

ENGAGE Writing Contest

James King, 3rd Place Winner

Untitled written for EN 248

You know how when you write about your life, you can gain new insight? Well this isn't one of those stories.

Chapter 1: The Intro

My journey started on a shitty hobby farm in Presque isle county, a dilute underbelly of Lake Huron's northern coast. The hobby was parenting.

The animals were myself, my half-sister Beth, her half-brother Derek, and the rest.

Like many hobbies, it was formed while trying to break another—you see the habitual act of drinking as a hobby, led my parents to cross paths at an Alcoholics A--- meeting.

The subsequent raucous coital passion which led to my conception was no doubt legendary.

We all love the imagery of our parents having sex, don't we? I'll pause, dear reader, while you think about your parents in the throws of erotic synergy.

Go ahead, I'll wait.

So there was conception. I don't remember it.

And then I was born, like all of you, crippled and stupid, with a vast cavern of mind to fill with memories, conclusions, judgments: a warehouse where we build the store of implements with which we nightly torture ourselves in our dreams.

Of the event of my birth I have but few memories.

I was naked, wet, and hungry. Then things got worse.

My circumcision was so painful, I couldn't walk for a year.

Adolescence was clumsy, and lonely. As a boy I laid in my twin size bed and wondered where my brother was. My mother was a frenzied abuser, unleashing generational anxiety and distrust to the children around her. My sister B— took care of me, when I needed it. I spent a lot of time in the woods.

I grew up pedagogically auto-didactic. (I would read the dictionary). I would read anything, in fact, I was completely possessed of an earnest lust for knowledge. It was kept at bay by my abusive mother, distant father, and largely-ignorant community. My father— He wasn't good or cruel or evil or extreme in any way but one, which was that he had elevated greyness to the status of a fine art and cultivated a mind that was as bleak and pitiless and logical as the slopes of Hell.

My community was small, tight-nit. Some people might consider them to be unimaginative, stolid, and... how can I put this? ... possessed of an inbuilt disposition to accept the first explanation that presents itself and then bunk off for a quiet smoke? A certain lack of imagination? An ability to get out of their depth on wet pavement?

The kind of people who never speak save in the based patois of their environment.

Nonetheless, there is a bucolic merriment that surrounds the village of P—.

A town so small, a map of the place doesn't include it.

A town so small, the town limit signs are back-to-back.

Of course I hurt people along the way. Of course I was hurt. Of course I loved and lost. But this is the very condition of existence. To become spring, means accepting the risk of winter. To become presence, means accepting the risk of absence.

Chapter 2: The hat of fate

When I was young people would tell me that the world is my oyster. Then I got older and tried an oyster. They're disgusting.

But I like hats. (I'm wearing one right now). The worst hat I ever owned was a 20's style bowler cap I bought for a festival. The best hat I ever owned left itself on a Delta international flight. This story is about the former. Some years ago, as I was just rounding the last month of high school, I was beset upon by a mission— you must go to college!

Now, this wasn't my mission per se, but I knew I couldn't stay where I was. So I grabbed a piece of paper, ripped it thrice, and wrote the name of a school on each.

Into the hat they went.

Each one had pros or cons.

But I'll tell you, when I withdrew from that hat the school I'd eventually ship-off to, and subsequently write a check for the balance of my checking account; I'd never set foot on the campus. As far as I knew, I'd never met anyone that had ever gone there.

But I did.

Armed with a countryboy's value-of-a-dollar and meritorious candor I demonstrated utter incompetence as a freshman. I left the year renowned for heists, tomfoolery, dropping in on classes, and being rather acquainted with the school's disciplinary board.

Chapter 3: The malady of the poor and the boots theory of economics.

My family was so poor we would eat our Cheerios with forks so we could reuse the milk. And I learned to work for what I have.

I have a pair of boots. They aren't good— my toes go numb during the deep-freeze months of January and February, they're worn, cracked and faded— but they were all I could afford when I bought them. You get what you pay for. They lasted me one winter, and I'll buy another pair this winter. In fact, I've done this ad nauseum. A \$40 pair of boots lasts one season. A \$60 pair of boots lasts two seasons. An \$80 pair... 3 seasons.

You ever get those bands that put their flyers on your car windshield? It's like, come on, I don't want to see your shitty band called "parking ticket" at the Courthouse.

Oh crap.

By the time I have enough money to pay that ticket, the fine will have doubled.

So it's what I call the boots theory of economics. Poor begets poor. And I had often wondered if I would die, in debt, never doing the things I wanted to. Will you? Is my destiny irrefutably: subjected survivor? Like glass coffins, remains to be seen.

To be continued...