



Chapter 4 – My Background is telling Me Things

To write this, I go back a lifetime in my mind and figure out that I live in more than 40 fixed addresses in ships, barracks, room-shares, hotels, YMCA's, mobile homes, duplexes, cabins, apartments, and houses - across 31 different towns and among 13 states that include Ohio, Massachusetts, Virginia, California, Louisiana, Kentucky, Arizona, Connecticut, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Montana, Oklahoma, and Utah. This means packing 35 times and slimming-my-things down to the size of whatever I use to move me.

I can't count the number of places I visit along the way, but my feet take steps in every state, and the world owes me a day because I manage to travel completely around it, starting in California, going to the Middle East, then Europe, then Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, and next to Treasure Island in California.

This mess also includes me going to three different elementary schools, three different middle schools, and four separate high schools before I throw in the towel and earn a GED soon after my last attempt. The lists don't include two different military boot camps, two military vocational schools, and too many additional four and five-week schools to count (plus all of those Amway meetings my brother wants to go to before we can eat dinner).

Since about thirteen-years-old, I start a tilting that keeps me up most nights, and I also start degrading from sleep deprivation. Until a diagnosis, the only two ways that my mind quiets are through total exhaustion or alcohol. In 2012, at 49 years-old, I am diagnosed with high-functioning Autism, which is the relief where my slide finally starts slowing down and I get a chance to start salvaging the wreckage; I gain a new understanding for the phrase that “planes always beat the medics to the crash site.”

My career choices are inspired by the degrees, licenses, and certifications I collect over the years and represent a combination of worm-farmer, lawn-cutter, paperboy, gutter-cleaner, car wash hop, dishwasher, busboy, waiter, Coast Guard cook, sous chef, manager trainee; taxi driver, student, pressroom electrician, master electrician, director of engineering, computer programmer, technical administrative assistant, hotshot driver, surplus seller, real estate agent, underground and surface miner, instrument technician, planner, toilet paper packaging machine repairman, bail bondsman, advocate, and pro se litigator; my Navy positions include human research volunteer, cook, electrician, elevator technician, recruiter, maintenance coordinator, and leading petty officer.

Of the dozen-or-so state exam certifications or court appointments I collect, I really haven't used my process server, electrical contractor, distance learning locksmith, shoe salesman, notary, truck driver, security, private investigator, or bail enforcer credentials yet...I want to see how law school goes first.

I think my career description is really just finding out why the last guy leaves the job I just get, or the wife I just marry; it can be that aside from my social disorder, choosing better jobs means fewer moves to new places ripe with the potential for new wives getting me for a new husband; lately I feel that my relocations are simple acknowledgments of where I don't belong, rather than a hope of finding where I will fit.

I stay married for 20-years, but there are four wives involved in getting there; in hindsight, from all the invitations, I probably can do without going to all five of the weddings I participate or spectate at.

About a year after I start the medications and treatment for autism, that help me sleep more fully and understand new things in new ways, I earn my first college degree – an AA in English language and literature; the degree is the game changer that allows me to chase-down a degree in education (after another degree in electronics), which gets me most of the way through a law degree that I hope I can finish one day.

At least thirty years of my life are involved with equipment maintenance, where the only certainty is that: “whatever equipment is doing, is exactly what it is supposed to be doing in its current condition.” The printing plant I work at (next to the Milton Bradley toy factory), teaches classes in W. Edwards Demings’ Total Quality Management theories – these theories show me that ‘what *anything* is doing right now, is exactly what *that-thing* is supposed to be doing with *everything* in its current condition.’ The idea brings out that finding a root cause allows me to start looking at things that are still a step away.

An autobiography is a look in the mirror if it can be kept out of the fiction aisle. It’s no secret that people want to be seen in their best light, but sometimes the best light that is available at certain times, is in helping others by honest description and being a model bad example with flaws (falling down), who addresses flaws (getting back up), who keeps looking for the flaws, and in this process I will find the ways to gain forgiveness; ways that I relate to the Maya Angelou quote: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

I have an earlier version of Maya’s quote, using the different ending words of “but people will never forget how the problem was handled.” I am glad I run into this better version because how things are handled determines how people feel, and I never look that far and find that root cause without the doctor’s help. I also see something extra to pick up as well; in turning Dr. Angelou’s words more inward I

don't see how it is possible that her words above can be true without these additional words also being true: "I've learned that I will forget what I said, I will forget what I did, but I will never forget how I made me feel."

Bringing Angelou's and Demings' words together create something useful for me to look over. I understand Demings' words: "If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing." so I can now sense an Angelou motherly whisper that I can't know what I'm feeling if I can't describe the feeling, or what brings me to it.

It is important to me...to this autistic male, that I know about both Deming and Angelou when combining my inflexible feelings with some practical application of their knowledge; if I want to vent by writing a helpful autobiography that stays out of the fiction aisle, I have to reflect from the correct mirror. Nothing less than being able to describe my feelings, and what brings me to them, can show that I know what I'm feeling.

Maybe the most important upshot that can be added here is in giving an allowance for change: that inwardly, I change how I see myself by the way I change how I treat myself, so it follows that outwardly - people can change how they see both me and each other by how they and I change the ways we treat each other. I am either fully capable of change and stand to gain that award, or I face becoming entirely incapable of change, with the reward that I continue to be totally screwed.

Dismissing the comedians who claim that things like bicycle helmets, seat-belts, and industrial safety regulations have doomed future evolution by allowing the criminally stupid to stay in the gene-pool and reproduce, Darwin's laws of natural selection otherwise prove that those who adapt to change [accurately], will survive better and longer than those who can't or won't.