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1

Sometimes surviving your 20s is nothing more glamorous than just holding on for dear life on the back of an inner tube like a kid being whipped around by a speedboat.

You can't see a thing.

Repeated waves knock the wind out of you.

Your hands are gripped so tight your fingers begin to cramp.

And your only choice of survival is to **just let go.**

2

The possibility for greatness and embarrassment both exist in the same space. If you're not willing to be embarrassed, you're probably not willing to be great.

A couple years ago while riding my bike at a park, I came across a peculiar, once-in-a-lifetime sight—a Beach Boys cover band up on a stage playing to a crowd of about 500 people. Like a moth to the flame of '60s music I stood there, when the band made an announcement:

“For our last song we need five volunteers to come on stage and play some air guitar. The crowd will vote on the best performance with the winner getting this!” The lead singer held up a beautiful,

white Les Paul guitar. “First five that make it up front, make it on stage!”

Free guitar!? I couldn’t have pulled up at a better time as I had a 50-foot head start on anyone in the crowd. People began to stand. A few started to run. I took two steps. Then froze. I looked at the size of the crowd. Anxiety rushed through me like I’d downed three Mountain Dews before running with the bulls.

Making a fool of myself for a free guitar? Was it worth it?

I didn’t know a soul in the crowd. Get me on stage and I’ll come alive and put on a show. But that takes me *actually* getting on stage.

I deliberated. I debated. And by the time I slowly sauntered over, they had chosen the five.

I missed the moment.

I then watched the five who made it on stage give halfhearted, lame attempts at air guitar that would’ve made Jimi Hendrix cry—their fear of embarrassment making it embarrassing. I felt sick because that guitar could’ve been mine.

But you have to be on the stage to win. They weren’t going to give the guitar to the bystander in the front row who swore he could’ve done it better.

THE FEAR OF EMBARRASSMENT KILLS

The possibility for embarrassment and greatness usually exist in the same space. It’s difficult to remove one and not the other. When you do, you exist in the middle. Mediocrity your brand. No one saying a thing about you—good or bad. Why would they?

That’s where I’ve existed most days. How many moments have I lived in a sterile, white-walled existence where my *perceived appearance* is the wild card that trumps all?

Well nuts to that. Let's overnight the fear of embarrassment to the unreachable depths of the south pole.

The fear of embarrassment poisons creativity.

The fear of embarrassment stifles risk.

The fear of embarrassment lets insecurities call the shots.

Embarrassment thrives like a fungus in the petri dish of "*what will others think?*"

Who cares what others think?

Let them exist in the middle.

I want my guitar.

Who's with me?

3

Making and keeping friendships in your 20s is harder than G.I. Joe's abs.

Making friends was so easy when we were kids. Or at least that's how my nostalgia remembers it.

You tackled a kid at recess. Partnered with someone for Bio Lab. Played a basketball game at the park. Got cast in a play. Moved into a dorm.

Then *bam*, you had a friend.

Lots of them.

Like the kid whose dad worked for Nintendo—friends just waiting at your doorstep.

And then college happened—the height of *Friend Mania*.

And then college ended and with it, so did many of your friendships.

WHERE DID ALL THE FRIENDSHIPS GO????

Then you entered the abyss—the *Friend Abyss*.

Your 20s and 30s are deep, uncharted waters where friends are dumped in black bags never to be seen again.

All those *friends-are-friends-forever* friends, gone—the apparent expiration date on “forever” lasting about two and a half years.

Because you move. Get married. Have kids. Or work a 60-hour a week job. Keeping friendships in your 20s becomes harder than G.I. Joe’s abs (*that’s prison-walls-hard, people*) because you don’t have the same shared experiences anymore. You’re not going to class, then eating lunch, going to practice, eating dinner, hanging out until 2 a.m. like you did in college.

Now your best friend calls and the first thought in your head might be, “Really. *Now*. I don’t have time.”

You stare at the phone as if to say “I’m sorry” as the ring lets out one last cry for help before it’s sent to voicemail like a kid sent to detention for not showing up on time.

Maybe you’ll call back in a day, or maybe a week. But most likely when you do, you’ll get voicemail too. Then you’ll begin the respected twentysomething tradition: **Voicemail Tag**. Almost as fun as freeze tag when we were kids, with one big difference—it’s not fun at all.

So after a couple back-and-forths on voicemail, then a couple texts, then a couple Facebook messages—next thing you know your *friendship* has been reduced to throwing out the once-a-year “*Happy B-Day!!!!*” Facebook wall post, giving it four “!!!!” to show just how excited you really are about your friend (check that friendship off for another year).

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

If keeping up with old friends is *hard*, making new ones is *Bruce Lee-Fists-of-Destruction harder*.

Between work, spouse, babies, work outside of work, and then those silly things like the need to sleep, who has time to go meet new people? And then actually go through the long, awkward process of *Friending*.

And the only thing harder than finding new friends post-college? Finding new couple friends post-college. Now four people to toss into the **Compatibility Blender**.

And the only thing harder than finding couple friends post-college? Finding couple married friends with young babies who:

A. Aren't on the fast track to divorce. So that by the time you finally go through all the awkward lunches, meet-and-greets, and you seal the friendship deal, one of them isn't off with their new assistant.

B. All four adults like each other, but the baby keeps slapping yours in the face and throwing temper tantrums like a spoiled teenager who gets a Kia for her first car instead of a BMW.

This twentysomething friend-shoot ain't easy . . .

4

Your 20s are about having the courage to write a frightful first draft.

I think most of us went into our 20s expecting a box office smash, when instead our twentysomething story is not even going to make it to the theaters. At least not yet.

As a writer, I used to be bummed about all the time and effort I spent writing hundreds of pages that would never see the light. But as I grew as a writer I learned that you have to write a lot of really atrocious first drafts before you can find the story you need to tell.

Our 20s are the same way. For many years it will be about getting words down on paper that we'll edit later. Plans will fail because that's part of **Frightful First Draftdom**. But five rewrites later, we'll lean back and say, "Wow, that's actually not too bad."

We have to be willing to allow ourselves to write some terrible first drafts.

You can't have a good story without a good struggle.

Don't ever, ever check Facebook when you're:

- A. Depressed.
- B. Drinking.
- C. Depressed and drinking.
- D. Unemployed.
- E. Struggling with being *blessed with singleness* while some of your friends seem to be blessed with a Brad Pitt look-alike and that blazing white picket fence shining with the glory of the American Dream on steroids.

OR—F. Anytime after 9:17 p.m.

6

Life will never feel like it's supposed to.

When am I going to experience the success I am supposed to? I've asked that question exactly 4,399 times and only now am I catching a whiff of the answer.

Never.

Because what the heck is “supposed to”? Who holds the blueprint for my life—down to the number of kids, salary, and size of my house? Who decides “supposed to”?

“Supposed to” is a lie. A fairy tale. It is the stealer of peace and productivity. It is the leading cause of Obsessive Comparison Disorder with everyone who “has it better.”

No one has it all figured out. No one holds their first child with all the answers. Not many walk right into their passion from the graduation stage. Not everyone gets married like they're “supposed to” or climbs the corporate ladder full of broken rungs.

If we keep trying to live other people's lives, who is going to live ours?

Being twentysomething can feel like **Death by Unmet Expectations**. However, you are right now, at this moment, exactly where you need to be. You'll just only be able to see that five years and thirty-three days from today.

Let go of "supposed to." Tie an anvil around its neck and throw it out to sea.

If we're always trying to live like we're "supposed to," we're never going to truly live.

7

Feel no shame in seeking help from a counselor or therapist. We all have rotting junk we try to wrap and hide under the Christmas tree. Get rid of it before it smells up your entire holiday.

There is nothing more depressing than searching for a counselor to help with your depression.

At 24 years old, depression was seeping under my bedroom door like a gas leak, and I had no idea who to call to help plug it up.

I mean, *find a counselor?* How does one go about doing such a

thing? It's not exactly something you post on Facebook.

"Hey, does anyone have a good recommendation for a Thai restaurant downtown? Oh, and a good therapist who specializes in depression and an anxiety that feels like your heart has been injected with 1,500 milligrams of caffeine?"

And if finding a counselor who you connect with isn't hard enough, finding a counselor who you connect with and can *actually afford* is a miracle worthy of a burning bush crossing the Red Sea. Sure, *lots* of us twentysomethings have an extra \$300 a month lying around for mental health. I just didn't happen to be one of them.

But we all need help. And sometimes the greatest help we need is help finding help.