetermined. The major events of a match are planned and discussed beforehand, and so is the outcome. Some major events are definitely planned — for instance, someone might interfere in a match just as the bad guy, or 'heel,' is about to lose. The duration of the match is also predetermined, and the time is kept by the referee. If you time the matches on, say, WWE, you might notice that there are broadly five, fifteen, and twenty five minute matches.

The referee is not just a neutral bystander. The referee keeps track of time and tells wrestlers when to wrap up a match. He also helps communicate things between wrestlers, and assists in the overall story by "accidentally" getting bumped into during the course of a match, so that the bad guy or "heel" can cheat. Sometimes, when a wrestler wants things to get a bit bloody, the referee may slip a razor to him to cut himself (and collect it back later). At the same time, the referee needs to keep within the illusion of rulekeeping (disqualifications, count-outs, pinfalls). Lastly, the referee has the full discretion to stop a match if one of the wrestlers is seriously injured, and he has to balance this discretion with the show's need to follow the scripted narrative.

Much (but not all) of a wrestling match is spontaneous. Wrestlers "call spots" to each other, ie, instruct each other

about moves they will give or want to receive. Usually this is discreet, though occasionally one might be able to hear or spot it on TV.

Selling, or exaggerating moves. Some moves, like the "stunner" and the "cutter", are not particularly painful for the receiving wrestler and he is the one who has to 'sell' it to make it look convincing. You might see wrestlers jump a couple of feet away after getting a chop or an uppercut — some 'sell' more than others. The powerhouse wrestlers, of course, deliberately "no sell" moves. If you don't 'sell' right, it looks bad.

Wrestlers protecting each other. You will find that high flying moves almost always hit their target, and in fact it can be quite obvious in a few cases that the receiving wrestlers open their arms and bodies to 'catch' the attacking wrestler. Wrestlers help each other out in potentially dangerous moves by, for instance, tapping the receiving wrestler when he is about to execute the move (the 'DDT'), or by releasing the arms of the receiving wrestler so he can protect his face and head upon impact with the mat (Triple H's 'Pedigree'). Very large, or powerful wrestlers must protect opponents, for instance, by not putting all his weight on the receiving wrestler in high-impact moves.

Wrestlers protecting themselves. Wrestlers will brace themselves for impact, for instance, by falling in a certain way or using their hands and knees to cushion an impact so they don't hit their heads. In some potentially dangerous moves, like the Undertaker's tombstone piledriver, you can actually see the receiving wrestler literally hugging the attacking wrestler tightly as a precaution.

The dangerous part of the tombstone piledriver here is that the attacking wrestler (wearing black) might lose his grip on an opponent (wearing white) who is suspended upside down with no protection to his head. Done correctly, the receiving wrestler actually does not impact the ground at all. His long hair and the speed of the movement disguises the fact that receiving wrestler's head is above the attacking wrestler's knees.

Wrestlers assisting each other. Like Brian says, although wrestlers are very strong and able to carry much more than their own body weight, many moves still require the assis-

tance of the receiver. The 'chokeslam,' for instance, often requires the receiving wrestler to bend his knees and kick off the ground a bit.

Wrestlers hating each other. Of course they (usually) don't hate each other all that much. The strange thing about wrestling is that you have to both hit the opponent and protect him, which compounds the already complex working dynamic between wrestlers who travel with each other two hundred days in a year in the WWE's case.

Punching / hitting with hands. Wrestlers don't punch each other like boxers do. They seldom hit each other with the knuckles of their fists, but with the back of the hand, or the wrist, or some part of the hand/arm that is less sharp than the knuckle. They are very restrained in this way, but a good wrestler will know how to disguise this restraint with his body language or with his hitting 'technique.'

Stamping. Punches make little sound. Wrestlers stamp their feet on the ground as they snap into a punch to generate what sounds like an impressive, audible punch. But it's their feet. A good wrestler will know how to make this stamping look natural and look necessary for gaining momentum.

THINGS THAT ARE REAL

Taking a bump (how wrestlers fall). Wrestlers actually take a bit more pain than they have to. When the wrestler takes a "back bump," he is actually slamming himself on the mat with more force than he has to. The mats are rigged with microphones to amplify the sound, but those can only go so far.

Chair and table shots. They're not fake props. The steel chairs are really steel chairs. In some cases, some props like tables may be pre-cut, but this is so that they break in a predictable fashion and therefore not injure the wrestler with unexpected splinters.

The pain. The mats aren't concrete, but they're not mattresses either. There is some padding, but it doesn't save the wrestlers from feeling sore all week long. It hurts when you slam onto the mat. It hurts when you're whipped into a metal railing, steel steps, hit by a chair, a belt, a ring bell, a 2-by-4.

The soreness. People forget that while the top MMA fighters and boxers only fight a handful of times a year (if

that). Those fights are brutal, but leave enough time for the body to recuperate. WWE wrestlers tour two hundred days in the year. The biggest WWE stars may wrestle three or four times a week (Raw, Smackdown, and at least one untelevised house show), in addition to media commitments and travelling time (which can amount to twenty to forty hours — the WWE travels to almost every continent on the planet). Most wrestlers go through the entire year sore or suffering from a nagging pain that never goes away. A few, like Edge and Shawn Michaels, have suffered well-documented back problems. Edge had to retire in his prime to avoid spending the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

The athleticism. Many people disparage WWE wrestlers as actors, but pro-wrestling requires a great deal of athleticism. Many of the WWE's roster, past and present, are athletes in their own right. Kurt Angle was a Olympic gold medalist, and of the current roster, Alberto Del Rio has a background as an MMA fighter and a gold medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling at the Pan-American games. A few others have excellent amateur backgrounds — Jack Swagger was a two-time All-American.

The concussions. Concussions are well documented in wrestling. Many promotions like the WWE no longer allow chair shots on the head due to the very real effects on health. You don't need to be hit on the head to have a concussion. When you are dealing with wrestlers in the 100-200 kg (or 200-400 lbs) range, one can get a concussion from the most innocuous of wrestling moves. The wrestler often continues wrestling through a concussion. Depending on his level of awareness, his opponent(s) often improvise a finish. In this link (http://www.wrestlinginc.com/wi/news/2012/0818/555395/kurt-angle/), Kurt Angle talks about how Triple H and The Rock improvised a finish when he suffered a concussion during a triple threat match involving the three.

Submission moves. Some submission holds are for show. The "sleeper" is usually meant for the wrestlers to rest and 'call spots' for the rest of the match. It is perfect because the wrestlers get to be within whispering distance of each other. They call spots, of course, after hiding or angling their mouths away from the cameras. The common feature of al-

most all submission moves is that they meant to be adjustable (ie, can be loosened a bit) and have a few exit spots to allow the receiver to counter the move. However, many submission moves genuinely hurt (like Bret Hart's 'sharpshooter'). Many of the submission moves you see on the WWE are borrowed from "real" sports like MMA and jiujitsu — such as the arm trap triangle choke or the gogoplata.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-6

TECHNOLOGY

What does it feel like to be the CEO of a start-up?

Paul DeJoe, Least valuable person Ecquire.com

Very tough to sleep most nights of the week. Weekends don't mean anything to you anymore. Closing a round of financing is not a relief. It means more people are depending on you to turn their investment into twenty times what they gave you.

It's very difficult to "turn it off." But at the same time, television, movies, and vacations become so boring to you when your company's future might be sitting in your inbox or in the results of a new A/B test you decide to run.

You feel guilty when you're doing something you like doing outside of the company. Only through years of wrestling with this internal fight do you recognize how the word "balance" is an art that is just as important as any other skill set you could ever hope to have. You begin to see how valuable creativity is and that you must think differently not only to win, but to see the biggest opportunity. You recognize that you get your best ideas when you're not staring at a screen. You see immediate returns on healthy distractions.

You start to respect the Duck. Paddle like hell under the water, but be smooth and calm on top where everyone can see you. You learn the hard way that if you lose your cool, you lose.

You always ask yourself if you are changing The World in a good way. Are people's lives better for having known you?

You are creative, and when you have an idea, it has no filter before it becomes a reality. This feeling is why you can't do anything else.

You start to see that the word "entrepreneur" is a personality. It's difficult to talk to your friends that are not risking the same things you are because they are content with not pushing themselves or putting it all out there in the public with the likelihood of failure staring at them everyday. You start to turn a lot of your conversations with relatives into how they might exploit opportunities for profit. Those close to you will view your focus as something completely different because they don't understand. You don't blame them. They can't understand if they haven't done it themselves. It's why you will gravitate towards other entrepreneurs. You will find reward in helping other entrepreneurs.

Your job is to create a vision, a culture, to get the right people on the bus and to inspire. When you look around at a team that believes in the vision as much as you do and trusts you will do the right thing all the time, it's a feeling that can't be explained. The exponential productivity from great people will always amaze you. It's why finding the right team is the most difficult thing you will do but the most important. This learning will affect your life significantly. You will not settle for things anymore because you will see what is possible when you hold out for the best and push to find people that are the best. You don't have a problem anymore being honest with people about not cutting it.

You start to see that you're a leader, and you have to lead or you can't be involved with it at all. You turn down acquisition offers because you need to run the show, you feel like your team is the best in the world, and you can do anything with hard work. Quitting is not an option.

You have to be willing to sleep in your car and laugh about it. You have to be able to laugh at many things, because when you think of the worse things in the world that could happen to your company, they will happen. Imagine working for something for two years and then having to throw it out completely because you see one day that it's wrong. You

realize that if your team is having fun and can always laugh, you won't die, and in fact, the opposite will happen: you will learn to love the journey and look forward to what you do everyday, even at the lowest times. You'll hear not to get too low when things are bad and not to get too high when things are good, and you'll even give that advice. But you'll never take it, because being in the middle all the time isn't exciting, and an even keel is never worth missing out on something worth celebrating. You'll become addicted to finding the hardest challenges because there's a direct relationship between how difficult something is and the euphoria of a feeling when you do the impossible.

You realize that it was much more fun when you didn't have money, and that money might be the worse thing you could have as a personal goal. If you're lucky enough to genuinely feel this way, it is a surreal feeling that is the closest thing to peace, because you realize it's the challenges and the work that you love. Your currencies are freedom, autonomy, responsibility, and recognition. Those happen to be the same currencies of the people you want around you.

You feel like a parent to your customers in that they will never realize how much you love them, and they validate that you are not crazy. You want to hug every one of them. They mean the world to you.

You learn the most about yourself, more than any other vocation, as an entrepreneur. You learn what you do when you get punched in the face many, many times. You learn what you do when no one is looking and when no one would find out. You learn that you are bad at many things, lucky if you're good at a handful of things, and the only thing you can ever be great at is being yourself, which is why you can never compromise it. You learn how power and recognition can be addicting and see how they could corrupt so many.

You become incredibly grateful for the times that things were going as bad as they possibly could. Most people won't get to see this in any other calling. When things are really bad, there are people that come running to help and don't think twice about it. Tal Raviv, Gary Smith, Joe Reyes, Toan Dang, Vincent Cheung, Eric Elinow, Abe Marciano are some of them. I will forever be in their debt, and I could never repay

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them nor would they want or expect to be repaid.

You begin to realize that in life, the luckiest people in the world only get one shot at being a part of something great. Knowing this helps you make sense of your commitment.

Of all the things said though, it's exciting. Every day is different and so exciting. Even when it's bad, it's exciting. Knowing that your decisions will not only affect you but many others also is a weight that I would rather have any day than the weight of not controlling my future. That's why I could not do anything else.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-paul-dejoe

What factors led to the bursting of the Internet bubble of the late 1990s?

Steve Case, Co-founder of AOL; now Chairman of Case Foundation and Revolution (Zipcar, LivingSocial, Exclusive Resorts, Everyday Health, Revolution Money, Miraval, etc)

The Internet went through some fairly predictable phases.

The first was a **research** phase (the 70s), when some forward thinkers were working on early research projects for what was then called videotex, teletext, 2-way TV, etc. These were experiments in labs as consumers did not have PCs or any practical way to access these services. Futurists like Alvin Toffler wrote about the notion of an "electronic cottage" (he wrote The Third Wave in 1979), but it was considered a pie-in-the-sky prediction.

Next was the **pioneering** phase (early 80s to early 90s), when a relatively small number of people were trying to build interactive services, but it was an uphill battle. Few people used them (and the Internet itself was still limited to government/educational institutions — indeed, it was illegal to use

it for commercial purposes). The conventional wisdom was that the market would always be limited to hackers/hobbyists. AOL was the first "Internet" company (it was actually called an "online services" or "interactive services" company at the time) to go public, and I remember on the road show (in 1992) explaining why we thought this would be a large market someday. Given we had been in business seven years and had less than 200,000 users, most were skeptical.

Suddenly, interest in the Internet took off and we entered a **growth** phase (mid-90s). A lot of factors contributed to this: consumers started buying PCs in large numbers, PCs started shipping with pre-installed modems, network costs dropped sharply, making access more affordable, software was developed to improve ease of use for mainstream users, the World Wide Web emerged, the first wave of start-ups were developed, etc. Suddenly, a market that had been nascent for more than a decade was showing signs of life. As an example, AOL went from 200,000 users to 1 million in a two year period.

This sudden surge in interest led to the **hype** phase (late 90s), when people came out of the woodwork to be part of the Internet gold rush. Hundreds of companies were started, and everybody wanted to invest. Valuations shot up. Me-too companies became prevalent. Crazy ideas that had no business model and no realistic chance of success were viewed as the next big thing. As millions of people decided to go online virtually overnight, companies like AOL expanded rapidly. We were literally getting America online, adding 1 million new users every month or two. Our market value soared, from $70 million at the time of the 1992 IPO to $150 billion in early 2000.

Not surprisingly, this hype phase was followed by **despair** (early 2000s). Some called this the Internet's nuclear winter. Investors ran from the sector and valuations plummeted. Some companies lost 99% of their market value in a matter of months. Dozens went bankrupt. The sector went from being the hottest thing on Wall Street to being cold. New companies could not raise start-up capital. Most people thought the Internet as a passing fad.

That then led to a **recovery** phase (mid 2000s). Some of the companies started in the hype phase built large franchises

(Yahoo, eBay, Amazon, etc), and a handful of newer companies got traction (Google, in particular). This was a slower, steadier, saner period of growth. Investors tended to be selective, betting on the winners that survived the bust that were consolidating their positions.

Now we appear to be in a **boom** phase again. The success of social media (Facebook in particular) and more recently social commerce (Groupon and LivingSocial) has reminded people of how quickly large, profitable, valuable franchises can be built. As a result, there is once again a rush to invest. This will inevitably lead to many disappointments, but the difference now vs. a decade ago is that companies have real business models, significant revenues, etc. Valuations are likely to move up — or down — quickly, but the underlying businesses are for the most part pretty stable.

This cycle — hope, hype, despair, rebound, etc — has been interesting to watch (and live through) over the past 25+ years. It is is worth pointing out though that what happened with the Internet is not unique to the Internet — the cycles just happened a little faster. Most significant inventions and industries (cars, etc) have undergone similar transitions. Success seems to require a mix of passion, perspective, and perseverance.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-steve-case

What was the genesis of Instagram?

Kevin Systrom, CEO, co-founder

First off, we have to say that we never expected the overwhelming response that we've seen. We went from literally a handful of users to the #1 free photography app in a matter of hours. But as my cofounder Mike Krieger likes to say, Instagram is an app that only took eight weeks to build and ship, but was a product of over a year of work.

The story starts when I worked at Nextstop. While I was there working in marketing, I started doing more and more engineering at night on simple ideas that helped me learn how to program (I don't have any formal CS degree or training). One of these ideas was combining elements of Foursquare (check-ins) with elements of Mafia Wars (hence the name Burbn). I figured I could build a prototype of the idea in HTML5 and get it to some friends. Those friends ended up using the prototype without any branding elements or design at all. I spent weekends working on improving the prototype for my friends. At a party for the Hunch folks, I ran into a bunch of people who would basically make starting Burbn a reality. At that party were two people from Baseline Ventures and Andreessen Horowitz. I showed the prototype, and we decided we'd meet up for coffee to talk about it. After the first meeting, I decided to take the dive and leave my job to go solo and see if Burbn could be a company. Within two weeks of leaving, I raised $500k from both Baseline and Andreessen Horowitz, and started work on finding a team.

Mike Krieger and I started talking and he decided he liked the idea of helping start the company. Once he joined, we took a step back and looked at the product as it stood. By this time, we had built Burbn into a (private) really neat HTML5 mobile web app that let you: Check in to locations, Make plans (future check-ins), Earn points for hanging out with friends, Post pictures, and much more.

We decided that if we were going to build a company, we wanted to focus on being really good at one thing. We saw mobile photos as an awesome opportunity to try out some new ideas. We spent one week prototyping a version that focused solely on photos. It was pretty awful. So we went back to creating a native version of Burbn. We actually got an entire version of Burbn done as an iPhone app, but it felt cluttered, and overrun with features. It was really difficult to decide to start from scratch, but we went out on a limb, and basically cut everything in the Burbn app except for its photo, comment, and like capabilities. What remained was Instagram. (We renamed because we felt it better captured what you were doing — an instant telegram of sorts. It also sounded camera-y).

So eight weeks later, we gave it to our friends, beta tested,

bug fixed, etc. and then we decided it was ready to ship. We've got a long road ahead of us, but we're encouraged by the adoption and usage that has far exceeded our bets pre-launch.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-kevin-systrom

Am I missing out by not playing any video or console games?

David Cole, Designer at Quora

Reasons why you might not be missing out:

You consider art or recreation a waste of time in general. If you believe this, then you can toss video games into the same pile with novels, films, sports, hiking, and chess. I don't think there's any way around this, some people just want to feel productive with everything they do.

You lack the capacity to derive meaning from video games. I don't think there's a category of art where I haven't connected to at least one piece (opera, maybe?) but I'd bet there are people for whom this is true. If you've given the form an earnest try and got nothing from it, I wouldn't blame ya for shrugging it off in favor of art you do find meaningful.

You don't want to deal with learning or skill-based challenge in your art. Games are exceptional from other forms of art in that they often require skill to get through, or at least a learning period around the input methods. This can be alienating, and I don't blame people for being turned off by this. We've developed input and mechanical tropes (the platformer, the first person shooter) to help smooth out the learning curve, but you still need to learn one before you can play the rest.

If this doesn't describe you, it might just be a function of misconception or inexperience:

You think video games lack artistic or recreational capacity. You're mistaken. We're witnessing the birth and rapid evolution of a brand new art form, dense with new expressive faculty. To be alive right now and choose to ignore this strikes me as a shame.

You think video games require a lot more of your time relative to other forms of art and recreation. Many of the games that get the most outside attention (*Skyrim*, *Minecraft*, *Grand Theft Auto*) also happen to be massive time sinks. Good games can be found at any length imaginable from a few minutes (*Passage*) to a few hours (*Portal*) to the more typical fifteen to twenty hours for your mainstream, large budget games. These are no less a time sink than a novel.

You haven't played a video game you connected with. I'd bet this is the case for most people who dismiss video games. There's this myth of the "gamer," or that people who play games are a specific kind of person. Movie goers and book readers do not have an equivalent identity. This is problematic: people feel like they're either inside or outside the world of games.

In reality, games are more diverse than people think, as are the people who play them. If you don't want a game that requires hand-eye coordination and action-based challenges, you can play sim games, or turn based strategy games. Within the interactive fiction and experimental "art" game communities you can find games that lack challenge entirely.

Because it's a medium in constant evolution and experimentation, it's hard to dabble and understand what's out there. If you really are wondering if there's a game out there for you, consider asking a friend with diverse gaming tastes what they might recommend.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-david-cole

Why did Steve Jobs choose not to effectively treat his cancer?

Ramzi Amri, MD/PhD Candidate, MGH Surgical Oncology

I hesitated a long time before addressing this topic. To avoid any risks of bias, let me start by stating that all the details on Jobs' specific case are based on secondary sources, albeit from reliable sources in the media. I write this on a personal title, I do not pretend to know anything about the case on a personal level, and I never participated in the care of Mr. Jobs. I base all my cancer figures on sources from biomedical research known to me.

I respect the privacy of, and in no way wish to offend, anyone mourning his passing. I have the profoundest respect for Mr. Jobs and his legacy, but I feel that in the spirit of his progressive view of the world, learning from his case is an appropriate way to look back on the facts concerning his life and legacy.

I have done a year and a half of research on the type of tumor that affected Steve Jobs as a medical student in Amsterdam and have some strong opinions on his case, not only as an admirer of his work, but also as a cancer researcher who has the impression that his disease course has been far from optimal.

Let me cut to the chase: Mr. Jobs allegedly chose to undergo all sorts of alternative treatment options before opting for conventional medicine.

This was, of course, a freedom he had all the rights to take, but given the circumstances, it seems sound to assume that Mr. Jobs' choice for alternative medicine could have led to an unnecessarily early death.

Again, please understand that I have no knowledge of the specific case, I'm just trying to give insights on his *a priori* odds of cure. These are independent of his case and mere indicators that somehow his case turned for the worse when it statistically was improbable. What made this happen will remain in the domain of speculations. We're here to see if his

therapeutic choices are **possibly** what made this happen.

First, let me clarify a few things about his disease:

Neuroendocrine tumors are far less deadly than "ordinary" pancreatic cancer.

The big confusion in the media is that Jobs had pancreatic cancer. Though his tumor might have originated in his pancreas, we're not speaking of the dreaded pancreatic **adenocarcinoma** that has such a horrible prognosis and makes up for 95% of pancreatic tumors.

Jobs is cited to have said himself that he had an islet-cell tumor, which is a colloquially used, less accurate name for the other 5% of pancreatic tumors, so-called neuroendocrine tumors.

Neuroendocrine tumors are relatively mild forms of cancer.

Gastroenteropancreatic Neuroendocrine Tumors (GEP-NET's) are a range of tumors that mostly keep their original function, producing endocrine hormones.

The disadvantage of that is the havoc they wreak on the body due to all sorts of hormonal imbalances caused by the hormones they produce. On the other hand, the level of differentiation is a strong indicator of how aggressive a tumor is: the better a tumor is differentiated e.g. keeps the features of its originator, the least invasive and prone to metastasis it is.

Just to illustrate how mild these tumors can be:

- As many as 10% of autopsied persons in the general population have been reported to have one of these without ever having had any symptoms during their life.

- Up to 30% of detected GEP-NETs are so well-differentiated they're strictly not cancers. I have even come across an article where insulinomas, the most common type of GEP-NETs were benign in 90% of the cases.

- If treated appropriately and in time, most people won't die from the cancer itself. In my series of patients, for many subtypes, the survival rate was as high as 100% over a decade.

Neuroendocrine tumors caught in time can be treated just by surgically removing the tumor.

This is a relatively low-risk treatment that — especially compared to chemo and radiation — has negligible disadvantages. In many cases, a simple enucleation (just cutting out the tumor with a safe margin around it) is enough and leaves no residual side-effects.

Now, about this specific case:

Jobs had many favorable factors that indicate an early surgical treatment could have been curative.

- Mr. Jobs said himself that they caught the tumor early. Early in GEP-NETs means in many cases that surgically removing the primary tumor without additional removal of organs is a curative with a low chance or recurrence.

- The tumor was located at a relatively clement site, the pancreas.

- The tumor was allegedly an insulinoma, one of the best treatable subtypes of GEP-NETs.

- The tumor was probably well-differentiated. Mr. Jobs spoke of a hormonal imbalance, this points to a tumor that keeps its endocrine function, which is an general indicator of good differentiation. Well-differentiated tumors are less prone to metastasize and grow rapidly.

See table linked to below for a comprehensive illustration of the numbers I'm referring to, I chose an article from The Annals of Oncology as a source as it's one of the few papers freely accessible for everyone interested to read the full article: http://annonc.oxfordjournals.org/content/21/9/1794.

...but not treating the most innocent cancer can still cause it to go seriously bad.

I'm currently reviewing hundreds of colon cancer cases, and about 25% of them start with a patient that comes with a history of polyps. Polyps are small benign little growths in the lining of the intestine. They are absolutely harmless at first, yet slowly but surely, over years, they lose more and more of the above mentioned "differentiation" and some eventually turn to a malign colon cancer.

In fact, it is supposed that all colon cancers start as a polyp. These 25% had polyps removed, but were unlucky enough that between two colonoscopies, some other polyp found the

time to grow into a real cancer. That's also why screening — and going there on time — is so important.

This illustrates also why leaving even the most innocent malign tumor to grow is just a foolish thing to do — a ticking time bomb.

Jobs was a hippie back in the day, and a conventional medicine skeptic now. His reaction to the disease gave the disease time to spread.

Many mainstream media, including CNN, stated that Mr. Jobs might have spent as long as two years without proper (conventional) treatment.

While Mr. Jobs was trying all sorts of alternative mumbo-jumbo I won't even bother to go through as their failure is now sadly irrefutably proven, his tumor grew, and grew, and grew…

…and then it somehow grew beyond control.

• Jobs waited so long before seeking normal treatment that he had to undergo a Whipple procedure, losing his pancreas and whole duodenum in 2004. This was the first alarming sign that his disease had progressed beyond a compact primary to at least a tumor so large his Pancreas and duodenum could not be saved.

• Jobs seemingly waited long enough for the disease revealed to have spread extensively to his liver. The only reason he'd have a transplant after a GEP-NET would be that the tumor invaded all major parts of the liver, which takes a considerable amount of time. Years, in most neuroendocrine tumors. It could be that this happened before his diagnosis, but the risk grows exponentially with time.

• We then saw the tumor slowly draining the life out him. It was a horrible thing to see him lose weight and slowly turn into a skin and bones form of himself.

Yet it seems that even during this recurrent phase, Mr. Jobs opted to dedicate his time to Apple as the disease progressed, instead of opting for chemotherapy or any other conventional treatment.

As for the "Why?" question:
Every patient has another view of his or her disease and

the priorities for the treatment, or how much suffering and risk they're ready to endure as a trade-off for a higher chance of getting cured.

For most people, the trust in their doctor's intention to treat them is near-absolute. We encourage patients to inform themselves on the subject and stimulate personal choices, but the extent to which people can go through all the technicalities and the enormous pile of medical evidence is limited not only by the level of understanding of this specialist knowledge, but also simply by the sheer time it takes to inform oneself about this.

Now Mr. Jobs always was a free thinker, a strong believer in spirituality, a vegetarian, and a known skeptic of conventional medicine. He chose to reject conventional medicine altogether for a while. He's not alone in that. We come across many people like this, and we all know someone in our midst that uses homeopathy or has this known fear of anything "chemical" (to those I always say that everything is chemical, if you think dihydrogen oxide sounds scary you should stop drinking water). Individual freedom of thought and choice is a cornerstone of our modern society, and the medical world makes no exception.

It's always an ethical puzzle if a patient chooses alternative treatment that we know from fact will not work. Yet, as long as the person is mentally sane, we cannot force them to choose a working treatment, even if it means their death. Sadly, even for one of the greatest personalities of the last hundred years, there will be no exception, and badly treated cancer is just as deadly for him as for anyone else…

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ramzi-amri

What are the best stories about people randomly meeting Steve Jobs?

Tim Smith, Principal, Applied Design Group

I dated for years a young woman whose father was Steve Jobs's neighbor in Palo Alto. I thus found myself in the neighborhood often, at dinners, or parties, etc. We would see the Jobs come and go – they have a "normal" house, no gates, no guards, no high fences, not even a big lot. Often, leaving a party at my girlfriend's house late at night, I would drive past their house and you would actually see Steve sometimes, working on a Mac.

One afternoon I attended a party, driving an old Sunbeam Alpine sports car I had the misfortune to own at the time. After the party, I started the Alpine, pulled away from the curb, and – as classic British sports cars will oft do – the electrical system blinked out and I coasted gracefully to a stop, directly in front of the Jobs' driveway.

Their cars weren't there, which was a relief to me, because I was sure they would consider me some weird stalker. So I got out, popped the hood and tried to quick-fix the electrical to at least move further away – and call AAA.

Within about fifteen minutes, of course, I heard two cars pull in behind me, and into the Jobs' driveway – the Jobs were home. I huddled under the hood of the Alpine and hoped they wouldn't notice – although I was the only other car on the street. They went inside, with kids, thankfully, without saying anything. So I closed the hood and prepared to walk back next door to my girlfriend's parents house to call AAA.

As I was putting my jacket on, I heard a call from across the street behind me – the Jobs' driveway – "British or Italian?" It was Jobs's lovely wife Laurene. "British," I said, "and acting like it." "You want a beer?" she said. I tried to decline (shocked I guess at first), but she insisted, said, "You're not going anywhere," and walked back in the house – only to re-

turn with two bottles of beer.

I was determined not to let on that I knew exactly who I was talking to – I was so afraid of being cast a stalker – but the scene was already getting weird for me, standing by my broken car having a beer with Steve Jobs's wife. So, it got weirder.

"You know, we have a friend who knows all about these Sunbeams. We should call him."

I begged her not to, that I'd call AAA and be on my way. She left her beer and went back in the house for a minute, only to return saying, "They're on their way out, but said they would drop by to take a look."

By this point, I am fully resigned to whatever story is going to play out. It was starting to dawn on me that these were not just Silicon Valley elite – they were real people, just helping a poor guy out. It was just unexpected, given what you might think about people like this: it would have been so easy for them to just ignore me. Or call the police.

Within about fifteen minutes, a very long, very black car I won't identify pulled up and – Felini could not have directed this – a handsome gentleman in (I think) a tuxedo, and a beautifully formally dressed wife emerged, to examine my car. This was Laurene's friend, the Sunbeam mechanic.

I protested, all was ignored. The tuxedoed man (who to this day I have no idea who he was – I'll call him James Bond) took off his jacket, opened the hood of my car, and commenced to fishing around inside, while we all visited amicably.

So Steve comes out.

At which point – being an admirer of Jobs for many years – I guess I knew was inevitable, and I both dreaded and anticipated it. He ambled over. I think he had a beer too. And asked what was going on. He was joined by one of the kids.

The Jobs made small talk and joked with their friends – dressed to the nines, repairing my car – while I politely thanked them over and over and tried not to throw up at the insanity of the scene. And then of course, it got even weirder, or funnier, depending on whether you were me or not.

James Bond told someone to try to crank the car. I was talking with Laurene, so Jobs actually sits down in the Alpine and tries to crank it – with his kid sitting behind him. To no

avail.

So I have to stop here – it's a Kodak moment – something you want to remember. It's a beautiful Fall evening in Palo Alto. Your car's broken. A formally dressed close friend of Steve Jobs is under the hood working on your engine. You are talking with Steve's absolutely lovely and down-to-earth wife. Steve is in the car, with his kid, trying to crank it.

That's the moment. You don't often get close to people like the Jobs, much less in a ridiculous situation like this, where you realize that they are just really good people. They're normal, funny, charitable, real people. Not the people the press talks about. Steve is not the maniacal business and design despot the media loves to portray – well he is, but not always. These were real, nice, people.

But still Steve Jobs. The car didn't start. James Bond got his tuxedo back together, apologized to me (!) for not being able to fix it. Said it was the electrical (of course). They said their goodbyes and departed in their giant, silent black car. Steve said something like "piece of shit" as he got out, and walked back into the house. Classic Steve – he was right.

Laurene said, "Come inside and use the phone." Still rolling with it at this point, I followed her into the house, stepping over the dirty laundry you find in everyone's real house and into the kitchen where she pointed me to a phone with god knows how many lines on it. I called AAA, thanked Laurene profusely (for the 50th time), and left quietly. I never acknowledged I had any idea who they were.

A week later, I dropped a six pack of beer off at the Jobs' door, with a note saying thanks. Like anyone would have done, I guess.

I'm an Apple follower. I own a fair amount of Apple stock. You can't avoid the public persona and reputation of Steve Jobs – the media stories. But, as with the other vignettes some have posted, we don't hear about or appreciate the personal side of Jobs and his family. They deserve their privacy, and it must be hard to maintain I'm sure, but the flip side of that is that most never see how frankly normal they are. I purchased the bio that came out last fall, but have not started it. I hope that, on balance, it is as much about what a decent, probably brilliant, real, caring individual Steve Jobs was: a husband,

father, neighbor – and CEO. Tortured probably, in his brilliance. I saw him in his most personal element – family and friends – around a broken down car in Palo Alto one night, just by chance. I was lucky – and I was delighted.

It's one of my fondest memories.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-tim-smith

Which of the Hogwarts Houses does each of the Gang of Four companies correspond to?

Peter Clark

AMAZON - GRYFFINDOR

Gryffindor believes in *bravery, daring*, and *nerve*. Amazon, a company that sold books online, bravely decided to risk eating into their own business with their marketplace offerings (which many speculated would be the downfall of Amazon), they have displayed great bravery in keeping the pedal to the floor with their Amazon Web Services, a service vastly out of the traditional ecommerce Amazon brand.

Amazon has also repeatedly shown remarkable nerve to governments, companies, and users. From revoking books from the Amazon Kindle, to revoking free shipping to American states that wanted to charge them additional costs, and flying in the face of record labels to offer their cloud offerings for hosted music.

The Gryffindor element is fire, and a great fuel for fire is wood which you can find in the Amazon rainforest.

FACEBOOK - HUFFLEPUFF

Facebook thrives on an environment of hard work on their product, loyalty both from users and employees (active Facebook users use the service every day), and being non-judge-

mental. Which of the other three companies do you think would not just support, but *encourage*, applications that allowed you to throw sheep at your friends?

Hufflepuff is an inclusive house, and this resonates with various cultural jokes that bounce around the walls of Facebook, from hoodies with cryptic logos, to in-jokes on Quora.

Additionally, a famous Hufflepuff student, Cedric Diggory, was played by Robert Pattison, who is famous (to muggles) for his role in the Twilight trilogy, and guess what one of the most popular Facebook pages is? The Twilight Trilogy. (16M fans!)

GOOGLE - RAVENCLAW

Like Ravenclaw, Google values *intelligence* and *knowledge*. Ravenclaw was founded by the Grey Lady, who was killed for fleeing her lover and refusing to see him again, parallels could be drawn between this, and Larry Page replacing Eric Schmidt as CEO, who had joined Larry and Sergey, and essentially replaced them as CEO pre-IPO.

In addition to all this, this is the only Harry Potter house where *you answer a question* to enter the common room — which other company would you *ever* use to answer questions?

APPLE - SLYTHERIN

Most people paint Slytherin with a broad stroke of being evil. Some elements of Slytherin are evil, and others parts are labelled evil but perhaps simply overly ambitious.

Nothing could describe Apple better.

Slytherin values ambition, cunning, and resourcefulness in their students. Apple has shown the most ambition (the most valued internet company and fastest growing company in the world), the most cunning (doing business deals then pulling them at the last moment due to CEOs blabbing, incredible utilization of already existing technology with good marketing to sell to users) and has shown resourcefulness only typically demonstrated in the most brilliant entrepreneurs — from the Apple Stores, to the iPad Smart Covers, to the sheer "cool" of how their employees carry themselves:*"We're Apple. We don't wear suits. We don't even own suits."*

The Slytherin colours are green and silver. Apples are

green; Macs are silver. The Slytherin element is water, which is utilized in Apple's ground breaking aluminium laser cutting technique displayed in all of their products.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-peter-clark

WOMEN

What does it feel like to be an unattractive woman?

Anne K. Halsall, extraordinaire

I'd like to answer this, not because I feel I am unattractive, but because at various points in my life, I have been treated as such and I want to share honestly and openly what that experience was like.

To provide some background, I have struggled with my weight since I was a young child, and was more or less always the heaviest girl in my peer groups at school. My family did not have a lot of money, meaning that I didn't get nice haircuts or highlights, makeup, or fashionable clothing and accessories. And finally, I was a nerdy tomboy who actively shunned the idea that appearance matters. I preferred sweatpants to jeans and didn't have the first clue about how to dress myself or do my hair (which was always tangled and frizzy).

Later on in my life, some of these issues got straightened out, but I remained awkward and extremely overweight until my mid-20s. Therefore, I've experienced both the "ugly girl at school" and the "unattractive woman" sides of things.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

This was honestly the hardest. Children can be cruel and overt

in their treatment of social misfits. I was teased mercilessly, especially by the attractive "popular kids," on an ongoing basis from as early as first grade. Here are just a few things that happened to me in grade school and middle school:

- One boy sent me a fake love letter, which I unfortunately believed was true until the punchline was delivered to me in front of a group of other kids.

- My assigned seatmate on the bus made me sit in the aisle because I was "too fat" to sit on the seat and regularly poured soda into my hair on the 45-minute long drive to school.

- I was only allowed to be friends with other unattractive people, which actually worked out because they were often the nicest and funniest kids. One pretty but awkward girl I was friends with took a chance to promote her social status by ditching me publicly at recess. It made perfect sense; she was too pretty for the ugly kids' group.

- I only got valentine's day cards from the teachers.

- I had crushes on people but knew that I could never be the object of someone else's affection. I went to school dances alone, if at all. I didn't exchange cute "if you like me, check this box" notes. I didn't go to boy/girl parties and giggle about "making out" the next day.

- I learned to be okay with spending a lot of time alone. Being an unattractive girl doesn't just make it hard to get a date. It makes it hard to make friends at all, especially in the tweens when a lot of the other girls are very focused on appearance.

YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Things do improve as you get older. The teasing stops (mostly) as it becomes socially unacceptable to mock someone for their appearance or weight. But in some ways, this makes it harder to cope with. You know people are judging you and treating you differently in subtle ways, but since they're nice about it, it's harder to just ignore them or put up walls.

- People are simply nicer to attractive women. If you go out with a cute friend, you can see this painfully clearly. This isn't to say that people are mean to unattractive women; they aren't. It's more like you're invisible.

- You can't shop at a lot of normal stores. Many don't carry plus-sizes, so you have to go to special stores for larger women.

- You don't get hit on, you don't get people asking for your number, you don't get people buying you drinks, you don't get much attention of any kind really.

- You date online, and you get used to people telling you they just aren't attracted to you.

- It's easier to be platonic friends with men because there's little chance they'll end up sexually or romantically interested in you.

- You get used to people giving you unsolicited advice about your health and/or appearance. If you're fat or ugly, you just aren't working hard enough at being otherwise.

- You either feel ashamed of how you look or you learn to not care.

- People don't take pictures of you. Honestly. I know it sounds weird, but I have very few pictures of myself from the time when I was seriously overweight.

THE GOOD

While it can be extremely traumatic to go through the experiences I've described here, there is actually a silver lining to it all. Attractive women are treated well primarily because we as a society objectify them. In a way, you get to dodge that bullet. It hurts to feel invisible to the world, but it's also liberating. You are free to simply exist as a person, and if you are able to make the most of that, it can be a great opportunity for spiritual growth.

The other big upside is that you have likely developed a good personality and/or career in order to cope with the social downsides of being unattractive. Combine this with the fact that age, money, and time can go a long way towards

making you more attractive, and you will almost certainly end up at an advantage later on in your life.

Natural beauty fades, of course, but intelligence, empathy, wit, and kindness last forever.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anne-k-halsall

Why are women so negative about the "picking up women" school of thought?

Gayle Laakmann McDowell, I read things

I became negative about it because of what I saw it do to guys.

When I first learned about it, I was mostly just intrigued. I ended up learning a bunch about it. I read *The Game* (which I still think is a really interesting book) and ended up meeting a lot of people who were in the Pick-up Artist (PUA) Community (not a goal — it just happened).

I even ended up helping out with one of their weekend seminars, to be a "female test dummy" essentially. Far from the stereotype of sleazy guys who want one night stands, 24 of the 25 guys in the class were just awkward, nerdy guys who just wanted a girlfriend (the 25th wanted to bring home a girl for a threesome with his girlfriend). But that's not the instruction of these classes. The classes are about *getting laid*, not getting a girlfriend.

This was my first big hint that something was wrong.

There was a mismatch. They were taking guys who wanted girlfriends and teaching them how to pick up girls in bars. How many relationships do you know of that started in bars? Do you know *any*? If you want a girlfriend, go sign up for an online dating site. Start dating! Statistically speaking, bars don't work.

And then there was the instruction itself.

The problem is that what works for one person doesn't work for everyone — not all guys, and not on all girls. They were telling guys things like:

- Touch a girl when she talks to you.

- Criticize a girl (sorry, I mean "neg").

- When a girl seems uninterested, she's just playing games.

- Don't talk about "real" topics, like education and your job. They're too "boring."

- No woman is out of your league.

The problem here is that touching *can* be flirty, but it can also be really creepy when the touching isn't natural. And when you're telling an awkward, nerdy guy who has no idea how to flirt "okay, now, touch a girl here," it's almost always creepy. (Personally, I *don't* like random guys at bars touching me. It makes me really uncomfortable.)

And then you're telling the guy to criticize the girl, which is just plain mean.

And then, when the girl isn't interested, the guy is now being told, "Oh, she's just trying to play games with you." *He doesn't back off.* Eww.

And all of this is ridiculous because sometimes, the girl *is* out of your league, or at least just isn't interested. I'm 5'9 and I'm just <u>not</u> going to go home with a guy who is 5'3, goes by the nickname "Snake" (seriously?!?), overweight, pimply, and won't just answer a direct question about what he does for a living. But he keeps pursuing because, well, "I'm just playing games with him." I'm trying to see if he passes some test, apparently.

These are the sort of repeated interactions I had with guys in the PUA community, and why I got turned against it. Once upon a time, this guy might have been a perfectly normal but nerdy guy, who could have dated online, met someone nice, got married, and been perfectly happy.

PUA instruction turns awkward, nerdy guys who just want a girlfriend into creepy guys who harass and insult women. And that's not okay!

PUA instruction teaches guys these mechanical ways of

interacting with women which don't really work and totally fails to recognize that every woman is different. Some women just won't go home with you. Sorry. Maybe it's because she's out of your league. Or maybe she's just not interested in you. Or maybe she just doesn't go home with random dudes from bars.

The words coming out of a women's mouth? It's not all a game. You can have actual conversations with us. When I say, "What do you do for a living?" it's because I actually care. Because I'm looking for someone to build a relationship with, and someone with no career goals is not a good match for me. *Answer the question.*

Conversation is not all a giant game. When I'm not interested, it's because I'm not interested. Not because I'm putting some sort of girl test in front of you.

So that's why I'm against it. Because, beyond just giving men the courage to approach women, the instruction is harmful to the guys.

Some of my friends who were involved in the community got out of it okay, but they were probably more normally adjusted to start with. Another friend, well, he got his taste of one night stands and "can't understand the point of girlfriend." And other guys I've met are so uncomfortable to be around that, well, we never really became friends.

http:// www.quora.com/l/boq-gayle-laakmann-mcdowell

As a young woman, how can I shake the feeling that being good-looking is the primary thing that males will acknowledge and praise my existence for?

Shannon Larson, I think a radical feminist viewpoint adds value to many discussions.

Your concern is justified. You cannot shake that feeling because it is, to a large degree, correct. You can, however, take steps to drown it out.

Male attention is natural, but it's only because our society was built and is still structured as a patriarchy that the lust factor is what defines a woman's worth, *not just romantically, but often socially and economically, as well*.

We are living a man's world. Its institutions are built according to men's priorities. That's why being good-looking is so important for females.

There have been cultures where women are used as currency. That's in our cultural DNA. Trafficking of women and girls is a current problem in the US. Attractive women literally have high economic worth, as a commodity.

The one thing that men have in common is a desire for women (unless they're gay or asexual, in which case for much of recent history they were under extreme pressure to suck it up and still wed and impregnate women, which probably made them angry, bitter, and resentful, which is probably even worse for women). That is a major basis of male camaraderie.

Men rule the institutions of this world. Being acknowledged and praised by men is very important. It's often how you're hired and promoted. You can't just shake off how men view you. That's how entrenched power views you.

This is why qualifying as an object for male lust is so important to your success. In a world structured by men's pref-

erences, one of the easiest ways to succeed is by adhering to those preferences, gaining their favor, holding their attention, thereby lessening the annoyance of a woman encroaching on male territory.

A handful of enlightened men doesn't outweigh the majority, who don't work to change the system in the name of altruism, especially since that would expose themselves to more competition. That's too selfless to be universally practiced. That effort that can better be spent advancing their own career.

Everyone, male and female alike, is indoctrinated into the male-centered paradigm.

As a girl, how many times were you told that you were "beautiful," by your mother and father or by male and female strangers? How many times was your brother praised so highly for his appearance? Instead of receiving beauty praise, how many times did people compliment you as "smart" or "hard-working"? Were you told that you're going to have to "fight off the boys" or that you'll support a family one day?

This is how you were trained to expect praise primarily for your appearance.

Miss America is judged on dazzling smiles and good looks. This beauty is innate value that cannot be easily altered and steadily degrades over time. By contrast, Mr. Universe (which doesn't have anything close to the same audience) is about muscles, which can be judged more objectively and which men have to work hard to get and can build over time.

This is how you were trained to evaluate other women by their appearance.

A female's looks are what matters, and their grading is subjective. No woman can be entirely confident that she is attractive to every man. She has to stay on her toes, working to continually improve her beauty while nature steadily undermines it.

Women decline in value as they age, "losing their figure." Professional accomplishments rarely outweigh a sagging butt. A mark of success is a wife who does Pilates, not a wife with a high-powered career.

A woman should have a "great figure" and a "great ass." This is often how she gets approval from females, as well as

males.

Hot-or-not is how we are taught to evaluate women. There are individual exceptions, but the herd mentality is to value hotness above all else. It is the primary way society judges women.

For example, a woman having a "great personality" is slang for being undesirable. No man is congratulated for having a girlfriend/wife with a "great personality."

It is impossible for a woman to be praised for having a "great personality."

For a sad honest picture of society, ask a sweet, smart, funny, heavy woman about her love life.

Then consider the fact that in my high school, there was a girl who abused laxatives over the summer to lose a lot of weight. Everyone knew this, but she looked hot. Her dating life took off. Hotness outweighs bulimia.

Enough with the problem. Let's look at solutions:

You need to live much of your life in an echo chamber of positive messages.

Stop consuming mainstream culture.

Turn off the TV. Rarely watch movies. Don't listen to pop music. Don't read magazines. Once you start paying close attention to how women are portrayed, these media will lose much of their appeal, anyway. There is a clear message that hotness is a woman's primary worth.

One of the greatest tragedies of American (and increasingly so, global) society is the fact that our culture is manufactured by lovers of buxom, bronzed, Botoxed, bottle-blonde bimbos. (Even if women are intelligent, they won't be rewarded for displaying it. It's irrelevant that Shakira is in MENSA.)

Hollywood is the most extreme example of praising females almost exclusively for their looks. A female can earn an acting award, but extreme hotness is a prerequisite to even being considered.

Build your social world around common-interest niches.

There is a broad spectrum of how much emphasis people place on attractiveness, so on a personal level, you have hopes of finding a respectful partner and true friends who value you for who you are, not how you look.

Make friends with gamers. Make friends on Quora. Make friends organizing a project you feel passionate about. Join a book group.

You could also step off into a counterculture. Looks won't become unimportant, but there will be a better balance. Creativity and intellectual depth are what will get you praise from everyone.

Don't compare your looks to other women.

This is a competition in which we all lose. Beauty is subjective. There will always be someone more beautiful than you, and in someone else's eyes, there will always be someone more beautiful than she.

There will always be women, like Helen Mirren, who look amazing as they age, and if you consider them the competition, you will feel like a loser.

Don't hang out with vain women.

Limit your conversations about clothes, jewelry, makeup, etc. Don't talk to people who sound like *Cosmo*. Don't gossip about other people's love lives.

Date a man who calls you smart/determined/whatever-positive-adjective-applies-to-you way more than he calls you beautiful/pretty/hot.

This problem goes far beyond dating, but this is a great place to start.

Find female mentors, especially ones old enough to have degraded in fertility appeal.

The majority of the workforce is still male-dominated. You need someone to turn to when you realize you didn't get invited to a meeting because the salesman who called it spent half the time talking about sleeping with women.

Don't work too hard on a "perfect" appearance.

Dress to express something other than a desire for beauty. Dress to be professional, fun, crazy, artsy, comfortable, sporty, classy. Pay homage to a certain place, time, person, or film. Don't necessarily focus on hotness, which will come along with confidence and happiness anyway.

Don't worry if something isn't super-flattering if you love it. I have this bright, colorful full skirt that doesn't flatter my wide hips but looks amazing blowing in the wind. That's my favorite thing to wear.

Focus on flattering your coloring, which will stay constant, instead of wearing shorts with words that draw attention to your perky butt, which you will lose.

When you work out, focus on getting stronger and healthier, not hotter.

Don't worry about making yourself look flawless with makeup. Everyone has flaws. If you still want to wear makeup, play up your favorite features and experiment with color.

Shrug off comments on your appearance.

A stranger saying, "Hi, gorgeous," doesn't matter. Don't act like it does. Since you do have to process it, interpret it as meaning you look happy today.

Be aware of negative stereotypes of women and don't exhibit them around male colleagues.

Masculinity is strong, and femininity is weak. Those are the house rules. Don't undermine your professional image with the power brokers. Maintain your non-beauty value.

Work to succeed according to your own values.

That's how you circumvent the house rules.

Mother Teresa didn't have to be hot.

The bad news is that you're not going to be able to change the broader picture, and you will not be able to totally shake this feeling because that is the way the world is.

When you're featured in an article on female gamers, the number one question many men will have is whether you're hot. When you're walking down the road, men will evaluate your ass when they drive by and let you know if you passed their lust assessment. Those are experiences you can't avoid.

You've just got to write them off as haters (woman-haters, to be more specific) and rise above it.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-shannon-larson

What is it like to be a woman working in the tech industry?

Rebekah Cox, I've been working since I was 15.

Being a woman in the tech industry is awesome if you love technology enough to push through the more difficult parts.

Right off the bat, a disclaimer: It's very difficult to answer this question broadly. Not all experiences are the same. However, I can share my personal experience because it might contribute to some larger themes. So, here's my answer... an answer from a product designer who has spent over a decade building products and has spent the last four years building products and managing people in Silicon Valley[1].

ACT 1 - UNFORTUNATE REALITY

The Environment Is Generally Rough

Girls are raised differently than boys. Not all girls and not all boys are raised the same, obviously, but on average, girls are more sheltered than boys in their formative years. Girls are typically raised with kid gloves and rarely receive the hard, direct, and tough feedback of their male counterparts. This is important because the technical environment is tough and has been built on a foundation of direct feedback, and there are very established and elaborate structures that facilitate nerd trash talk. So, if you enter this environment as a woman without any sort of agenda or understanding of this culture, the first thing you find is that if you actually say something, the most likely reaction is for a guy to verbally hit you directly in the face. To the guys, this is perfectly normal, expected, and encouraged behavior, but to women this is completely out of nowhere and extremely discouraging.

As a technical woman, this is your introduction, and the first thing you have to learn is how to get back up and walk right back into a situation where the likelihood of getting punished for participating is one. How you choose to react to this[2] determines the rest of your career in technology. If it's too painful, you'll retreat to management, if you can tough

it out, your career will be limited because the very tools you develop to survive have other social consequences[3].

You Generally Feel Alone
Because the environment is so rough and generally hostile, the women who can navigate it are a very small, select group[4]. It's rare to encounter another woman and even rarer to encounter another technical woman.

Overall, it's awesome to encounter other women because while you grow accustomed to quirks of a room full of men (the jostling, the chest beating, the pissing contests, the egos, etc.), it does get old. When another woman is thrown into that mix, you get to avoid the old script and reevaluate the dynamic so it's more interesting. However, you and everyone else is accustomed to women in the facilitator manager role, not in the making technical decisions role. Typically your collaborative and directional contributions almost always fare better than your technical contributions. If you pay attention to those social cues, you may start to subtly pull yourself out of the rough and tumble technical decision making and retreat into the facilitation role. If you ignore the social cues, you have to assert yourself aggressively into the technical conversation[5] and take some lumps. If you choose that aggressive path, you will be even more alone because those likely less technical women in the room with you don't have the expertise to back you up.

ACT II - FORTUNATE REALITY

You Have Access to Opportunities (You Are NOT Actually Alone)
Even the aforementioned nerd trash talk is actually a useful tool that can help you. The reason that culture exists is to make everyone in the group better. The fact that you are getting hit in the face means that someone is either wrong, and you can hit back with a correct answer or that you are wrong and someone is letting you know that directly. Sticking that out means you are learning in an accelerated environment with instant correction.

Furthermore, if you stick around long enough, you can find people who aren't completely insecure and are confident

enough to not resort to insults to assert themselves. Those people make the tough environment actually tolerable. If you can help each other, then you can establish a safer zone to talk through ideas. And since those more secure people are typically so secure because they are really, really good, you can find yourself in an informational jet-stream.

Opportunities also exist in the form of help from others pushing you forward and help in the form of others who don't let you get away with anything. Help might be treating you like everyone else. Help might be from the powerful women who may not make the perfect guidepost but are available and will make time for you. For me personally, a huge turning point was working at Quora. I remember realizing how the founders had trusted me with this incredible challenge involved with taking responsibility for building Quora's product and interface. It was the first time I was able to take responsibility directly, which is a remarkable opportunity.

Results Matter and Are Powerful
The technology world isn't a perfect meritocracy, but it's close enough and awesome results do matter. Whatever barrier is in front of you, an amazing product that gets traction will cut through it. The same is true for an awesome abstraction that boasts a 50% speed improvement or generates elegant code that enables future efficiency. The absence of an outright block means that making something great can open many closed doors. Just knowing that is possible is very encouraging. Additionally, if you push through the crap and have major contributions to make, no one is going to be able to ignore your results, nor will they want to. At the end of the day, everyone in technology wants to turn a dollar into ten and then into a thousand; it's essentially a culture built on hope and results. The barriers to entry are pretty low and inexpensive. Start building, learn JavaScript, publish thoughts, all of these building blocks are readily accessible. Use them. Get results. People will give you money to get more results.

Being a Woman in Tech Is a Competitive Advantage
Developing new technologies is about oscillating from extreme focus (for designing and programming and building) to

wide open creative exploration (in order to understand people and their motivations as well as their problems). As a woman thinking about these complex issues, you have a rich and deep understanding around details like safety and privacy but also around tone and cooperative communication and gathering feedback. You also have this ability to obsess about the details[6] others may ignorantly avoid. That's not even the faintest outline of the unique characteristics women bring. When half of all consumers are women, being able to tap into those women to use your product is obviously huge. Not enough women capitalize on this advantage, but that doesn't make it less meaningful.

Technology Is Awesome

Being a woman in technology means being surrounded by amazing technology and crazy smart and ambitious people *all the time*. Being a technical woman means being able to join in on the fun and building things for people as a path toward making their lives better. How awesome is that?

[1] Additional context: There are a lot of overlapping yet ultimately distinct cultures in SV right now. There is the founder culture and within that there are established founders and so-called founders of products that are even more likely to fail. There are run-of-the-mill engineers and so-called 10x engineers. There are designers and product managers, each with its own 10x variety. There are people who speak at conferences and are good at promoting themselves and there are people who are actually extremely talented and fly under the radar completely.

On top of that there's what the press cares about and the press cares about founders and sometimes managers. There are precious few women founders, and of that small subset, they are generally not **established** founders with proven successes who are also technical. (I can only think of one woman who has founded a company that had a chance of succeeding, and she's amazing and talented and impressive but not technical.) As a result, most articles that are written about women are almost always exclusively about women in tech who are managers (prod-

uct or professional), not specifically technical women.

So you read about these managers, but then you also read these regular calls for more women in tech and how none exist and you look around thinking, "Hello! Right here! C'mon! WTF?" Now, to be fair, sometimes the women written about are also somewhat technical in that they have taken CS classes but anyone who is actively technical knows that a few CS classes are not the same as being in the trenches and building a product hands-on. This context is important, because as a technical woman, you are looking for something to cling to and determine how you fit in to the larger ecosystem. But because the larger ecosystem is nearly totally empty when it comes to role models, you have to look either at men or closer to home at the women in your immediate vicinity who are probably not technical.

The women who are actually ambitious enough to potentially make it in tech as technical women look at this landscape and every signal derails her from that technical path because the vicious cycle encourages her to chase only the most viable channels. Chief among them: management.

[2] If you are lucky, you will encounter people (men and women) who are caring enough to help you in deal with this in exactly two ways: i) They encourage you to keep going and ii) they hold you to the same high standard as everyone else. If you are unlucky, you will encounter people (men and women) who validate your worst fears and allow you to give up.

[3] There's another dimension, which is the girls club versus boys club which is situated on top of this mess. The girls club is very different than the boys club. Entirely different rules apply and if you've spent any amount of time optimizing to fit into the boys club, it will not transfer to the girls club. The girls club is full of managers, not engineers. Users, not builders. All the tools that allow you to survive the boys club as a technical woman become these huge liabilities in the girls club. You are seen as too rough, too aloof, and too disinterested (because you actually probably are). In my case, I am also seen as having far

too many sharp edges, being too mean, etc. That's all true but not without purpose.

[4] You're also constantly looking to other women for someone to model yourself after. Because the set of available candidates is so limited, it's really hard to find someone you feel comfortable with having as a guidepost. So, you basically either choose a man to model after or cobble something together from fragments of women. A frankinmodel is usually always bad because the traits that make a product or professional manager successful are different from those that make a technical founder successful.

[5] The worst part for me personally was a stage where I was behind. I didn't touch a computer until I was in college. My male counterparts, however, had been programming actively for years before I even navigated the filesystem. But there is something far more treacherous than losing from being behind: it's not being considered a competitor. When you are strapped with low expectations, it's easy for you to start believing those are true. People are also sometimes quick to validate your low expectations and even performance.

In college, I had this racquetball class. The first thing the coach did was divide the group into boys and girls. The boys played against other boys and girls played against other girls. After a few weeks of this arrangement, I was destroying the other girls. Eventually, the coach allowed me to play against the guys and even the worst guy promptly destroyed me. They hit the ball way harder than the girls and the play was very physical and intimidating. On the final day of class in the final match, I lost by only a couple points. By that time, I had finally started to hone a new strategy: I couldn't compete on speed or power, so I competed on finesse. That meant skating the ball along a wall and giving the guys less of an opportunity to hit the ball with any amount of power. I felt pretty good about getting to that point, but upset that I didn't have an entire term of play at the guy's level. Had I started earlier and had my competition been tougher, I bet I would have won a few.

[6] I have this trick where if I start to obsess about something that doesn't actually matter, I'll try to divert that attention to obsessing about something to make the product better. That obsession breeds focus, and when directed productively toward real problems, awesome results can sometimes be generated.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-rebekah-cox

What advice would seasoned women in tech give to younger girls deciding to make a tech career for themselves?

Nora Mullaney, Software Engineer at Facebook

Working in the tech industry is awesome. You get to go out and build the future every day. In spite of what you might think, giving the paucity of females in tech, it's a pretty good place for women to work:

- It's got one of the smallest income gender gaps (I believe it's about 96% vs. an average of 70%).

- The pay is generous (at least for software engineers).

- It tends to be relatively flexible, in terms of when you work.

- It's very easy to work remotely.

Another great thing about working in technology is that it's very easy to mix in other interests. If you are passionate about music or sports or biology or charity, you are likely to be able to find a tech company that's working in that space.

Advice (which mostly applies to both genders):

- The best way to learn in the tech field is to jump in and build things, so you should go ahead and do that as much as possible.

- Don't be intimidated by those who seem to know more than you. It's very easy to techno-babble at someone and seem intelligent. Never be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something. It's a great way to learn. If the person you ask can't/won't explain, it's likely he/she doesn't really understand.

- Sadly, you will likely run into some sexism. Don't let it get you down. One of the nice things about engineering is that you can usually prove an idea is better by building it. Don't be afraid to ignore nay-sayers and just go for it.

- Choose your environments/companies well. They may vary a lot in how things are run. I prefer meritocracies, for avoiding sexism and experience-ism. Web companies are fun because they usually have a very fast release cycle. The most important thing is to work on something that you're interested in and passionate about.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-nora-mullaney

THE UNITED STATES

What did it feel like to be inside the World Trade Center at the time of the 9/11 attacks?

Ashton Lee, world's crossroad

I was living and working at the World Trade Center on that day, and this is what I remember.

I was a consultant at the time, and my office was in Tower Two on the 43rd floor. I had a meeting that morning that was cancelled just the night before. When the first plane struck, I was on the 18th floor, not yet at my office, and I remember looking at a nearby digital clock that read 8:46am. You could feel the building shake, and it was scary, not because the building moved, but to the degree that it did. I was used to working on the higher floors of both towers, and the Twin Towers were made to sway and move ever so slightly. You could sometimes feel it just a little during periods of heavy wind.

But this time it was different. This was not caused by wind; it was a sudden jolt. I looked outside the window and saw what I thought was a piece of metal flying by. My heart and my mind raced. Strange to say this now, but I felt VERY ALIVE, while a deep and sudden fear also crept over me.

Fear was soon replaced by a driving need to act. My body

was full of adrenaline, and my mind was factoring over different scenarios within what must have been a few eye blinks. I recalled seeing a cable show a few weeks back that talked about how the towers were built, their structural make up, and particularly their height. I recalled the narrative saying the buildings were so tall that if they were to tip over, it would hit or shake New Jersey, I don't recall the exact words, but the meaning stuck with me. It became a dominant thought in my head.

I ran for the stairs. I was not the only one. I could hear someone shout that there was a fire. It became very crowded, but the exit at this early time was still orderly.

A small crowd started congregating outside the Marriott WTC, which was situated right between the two main towers of the World Trade Center area connecting the two buildings. People were dismayed and trying to figure out what was going on. Across the street was the Hudson River. My mind was still in worst case scenario mode; I thought if anything really happened to the buildings here it would be safer by the water than close to the buildings, and I imagined myself jumping in to prepare myself mentally.

I looked around, people were not moving. Even worse, joggers and nearby pedestrians were heading TOWARD the buildings to see what the commotion was about. I thought, this is madness!

I shouted as loud as I could, "If this building falls it will hit New Jersey! Run!" A lady screamed. I then started running toward the waters of the Hudson alongside Northern Battery Park, and others did too. I just wanted to get away far enough to assess the situation from a position of safety.

And I kept running. Looking back, I could see dark smoke start to form; it wasn't a good sign. The fear came back, but so did the need to act. It was still early, and the mobile phone networks had not yet jammed up. I called my sister to let her know that I was ok, that she may see New York in the news, but that I was not in the towers, more importantly that I loved everyone and that she should relay this message to our family members and especially my mom.

I needed to get off the island, that was my dominant thought. I headed toward Chelsea Piers, to the ferries I knew

were there. Still seeing more people heading toward the commotion, I yelled at them, that I just came from there, and that they were headed in the wrong direction. Madness.

When I got to the ferries, I ran into another friend of mine who ran over from midtown, Times Square. We were there early enough where people had not caught up with what was going on, we still had to wait in line and pay for the ferry crossing.

I was on the ferry in the Hudson River when the first tower fell… It was gut-wrenching and surreal. The darkness of the smoke started to envelop the sky. People were crying, trying to call their loved ones, asking questions. A friend of mine would recall to me getting out of the subway stop for the WTC after 9am, while I was still running. He told me it was an image out of hell. He could see people jumping out of the buildings, everywhere there was a mad scramble by that time to get out. I can't fully fathom what his experience must have been like nor would I want to.

Was our country being attacked? No one knew. My friend and I decided that we needed to go somewhere far away, away from big buildings but with solid communication networks, and food supplies. His girlfriend at the time went to Yale University, and I thought there was a certain degree of safety within a closed area like a university in a small town. So that became our destination. Close enough to reach yet, far enough to regroup.

When we reached Jersey, we found a private car. She charged us 300USD or so, cash only. I went to the ATM, came back, and paid. As we drove further north, the skyline behind us became more and more enveloped in black smoke. It was like a scene out of a movie, that's what I was thinking. Phone lines were jammed up by this time. I would later reconnect with family and friends over email from the Yale campus. I turned on the news.

The world, our world, my own world; nothing would ever quite be the same.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ashton-lee

What does it mean to be Asian American?

Marq Hwang, the Ill-informed

Like all stories about Americans, it's kind of long. It's kind of confusedly muddled. It's kind of wonderful.

It's a story about loss, about disconnection.
Traditions are the first to go. Born here, raised here, half a world away, your parents try to keep as many as they can, but it's a losing battle. What holiday is this? 추석? Well, we're not going over there. Mom's too tired to make the traditional foods, whatever they are, so let's just go out to dinner. Maybe call 할머니. Then, later in the year, maybe the next, you fly home, across the Great Flat Ocean, and you visit the shrine of your ancestors. How many 절 do I do? Am I even doing it right? Am I spelling it right? My knees are getting tired. Why prostrate myself to these ancestors I've never met, whose gaze of my life is so distant, clouded by time and space, whose memory I can't even conjure?

The language is the next to go. You have a fight with your mom about going to homecoming. You want to go. You don't know why, exactly, since you don't care much for the football team. You're angry all the time. Angry because they get all the funding. Angry because all the 'traditions' that come so naturally to others, you don't know about. Angry because the white girl you kinda like and want to go with can trace her family back to the first settlers, and you don't know anything past the hint that your grandfather might have been in the Resistance. Angry because of hormones. Your mom yells at you, demanding you study. That you stay home and spend time with your visiting relatives. She shouts in Korean at you. And instead of shouting back in Korean, you yell back in English. You slam the door to your room, cursing in English. Years later, in a college class you picked because you thought it would be cake, you realize the only Korean you know comes from the few movies you watch, what you learned at home, and how you

order at restaurants. You barely pass.

The ties are the last to go. You rarely speak to your relatives unless you visit or call, the distance becoming more than just geographical. You try to keep up with them on Facebook, but you hide parts of your life because you don't know how they'd react. Even your mom gets in on the gig, saying that it would be best if they didn't know some things. You dream of living back in your ancestral homeland, but reality reminds you that it would probably only be fun for a little while, before you want to come home, here, to the Americas.

It's a story about gain, about building.
When your roots are loose, the first thing you do is to put new ones down. You end up in a place you find rather agreeable. You make friends, build your own 'extended' family. You let your best friends' families 'adopt' you, and you bring your own to their Thanksgivings, their Christmases, their Seders. You get hurt when these friends move away, but you eventually realize that wherever they settle, you have carte blanche to visit them, to make new roots someplace new.

When your knowledge of your ancestral culture is fractured, the first thing you do is try to create one. You do this by voraciously reading up on your own. You still don't remember all the details, but you go through the motions, hoping that there's some meaning there. You read up on others', and you discover ones that you never knew existed. You fall in with the nerds, the punks, the gays, the outcasts. You pick up their slang, their argot, their mannerisms. You move on, sometimes, after you get bored, but they're always a part of you, and you make your own.

And when your traditions are hazy and gone, you make new ones. Your Christmases are now spent with your family, watching bad movies like *Jingle All the Way*. You always block time out at the major holidays to visit your best friends. When you're sick, you always order out from that same Korean restaurant that makes 짬뽕. Is that what your relatives eat when they're feeling sick? No? You don't care. It makes you feel better. Every birthday, you invite your friends out to a Korean restaurant, and put what little Korean you still remember to good use, and on theirs, you learn how to wrap

gifts in 風呂敷. It's Japanese, actually, but you don't care, and neither do they — it's elegant, and beautiful.

It's a story about bridges, about synthesis.
At potlucks, you're the one everyone's curious about. You bring dishes that are usually a little bit interesting, outside of the norm. Risotto, but what's that flavor? You used miso as the broth? Amazing. These dumplings? Chorizo and scallions? Wow. They come to you after hearing about the Korean taco stands, and you go together, to everyone's enjoyment. You hear about this amazing phở place, or a brand new place that serves fufu and melon seed soup, and you drag your friends along.

Sometimes you answer questions. What exactly is that Gangnam Style he's singing about? Why is the North so weird? Is the internet there really better? And even though you preface your answers with a little bit of uncertainty, you muddle through. They're just as interested as you are, maybe more so. But you're interested in what your Romanian friends' experiences were when Ceaușescu fell, and you ask. You want to know what your friends from Zimbabwe eat. You want to see this 'Austin' that your Texan friends rave about. And everyone understands each other more.

You've flitted in and out of various subcultures and groups. Your facility with English is top-notch. You've experienced all these new things now, sampled from various plates and listened to all sorts of songs. So you take all these things home with you; you take your mama out all night, and you show her all these things you've done, that you've learned. You see her eyes open, like Sokath's, and she understands this place in a new way, a way she never has, as a native, as an American.

It's a story, like every other story.
When I first sat down to write this, I thought a little bit about writing about the little things that trip one up every day. The assumption that we're foreigners. The stereotypes and the suspicion that hangs over us whether we pretend to ignore it or not.

But that's not the story. That's not what it means to be Asian American. To be Asian American, you start to real-

ize that you put more and more of yourself in the American category, and you view the Asian as a slight spin, like Irish, Newyorican, German. You know that while you could pass in the old country, for a little while, you grew up with a few too many cheeseburgers and cokes, a taste for grits, and a soft spot for Country Pop that you keep deep in the closet, deeper, probably, than the affection you have for really bad action movies like *The Expendables*. You know you're too loud, abrasive, and obnoxious to be anything but American, too proud, and maybe even a too little knee-jerk patriotic. You can talk shit about America, because it's yours. Those people in other countries can't.

And you know that no matter how others see you, it doesn't really matter. Your blood might have come from overseas, but your heart started beating here.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-marq-hwang

Why is NYC so great?

Matt Schiavenza, Live it and love it

Where to start? As someone who grew up elsewhere and has lived and traveled on three continents, I can attest that New York is indeed a wonderfully special place. Here's why:

- **New York is the quintessential urban experience in our contemporary world.** A century ago, it was London. A century from now, it could well be Shanghai or Mumbai, Sao Paolo or Lagos. But New York, for our time and place, is the world's capital. While this may seem a spurious reason to vouch for a city's greatness, New York's role as the "center of the world" is something you can almost feel. The political, financial, and cultural institutions based in this city attract talented and ambitious people from all over the world. (And would attract even more if the US had a sensible immigration policy, but I digress…) In no other place I can think of, save London, can you find people at

the pinnacle of their profession in such a small geographical radius. It's an extraordinary privilege to be so close to so many interesting people.

- **The density and the diversity.** New York City is, by far, the densest city in the United States — and that includes the outer boroughs. Manhattan alone is one of the densest urban areas in the world, especially in the developed world. (The only comparable place I've been in the so-called 'first world' is Hong Kong, which is a whole other story). People think of Manhattan as a rich person's territory — justifiably — but bear in mind that there's Harlem, and Washington Heights, and Morningside Heights, as well as a multitude of areas with a lot of working-class and middle-class people. Because of this geographic compression and a flat-rate subway, New York's various populations mix and mingle more than those in many other cities. In Los Angeles, the wealthy of Beverly Hills do not identify with the poor of Compton. In New York, both the wealthy and the poor recognize each others as part of the same basic polity. As a result, despite the extraordinary wealth and snobbery you can encounter in New York, people are more tolerant of others simply due to the incredible density. Is there still bigotry? Of course. But New Yorkers, to me, treat each other better than almost anyone else I've ever met. Laugh all you want, but I believe it completely.

- **The range of occupations**. I grew up in the Bay Area, which I still regard as America's most beautiful and livable metropolitan area. But culturally, the Bay Area is still dominated to a large extent by the tech sector, which can be a little… lame… if you're not into it. Los Angeles, too, sucks in people who want to work in the entertainment industry, while Washington DC is a magnet for political/government types. These places are great in their own ways, but it can be hard to get away from it all when you want to. In New York, simply due to its sheer size, no one industry predominates. Finance is a huge business here, but it's remarkably easy to avoid ever dealing with Wall Street types if you don't want to. There are theater nerds, literary nerds, music nerds, and all else, but the

occupational diversity in New York keeps anyone from operating too much inside a particular bubble. Perhaps most importantly, people choose to live in New York because they want to live in New York, not because they have to in order to get work in a particular industry. Half the people you meet in Washington DC, I'd argue, would move to New York in a heartbeat if their job allowed them to.

- **Fun on any budget**. Yes, rents in New York are really expensive. But (shhhh…), here's a little secret. You can have a great time here without spending a lot of money. The subway, which runs 24/7, costs $2.25 a ticket and goes just about everywhere. There are millions of cheap places to eat, ranging from delis to ethnic dives to classic diners, and there are supermarkets everywhere for when you want to cook. If you're clever and creative, you can get massive discounts on typically pricey cultural items (theater tickets, concert tickets, etc.). Most importantly, just walking around outside is entertainment enough and doesn't cost you a thing. When I hear of people complaining about how they can't afford to have fun, I shake my head. The sky is the limit, obviously, when it comes to how much you can spend if you'd like. But when it comes down to it, anyone with a bit of creativity and savvy can have a great time in the city on a very limited budget.

- **Walk, walk, walk.** New York is the best walking city in the United States and one of the very best in the world. The "grid" system in Manhattan makes it idiot-proof (for people like me who lack a good sense of direction), and there are so many places to see that you'll never get bored. There are also pedestrian-friendly parks everywhere (Riverside, Central, Prospect) and a waterfront which can be very pleasant to stroll down when the weather cooperates. Can't afford a gym membership? Buy a good pair of walking shoes and explore the city. It's good for your mind and soul.

- **Convenience.** In New York, you can get any kind of food delivered to your door at any hour of the day. I exaggerate, but just slightly. Just about every major musical act, theater act, book reading, and other event will pass through

town on its way around the country, or world. Need to go to the company headquarters? It's probably in New York.

- **Beauty**. San Francisco is more beautiful, not to mention Paris and Rome and probably Istanbul and Barcelona, too. But New York has its fair share of beauty, beginning with gorgeous brownstone buildings, skyscrapers like the Empire State Building, and the year-long magnificence of Central Park. On a more prurient level, there is also no shortage of beautiful people to gawk at, especially on a warm day.

- **Welcoming.** Someone once described New York to me as the world's most exclusive club that literally anyone can join. You don't have to have been born in New York to be a "New Yorker." If you know how to order a sandwich, negotiate the subway, not block the sidewalk, talk about real estate to strangers, laugh about Post headlines, complain about the weather, exercise basic taxi etiquette, tip properly, help a stranger with directions, and stop to cheer the Meetles in the Times Square subway stop, you're a New Yorker. It doesn't matter if you're originally from Lahore or Santo Domingo or Hamburg or Addis Ababa, or if you've been in the city for two years or your whole life. New York can be intimidating to the uninitiated, sure. But once you get settled, learn your way around, you'll see life here for what it really is: a gift.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-matt-schiavenza

What are good tips for hailing a taxi in Manhattan?

Max Cohen, BFA, MBA, CAB, Web Visionary

I drive a yellow cab. Here are some tips to the tourist, the New Yorker, and the tourist that thinks he's a New Yorker.

- Don't wait till we are passing you to throw up your hail. We need to see you in advance so we can get over to you.

- Get off that curb. It's okay, baby, this is NYC — don't be afraid. Stand in the street. Hang off the curb. Ignore those oncoming cars, they'll move… (maybe). Just remember, everyone's on the sidewalk: the masses, mailboxes, streetlights, homeless people, halal stands, cell phone case stands, overflowing trash bins, and red light cameras (Houston and Chrystie, I will get you!). If you want a cab, make yourself SEEN!

- Go to a gas station between 4 and 5 a.m. or p.m. The shifts end at five, and cabbies need to fill up before they go in. There are only ten or twelve gas stations in Manhattan. Eight of them are on the West Side on 10th Ave. Take your pick.

- Lexington Avenue from 30th down to 23rd St. has the largest concentration of Indian restaurants in the city. I like curry in a hurry.

- Bond St. between Bowery and Lafayette is a major shift change spot for private drivers that don't work for a garage. You will always find a ride when the shifts change from day to night.

- If you're downtown, stand on the uptown side. If you're uptown, stand on the downtown side. This is regardless of where you are actually going.

- Don't look shady. This applies to all races. There is no other group of workers that work harder at a more dangerous job so crucial to the survival of NYC and without health insurance. We carry a large amount of cash on us and are easy targets. If you look like trouble, we're going to keep driving.

- Let your girl do the hailing.

- Don't look like you're going to throw up.

- Don't stand with the large group of people you're going to ask to illegally jam in my cab.

- Don't stand at the base of a bridge (particularly the Williamsburg Bridge). There's nowhere to pull over safely to pick you up, and if we're going over the bridge we probably already have passengers.

For more, please check out my website: www.thingsiseefrommycab.com.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-max-cohen

How likely would Abraham Lincoln be to survive his wounds today?

Laszlo B. Tamas, Many years spent covering Level 1 and 2 trauma centers as a surgeon.

Without a CT scan and detailed neurological examination, it's hard to say definitively what internal brain injuries Lincoln sustained when he was shot. And when it comes to the brain, "God is indeed in the details."

But there are a few lines of thinking that should be strongly considered:

1. **By any measure, this injury was an absolute mess!** The bullet was big, shattered into smaller projectiles inside the brain, and also drove sharp pieces of skull into parts of the brain. It is wrong to think of just the "bullet trajectory" when assessing the damage it caused.

2. **Bullets cause shock waves.** Even at low velocity (for a bullet), a projectile passing through the brain will have a shock wave around its path which will injure brain areas well outside its strict trajectory. Just one example is how Lincoln's right eye was protruding out of the skull, even though the bullet did not injure it directly. Again, the "trajectory" is far from the only injury caused.

3. **There was blood in and around much of the brain.** Lincoln's autopsy report mentions injury to the lateral (trans-

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verse) venous sinus — one of the few brain structures that can cause exsanguinating hemorrhage. It also notes blood in both lateral ventricles, subarachnoid spaces all over the brain convexities, and widespread hemorrhage and contusion within the brain substance itself. This blood can lead to many potentially lethal things, including tentorial herniation, ischemia with vasospasm and stroke, and of course severe brain swelling.

4. **The brainstem was affected right from the start.** You don't have to see a CT scan or autopsy to know if the brainstem is injured (directly or indirectly), if it doesn't work right.

    The description of the first doctor at the scene mentioned that Lincoln was not breathing, and one pupil was dilated (the latter a clear and unequivocal sign of dysfunction of the third cranial nerve or the upper brainstem, from where it comes). Unfortunately, the second doctor described the enlarged pupil being the right one (it's extremely unlikely to have been one and then the other — one of the doctors was probably mistaken as to the side).

    By three hours after injury, both pupils were fixed and dilated, and Lincoln showed extensor (decerebrate) posturing — again, all signs of profound brainstem dysfunction (but not yet brain death, though pretty close to it).

5. **Most of Lincoln's brain injuries were "primary."** What therapies we have for brain injury have to do with fighting **secondary** processes: swelling and edema, ischemia, herniation and such. We have little to offer someone whose primary injury to deep brain structures is already severe right from the start. The brainstem signs Lincoln was witnessed to have within minutes (seconds?) of his injury prove that most of his coma was from **primary** injury. It is this **primary** injury that largely determines the grim prognosis.

The following website has good info about what witnesses saw: http://www.galenpress.com/extras/extra29.htm

Neither of the two people quoted in another answer — Thomas Scalea and Blaine Houmes — is a neurosurgeon (or neurologist), so I'm not sure they have a "feel" for the issues the way a neurosurgeon who sees brain injury all the time

would (though Houmes has become an expert on this question). So it's not surprising that, for example, Scalea omits hemiplegia as an expected outcome if Lincoln had survived (of course he would have been hemiplegic!).

Also, Scalea seems to have a very optimistic view of what modern techniques can offer in cases of massive brain swelling, which Lincoln must definitely have had. Yes — we have more things we can throw at brain swelling these days, but that doesn't mean they are very successful.

No, modern treatment would not have saved Lincoln. I rest my case.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-laszlo-b-tamas

How could the sinking of the Titanic have been prevented?

Chris O'Regan, amateur.

1. *Titanic* could have been constructed with a **double hull.** The technology to construct double hulls was available: SS *Great Eastern* had been launched with a complete double hull over fifty years earlier, in 1858. In a classic failure of risk management, *Titanic*'s manufacturers, alongside with most shipbuilders at the time, considered a full double hull an unnecessary expense, being satisfied with a double bottom instead. This all changed after the disaster, with liners everywhere being refitted with full double hulls. Suddenly the expense didn't seem to matter so much.

2. The quality of the **riveting and steel plates** could have been better. In the present day, ship plates are welded together using oxyacetelene torches. This technology was unavailable in *Titanic*'s time. Instead, *Titanic*'s overlapping steel hull plates were held together by rivets that were hammered in by hand. Most of the rivets were steel,

but some were made of wrought iron; according to some, the rivets were poor-quality and contained large amounts of slag. The actual holing of the ship was caused when she dragged over the surface of the iceberg, with the berg snapping or popping the rivets along the hull, allowing water to enter in between the hull plates. The hull plates themselves are alleged to have not been strong enough, with signs of stress fracturing; but this is disputed.

3. The ship's **watertight bulkheads** could have been extended and fully sealed to reduce the risk of flooding. Titanic was constructed with transverse bulkheads (i.e. walls) to divide the ship into sixteen watertight compartments, which could be sealed off with doors operated either manually or remotely from the bridge. So far, so good. However, the bulkheads didn't extend up the height of all decks, and weren't sealed at the top. So while flooding could be safely be contained if only a small number of compartments were flooded, if too many flooded, water would reach over the top of the bulkheads and flood the rest of the compartments until the ship sank. The designer of the ship, Thomas Andrews, was on board and consulted by Captain Smith immediately after the iceberg was hit. He quickly realised that with five compartments flooded thanks to the iceberg dragging along the ship, the flooding could not be contained and the ship would eventually sink. His calculations convinced Smith to begin evacuations and therefore probably saved lives. Bulkhead design on subsequent ships would be improved as a result of the disaster.

4. Captain Smith could have **responded to the numerous ice warnings** the ship received by slowing down or stopping completely and waiting for daylight. *Titanic* was radioed several times by several different ships to warn of large amounts of ice in the area. *Titanic* acknowledged these warnings, but continued to cruise ahead at full speed. Captain Smith did respond to the warnings; he changed the ship's course to be more southerly, and he posted lookouts to watch specifically for icebergs. One of those lookouts did in fact spot the iceberg, but not with enough time to avoid a collision, since it was a moonless night

and *Titanic* was travelling at around twenty knots, close to her maximum speed. This might seem insane to us now, but passenger liners had a very strict schedule to keep, and ships of her size and construction weren't considered to be vulnerable to icebergs (the 1997 movie implied *Titanic* was trying to break a speed record at the behest of J. Bruce Ismay, but that is fictional).

5. The wireless (i.e. radio) operators could have **passed on the ice warnings with more urgency**. One incident in particular became notorious. The nearest ship to the Titanic before she sank was SS *Californian*; her captain had decided the ice was so bad that he would stop and try to resume the journey at first light. Californian's wireless operator signalled to Titanic about this. Unfortunately, that message came right at the time that Senior Wireless Operator Jack Phillips was attempting to get through a backlog of passenger messages he hadn't been able to send off earlier (because the set had been broken earlier and *Titanic* hadn't been in range of the nearest wireless station, Cape Race, Newfoundland). Californian's signal broke in over the top of Phillip's broadcast (these were wireless spark-gap transmitters that used morse code; signals couldn't be tuned out) and was very loud in his headphones because the ships were so close. Phillips angrily replied, "Shut up! Shut up! I'm working Cape Race!" Although this was not the only warning Titanic received, it happened less than ten minutes before the collision, so it might possibly have made a difference if Phillips had been paying more attention and had relayed it promptly to the bridge. A warning before that, from SS *Mesaba*, had not gone up to the bridge because Phillips was busy processing the passenger messages.

6. Finally, once the iceberg had been spotted, the officer on watch, First Officer William Murdoch, **could have reacted differently** in trying to avoid a collision. Some have suggested that *Titanic* should have not attempted a course change and simply steamed over the top of the iceberg; I highly doubt this would have helped. But one thing that might have helped is if he hadn't ordered "Full Astern (i.e.

reverse)" as he attempted to steer around the berg. Ships of the period did not have a throttle accessible on the bridge; instead, orders to change speed or direction were relayed to the engine room by a device known as an engine room telegraph (the famous circular brass contraption). Once the message was received at the engine room, the engineers had to spend a few moments getting the ship's enormous engines to respond and switch to reverse (the steering gear, as well, took time to respond as the steam-powered rudder moved into position). If the *Titanic* had not been slowing down as she approached the iceberg but instead continuing at full speed, she might have been more maneuverable, able to turn harder and avoid the iceberg entirely. But this is speculation: there was only a very short amount of time (around forty seconds) for Murdoch and the engine room to react, and something else could easily have gone wrong.

There are plenty of other things that could have been done to make the sinking less calamitous when it did happen (for example, the ship needed more lifeboats), but these are the main things that could have made a difference *prior to the collision itself*. Once the hull had been breached across more than four compartments, which happened immediately after the iceberg struck, the ship was doomed.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-chris-oregan

HIPSTERS

What do hipsters know that I don't know?

Anon User

Hipsters know that **culture makes progress**, and they celebrate that fact. This knowledge leads to actions that can make them appear pretentious, fickle, and lazy, when hipsters' approach to culture is actually more democratic, consistent, and

diligent — and, therefore, *better* — than that of their "non-hipster" counterparts.

The three most widely cited hipster flaws are, in fact, signs of vibrant cultural consumption:

- **Elitism**. As the previous answers make clear, hipster taste tends toward the obscure. Almost every question pertaining to hipsters includes a jab at their penchant for liking things that "you haven't heard of." But did you ever consider that this perspective might be a result of your shortcomings, not theirs? I can guarantee that hipsters are familiar with both popular and underground culture, yet they overwhelmingly prefer the latter. You, on the other hand, only know the former. Hipsters have given everything a chance, and have settled on niches they consider superior (usually rightly so). You are afraid to venture outside the cozy confines of mainstream media. Who is the elitist in this situation?

- **Capriciousness.** Everyone values novelty in some aspects of their lives. Nobody wants to watch the same movie every night, or use the same computer until the day they die. This is because novelty broadens our knowledge base and makes us more productive. So what's wrong with actively seeking novelty in music, art, film, and literature? Maybe it *is* inefficient to dwell on works that repeat last year's conventions, as progress in any area of society requires us to reject clichés. Maybe hipsters' passion for the "new" is much healthier than your complacency.

- **Laziness.** Hipsters are often bashed for being consumers, rather than producers. But people forget that consumers are an integral part of any functioning economy. Hipsters limit their consumption of material goods, living five to a flat, shopping at thrift stores, and drinking cheap beer. But they provide a much-needed boost to the cultural sphere by eagerly buying records, going to concerts, and attending gallery openings. They represent what we could use more of in every area of society: critical, informed consumers who don't buy into something because "everyone else is doing it," but because they genuinely think it is better.

Therefore, hipsters know about a lot of things that you haven't heard of. But that should be considered a feature, not a flaw. And what's perceived as elitism is actually a public good. Hipsters tried to tell you, but you refused to listen.

If this seems like an outspoken defense of hipsters, that's because it is.

To be clear, I don't accept this label for myself, nor would most people identify me as a hipster. I don't wear hipster clothes, live in a hipster neighborhood, or work at a typical hipster job (or lack thereof). At the same time, I strongly identify with hipster culture. I listen to "indie" music, read Continental philosophy, and watch foreign films. In fact, my cultural knowledge puts most of my outwardly hipster friends to shame. But I don't seek out new media to impress others, as many would assume. I do it because I derive far more enjoyment and intellectual stimulation from "non-mainstream" culture. You could, too, if you knew what the hipsters know.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-7

What facts about Burning Man do virgin burners not believe until they go?

Ben Newman, Better for it.

- That the dust will find its way into everything.

- That your parents and the parents of your friends represent such a tiny fraction of all the possible kinds of adulthood.

- The extent to which advertising and the notion that everyone is "selling something" permeate American society.

- Just how radical the concept of "radical self-reliance" is, and how terminally, obliviously, contentedly dependent most members of society are.

- How much more thought you could have put into your costumes.

- How much more deeply you could be invested in everything that you do.

- That the hours you spend waiting in line at the gates could be pure anticipatory glee, if only you knew what was waiting for you.

- That a piece of art could make you want to quit your job and spend your life with a welding torch.

- That boredom is always your fault.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ben-newman

AMERICAN CULTURE

Why does the USA insist on doing things differently than the majority of other developed nations?

Gary Teal, Republican

America doesn't insist on doing anything differently. We just do whatever the hell we want because we grew up in a world where we didn't know, and didn't need to know, what anyone else was doing.

From Columbus to the turn of the twentieth century, we weren't isolationist, we were isolated. Of course, we imported our language from England and most of our culture from Europe, but it's amazing how much we had to figure out on our own. When someone had the idea to build the Erie Canal, there were no civil engineers living in America, so a couple of judges laid it out. Obviously there are a million stories like that one, and just as obviously, it didn't mean that they did a better job than the dike builders in Holland. It's just that Americans waded into problems with little or no reference to how things were done outside the US. I don't want to exaggerate this effect; people continued to immigrate to the US and read books printed in England. But we were solving problems on our own even while others were doing the same work else-

where. In some cases, like heavier than air flight or automobiles, everyone in America knows who was first in the world, and everyone in Europe knows who was first in the world, but the names aren't the same.

We did in fact implement many technological innovations on a wide scale before other countries and have suffered a bit on the bleeding edge for our troubles. We have 110 volt power in the US, and we're stuck with it perhaps forever, but the rest of the world was able to wire for 220, which is more efficient. We laid a kabillion miles of copper cable for telephone communication and other countries will skip that for the most part.

By the time we finally engaged in world affairs in the twentieth century, we were already so large that we just didn't need much of anything in the way of manufactured goods or technology from outside the US. Shipping wasn't yet cheap, and services had to be done locally, so we traded with our small neighbor to the north and our underdeveloped neighbor to the south, but mostly didn't think very often about either of them any more than we did Siam.

After World War II, the US underwent a two decade boom time unprecedented in human history. Our population and wealth grew to a point where we became even more self-sufficient than before, even as we were coming in contact with more of the world. In terms of many manufactured goods, we're different from the rest of the world not because everything we have is better, but because we form a large enough market to support any given product. I think TVs are even now measured in inches all over the world, right? I am not sure anybody makes TVs in the US any more, but we're a big market and our influence is still felt.

Being isolated and self-centered sounds awful, and in terms of a good intellectual education about the world, it is. But it was an outgrowth not of a bad attitude, or a superior attitude, but simple self-sufficiency. Americans often didn't speak a second language, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. French and German people spoke two or three in most cases. Was that because the Americans are jerks and the Europeans are well-educated and urbane? Of course not. It's because an American could live an entire lifetime in

the US and never come across anybody who didn't speak his language. Of course this extended to cultural issues as well; no need to understand how or when to bow or why to not eat with one's left hand, if you literally never encountered anyone who had different customs than you.

I believe this is all changing finally. Very nearly everyone you know can talk to any person anywhere on the planet now. (The cellphone statistic on Wikipedia is 80% of the world's seven billion people.) Many of us can see pictures or video taken by our friends, made just for us, on the other side of the planet either minutes ago or even streaming live. A larger and larger percentage of Americans know someone who is from another country or someone now living outside the US. Our doughboys saw gay Paree, but now our soldiers are coming home with a thorough familiarity with nations that their fathers and mothers pretty much didn't know existed.

Will Americans seize the opportunity to learn about other cultures via all our new technology? Yes and no. As everyone in the world gets closer, we'll learn about the world but the world will also learn about us. To some extent, it is inevitable that virtually everyone on the grid will know at least one language among Chinese, Hindi, or English, and frankly, I'm betting on English as an almost universal language at some point in the lifetimes of my grandchildren. It's not because the US is imposing our language on anyone. We have an attractive culture (which is very different from, if not the opposite of, sophisticated culture). We have created a great deal of music and film that is available in English all over the world. If you want to consume those products, you'll end up learning some English. What language will Americans need to learn? Well, I'm glad we're offering our children a wider variety than old standbys Spanish and French (though I'm sorry we don't very often teach Latin, which gives you such a head start in five languages plus English itself), and we certainly are making strides, at least at better schools, with a broad range of offerings that emphasize Mandarin but include Arabic at many schools. (I don't hear much about Americans learning Hindi, though.) Still, an American can live without knowing another language, and that is the minimum test. An Italian or a Brazilian will find it much harder to be part of world trade and

travel and culture if they don't learn a second language. C'est la vie. Many Americans won't learn a second language. Tant pis.

Please let me make it clear that no matter how jingoistic I might sound, there is no country which I would not want to live in for a month, and if I could be safe and dry, for a year. (I grew up in West Texas and just don't want to live for months on end in a rainy jungle with bugs everywhere. Sorry, Seattle.) I've mentioned it more than once, so you can guess already that I have a very special place in my heart for India, where I went on my honeymoon, and have been twice since. Of all the places I've seen, India is where you can be farthest from America (I've never been to China). And of course you may know that it was not difficult for us to visit ten cities in India with ten different languages and — this is something that Americans don't appreciate the difficulty of — ten alphabets. (I know there are similarities but learning the first one is hard.) So I could spend thirty years in New Delhi and not understand everything I want to know, and then drive two hours west and start all over in Rajasthan. You run out of thirty year blocks of time pretty quickly; I'm quite likely on my last such block. I would literally burst into tears if I somehow learned that I would never see Paris again, or that I would never see Tokyo or Rio for the first time.

And yet, I do believe in an American Exceptionalism that flows in great part from our system of government. I know there's an accepted and specific scholarly definition for that term, but I think it's fair to point out that exceptional does not mean "uniquely and permanently superior to all" in the vernacular. It means "really, really good." I believe the Communist Lovecraft was right, and that the US had some unique advantages that freed us from some of the historical problems that Communism was a response to. I don't believe that it should be taken to mean that the US has any supernaturally guided mission to lead the world as a political force. But the ideas that made American exceptional are ideas that other countries will find advantageous if and when they do adopt them. We set a good example. There is a future just ahead in which fifty nations are just as rich and safe and comfortable and well educated as we are today, and some day a world

where virtually everyone is as rich and safe and comfortable and well educated as we are today. I think it's stunning that such a young nation as ours is operating under the world's oldest constitution. This is not to say that our constitution would work this well in any other nation, but it has worked extremely well for us. Capitalism has worked for us. The Rule of Law has worked for us. And a culture of transparency has worked for us. We should be proud of our multiculturalism, and it may be this, if anything, that teaches us the value of learning more about the various cultures of our family's (often multiple) origins and those of our neighbors. In each of these areas, we started with more of an ideal than a reality, and in each case we make progress decade by decade. None of these things is uniquely American at all. It's a political disaster if or when they get labeled as American ideas, because each developing country should want their own version of these concepts, not the American concept of them. While I think we are doing very well compared to most countries, my own definition of American Exceptionalism includes actively working to help any country who wants the help reach the same level. Our exceptionalism is not measured in a way that implies that we will always be better than the rest of the world. It means that we're closer to our own ideals.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-gary-teal

WORK ADVICE

What do recruiters look for in a resume at first glance?

Ambra Nykol, Recruiter @ LivingSocial, Google, Expedia, & for Microsoft

I think this varies from recruiter to recruiter and also depends on the role for which you're applying. For one, I don't look through stacks of resumes anymore. I hate paper. I do everything online. But I'll highlight briefly how *I* personally absorb a resume. I should preface this by saying that I primarily recruit for senior-level individuals. In my past life, I was a campus recruiter, and you read resumes of new grads a bit differently since experience is less of a factor. I'll address how I read a mid- to senior-level resume:

- **Most recent role** - I'm generally trying to figure out what this person's current status is and why they might even be interested in a new role. Are they laid off? Did they get fired? Have they only been in their role for a few months? Is their most recent experience relevant to the position for which I'm hiring?

- **Company recognition** - Not even gonna lie. I am a company snob. It's not even that I think certain companies are better than others (although some are). It's purely a

matter of how quickly can I assign a frame of reference. This is often more difficult to do when a candidate has only worked for obscure companies I've never heard of. When I can't assign company recognition, it just means I have to read the resume a little deeper, which usually isn't an issue, unless it's poorly formatted and wrought with spelling errors in which case... you lost my interest.

- **Overall experience** - Is there a career progression? Do they have increasing levels of responsibility? Do the titles make sense? Do the responsibilities listed therein match what I'm looking for.

- **Keyword search** - Do they have the specific experience for the role I'm hiring for? I Command + F the crap out of resumes. On any given day, I'm searching for things like Ruby on Rails, Mule, Business Intelligence, MBA, Consulting, POS, Cisco, Javascript, and seriously, anything you can think of.

- **Gaps** - I don't mind gaps so long as there's a sufficient explanation. Oh, you took three years off to raise your children? Fine by me, and might I add, I bow down. You tried your hand at starting your own company and failed miserably? Very impressive! Gap sufficiently explained. Whatever it is, just say it. It's the absence of an explanation that makes me wonder.

- **Personal web presence** - This includes personal domains, Twitter handle, GitHub contributions, dribbble account, or anything a candidate has chosen to list. Two out of three times, I almost always click through to a candidate's website or twitter account. It's one of my favorite parts of recruiting. Random aside: I care less about what people say on Twitter and more about who is following you and who you follow. *So* much insight gained by seeing who values your thoughts.

- **General logistics** - Location, Eligibility to work in the US

- **Overall organization** - This includes spelling, grammar, ease of use, ability to clearly present ideas.

- **Total time it takes me to do all of above**: < 30 seconds*

*Note: I will likely later read the resume far more in depth, but only if I already know I like the candidate. It takes me less than a minute to fully digest a resume and flag that person for follow up. I read a resume pretty thoroughly once I know I will be speaking to that person on the phone. But I will not thoroughly read a resume of someone who did not pass the above categories.

THINGS I RARELY PAY ATTENTION TO

- **Education -** In the last month alone having viewed hundreds of resumes, I honestly don't remember looking at this section once. When I used to exclusively recruit MBAs, this was one of the first things I looked for because I was generally looking for top tier b-schools. When I used to be a campus tech recruiter, I immediately checked for top CS schools. But outside of my old campus recruiting days, I am not often looking at the education. I think this is because at the level I generally hire, it's the least of what I'm looking for. Experience is king. I can think of a few exceptions where perhaps a hiring manager wanted a certain pedigree, but that's happening less and less, I find. I will also add that this changes *drastically* by industry and company. I currently work in tech, but I've also worked in management consulting and education is huge in consulting. I'll also add that some tech companies care more about education than others — take Google or Facebook for example (I'm using big companies just for name recognition).

- **Fancy Formatting** - There are exceptions here. I say this with the caveat that I LOVE a creatively formatted resume. LOVE. In fact, on Pinterest, I've started collecting beautifully presented resumes. However, it's important to keep in mind that if you're applying to a position online, whether it's a PDF or not, most companies' applicant tracking systems parse your resume for information and convert it to pure text as the most immediate viewing format. Recruiters don't often see how awesome your resume is. The original file is usually there for us, but most re-

cruiters aren't clicking through to that. If you're going to do something fun with your resume, I recommend having a clean text resume as well whenever possible so it doesn't come through our system looking wonky. Also, if the formatting is important, always send in PDF. Nine times out of ten, if I genuinely like a candidate and all I have is a text resume, I'll ask them to send me the prettier version for when I present them to a hiring manager.

- **Uncomfortably personal details** - There are legal reasons here. I learn to tune out certain things like marital status, family status (whether or not a person has children), reference to health or medical issues/triumphs, personal photos). Including things like this is common in CVs in other countries, but it seriously makes me uncomfortable when people include photos with their resumes. If I want to see what you look like, I'll stalk you on LinkedIn… and maybe other places. Can't confirm that.

- **Cover letters** - I abhor them and rarely read them. Most of my recruiting colleagues agree, but I know there are still recruiters that do. I find that a lot of candidates don't even send them anymore (Hallelujah). If you're going to send one, that puppy better be darn good. I'm of the mind that most companies that request cover letters only do so to weed out the people who haven't bothered to read the directions.

THINGS I WISH MORE PEOPLE WOULD DO

- **Bring personality into the resume** - We recruiters are staring at these missives all day long. Throw a joke in there somewhere for goodness sake. Talk about how much you love Nutella (I have this in my own personal resume). If you're a rockstar, throw some cheeky self-deprecation in there if you can do so elegantly. I think it's important to keep the work experience details as professional as possible, but trust me, there are ways to have fun with it. I love an easter egg buried in a resume… figuratively speaking.

- **Include URLs for other web presences** - nuff said. And within your comfortability of course. I get it. I don't want

professional acquaintances to see my Facebook page either.

- **List key personal projects** - I ask this in almost every phone interview I do. "What kind of stuff are you working on in your free time?" I am always inspired by this. Also shows me that you have passion for your field beyond your 9-5 (ha, ha, like those even exist anymore).

- **Use color and lovely typography**

THINGS I WISH PEOPLE WOULD STOP DOING

- **Using MS Word's resume templates** - Period.

- **Writing resumes in first person** - Exceptions made for people who do it cleverly.

- **Allowing their resume to be a ridiculous number of pages** - Unless you are a college professor with multiple published works, you do not need an 8+ page resume. That is not impressive; that is obnoxious. Condense that bad boy, s'il vous plait. Also, I do not care that you worked at Burger King in 1988. I mean, good for you, but no; not relevant.

- **Mixing up first person and third person or present tense and past tense** - Pick a voice, pick a tense, and then stick with it. I suggest third person and past tense.

- **Listing an objective at the top of the resume** - Dude, seriously? This isn't 1992.

- **Mailing, faxing, or hand-delivering paper resumes** - immediate disqualification. Do not pass go.

- **Sending resumes addressed to the CEO that end up on my desk unopened** - This is a gross generalization here and exceptions are made for smaller companies, but um, CEOs don't read resumes — not the first pass. Also see above re: paper resumes. P.S. We laugh at people who do this.

- **Exaggerating titles and responsibilities** — Eventually the truth comes out.

(All of the above does not apply if you're Tristan Walker or exude ridiculous amounts of awesomeness)

That is all. I know, this is more information than you ever wanted to know. Sorry.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ambra-nykol

What distinguishes the top 1% of product managers from the top 10%?

Ian McAllister, I lead unusual projects at Amazon

The top 10% of product managers excel at a few of these things. The top 1% excel at most or all of them:

- **Think big** - A 1% PM's thinking won't be constrained by the resources available to them today or today's market environment. They'll describe large disruptive opportunities and develop concrete plans for how to take advantage of them.

- **Communicate** - A 1% PM can make a case that is impossible to refute or ignore. They'll use data appropriately, when available, but they'll also tap into other biases, beliefs, and triggers that can convince the powers that be to part with headcount, money, or other resources and then get out of the way.

- **Simplify** - A 1% PM knows how to get 80% of the value out of any feature or project with 20% of the effort. They do so repeatedly, launching more and achieving compounding effects for the product or business.

- **Prioritize** - A 1% PM knows how to sequence projects. They balance quick wins vs. platform investments appropriately. They balance offense and defense projects appropriately. Offense projects are ones that grow the business. Defense projects are ones that protect and remove drag on

the business (operations, reducing technical debt, fixing bugs, etc.).

- **Forecast and measure** - A 1% PM is able to forecast the approximate benefit of a project and can do so efficiently by applying past experience and leveraging comparable benchmarks. They also measure benefit once projects are launched and factor those learnings into their future prioritization and forecasts.

- **Execute** - A 1% PM grinds it out. They do whatever is necessary to ship. They recognize no specific bounds to the scope of their role. As necessary, they recruit, they produce buttons, they do bizdev, they escalate, they tussle with internal counsel…

- **Understand technical trade-offs** - A 1% PM does not need to have a CS degree. They do need to be able to roughly understand the technical complexity of the features they put on the backlog, without any costing input from devs. They should partner with devs to make the right technical trade-offs (i.e. compromise).

- **Understand good design** - A 1% PM doesn't have to be a designer, but they should appreciate great design and be able to distinguish it from good design. They should also be able to articulate the difference to their design counterparts, or at least articulate directions to pursue to go from good to great.

- **Write effective copy** - A 1% PM should be able to write concise copy that gets the job done. They should understand that each additional word they write dilutes the value of the previous ones. They should spend time and energy trying to find the perfect words for key copy (button labels, nav, calls-to-action, etc.), not just words that will suffice.

I'm not sure I've ever met a 1% PM, certainly not one that I identified as such prior to hiring. Instead of trying to hire one, you're better off trying to hire a 10% PM who strives to develop and improve along these dimensions.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-ian-mcallister

How can you increase your productivity on your side projects at the end of the day when you're tired from work/college?

Kah Keng Tay, Quora Engineer

I try to **minimize startup and switching costs**, in other words, the time it takes to get started working on the side project. This way, even if I only have a few minutes to work on it before I turn in for the night, I can still do something useful. Also, I try to **make each opportunity count**. These are hard to come by, and so it is good not to waste any single minute.

This boils down to me doing some or all of the following:

- **Keeping as much state persistent across sessions as possible.** I leave all my editors, browser windows, etc exactly the way they are so I can pick up and resume where I left off. This means I usually never shut down my computer, preferring to put it to sleep or standby where possible.

- **Having a quick and painless to-do list.** I used to do this in a text file but I've recently started to use Evernote for this. Then, when secondary tasks crop up that are not central to what I'm doing right now, I'll put them on the list and work on them later.

- **Biting off only what can be chewed.** Related to above, I make sure I tackle only what seems reasonably possible within the time I have. If I took on too big a task and didn't manage to finish, and only got back to it a few days later, I would have forgotten by then some of the reasons why I did things in a certain way. This would cost me time that is spent rethinking and refactoring my design unnecessarily.

- **Prioritizing tasks according to what is important (or interesting if I'm not feeling particularly inspired).** This goes in line with making each opportunity count. In down-

time, I would transfer some of the tasks in the lightweight list into something more persistent for issue tracking and prioritizing. I found Trac with a Git or Mercurial plugin to be pretty useful for this purpose, and it helps me to keep focused with the big picture in mind.

- **Having near-term milestones.** These are helpful to stay motivated and give you some pressure to keep on-track with your goals. I think it's easiest to just have a single feature in mind and a fixed date that you want it finished, and use that to inform your decision making.

- **Deserializing in advance mentally.** The concept of serialization in computer science refers to storing state in a form that can be persisted. In the case of a side project, between the times you get to work on it, your ideas and thoughts often live in your biologically memory, probably in medium- to long-term storage. I've found that it takes time to get all that back into the forefront of your thinking and creative process, but it's a waste if that time could be spent actually working on your project. Instead, I'll spend my commute doing that deserialization, mentally getting ready a list of things I'd be able to do right away once I get home.

Some of the above are also pretty applicable to regular work, so it's good for general productivity if they become habits.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-kah-keng-tay

How do you fire an employee that just isn't good enough?

Michael O. Church, NYC machine learning functional programmer, writer, and game designer.

The best employees are multipliers who make others more productive, and next are the adders (workhorses). Subtractors are the good-faith incompetents who cost more than they

bring. Dividers are the worst kind of problem employee; they bring the whole team (or company) down.

Right now, it sounds like he's a *subtracter*. He's not a bad person, and he's not doing substantial harm, but he's worth less than he costs (including communication overhead).

Dividers: fire them immediately. Don't wait a day. Prefer severance over a "performance improvement plan" (PIP). Severance is cheaper than having a fired employee come into work for two months while you build a case. People tend to be averse to writing packages for bad employees, as if they're "rewarding failure," but this is business and it's not the place for that kind of emotion. Pay the go-away fee, but fire dividers as soon as you can. A divider can easily cost you ten thousand dollars per day in damaged morale and internal friction.

Subtractors: good-faith employees who just aren't producing more than they cost. You're losing money on them, but in small amounts. **If you can turn them into adders, try to do so.** Most people start out new jobs as subtractors, and the problem may be project/person fit rather than the employee. Find mentors, move them around, and give them chances as long as (a) you can afford to do so and (b) they remain basically decent (i.e. they're trying to do good work). This "not very bright" guy might surprise you if you change the context. I've seen that happen.

When you turn a subtractor into an adder, what you get is a very loyal employee; someone who was well-mentored and learned a lot. Three years later, you might have a *bona fide* multiplier. I've seen it happen.

You really need to ask yourself, "Is he hurting anyone?" If the only loss is that you're paying $100k per year for $80k-level work, then he's probably not an existential threat to your company. You should "manage him out" (i.e. find a way to convince him to leave with his dignity intact) eventually if you see no hope of improving, but don't be rash about it and don't be a dick. People talk.

Whatever you do, don't use a formal "performance improvement plan" (PIP). Everyone knows what it means when a manager starts "documenting." This process turns a subtractor into a divider instantly. If you see no alternative to letting the person go, then you should prefer severance over the PIP.

HR departments like PIPs because they "save money" on severance payments, but the reality is that they externalize the cost to the team, making HR look good but forcing (a) managers to conduct a kangaroo court, (b) the team to deal with a walking-dead employee, and (c) the employee to decipher whether it's an honest PIP (rare) or firing papers; because in the latter, he should be treating the PIP period as severance (since a PIP usually means there will be no severance; that's why the CYA papers exist) and putting his entire effort into his job search.

Writing a package. Have an attorney draft it. Include non-disparagement, non-litigation, and non-disclosure of the contract's existence. Offer to let him represent himself as employed during the search for the next job. If this is a good-faith subtractor, offer a positive reference. If he's a divider and you truly believe he's toxic, stick to name and dates. By the way, it's **never** worth it to give a bad reference. Defamation lawsuits are usually less of an issue than wrongful termination suits, but the latter come down to "he-said/she-said," and the company usually gets the benefit of the doubt, but loses it the second a bad reference comes into play. Giving a bad reference can literally cost you millions of dollars.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-michael-o-church

What are telltale signs that you're working at a "sinking ship" company?

Michael Wolfe, Four startups and counting.

LARGE COMPANY EDITION

- New opportunities are framed in terms of how they impact the existing legacy businesses, not how they impact the customer and the future.

- Mediocre employees are not fired since you can't recruit better ones anyway.

- You benchmark against your direct (mediocre) peers instead of the disruptive entrants in your market.

- Your co-workers roll their eyes at Facebook, Twitter, cloud services, iPhones, about how they are for children and your customers will never trust their business to them.

- You spend more time talking about how you are going to make the quarter than you do about long-term growth.

- Cross-functional committees are formed to solve problems that would have been solved already if the people responsible for them were any good.

- Management consultants are brought in to solve problems that would have been solved already if the people responsible for them were any good.

- All problems can be solved with more budget (not better people or better decisions).

- Acquired companies disintegrate after they regress to the mean of the rest of the company.

- The CFO spends 95% of his time looking for places to spend less money and 5% looking for new investment opportunities.

- The HR department thinks their job is administration, not leadership.

- All technology decisions go through a centralized IT bottleneck steering committee.

- IT sends out a memo that says anyone using unauthorized cloud services will be fired.

- You have a Chief Strategy Officer.

- You don't have a recruiting playbook.

- People argue over offices.

- When risky, innovative projects are cancelled, the people working on them are laid off, thus getting richly punished for their risk-taking.

- Spending and hiring decisions are "approved" by an entity outside of your group, even if they are within existing budget.

- The company shuts down over the holidays just to get vacation off of the books.

- No one can answer, "Why work here?" except to talk about the dental plan.

- Executives are shuffled around the company to new roles, but outsiders don't ever seem to be brought in to raise the bar.

- When executives quit, their next in lines are automatically promoted to their bosses' jobs, even if they weren't that great and there would have been better candidates elsewhere.

- Each employee has a rationale for why, "I'm glad I don't have to work at Facebook/Twitter/Goldman."

SMALL COMPANY EDITION

- You "rehearse" for board meetings.

- When pressured on the business by employees, CEO always starts with, "I need you to stay focused on…"

- You have more than one MBA on the team.

- You have a Chief Strategy Officer.

- Your CTO just came out of a PhD program.

- Your CEO sells instead of listens.

- You have a launch party, and no customers attend.

- Customers hate the product and vision, so the sales guy is fired.

- You are not told the terms of the last funding round (5x liquidation preference?).

- You never hear how much cash you have in the bank or see board meeting notes.

- You complain about how the customers "just don't get it" and aren't "visionary."

- Your CEO says revenue is coming in in two weeks, just after he gets a meeting with the buyer, negotiates price, gets it approved, agrees on terms, writes up up contracts, negotiates them, signs them, and invoices the customer on net 30 terms.

- You add features because board members want them.

- Your CEO calls himself a "visionary" in his bio.

- The CEO keeps everything secret because, "That is how Apple does it."

- The CEO approves all of the design decisions because, "That is how Apple does it."

- You are selling a platform.

- Co-founder agrees to bring in experienced execs, but thinks they will report to him.

- You are selling to schools, hospitals, or non-profits.

- You are commercializing a technology.

- Your value proposition is that you help workers break down organizational barriers and work cross-functionally.

- Your business model assume you will become one of the seven websites that the average user visits every day.

- Your site is going to be ad-supported, and you have fifteen hundred users.

- CEO avoids eye contact.

- It gets really quiet.

- You get free lunch but have no customers.

- Your free lunch is taken away.

- You get asked, "How much do you really need to live on?"

- You get a pay cut. Your co-worker disappears.

- Your CEO still doesn't make eye contact.

- You get laid off and become a creditor to the company because they didn't reimburse your last five expense reports.

- The company declines to buy your unvested shares back.

- The liquidation yields five Aeron chairs and an espresso machine, and Ashton Kutcher's stock is senior to yours.

  http://www.quora.com/l/boq-michael-wolfe

How do you know when it's time to leave your current company and move on?

Edmond Lau, Quora Engineer

A number of red flags should cause you to reconsider your position at your current company, including:

- being compensated unfairly.

- being mistreated, undervalued, or disrespected.

- disagreeing with the fundamental strategy or practices of the company and not being in a position to change them.

- failing to get along with your manager and your teammates.

- failing to fit in with the company culture.

These types of reasons aren't too hard to identify and provide concrete justifications for trying something new.

It's also time to leave when your learning rate at your job tapers off and starts to plateau. This is a much more subtle reason for leaving that's harder for people to recognize but likely affects a much larger group of people. Transitioning to another team or company provides an opportunity to switch to a different learning curve and to accelerate your learning.

Paying attention to your learning rate is important in general but particularly important for young professionals.

Learning is an investment in yourself for the future. It also compounds — knowledge not only begets knowledge, but more knowledge gives you a foundation upon which to gain knowledge even faster. This is why most people learn more in college than they did in high school and more in high school than they did in earlier years. Ideally, out of college, you should set yourself up to learn even more than before.

Palantir co-founder Stephen Cohen captures the importance of the compounding effects of learning, in an argument for why college graduates ought to work at startups instead of established companies [1]:

> If you graduate Stanford at 22 and Google recruits you, you'll work a 9-to-5. It's probably more like an 11-to-3 in terms of hard work. They'll pay well. It's relaxing. But what they are actually doing is paying you to accept a much lower intellectual growth rate. When you recognize that intelligence is compounding, the cost of that missing long-term compounding is enormous. They're not giving you the best opportunity of your life. Then a scary thing can happen: You might realize one day that you've lost your competitive edge. You won't be the best anymore. You won't be able to fall in love with new stuff. Things are cushy where you are. You get complacent and stall.

Startups might not be for everyone, but the message about not shortchanging your intellectual growth rate still applies.

What about a passion for what you're working on? A strong passion and excitement in your company mission or in what you're doing is critical to sustaining a steep learning curve. Passion and meaningful work supply the motivation for long-term learning [2] and allow you to stay in a state of flow more often. Mihayli Csikszentmihalyi, one of the world's leading researchers in positive psychology, developed the theory of "flow," a state where you enjoy what you're doing so much that you don't even notice the passage of time, and found that more flow generally leads to more happiness [3]. It's hard to stay motivated to learn or to enter a state of flow in the long run unless you believe in and enjoy what you do, and it's also hard not to be getting better if you love what you're doing.

Assessing your learning rate first requires identifying the many different types of learning can happen on a job:

- **Technical learning specific to your job function.** For a software engineering position, for example, this might include things like learning a new language, getting familiar with new tools, improving your ability to design new systems, etc. Getting better at these skills makes you more proficient as an individual contributor.

- **Prioritization skills.** Oftentimes, there are tens or hundreds of things that you could be working on that might generate value. Figuring out the highest leverage activity that generates the most value for the least amount of work at any given point is hard, but it's probably the single most valuable lesson you can learn professionally [4].

- **Execution.** Learning how to or how not to build and deliver a great product or service and how to do it consistently and on time takes practice.

- **Mentorship / management skills.** The faster an organization grows, the sooner you become a more senior member of the team. Seniority provides opportunities to mentor or manage other teammates, to shape the company culture and values that develop, and to influence the direction of the team.

- **Team leadership skills.** The skills needed to make a team function effectively differ from those needed to be productively as an individual. How should milestones be organized? How do you coordinate effectively and minimize communication overhead? How do you make sure a team gels?

At various points in your career, you'll value these skills differently and should seek out opportunities that develop the skills you value. All of these skills are mostly generalizable beyond your job at your current company. You take those skills and experiences with you to your next job.

There's also a type of learning that's important for career success but that is less transferable to other companies. And that's institutional learning on how to function well within the specific processes defined at the company: how to get the approval of key gatekeepers for decisions, how to get projects you believe in prioritized on the roadmap, how to nego-

tiate for more resources for your team given the company's resource allocation process, etc. Some amount of this is necessary to do well, and some of the negotiation and persuasion skills will help in the future, but to the extent that much of this learning deals with the particular bureacracy or process that you need to deal with, it's significantly less valuable than other types of learning.

When you first join a company, the learning curve usually starts really steep (hopefully, if you've made a good choice). You're immersed in new technologies, in a new product, and on a new team, and there are opportunities to learn along multiple dimensions. When I first joined Google right out of college, I learned a lot in my first six months there. Google's done a great job with their GoogleEDU training materials. I soaked in all the codelabs that discussed why core abstractions existed and how they worked. I studied programming style guides to learn best industry practices. I read design docs about search indexing and other scalable engineering systems being built internally. I learned to build and ship something seen by tens to hundreds of millions of people per day on google.com.

Your learning rate might decrease due to organizational issues (maybe processes have become too bureaucratic and limit your ability to iterate and launch quickly) or due to maintenance issues where the team doesn't grow quickly enough to scale with the complexity of the product. The second makes it hard for you to switch projects and work on new things.

Warning flags for me at Google started to appear when I realized that many projects either had no concrete launch paths or depended on non-transparent approval processes over which I had little visibility or control. Being able to launch products was important to the extent that I wanted to learn how to build great products, and quick, iterative feedback is a necessary foundation for learning. When I projected what I could accomplish and reasonably launch by staying an additional year, I didn't feel satisfied, so I left. There was certainly more I could have learned by staying — I could have dug into the internals of more major systems — but my rate of learning no longer mirrored what I encountered when I first started.

I similarly left Ooyala when I felt that my own learning rate at the company began to plateau. While I was there, I learned about building and selling an enterprise product, the intricacies of flash video and analytics, project estimation and team organization, and more. I left when it became clear to me that I could learn much more on engineering and on building a product by joining a smaller and faster-growing team. A contributing factor that I only discovered after working at Ooyala for a while was that I wasn't nearly as excited and motivated to work on an enterprise product as I was to work on a consumer product that I would actually use everyday.

Having worked at Quora for two years, I'm happy that I'm still continuously learning new things at a good rate [5, 6], and it certainly helps that the product itself is also so learning-focused.

When I interned at Microsoft the summer of my junior year in college, I received a good piece of advice secondhand from a friend's mentor: always re-examine and reflect on where you are in your career at least every two years. Even if you're perfectly happy with your job, the exercise forces you to check that you are actually enjoying your work and learning on the job rather than just being comfortable.

[1] http://blakemasters.tumblr.com/post/21437840885/peter-thiels-cs183-startup-class-5-notes-essay

[2] http://qr.ae/1vcv2

[3] Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 2008.

[4] http://qr.ae/1vcnu

[5] http://qr.ae/1vctP

[6] http://qr.ae/1vct9

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-edmond-lau

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

What is it like to be in a train crash?

Faisal Abid, Software Engineer, Entrepreneur and Author

Being in a train crash is a very interesting experience. It's the scariest thing that I've been through, and the most enlightening.

Let me start off by describing how it was scary.

Sam Beck and I were coming back to Toronto from Niagara Falls when, about twenty minutes or so into the journey, the train bounced and started to tilt sideways.

This is one of those feelings I won't ever forget.

The train probably took less than ten seconds to tip over, but for me, those ten seconds felt like ten hours. Since I was sitting on the right side, the same side the train was tipping over to, people, luggage, and, even worse, laptops came flying into me.

While I have no idea how far the train skidded on its side, it also felt like it wasn't going to end. It kept violently shaking till it finally came to a stop. Once it stopped, that's when things went from worse to ugly.

Once the train stopped, things went quiet for a second. Then the panic started, people started to cry for help, I turned

around after managing to stand up and saw that some people really got banged up badly. I'm not going to elaborate on the injuries out of respect for their privacy, but there was quite a lot of blood and people panicking thinking they were going to die.

What made matters worse was when the entire train car started to fill with smoke/gas. This was **THE scariest moment of my life.** Why? It's one thing to die suddenly in a train crash, it's another thing to think that your cabin is being filled with something that is going to explode, and you're just waiting for death.

Why couldn't we have just gone out the emergency windows or exits?

All the emergency windows on the right side were blocked by the ground, and there was no way to go through the exits on the left side — which was now our roof — because the chairs were crazy unstable with metal sticking out of them. Plus, none of us could actually reach that high or climb ourselves up.

Soon we heard from one of the people in charge that the ambulance and firefighters are on their way.

But that wait felt like forever. What happened during those moments is very interesting. First, everyone who wasn't injured started to help out the people in need. Either by telling them everything is going to be okay, or getting them to a safer area. Second, there seemed to be a small community that formed. We got to know each other, not personally, but there was this connection that formed, and we knew that whatever happened, we were not going to let anything happen to anyone on that train.

Once the firefighters came, they broke in through the top corner of the train and came in. I've never actually seen firefighters up close, so it was kinda cool. These guys looked like 'Gears of War' characters, huge with crazy equipment and awesome professionalism. They came in and got right to business. They went to the injured people, they made sure they were safe, and got the people who were able to help them out.

One of the hardest things to do was leave the train from the other side. Since there were quite a few injured people who could not have been taken out right away, we had to un-

fortunately go over them and the paramedics that were also in the train helping them. Going over them was hard, it felt like a disaster movie, where every step you took, you had to make sure the seat wasn't just going to give in and send you falling and breaking a leg or something.

We eventually got out of there and were rushed by paramedics who gave us full medical evaluation. We waited in a bus till the authorities told us it was okay to go home, and we basically took a subway home. Nothing dramatic, nothing crazy compared to what we just went through.

How it was enlightening:

During the months before the crash, I was going through a very hard phase because of my first startup. We were battling every day with the possibility of us failing, and I took it harder than anyone else. After all, I had dropped out of school to follow my passion, and it looked like I was going to be a loser for the rest of my life because of my failed startup.

Then the train crash happened, and something changed in me. To paraphrase, I saw that life is short; I could be dead tomorrow. I realized that rather than worrying about failure and what people will think of me, I should just focus on what I do, do it to the best of my ability, and keep persisting. If I fail (which my startup did), then great — I am still breathing, and that means I could start my next one (which I've done).

I won't say I've become someone amazing who is super productive all the time, but I have become more mature and more responsible. I know what to do, I know what to focus on. I know not to worry about what people will think of me, because at the end of the day when I die, it won't make a difference what they thought, the only thing that will matter is what I've accomplished.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-faisal-abid

What is it like to leave the Church of Scientology?

Flemming Funch, Ex-Scientologist, declared Suppressive Person (excommunicated) in 1982. OT16.

It is usually very hard and takes a long time.

I was kicked out, excommunicated, and declared a "suppressive person" in 1982. Yet, at the time, I didn't agree, and I tried hard to be taken back. It wasn't before about a year later that I realized that I was much better outside that organization, and I wouldn't want to ever be a member of it again.

At that time, I was essentially still a Scientologist, just one that had disagreements with the way the organization was run. It took me another number of years to get over that and consider myself an ex-scientologist.

Leaving the organization and leaving the subject are two different things, but typically tightly interwoven. One is afraid of leaving the oppressive cultish organization because one is afraid of letting go of that whole manner of thinking and that body of material which is Scientology.

I could talk for hours about my experiences, so it is hard to put into a brief message. Leaving the Church of Scientology is probably similar in many ways to leaving any other all-encompassing religious type of organization. You know, one where most of your friends and family members are members, and so are your business partners, your employers, etc. Where it guides what books you read, how you interpret the news, how you plan things, which things you plan on doing, etc. It is so all-pervasive that it is very hard to leave. If you do, you have to come up with new ways of doing almost everything. And if the tradition in that organization or religion is to shun people who leave, all the worse, you have to find new friends, maybe even a new family. The escape velocity is very high. You really need to gather yourself together to leave. Or you have to be thrown out quite forcefully before you really leave.

But ultimately, it is very freeing to leave an organization that tries to control your thinking. It can be a very healthy

process to sort out for yourself what you actually think is true and how you want to think and feel. The more the subject you're leaving has pretended to have the answer to everything, the longer it takes to sort through. But it is worth it.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-flemming-funch

What is it like to be kidnapped?

Anon User

I was kidnapped eight years ago, and it changed me forever. It's an experience you wouldn't want to wish on your worst enemy. Thankfully, I wasn't harmed physically, so I can't imagine what the experience is like for others.

I was out with my mom running some errands, and we returned home at night around nine in the evening. In our part of the world, it's common to have a guard (ours was unarmed) because robberies are common, kidnappings aren't. The gate was opened by a stranger wearing a guard's uniform — later we found out it was one of the kidnappers who had beaten up the guard and was wearing his uniform. There were three others, and we found them in the house pointing a gun at my dad's head — his hands were tied, and I can never forget the look on his face and his body language (total helplessness).

The four home invaders/robbers (at that point we didn't know this was a kidnapping) stayed at our place for the next eight hours, ransacking the place and grabbing anything that caught their attention (for example they took gold cufflinks). They were heavily armed and had an AK47 and a couple of pistols. They also had some kind of drug in a vial and a syringe which they said they were going to use on me if I didn't cooperate (that's what they used on our guard after beating him up).

At the end, closer to day break, they let us know that they didn't find enough in the house and were going to take me with them for ransom. They let me change, and I said one of

the most painful goodbyes to my parents — basically we were prepared to not see each other in this world ever again.

The kidnappers got in one of the cars (the one without GPS tracking) and drove about three to four hours. They made me promise to close my eyes otherwise they would drug me. We got to a "safe house" in a rural area at the end of the journey where they had more weapons and food etc. Here they separated into two groups with two of them taking me on a motorbike while the rest took our car.

This was the start of a very dangerous part of the journey… I was sandwiched between the two guys, the guy behind me had the AK47 between us… definitely a very blunt/hard implied threat. Shortly after we took off from the safe house, they got very tense, saying that a group of rivals was on the way to kill them. We basically sped through roads, markets, and other areas, which added to the stress. At different points, we had to take refuge in fruit orchards and fields to "evade" this group coming after them.

By evening, we got to another safe house in a rural area. I could see villagers and other people around, and it became evident that they knew what was going on and that they wouldn't help. They were either afraid of these guys or were in on the take.

The other two who took our car came back by evening, also a bit shaken up. They had encountered the police, and our car had been banged up a bit because it had fallen into a canal. I'm a Muslim and have strong faith, so I had been praying and reciting the Quran, which seemed to unsettle them a bit. I had also talked to my parents once, and they let me know that they'd asked someone to pray at the Holy Mosque in Mecca and Medina. I also let them know about this. All of this info (the people following us on the bike, the car accident, and the praying) definitely got to them, and I think they made a decision to get a ransom as soon as possible and let me go. They were a superstitious bunch and at some level, they were trying to justify what they were doing in a rational way.

They also admitted they knew the local police and had been arrested before. They had paid them off and escaped more than once, and the AK47 was a police issue. They also were a professional bunch and had killed and kidnapped

many people before in other cities.

I got to spend the night with them, but the next morning they had arranged to meet my dad for the ransom. They drove with me to the pick up point and let me go.

In the end, I am thankful to God that I got away — I think my faith and our concept of Karma/Fate helped me through this ordeal. But it has left a scar — life will never be the same again. It was hard to trust anyone for a while — I went into a shell. Even today, I look at people lurking in shadows suspiciously, lock all the doors in the house, etc. But that feeling of being safe in my own home is gone.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-8

DRUG ADDICTION

What does it feel like to be addicted to drugs?

Dan Holliday, Please pull around to the second window.

Stages. Everything comes in stages.
I was always such a prude. No, not a sex prude, but a drug/alcohol prude as a kid. My best friend and I (in fact, my entire circle of friends) were pretty snooty about any addictive substances. I made it through high school without ever touching tobacco or any "street drugs." I remember refusing to take pain killers after surgery. I didn't drink that much (though, I don't ever deny having drunk alcohol in high school). Generally, I was well-focused in that regard.

I remember seeing the *stoners* in high school and laughing at them and calling them losers. I remember wondering what, WHAT!, in the hell were they thinking. *How messed up can you get?*

I made it through early adulthood. I passed my twenty-first birthday and still only drank ("only" meaning that I drank on weekends, but not much beyond). Never drugs. I watched some guys do drugs and just wondered what the hell they were thinking. Seriously, one time I watched guys smoke

some weed, and I got all nervous and had to leave a party. I just didn't touch any drugs.

Twenty-first year. Twenty-second year. And then my twenty-third year. I was living in Key West. I started drinking heavily. See, KW doesn't really have that much to do beyond ocean stuff and night life. I really partied a lot. And tons of guys were popping these newish pills called "Ex" (they called it that in Key West) and it seemed so easy and they really seemed to enjoy the stuff. But the thought of it just made me shudder.

I didn't do drugs.

And damn, I kept thinking about how much fun it looked like they were having. So, my friend at the time (a lady I still talk to who, herself, has moved well beyond that era) was sort of in a relationship with some French Canadians living in the Keys who had a whole "business" going that was focused just on ecstasy. And you have to remember, the US Federal Government at this time hadn't even caught up with the stuff; it was still something like Schedule 2 or 3. It was not a high priority.

And given how it didn't seem to have any weird side effects, I finally gave in to the curiosity and asked to buy a pill†. That was a big deal. The big night came, and I took it. Tick tock, tick tock. Nothing. Another hour went by and nothing. Damn, and by the time we realized that it was not going to happen, there weren't anymore connections. Shit. What a waste of fifteen bucks!! Worked for everybody else, just not me.

So, the next weekend came and we were prepared: TWO PILLS!!! We did that shit right and popped the pill right as I got to the club (I'm actually getting jittery thinking about it now). Tick tock. Tick tock. Nothing. "GODDAMN MAN! You must have an iron metabolism. No worry. We came prepared. Second pill… **CRUSHED**! Now open up. This'll be a little gross buddy, but it's sure to…"

Alllkkkkk! Splattt! Clakk! Grulp. Ugh. Oh, holy mother, there's nothing that can describe the horror, the absolute gag-reflex-inducing, hellish, *bitternesss* of a crushed up pill of ecstasy in the mouth. Aspirin doesn't even come close. That shit was horrible.

Then suddenly after swallowing the crushed-up *death-tasting* powder, **it hit me**. "Wait a second, even a crushed-up pill of Ex can't hit you that fast. *Oh SHIT!* That's the *first* pill kicking in. OH GODDAMN, DAN! You gotta hold on buddy because when the second dose kicks in, you're gonna be in for a hell of a night."

This is why I'm still an addict. This is why I will be "in recovery" for the remainder of my life. As I type this answer, an answer I've had marked to answer for a while, my eyes are dilating and my hands are shuddering so much that I have to get up and take a break. My right leg has been bouncing on the floor so hard and so fast that my boyfriend had to walk into the office to find out what the pounding was… He knows. He knows me well. He knows this emotional force emanating from me right now like coronal flares. He hates it and wisely fears it because conversations about this subject should induce horror or shame or fear, but this specific drug and conversations there-about always inspire poetic, fantastical, whimsical language in me of joy and excitement that aren't in line with the reality that was, with the reality that I make myself remember in order to remind me that the reality and the memories were always worlds apart. NOTHING about this isn't exciting right now. That's something he rightly fears, though having never seen the addict. I've been clean for eleven years.

From that moment in time, from that moment forward for the next four years and four months and three days, *I was a barely functioning (and rarely functioning) drug addict.* I didn't stop. Every weekend for the next four years was spent on some kind of drug, culminating in the last year of my life spent endlessly on drugs and at times without a home. But we're not there yet. We're at the fun stage where no problems seem to be caused by the drug.

Only good times. And that night was a really good time. The intensity of pleasure and joy and connection I felt with those people in that minute was profound. That's what MDMA does. I know it's history. The Dan Holliday who spouts proudly his knowledge of history existed back then as well as today.

3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine was invented a long time ago. In fact, it's celebrating its one hundred year an-

niversary this year, 2012. Invented in Germany as a test drug for treating psychological issues, it is highly "empathogenic," meaning that it just makes you a happy, cuddly, loving person while you're on it. I've witnessed, live, many closed, shy, homophobic, hateful, angry people turn about and confront their inner hangups about things and become the happiest people I ever knew. Ecstasy just has that effect. You cannot hate on that shit.

And I used and used. I burned through thousands... oh so many thousands of dollars over the next few years. Night after night, week after week. The intervening two-ish years are unimportant because they were all repeats of the same night over and over again.

Until I met Luke.

No, his name isn't Luke. It could be Tommy or Jake or Omar or Juan. But we're calling him Luke because his name really isn't important. Luke was a good guy, I mean it. A heart of gold, but just misguided as I was at that time. Luke was, well, he was my dream guy: very attractive, friendly, gay friendly in fact, and totally straight. We were instantly friends. Luke was well ahead of me in self-destructiveness, and he'd had a love affair with meth and coke for a while.

Ever wonder how a person who "fears" a thing can instantly break down their barriers stopping them from doing that "thing"? *Lust.* I don't know a single person on earth who hasn't engaged in the stupidest shit over lust, and I lusted after Luke. Luke's all I thought about. On our second night hanging out, we went to a gay bar and Luke did something that utterly melted my heart and — from that moment on — made me completely infatuated with him... *addicted to him* in ways more powerful than drugs.

At the club, I could see that he was a bit loopy. Heart beating faster than it should. The pulsing being visible in the way he was breathing and the veins in his neck. I was curious, *so I asked.* Without a second thought, he grabbed my hand and put it on his chest to feel his heart. *Pounding. Pounding. Pounding.* Nothing about that powerful of a heartbeat is safe. A goddamned battering ram pushing through his rib cage.

It's been thirteen years since that day. Humans have been born and entered puberty. A global war on terror has come

and nearly gone. Millions of lives have entered and left the Earth. Regimes have changed and taken the course of history with them.

Thirteen years is a long time. But I remember.

I remember every person in the bar, what I was wearing, what he was wearing, the music, our drinks, the looks (Luke always got lots of looks), the conversation, *and his face*. I call that a "crystal moment" (appropriately coincidental considering the subject matter). I felt his heart through his chest, and every muscle on his chest. Luke didn't think about what he was doing and had no clue what I was really feeling. He was just a guy, but my hand on his chest feeling his heart beat made me completely enslaved from that moment on. Luke, *beautiful Luke*, was on meth that night.

I wasn't far behind.

The next day, we snorted crystal together.‡ A week later, we did coke. Within a few months, I had lied to my wealthy grandfather and convinced him to send me a sizable chunk of change. All of which was spent on drugs. Huge Christmas gifts came in from the same grandfather (by "huge," I mean: new car or down payments on houses, big). All of it spent on drugs. All of it spent on Luke.

And then the money started running out, and I'd lost my job and I'd moved out of my one stable friend's house (who was, himself, extremely worried about me). I'd stopped talking with my family. I'd stopped eating right. I started losing weight. Weeknights and weekends were spent "casually" using meth, while spending the entire weekend at raves or after hours night clubs in Phoenix that catered to drug users.

I was there, and it was so exciting. Then, somewhere along the way, the ecstasy stopped being as fun, and I'd switched to "just coke and meth" (because I didn't want that drunk feeling). And along the way, I'd stopped parachuting meth (putting a few grains in a wad of toilet paper or napkin and swallowing it like a pill). I'd switched to smoking it out of a pipe. And along the way, I'd begun using (not going to spell it out) *alternate methods* to make income and pay for my addiction.

And I wasn't one of those stupid drug addicts in denial. I knew full well I was addicted and admitted and talked about it. I laughed about it. I made art about it. I wrote poems about

it. I was never in denial, *I just didn't care.*

And then I lost my house. And then I lost my car. And then I had to start sleeping on a buddy's couch because I had nowhere else to go. My friend, Luke, stopped being my friend and like a shot in the head, I spiraled out of control. It took YEARS to admit that I was in love with Luke, but not then, I was in denial (about a great deal). I started completely numbing myself with more and more meth. I smoked a full 8-ball a day (8th of an ounce — enough to keep an ordinary person strung out for a week). I'd lost all my friends.

My apartment had been robbed long ago and all my good shit was stolen, so I couldn't sell that. And everything, EVERYTHING was just completely lost. FUBAR. Even my last friend, the guy whose couch I'd been sleeping on, had had enough of me. I was so emotional (drug emotions are like being severely bipolar — indistinguishable, in fact). I was up and down. I was insane and incorrigible. I was alone and on the verge of just killing myself. It was so painful. I remember wanting out and not knowing how; trapped in a world of drugs, drug selling, and the caramel river of one pointless day oozing into the next, without enough velocity to crush me against the rocks, but not solid enough for me to get a grip and swim to shore.

People were looking for me. I owed money. Goddamn, I owed so much money to so many people. Death was the quickest and easiest way out. I'd spent my last relationship. I had nothing left, and the years that I should have spent doing something of value were spent doing nothing of any worth and so, having no recourse, I'd decided that I was just going to kill myself.

And I called my dad to say goodbye.

We hadn't spoken in years. Three-ish years. I was certain he'd written me off. I was always more than the black sheep; the pink sheep, of the family. I never fell in line. I never ever feared being different, and I didn't have a problem making other people suffer for me being different; *so what would he care if I was gone?*

Biology.

So many people make so much of biology. My dad who raised me was not my biological father. At something like

when I was a month old, my mother left my biological father. At something like when I was nine months old, my mother met my dad and as far as both of them tell me, I instantly considered him my dad. The other guy wasn't around, and when he finally showed his face, I'd already bonded with my dad. The other guy was just a sperm donor.

My dad was there through it all. When I was attacked by dogs, he stayed with me through the surgeries. When we were in a car accident and my mother was killed, he was our rock. When I struggled in my early teen years with letting go of my mother, he held out and gave love to this irascible, splenetic teenage boy. And while he wasn't a perfect dad (and who the hell gets to put that kind of pressure on father? How dare I make that demand as a kid, as if I could ever do better), he was a great dad to a less than great kid.

Biology.

And so much is made of biology, like our connections are defined by chemical similarities within our cells and **not** by shared experiences and shared pains and time-well-spent together. In my head, I'd convinced myself that I wasn't "really one of his," that he'd written me off. *He wouldn't care. Why would he, after all I've done?* He had his "real" kids (and never did he ever, EVER make that distinction between any of us).

None of you have any clue what it means *to know what a dad is* until you've pushed that relationship so far; sullied it; cursed it; insulted it; belittled it; lied to it; used it; pissed and shit on it; defiled it in ways that rightly IT SHOULD NOT BE THERE, that rightly you should have been left rotting in a ditch for what you'd done... only to turn around and find a granite block of unmovable, unbending, unstoppable love... *and arms* wrapped so tightly around you that for the first time in years, you realize you were never alone and that you'd never fall.

And my dad caught me before I hit the ground.

† I kept a journal for a period of four years of my life throughout my drug use — yeah, VERY Basketball Diaries — and I tracked with intricate detail the pills I took. First pill was a "Pink Elephant."

‡   Burn? BURN!? Oh my. You have no idea.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-dan-holliday

What is it like to be an alcoholic?

Karen Opas, Editor, writer, & clumsy typist

What's it like to be an alcoholic? At first, it's great. Truly, truly wonderful. A few glasses of the magic potion and suddenly I was relaxed, happy, having fun, and supremely confident. Alcohol *answered* something in me. It took away my ever-present anxiety. I could be in the moment. I was thirteen the first time I experienced just how sublime being drunk could be.

I could drink a lot (comparatively) without showing it. At fifteen, I was at a bush party where a girlfriend was raped by her date — she was so drunk that she couldn't fight him off — and I remember judging her for getting so drunk, rather than sympathizing.

I turned seventeen and finished high school at the same time. My father told me I could no longer live in the family home. I went on a drunken tour of Europe for a few months and then moved to Banff, where I worked, drank, and drugged. By my seventeenth summer, I was drinking three to four bottles of wine at least five times a week and taking speed to prevent blackouts. But drinking was still fun. I was with a young, beautiful, and hard partying crowd. What I did was normal in context. There were some bad hangovers, a few guys I slept with that I regretted, and a night in the drunk tank when the RCMP found me literally crawling home in skirt and t-shirt in mid-January (think it was about -25 Celsius that night) and I was too drunk to tell them were I lived. They probably saved my life (or at least a few fingers and toes).

A couple of years later, my friends were leaving Banff, giving up the partying and heading to university, careers,marriage, mortgages, kids, and all the grown up stuff.

And some of them were suggesting that I might be partying a bit too hard. I dismissed them as boring a-holes.

But life in a ski town wasn't so much fun anymore, so I went to university. In order to make the money to go there, I headed up to Yellowknife to tend bar at the Gold Range. The way the patrons drank made my drinking seem the epitome of restraint. So, I was able to tell myself that I didn't have a drinking problem. When I started university, I got a part-time job serving tables at the bar where the CFL and NHL players partied. Once again, my drinking and drug habits seemed pretty normal. I dated a player (who would later be booted out of the league for his coke use) who liked that "I could keep up with him." I told myself that I didn't have a problem with drinking because I only drank when I was with other people, so I was a social drinker. REAL alcoholics drank alone — but I had groups of "friends" who lived by different clocks. I could always find people to drink with.

I was twenty-one and drinking was still, mostly, fun. I was getting great grades. But there were warning signs; people I wouldn't hang out with because they were boring (didn't drink more than a glass or two on weeknights), classes I missed because I was too hungover to make it in, I had to borrow money to pay rent and bills, because I was spending my earnings and savings on booze and drugs. Time passed; I dropped out of university because, I told myself, "I don't want this." Actually, I was failing that semester because I was drinking and drugging so heavily that I couldn't do course work or pass exams.

So then, like countless alcoholics before and since, I decided that the problem wasn't me, it was where I lived. So I moved. But no matter where you go, there you are. I was able to stop doing coke and speed in my new town, but my drinking got even heavier to compensate. Oh, and drinking no longer worked its old magic. I had to drink so as not to go crazy, but it didn't make me feel good, it didn't fill me with warmth and good cheer. It had become a dreary necessity.

Drinking pretty much took over my life. I had a few friends who drank as hard as I did. We prided ourselves on it and thought the rest of the world were boring sheep with no sense of adventure. I did things I was ashamed of. Maybe

not the stuff you might be ashamed of — sex was as meaningless as drinking a glass of water by then — but stealing from friends and convincing myself it wasn't theft, that they owed me or would want me to have it. I was best woman at a childhood friend's wedding, and I didn't show up for the ceremony. I had gotten drunk the night before and, truthfully, didn't want to stand up and watch someone be happy and move forward in life. I coveted happiness and hated everyone else for having a better life than I did. I hated myself even more. And the only thing I knew how to do was pick up a bottle.

Alcoholism is lonely. Even when you are surrounded by people, you don't feel the connection. Even when those people really love you. Because you think they love the mask you are holding up to the world, not the real you, not the worm inside that is your core self. And I drank even harder to get rid of that realization.

Being an alcoholic is tedious and fearful. I lived in fear of being found out, and I had to plan every activity to make sure that there was access to alcohol. I'd show up at parties and drop a bottle of wine on the table. Then I'd head to the bathroom and stash a bottle of scotch inside the toilet tank so that I didn't have to worry about running out of booze. And people wouldn't know just how much I was drinking. Over a decade later, I still know the closing hours of all the liquor stores in Vancouver!

Twice, during the last five years of my drinking, I managed to stop for about a month. But the entire time, there was a hamster wheel in my head, one that kept repeating, "I am not drinking. I am not drinking." The only thing I thought about was booze. And how horrible it was not to be drinking any.

I can tell a lot of funny stories about my drinking years. But most of the time I was scared, alone, angry, and bored. I *knew* the future that was coming was a bad one. And then I had that moment of clarity. I almost choked to death on my own vomit, and I realized that I would die if I kept drinking and that I didn't want to die like this. The long process of recovery began. Recovery is amazing and it is brutal. I had to grow up and become a whole person, so that I didn't try and fill the black hole at my core with booze, drugs, sex, drama,

and all the other distractions I had used. Growing up isn't easy, especially when you are twenty years behind the curve. But it is possible, as long as I put in the daily work.

Today, I have a wonderful sober life with great friends, a marriage full of fun and love, interesting, meaningful work, and a comfy home. And I believe that I could lose everything if I decide to pick up a drink again. Maybe that belief is wrong, but I've seen friends who started drinking again be just as bad or worse as they had been in a very short time and their family, careers, and bank accounts disappeared.

Sometimes people ask me if I couldn't just have one glass of wine, how do I know that I would have the same problems with booze after all these years? I usually answer with this, *"If you could play a slot machine that might reward you with a small payout, say $20, but if you got the wrong combination your right thumb got chopped off, would you do it?"* Nobody's ever said they'd play those odds. And neither will I.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-karen-opas

What does it feel like to have Asperger's Syndrome?

Alex K. Chen, InquilineKea/Simfish

You have absolutely zero social intuition (and not just that — but you don't even notice the social cues that allow you to develop that social intuition). As a result, every social situation feels like a potentially awkward situation where you don't know what to do or say (especially when it's so hard to enjoy the things that other people enjoy — and forcing yourself to enjoy what they enjoy doesn't work at all either). It feels like you can only get social interaction through academia, asking questions, trolling/creating drama, attention whoring, playing computer games, or eavesdropping/stalking.

So normally, I just end up studying or reading most of the

time — even when I'm in parties. With that all said, the survival techniques I've used to interact with people have gone a long way over the years. In most normal social situations, for example, I simply don't know what to do other than ask questions. But this survival tactic has caused me to develop such a strong talent in asking questions that I've asked more questions than anyone else on Quora and on many other forums. I'm also known for my questions in Academia too (especially in academic conferences) — I guess all the practice in asking questions has gotten to the point that I my questions made a sufficiently strong impression on a number of professors, and that skill did make me win a top student fellowship at a certain university.

Nonetheless, we can often only rely on unnatural ways of getting information (**especially** the type of "hidden" social information that you can't get from reading a book or website), and some neurotypicals object to the covert ways that we sometimes use to get that information. Nothing gets me angrier at humanity than the objections they use against how we try to obtain that hidden social information, but *shrug* I guess it's part of life.

The other thing is that it's often profoundly isolating to realize that almost no one in the world is going to fully appreciate the obsession that you have with your particular set of interests (and with the particular **details** about your interests, too). No — not even people in Academia (nor other Aspies for that matter) will appreciate the particular ways that you're obsessed with your interests. And the truth is that us Aspies also probably aren't ever going to be able to appreciate the interests of neurotypicals in the ways they carry out their interests. So the end result is that many of us prefer doing things by ourselves. Unless we're playing multiplayer computer games. Oftentimes, people in computer games (like Starcraft II) actually appreciate the fine details of things in Aspie-like detail. This definitely happened when I played Age of Empires II, although I ultimately suck at multiplayer games so I quit competitive multiplayer. With that all said, the Internet allows us to broadcast the details of our interests that we're most obsessed with, and we can *at least* theorize of the theoretical possibility that there might be someone out there who

appreciates things in the same ways that we appreciate them.

Oftentimes, I get along particularly well with foreign students, since being an Aspie is surprisingly similar to being a foreign student in your own country. As long as the foreign students don't have a bunch of other foreign students to hang out with, at least. With foreign students, it's **okay** if a situation is awkward.

People, even those who really like me, always try to keep some distance from me. I definitely notice it, and it often hurts. It has sometimes gotten me angry at the entirety of humanity in the past. But I don't know — at least Academia keeps you sufficiently busy that you always manage to find someone else so that you'll forget your anger at people who ignore you.

I've actually noticed that a number of Aspies can often become prolific trolls as well — since trolling is often one of the only ways they can get people to enjoy their presence (and it often works, quite well, too!). It's **much** easier to get someone to actually laugh at something you say or do (and for a legit reason too) by trolling than by doing something else. Most Aspies seem to troll in a way different from that of most neurotypicals, but it's hard to describe.

It often does feel profoundly isolating, but as Simon Baron-Cohen once said on edge.org, the Internet is super-liberating for all of us. For me in particular, I guess I can usually be okay since I have the combination of Internet and Academia.

One thing I'm known for doing is posting sprees of threads, questions, or status updates. I have almost no intuition for whether or not people will actually like my content (and the most-followed/liked items often surprise me), so I end up with a very low signal to noise ratio on many of my questions/status updates.

And we certainly do appreciate the recognition that a lot of people on the Internet and in educational institutions that people have for Aspies. I used to use Asperger's Syndrome as an excuse for everything, but I no longer use it very much because I started feeling ASHAMED of doing that, because having Asperger's doesn't always excuse us from at least **trying** to understand others a bit more. Nonetheless, I've learned that even when I **do** try to understand others more, I'll still be

different, and unfortunately, there's no way around that, so maybe I'll just have to mention it to others. **At least** a lot of people do try to accommodate themselves to us Aspies, even though we'll probably never be close to anyone (but over Academia/the Internet, that's okay).

I also have ADD, so *that* often makes certain aspects of ASD more "severe." I don't know how to describe it yet.

> **http://www.quora.com/l/boq-alex-k-chen**

What is it like to be in a relationship with someone who has Asperger's?

Laura Copeland, had some relationships

Heartbreaking.

I went to high school in the least glamorous part of California, in a rural town with no shortage of dairy farms, meth labs, and Pontiac GTOs sporting 20-inch rims. I was the only nerd for miles and miles, I thought, until I met Aaron Smith.

Aaron was 6'2", blue-eyed, well-read, and willing to play Scrabble with me for six hours straight without a break. His cerebral traits alone would've made me putty in his hands, but I would soon discover that Aaron had scissorhands, useless for playing with putty.

Most days Aaron sat in the back of our French class, staring out a tiny window in the door. He didn't speak unless called on, and then he'd respond with some brilliant comment to show he wasn't missing any class discussion.

Aaron came and left the second the bell rang, so I never saw him up-close, not until the end of the quarter, when we sat next to each other for a midterm in the computer lab. I finished early and glanced at his screen: He was finished, too, and had a web browser open to LiveJournal. Intrigued that someone else had an account on the site — and wasn't afraid,

like I was, of using it in front of our peers — I committed his username to memory and looked it up when I got home.

His entries were long and lovely, full of eloquent thoughts on philosophy and literature and a bucket-list wish to live in Asia. I left a flattering comment identifying myself, and then I added the screen name in Aaron's profile to my AIM buddy list.

Before long we were chatting all the time, late into the night, and playing marathon Scrabble games online. I grew to value him as a person with whom I could talk about *real* things, like Isaac Asimov and Ayn Rand and whether happiness was all an illusion (yes, my new friend said, and we can't be trusted to measure our own). In a place where it seemed nobody else knew what books were, I'd found my kindred spirit in Aaron.

Our online closeness never parlayed into a friendship at school, though. One of us would say hi when the other walked into the room, and sometimes we'd wave to each other in the halls, but I was too shy to talk to him at length in person, and French was our only period together. The rest of Aaron's day was spent in a portable classroom with the kid who had Down syndrome and a girl I knew from art class who was always writing letters to her father in prison. Aaron didn't show any signs of a broken home life or an intellectual disability — quite the opposite, actually — so I never thought to ask what the deal was with the separate class. I just assumed he was there for some behavioral issue. Maybe he did drugs.

Both of us skipped our senior year and left for college early, and thanks to late-starting schedules, we were staying up chatting even later. I started hinting that we should meet up the next time we were both back home, like in real life, at my favorite hole-in-the-wall coffee shop. Several months had passed since graduation, and I missed the guy.

"No, I don't drink coffee," he typed.

"Me either, but this place has a really good drink with little candy-bar bits. It doesn't even taste like coffee."

"Why would you order coffee if it doesn't taste like coffee?"

"Or you could get tea or whatever," I wrote back. "It'd just be fun to hang out."

I had these scuffles with him every now and again. They

didn't deter my pursuit. To put it crudely, I knew I was Aaron's only opportunity to get laid — intellectual teenage guys are still teenage guys, and in my experience driven by one thing — so I figured he must just be playing hard to get. Eventually, I got him to commit to meeting me for tea.

It was a warm fall day, so I laid out my beat-up board on one of the patio tables on the wrap-around porch at Queen Bean. I was happy to see Aaron when he walked up, and even happier when his Scrabble skills proved just as polished in person. Neither of us said much after some initial catching up — plus some shit-talking on my part, which Aaron never reciprocated — but I was actually relieved that there wasn't any pressure to keep a constant conversation going. I'm always a bit suspicious of people who are excessively chatty. Plus, I had to pay close attention during our games, or my inevitable loss would be even more shameful.

At one point, another regular at the cafe recognized me, and she came over to say hi and check out the game. Aaron apparently felt no need to be friendly to my other friend. He just sat there, solemnly staring, and offered only the slightest and awkwardest smile when I made introductions. My other friend would later ask who Aaron was, exactly, because he seemed, um, kinda weird.

But I was weird, too, in my own way. Isn't everyone? Aaron's awkwardness didn't faze me, and it didn't change the fact that he was hot, smart, had an excellent memory for little things I told him, and seemed entertained by the god-awful crazy shit I wrote in my Livejournal. He'd memorized the minutiae from my day-to-day life, and that meant more to me than his grace with strangers. It also meant he liked me, right? Maybe he was just uncomfortable at cafes.

"I'm feeling kinda stir-crazy, sitting here this long," I said after he'd beaten me at a second game. "What about you?"

"No," Aaron said. "I'm not stir-crazy."

We had half a dozen exchanges like this before I decided to lead the horse to water and directly assert what I'd been hinting: that we go back to his place. OK, he said. I followed him there in my own car and spent most of the drive second-guessing myself. Was I being too pushy?

The sun had set in the ten minutes it took us to get there,

and it was dark by the time we pulled up to the small duplex Aaron shared with his mother (another thing we had in common: I lived in close quarters with a single mom, too). Mrs. Smith was a mystery shopper, Aaron told me as he unlocked the door, and wouldn't be back for a while.

The living room was dark, with low ceilings and wall-to-wall bookshelves. A futon, covered in lint and too small for someone Aaron's height, was left open in the middle of the room. The frame dug into my pant legs when I sat down.

Aaron never took a seat, preferring instead to pace. These are my books, he told me, fingering their spines and pulling out a few, one at a time. Most were scifi novels, and he recounted their plots in painful detail. You'd like this one, he said. He said it about every book he showed me, indiscriminately, even though he knew I didn't care for the genre. This went on for a couple hours.

I waited and waited for something more to happen, but nothing ever did, not even when I got him, walked over to him, stood close and tried to *will* my friend out of his shell. I didn't just want to hook up; I would've taken emotional closeness, too, even the platonic kind that grows from discussing shared life experiences. I tried taking the lead again — what kind of music do you like? what do you want to do after college? — but Aaron would deflect my questions with one-word answers and go back to talking about the books. He didn't listen to music, he said. But this one, this book, it's really great, he said. When was he going to stop talking about the books? Even a book*seller* at a book*shop* would've at least asked what brought me into the store that day.

The more Aaron talked, the more I was broken down by self-doubt: I'm not this guy's intellectual equal, after all. I'm not pretty enough. I spend too much time online, and now I've lost the art of interacting with live human beings. I left, crestfallen, when he was holding *Of Men and Monsters* in his hands and telling me about a society where the humans had turned into vermin living in the walls of monster's houses.

I'm an average-looking girl, maybe a little above-average, but certainly not some goddess who can get any guy she wants. My night with Aaron wasn't a disaster because we didn't hook up — that would've been normal and OK. It was a disaster be-

cause I felt like I was hanging out alone. I would've preferred he reject me.

Trainwreck dates are often described as ones where the couple "had no chemistry," but a more accurate description is to say that they had *bad* chemistry. They aren't the same. With Aaron, there really was no chemistry. And that void, that unknowing — it's much harder to swallow than rejection.

A few days after we hung out, when we were back to chatting on AIM, I learned that our evening together had been one of his more favorable social encounters.

He typed, "When you were at my house, did you want me to kiss you?"

Had I been twenty-seven, not seventeen, I would've explained to him — in plain language — that, yes, when a girl invites herself over, a girl who talks to you for hours online more nights than not, she wants you to kiss her. But I didn't say it. I backed my way out of the conversation and didn't talk to him again. Bitch move? Maybe. I have more empathy now. Back then I was in college, where well-read guys ran rampant. I didn't need the uphill battle.

A couple years ago, out of the blue, Aaron sent me this:

> I hope this is still your e-mail address. You know, I've discovered that overall I don't really like writing all that much. It sometimes depresses me. So I guess we have less in common than I first thought when we talked back in high school. Yeah, in fact a lot has changed, but I still wanted to catch up.

> I don't know what's happened when we've tried to talk before — I'm sure I did something wrong — but if you'd like to start corresponding again, I've just rediscovered e-mail.

> I'm including a picture of Nami from One Piece, because she reminds me of you every time I see her.

Nami is a busty anime character with short orange hair. No resemblance, but the picture at least cleared up the mystery of whether Aaron found me attractive.

Since his address was now in my contacts list, he showed up as a suggested friend on Facebook. He has a master's in history now and lives in Japan, teaching English as an expat

in a country where he doesn't speak the language.

I flicked through his photo albums, which look like what you get back when you develop the party-favor disposable cameras from a wedding that had an open bar — random shots of found objects, except without any shots of faces. Hundreds and hundreds of pictures spanning several years and not a single one contains another person. And the photos of Aaron, they're all self-portraits: his reflection in a car window, in a puddle on the sidewalk, in the mirror at a barbershop; his head in front of some Japanese tourist trap, his arm outstretched to fit everything in the frame. Where are his friends? Did he never get a girlfriend? Why was there never anyone around to take Aaron's picture?

I'm a journalist, and last year I interviewed a man with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS) who has lost his ability to speak, swallow, or move any body part but his eyes. He speaks through an optically controlled computer, blinking out a letter at a time, like Stephen Hawking does with his cheek. I never get scared of interviewing someone, but I was terrified of interviewing him.

Minutes after I arrived, though, the man's charm and humor had disarmed my nerves. Rather than wanting to leave, I wanted more time with him. The computer voice, the whooshing of the ventilator, the aide in the room, the delay before his replies — it all fades into the background and a warmth breaks through and *you can feel who he is*. It's no different than talking to anyone else.

Aaron has boundless advantages over a person in the late stages of ALS. He can change the volume and tone of his voice, laugh, crinkle his face, punctuate his sentences with hand gestures. He can tear across the room and give you a hug or a high-five or a slap on the ass. But you still can't feel who he is. Talking to him is worlds different from talking to anyone else. He's trapped in ice without a pick.

Despite what he said about losing interest in writing, Aaron still does it — hard habit to break — on a Wordpress blog that, bless his heart, shows up on the first page of search results for anyone who Googles his name. I spent a couple hours recently working my way back through the archives, just like I had ten years ago when I found his Livejournal. He's still a

good writer, gifted at churning out honest prose.

On his new blog, in between blunt descriptions of a new nephew (who "came out of [Aaron's] sister's insides") and a night at the bar (he still hasn't discovered his tolerance for alcohol), I found a painful nugget of truth, a revealing two sentences on his failed attempts at dating. I read it and realized that, if given the option of being paralyzed in midlife from ALS or reaching old age with an autism spectrum disorder, I'd have to think hard before picking. *I don't know why I'm like this*, my old friend wrote. *It's like I'm deaf to a dog-whistle everyone else can hear.*

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-laura-copeland

What does it feel like to have your sibling die?

John Clover, one day

Pretty miserable.

My sister died at the age of eighteen when I was sixteen.

She was attending her first semester of college majoring in Psychology at Florida State University when she came down with mono.

She came home to recover and due to her weakened immune system she ended up with viral pneumonia. I only remember some bits so they may not fit together (I still remember the date she died as different from her official date of death among other things), but as her symptoms worsened, my parents contacted her doctor on a Friday, who said to wait until Monday to come in, since the symptoms of the pneumonia were much the same as those of the mono.

My sister died before she could get to the doctor.

I remember my parents coming into my bedroom at night and waking me up, saying "Rebecca isn't breathing!"

Like a good Boy Scout, I was always prepared. I stormed

down the stairs, and went through the procedures I was certified for. My sister was on the floor next to the couch where she had been sleeping. There was fluid in her airway, I cleared it and began CPR. I told my parents to call 911 and continued until the paramedics arrived.

I remember the stain on the floor next to her head where I cleared her airway, and worrying about who would clean it up so my parents wouldn't have to see it. I remember the sound the air made as it left her lungs, like a balloon emptying out. There was no resistance, no life. There seemed to be a glimmer of hope when the paramedics attempted to revive her with shock paddles, but I think this was just wishful thinking.

We got in our car and followed them to the hospital where after a short time we were moved to a grievance room where we got to wait for a doctor to tell us what we already knew. It was hell to wait.

We were brought to see her body and told to collect any of her jewelry. It was the world's worst goodbye, even worse for my other two sisters who were out of town and not able to be present.

I had dreams she was still there, I would wake up thinking she was in the next room. I fantasized that she had been kidnapped, and one day she would come back and we'd be reunited.

I remember one of the last things I did for my sister and it makes me happy. She was hungry and weak from being sick, and I made her Kraft Mac and Cheese and she liked it. I'm really glad that by sheer luck I wasn't a dick little brother and that time, I made an effort to help her out.

I didn't cry and I didn't talk to anyone about my feelings. She died in December of 1996, and I remember the first time I cried was when I was driving to my friend's house and Hale-Bopp was near perihelion (around Feb/April 1997), and Lighting Crashes by Live was on the radio.

I pulled over and looked out my window at the comet, and cried. I still can't listen to that song. I pulled myself together and went to my friend's house and didn't cry again for I don't know how long.

Everything changed.

My mom started taking medication (it helped), my dad

took anger management classes and started giving very awkward hugs, as if he hadn't been properly trained on when and how to deliver affection (he wasn't unaffectionate before, but apparently he must have been instructed that he was doing it wrong and he should instead be hugging people, it felt awkward and alien, almost funny at first). He's greatly improved since then.

I was conscious of how I was suddenly treated differently and most of the time I tried to make a conscious effort not to take advantage of it. It was very easy to take advantage of the situation, even by accident, and that made me feel even more guilty, here I was making my life easier by taking advantage of the miserable situation that my sister died.

I got away with being a pretty bad student because of my "situation," and it wasn't my situation that was the problem it was that I was a pretty crappy student.

I stopped going to Boy Scouts because I felt really awkward being around my peers, like it was easier to avoid them than to make them feel obligated to console me or to try to relate. I regret this.

Every year I age, every new job I take, or adventure I go on, I wonder what my sister would have been doing, two years ahead of me. I like to think of her that way.

My family read her diary from college, and I refused to read it. I knew there were entries she made in it about doing drugs and drinking as a freshman, and I didn't want to remember her that way. She was the cheerleader who looked out for her nerdy little brother and introduced him to Paula Abdul and Michael Jackson. (All my sisters introduced me to their favorite music, perhaps trying to convince me to pick a side, and to this day I still love it all).

Every day, and in everything I do, I ask myself if she would be proud, if she would say, "Wow, John, that's awesome!"

It's a burden, but it's also a great driving force, it makes me live my life.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-john-clover

What's it like to come from a billion-dollar family?

John H. Hillman, V, sorry about the Roman numeral.

In my case it is pretty normal. To be clear, I am not "of the wealth" that flows through my family, I benefit from a minor tributary of the original fortune. I am not a poor person by any means, and I am super grateful for my family history, tradition, and the regional respect given towards us. Something that not only I, but the patriarch and matriarch Hillmans, have always tried to repay. **The reality is: the city that helped us, comes first.**

Without giving a full family history — which has already been done way better than I could — the gist of it is: I had a relative seven or eight generations ago who did very well cooking iron in Kentucky/Tennessee in the 1850s. A generation continued that success though the U.S. Civil War with some pitfalls until around the 1900s when some southerner Hillmans traveled to a city which was a perfect fit for industrial steel revolution: Pittsburgh. When the U.S. steel industry began to slump beginning in the 1960s my great-uncle Henry diversified into many things, notably an early Kleiner Perkins investment, international real estate, and others. I believe he has been on the Forbes 400 since the first list, though I may be wrong. The rest can be found via Google.

How does it feel for me? Aside from knowing that I come from solid stock, *which I try to live up to*, I have constant reminders such as the Hillman Library, which was named after my great-grandfather and is the main library of the University of Pittsburgh. The question I most often hear about that building is: "*Don't you like, own a library or something?*" Other than that there is The Hillman Cancer Center, which is a fantastic facility, every once in awhile, I have misguided people *thanking me* because their cancer was "cured." I don't like that at all, it makes me feel uncomfortable. The Hillman Center for Future Generation Technologies part of Carnegie Mellon University is cool-looking (inside and out) and is a

great partnership with Gates and CMU, but not something the average person cares about, including me. Then there are things like Hillman Hall of Minerals and Gems, part of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History that are so amazing, but also made me feel awkward as a first grader visiting with my school. Kids can be tough. I could name over fifty other really important buildings/endowments/things our family's success has benefited, but most people don't care. And it can all be found without me telling you.

I have great friends. I can't clarify that enough. They are all lifelong friends who know me well. It isn't like I have hangers-on or people who want to be in my life because of a perceived wealth, though I believe others in my family might have that problem.

Every month, I get a stranger that says "Hey, are you related to *the Hillmans…?"* or something like that. Basically I just go with the flow. I am modest, live a modest life, and it's all just fun and respect. Respect for my family and respect for people that are interested in "us." When I think of my family's fortunes I think of how much has been given back to Pittsburgh, and that is mainly how I identify with it.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-john-h-hillman-v

INTELLIGENCE

What does it feel like to be stupid?

Anon User

The following is a very unusual account of a true but unusual experience:

I had an arterial problem for a couple of years, which reduced blood supply to my heart and brain and depleted B vitamins from my nerves (to keep the heart in good repair). Although there is some vagueness as to the mechanisms, this made me forgetful, slow, and easily overwhelmed. In short, I felt like I was stupid compared to what I was used to, and I was.

It was frightening at first because I knew something wasn't right, but didn't know what, and very worrying for my career because I was simply not very good any more.

However, once I got used to it and resigned myself, it was great. Even though I knew I had a worrying illness, I was happy as a pig in mud. I no longer had the arrogance of being frustrated with slow people, I abandoned many projects, which reduced a lot of stress, I could enjoy films without knowing what would happen (my nickname before this used to be 'comic book guy' if you get the reference), and I became amazingly laid back and happy-go-lucky. I got on with people much better. I developed much more respect for one of my friends in particular who I always considered slow — it turned out he is much deeper than I thought, I just never had the patience to notice before. You could say I had more time to look around. The world just made more sense. The only negative, apart from struggling to perform at work, and having to write everything down, was that I no longer found sci-fi interesting — it just didn't seem important. (I'm not joking, although it sounds like a *cliché*.)

Eventually after more physical and life threatening symptoms developed, I got the right tests and they found my arteries were blocked up (two out of three of my main coronary arteries 100% blocked — they couldn't work out why I was alive — it later turned out that I had unusually good peripheral circulation from my intense cycling). I've since had stents to open up the arteries again and made a full recovery.

After a year or so, I am almost as 'clever' as I used to be, although I tend to ignore distractions more than I used to and focus on a smaller number of projects. I'm still more laid back than I used to be though, and have more patience with people. Most people still find me more socially competent. I also enjoy sci-fi again.

So an unusual perspective, from a fairly unusual circumstance, but that's what it feels like to be be stupid when you used to be fairly bright. In some ways, it was a great learning experience, although obviously in other ways it is a life changing fact I have to live with. Not many people get to walk about in other peoples shoes, and then pick up where they left off. Plus it's obviously nice to still be alive.

In short, I would say that the frustration of dealing with slower people is worse than being one of the slower people, even if you know you are slow. Obviously most people who are relatively slow don't know it, but I think I've glimpsed how they experience the world.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-9

What does it feel like to be both very physically beautiful and very academically intelligent?

Anon User

Being intelligent and attractive is a continuous test of character. It's incredibly tempting to rely on your looks to get you places, and you have to make and adhere to a firm decision of not taking that ticket because you can. It's also really lonely. You can't really complain about it to anyone because to do so, you'd have to break the unspoken convention of never acknowledging your own beauty. Even when writing this answer, I found myself wishing I could share it with friends but knowing that to do so would be socially unacceptable. When you're pretty, people mock you if you say anything negative about your looks, but they would find you stuck-up and intolerable if you actually admitted that you knew people found you attractive.

HOW IT AFFECTS YOUR CHILDHOOD

If you have siblings, no matter how smart you are, you are "the pretty one." Your sister is jealous but you don't realize that's why she says things about how she's so much smarter than you are and that your parents think you're dumb in comparison. You grow up learning that looks matter a lot. My immigrant grandparent was prouder of my looks than my education, which was a startling truth to discover. All of your

teachers love you and you can't really empathize with the students whom they don't like.

My working style may not be perfect but I am very hard-working. I'm proud of both my looks and my mind but doubt each of them in different ways. For my looks, I try to not dwell on them as much as possible. I care about dressing well and never appearing like a slob but I'm disappointed in myself when I spend too much time in a mirror or too much time thinking about a compliment I've received.

When I was younger, I really didn't understand why people seemed to find me so attractive — I didn't fit the Barbie conventions of beauty that I was familiar with. In some ways it was almost easier back then, because I felt insecure about my appearance like all of my peers and considered their remarks on how jealous they were of me to be insincere.

When I grew out of my adolescence, I finally started to understand that in some objective way, I was very attractive to some non-zero portion of society. Even though I still don't think of myself as beautiful in my heart-of-hearts, I've finally acknowledged to myself that I am to other people. Although this realization sounds very coming-of-age-y and like something you should congratulate me on ("You're no longer an insecure teenager who has body image issues!") it actually led to a lot of the self-doubt about my intelligence. Before, I struggled with the usual questions about how smart I was — was it just because I worked really hard? — but now I had new doubts. Was I only getting good grades because I was pretty? Did my teachers like me more because I had a great smile? How much did I really deserve my A+'s? My admission to a prestigious university made me unreasonably happy. There was no photo of me attached to the application — this was my moment to feel validated. The paranoid voice in your head whispers of letters of recommendation and grades and how they could be influenced by your attractiveness but you are deaf to them.

In college, there are occasional awkward moments with your TAs (I was lucky enough to never have anything too egregious with a professor). One TA for a lab told me that I

had been going to do something that I shouldn't have and he had called my name to tell me to stop, but when I turned with a smile, he was kind of blindsided and let me carry on. I don't know how common this is though.

HOW IT AFFECTS YOU PERSONALLY

I alluded to this in the introduction, but having both looks and brains forces you to make a choice early on about how much you should use each to your advantage. I chose to develop my brain and try to the best of my ability ignore the effect that my appearance had on others. One thing I had to do after making that decision was figure out where to draw the line in terms of what kind of help and favors it's acceptable to accept and what kind are not. Pretty people have the advantage of others liking being around them and not having to repay any favors, as if their presence is enough. I wasn't able to help whether or not the people helping me were attracted to me or not but I did try and behave as much as possible like I didn't take their help for granted. For me, this meant that whenever a classmate helped me with my work or to understand the material, I made sure to do something to show my gratitude, whether it be by baking them cookies or by helping them with homework for another class.

HOW IT AFFECTS YOU INTELLECTUALLY

Being intelligent and attractive can cause more pain than you realize. It's like the difference between humans and other animals, in that only we know that we'll someday die and dwell upon that. Similarly, as an intelligent person, I am fully aware of the fact that my beauty is ephemeral. In some ways, you look forward to being freed from the stifling weight of constantly worrying about your looks and how much your personal/intellectual merit has gotten you in life versus your looks. But mostly, you're afraid. I've never known a life of being unattractive to other people. I have no idea how much I've been living a "charmed life" or not because of them. I redouble my resolve to cultivate a mind so bright and a soul so light that even without my looks, I will be of value to my friends, family, and the world at large.

More than they do for your college acceptances, a lot of people assume that you've gotten the position at the awesome company you're at in large part because of your appearance. These aren't even just strangers — when I was offered a job at a dream company, my friends' justification for it was that my future boss had a crush on me. Although I played it off like it was a joke, that was a devastating blow. I was pretty angry that they said and thought that AND that they felt like it was perfectly acceptable to say, too. I wanted to remind them that I had been invited to interview at the company before they had any idea of what I looked like.

One of my friends is the child of a very, very successful parent. He and I would talk about using his parents' connections to get his foot in the door for things. His philosophy was that although it wasn't elegant, it wasn't unthinkable. He believed that because anyone else in his place would do the same, it wasn't reprehensible for him to do so. I've occasionally thought about that and if the same should apply to looks. So far, to the best of my conscious ability, I have avoided wielding my attractiveness as a tool for job-hunting.

HOW IT AFFECTS YOU SOCIALLY

Being both attractive and intelligent is a never-ending source of stress in high school. You wade between the popular crowd and the honors kids. It's an uneasy time, because your nerdy friends desperately despise your popular friends for having everything they think they want and your popular friends forget your nerdy friends even exist. Your popular friends are fun to be with because it's nice to not stand out too much. When you're only one pretty face in a group of pretty faces, you belong. But, you can't really party and date the quarterback if you want to do well in your classes and you really do want to do well in your classes. So, slowly, you drift to the smart kids side. You really count on your grades to give you a sense of worth, because you earned them in a way that you can never say of your looks.

Post high school, your mixture of looks and intelligence can still cause social pain. I had a roommate in college who once offhandedly told me that she would never introduce me

to a guy she liked before they started dating. The strange thing was that she meant it as a compliment of sorts — that she thought he'd never fall for her if he met me first. But really, that made me feel pretty awful. Nobody wants to unintentionally be the type of person that anyone is afraid to introduce their crush or significant other to. Likewise, it can be pretty tough to have close guy friends who have girlfriends. No matter how uninterested either/both of you are, the girlfriend feels threatened by your presence in his life. You hate causing strife, so you learn to back off as soon as one of your friends starts dating someone seriously.

In terms of your love life, being both attractive and intelligent heavily influences both who/how you date and your outlook on dating in general. Every pretty girl, intelligent or not, is used to the oafs who try to hit on them. The difference between the smart and pretty and the not smart but pretty is that the former attract more of the intelligent, nerdy guys. These guys are usually more well-intentioned than their oafish counterparts. They don't mean to make you uncomfortable with their spontaneous compliments. But some of them are less direct about what they want. We all know about these so-called "nice guys" who believe that they're being unfairly friend zoned. I suspect that these guys are, more often than not, guys of slightly above to vastly above average intelligence and as such, are drawn to the pretty and smart women. That means that we get to deal with them often.

Smart and attractive guys can be really hard to find and sometimes you have to compromise. I made the choice, more subconsciously than not, to optimize for intelligence in guys that I date rather than hotness. I've idly wondered if maybe the best guys for smart, beautiful women to date aren't actually the rich and successful ones. Only they can really potentially understand what it's like to fear that you are loved for something other than your sparkling personality.

Every now and then, you find a real gem of a boyfriend. He acts as though he's pulled the winning lottery ticket by catching a smart and beautiful girlfriend and is slow to take that for granted. Although you're pleased that he thinks you're

beautiful, you occasionally have nagging doubts about how much he likes you for your looks versus your personality/intelligence. ("I mostly believe that he thinks I'm smart but would he date me if I weren't pretty too?") It's enough to make you a little paranoid and treat dating more cautiously than your other friends.

If a boyfriend didn't find me attractive, I'd be upset, but it's also of vital importance to me that he believe me to be very intelligent. This quotation in Ethan Hein's answer is very apt: "As a female friend of mine once told me, 'The pretty ones want to be told they're smart, and the smart ones want to be told they're pretty.'"

This is a tough question to answer, like many of the other questions about personal experiences, because I don't know any other reality, but I gave it a fair shot.

At the end of the day, we really want you (you, as in, anyone whose opinion we respect and trust) to find us to be intelligent. Most of the compliments that I treasure the most are the ones which had something to do with my brain — a colleague who told me that he found my analysis to be incredibly insightful, a former classmate who mentioned my "brilliance" — these are the ones I hold dear. Most of the time, being attractive and intelligent is a very positive experience but I hope my answer gave you a peek into some of the less easy-to-guess aspects of this experience.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-10

What does it feel like to be unattractive and desired by none?

Anon User

It's been truly awful. I feel like I'm missing out on a lot of life.

I topped out a bit over 5′ tall. As a male, that's the kiss of death. Unlike other forms of unattractiveness, there's nothing I can do about it. If you're overweight, you can try going to the gym. Women who are concerned about their chest can get that fixed. If you're a jackass, you can pretend to be nice for as long as it's necessary. If you can't get an erection, just check your email.

It's just completely capricious and unfair. If I were female, it wouldn't be an issue at all. I can't think of a comparable issue for women. It's also something that was largely out of my control.

I'm smart, fairly well off financially, interesting, well-traveled, loyal and extremely generous... but all that hasn't been able to overcome my height. The research shows that unless I become a millionaire, I'm pretty much out of luck. If I could spend $500,000 to become 5′10″, I'd do it without thinking twice.

Being short is a triple whammy because it affects two other things that women value: confidence and clothes. While I try to be confident, it is hard when you haven't had a lot of success. Buying clothes is a real challenge and even with some tailoring I have to wear clothes that are too big for me.

I remember one speed dating event where a woman spent the whole ten minutes with me filing her nails and doing her make up. I wasn't interested in her anyway, but *geez*. How hard is it to be polite for ten minutes?

It feels like I have no choices, and I know that on a few occasions, I've continued to pursue things that weren't great because, hey, there was at least a bit of interest. Note to self: an atheist dating someone in seminary is not a good idea.

In a weird way, it's an invisible thing, despite being a completely visible thing. My friends (male and female) will make

jokes about short men in front of me. While they wouldn't make such comments about race, sexuality, etc., it seems perfectly socially acceptable to mock short men. Hollywood regularly mocks short men and perpetuates negative stereotypes, despite the fact that many of Hollywood's leading men and other celebrities are short (Tom Cruise, Dustin Hoffman, Jon Stewart, George Stephanopoulos).

There's also a lack of support, because my friends don't see the issue. "It's all in your head." Undoubtedly, rejection after rejection does take its toll on your psyche. I've tried going to therapy. Obviously, no amount of therapy can make me taller. But it also hasn't helped because there's just no relatability.

There are support groups for just about everything, but I haven't been able to find any support for my challenges. In watching the outpouring of support for bullied homosexuals, I can't help but think, "Why isn't anyone supporting me?" (And, yes, I do support the bullied homosexuals.)

At least a couple of times in my life, guy friends have deserted me. As best as I've been able to tell it's because they felt I was hurting their game.

A female friend once told me that it was kind of like winning the lottery. She meant that I had to keep playing. But sometimes it does feel like my odds are like playing Powerball, which are a lot less than getting struck by lightning.

I sometimes get the sense that women, including attractive women, will let themselves get close to me because they don't consider that I could possibly be interested in them. That ends up being even more crushing.

I also get to hear female friends go on about what jerks all men are, how they cheat, aren't trustworthy, etc. and I see the jerks that women are willing to tolerate. That really grates on me.

Being an unattractive man is especially hard because men are the ones expected to make the first move. This means constantly being subjected to rejection.

Outside the dating world, it just seems like things are much easier for others. I can't quantify it, but it's a feeling that sticks with me. People seem less willing to help unattractive people. I'm reminded of the 30 Rock episodes with Jon Hamm, where people fall all over each other to do things

for him because he's attractive.

Even moderately attractive female friends have expectations of what people will do for them that go way beyond what I would expect people to do for me. This isn't a case of getting what you give. I've been very generous to others, both with time and money. I've learned not to expect that others would do for me what I would do for them.

When I'm at parties with friends who have kids, it's pretty common to hear them cooing about how big their kids have gotten. I know it's not anything directly about me, but it's a constant reinforcement of how important size is in our culture.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-11

What's it like to pay for sex on a regular basis?

Anon User

I'm in a good position to answer this as I've probably seen around a hundred plus hookers since I was a teenager. I'm not proud of that, but not ashamed either. It is what it is.

What's it like to pay for sex on a regular basis? Hmmm. Disappointing. Thrilling. Painful. Fun. Abnormal. Pleasurable. Isolating. Eventually, boring.

I was always of the school of thought that paying for it was more honest than sleazing on/trying to impress a girl all night in some sticky-floored nightclub with a dozen other guys all doing the same just to get into her pants. It always seemed undignified to me. Paying for the pleasure always seemed like playing on a more open and level playing field. The nature of the encounter was explicit — no pretense or flirting was necessary. To liken paying for sex as charity on my part would of course be ludicrous, but there was always a part of me that liked the fact that I could get what I wanted, and in return, they would be able to pay their rent, bills, what-

ever. Sometimes it really does seem like a win-win situation. I remember meeting some beautiful girls, full of personality, although those memories are always memories half-buried in the dank recesses of my long-term recall. If I could kid myself that all of the great times I had weren't about money, and didn't have the clock counting down in the background, then I could conceivably find myself grinning from ear-to-ear every day. But I can't, and along with those factors, the thing that most tarnishes my memories of my most passionate nights (sounds corny, but I can't think of how else to describe them) is that they were had when I was at my lowest ebb, broken-up, grieving, alone (I've been fighting clinical depression for the last seven years). **"Sex is the last refuge of the miserable,"** Quentin Crisp said. All of my good nights were bittersweet.

And of course you get attached to some of them, love their foreign accent, their pep, their seemingly indefatigable lust for life and pleasure. Italian, South African, Czech, Hungarian, Brazilian, Spanish, Jamaican, Chinese, French, Ethiopian, Swedish — all a phone call away. I remember a wonderful brothel in my hometown just a twenty minute bus ride away from my home that had a procession of lovely, petite girls that were fun to talk to and great in the sack (the petite part was important as I'm on the shorter side myself). The atmosphere was very sex-positive, almost communal. And I guess that's what helps to give the illusion of love — their availability. If you're lucky, they'll leave you with something to think about too, some little pearl of wisdom, some kind of reassurance, something with some little nugget of truth to it. I remember telling one woman that she should work as a counselor, not a prostitute, after I had opened up to her about how I was feeling about my car crash of a life and after she had given me some helpful words of advice. She was in her forties, Italian, and had kids. She turned round to me and said, "I am what I am and my life is my life." It was one of the most powerful things I had ever heard. A simple acceptance of her life without anxiety or judgement. You'd have to be pretty desperate to fall in love with them — at least, within the context of how you meet them — but a young man like me can cherish and love those words and those kinds of encounters that seem fraught with some greater significance brought about through shared

feelings of being lost in an uncertain world. Actually, I always valued that as much as the sex. The connection, the conversation. I often never felt much different from the girls I was meeting. There was something wonderful about being able to be completely naked, physically and mentally, with someone lying across the bed from you, with no fear of judgement, or recriminations.

BUT, the last few encounters I've had have been awful, for reasons I won't go into here. The universe telling me to give it up, maybe. And I should. I should because I want to pursue a career in the medical field; I have aspirations to be a solid citizen — to grow out of being a idle denizen. I should because it hurts. It's probably the most spiritually damaging activity you could engage in, and I always wondered how these girls could be so tough to stand it. Prostitution demeans the punter and the working girl in almost equal measure. Like others have said, it's not real intimacy. There were many times when I would feel so dirty afterwards, many times when I knew the girl hated my guts, when I had knocked on their doors at three in the morning and got them out of bed, when I knew they missed their home country, their family.

I know I can leave this habit behind me, and I do know that I can't do this forever — the finer, more noble things in life now require more of my attention. I watched Steve McQueen's film "*Shame*" the other day and started sobbing uncontrollably as everything Michael Fassbender's character went through was instantly recognizable and relatable to me.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-anon-user-12

WEDDINGS

What does it feel like to cancel your wedding?

Anon User

I met Stephen when I was at University. A few years older than myself, he was a junior doctor at the local hospital

(friend of a friend type thing).

I was bowled over by what I thought was his charm and sophistication; I later came to realize that he was manipulative and cold but more of that later.

He had a relatively privileged upbringing as the only child of older parents who made sacrifices (enormous sacrifices, really), whilst I was the younger of two children in a family where my dad had made a reasonable amount of money from his own business.

I was somewhat naive and thought he was 'so special' when I saw him in his open top sports car. He did all of the things that I thought of as 'exotic' (windsurfing, skiing, flying lessons) and he seemed to have an aura around him that attracted a circle of followers.

For some unknown reason, he turned his attention to me. In hindsight, I wonder if it coincided with me arriving at a cricket match with my brother in a (borrowed) Porsche.

I was wooed in classic fashion, flowers, poems, grand romantic gestures etc. You name it, he did it. I can't begin to explain how flattering it was.

He asked me to marry him after three months; he telephoned my dad to ask for his permission. Some friends thought I was mad, but I told them that he was the love of my life. It was only later I learnt that he had asked my dad for money towards the engagement ring because I wanted an expensive one (this wasn't true and he certainly didn't spend the amount he had 'borrowed').

The wedding was booked for the following September, again hindsight would suggest an undue haste.

Only the best was good enough for Stephen; my parents had suggested a local hotel, but he pushed for a five star hotel in a stately home. The guest list grew and grew, two hundred guests to a four course meal after the wedding, with another three hundred in the evening.

A string quartet, a live band, a photographer from London because anybody local was too 'provincial' for him. I was complicit in all of this, swept along in the 'excitement.'

Of course, my dad was picking up the bill for all of this. And 'all of this' was (grotesquely) expensive. The meal alone was just over £100 per head. The champagne had to be vin-

tage, the flowers needed to be 'better than anyone else's.'

I started to feel uneasy about four months before the 'big day.' There was nothing specific, but I started to have doubts about him.

We had been to collect his new car from the garage, and I saw the way he spoke to the salesman and I felt shame. This was particularly relevant to me because my dad was 'a used car salesman' as Stephen put it! The fact that my dad owned several garages that were successful and the fact that my dad was paying for everything didn't seem to occur to him.

My uneasiness and unhappiness grew, I lost weight (a lot of it), I didn't sleep; I was drinking more than I should.

I finally made my decision three days (yes, three days) before the wedding. I told my dad first.

You need to know my dad was from working class stock, self-made man, down to earth etc he looked me up and down, touched my hair, hugged me, and said, "Better now than afterwards."

If only my mum had been so understanding. She said I had 'brought shame on the family!'

I told Stephen, he looked at me coldly and said I had 'humiliated' him. Which I had probably, but never once did he tell me he loved me, he didn't cry (like I was doing).

The next couple of days passed in a blur, my dad's secretary (Janet — I'll love her forever) took over cancelling everything.

My mum didn't speak to me. At all. My dad gave me some cash, and my brother drove me to a rented cottage in Devon, and I spent a week wandering along the coast, crying.

My mum didn't speak to me for about three months; even now she wears a pinched expression when she looks at me sometimes.

One of my friends told me that she had never liked him; she thought he was 'rude with a sense of entitlement.'

You asked how it felt to cancel a wedding: it felt awful. It still feels awful. It isn't about the money, which my dad lost (although I feel tremendous guilt), it's about my feelings of letting people down.

I've cried again writing this; I don't know why I got swept away by the event… the romance of it perhaps.

I do know that not marrying him was the right decision.

I just did it too late.

HEROISM

What is the most heroic thing you have ever done?

Drew Young Shin, Cardiology for kids

I ate a cockroach.
This requires an explanation.

While a trainee as a pediatric cardiologist during my rotation in the cardiac ICU, I met a stoic twelve-year-old girl (her fictitious name will be Tammy) diagnosed with heart condition called **dilated cardiomyopathy**. The heart muscle was weakened to the point where it no longer could sustain the needs of the body without the support of continuous infusions of powerful medications. There was no other option: she needed a heart transplant. She was stuck in the ICU, mostly bed-bound, waiting for a new heart. Depending on where you are in the United States, the average wait period for a matched kid-sized heart to become available for donation is five to six months. For many patients, it's simply too long, and some die waiting.

When I met Tammy, she was emaciated, weakened, depressed, and well into her third month of hospitalization with no word of an available heart. She struggled as an adolescent would — frustrated with life, isolated from her friends, literally plugged into pumps and IV bags, and surrounded by rotating physicians and probing medical students. I couldn't help but to notice that her room was her metaphorical aquarium, cage, even prison cell. Passerby ICU staff would constantly walk by, some would take the time to peer in, a minority would walk in, but mostly to examine her or drop off her meals. I overheard a cardiology fellow joke to another, referring to Tammy as the "mascot" of the cardiac ICU given her extensive length of hospitalization. I'm not entirely sure she didn't overhear it

as well. Her view from inside to outside must have solidified the feeling: healthy people laughing, interacting, going home to family and friends.

Tammy's response was to be severely withdrawn. Emotionally shutdown.

When I was assigned to her, I tried to connect with her, but could not get any traction. I was nervous as a new trainee, and my goal really was not to screw up her medical treatment plan. But recognizing her depression, I did consult child psychiatry to help her during this time. I stopped by her bedside multiple times throughout the day to chat, specifically avoiding medical jargon. During the first few weeks, I ended up mostly speaking to her mother, as she stayed withdrawn. After some time, through subtle probing, I discovered one of her favorite TV shows was "Fear Factor" — a reality based TV show that puts contestants through extreme challenges. I started watching the show so that we had something in common to talk about.

I had the idea to bring "Fear Factor" to the Cardiac ICU.

After convincing several of my colleagues, nurses and even the ICU attending to participate, we set up daily challenges for the medical staff to go through, very much in a Fear Factor manner. Wheelchair races, who-would-tolerate-the-biggest-IV-needle, etc. I could tell Tammy was instantly interested. She looked forward to the next challenges. My challenges for her were mostly physical (as a secret agenda to get her rehabilitated: transplant recipients do far better when they are better conditioned). Her interest grew, and she started coming up with challenges of her own. "Put an NG tube in your nose!" (she had one), "Drink the nasty Colace!" (she had to, too). Her mother commented to me that for the first time in a long time, she's smiling.

It was a fateful Saturday morning, when I came in for my call, I found both Tammy and her mother sporting an evil grin. They had procured a cockroach to ingest as the next challenge. Everyone instantly refused to partake in this one. So did I. Towards the afternoon, it looked like this challenge was going to be a bust. Tammy was by nature a stoic girl, but I could tell she was more than disappointed. Fearing we would lose the momentum of her new found spirit for life, I

mustered up the stomach to entertain the notion. I looked at the dead ghastly thing with as much of a poker face as I could gather. When I said I would try, Tammy giggled with so much delight that I knew there was no turning back. I could not break her already broken heart.

I'll spare you the details of the act itself, but I could see a look of gleeful horror yet immense satisfaction on her face while I was holding my nose and chewing. She clapped with vigor after the unimaginable deed was done. The nurses looked at me with disgust. My colleagues avoided me. But I had the joy of that girl for a few minutes, and it was worth it. That evening, when I was rounding, she was getting ready for bed. I checked in on her vitals and all was stable. I said goodnight, to which she replied, "Thank you for today." For some reason, the way she said it completely warmed my heart.

Early next morning, our team received a call that a heart was available. She received a heart transplant that very day. She sailed through her operation and was discharged to the ward then home shortly thereafter. A few weeks later, I received a photo from her in her Tae Kwon Do uniform — noticeably fuller than her previous emaciated self and... healthy. In her note, she said "Thanks for being my hero."

Her clinical course was marred with complications and near death experiences. At one point, I was performing CPR on her. A second time, I electrically shocked her for a malignant arrhythmia — both times averting certain death. But I am confident that her hero reference had nothing to do with that. It was all simply because I ate a goddamn cockroach. But it changed my perspective on what it means to "care" for a patient and how to have a meaningful impact as a physician.

http://www.quora.com/l/boq-drew-young-shin