

Plywood Stages

A headlong life

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Listen Dan,

I'm gonna put this as succinctly as possible. After the band broke up and Gloria left New York for good, I spent a couple years in the basement of a self-styled psychedelic traphouse in Bed-Stuy writing a book about fighting cops with Occupy Wall Street. By November of 2013 I was done with court dates. I was wasted and paranoid, my gums were bleeding, and I was only one-third through with the monster manuscript. I had women mad at me and I'd completely lost the stomach for Brooklyn life, so I left town headed south on a forty-year-old sailboat registered in someone else's name with suicide rigging and blown-up outboard. I was leaving New York so hard I would've left in a washtub. A few days later I smashed into a darkened beachhead at 4 a.m. near the border of Maryland and Virginia where wild horses roam the dunes at Asseteage. I skirted the Feds and salvaged the ship to a wrecker, then a friend got me a bus ticket to West Virginia where I spent Thanksgiving with the family for the first time in a decade. I caught a ride down to Gainesville for a while, then hit the old scene in Melbourne where I met up with R. Ellis for a much-overdue soul implosion courtesy my magic jar and the goodwill of several old friends. The Albanian sent me a bottle of L. on the front, and I sold enough over Christmas holiday to buy another sailboat in Cocoa Beach. R. Ellis quit his bar job and he and I went feral, living on the boat on a canal near Saint Sebastian River, making midnight and daytime shroom raids into the cow fields by Sebastian High for two months straight. Dolphins, eagles, manatees; boars and lynx; gators and wild turkeys; midnight owl mating rituals—you know the drill. We stole canoes and found Krishna, and I turned my id inside-out on MXE, saw the holodeck floor reveal itself under R.'s feet on the Spoil Islands one night

smoking chonga and eating 25-I. We rewrote the textbook on such matters. Unlimited intrigue and unparalleled righteousness until the jar was all but empty.

The boat needed repairs, so we anchored near Old Eau Gallie. I unloaded some shrooms and headed to West Virginia with a couple ounces to sell to Goody Abshire's friends (see "Best Intentions of Goody Abshire"), having run out of customers in Central Florida. A few days later, while I was gone, a storm hit and our boat sank in eight feet of water in the Banana River.

With that I headed back to New York City to raise funds for real, which I did amply, and soon I sent R. Ellis dough for a bus ticket, and for a while we shared a squatted room in the practice space at Meserole Street, at the time practically abandoned by the Hasidic pudding cartel who owns that block.

I started running pounds of Cali weed down to Goody in Jackson County, and tried to set R. up slinging to my Bushwick clients, but he lost most of them for me in a hurry, so he went to working the dance clubs and warehouse parties, his natural habitat.

Don't ask me how, but I managed to pick up another vintage boat—a 1977 O'Day 25 with a solid Suzuki motor named *Puff*—for ten dollars. I gave the guy a twenty and told him I was buying ten bucks worth of good luck to go with it. I moved into the marina at 59th Street in the Rockaways and built things up again until November rolled back around.

I doubled down, and cashed in, then bought a clarinet and just split town for Lima, Peru, flying down with a satchel full of comp books to finish *This Machine Loves Fashion*. I got my apartment in Barranco and a quarter-kilo of cocaine, and started banging it all out in heinous rally-race fashion. Just days before finishing my first draft, news came that my father was dead from liver. I was going to skip the funeral but my sister insisted and bought me an expensive last-minute plane ticket. My ride to the airport was late, so I missed check-in by thirty minutes. No refund, but I ended up with \$3,000 worth of non-transferable Delta points. I lost the apartment and went to live

at flophouses in Miraflores, able to finish the manuscript in overnight benders in hallways and on park benches, chipping away at the quarter-kilo and fending off a sudden bout of conjunctivitis that made it impossible to focus on the screen with both eyes open.

In March or April of 2015 I came back to New York with eighty grams of unmolested cocaine hidden in the bottom of my clarinet case. I was so flat broke I had to jump the Airtrain turnstiles to get back to the Rockaways, but me and R. Ellis sold every single gram for \$120 a pop and I managed to pocket about six grand off that one punt.

Then, a spooky thing happened. One day I decided to use up some of my Delta points on a trip to Nepal. I booked a flight online. I got the confirmation email, then went to a news site to check the headlines. The lead story: “Earthquake Strikes Kathmandu.” It hit the exact moment I booked my flight. I spent three weeks in a quake-ravaged Hindu holyland, eating acid and handing out chocolate Cliff bars to kids in tent cities.

When I’d had enough, I made arrangements with Greg the Ox for a ticket to Lima via Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and Sao Paulo, then headed to the Amazon ostensibly to film the wedding of Tenorio, the wannabe narco. After the wedding, Tenorio and I went on a mission into the mountains on a Yamaha 250 trail bike, and that’s where I first met Bernaldo, the Ketchwa *purgero*. Within weeks I bought a jungle house from Berno and began the process of learning his pharmacopeia.

But, when the money ran thin, I moved on, found myself on the Pacific coast where I got pistol-whipped by a masked gunman in a desert canyon near Mancora, then trudged a bus to Quito, Ecuador. I spent the night trying to sleep in the bushes wrapped in plastic. From Quito I rolled back into New York City with eight bucks, a bunch of illegal bananas, and nothing but unsecured drug debt waiting for me in Brooklyn. I started moving heavy doses courtesy of a mini vodka bottle half-full of blue LSD that I picked up from an old source from the university days.

Took a brief stint in Ireland with my mom and my sister, then to Holland where I ran through three-and-a-half grams of MDMA in

a week while editing *This Machine...* in a coffeeshop in Hilversum. In Amsterdam I met a woman from Portugal. That didn't work out well, but I'm telling you it could have been worse. I bought a huge peyote button, brought it back to the USA and mailed it to Magz. Moved pounds of shrooms and Blue Altoids in the city. Somewhere in here I sailed around Long Island with Olivia Shank, granddaughter of the man who founded the Iditarod, but I'm not sure when.

By December of 2015 I was back in Palmiche to become *el padron* for Nurita, one of Berno's young daughters, and soon I started having people come down from the States to drink ayahuasca with the old man.

I crossed the Amazon basin riding on cargo ships en route to Bogota. Got rolled twice by the cops there. Then, Mexico City.

I headed back to New York to shoot a short film with Ty Michael Robinson. It turned out great but we never premiered it. I did nothing but smoke pot for eight months, no drugs, then headed back to the jungle in November of 2016 with Miguelito, formerly the roadie for *Hotter Than A Crotch*, rumored to be one of the world's best. I gave him a small cash loan and helped negotiate the purchase of a really solid farmhouse from one of Berno's brothers. We hung out and made bulk batches of the brew until Miguelito went back to Portland. I left a month or so later, telling my family in Palmiche that I was going to look for an apartment in Bogota.

There was also some scenario about refining a hundred grams of coke powder from a giant brick of coca paste using my self-devised acetone-and-alcohol extraction technique, but that had mixed results, so the less said the better, and anyhow, most of this should be slated as an epistolary that starts: *Dear Dan the Man, Wish you were here. Sorry for stopping in every five or ten years unannounced, making inconvenient and socially awkward demands, wrecking your scene, trashing your house, pissing off your family and ruining your reputation among the neighbors. Thanks for hanging in there even though I repeatedly impugned your manhood somehow, probably (inadvertently, certainly), and thanks for*

not insinuating that the endless battery of chemistry experiments I urged you to perform in the '90s contributed to your brief misdiagnosis as a schizophrenic around the turn of the century. You've always been a real dude, and that's why I never call up asking for money even when I'm flat busted. P.S. You should listen to those LPs I sent you, that's what they're for...

Remember, Dan, this is not a rant but a carefully constructed narrative. There is a sequence of schemes here, an array of moments leading up to this one. The real moment. The *now* moment: Leticia, again. Tres Fronteras, where the rivers rule life and borders are a fluid fiction, existing only if you suspend disbelief. I hear the hymns of an Aventista choir carrying over from the church across the street like a whisper in a crowded dive bar, never meant to be overheard, and I realize it must be Saturday night. I got a clarinet case stuffed with homebrew coke in a false bottom that I just moved over from Peru, and no solid plan for what to do with it. Should have buried it in the cabin, but it's too late now, lying back in the heat of Hostel Leticia where I literally bought the bathroom sink—having been charged after knocking it off the wall one morning months back at 5 a.m. There are options, but all of them are pretty grisly. Maybe in the lonely bunkroom I can find a dummy plate covering the junction box of some obsolete TV antennae wiring in the wall. Maybe I can pull the screws out and cram an ounce or so of raw powder into the empty space, recover it for later. It's some of the best, and a fair chunk of what's left over from *mi procesa*, but it's unfiltered and needs to be strained one more time to screen out the tiny bug carcasses, lighten it up a bit before trying to move it to the States. Besides, I'm already a little surprised that I cleared *migración* this morning—because of that thing in Tarapoto—and don't know if I want to press my luck.

And I got other things on my mind now. There's talk of shooting one of my scripts in New York in the fall, but there's always talk of making movies in New York in the fall, and my days of putting stock in American talk are long over. I hear the rumors I tell myself

about dialing back the rage-years, tempering the edge somewhere for a while to get some work done, but all I know for sure is that Bogota will always have a cold chip on her shoulder for me now.

And other things you should hear about too, things that meant something at the time; fireworks seen from 30,000 feet in the night sky over Panama, so lost on ketamine I thought God was trying to communicate in Morse code; or the mixture of dread and relief I get from knowing *Puff* is always parked waiting for me in the Rockaways if I choose to return, wondering how much of her good luck I've already invoiced. In truth, I'm an expatriot now, and that sloop may be little more than a symbol.

All along the way lit mags and screenplay pitches. *This Machine...* is finished, 600 pages plus, but nobody'll touch it. And what else for your perusal? What else, Dan? The acid reflux of flashback memories: Me and Gloria, unhinged Northwest nights on punk-rock plywood stages.

