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# DEVONWEAVER

"... A SERIES OF LIFE LESSONS THAT ARE WITTY, CHATTY,  
REVEALING, AND HARD-HITTING, ALL IN ONE."

D. DONOVAN, SENIOR REVIEWER, MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW



Life Lessons (and Fart Stories) from the  
**Greatest Father** The World Has Ever Known

**DEVON WEAVER**

"Entertaining and clever -  
a laugh out loud masterpiece..."

"A classic of nonfiction narrative."

"Read this book. Read it because it'll split  
your sides, your pants, your face, and your  
heart."

## PRAISE FOR *THE \$20,000 T-SHIRT*

“Entertaining and clever – a laugh out loud masterpiece by a loving dad that reveals the essential truths of life in a light-hearted and captivating style. Revel in the joy of topical quotes, sharp anecdotes, and reminiscing about the mistakes that we’ve all made but don’t want to admit to our children!”

Monique Swanepoel, Ideas Consultant  
Trondheim, Norway

“Weaver has taken detailed moments in his life to craft relevant life lessons that all can relate to. This is more than a parenting advice book; its message transcends race, religion, and socio-economic backgrounds to deliver a simplistic look on living a good and fulfilling life.”

Allison Maccio, Vice President – Account Management  
Wilmington, DE

“Devon Weaver’s missive to his children overflows with world hewn wisdom, wit, and insight for all ages. A classic of nonfiction narrative.”

Jonathan Herring, Author  
Auckland, New Zealand

“I know Devon. I wanted to hate this book so bad so I could laugh at him for years. But I didn’t. It made me think of my Dad. Now that he’s gone, it made me cry thinking about all the things left unsaid between us.”

Rob Wooten, Sales Consultant  
Charlotte, NC

“Read this book. Read it because it’ll split your sides, your pants, your face, and your heart. Read it because it’ll make you spit your beverage of choice across the room and possibly make you laugh-fart. Read it because of the advice about life and peanut butter, Nutella, and jelly. Read it because it’s written by a dad who loves his kids and isn’t afraid to unabashedly tell them, or the world. Just read it for yourself, already. You’ll figure out why from the very first page. Sheer awesomeness.”

Margarita Martinez, Editor  
Albuquerque, NM

“*The \$20,000 T-Shirt* is a parenting book like no other, featuring a candid assessment of a father forced to examine the life lessons he was (or was not) teaching his children. What differentiates *The \$20,000 T-Shirt* from other parenting or advice guides is its attention to linking the author’s knowledge with bigger pictures based on a range of experiences. Specific strategies are provided, rather than generalities; and these form the heart of a powerful guide packed with solid advice that shouldn’t be limited to young adult readers alone. *The \$20,000 T-Shirt* is a highly recommended pick that parents can give their teens and read together with them.”

D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer – Midwest Book Review  
Oregon, WI

“This really was a great read. I kept looking forward to the next time I’d be able to pick it back up, and always left it feeling encouraged and motivated. Signs of a good book.”

Lauren Neilan, Regional Sponsorship Manager  
Indianapolis, IN

“For the general reader, I believe it will inspire and encourage them to start that project, read that book, focus on their strengths, and hopefully get off social media for god’s sake!!! I know it inspired me. I made it a point this week to read every free moment I got. I started listening to Ted Talks (never listened to a podcast before) and I decided to get up 30 minutes earlier every morning. This is mainly to read and drink coffee... lots of coffee! But it does start my day better just to have that time. By the way, Walmart always makes me feel better, too.”

Becca Streng, Mom  
Havre de Grace, MD

“Charming, witty, and poignant without ever becoming sappy, it presents important, practical advice in the form of the author’s own unique but entirely relatable real-life experiences. Humor balances with heart and raw, even gritty honesty in a book that is equal parts memoir and life-affirming look towards the future. The perfect gift for grads or anyone looking for an entertaining narrative of growing up and life in general.”

Gillian Pemberton, Writer/Book Critic  
Fairfax, VA

“Devon has given a new perspective on a familiar subject all the while weaving comedically through the ups and downs of life. He offers sound advice and useful techniques to help achieve a great balance for today’s youth. This is a great read for both the young and the young at heart. The chapters on his relationship with his Dad completely broke me down. I thought of all of the things I didn’t get to say to my dad before his passing. It could be the martinis talking but between Devon the ignored, Devon the greatest ginger father, and Devon the butt trumpet master, color me impressed!”

Wally Barton, Sales Manager  
North East, MD

“The author of *The \$20,000 T-Shirt*, Devon Weaver, is probably one of the most honest writers you’ll ever find. The book was initially just written for his children, but I believe it has such great guidance for people of all ages that it deserves to be published. I highly recommend you get a copy of this book, as it will enlighten you and really make you think about life and all of its gloriousness.”

Kimberly Hurley, Investigator  
Nashville, TN

“This is an emotional roller coaster of a book, which was intended for Weaver’s children’s eyes only. I think we are lucky that he decided to let other people read his work, as the book gives wonderful advice to children and adults alike. Even I, as a 30 year old, learned some new lessons.”

Kerrie Irish, Comfy Reading Blog  
Dundee, MI

“Incredibly hilarious and profoundly real, *The \$20,000 T-Shirt* will hook you from the start. Weaver’s anecdotes are honest and his advice is relevant, no matter what stage of life you find yourself reading it at. You’ll walk away from this book with a new game plan for life, likely in the form of a Trello list.”

Chloe Mix, Marketing & Promotions Coordinator  
Edmonton, Alberta

“This is a must read! It is not only entertaining, but I grew from it. I already have and will continue to use this book as a tool in conversations with my kids. Making a point is best done by story telling. And many times, I did not have a memory ready to insert into the point I was trying to make. Between my personal history and now yours, I have the stories needed for many life lessons. I expect I will be going back to this book for many years to come.”

Debbie Fellmeth, Corporate Partnership Sales Director  
Indianapolis, IN



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## BEFORE YOU DIVE IN, READ THIS

A QUICK NOTE TO MY TRILLIONS OF LOYAL READERS:

Originally, I wrote this entire book for a whopping audience of two: my 10-year-old daughter, Charley, and my five-year old son, Knox. *The \$20,000 T-Shirt* was hand delivered to them as a Christmas present.

The book was not intended for anyone other than my children. I would have been far less honest if I knew others would read it. But after some positive feedback and encouragement from my editor and friends, I decided to release it into the world (man, I hope this doesn't suck).

Even though the distribution model changed, the format stayed the same... it's basically a long advice letter to my kids. Enjoy!

— Devon Weaver

## INTRODUCTION

So, you might be wondering, “Why did my dad write this book for me?”

It’s a fair question indeed.

The answer is self-serving. I sought to right a major wrong in my life and to finally... FINALLY... make peace with the Texas-sized remorse over the passing of my father.

My dad was in my life for 19 years but he never really shared anything personal with me. When he died, I felt shortchanged. I needed more from our relationship together, but now it was too late. Sadly, he didn’t offer up the answers and I didn’t make the effort to ask the questions.

Since then, I’ve come to know him by asking questions of those closest to him: his wife, his brother, his in-laws, and his friends. That’s better than nothing, I guess, but it’s not the same as hearing it from him.

I don’t want that sense of anguish for the two of you. I want you to know me, my hopes and dreams, my successes and failures. I want to share the good and bad advice I’ve received over the years, things I wish I knew growing up or had to learn the hard way. Some life lessons are not included in this book that you will fortunately (not unfortunately) need to master on your own. But these tales should give you a good head start.

I have taught you both well in the ancient art of potty humor (no need to thank me). Poop jokes are hilarious... everyone knows that. Yet what have I done to help you when you are insecure, or hate yourself, or hate your life? Not much really.

I haven't been great about giving you survival skills or the true wisdom to live a meaningful life. This book is the response to my shortfall. I'm passing down what I know to be true, not out of moral obligation, but out of love.

I don't expect you to take everything to heart. Some of the contents within may be contradictory. You may flat out disagree with some of my opinions and that's okay. You may not need most of this book for 20 years. But the lessons may open up your life in ways you never imagined or keep you from giant, regretful mistakes.

To be honest, I'm afraid for you to read this book. I want to be a hero in your eyes—I don't want you two to ever think less of me. But hesitation aside, I want you to realize everyone on this planet (parents, teachers, kids, CEOs, pro athletes) is just a work in progress. We are all full of mistakes and failures and scattered successes. And I, of course, am no exception to that.

Over the years, be sure to come back to this book. Revisit it like an old friend. Keep it close by. I plan to be in your life for many years, but now you'll always have my words and thoughts with you regardless of what happens. I have a great life, but I desperately want yours to be head and shoulders above mine. I hope this helps.

Love,

Your Dad Aka The ~~Gassiest~~ Greatest Father in Human History

P.S. Charley, don't spill anything on it for god's sake. And Knox, please do not rip out any pages.



**ACT 1:  
THE GO-KART  
(THE EARLY YEARS)**





## WHO WAS CHARLIE WEAVER?

*“I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection.”*

— Sigmund Freud —

I know who Charley Weaver is. She’s the sassy one in my house with the super smelly feet. But who was Charlie Weaver, her BLT-loving namesake?

I’ll admit it. I have no idea. Charlie Weaver is my dad, and, if I relied on his words alone, I would know next to nothing about him. Since his death in 1998, my sophomore year in college, friends and family members have helped me to bridge the knowledge gap.

My grandfather, James Weaver, moved the family from a farm in the mountains of southwest Virginia to where I grew up, North East, Maryland. Young Charlie was allowed to bring one personal item with him to begin his hero’s journey; he chose a baby pig. That probably didn’t go over too well in the car ride north.

We come from a long line of entrepreneurs. Working for someone else was never an option, or at least, never until I came along. As soon as my grandfather hit the shores of North East, he started a new business: a bar.

Over time, the bar concept morphed into a liquor store, and grew quickly into one of the largest stores of its kind in Maryland. It was a noble accomplishment for some farmers from the middle-of-nowhere Virginia. Cecil County has tons of liquor stores... the locals there like to drink. But only one had my dad at the helm.

My dad worked seven days a week nearly his entire life. To him, work was such an ingrained habit that he seemed uneasy—unsure even—away from his stores. He became famous regionally for his knowledge of wines and his relationships with customers. I began working in the store when I was seven, dusting bottles and quite often knocking them over. Nothing makes a dad more proud than a giant puddle of red wine and broken glass.

Customers came from multiple states—Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York—to see my father and, over time, became some of his closest friends. They enjoyed his company and wanted to spend time with him outside of the store.

He talked and talked at work. He laughed. He joked. He sold. He performed. My dad was a natural at closing the deal, even though he was an introvert at heart. An introvert (like me) is someone who can be social at times, but interacting with others takes a lot out of them. They need alone time and silence to recharge their batteries.

When business hours were over, and his feet hit the front porch of our house, Dad was done talking for the day. His daily word quota had been exhausted.

Charlie Weaver's post-work routine began with my mom serving dinner promptly upon his arrival. If she didn't, there were consequences. I've seen anger from young children who haven't had nourishment in a while, but they were no match for my father. When the distance between meals became too long, he transformed into a mama bear who recently discovered her cubs were in danger. For the safety of all involved, you had better make sure he was fed.

After a rushed and silent family dinner, he would head upstairs for a few hours of reading. Fiction, usually—my dad loved to escape into the spy versus spy pursuits of a Tom Clancy novel. After story time came bedtime. Rinse and repeat tomorrow.

My dad read thousands of books in his lifetime and was ridiculous at Jeopardy (he knew the answer to almost every question)... two noble accomplishments indeed. But he had two kids at home who he rarely interacted with. We needed him to be present. He wasted his conversations on customers instead of saving them for his kids.

In middle and high school, the two of us rarely interacted with each other, unless I was in trouble (which happened often) or he had a task for me to complete.

Every few years or so, he would decide to have a catch with me in the yard. The exchange was the epitome of awkwardness, like he was checking off the “interact with your son” box. You could tell this wasn’t really his thing. After a few minutes, we stopped. He became bored with the activity.

Time moves fast though and before Dad knew it, it was time to ship me, the youngest child, off to college in Columbia, South Carolina. I remember the long drive to school. The whole family went. My sister and I fought, as usual. I had slept for only an hour after attending a party the night before, and was annoyed about having to leave some personal items at home so she would have a place to sit. I had less than normal patience for her behavior on the trip.

My dad loved that I was attending college in the south so he could partake of Salisbury steak, fried okra, collards, and other delicacies of the region. On my initial trek to school, we made a good trial run on the southern restaurants dotting the map between Maryland and South Carolina. He proudly ordered shrimp and grits, swapping the ‘hr’ in shrimp for a couple of ‘w’s’. This was not embarrassing at all to a self-absorbed 18-year-old.

After the third lunch, I declared that enough was enough. Onward and upward. We shot down 95 to 85, then I-77. We passed the city of Charlotte. On the left, I could see the bank towers and the Carolina Panthers stadium. Seven years later, I would call this city my home and begin to raise a family there.

Once the duffel bags and large foam cowboy hat were placed securely in my palatial dorm room, it was time to cut the cord. After a few hugs and shoulder pat pats, my mom and sister hopped back into the Bravada, leaving only my father in the crowded loading dock area of Moore dorm. When the weight of the moment hit him, my dad began to cry. Head down, staring awkwardly at the concrete below, he choked out the words “bye, son.” Then a quick hug and a slammed car door.

I cried as I walked back inside, careful so no one would see me. I was in shock—he had hugged me AND cried, a previously unseen emotional combo from pops. I think he loved me more than he let on but just didn’t know how to show it. And because he didn’t know how to give it, I didn’t exactly know how to receive it.

During my freshman year in school, he sent me letters each week and \$20, crucial for a broke college student. At parents’ weekend in late September, he attended the football game with my mom at Williams Brice. He struggled badly to walk up the steps to his seat, too winded to breathe. That was the first sign something was wrong with him.

Soon afterwards, he was diagnosed with pulmonary hypertension or high blood pressure in the lungs and heart. A terminal illness. He didn’t have too long to live, maybe a year or two tops.

The last 18 months of his life were filled with constant hospital visits—Johns Hopkins and University Medical Center of Baltimore became like second homes to him. He had to carry around an oxygen tank; a tube connected the tank to a giant hole in his chest.

He was on all kinds of medicine including steroids. It made him more temperamental than usual and his usual wasn't good. If dinner wasn't brought up to him in a timely manner, he would let you know in a loud 'roid rage. The hushed and still childhood dinners I had known morphed into Dad dining alone, on his bed, with only CNN to keep him company.

Even though he was sick and swollen and nearing death, he was fully present at my sister's wedding in 1997. He walked her down the aisle, eyes flooded with tears. Against all advice, he mustered enough breath to start the conga line at her reception.

In November, after visiting him in the hospital, I came home around 9:00 p.m. and had Thanksgiving dinner alone. I felt sorry for my dad. I felt sorry for the situation. This sickness had reduced him to a shell of a man, dependent upon others for his survival. Crossing items off a bucket list—if he had one—was no longer an option.

During his extended stays in the hospital, I would talk to the other patients on his floor. They idolized my dad. He made them laugh with his heroic stories of mistaking his pee bottle for his drink jug during the darkness of night. He made them forget about their situations for a small time. It was noble, and I loved that he did that for others.

In the back of my mind though, I selfishly wondered, *why didn't he ever do that for us? Why is he more comfortable around strangers than his own family?*

I pledged a fraternity my sophomore year in college, the last year of my dad's life. A fraternity is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a men's student organization formed chiefly for social purposes having secret rites and a name consisting of Greek letters." Hell Week is a stupid tradition within the fraternity where current members make life miserable for the pledges, those trying to get into the club.

During my Hell Week, under some pretty stressful circumstances, I was asked a question about what my dad did for a living. I broke down

and cried. I told them, “My dad doesn’t do anything. He’s sick.” As pledges, we were trying to be so tough during this time. All I could think about was my dad. *He’s dying and I’m 600 miles away, scraping last night’s throw up off a sociology textbook. What am I doing? Why am I here?*

My dad survived so many close calls that I just thought he would always keep trucking along. Even though he was in such bad shape, I didn’t really think he was going to die any time soon.

Until one day, he did.

## ADULTS ARE CLUELESS

*“Grown ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”*

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry —

**A**ugust 23, 1989, the day that changed the sport of professional baseball forever.

Pete Rose, baseball’s all-time hit king and proud member of the Big Red Machine—the intimidating Cincinnati Reds squad from the 1970s—agreed to a lifetime ban from the game. He desperately wanted to stop the Dowd investigation from peering any further into his life, possibly unearthing more skeletons.

At the time, Pete strictly managed the Reds, no longer a player or player-manager. He wagered on his team to win and broke the first and cardinal commandment of baseball, a rule clearly outlined in every locker room at every level of the game: thou shalt not gamble on the sport.

Baseball has a long history of scandals, from the Black Sox throwing the World Series in 1919 to the recent steroid abuse of the past few decades. The game narrowly escaped each time, but it wasn’t taking any chances this go round.

Tolerance for gambling on the game—destroying fans’ trust of legitimate outcomes—was not low; it was non-existent. Commissioner Bart Giamatti ruled: Pete had to go. He received baseball’s version of the death penalty: banishment from the sport for jeopardizing the integrity of the game. For someone like Pete, exile from the game he so loved was far worse than any mortal death.

And just like that, he was out. No Hall of Fame bust or induction ceremonies. No managerial roles or front office employment. No association of any kind with any team.

Through the wine business, my dad had some connections to Philadelphia-area sports writers. Pete was playing for the Phillies at the time. My dad was able to get Charlie Hustle’s autograph and one from the great Mike Schmidt, both at one point guaranteed locks for the Hall of Fame.

When I first heard about the scandal, I remember staring at that autograph—a shot of Pete looking for two out of the batter’s box—and just feeling sorry for him. I didn’t understand his motive. **Why had he risked everything he loved over a few bets?** It seemed as fair a trade as the Colts sending Elway to the Broncos for the immortal trio of Mark Hermann, Chris Hinton, and Ron Solt.

Peter Edward Rose Sr. was a 48-year-old “grown up” at the time of his dismissal from the league. As a grown-ass man, didn’t he know any better? Didn’t he realize the risks of his behavior?

Was his hideous haircut—a Moe Howard-shaped debacle—a symptom of his poor decision-making skills? Should we have expected this type of behavior based solely on his follicle faux pas?

I wasn’t a fan of the Reds or the Phillies, but I loved Pete Rose. I had an affinity for the gritty, gutty ball players, guys like Johnny Bench, Nolan Ryan, and Lenny Dykstra. Pete was the Heisenberg of this style of play, once breaking a catcher’s arm in a home plate collision. The clash oc-

curred in an all-star game, a meaningless competition between the American and National Leagues.

Pete played the game one way. It didn't matter if it was a spring training contest in March, the midsummer classic, or the seventh, and final, game of the World Series: he was going to work the count, fly around the bases so fast his helmet would fall off, and yes, if he needed to, he would lower his head into a catcher's chest to notch the run.

After initially denying the allegations for 15 years, Pete owned up to his indiscretions in his 2004 autobiography, *My Prison Without Bars*. Neither strategy worked though; despite multiple applications for reinstatement, Pete Rose is still banned from the game.

As far as I can remember, this was the first time I witnessed an idol's fall from grace, **my eyes suddenly opened to the fact that superior athletic ability didn't necessarily translate to all facets of life**. Pete could lace a single off any pitcher in the game, but he didn't properly consider risk-reward scenarios before plunking down his capital on his own team. And if he did take heed of the risks, the come-hither whisper of the gamble proved too strong to resist.

When I was a kid, out of the naiveté of limited exposure, **I believed that ALL adults just had it together**. Like it was a rite of passage. You couldn't become an adult until you figured things out. Kids were the ones who had all the questions but none of the answers. Once you lived in the faraway land of adulthood, you made well-thought-out, rational decisions.

As the years passed, I learned that couldn't be further from the truth. On the television screen, I watched adults like Ben Johnson try to get an edge over Carl Lewis with steroids, fooling no one including the Olympic Committee. I learned neither Milli nor Vanilli could sing, scurrying off the stage in embarrassment as the recording skipped. I watched famous TV evangelists lie, cheat, and steal their way to the bottom, dripping with crocodile tears while defrauding hopeful folks out of millions of dollars.

These events shattered my faith in adults. **They seemed obsessed with money, fame, and each other, and like bullies on the playground, they weren't afraid to be mean to the kids lower on the hierarchy to make themselves look better.**

I finally understood now: adults were just kids who got older and bigger. Just because they were born in the '40s, '50s, or '60s didn't mean they'd acquired any life skills or knowledge or actually applied anything they'd learned along the way. And it didn't mean they were immune from mistakes, small ones like white lies and big ones like getting kicked out of baseball.

Scott Adams, the creator of the *Dilbert* comic strip, boils the concept down simply: everyone is irrational all the time. **People are just balls of emotion**, guided by feelings, biases, and habits, rather than analytical thought. Life is easier when you lower your expectations for others, including those driving Corvettes and using walkers with tennis balls at the bottom.

Adults have fears... weaknesses... areas of their life to improve upon. They may act like everything is great, even though it's not.

Remember this as you get older, remember this as you set expectations for others: **Everyone is struggling with something in their lives. Everyone makes miscalculations.**

You can be empathetic with their struggle. Listen to them. People most often just want to be heard and have their feelings validated. They want to know it's okay to feel the way they do.

Adults are no different than high school social circles. People want to belong. They want to be important and feel like they matter.

We all want to be unique snowflakes, but deep down, we're pretty much the same. We are all the scared freshmen, hiding in the corner, hoping someday the cool kids will like us. We all want the same things out of life.

In Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he states, "Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure... or a quest for power... but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life." Frankl saw three possible sources for finding this meaning:

1. In work (doing something significant)
2. In love (caring for another person), and
3. In courage during difficult times.

Keep that wisdom in mind. **Everyone is trying to figure out life—uncovering our *why*—including me and you...**

## THE TACO BELL PAY PHONE

*“If you say gullible slowly, it sounds like oranges.”*

— Anonymous —

I couldn't believe my luck. I was in Hollywood, California, for work meetings, and on the brief walk from the Hilton Garden Inn to the Live Nation office, I spotted Zach Galifianakis offering to buy a cup of coffee for a homeless guy.

This was definitely him. The beard. The voice. The mannerisms. I snuck across the street as he waited in line for his coffees. I creepily moved to another corner of the intersection for a better view, snapping some candid shots of him like a shameless TMZ photog.

For most people in Hollywood, I wouldn't have bothered with pics. But this was Alan from *The Hangover*, David Ghattt from *Masterminds*, and the voice of the Joker in *The Lego Batman Movie*. This was different.

At lunch, my boss and I trekked over to California Pizza Kitchen. I told him about seeing ZG, who was my soon-to-be BFF. Brian said, “That’s weird. Normally the celebrities don’t come into Hollywood.” Uh oh. Did I shoot pics of the wrong guy?

On our way back from lunch, I saw Zach again. With his back to Hollywood Blvd, he was snapping pics with adoring tourists. Like the elevator scene in *The Hangover*, he wore the baby carrier, but young Carlos had been replaced with a plastic doll. Each wore the signature shades. Oh, man. This was an impersonator, a dead ringer for the funny guy from Wilkesboro, North Carolina, but not the real thing.

My boss didn't say anything. He didn't have to. We both knew I was a giant dummy cakes. What was next... mistaking the sweaty guy with sideburns and sweatpants in the K-Mart parking lot for the real King from Tupelo?

**Okay. I'll admit it. I'm a sucker.**

I thought Bill Cosby *was* Heathcliff Huxtable, bouncing their next-door neighbor, Peter, on his knee during Rudy's slumber party. I refused to believe most of the "Maryland" crabs were from North Carolina. I read *A Million Little Pieces*, or *A Million Little Lies*, as my friend Graham called it—in one sitting. It was my favorite book right up until the author admitted to making most of it up.

During a game of poker where I was the chip leader, I believed that my buddies Joe and Jeremy were drinking tall glasses of vodka, too. Theirs were water, of course, and as my chips disappeared from my stack and my vision blurred, I knew I had been duped, again.

Often, I reacted emotionally with no forethought, and that got me in trouble. Or at least laughed at.

On weekends in high school, after a night of mischief, we would often end up at the Taco Bell in Elkton, 10 minutes east of North East. The food was ridiculously cheap, and at the time, I believed that it actually tasted good.

Like most establishments in the 90s, Taco Bell had a payphone outside. Cell phones didn't exist at the time. If you needed to make a call,

you had to use the phone in someone's house / business or use a payphone. You inserted money into this giant box, and then you put the disease-filled receiver up to your ear.

One night, as we exited our cars and crossed the border into the Michelin-rated restaurant, the payphone rang. An old man stood twenty feet away, leaning against a car, diligently watching the scene unfold. I looked at him and he looked at me. He didn't budge.

My friends were around so I took the chance. I sauntered over to the payphone. I was going to be a sarcastic butt face to the caller and make my chums laugh.

I picked up the phone part and put it to my ear. I started to talk, but stopped immediately. The earpiece was filled with a pudding-like substance... could have been anything... I hope it was pudding. It was all over my ear and shoulder; some plopped down onto the pavement below.

The old man howled with laughter. I had been set up. Someone nearby had put the goop on the phone, then waited for someone to be close by. And then they dialed, hoping the stooge would be stupid enough to pick up.

I was the mark and took the bait, hook, line, and sinker. The old man was in on it somehow. I wasn't sure how, but his presence near the phone was odd. The situation felt weird.

I wanted to strangle him with the phone cord. However, I couldn't touch him. I had no proof he was involved.

The moral of the story is don't be a sucker. My brain told me: here's an opportunity to make your friends laugh. My gut told me, "Hey, stupid. DON'T ANSWER THE PHONE!!!!!!!!!!!!!! It isn't someone you know. The creepy old man is staring at a payphone. Beware." I answered it anyway and got what I deserved.

Your brain (conscious mind) wants comfort, security, and survival. Basically, a mediocre life.

**Your gut is your subconscious mind... a form of Spidey sense to properly guide you in various situations. Trust those instincts with every fiber of your being. Be quiet and listen for them.**

Your brain and your gut may be shooting you different lines of communication—when in doubt, always side with the southern signals. Those decisions contain much more wisdom than what your brain can deliver.

It may be years before you feel this, but you may walk into a room and sense something is not right. Or you may meet someone for the first time and get an overwhelming feeling that *I need to stay away from this person*.

Trust those feelings. Your brain doesn't know why you're feeling that way, but your gut is light-years ahead, screaming—danger, danger, danger. Take heed, my friend.

## GROUPTHINK STINKS

*“The larger the group, the more toxic, the more of your beauty as an individual you have to surrender for the sake of group thought. And when you suspend your individual beauty you also give up a lot of your humanity. You will do things in the name of a group that you would never do on your own. Injuring, hurting, killing, drinking are all part of it, because you’ve lost your identity, because you now owe your allegiance to this thing that’s bigger than you are and that controls you.”*

— George Carlin —

I joined a cult on January 31, 1988. After falling behind early and storming back, the Washington Redskins defeated John Elway and the Denver Broncos 42-10, securing the Lombardi Trophy for the nation’s capital.

I didn’t have a favorite football team at the time—my focus was solely on professional baseball, my first love. I thought, if you’re going to have a squad, why not start at the top with the Super Bowl champs?

Looking back, maybe I should have chosen a more scientific method. After Doug Williams triumphantly overcame an early 10-0 deficit in

1988, there were a few more years of success, including one more Super Bowl during the 1991-1992 season. And then came the futility—nearly 25 straight years of pain. Still, I plunk down my money annually on merchandise, waste three and a half hours each Sunday in the fall watching my bumbling team sputter to between three and seven wins per year, and get caught up in Shakespearean message board threads concerning draft picks and depth charts. Against proper judgement, I even select some of the disappointing Redskins “stars” for my fantasy team.

I’m hooked. The owner of the team, Daniel Snyder, full of small man’s syndrome and poor business decisions, is my leader.

But this is BS, Danny Boy. I signed up for Super Bowl rings. Finishing third in the NFC East—out of the playoffs AGAIN—doesn’t really do much for my ego.

What? You don’t think sports fans are cult-like?

My dear friends at Merriam-Webster define the word cult as:

A small religious group that is not part of a larger and more accepted religion and that has beliefs regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous; a situation in which people admire and care about something or someone very much or too much.

Hmmm... The second half—the part about caring about something too much... that sounds like the guy in the third row, shirtless, with the team logo hand painted across his muffin top. I wonder if that relentless clinging to a cause could have negative consequences?

Let’s switch over to the sport of baseball. Opening Day in Los Angeles.

The *USA Today* details the brutal 2011 attack of Bryan Stow:

Stow, 45, a Santa Cruz paramedic and father of two, was leaving Dodger Stadium after the March 31, 2011, opening game when he was attacked from behind. Prosecutors said Sanchez knocked

Stow unconscious during an unprovoked attack in the stadium's parking lot.

He suffered severe brain trauma and will require long-term care and 24-hour assistance for the rest of his life.

What was Stow's crime? Why did these two strangers attack him?

He belonged to the wrong cult, the rival San Francisco Giants. He wore enemy colors—the orange and black—in the land of the blue and white, Dodger Stadium. Does this sound any different than LA's more notorious gangs, the Bloods and the Crips?

Now, Stow has been reduced to a toddler, needing help with bathing, eating, and dressing himself. He takes 24.5 pills per day—every day—to calm his seizures, among other symptoms.

When you boil the altercation down into its most basic elements, the brain trauma, the coma, the rehab, the lifelong uphill battle for Mr. Stow, it all occurred over a game. A contest between two tribes to score the most points or runs.

When did team affiliations get so serious? These days, playful verbal jabs have been replaced by real fists. The mixture of alcohol, testosterone, and defending your turf against invaders—fans of the other team—can have disastrous consequences.

Sports are the quintessential cults of our time, but this sheep-like devotion extends far beyond a baseball diamond or hooligans of a soccer match. It's leaked into our faith and elected representatives.

Religious cults sound fun, don't they? In the Jonestown Massacre, 900 people lost their lives, all over a devotion to the weirdo leader and resident conman, Jim Jones. They sipped a sugary flavored potion laced with cyanide, known today as "drinking the Kool-Aid," a euphemism for blindly bowing to persuasion.

Maybe we should ask *The King of Queens* actress, Leah Remini, what a treat escaping Scientology was.

Politicians love to divide us by using similar brainwashing tactics to herd citizens of the same country into us vs. them, good vs. evil. The charismatic and authoritarian legislative leaders unite worshippers against a common enemy—a strawman—basically anyone who disagrees with them. Anyone not with us must be against us.

What the one in charge says goes. They will lie straight to our face. As a part of the herd, what can we do? We can't speak up. One president will calmly claim Iraq certainly *does* have weapons of mass destruction (they're buried somewhere over there... keep looking). Trust him on this, okay? Another will make a \$221 million payment to Palestine on his way out of office. Who needs the gold standard when you can print money at will? Does the letter next to the name—an R or a D—really matter?

Forget about the three branches of government—there are no true checks and balances. You can't question them. And like the Eagles hit "Hotel California," *You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave!* Congratulations on your lifetime membership!

If you really think it through, is the political arena really any different than the wrestling arena? How fictional is Francis J. Underwood?

Back in the caveman days, hunter-gatherer societies for the furry human beings made sense. They were essential to survival. Each person had a role, and it needed to be done to see tomorrow. The tribe elders made decisions on behalf of the group, using age and experience as the basis for their decisions. Strong opinions from a single member had real consequences, most likely outcast status or banishment from the tribe altogether.

**But we're not fending off sabretooth tigers anymore. Why do we still seek that same sense of belonging, and the conformity that comes**

**with it?** Why do intelligent individuals follow a science fiction writer who concocted a new religion, dreaming of tax-exempt status?

The answer: the lost soul is looking for something they don't think they can get on their own.

In college, I joined another cult, the Kappa Sigma Fraternity. I pledged my sophomore year after already establishing a core group of best friends. Why did I join? I did it for the same reason why most guys do anything: to meet girls.

After a few weeks as a trial member—a pledge, I found the whole thing just plain silly. The secret phrases and handshakes. Hazing rituals. Learning the history of the founders. Hey, guys, can we bring on the ladies, not stories of Frank Courtney Nicodemus? This isn't what I signed up for.

Several times I wanted to walk away, but I liked the guys in my pledge class. I kept a straight face and my mouth shut. I had to play along to attend the mixers—the parties with sororities—which was the entire point of me being there. Like one of the team, I stifled my opinion, choosing their mindset over mine, dangerous for a newly-crowned “adult.”

**AS YOU STROLL THROUGH LIFE, BEWARE OF GROUPS. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND ON YOUR ROAD TO AN INDEPENDENT SPIRIT:**

- **If you let them, others will sabotage your hopes and dreams and impress theirs upon you. Their agenda is now yours.**
- **Be open to changing your mind.** Accept it. Make peace with it. I do many of the things I laughed at five years ago (hot yoga, anyone?)
- **Watch your biases.** Bias is natural for human beings. Opinions vary based on life experiences, parents, environment, etc. But pay attention to them. Do you dislike something even though you don't understand it? Did you borrow an opinion from someone else because it was easier than building one yourself?

- **Challenge yourself and others, always (yes, even me).** Ask *why* constantly. Ask dumb questions. Be skeptical. Don't take anything at surface level. You'll often find that those who shout the loudest really don't know what they're talking about. Be prepared though, people get angry when you challenge their thoughts and beliefs.
- **Question this book and the contents within.**
- It's okay to say *I don't know* or *I'm not sure*. Your brain loves shortcuts—it doesn't want to work that hard. It wants to chill in a hammock instead of pondering a topic from multiple angles. **Don't be lazy with your opinions. Either attach real facts or thoughts to an opinion or be neutral.**
- If you want good advice, seek a current expert.
- If you want great advice, seek the classics like Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, and Seneca. Their words have lasted thousands of years for a reason.
- **Trust but verify.** Double check people and things.
- Calm political or religious discussions sound great in theory. They are rare these days; everyone is glued to their opinion. Attempting to sway someone over to your side probably isn't worth the effort.
- Ignore others' opinions when you know the truth.
- Beware of self-righteous people. They are hiding something, often engaging in the very thing they are telling other people not to do. Guilty conscience, maybe?
- Be wary of good vs. evil discussions like with our political parties. Republicans think Democrats are evil and vice versa.
- Be careful trusting anyone where money is involved. The thirst for money makes people do awful things to each other.

- James Altucher has a great line about not outsourcing your self-esteem. You're in charge, chief. What you think of yourself is up to you.
- **Stand up for yourself, always. There may be consequences to this though.**
- I guess everyone belongs to some groups whether they want to or not. It's impossible not to be part of a gender or state or country. But automatic membership doesn't mean you need to adhere to a mindset or conform to the group. Don't let the group control you. Don't succumb to the toxic groupthink, where all members are expected to share the same opinion because of a common thread. Joining an art club is fine; joining a cult is not.

Above all, be an individual. Losing this sense of self is not smart in any situation. **You were created with unique strands of DNA for a reason. You were not a copy and paste job.**

As I stray dangerously close to my 40s, I like to believe I've graduated from the desire to be part of a group. In the 2016 election, I decided not to vote. I didn't bash people who did, but I didn't see the point. That was an opinion of mine, and I caught flak for it. But I believed in the decision then and I still do. It would have been easier to lie to people or just go vote for someone. But I wasn't going to silence my beliefs or sacrifice myself for the "common good."

Ron Paul, the former Congressman from Texas and a great independent thinker, tells a story about how we must stand up for ourselves:

Years ago, a member of Congress slipped a laminated quote into my hand that he must have thought I would find meaningful. I paid little attention at first and, unfortunately, I don't recall just who gave me the quote. I placed it next to my voting card and have carried it ever since. The quote came from Elie Wiesel's book *One Generation After*. The quote was entitled "Why I Protest."

Author Elie Wiesel tells the story of the one righteous man of Sodom, who walked the streets protesting against the injustice of this city. People made fun of him, derided him. Finally, a young person asked: “Why do you continue your protest against evil; can’t you see no one is paying attention to you?” He answered, “I’ll tell you why I continue. In the beginning, I thought I would change people. Today, I know I cannot. Yet if I continue my protest, at least I will prevent others from changing me.

Remember, as the 15-foot wave of peer pressure knocks you into the sand, the strong stand alone. **The weak find strength, not in themselves, but in sheer volume... in the numbers. The strong know the truth and ignore all else; the weak wait to hear it from their master.**

**Which one are you going to be?**

# THANK YOU FOR READING

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you should buy several hundred  
copies for your family and friends...



**devon is pale**