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UBER AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

by

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Non-Fiction

Culture, Philosophy

PREFACE

We've all had those moments. You're stuck in a rut, can't seem to catch your breath. Your sanity is dangling by such a terribly tiny thread that you're utterly stunned—and admittedly a bit proud of yourself!—that everything hasn't come crashing down months ago.

With a title like *Uber and the Meaning of Life*, you might expect its author to have things all, or at least *mostly*, “figured out.”

Maybe this quirky little book was an assigned writing gig? Maybe some witty publishing house executive had a charmingly funny idea and emailed one of his seasoned writers, “Hey Jonathan, This is a little off the wall, but I think it'll be a huge success! Forget about your current book, go hop in your car, and try this one out—*Uber and the Meaning of Life!*”

I really wish!

Nope... No grand publishing schemes or sexy branding stories of any size, shape or sort here.

Truth be told—it was all a bit of a strange synchronicity.

It was one of those moments when—right when you've reached the point where you're ready to throw both hands up in surrender to your current situation—fate taps you on the shoulder and whispers in your ear “Hey... Don't you dare give up that easily! You're going to love what I've got for you next.”

In July 2021 I started working as a hotel front desk agent at my local Holiday Inn Express.

What had started out as a great set-up—basically every writer's dream in which most moments of downtime I spent with an open laptop and Word document—had quickly morphed into a total nightmare.

A few of our “dependables” had quit and I worked the afternoon shift alone most days, playing amateur housekeeper, pool cleaner and bodyguard in stressfully seamless combination.

In June 2022 I quit.

After a few days of head-scratching and aimless doodling, I had a crazy plan—I was going to *Uber*... But I wasn't going to *just Uber*... I was going to Uber and find a way to make it the time of my life. It was time to shake things up!

That's when I unwrapped the "Golden Ticket" so to speak.

It all became blindingly obvious: "Ok... you're a *writer* right? If you're gonna Uber, why not turn it into a *story*? Why not turn it into a *book of its own*? And you're also a *philosopher* right? Why not make it *meaningful*? Why not see what people think about this crazy and exciting little world we live in and the lives we lead? Why not—*Uber and the Meaning of Life*?"

And with that... I embarked on one of the most fascinatingly fulfilling and continually surprising phases of my life.

Each person I chatted with had something unique to say; there's no doubt about that. But I'll admit... Some of the dialogues I had absolutely blew me away. Every possible judgement or initial conception I had about this project and its possible directions was irrevocably changed.

I quickly came to a conclusion.

If we've ever wondered where the *meaning* in life is to be found—through the stress, the trials, the disappointments and the failures—the meaning is in the moment; in the people we're with; their heartfelt thoughts; the secrets they share.

It is that marvelous *meaning* that I wish to share here.

INTRODUCTION

We're told we need *unity*. We're urged to "come together," to be a community, to push past our differences—to love each other, accept our fellow humans' flaws and faults and relish in our uniquely human bond.

We hear this from our parents, from our pastors, from our politicians, from our teachers and from our bosses and organizations. We hear it on our news. We read it in our magazines. And we see it in our advertisements.

But there's something that's a little tough for us to admit. There's something that a lot of us [read: probably all of us] are thinking but oh so *embarrassed* to own up to.

It is not easy for us to love, to accept, to "come together," to "rally around." In fact, to accept each other lovingly—no matter our interests, our backgrounds, our worldviews—is perhaps *the hardest thing there is* on this marvelously crazy planet of ours.

And here's maybe the most infuriating thing: it's *so darn easy* in theory. It is the most straightforward thing imaginable. Simply look each other in the eye, make peace and get ready to welcome in a new world in which hatred, deception and war no longer exist... Right?

But no.

As is often the case, the simplest thing is simultaneously the most profoundly challenging.

So perhaps that's it... Maybe we should admit to ourselves and each other that this whole "coming together" thing is far too big a feat for us mere humans. Maybe we should throw in the towel, pack it in, chalk it up to our collective fate.

It's *tempting*.

But I don't think so.

In June 2022 I quit my job and, on a complete whim, started driving for Uber. I met hundreds upon hundreds of profoundly interesting and inspiring people and indulged in some of the greatest conversations of my life.

By the time I finished driving in February of 2023 I had compiled a treasure trove of these marvelous peoples' perspectives and views on some of this world's deepest and most moving topics. This project is a mosaic of some of these individuals' answers to questions as intriguing as "Does this life have a purpose?" and as intimate as "Would your ten-year-old self be proud?" And the answers they graciously gave paint a colorfully inspiring portrait of humanity.

But if there's one thing this little project has taught me above all else—as cheesy and as mushy as it may sound—*there is a piece of us in all others*. And it is *this*. It is *this* that will carry us home. *This* is our superpower.

There is a piece of the supermarket clerk in the lawyer. There is a piece of the depressed person in the joyful. There is a piece of the mother in the father. And there is a piece of the criminal in the clean-slated.

We don't have to drive ourselves mad or berate ourselves over not unconditionally loving those around us. We don't have to blindly or uncritically accept each and every piece of each other.

All we have to do is search for that *one piece* in the other that is *also ours*. And once we find that piece, I think we'll quickly find more *commonalities* and more *companionships* that we could have ever thought possible.

And when things go awry and the waters grow choppy—as they no doubt will on occasion—we've got one more tool in our belt: *laughter*.

Laughter can no doubt unite that which all the hard-fought empathy or earnestly practiced compassion could never pretend to. And trust me... some of the responses I received are just *bellyachingly hilarious*.

In fact, I didn't just get hilariously witty responses. I give to you the whole gamut of human emotion and ingenuity in Part I, "Standouts."

There's not only "The Witty" but also "The Profound," "The Heartfelt" and "The Rebellious and Disgruntled." And don't worry, there was only a small and highly entertaining handful of "disgruntled's."

In Part II I divvy things up by theme. There's "The Deep," "The Valuable," "The Emotional" and "The Personal." These chapter titles correspond to the four categories that I clumped my questions to my passengers into—*Deep, Values, Emotions* and *Self*. Each category consisted of twelve possible questions to choose from, and the passengers picked one question to answer from each of the categories, summing to a total of four questions and answers for each passenger.

And in Part III "People," I showcase all of my passengers' answers to each of the four questions they chose. Each of their personalities is on shining display in this section, and oftentimes the depth and range of their responses across all four questions is truly amazing.

Although I only drove Uber for eight months, I felt like I had come away with a whole decade's worth of down-to-earth wisdom and human experience. The more people I spoke to and learned from the more I began to *see*.

Philosophers, scientists and mystics have waged war over the *meaning* of these curious lives we lead for centuries.

"Perhaps it's all a grand illusion!" some have shouted.

"Maybe there is no meaning to be had at all..." some have mused melancholically.

To these brilliant souls I have only one thing to say. And yes, I invite them to laugh. But I also invite them to stay.

Perhaps the *meaning* is to be found right *here*, right *now*. Perhaps there's a little meaning in this woman here, and in this man over there. Perhaps—through the stress, the trials, the disappointments and the failures of this wild world—the meaning is in the moment; in the people we're with; their heartfelt thoughts; the secrets they share.

Perhaps *that* is the *purpose* we all share.

Now let's go for a ride, shall we?

PART I

Standouts

CHAPTER 1

The Witty

It's nearly impossible to see the meaning in life without a little humor.

There's nearly as many flavors of humor as there are personality types. There's the amusing, the clever, the charming and the outright hilarious. And in each flavor, there's something to be found for everybody.

Humor is the great unifier. It transcends boundaries that the other human elements cannot. And in each category of questions my passengers answered, from "The Deep" to "The Personal," humor shone through, sometimes in totally unexpected ways.

In this chapter we see clever answers to cuttngly deep questions. We see charming answers to cut-and-dried questions. And we see candidly hilarious answers to personal questions. But most of all—we see levity and lightness of spirit in all of its chuckle-worthy incarnations.

Q: Do you trust your intuition or “gut?”

(Written)

A: Even when I’ve been skinny, my “gut” is all I’ve got! I can’t imagine not going with your gut. I can be rational when I need to be, but that’s not usually how I roll.

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn’t fire you?

(Spoken)

A: Oh sh*t... Hah! I love this one man. Look... my boss, he one of the most messed up people I know man... Like this a dude who will come over and mess with you just to do it. He does this with damn near everybody there too. If I had to tell him something finally it’d have to be ‘Look man... You the kinda person that go to hell and gets kicked the hell out man... You the kinda person that after they kicked outta hell is all schemin’ and plottin’ to get back into hell and overthrow the damn devil himself man... You the kinda person that after he throw out the devil gets ganged up on by all them demons and people down there and thrown outta there again man... [Chuckles]

Q: Can humanity ever achieve a theory of everything?

(Spoken)

A: Hmmm... You mean like a theory of each little thing under the sun or one big theory that takes care of literally everything? [Chuckles] That’s a pretty huge difference. I mean... I think that it’s obviously possible to have a theory about each topic that we discover. Like I don’t think it’s possible for us to discover something and then never have the possibility to know about it, if that makes sense... So... in theory... in theory if this is true then there should be no big deal with finding one big theory that explains absolutely everything... I don’t really see why that would be impossible. It’s something to shoot for at least!

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

(Spoken)

A: Ya know... if I uh... If I say “bad” that kinda makes me the bad guy, right? And if I say “good” that prob’ly means I’m just blowin’ smoke [Laughter] I say... I say people are *both*. That way I ain’t guilty of either way [Laughter]

Q: Would your ten-year-old self be proud?

(Spoken)

A: You know... I tend to think that your ten-year-old self would be proud of just about anything... [Chuckles] Like... If I told my ten-year-old self that I stayed at home all day and built Lincoln Log mansions and Lego forts, he’d be totally pumped [Laughter] Nah... really though... I think the younger me would be pretty proud of me. That little guy always wanted to do something out in nature, he always wanted to roam free and never wanted to go inside. I actually work on an oil rig... also do the drill engineering. And somehow, I think he would find that pretty darn cool [Chuckles]

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn’t fire you?

(Spoken)

A: Ahhhhah! [Laughter] *Yeahhh*... So... I work for a psychology research “think tank” type thing, right? And... so the way it works is that there’s not one boss... there’s like *eight* of them... so this is gonna be *extra* fun. [Laughter] Ok I won’t even sugarcoat it... So some of these people are like really... I mean *really* stilted and out of touch with the world. They’ve basically never stepped foot outside of their office or off of their campus. So some of the stuff they suggest to us is just straight up stupid... and if we were to actually implement these in the real world, it would be a *total* trainwreck. [Chuckles] I’m basically always daydreaming of walking into a meeting and just grilling them like “Oh really...? Your research shows that spending 20 straight hours together actually bonds people and builds empathy? So you want our clients to start setting up 20 hour meetings and holding their constituents for ransom while citing that study?” [Laughter] Like come on people!

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

(Spoken)

A: That's definitely the question isn't it... [Chuckles] Yeah... I feel like once you get past like 40... hell maybe even younger than that... I feel like once you get around that certain age, you start to sorta wake up and find out like "Wow... Yeah most people aren't that great"...

[Chuckles]

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

(Spoken)

A: Yeah... this one hits deep... Hmm... [5 second pause] I think the easy answer that everybody kinda like feels like they need to say is "yes"... But I don't know if it's that simple. Like imagine instead of life and people it's a video game and you're choosing characters... You've got 8 billion characters to choose from and you're somehow, *magically*, gonna choose the exact same character you got randomly assigned to you...? Uhhh... [Chuckles] I really don't think so... So there's that. But then there's definitely also something to be said for standing firm and strong in who you are and loving every part of yourself. Like if we're being practical, obviously we shouldn't want to be someone else... But if we're being realistic... I think most people would... uh... *shake things up a bit* [Laughter]

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

(Spoken)

A: Welp... I *am* the boss [Laughter] I suppose I am known to say some pretty nasty stuff to *myself* on occasion though... I haven't fired myself yet though thankfully [Chuckles]

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

(Spoken)

A: I think they totally can... Now, does that mean it's gonna be easy? Does that mean we can just slap some picket signs together, parade down the streets and then we get world peace? No way... But I think for the amount of effort we've put forth so far... uh... like basically next to nothing... [Laughter] I think considering that we've never truly tried in any huge way to come

together on a global scale before... We just might be surprised what might happen if we start trying for that.

(Spoken)

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

A: Uhh... *Yeah...* yeah I *would* care... [Laughter] It would be like having the longest homework assignment of your life, doing your extra best, studying for years and years and years... with all these damn distractions and crazy ass sh*t popping up... and then you finally go to submit it and the teacher is like “Yeah... that was just a practice sheet. We don’t have any more assignments left” Like come *onnnn*. [Laughter] I’m sure some people would be relieved and be all like “Oh my god thank you!!”, you know, like this whole idea of “Now I’m free and there’s no more stress” But I just don’t get how that wouldn’t mess with your head...

(Spoken)

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn’t fire you?

A: Oooh... [Laughter] Mmm mmm mmm... [Chuckles] I can’t say his name can I...? No? [Laughter] Gotcha... Well... This wrong, I know it... [Laughter] But... this dude’s style is whack. I can’t even hold it back. Dude be wearin’ a bowtie... You know, one of them little cute, tiny red lookin’ ones too... He be lookin’ like a damn Christmas present... [Laughter] And he thinkin’ he look good... [Shakes head]

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

(Spoken)

A: So... If we wanna talk like war history... [Laughter] So Stalin, this was in World War II, right... Stalin had this crazy policy, Order... Order Number 229 I think? 227...? Anyways, something like that. Stalin had this order sent out to the troops on the front line—if you retreat, you will be shot on sight! They called this the “Not one step back” order. Basically, Stalin had the idea to not even allow cowardice to happen. [Laughter] But like when you consider what that means... Ok, you’re gonna outlaw cowardice... But in terms of having to issue an order like that... Doesn’t that kinda mean, like, *Stalin...* c’mon... you’re a *pretty sh*tty motivator* man.

[Laughter] Who's the real coward then? The troops who are like "Hey... this sucks, let's go back" or the dude so scared of "cowards" that he's gotta kill 'em all.

Q: Where did you want to be in life? Where are you now?

(Spoken)

A: So... I went to college out of state, right... I went to Washington State on scholarship and was like totally on my own and everything. Back then I didn't have a clue what the hell I wanted from life and what I was going to do. I feel like I just... Like I sorta just spun a wheel and chose a random major? [Laughter] My parents wanted me to be a nurse or something medical (my dad's a surgeon... ugh...) but I hated that so I chose something basically as far away from the medical field as possible: English Lit. I remember my parents like freaking the f*ck out and basically demanding that I come back home because they didn't want their money wasted on English Lit... [Laughter] My dad called it "English Sh*t"... But actually... This ended up being one of my best choices... Two years in I ended up changing over to journalism and my Junior year I already got an offer from a really good magazine. My dad still hated it but at least I got the last laugh...!

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

(Spoken)

A: Oh man... [Laughter] I've always kinda fantasized about that perfect moment, ya know... where everybody else has just packed up and left and it's just me and the boss standing there alone. He starts to open his mouth but I hold up a finger and go "Wait a second buddy" [Chuckles] "Wait a second." [Laughter] I'd have a ball with it [Chuckles] I'd go "Look here man... you open that mouth and you're fired." He'd go to open his mouth again and I'd be like "What did I say, Doug?" He'd finally get pissed and overpower me but then I'd just go "No... That's not really how it works, Doug... You're the one who's fired here." And... I figure we'd kinda just go back and forth like that until he finally gave up or physically assaulted me [Laughter]

CHAPTER 2

The Profound

There's moments where you're mildly impressed. You nod your head in casual affirmation.

And then there's moments where you're stunned. You've got to bend down and pick up your jaw from the carpet.

There's the lightness and levity of humor, and then there's the weightier, more substantial punch that's packed into a profound sentence or idea.

We humans have been obsessed with the profound for many centuries. There's a special sort of reward that accompanies the revelation of a rivetingly deep idea. And perhaps the most awesome thing—there's no special qualifications or credentials required. Often the people who are least expected to dazzle with their minds bring us some of the sweetest food for thought.

In this chapter we see the profound in all of its variety and power.

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

(Written)

A: I think that most people are confused. We tend to call the most confused “bad”. And the ones that aren’t as confused we call “good”. I like to think that most people are just confused enough to not be saint-like but not confused enough to be satan-like.

Q: If you could be God for a day, would you?

(Spoken)

A: Oh *this* one... this one is *good*. Ok... I *would* actually. Here’s what I would do... So... like you make a world where everybody’s good right? Basically you make 8 billion Adam and Eve’s... You run the “simulation” for like a couple hundred of years. After that you see how deeply people *felt*, how deeply everybody *loved*. What was their world like? Then... you take 8 billion people and allow them to *choose*—be *good* or be *bad*. Run the simulation again... You see how everybody did, what they felt and how deep their love was again... Ok now here’s the cool part... There is absolutely *no* way, just no way... there’s no way that the 8 billion Adam and Eve’s were able to love more strongly than the 8 billion “normal” people. In fact... and call me crazy because this is crazy sounding for sure... but I think... I think like you would find that the “normal” people... I think you would find that they loved even *stronger* and *harder* than the “good” people. *Why* though...? I mean... I can only guess... But I can only guess that it’s the whole reason the bad or the “evil” exists... it exists to remind us of the value of the good. The evil pushes us past our boundaries... the evil makes us love so much more boldly. Loving in the face of evil is so much more brave.

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

(Spoken)

A: So... I’m a little “quirky,” you could say... I’m very, very spiritual and into the spiritual world, and this is a question that I’ve thought a whole lot about... I’ve thought about it for like two whole decades [Laughter] There’s uh... there’s several schools or “streams” of spirituality out there that show that... in some sense or another... we actually choose to be ourselves... we choose to incarnate into these bodies, on this planet. There’s even the idea that we also choose

our immediate family, our friends and our spouse. Something about these ideas just really captivated me and I've been exploring them ever since I found them. So yeah... I think I just might have actually chosen to be me... and that's a really cool thing.

Q: What makes someone powerful?

(Written)

A: The most powerful people, I think, are the ones who seem least powerful. The most "powerful" people I've ever known don't seem very "powerful" to most around them. There is great power in silence. There is much power that is hidden in plain sight.

Q: What does love mean to you?

(Spoken)

A: I think with social media and everything, people have started to get an even more twisted idea of what love really is... You know, we've got everything from The Bachelorette to people feeling the constant need to update everybody on the most intimate deals of their romantic relationships [Chuckles] I'm actually a therapist... and a lot of the younger people I talk to usually bring up romantic troubles... So, obviously, I ask them questions to get them thinking about how they view love and how this affects how they view their partner and the standards they hold them up to... stuff like that, right? I almost always... almost *without exception*... find that with my younger patients, there's this idea that love should just "work" and that it should just always be seamless and easy... no effort required *ever*. And... you know, that might very well be true for the first 1... *maybe 2?*... years... [Laughter] But yeah... after that you and your partner get down to business. And that's not even a bad thing... It just means that you start having to learn even more about what makes them tick and how the two of you can be on the same team as things evolve.

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

(Spoken)

A: See... If you say they're fundamentally good, everything you see around you and everything you do is gonna be colored in that light... so people will appear "good"... or at least better. And if you say they're fundamentally bad, you're also gonna see everything through that lens are

come away with that idea reinforced in the exact same way... I think either extreme... either side of the uh... *coin*.... either end is a bit unrealistic. People aren't just good or bad. There's everything in between... there's all shades and colors between the good and the bad. And... I think if you take that sort of perspective, you'll find that you get a healthier, more balanced view of the world. You'll be able to see the good that's in the "bad", the bad that's in the "good" and everything else that's out there in this crazy world...

Q: What's the weirdest emotion you've felt?

(Spoken)

A: I'm not really sure if this qualifies as an emotion... I guess it's more of an experience of sorts... But it was definitely an emotionally charged thing. So basically, when I was a teen I had this super bizarre experience. It's called "derealization" or "depersonalization" or something like that. It makes you feel like you're not even in control of your own body or decisions... it's like you're just kinda sitting there behind a screen, watching yourself move around and do things throughout the day. It sounds kinda weird and stupid, but it was by far the most terrifying thing of my life. What made it more scary was that I didn't really know how to tell anybody about it without them thinking I had just totally lost my mind [Laughter]

Q: What makes someone powerful?

(Spoken)

A: Ohhhh man... Yeah... Power... Power is somethin' that nobody can get all the way into they heads... Power... power to one man is money, right? Power to another man is fame. Power to the next dude is sex. It keeps on goin' man... See... and *today*... today, we somehow decided that power is what all those men have together... Power is, you know, the dude with both the *money*... the... the *fame*... the *sex*. There ain't no end to that. See... what *true* power is, true power is about the one who can sit there and lose *all of that*... lose *each and every one of those*... and *still* somehow make it and get sh*t movin'. *That's* power man...

Q: Can humanity ever achieve a theory of everything?

(Spoken)

A: Hmm... You mean like a theory of each little thing under the sun or one big theory that takes care of literally everything? [Chuckles] That's a pretty huge difference. I mean... I think that it's obviously possible to have a theory about each topic that we discover. Like I don't think it's possible for us to discover something and then never have the possibility to know about it, if that makes sense... So... in theory... in theory if this is true then there should be no big deal with finding one big theory that explains absolutely everything... I don't really see why that would be impossible. It's something to shoot for at least!

Q: What is most valuable?

(Spoken)

A: Hmm... Value's a tricky thing for sure... I mean... I guess I would say that value is connected to *community*. And not in some like weird, abstract sense either... Like, I mean that value is rooted in the systems of social support and love that we have around us, from family all the way up to our government. Obviously though... if we have a crappy society around us, it's gonna be hard for us to see any value anywhere around us. But... if we have a really strong network of support and a really healthy web of people around us, both our family and our broader social contacts... value starts popping up everywhere, everywhere you look you can see the meaning of things. And I think that's why we have so many people today we are struggling so hard to find meaning, to find that sort of "purpose", you know? Value is definitely something beyond money and beyond status... Value's in our social world.

Q: Does God play dice?

{Spoken}

A: Ya know... I never really understand what this meant... It's like... If I'm God, right? And I wanna create somethin'... Alls I gotta do is reach down and... BOOM... Right? It's already right there. If God be "playin' dice"... If God have to play dice... *Then*... who is he playin' dice *for*? Right? Cuz you don't sit there playin' dice for nothin'... Who he playin' those dice *for*? That's all I'm sayin'...

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

(Written)

A: One word: Duality. It's a struggle we all have. As babies, we're born perfect, but as human beings, we're also corruptible. What it boils down to is how we let ourselves be affected by the circumstances we go through and the choices we make because of them.

There is a saying; "Saints and sinners are quite the same." This means that the tide can change at any point because neither one is better than the other and each person is a result of the choices they make. We are who we choose to be.

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

(Written)

A: No. Politics is driven by two things—money and power—and the easiest way to obtain one or the other is by screwing someone over. It can happen on a small scale, like a businessman profiting off his partner, or on a larger scale, like politicians making poor decisions for their constituents. A wise politician recognizes the need for money and power to ascend in the political rankings and is willing to act completely out of line in order to achieve their desires. They may sugarcoat it, or even be straight up deceptive, but in the end, you can be sure your best interests are never on their mind. Additionally, the introduction of new cultures and ideals to a community makes it even harder to appease the masses, inflating the disconnect from the constituents.

Q: Is it better to be nice or be right?

(Spoken)

A: Obviously nice, right...? But there's for sure also times where you just really can't be one or the other. Ok this just popped into my head... it's *horrible*... it's *sooo bad*... [Laughter] But I really can't help myself. So imagine a dude is out there standing on the train tracks... Like he's just ready to end it all, right? Imagine you're like walking by on the sidewalk and look over and see him. You're definitely not gonna just be like "That's awesome! You have free will and deserve to make your own choice with your life!" [Laughter] Right...? Or like you're not gonna be all like "Hey man, I love your shoes! Where'd you get them?" You're gonna have to actually

not be that nice, or maybe even that right... Like maybe this poor dude really doesn't have much to live for in his mind, right? Maybe his situation objectively sucks and it may never get much better... But you still have to be like "Dude, what are you doing?! You've got your whole life ahead of you!"... You can't exactly be 100 percent "nice" or a 100 percent "right"...

Q: What does depression mean to you?

(Spoken)

A: Well... It's like I was saying about the whole insecurity and success thing... if you have this missing piece or like "void" inside of you, then you're definitely gonna feel it. I think a lot of depression comes from that sort of feeling where you're just drifting and not really anchored into your deeper or true self, you haven't found that yet or are too scared to embrace it. It's kinda like the whole Jim Carrey thing. I don't remember when but I guess a few years ago he came out and basically told everyone like "Look guys... I've been playing a character for years now... decades even... and I'm totally miserable. I have to get in tune with myself or it's gonna kill me." It's that sort of thing where if you're hiding yourself or masking things you hate, you're not going to end up feeling whole or healthy.

CHAPTER 3

The Heartfelt

We fire off many pleasantries and platitudes as we walk through our days.

Almost robotically, we send out a “How’s it going?” to grease the wheels and pass out a “I’m doing good” to set the tone.

But there’s the occasional moment when the veil drops and we get invited into another’s special little human world. This is where true connection can be cherished.

It’s in this heart-to-heart environment that we can learn and experience some pretty incredible things. Deep desires are shared. Goals and fantasies are freely shown. And the most intimate and inspiring aspects of one’s identity are revealed.

In this chapter we get to see what people truly see and feel what they truly feel. We catch a glimpse into the hearts, minds and souls of various individuals. And we come away with a wide range of heartfelt experience.

Q: What is the most courageous act?

(Spoken)

A: So I'm actually a veteran... Three tours in Iraq... What they tell you about courage over there doesn't always, uh... let me just say it doesn't always "match up" with what you feel like courage should be. What you end up realizing... after a lot of really, really messed up stuff... What you end up realizing is that courage isn't about playing the right "side" or winning or any of that... People are *people* man... And you're a coward if you're gonna treat any one group of people as somehow beneath or not even deserving of life...

Q: What is the strongest emotion you've felt?

(Spoken)

A: Well, I guess I can piggyback off of my last answer... [Chuckles] By far... The strongest thing I ever felt was when my son was born. I'm not even normally that emotional of a guy... But it was really something... Knowing that this is a completely new human being, a new soul... And this soul is now your responsibility and great blessing. It's a wild thing... Please don't tell my wife I didn't mention our wedding day though...! [Laughter]

Q: What haunts you?

(Spoken)

A: This might sound kinda weird because I'm not exactly sure how to word it... But what scares me the most is being seen basically... Having somebody be able to look at me, into my eyes... and just somehow tell everything I'm thinking, who I really am and basically know more about me than I know about myself... I'm not sure if that even makes sense...? But yeah... I'm outgoing and everything but I'm also a pretty private person too. I don't like letting many people see who I am on a deeper level. Makes me feel... I guess "vulnerable" is the best way to put it...

Q: What's one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

(Written)

A: I always wished that I had the guts to love freely. For me, love is the most important thing that exists. But I've always been fearful of expressing it to others. That's been a part of the

harmful side of masculinity, is that showing emotions is shown as a sign of weakness. Struggling with the self judgment I've had when I do feel strongly towards another person has made it more difficult to hold onto relationships and the people I care about. There comes a lot of fear with love, but I'm trying to be better at facing that fear.

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

(Spoken)

A: Back to the courage thing... It's one of those things that really makes you think. We're always brought up to think that a "man" is someone who is like... "fearless", you know? A man is someone who doesn't even feel the fear or the pain... and he's always aggressive and playing on offense... But somewhere... at some point you start to realize that this isn't really true. Look man... every man has this sort of "objective line" that he will cross... it don't matter if you're frickin' Superman or the Hulk... once you get into a bad enough situation: *you're gonna feel it*. What really makes a man is not that he's totally oblivious to all the bad stuff that's thrown at him... what matters is that he cares enough about what he values the most, what he loves... what matters it that he cares enough about these things to continue through that pain and through the sadness.

Q: What is the strongest emotion you've felt?

(Spoken)

A: Oh man... Strongest... [10-second pause] I think I'd have to go with my wedding day... I'm sorry kids... [Laughter] I should probably say when my daughters were born... [Laughter] I mean that was very strong too obviously. But a different kind of strong. I think my wedding day was so special because the man I married helped pull me out of a really dark place in my life. I never ever expected to find something like that. It was a really cool thing.

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: I actually had post partum depression pretty bad after my first. I felt super guilt on top of all that. To me it was like just being totally dull. It wasn't really even sadness. It was more just this sickening gray feeling if that makes sense. My eyes were open but my mind didn't feel "on".

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

(Written)

A: I really want to say yes but I don't think its so realistic... I have struggled with eating disorder most of my life, I don't really like how I look but I really try to. Its not easy being a girl today, especially with all these people around you telling you how you need to look.

Q: Is there an unforgivable deed?

(Spoken)

A: Ah... Well I'm probably the right person to ask... [Laughter] I've done and seen some crazy sh*t... I tell ya... [Laughter] But uh... No. Look... there ain't a single thing that I ever done, or that anybody I know personally ever done, that can't be forgiven. There ain't no doubt about that one.

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

(Spoken)

A: So this is a weird one I guess for a grown ass man to be talking about I guess but I've had my fair share of nerves. Like a lot of people are shocked when I tell them that I was this super shy kid right? [Chuckles] They're like "Nah... not *you* man...?" you know? But yeah... Dude, I sh*t you not... I couldn't even call someone on the phone until I was like 18 years old bro [laughter] See I was an 80s kid and we couldn't just Instagram or text or any of that. I remember my parents wondering why I never took any calls. They'd be like "Hey Reilly, you've got someone asking for you!" and I'd just be like "Nah, it's ok!" [Laughter] Yeah... [laughter] I would've straight up *killed* for a cell phone back then man.

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

(Spoken)

A: I guess I have a pretty unique answer to this one... I'm gonna have to go with my dad, and maybe not for the most common of reasons... So my dad had me when he was only 17, right... And the girl he was with... my real mom... ended up dying in some freak accident like a year after I was born... So he and his family basically raised me solo until I was around like eight or

nine years old, then he got married. It was such an odd feeling being in my teens are having my dad be like basically a kid himself [Chuckles] My buddies always wanted to like make him their own friend and get him to give life advice and everything [Laughter] And I used to be like “Guys... you know he barely knows more than we do, right...?” [Laughter] But yeah... That man helped me out more than he’ll probably ever know... Hell of a guy.

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

(Spoken)

A: Let’s make this one a little bit less gloomy... [Laughter] Uh... Yeah, I’d say I’ve learned to love being sensitive and emotional. Obviously when you’re little... especially being a guy... that’s not really a thing that’s valued at all... most people are gonna be relentless and pick on you for feeling things deeply or wanting to be in tune with what you or others are feeling. But you finally end up reaching a point where you realize how powerful it is to feel... how powerful it is to feel deeply and be super sensitive. I just wish the world recognized that more.

Q: What does love mean to you?

(Written)

A: To me, love is everything. It’s the meaning of life and its what gets me up every day. Whether that be love for an individual or love for my work or the planet, it surrounds us and I’ve learned to search for it. Love doesn’t always have to have someone else involved, loving yourself is one of the most important things someone can do. Love is what binds us together and helps us grow as a society.

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: Man... My little baby girl was born 2 weeks ago [Big smile]... [10-second pause] The kind of man I used to be... I never knew... I really just never knew if I’d get that chance. It’s an incredible thing to see for me. And I promise that little girl, with everything I’ve got in me, that her daddy’s gonna protect her... love on her... and make her proud.

Q: What haunts you?

(Spoken)

A: Honestly...? Not being able to help the people I want to. Being totally ineffectual... totally unable to lend a hand to the people who need it the most... the people who are counting on me to help them out and pull them through. I don't know... I figure this is a common thing with therapists... Sometimes you get those people you see, the regulars, those people you get to know so well... You know their entire life and their mind maybe better than their closest friends and family do... And then sometimes they just drop off the face of the earth. Sometimes you guess it's because they got better... maybe they just realized they no longer needed to talk and they went about their life. Other times... other times, you just never know. It *haunts* me... it haunts me everyday to think that maybe some of those people who stopped coming aren't still here with us.

CHAPTER 4

The Rebellious and Disgruntled

We've been tickled by humor, wowed with profundities and inspired—perhaps to the point of both tears of joy and tears of sorrow—by heartfelt stories.

Now it's time we let loose a little and indulge our rebellious side.

For every assignment, activity or endeavor there's always at least a few rebels. These are the outlaws who carve their own path, whether in spite, in jest or in exhilaration.

Of course, there's also those who merely missed the memo or were simply struck by inattention, but that's not nearly as sexy is it?

In this chapter we pay homage to those few who dared to be different. There's a spiteful one or two. There's a few amusing jesters. And there's a pair who simply missed the memo. But we've gotta love 'em all the same. Oh, and don't you worry, the names have been changed to protect the innocent (and the not so innocent!).

Rebel 1

(Written)

Rebel 1 started out fairly strong—their first two answers were coherent. But they got a little emotional when they butted up against the “Emotions” category. In the doubtful case that they do have personal experience with mental illness, perhaps their experience was simply too tricky to talk about (yet somehow too irresistible to mention). Nonetheless, Rebel 1 rounded things out on a more lighthearted note by humorously admitting to their own hypocrisy.

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: No

Values

Q: Is there an unforgiveable deed

A: Yes

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: No

Self

Q: What’s one thing you’ll never do?

A: This

Rebel 2

(Written)

Rebel 2 isn’t so much of a “rebel” at all. In fact, you might recognize this rebel from Chapter 2, “The Profound.” Alas, for all of their profundity, Rebel 2 didn’t follow through, answering only one of the questions on the list. It’s a true shame we were denied access to the other three profundities Rebel 2 could have woven.

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: One word: Duality. It's a struggle we all have. As babies, we're born perfect, but as human beings, we're also corruptible. What it boils down to is how we let ourselves be affected by the circumstances we go through and the choices we make because of them.

There is a saying; "Saints and sinners are quite the same." This means that the tide can change at any point because neither one is better than the other and each person is a result of the choices they make. We are who we choose to be.

Rebel 3

(Written)

Rebel 3 doesn't mess around. When we use the word "rebel" it's individuals like this that we have in mind. Rebel 3 gives us an impressive display of aggression. Yet, for someone so seemingly opposed to this project, they followed through admirably, writing nearly as much—and with as high quality of grammar—as some of their non-rebel counterparts.

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: Yup. He sure f*cking does.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: It means getting in an Uber and not having to fill out a survey.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: It's like getting into an Uber and having to write sh*t.

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: In an Uber without a survey.

Rebel 4

(Written)

Much like Rebel 2, Rebel 4 isn't so much of a rebel. In fact, Rebel 4 was extremely enthusiastic about the project, answering two questions from each category. We can only wish that this rebel friend of ours had been a bit more descriptive, for all the questions they tackled.

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: Good

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: Mars

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: Be an example

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: Everything

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or "gut?"

A: gut

Q: What's one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: love

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: With my loved ones

Q: Which fears have you overcome?

A: Losing

Rebel 5

(Written)

Rebel 5 might remind us a bit of Rebel 2, our rather profound—and charmingly inattentive—friend. Rebel 5 gave us three incredibly thoughtful and heartfelt answers. But, in the end, they left us hanging... eagerly waiting for one more.

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: God would just let it roll and so far no one could not find out what God does. He should be more than probability, science, and universe.

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: For me love is unconditional since I have been seeing parents do so. There are all kinds of love, but I believe loves conquers all.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: It is emptiness. You do not know what you are doing, neither there is a meaning in living. Also doing the same thing over and over again like some psychologist had said, madness is a loophole very hard to get out.

Rebel 6

Rebelliousness is always served better with a side of wit. And Rebel 6's wit is truly something to savor. That is... if you're a "dad joke" connoisseur.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: I'm actually more of a Poker player now... But dice games can be pretty fun too.

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or be right?

A: Technically speaking, this question should read "...to be nice or right...". It's ok though... I'm not gonna point that out or make a big deal out of it. I'm a pretty nice guy.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: I'm a pretty put-together person and have never gone crazy. I would like to say that this is largely due to my best buddy Horace the purple penguin. Horace is a total character, but is really down to earth also. Sometimes he and I shoot the sh*t about how crazy this world has gotten.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I've never really been one to answer surveys or do questionnaires. That's one thing I will always steer clear of!

Rebel 7

(Written)

Rebel 7 is a clever little thing. For those who don't get the reference, you might consider Googling "The Room." If you do, however, be warned—your view on cinema and the arts may never be the same.

Deep

Q: Does God play dice? Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh hiii Mark

Values

Q: ~~What does success mean to you?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh haiii Mark

Emotions

Q: ~~What is it like to lose your mind?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh haiii Mark

Self

Q: ~~Where do you want to be in a decade?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh haiii Mark

PART II

Themes

CHAPTER 5

The Deep

The world around us is not an easy one to understand.

Questions such as “Who are we?” and “Where are we headed?” have occupied the human mind for as long we have been self-reflective creatures. These deep and dizzying questions are probably the first thing folks think of when they hear the word “philosophy.”

The more “global” society gets, the more pressing these questions seem to become. The first half of the 21st century has centered on such heady questions as “Should we leave Earth for Mars?” and “Can humanity ever achieve a theory of everything?” Such questions involve each and every one of us. They speak to humanity’s choices and future as a collective whole.

However, not every difficult question has to be as dizzyingly deep as these. There are also softer, more subjective questions that are just as challenging for humankind to answer. Questions like “Would you have chosen to be yourself?” and “Can people genuinely care about strangers?” perplex and confound us equally as much as this world’s most pressing problems do.

This chapter offers an assortment of intriguingly difficult questions, the kind that make you want to scream—both from frustration and excitement.

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

(Written)

A: This is really hard to say... But I think so, yes. My life has not been easy but I like to think that I did what I could and was a better “me” than anybody else could have been :)

(Written)

A: I really want to say yes but I don't think its so realistic... I have struggled with eating disorder most of my life, I don't really like how I look but I really try to. Its not easy being a girl today, especially with all these people around you telling you how you need to look.

(Written)

A: I would used to say “no way” but in the last years I've learned to embrace it. It took me alot of work to get to where I'm at. I used to be pretty overweight and depressed like 2 or 3 years ago. But something happened where I looked in the mirror and instead of hate, I started to feel something inspiring. I'm still not sure how exactly it happened. But I'm happy to be me now.

(Written)

A: The short answer is... Probably not. I've always wondered about this sort of thing though. When I was younger I used to play this imaginary game where I would imagine being a soul like “before birth” or something. Kind've like the movie “Soul” actually. I would imagine trying on different looks and personalities and figuring out who I wanted to be. I remember coming up with some pretty crazy stuff! It's not even that I didn't or don't like who I am but I just really doubt I'd chose exactly who I am if I could choose from all of these different characters, you know?

(Written)

A: The short answer is... Probably not. I've always wondered about this sort of thing though. When I was younger I used to play this imaginary game where I would imagine being a soul like “before birth” or something. Kind've like the movie “Soul” actually. I would imagine trying on different looks and personalities and figuring out who I wanted to be. I remember coming up with some pretty crazy stuff! It's not even that I didn't or don't like who I am but I just really

doubt I'd chose exactly who I am if I could choose from all of these different characters, you know?

(Spoken)

A: So... I'm a little "quirky," you could say... I'm very, very spiritual and into the spiritual world, and this is a question that I've thought a whole lot about... I've thought about it for like two whole decades [Laughter] There's uh... there's several schools or "streams" of spirituality out there that show that... in some sense or another... we actually choose to be ourselves... we choose to incarnate into these bodies, on this planet. There's even the idea that we also choose our immediate family, our friends and our spouse. Something about these ideas just really captivated me and I've been exploring them ever since I found them. So yeah... I think I just might have actually chosen to be me... and that's a really cool thing.

(Written)

A: If I was asked this question a few years ago, I would have chosen to be someone else in a heartbeat. Things were never that bad for me, but nothing was extraordinary one way or the over. At the time that's all I wanted to be or experience. But these last two years have been the hardest of my life, but I've been the happiest I've ever been. I have no explanation for it. Now I've come to realize that every life is beautiful and unique in its own way. Experiencing what life has to offer from your own point of view is such a gift but I haven't learned to appreciate until very recently. I would always choose to be me and I strive to never be envious of someone else.

(Spoken)

A: Yeah... this one hits deep... Hmm... [5 second pause] I think the easy answer that everybody kinda like feels like they need to say is "yes"... But I don't know if it's that simple. Like imagine instead of life and people it's a video game and you're choosing characters... You've got 8 billion characters to choose from and you're somehow, *magically*, gonna choose the exact same character you got randomly assigned to you...? Uhhh... [Chuckles] I really don't think so... So there's that. But then there's definitely also something to be said for standing firm and strong in who you are and loving every part of yourself. Like if we're being practical, obviously we

shouldn't want to be someone else... But if we're being realistic... I think most people would... uh... *shake things up a bit* [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Oh boy... [Awkward grimace] I mean... I like this question but this is tough. I think, like, when you're little—like really little like five or six—you have this idea that everything's perfect, that you're perfect and have no concept of anybody being better or worse, you know? But... like at some point you start to look at others around you and compare. Especially for girls and women too... That's the really tough part. And obviously with stuff like Instagram and TikTok and everything all of this has just like spun out of control... But... Yeah... I mean long story short, I struggled with a lot of that stuff for a while. But I'm finally at a place where I can look at myself and stop comparing myself to others as much. I would definitely choose myself now [smiles with satisfaction].

(Spoken)

A: Ya know... All throughout my teens and even my twenties basically I wanted to be pretty so bad. It's not like I was hideous or like... outright "ugly" looking... But I just always knew that I was very plain and nothing special. My older sister is like.. *ridiculously* good looking... always has been... and that used to drive me crazy... everybody always complimenting her and then looking over at me for contrast like "Oh..." [Laughter] It was pretty rough for a while but once I started getting older... I mean like late twenties, thirties probably... I had this sort of revelation hit me all at once—"It would actually be *really* annoying to get all that attention... Why did you ever want that?" [Chuckles] It just kinda hit me that maybe there's bonuses to being just average looking that most people just forget about because they want to be good looking so bad. My plain Jane looks let me hide out in the background... and I'm learning to *really* love it [Laughter]

Q: If you could be God for a day, would you?

(Written)

A: Yes. I would and try. But no way I could handle.

(Written)

A: No, I will allow God to do this job because he has the ability to do wonderful and important things that we might not understand.

(Spoken)

A: Man... I always wondered what it would be like... no joke. You know, when you a little kid up in Bible school and church you don't really realize what's goin' on. You think there some white dude in the sky with sandals and a big ol' beard helping you out or somethin' right? Nah man... God ain't no human man. You just gotta wonder what the heck it's like... Seein' everything at once and all that crazy sh*t. Reachin' down and re-arrangin' whole countries...

(Spoken)

A: Oh *this* one... this one is *good*. Ok... I *would* actually. Here's what I would do... So... like you make a world where everybody's good right? Basically you make 8 billion Adam and Eve's... You run the "simulation" for like a couple hundred of years. After that you see how deeply people *felt*, how deeply everybody *loved*. What was their world like? Then... you take 8 billion people and allow them to *choose*—be *good* or be *bad*. Run the simulation again... You see how everybody did, what they felt and how deep their love was again... Ok now here's the cool part... There is absolutely *no* way, just no way... there's no way that the 8 billion Adam and Eve's were able to love more strongly than the 8 billion "normal" people. In fact... and call me crazy because this is crazy sounding for sure... but I think... I think like you would find that the "normal" people... I think you would find that they loved *even stronger* and *harder* than the "good" people. *Why* though...? I mean... I can only guess... But I can only guess that it's the whole reason the bad or the "evil" exists... it exists to remind us of the value of the good. The evil pushes us past our boundaries... the evil makes us love so much more boldly. Loving in the face of evil is so much more brave.

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

(Written)

A: No

(Written)

A: Oh for sure. If there where no purpose there would be no reasons to live.

(Written)

A: Yes definitely. Everyone who comes to life carries a predetermined purpose - in my opinion.

(Spoken)

A: I think the purpose is what'cha make of it honey... If you don't think there's any purpose, there won't be. If you sit down, have a come to Jesus moment, and get you your purpose... well then there it is.

(Written)

A: Purpose is a loaded word. Ones purpose may not exactly be another's purpose. Some things that make a person's life could break another's, this life has purposes, that cannot be denied. But can we ever connect those purposes together into a Purpose? That's a tough question.

(Spoken)

A: Oh you'd better believe it does fella... You'd better believe it. Look... you know... *everybody* doubts this in their life... at some time or another. But there's just those moments you can't forget. There's those little flashes of God that you can't mistake for anything else... Ain't nothin' else can do what He does.

(Spoken)

A: Ohhh yes it does. The sad thing is, is that it's one of those things you can't necessarily prove to people... You can't just walk up to someone and fully convince them... beyond a doubt... that they're not just floating on some blue rock out in the middle of space for absolutely no reason whatsoever. It's basically one of those things that everybody needs to find out in their own peculiar, usually quite painful [Laughter] way.

(Spoken)

A: Dude, I been thinking for years about this. I took some philosophy courses my freshmen and sophomore years and this a big thing we talked about. Most people use religion as they purpose,

Christianity, Muslim, and so on... But when you break away of the religious stuff and you on you own. I know lots of people who ain't religious but they still have they goals and values. But it definitely ain't easy. I'm still not sure which side I on...

(Written)

A: Absolutely. I have always believed that my life has a purpose. I believe that as long as I can impact one person (hopefully positively) then I have fulfilled my purpose. You learn from everyone you meet and whether I have made a positive or negative impact on somebody I have altered their life in some type of way. We all learn and grow from each other. It's how we become better humans and the best versions of ourselves. Spread love and happiness.

(Written)

A: This is a question I have been considering for many years. Sometimes I think having an overactive mind is a curse, other times it is a blessing. Yet, for all my thinking, I still cannot seem to narrow down an answer to the question. So many people go "Of course it does!" out of emotion and the self-fulfilling prophecy that is valuing life. But if you ask these people "How do you know for *certain*?", I am not sure I single one could tell you. The jury is still out, and it just may be out for ever.

(Spoken)

A: Welp... I hate to be the bearer of bad newsss... [Chuckles] But, uh... [Snort] The overwhelming odds are that nothing here really matters. I mean this has been the whole search of the last couple thousand years, right? People realize that this world is pretty messed up, people go off seeking for some sort of antidote to the "messed up-ness", people create a bunch of cool-sounding stories to distract themselves from the "messed up", yada yada yada... Whatever sort of "purpose" there is to all of this... Any sort of "purpose" would have to come from the self. If you're seeking any sort of big, grand, flashy "Truth" out there around you... That *sure* ain't gonna end well.

(Spoken)

A: This one makes me think for real... I uh... I... A couple years ago I was in bad shape. Like really bad... I always done the right thing, more or less. But I just... There was a lot of really bad sh*t around me, you know... Anyways... I was dating this guy. He was a dealer. Like everything... pills, weed, coke. All that, right? And uh... long story short I guess... I was helpin' him out right. Basically uh... doing his bidding and helpin' set sh*t up for him, right... So he got busted... And I got busted... They put me in for three years... Holy sh*t... you know?

[Laughter] So I ended up not doin' full time, thank the Lord. But I remember a good... I don't know... two or three months in, jus' thinkin' to myself... "What the hell *is* all this?" I would pray damn near every night. Jus' kept turnin' it all over in my head, ya know?

So anyways... One night I had this dream, right? This was one of the most uh... *real*-feeling... dreams I've had. I remember I was just sitting there in my cell in the dream. And then I saw this little green light lookin' thing. It would like flash real bright and then get real soft-like. And then it started to glow and get real bright... Kinda like the sun bein' in your room. Alright... this sounds crazy I'm sure of it... But this lil' ball of light thing moved up near me, right? It jus' keeps gettin' closer... and closer... and then it sits right up, right up on my chest... like a damn dog or somethin'... it just sits right there on me. For whatever reason too... I wasn't even scared. I shoulda been scared sh*tless... But something about that light was so calming. It didn't say nothin' or do nothin' else but that... just sat right there on me... But after that moment I felt totally different. God... or uh... whoever it may be... Something was with me in there. And it wasn't just in there either... I just started thinkin' after that that whatever that was... It was always there with me. That little ball of light... That thing helped me a lot.

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

(Written)

A: Because what is human nature but strife? Truly what is human nature is the real question.

(Written)

A: I would like to think yes but I'm not so sure. The dreamer, flower-child in me wants to shout "Yes, of course!!" But I think I know better by now. Maybe in the distant future?

(Written)

A: Usually one people share a goal on a large scale it's for a pretty sh*tty reason. Look at Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia... Tons of people were "unified" and "united" there but the goal was a horrible one. I think it's in theory possible to unite everybody under a common goal but making sure that goal is actually a good one is much more difficult!

(Spoken)

A: Well... I guess it depend on what it mean by "common"... what *is* common and what do it mean. And that ain't easy... It's "common" for people to be happy, motivated, helpin' others out. It also "common" for people to be nasty, straight up crazy... mean... and... and doin' they own thing... It all come down to whether or not people wanna try and change what they do... And change ain't easy.

(Spoken)

A: I think they totally can... Now, does that mean it's gonna be easy? Does that mean we can just slap some picket signs together, parade down the streets and then we get world peace? No way... But I think for the amount of effort we've put forth so far... uh... like basically next to nothing... [Laughter] I think considering that we've never truly tried in any huge way to come together on a global scale before... We just might be surprised what might happen if we start trying for that.

(Spoken)

A: This is an interesting one... One common goal... Yeah, so I think anytime you're talking about like rallying people around something, getting them to sort of share in this group-level thinking... You're probably going to have to *lie*. Like at least a little bit right? [Laughter] Like... if you're just totally boldfaced honest about things, you're never gonna get everybody to agree. What sounds good to one person out there is gonna sound freakin' awful to the next one. So yeah... I think the whole question of getting people to agree on one... just like one, blanket statement type thing... Isn't really gonna work.

(Spoken)

A: One common goal... Hmm... Well, I think it's one of those things that definitely sounds pretty far fetched [Laughter] Humans aren't particularly good at coming together or agreeing on things [Chuckles] Especially when you've got so many different cultures and mindsets and all that... I mean I do think that if there were one thing we could all somehow converge on, I think it would have to be common access to the bare necessities... food, water, shelter and clothes. I think it should already be kinda self-evident that if we've got the supply to do it, we should make sure everybody is set up and not lacking bare basics like that. That shouldn't be too absurdly hard of a thing to agree on... You never know though [Laughter]

Q: Does God play dice?

(Written)

A: Yup. He sure f*cking does.

(Written)

A: I'm actually more of a Poker player now... But dice games can be pretty fun too.

(Written)

A: God would just let it roll and so far no one could not find out what God does. He should be more than probability, science, and universe.

(Written)

A: I think he has to, yes. The idea that even God would somehow know everything he was going to ever do is insane. I think he (she? It?) would become incredibly bored after a while. God wouldn't be his own slave!

(Written)

A: If God plays dice, then he's not very good at it, is he? The odds of dying in some senseless or totally unnecessary way or a freak accident are too high. The odds of a child dying are high; the odds of divorce are high; the odds of having an incurable disease are high. It is not a winning game we have here.

(Spoken)

A: Ya know... I never really understand what this meant... It's like... If I'm God, right? And I wanna create somethin'... Alls I gotta do is reach down and... BOOM... Right? It's already right there. If God be "playin' *dice*"... If God have to play dice... *Then...* who is he playin' dice *for*? Right? Cuz you don't sit there playin' dice for nothin'... Who he playin' those dice *for*? That's all I'm sayin'...

(Written)

A: I've been waiting a long time for a stranger to ask me this question...! LOL I legit got my PhD in Theoretical Physics two years ago. So this is super exciting for me... I remember one of my professors literally posed this question to us, maybe in a bit different terms. But it was the same idea. One of the biggest dichotomies in physics right now is this divide between randomness and determinacy. In other words, what are the the limits of what we can predict and what we can know for certain. To be totally fair, I never quite got a strong intuition one way or the other. And this is obviously an unanswered question. But basically what I came to is that whatever a "god" could be, it would have to abide by at least some principle of statistical causality. This is a roundabout way of saying—yes, God does play dice!

(Spoken)

A: Well, uh... It's always tough to talk spirituality and religion isn't it...? That infamous "G word" really gets things pretty heated sometimes... and actually for pretty good reason I think too. I'm not sure if you've heard of Christopher Hitchens? Yeah... He put out a lot of books, most of which I haven't gotten around to reading but I did finish his "God is Not Great" a few years ago. I was definitely an agnostic, agnostic/atheist... however you wanna call it, before then... But this book really did something for me. I'm not even really sure it was from Hitchens himself, but I think it was like some sort of quote from someone else he included in there. I remember it basically saying something like "When I look up at the stars at night, I know quite well... That for all they care, I can go to hell." Yeah... [Chuckles] That one kinda struck me and solidified some things for me that I had been tinkering around with. So... long story short... I *don't* think God plays dice... Because... I don't think "God" *exists*... [Laughter]

Q: Can people genuinely care about strangers?

(Written)

A: Most will say yes but I don't really think so, it take a lot to actually care and not just go threw the motion.

(Written)

A: Of course they can! It sure isn't easy but people do this all the time. If they didn't there couldn't be things like food banks or Goodwill.

(Written)

A: Yes. Hebrews 13:2 says "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Our world seems to get colder each day, but a little kindness goes a long way.

(Written)

A: Oh gosh... This might give away my age, but I think yes. Yes people can for sure. I remember a time where people smiled to each other on the street. People were always helping people out. Something happened though and many things changed. But deep down I think we still have that in us some where.

(Spoken)

A: Oof... Yeah this is a tricky one! [Laughter] Me personally, I was raised in, you know, a "good" little Catholic household... Where you're expected to care about everybody, even if you don't even care you're supposed to put on that smiley face and go help out, you know? All I know is that it took me a while to actually start to care. That probably sounds a little cold or cruel... I don't know... [Laughter] Anyways... I think people *can* care... For sure. It's just that even if you see people who look like they really care and are all out at the foodbank and stuff. That doesn't mean they're actually loving what they're doing. A lot of folks... I think... A lot of people just like the feeling of being *seen* for helping more than anything else.

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

(Written)

A: Good

(Written)

A: Bad I'd would say. I used to think most people were good but I'm not so sure. Sometimes people play nice just because they want something. Most people do this honestly.

(Written)

A: I think that most people are confused. We tend to call the most confused "bad". And the ones that aren't as confused we call "good". I like to think that most people are just confused enough to not be saint-like but not confused enough to be satan-like.

(Written)

A: I would say neither... Some are "good", some are "bad" and others are some where in between. Any time, you ask if someone is "fundamentally" anything, you end up in a sticky situation. I don't really believe in fundamental things in that sense. It's not that simple.

(Spoken)

A: Ya know... if I uh... If I say "bad" that kinda makes me the bad guy, right? And if I say "good" that prob'ly means I'm just blowin' smoke [Laughter] I say... I say people are *both*. That way I ain't guilty of either way [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: That's definitely the question isn't it... [Chuckles] Yeah... I feel like once you get past like 40... hell maybe even younger than that... I feel like once you get around that certain age, you start to sorta wake up and find out like "Wow... Yeah most people aren't that great"...

[Chuckles]

(Written)

A: I would used to have told you bad. I learned alot though and made alot of mistakes, some things happened to me that changed my mind. Its not that people are good or bad, everybody is both... we just have to find the ones meant for us and do the best we can with them.

(Spoken)

A: You know... I've known some real good people who did some real *bad* things... And I've known some real bad people who did some real *good* things... [Laughter] I know people who did thirty years for murder... thirty years... and they came out happier and better than you coulda ever imagined. This whole "bad" and "good" thing... it ain't as easy as it made out to be.

(Written)

A: One word: Duality. It's a struggle we all have. As babies, we're born perfect, but as human beings, we're also corruptible. What it boils down to is how we let ourselves be affected by the circumstances we go through and the choices we make because of them.

There is a saying; "Saints and sinners are quite the same." This means that the tide can change at any point because neither one is better than the other and each person is a result of the choices they make. We are who we choose to be.

(Spoken)

A: See... If you say they're fundamentally good, everything you see around you and everything you do is gonna be colored in that light... so people will appear "good"... or at least better. And if you say they're fundamentally bad, you're also gonna see everything through that lens are come away with that idea reinforced in the exact same way... I think either extreme... either side of the uh... *coin*.... either end is a bit unrealistic. People aren't just good or bad. There's everything in between... there's all shades and colors between the good and the bad. And... I think if you take that sort of perspective, you'll find that you get a healthier, more balanced view of the world. You'll be able to see the good that's in the "bad", the bad that's in the "good" and everything else that's out there in this crazy world...

Q: Can humanity ever achieve a theory of everything?

(Written)

A: I don't believe so, no. I actually studied a bit of physics and philosophy in college, and it seems that there are just too many systems of thought and theories to ever unify into one thing. Also, people like Richard Feynman (a physicist who worked on the atomic bomb) always mention the fact that a "theory of everything" would prevent us from progressing in knowledge in the future.

(Spoken)

A: Hmmm... You mean like a theory of each little thing under the sun or one big theory that takes care of literally everything? [Chuckles] That's a pretty huge difference. I mean... I think that it's obviously possible to have a theory about each topic that we discover. Like I don't think it's possible for us to discover something and then never have the possibility to know about it, if that makes sense... So... in theory... in theory if this is true then there should be no big deal with finding one big theory that explains absolutely everything... I don't really see why that would be impossible. It's something to shoot for at least!

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

(Written)

A: No. The way I live my life. In faith and in Jesus. It wouldn't make a difference to me. Either way I tried my best and stayed faithful.

(Written)

A: I would definitely be a bit scared by that... But I think that if I knew that I lived as fully as possible and loved people as much as I could, things wouldn't be that bad after all.

(Spoken)

A: I won't lie man... it would be one hell of a letdown [Chuckles] Obviously that's not something I try to think about a lot though... I think if you were to keep thinking about that stuff it'd really screw with ya... You'd probably have a schizophrenic breakdown or something [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Call me a psychopath... but I don't think I would honestly care that much... [Laughter] I try to treat life like a game of sorts. There's stuff that feels good, stuff that feels bad... There's stuff that's challenging, stuff that's easy, stuff that's boring and stuff that's exciting. Basically it's just about balancing all these things. I never really bothered too much about some bigger "purpose" or grand idea behind it all. That's just how I'm wired though... I wouldn't assume most people think this way [Chuckles]

(Spoken)

A: Uhh... *Yeah...* yeah I *would* care... [Laughter] It would be like having the longest homework assignment of your life, doing your extra best, studying for years and years and years... with all these damn distractions and crazy ass sh*t popping up... and then you finally go to submit it and the teacher is like "Yeah... that was just a practice sheet. We don't have any more assignments left" Like come *onnnn*. [Laughter] I'm sure some people would be relieved and be all like "Oh my god thank you!!", you know, like this whole idea of "Now I'm free and there's no more stress" But I just don't get how that wouldn't mess with your head...

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

(Written)

A: Mars

(Written)

A: In my opinion, no. I don't really see how we can take care of a complete different planet if you can't even take care of our own... it seems to be missing the point.

(Written)

A: In my opinion yes we've already trashed this planet. I think people like Elon Musk are right that we need another place to go and to start making changes. Things won't magically get better.

(Written)

A: Yes. We do not have much hope left on this planet in my opinion, we are quickly running out of time and energy on this world and we must find a way to address these problems fast.

(Written)

A: Ugh... I honestly hate when people talk about this idea. I'm a biology and botany major and a total Earth nerd... I think its really simple actually; if we can't take care of Earth then how the heck are we supposed to take care of a planet that doesn't even have any trees or life at all. It makes absolutely zero sense.

(Written)

A: I mean, in theory we obviously shouldn't need to leave this planet. But it's looking like we're headed to the point of no return. I know lots of people are excited about the idea of taking on a whole new planet and transforming it and beautifying it with our own will. I'm still not fully sold but I do think we should keep open to that possibility (I'm an engineer so I'm always practical, ha!).

(Spoken)

A: Isn't that something that "Elon" dude has talked about...? Right? What's that dude's name... Elon something... Oh! Musk, that's it. Yeah I remember reading some article thing about Elon Musk wanting to go terraform Mars, like turn the whole thing from red to green and have space colonies and sh*t... Dude, I won't even lie... That sounds really freakin' cool [laughter] I mean... I'm not sayin' we *should*. Buuuut... You gotta admit—that's pretty badass.

(Spoken)

A: Hmm... You know... I've always thought that was pretty funny. Here we are... we've gutted our planet, right? We've like trashed everything out. We've polluted the oceans, killed off all these species, slashed all these trees... like all of this insane stuff, right? We're the exact same group of beings... the exact same race as the people that started doing all of this... Nothing has changed really. We're still the exact same... genetically, socially, mentally... we're like the exact same as we were since we started trashing everything out like 200, 300 years ago... So... what in the hell makes us think that we're gonna somehow like "jump ship" to a whole new

planet and like magically treat that new planet any different than we've been treating this one? This makes absolutely, *absolutely Zero* sense... [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Dude... Look... I don't know about like, all the uh... all the "technical" side of things and stuff, right? But this Elon Musk guy is badass man. This ' a dude who literally has a company called the "Boring *Company*"... He's so big that they just let him name a company like that [Laughter] I think he's got like eight or nine different companies too... So like... if I remember correctly too, I think he's been talking about Mars since like 2012 or something insane. Basically he's like gathering all his companies together and testing them on Earth before he gets bold enough to be like "Alright, I'm out guys!" and hops over to Mars [Laughter] Look man... I'm inclined to believe anyone who has ideas that are that well put-together, who's got a track record like he does man...

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

(Written)

A: No. I don't think it can change. If there is some miracle where people start to see through others eyes then yes but I can't see this happening at all.

(Written)

A: I mean... If people finally wake-up and understand. At this point it ain't even about the right or the left or what ever the hell else they have up there running for office. I think things only change, if we let ourselves move ahead and passed this whole set-up we've got going.

(Written)

A: No. Politics is driven by two things—money and power—and the easiest way to obtain one or the other is by screwing someone over. It can happen on a small scale, like a businessman profiting off his partner, or on a larger scale, like politicians making poor decisions for their constituents. A wise politician recognizes the need for money and power to ascend in the political rankings and is willing to act completely out of line in order to achieve their desires. They may sugarcoat it, or even be straight up deceptive, but in the end, you can be sure your best interests are never on their mind. Additionally, the introduction of new cultures and ideals to a

community makes it even harder to appease the masses, inflating the disconnect from the constituents.

(Written)

A: I can't resist this one! I'm actually a political journalist. I probably shouldn't say the name of the company I'm with, but it's a pretty cool place. Of course... as someone intimately involved in politics I'm probably not the most unbiased judge...! But I do think having an inside scoop, so to speak, on the matter helps me access certain things that others might not be privy to. To be totally fair, I think that there *is* a possibility that things change. But I can't really see how that would happen or when. I think the biggest impediment to political change is the human psyche. A fair share of what I write about deals in human emotions, societal trends and popular wishes. If things do change, it will simply be a matter of the currents diverting human nature into a different, less dirty tributary. I can't say I wouldn't like to see something like this happen!

(Written)

A: I do not believe so. I think that fundamentally all men have a strong desire for power over another and the game of politics is a very enticing means to the end. We are in my spiritual beliefs all born under the curse of sin, and without yielding to a higher power of God one remains under the control of his own self will. This will is not guided by anything other than survival of the fittest and one's own self-protection, and lusts for the things of the world. How more appropriate then to be elected into a position of power under the disguise of the voters worldly faith to lend credence to a life of self-righteousness and narcissistic power over others. Never doing good because one is incapable of shedding the cloak of sin, yielding to a life of ruling for the greater good. Until all men surrender to Him men and women of politics (what ever system) will never change life for the better.

(Spoken)

A: Well... that's really a good way to put it... a "game" it certainly is... no doubt about it. But... look... is that really that much of a bad thing? There's that whole saying "Life is a game" for a reason. Literally any situation you can think of is some sort of game... it has a set of rules and there's moves people make that lead to certain outcomes... This really should be common knowledge [Chuckles] But... it's *not*. At any rate, what I'm getting at is that there's not some sort

of special quality that politics necessarily has as a game that other games don't. You look at all of life, there's winners and there's losers... some win big and some lose big, some are just somewhere in the middle. So... if we're asking if the game of politics could ever change so that it's played more effectively or efficiently... It would really just be as simple as people working to change the rules of that game, people coming together and agreeing on a new set of rules to play by and making sure that everybody is on the same page. Do I think it'll happen? *No*... these people have no reason to even want to change the rules... because... they play extremely well under them. But the basic idea is extremely simple. Politics is nothing special. It's a game just like all else.

Q: Are you skeptical by nature?

(Written)

A: It's really hard not to be! There are so many things to be thinking about and so many unsolved problems in this modern world. If you aren't skeptical then I think you haven't thought about things enough.

(Spoken)

A: You basically have to be in this kind of world... If you're all naïve and just happily roaming about without any awareness of what's going on around you, you're gonna get seriously screwed over [Chuckles] Of course... you shouldn't just be totally locked in and not open to possibilities around you that actually crop up... But you definitely should have self-protection as your sort of "default mode."

(Spoken)

A: See... In a world like *this*... you kinda have to be at least a little skeptical, you know? Basically... the way I taught my kids to think about things was like this... Always assume that somebody simply wants something from you, *until*... *until* you figure out otherwise. It's not like being judgy or nothin'... It's just the only way to really go about it without ending up making a fool outta yourself and getting taken advantage of.

(Spoken)

A: I'll guess I'll go with this one... Nothin' else is really doing it for me there... So I guess I'm a natural skeptic. I'm not like super cynical or anything, but yeah... See stuff like religion and spirituality just never did it for me. The whole "faith" thing... None of that makes too much sense. I get that it helps people feel better about things, but I think it's better to just know what's up and not cling onto stuff that really might not even be there, you know?

(Written)

A: I'm way too skeptical for my own good. I don't even mean skeptical of religion or anything like that necessarily either. I'm largely skeptical of people due to my childhood and upbringing overall. There's two sides to this. On the one hand, I feel like being skeptical has really helped me achieve things, because I tend to sniff out the "B.S." that most others are unaware of. Although... on the other hand, I also miss out on genuine opportunities and end up kicking myself later, realizing "Ah crap... that one was real and you just had your guard up way too much."

CHAPTER 6

The Valuable

“What does success mean?”

“What is the most valuable?”

These are questions that cut to the core of what our lives truly stand for. In modern society it is taken for granted that there are three main staples of success and value—our family, our friends and our careers. Who do we *love*? Who do we *spend our time with*? What do we *do*?

If we have a thriving career, a caring family and a caring and entertaining group of friends, we tend to feel happy and successful. Moreover, if we simply *appear* to possess all three of these boons, people tend to view us as successful (even if our lives are secretly falling apart, and we’re slowly dying on the inside).

Of course, the list above, what we might call “The 3 C’s”—a thriving *career*, a *caring* family and a *caring* group of friends—is not the ultimate determinant of human value. There are jobless, family-less hermits who are fulfilled in deep ways. There are people with lucrative jobs, smiling friends and large families who are profoundly unhappy. And there are various shades and hues of human value and meaning somewhere in between these two extremes.

Indeed, there are as many ways to find value as there are ways to live our lives. And in this chapter, the marvelous human mosaic of meaning and value is on full display.

Q: What does success mean to you?

(Written)

A: Success is hard and you can't get none if you don't get that.

(Written)

A: It means getting in an Uber and not having to fill out a survey.

(Written)

A: I think success is something that is hard to achieve and nobody can take that away. If what you did wasn't hard then you didn't really have any success.

(Written)

A: So many people are focused on money, but there's so much more than that. A few hundred years ago, success wasn't as tied to money as it is now. Success was found more in intellectual and creative pursuits than in financial endeavors.

(Spoken)

A: Success... Eh... It's definitely a sort of dirty word. Like is it a bunch of money and stuff? Is it status or prestige? Is it being a CEO? [Laughter] Yeah... I don't think you can ever really just "define" success like that. Lots of people think they've like "made it" but have they really? It's hard to tell...

(Spoken)

A: You open up Instagram and see all this stuff about making it big and making tons of cash really fast right? Everybody always want to make it big. I don't really think any of that crap matters. I've know people that get all this money and guessed what... They still the exact same as they use to be. They still miserable a** people that can't enjoy anything except drugs and sex man...

(Spoken)

A: Success... Yeesh... [Chuckles] Look, I suppose I already outed myself as a totally nihilist... [Laughter] So I figure I'll go for the jugular here. Look... if there's no meaning to life... if

there's absolutely no right, wrong or way to measure how well you do at anything... then who the hell is to even say what it means to be "successful"? Like this goes beyond the whole "success isn't found in money" type thing... Success, uh... *technically*... isn't found *anywhere*
[Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: You always hear these stories about getting rich quick, buying some fancy sports car and jetting off to some island... But it's like... When that dust settles and you're just sitting there alone in your mansion... what *next*? [Laughter] There has to be something more, some sort of passion or some sort of mission that you're on, I think. Also... and I know this from personal experience too... a special kind of hell that I put myself through when I was younger [Laughter]... If you're trying to get successful just because you hate yourself or are insecure about something... no amount of money on the planet is gonna fix that.

(Spoken)

A: There's so much thrown around about success... especially with this whole social media, Instagram cultural thing going on. I think when you get to the roots of it though it's pretty basic... It's about one thing really and one thing only—*focus*. You look at the world's highest achievers, the total freaks of nature on this planet who do things that nobody else is even dreaming about doing... they've got one thing in common above nearly everything else: the extreme ability to focus and just tune everything else out. You're simply not gonna be anywhere near successful if you can't focus on what you're trying to become great at. Not all the talent or skill or charisma in the world is gonna make up for a lack of focus.

Q: What makes someone powerful?

(Written)

A: Knowledge is what makes someone powerful. Knowledge about self (our limitations and strengths) makes one powerful.

(Written)

A: Being kind is powerful, I don't think people have any right to be anything over than kind.

(Written)

A: Power is a nasty word. But I think it can be redeemed. Power is all about loving boldly, especially when it's hardest to do.

(Spoken)

A: Power... power is also what'cha make of it... [Chuckles] *Except...* except if you think ya powerful... you ain't powerful. *But ...* but if you think you're weak, not powerful one bit... then you just might be powerful.

(Written)

A: The most powerful people, I think, are the ones who seem least powerful. The most "powerful" people I've ever known don't seem very "powerful" to most around them. There is great power in silence. There is much power that is hidden in plain sight.

(Spoken)

A: You know... I'm not entirely certain power is all it's cracked up to be [Chuckles] I don't know... I think if you asked twenty different people this question, you'd probably get twenty different answers too... Everybody has something that gets them going more than the other things I suppose. Some are for the cash, some for the fame, some for the... hell, I don't know... [Laughter] There's all sorts of things... I'm just not completely sure any of those things means anything at all.

(Spoken)

A: Ahh... power...? Hah! That's one hell of a word man. Look... it's... it's, uh... it sure as hell ain't easy to be the dude callin' the shots man. You know? Like we all wanna take shots at the big dude up there and make him out to be somethin' all wild, crazy and psychopathic and sh*t right? Nah man... I mean... Yeah sure. Some of these dudes are like that. But I think people gotta step back and think about themselves before they go talkin' about these dudes man...

(Spoken)

A: Ohhhh man... Yeah... Power... Power is somethin' that nobody can get all the way into they heads... Power... power to one man is money, right? Power to another man is fame. Power to

the next dude is sex. It keeps on goin' man... See... and *today*... today, we somehow decided that power is what all those men have together... Power is, you know, the dude with both the *money*... the... the *fame*... the *sex*. There ain't no end to that. See... what *true* power is, true power is about the one who can sit there and lose *all of that*... lose *each and every one of those*... and *still* somehow make it and get sh*t movin'. *That's* power man...

(Spoken)

A: Hey... this is a good one... Might as well tie this into the God question. So what do Christians... or uh... or any other religious people always tell you? They always claim that God is all-powerful, that He can do anything and everything he desires in an instant, right? But what does that even mean? You could look at it this way... If God, theoretically, could just start this whole thing over in an instant... then why isn't He...? And what does the fact that He hasn't like... hit the "reboot" button on this thing tell us about His power? Like imagine some King or ruler or something... Imagine that he goes around telling everybody, "Look... I have the power to change things and make everything better! But... I have decided not to exercise that power, because I am too good for that ... *And* I would like you to make *your own* decisions *instead!*" Uh... *what?* [Laughter] If you have the power to make things better but you're not using it... That kinda means you're not as powerful as you thought you were [Chuckles]

Q: What does courage mean to you?

(Written)

A: What does courage mean to anybody. There are many embodiments of courage each faceted in their own way. So truly the meaning is endless.

(Written)

A: Courage is doing the difficult when you least want to do it and when you have a million excuses not to. Had I not enlisted in the Air Force as a young, bratty teen I probably would've never understood this!

(Spoken)

A: Courage doesn't mean you're fearless... It doesn't mean that you've gotta be some kind of gladiator fending off lions or some soldier on the front lines risking everything without a second

thought...Everybody's gonna feel fear... that's human nature. Courage is feeling the fear and yet still keeping on and not letting that emotion get to you or totally derail your mission and purpose.

(Written)

A: Courage is something that is hard to define, but you'll know it when you see it. I think maybe the best way to explain courage is that it is something that is both inspiring and difficult. Of course, there's the idea that to be courageous you have to overcome your fears, but just overcoming your fears doesn't mean that you're courageous. Courage also requires a mission I think.

(Spoken)

A: Courage... I would say... It's something so many people talk about and something that's very valued in this world obviously. I think a lot of people have this idea that courage is being fearless, like not even feeling scared of anything at all... But to me—and what I've seen and done in my life personally—courage is really just pushing through that fear and keeping at it even when you least want to continue. I think if we would talk more in those terms about courage that there'd be less of this like “macho” bravado type intimidation attached to it, you know?

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

(Written)

A: Giving up on you're friends is cowardly. I've had this done to me and its very hard to forgive. Worst then getting into a fight or cheating.

(Written)

A: Cowardice is usually something associated with war or not wanting to face physical violence, but cowardice also applies to family matters. As a former single mom, I can definitely say that men who abandon their children or their families in general are cowardly.

(Written)

A: Not taking accountability for your actions. You are running away from your problems and making excuses instead of facing them. You are deluding yourself and disappointing your peers.

It's a sign of immaturity. You are telling others you are too good for them. You are unable to learn from your mistakes if you cannot recognize them and adjust—doing so will only strengthen your character.

(Spoken)

A: Most people think of all this intense stuff like war and death when they talk about being a coward... But I think the truly cowardly thing is to give up on your friends. I mean there are some cases... like if it's just more of an acquaintance or not a very good friend... but if it's one of your really good friends and you stab them in the back, then that's just about as low as you can get.

(Spoken)

A: You wanna know cowardly? I had this girl a while back... We'd been datin'... I'd say about four or five months... somethin' like that. She wakes up one day and looks me in the eye and is all "Babe... I slept with your friend. And I'm leaving you" [Shakes head] Come one man... Look... I ain't that forgivin' of a guy... But I at least wanted to talk to her and stuff, right? Nope. She just closed the door right in my face like that [Chuckles]

(Spoken)

A: Oooh this is a good one... [smiles assuredly] I'm gonna get a little uh... personal if that's cool [charmingly and disarmingly awkward laughter]... So yeah, last year I had a big breakup right... but this wasn't like a normal type of "Yeah I think we should talk" and agree to head our own ways kinda thing, ya know? This was like some intense a** sh*t [laughter] Yeah... So this dude not only cheats on me... Not only cheats on me with my *best friend*...! But he goes and pulls the "No I swear she's the one who started it" card on me. [Big exhale] Yeah...! [Laughter] Andddd...! After I broke up with him he's all talking about how he's gonna kill himself and how much he loves me. Eeesh! That sh*t is *cowardly*.

(Spoken)

A: So... If we wanna talk like war history... [Laughter] So Stalin, this was in World War II, right... Stalin had this crazy policy, Order... Order Number 229 I think? 227...? Anyways, something like that. Stalin had this order sent out to the troops on the front line—if you retreat,

you will be shot on sight! They called this the “Not one step back” order. Basically, Stalin had the idea to not even allow cowardice to happen. [Laughter] But like when you consider what that means... Ok, you’re gonna outlaw cowardice... But in terms of having to issue an order like that... Doesn’t that kinda mean, like, *Stalin*... c’mon... you’re a *pretty sh*tty motivator* man. [Laughter] Who’s the real coward then? The troops who are like “Hey... this sucks, let’s go back” or the dude so scared of “cowards” that he’s gotta kill ‘em all.

Q: What is most valuable?

(Written)

A: Respect, if you respect yourself and others you will leave a wholesome life.

(Written)

A: Love. Love is always something to help you up and get you where you are going. Doesn’t matter who its from.

(Written)

A:Time in the present moment is very valuable to me.

I try to balance my time by using it to relax, enjoy hobbies, work and connect with friends and family.

(Written)

A: Time is most valuable. You can buy almost everything in the world but not time. What you lose in terms of time you lose in terms of everything else.

(Written)

A: I would have to say empathy is the most valuable thing. It’s a really rare thing now, especially when it comes to politics and stuff like that. It’s something you really can’t have anything nice without though.

(Spoken)

A: It's family... *family*, ain't no doubt about it. You can be... you know... the richest man in the world, have a whole bunchy shiny things and pretty girls... but if you ain't got family or they all against you... You got nothin'.

(Written)

A: To me, happiness is most valuable. Happiness is one thing that money cannot buy. You can't really put a value on it. To me, this makes it the most valuable. It's something everyone wants but there is no set way to get it.

(Written)

A: I'd say having a nice and supportive family is the most valuable thing anybody could have. All of the most "messed up" people I've ever met have missed out on good family. And most of the nicest people I've met have had pretty good parents and support.

(Written)

A: I'll be a bit of a curmudgeon here... I don't think it's love or faith or strength that's most valuable. Sure, these are immensely important things. But I think a lot of the content of those things is emotional, subject to change in an instant. If we're going to be objective about things, I think we have to go with *knowledge*. Knowledge is the cornerstone upon which all other things are laid.

(Spoken)

A: Hmm... Value's a tricky thing for sure... I mean... I guess I would say that value is connected to *community*. And not in some like weird, abstract sense either... Like, I mean that value is rooted in the systems of social support and love that we have around us, from family all the way up to our government. Obviously though... if we have a crappy society around us, it's gonna be hard for us to see any value anywhere around us. But... if we have a really strong network of support and a really healthy web of people around us, both our family and our broader social contacts... value starts popping up everywhere, everywhere you look you can see the meaning of things. And I think that's why we have so many people today we are struggling

so hard to find meaning, to find that sort of “purpose”, you know? Value is definitely something beyond money and beyond status... Value’s in our social world.

(Written)

A: I believe it is Time. Now that I am 60 I have a whole life to look back upon. I can think of no other commodity other than faith in God that is so underestimated in value. In my early years as a boy I often heard “appreciate each day”, “stop to smell the roses”, and other phrases. At that age we seem invincible and nothing, not time or aging will affect us. Oh how foolish we are not to take everyday as a gift. To wake up and live each day as if the end was closer then we dear look. To laugh and to love like each event could be it’s last. One can never appreciated time until it has slipped away. Regrets is the gift left behind by her slippage, and regret of lost hours, and lost love, and lost moments with the ones we love is a cruel awakening to the heart. Yes time; fleeting and heading us to the ultimate end and most if not everyone throws it away.

Q: What does love mean to you?

(Written)

A: Love go beyond anything you can see. Love is just something that makes none of the BS around matter. A true lover won’t ever judge.

(Written)

A: When I was a young punk I probably would’ve told you love means passion and deep desire and feelings. I was such a dreamer. Now, as a happily married man, I can tell you what love *isn’t*: it sure as heck ain’t ooey gooey passion and romance if you make it passed the first couple years fellas... Ha! Lets hope she doesn’t read this.

(Written)

A: To me, love is everything. It’s the meaning of life and its what gets me up every day. Whether that be love for an individual or love for my work or the planet, it surrounds us and I’ve learned to search for it. Love doesn’t always have to have someone else involved, loving yourself is one of the most important things someone can do. Love is what binds us together and helps us grow as a society.

(Written)

A: For me love is unconditional since I have been seeing parents do so. There are all kinds of love, but I believe loves conquers all.

(Spoken)

A: I think with social media and everything, people have started to get an even more twisted idea of what love really is... You know, we've got everything from The Bachelorette to people feeling the constant need to update everybody on the most intimate deals of their romantic relationships [Chuckles] I'm actually a therapist... and a lot of the younger people I talk to usually bring up romantic troubles... So, obviously, I ask them questions to get them thinking about how they view love and how this affects how they view their partner and the standards they hold them up to... stuff like that, right? I almost always... almost *without exception*... find that with my younger patients, there's this idea that love should just "work" and that it should just always be seamless and easy... no effort required *ever*. And... you know, that might very well be true for the first 1... *maybe 2?*... years... [Laughter] But yeah... after that you and your partner get down to business. And that's not even a bad thing... It just means that you start having to learn even more about what makes them tick and how the two of you can be on the same team as things evolve.

(Written)

A: I'm not entirely sure what this society likes to call "love" exists. What I do know is that we are a species programmed with a certain set of rules that we follow, like robots in a certain way. What makes us feel good, what makes us feel positive-feeling emotions like "love", is something that has been programmed into us. There's no such thing as totally "selfless" or objective love when you realize this.

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

(Written)

A: Be an example

(Written)

A: Good leadership usually means being strong. You don't have to be physically strong but that can help. Usually it is also helpful to be smart.

(Written)

A: Being a leader means sticking up for those under you. If all you do is sit there and boss people around, no one will ever actually respect you.

(Written)

A: Leadership is something way more than telling people what to do or how to do it... A big part of leadership, I think, is helping to ignite peoples deepest desires and motivations and then directing those in a mutually beneficial way.

(Spoken)

A: A person only a "leader" when they actually stand up and admit when they wrong. Anytime you got someone who be actin' like they ain't never done nothin' wrong, you got someone who ain't leading. There way too many of these types... *'specially* today.

(Written)

A: To lead people you first need to know who you are. I remember I took a couple leadership classes in college and the one thing they always said was "You have to always remember who you are and who the people you're leading think you are. And those are usually two very different things." That one really stuck with me.

(Written)

A: In today's society we are so fixated on the glitz and the glamor, on the "sexy" things which appeal to our animalistic senses. This element of superficiality makes us think that leadership is the handsome, enterprising person with 500 million in the bank, commanding a team of people to do his bidding. Yet, in less than 100 years both he and his team will have faded into dust. Then what is left of them? Sometimes there is some sort of legacy left behind. Sometimes there is a cultural impact. Oftentimes, however, there is not much remnant. True leadership arises from those who make cultural and intellectual impacts which reach far beyond their time. These are the guardians of our future, the beacons for future generations.

Q: Is it better to be nice or to be right?

(Written)

A: Obviously nice. I think a lot of people have some pretty bad memories of being bullied by someone who really just wanted to be right. Nobody likes to know it all.

(Written)

A: Technically speaking, this question should read "...to be nice or right...". It's ok though... I'm not gonna point that out or make a big deal out of it. I'm a pretty nice guy.

(Written)

A: Definitely better to be nice. Though wisdom is valuable, love is more important when it comes to people. Plus God hates pride. Being humble is a challenge at times, especially when you know you're right and people can't see truth!

(Written)

A: I won't even lie: it feels damned good to be right! But I've learned the hard way (way harder than it should've been) that being nice is way more important. Luckily my wife and her sensitive soul is there to constantly remind me of this!

(Written)

A: It's always better to be nice. When I was younger I used to be way too opinionated. It got me into a lot of situations that really could have been avoided. I also lost some friends who were dear to me. Always be nice instead of trying or needing to be right.

(Spoken)

A: So... It's never straight up "bad" to be nice obviously... But if you're being overly nice or like being nice just for the sake of being too timid to tell everybody what's actually going on, then that's basically worse than being outright rude or mean. This is true especially in jobs and in places where you need stuff to be super accurate and done right the first time. Trust me... No business person or engineer or doctor, lawyer, whatever else... None of them is gonna tell you that it's better to be nice than to be right and efficient.

(Spoken)

A: Obviously nice, right...? But there's for sure also times where you just really can't be one or the other. Ok this just popped into my head... it's *horrible*... it's *sooo bad*... [Laughter] But I really can't help myself. So imagine a dude is out there standing on the train tracks... Like he's just ready to end it all, right? Imagine you're like walking by on the sidewalk and look over and see him. You're definitely not gonna just be like "That's awesome! You have free will and deserve to make your own choice with your life!" [Laughter] Right...? Or like you're not gonna be all like "Hey man, I love your shoes! Where'd you get them?" You're gonna have to actually not be that nice, or maybe even that right... Like maybe this poor dude really doesn't have much to live for in his mind, right? Maybe his situation objectively sucks and it may never get much better... But you still have to be like "Dude, what are you doing?! You've got your whole life ahead of you!"... You can't exactly be 100 percent "nice" or a 100 percent "right"...

Q: Is there an unforgiveable deed?

(Written)

A: Yes

(Spoken)

A: Well... I think whatever is "unforgivable" is something that's unforgiveable for the self. There's never really something that's unforgiveable unless there's something you haven't forgiven yourself for, is what I mean to say.

(Spoken)

A: Ah... Well I'm probably the right person to ask... [Laughter] I've done and seen some crazy sh*t... I tell ya... [Laughter] But uh... No. Look... there ain't a single thing that I ever done, or that anybody I know personally ever done, that can't be forgiven. There ain't no doubt about that one.

(Spoken)

A: I mean... are we going with the Bible here or...? [Laughter] I mean I know tons of people that claim to forgive and forget but you can like just tell they don't... you know? It's way harder

to actually forgive I think. But like... in terms of myself personally... Eeegh... [awkwardly crosses arms] That's a tough one bro. I would love to sit here and say that I've forgiven everybody man. But I guess there's some f*cked up sh*t that's happened you know? [10 second pause and a bit of a sigh] One thing I can't see how anybody can forgive is murder. I don't know anybody like personally related to this but I did have a friend when I was younger whose mom was murdered. I can't even blame the dude... He never forgave that. Still hasn't and he's like 40 years old now...

(Spoken)

A: I'm gonna play into the last question a bit with this one... This is also another question I've thought a lot about... I told you, I'm weird [Laughter] So... there was always something that never sat right with me about some of the uh... more... "mainstream," you could say... religious ideas on punishment, heaven and hell and all that. I never really understood why someone could be punished an infinite amount of time for a finite misstep... ya know? That just didn't sound right at all [Laughter] So anyway... I poked around different mystical traditions and stuff, looking for something that would satisfy me. It was right about the same time I found the ideas related to, like, "choosing" to be yourself that I found this idea that nobody is ever truly "too far gone." And not in like some sort of inevitable cycle of "karma" or something either. Basically the idea is that each soul has an infinite amount of time to finally "make the choice" and get it together [Chuckles] I really like that idea.

Q: What makes someone inspirational?

(Written)

A: Happiness make one inspirational. People inspirational as smiling and laughing.

(Written)

A: The times where I'm inspired are when I can feel alot of energy. People who love what they are doing and can't help but share it are inspiring.

(Written)

A: Inspiration is all about emotion. Obviously someone inspirational is not over-emotional or an emotional wreck however, someone inspirational is someone who channels their positive

emotions into their passions. You can be passionate but not inspirational, but I don't see how you could be inspirational without being passionate.

(Spoken)

A: I think it's inspirational to show that you actually care. And I don't mean like the whole "I can guarantee you personally... That I *care* for my constituents and the American people" type crap from the politicians [Chuckles] I mean those people who you can just tell eat, live and breath for whatever it is they're doing... And yet somehow they're still not douchey or smug about it. That's always an inspirational thing to see.

(Written)

A: I can't help but tie this back into physics... Haha! So basically the most inspirational theories to a lot of physicists (and mathematicians even!) are ones that draw on completely new *concepts*. That's basically why Einstein's relativity theories were so groundbreaking—he was explaining things not only in a "new" way, but he was using entirely new concepts to reason about questions posed many years ago. Any time you don't just rearrange things in a new way but you actually extend the very conceptual field that humans possess at any given time, I'd say that qualifies as pretty inspirational.

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

(Written)

A: Everything

(Written)

A: Being a parent means sacrifice. You can try and idealize it all you want but you won't truly know what it takes and the amount of time it takes until you become one. Some where along the lines though you start to get it... The sacrifice turns into something you would never trade for anything. No amount of free time in the world would do it.

(Spoken)

A: Man... My little baby girl was born 2 weeks ago [Big smile]... [10-second pause] The kind of man I used to be... I never knew... I really just never knew if I'd get that chance. It's an

incredible thing to see for me. And I promise that little girl, with everything I've got in me, that her daddy's gonna protect her... love on her... and make her proud.

(Written)

A: Being a parent is more than just being there and doing all the things your child needs. Its definitely easy to get bogged down and just go threw the motions with things but if you keep doing that then you're kids are going to feel that. People think that just because you kid's like 2 or 3 that they don't pick up on things like that, but they do.

(Spoken)

A: I think the most important thing about being a parent is the work you gotta put into it... Most people really just don't realize the amount of work you have to put in, even jus' to do the bare minimum. It's like... Look... even if you're aiming to be like... you know... "The World's Most *Average Mom*" or something... [Laughter] Even if you're just goin' for that... You're still gonna have to put in 40... 50 hours a week. And if you're goin' for the real deal... If you're trying to actually make a good impact on your kid, like actually help him or her succeed and treat other people well... You're gonna be totally involved, totally consumed by it...

(Spoken)

A: So I always had this idea that I never really wanted kids. I'm not really sure why I never did honestly... I guess I was an only child, a kid of divorce... Just didn't really want to bother with any of that, you know? But as soon as I met my wife, this instantly changed. The best way I can describe it is that all of those little things that were keeping me from wanting a kid just faded away. None of the previous reasons I had for not wanting any held up anymore. So... basically... you know, obviously there's the responsibility of being a parent. But on top of that, getting to be a parent, for me... for me it basically symbolizes this idea that "Hey... I can change... I can actually do a complete 180 and adapt to it." It was pretty cool for me to realize that.

Q: What is the most courageous act?

(Spoken)

A: This kinda ties into the previous question here... The most courageous thing you can do is simply just stand up for yourself... even... or *especially*... if people are going against you in huge ways. It's a hell of a lot easier said than done... Trust me on that [Chuckles]

(Spoken)

A: So I'm actually a veteran... Three tours in Iraq... What they tell you about courage over there doesn't always, uh... let me just say it doesn't always "match up" with what you feel like courage should be. What you end up realizing... after a lot of really, really messed up stuff... What you end up realizing is that courage isn't about playing the right "side" or winning or any of that... People are *people* man... And you're a coward if you're gonna treat any one group of people as somehow beneath or not even deserving of life...

(Spoken)

A: So I come from a pretty strict and uh... "traditional" family you could say... And one of the toughest things about it is that everybody feels super, I mean *super* pressured to like "fall in line" and not question everybody's expectations. Some types of people actually like this I've found... it basically means less work for them and less decision making... if that makes sense. Other people hate it but just never gather up the strength to go against the grain or actually show their individuality in any way. And then there's some... if I can be so cocky to say [Laughter]... there are some who have the courage to stand up and basically say, "Look... I know you guys really want me to do this... But if I do that, I'm going to live a life that's only half lived; I won't trade my misery for your happiness." That's admittedly scary as sh*t... But oh my god does it feel so *good*.

CHAPTER 7

The Emotional

So much fuss has been made about us humans being the “rational animal,” that sometimes our deeply emotional nature is forgotten.

People can feel as many feelings as there are imaginative new words people can create to describe them. Foreign languages have a multitude of specific words for very specific emotions, from the well-known German *schadenfreude*, referring to peoples’ pleasure at seeing another fall or fail, to the lesser known Danish *hygge*, used to convey the warm, cozy atmosphere of domestic joy that comes along with lighting candles, baking and spending time with family.

But, throughout the whole panoply of emotion, there are perhaps four distinctive shades that stand out the most in our lifetimes—*love*, *fear*, *sadness* and *excitement*.

There’s that *love* we feel in both a wild romantic journey and a familiar, familial bond. There’s that *fear* we have both when considering the uncertain future and facing the painful present moment. There’s that *sadness* we feel both in longing regret and in resigned hopelessness. And there’s that *excitement* we cherish both in the precious present and in eager anticipation.

In this chapter, questions like “What’s one thing you wish you had the guts to do?”, “What haunts you?” and “What’s the strongest emotion you’ve felt?” challenge and invite people to share the whole range of their inner, emotional worlds. And the answers they offer are sure to elicit a profound range of emotions themselves.

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

(Written)

A: No

(Written)

A: It's like getting into an Uber and having to write sh*t.

(Written)

A: Very scary. I hadn't lost my mind but my ex did. She woke up one day and just started staring at nothing. I couldn't get through to her. I tried.

(Written)

A: I don't know because I haven't personally but I remember my friend telling me about how her mom went crazy. Supposedly it can change everything about that person, my friend's mom turned into a totally different person after.

(Written)

It is emptiness. You do not know what you are doing, neither there is a meaning in living. Also doing the same thing over and over again like some psychologist had said, madness is a loophole very hard to get out.

(Written)

A: I'm a pretty put-together person and have never gone crazy. I would like to say that this is largely due to my best buddy Horace the purple penguin. Horace is a total character, but is really down to earth also. Sometimes he and I shoot the sh*t about how crazy this world has gotten.

(Written)

A: For a normally quite rational person, it is especially hard. When I was 36 I got diagnosed with bipolar. It is very rare to be diagnosed this late, and I had no symptoms or signs of it before then. My husband first started suspecting something was up way before I did. It's been a journey...

(Spoken)

A: My mother was crazy... like *real* crazy too. She used to walk up to me and my brothers with a uh... with a knife... and say she was gonna kill herself, that she'd had enough of all of us and our dad. It was jus' a whole differen' level of crazy man... I ain't talked to her in years... As far as I know she still the exact same way...

(Spoken)

A: Man... I'll tell ya... [Chuckles] I'll tell ya. Look man... I use to do some pretty messed up sh*t man... This was uh... This was when I was like 20... 22... Back then I was up in St Louis... Gravois Park man... Look it up... Uh... And yeah... I was out for that "candy"... ya know? I got me some candy and I get back to my place... Sit down, ya know, do my thing... I was feelin' good, everythin' was real good... And then somethin' snapped. I started floatin' up above my own head man... Can barely describe somethin' like that. Now... I wasn't one of them "near-death" things, that's for certain. But this was somethin' wild man... I thought I was gonna die right there.

(Spoken)

A: So I haven't technically lost my mind... But I did have this one acid trip that basically took me to the edge of all sanity [Laughter] I'm not sure if you've ever done acid, but there's like times where you lose basically all sense of time. Other times, the "flow" of time, you could say... the "flow" changes completely. So like 10 minutes could feel literally like 10 hours or more. This one time... No joke... This sounds *insane*...! This one time I was trapped in the body of a *deer*... or like elk or something? A *moose*? Who the hell knows... [laughter] for what felt like a couple of days. I had my same, like... same "consciousness" and everything. I was just trapped in this moose body, wandering around this forest somewhere. I remember coming back and just feeling like crawling away and taking a break from life for a while... That was some really mind-f*cking sh*t man... [Laughter]

Q: What haunts you?

(Written)

A: Death. The dying is what scare me most.

(Written)

A: Death man... death. I don't believe anybody really knows what will happen. People love to act like they do but there is no true way to know.

(Written)

A: I won't lie... Dying still haunts me. The thought that there could only be blackness and nothing is a scary thing. I'm also not very religious. This is something I think about pretty often.

(Written)

A: That when I die my family will be forced to exaggerate and say things they think are true to the small audience of mostly family members as a result of the significant lack of personal bond.

(Written)

A: It used to be my own death but I'm finding that the older I get the more I'm worried about my parents death. I have really awesome parents and I can't hardly bare to see them go. That's a very scary thought.

(Written)

A: I don't like to think about it but death is one thing that haunts me more than anything else. The idea of me dying and not doing the things that I wanted to do. Even though when I die it won't really matter since I'll be dead.

(Written)

A: Ok I'll take a break from the physics now LOL. To be totally frank, death scares the crap out of me. Ok I lied a bit with that first sentence... My fear of death only got worse the further I got into physics...! I mean not only are *we* gonna die, but the *whole thing* is gonna die too?! C'mon now...

(Spoken)

A: Ya know... ask me this a decade ago or so and I'd tell you "death"... Ask me this now and I've gotta go with "life"... [Chuckles] Like it's one thing to get past that fear of death... And like when you do get past it, you sorta think that most of your fears are over with I guess, and that you're in the clear. But getting over that fear is just the very beginning of it all man... [Chuckles] That's where the real... real, uh... "fun"... starts.

(Spoken)

A: This might sound kinda weird because I'm not exactly sure how to word it... But what scares me the most is being seen basically... Having somebody be able to look at me, into my eyes... and just somehow tell everything I'm thinking, who I really am and basically know more about me than I know about myself... I'm not sure if that even makes sense...? But yeah... I'm outgoing and everything but I'm also a pretty private person too. I don't like letting many people see who I am on a deeper level. Makes me feel... I guess "vulnerable" is the best way to put it...

(Spoken)

A: Honestly...? Not being able to help the people I want to. Being totally ineffectual... totally unable to lend a hand to the people who need it the most... the people who are counting on me to help them out and pull them through. I don't know... I figure this is a common thing with therapists... Sometimes you get those people you see, the regulars, those people you get to know so well... You know their entire life and their mind maybe better than their closest friends and family do... And then sometimes they just drop off the face of the earth. Sometimes you guess it's because they got better... maybe they just realized they no longer needed to talk and they went about their life. Other times... other times, you just never know. It *haunts* me... it haunts me everyday to think that maybe some of those people who stopped coming aren't still here with us.

Q: Do you trust your intuition or “gut?”

(Written)

A: gut

(Written)

A: Yes. In my opinion, intuition is the collective inference of the knowledge one has acquired. This helps as a valuable parameter in the decision making process.

(Written)

A: Even when I’ve been skinny, my “gut” is all I’ve got! I can’t imagine not going with your gut. I can be rational when I need to be, but that’s not usually how I roll.

(Written)

A: Most definitely. There are times I can feel when God is showing me something. If I have a bad feeling about something, I’m usually right. I know discernment is real. It’s a precious gift from God.

(Spoken)

A: Oh you *have* to... you *got* to. Nobody ever made a decent decision by drawin’ up all sorts of fancy maps and plans and things. You might land on somethin’ that way, sure... But it ain’t gonna be what’s really best for you.

(Written)

A: I try to. I’ve always been a sort of “artsy” kid and person. So I think it’s easy for me to stick with my gut and intuition. Sometimes this gets me into a pickle though! Thankfully my husband is more rational and can help me think more strategically.

(Written)

A: I like to try to but it’s a pretty difficult thing to do consistently. I’m an architect and sometimes there’s times where I know I should just go with my gut for the design, but it’s always tricky when you have to consider all of your client’s desires too.

(Written)

A: Besides the Lord, it would be my grandmother. She knew what love was. She WAS love. And everyone loved her. She also had amazing faith. I believe because of her example, and most definitely her prayers for me, I am going in the right direction!! Without her love while I was growing up, I honestly wouldn't know what maternal love was like. Thank God for her.

(Spoken)

A: I think you kinda have to... I'm a lawyer... been in law for two decades now... and I'll tell you one thing for sure: you can't be a good lawyer if you're just reciting a bunch of book knowledge or just memorizing every case or term that's thrown at you. In law school you've got your two kinds of students... you've got those who think that throwing out more precedents and flashy names and dates is gonna land them the prize and then you've got the folks who have that type of mind that you simply can't train to have. To be truly great at law you've got to be creative and able to bring things together, mix and match, analyze and synthesize... all on the fly. And that basically all comes down to having a flawless intuition and a very deep understanding of the fundamentals of what you're doing.

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

(Written)

A: It means wanting to hide away from the hole world not wanting anyone to see or anything to judge you.

(Written)

A: Many times anxiety has taken me out of my comfort zone and pushed me to continue working towards professional or personal goals. I am a better person by letting go of my fears.

(Written)

A: Anxiety is a feeling unlike anything else, it can make you believe anything, no matter how crazy it sounds. Anxiety is different to each person but there are also things that are common to everyone who suffers.

(Written)

A: I have struggled a lot with anxiety in my life. Anxiety is a burning, itching feeling that only gets worse as the more you try to make it leave. Anxiety makes you think that you aren't yourself. That you aren't as good as you actually are.

(Written)

A: You've come to the right person! LOL. When I was younger my anxiety was super bad and it caused me a lot of problems. I remember I couldn't look anybody in the eye at all. Barely even my own parents. That was the most humiliating feeling of my life. Anxiety can really kill your self esteem.

(Spoken)

A: I mean... Obviously there's the like... *physical* symptoms, you know... Sweaty palms, heart beating fast, head spinning... And then there's like the doubts. That's probably the biggest thing I face, all those thoughts that just creep up and hit you with all this nasty stuff. Feeling anxious is one thing, but the doubts really just do me in...

(Spoken)

A: I'd be totally lying to you if I said death doesn't still scare the crap outta me... [Chuckles] Sure... there's some people... some atheists rather... who will tell you that you should feel free and bold after you've found the "truth" so to speak... But death is still this inherently scary thing to us... I mean that's basically why religion exists in the first place, right? Nobody wants to die. Everybody wants to have a safe, cozy place to go after this world and not some black void of total mystery.

(Spoken)

A: Well... I don't know if it qualifies as anxiety... But I've always sorta struggled with feeling like I deserve things, ya know? I forget what it is... they've got this name for it and everything... like you can never believe you've actually done or achieved something, no matter how many things you get done in your life.... What is it... uh... ahh that's it... yeah, "imposter syndrome" they call it. So... I don't think I qualify for anxiety. But... I definitely qualify for that imposter

type feeling... It's gotten better, but I really don't do well with... like actually accepting what I've done or what I do...

(Spoken)

A: So this is a weird one I guess for a grown ass man to be talking about I guess but I've had my fair share of nerves. Like a lot of people are shocked when I tell them that I was this super shy kid right? [Chuckles] They're like "Nah... not *you* man...?" you know? But yeah... Dude, I sh*t you not... I couldn't even call someone on the phone until I was like 18 years old bro [laughter] See I was an 80s kid and we couldn't just Instagram or text or any of that. I remember my parents wondering why I never took any calls. They'd be like "Hey Reilly, you've got someone asking for you!" and I'd just be like "Nah, it's ok!" [Laughter] Yeah... [laughter] I would've straight up *killed* for a cell phone back then man.

Q: What is the strongest emotion you've felt?

(Written)

A: When my daughter was born. All that pain was worth it!

(Written)

A: Love haha. I mean... it was crazy strong. For sure it also messed with me though.

(Spoken)

A: Welp... This is an easy one [Laughter] When that girl of mine was born... There was nothing even remotely close man... not even close.

(Spoken)

A: Well, I guess I can piggyback off of my last answer... [Chuckles] By far... The strongest thing I ever felt was when my son was born. I'm not even normally that emotional of a guy... But it was really something... Knowing that this is a completely new human being, a new soul... And this soul is now your responsibility and great blessing. It's a wild thing... Please don't tell my wife I didn't mention our wedding day though...! [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Strongest? Hmm... Well... I uh... Strongest... [10-second pause] I wanna say love but that's a whole can o' worms there... [Laughter] I mean besides that I'd say the strongest thing I've ever felt is anger. You know, before that little story about that green light thing happened, I remember just feelin' really, *really* mad. It was somethin' I never knew how to handle. Usually that's a guy's issue... [Awkward laughter] But yeah... that was a strong... strong feeling for me.

(Spoken)

A: Oh man... Strongest... [10-second pause] I think I'd have to go with my wedding day... I'm sorry kids... [Laughter] I should probably say when my daughters were born... [Laughter] I mean that was very strong too obviously. But a different kind of strong. I think my wedding day was so special because the man I married helped pull me out of a really dark place in my life. I never ever expected to find something like that. It was a really cool thing.

Q: What's the weirdest emotion you've felt?

(Written)

A: Depression

(Spoken)

A: *Weirdest*... Weirdest thing I ever felt for sure was after I told my family literally what I just told you... [Laughter] Because obviously it was *awesome* and *freeing* and all that *jazz*... But... ugh... the *guilt*. I came away from that basically as one big bundle of nerves, both from the excitement of finally being free and being like "Now what...?" and the crushing dread of like "Did I actually make a mistake here...?" [Chuckles]

(Spoken)

A: I'm not really sure if this qualifies as an emotion... I guess it's more of an experience of sorts... But it was definitely an emotionally charged thing. So basically, when I was a teen I had this super bizarre experience. It's called "derealization" or "depersonalization" or something like that. It makes you feel like you're not even in control of your own body or decisions... it's like you're just kinda sitting there behind a screen, watching yourself move around and do things

throughout the day. It sounds kinda weird and stupid, but it was by far the most terrifying thing of my life. What made it more scary was that I didn't really know how to tell anybody about it without them thinking I had just totally lost my mind [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Oh I really like this one... And I'm not even sure why but I just had an answer just like jump right out at me. The weirdest emotion by far I ever had was when my parents divorced... [Chuckles] Like obviously people always joke about the "two Christmases" thing, right? But it wasn't just that... Like basically ever since I could remember my parents were always fighting and just being nasty to each other. I think they could maybe, *maybe?* go *two* or *three* days without getting at each other's throats...? But yeah... I was... uh... I think I was *16?* when they finally got divorced... 16 or 17... And I remember just being initially so happy, like just totally thrilled, right? And I was way past that whole "two Christmases" stage [Chuckles] But yeah, I was so happy because I felt like I could finally just live, in peace... and drama free. But then this weird sadness also started to hit me... It's like all this stuff you don't even think about until it happens too... You know... I started thinking like, "Now I won't even have a home to come back to when I visit with my own family" and all that weird stuff... Not that I would have even enjoyed coming back... [Chuckles] It was just one of those weird things.

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

(Written)

A: When I was 16 I almost died. I jumped off a bridge into the water. It was almost a 100 feet in the air. I was lucky that I only broke my foot.

(Written)

A: When I was 3 I almost got hit by a huge bus. I vividly remember my parents screaming and the wheels screeching next to me. I was trying to run but my little legs couldn't do much back then. I have never felt my heart drop like that since!

(Written)

A: Back to the previous question, the scariest moment of my life was when my ex left me and our daughter. I had 0 idea how I would make it and what I was going to do. On top of that, there was the sadness and sense of loss too. This was quite a crazy experience.

(Spoken)

A: Scariest moment of my life is the day my daughter was born. She came out holdin' her breath... not breathin' at all. All them doctors came runnin' in and mess around with her and do all these tests... All that work, and all that hope that goes into havin' a baby, ya know? All of that and then you realize it might all be for nothing... That ain't easy.

(Spoken)

A: Scariest moment of my life is when I almost drowned in the Gulf of Mexico... [Chuckles] I can't remember if it was like Padre Island or Corpus Christi area, but it was somewhere around there... Anyway, I remember not thinking that I was that far out there, but then this massive group of waves just kinda popped up outta nowhere. My first instinct for whatever reason was to like dive under them to escape... [Chuckles] *Andddd*... I quickly realized that was a horrible idea [Laughter] I was under the water for probably a good minute, maybe more. I remember just trying so hard to struggle up back to the top to take a breath. After a while the waves started to calm down and I was finally able to come back up. But... Yeah... I have no doubt that if those waves didn't stop I wouldn't be here today. Scariest moment I've had by far...

(Written)

A: One moment especially jumps out for me. I was in 10th Grade I think, I was on the wrestling team. I was facing this dude everybody thought I was going to wipe the floor with, I'll admit that I got a little cocky to. Anyway, I was being lazy and he got me face down and had my right arm pulled back behind my back. Any time your arm is more than like 90 degrees bent in this position, the refs usually call it. But I remember feeling my arm get to 90 and this dude just kept twisting my arm even more. I started feeling my forearm really burning. Still no ref. Turns out the ref ran over to check on something and totally missed what was happening. I was trying to

yell out but my face was jammed in the mat. Then I felt it... My bone in my forearm popped straight out of my arm. Holy crap was that scary!

Q: What's one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

(Written)

A: love

(Spoken)

A: I wish I had the guts to be fully myself... That's always been a really hard thing for me. It's not that I'm fake or that I don't like myself either... It's just a very scary thing for me and doesn't come natural at all.

(Spoken)

A: Ok... Like, honestly... This is gonna sound a little creepy but there's this guy I always see at the grocery store and usually we make eye contact. But none of us ever does anything. I wish I had the guts to get his number. Maybe this will motivate me to? [laughter]

(Written)

A: This is a little cliché but I really wish I would have stuck with my passion. When I was a teenager I was an exceptionally good artist. I did everything from painting to sculpting and pottery. My parents even hired someone to coach me. I still sometimes dream about getting back into it but I'm not truly sure if I ever can. I do wish I had someone to help ease me back into it...

(Spoken)

A: There's this one girl... It's always a girl, right? [Laughter] There's this girl I was good friends with a couple years ago up in the Boston area. We were both in this Master's program together... Long story short, I planned out super elaborately how I was gonna make a move and how we were gonna be together, this and that... I never ended up doing it though... It still pisses me off [Shakes head and chuckles]

(Written)

A: I always wished that I had the guts to love freely. For me, love is the most important thing that exists. But I've always been fearful of expressing it to others. That's been a part of the harmful side of masculinity, is that showing emotions is shown as a sign of weakness. Struggling with the self judgment I've had when I do feel strongly towards another person has made it more difficult to hold onto relationships and the people I care about. There comes a lot of fear with love, but I'm trying to be better at facing that fear.

(Written)

A: I wish I had the guts to face people in the streets and preach the Word of God. I must admit that I fear so much the spirit of looking foolish and uneducated on the subject. I have found my entire life to be one of the fear. I grew up feeling push around and unseen. I look back and realize that is why I've lived a life of many regrets, always trying to be seen, to be known, to be on in the lights, to be looked up to, to be important. It's a terrible place to be. It takes much energy to hide this from the ones you love, or seek respect from others. To have to live a life of avoidance of confrontations, and stepping out of the heard; because someone might just discover how afraid you are. To be lit up "as the say" as a fake. I wish I had the guts to live in strength.

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

(Written)

A: Truth be told, I'm self-employed and loving every second of it.

(Written)

A: That she don't know how to talk to people and need a huge reality check!

(Written)

A: I'd probably point out all of the inefficiencies and stupidities that we do on a daily basis... I'm sure he wouldn't care though!

(Spoken)

A: Welp... I *am* the boss [Laughter] I suppose I am known to say some pretty nasty stuff to *myself* on occasion though... I haven't fired myself yet though thankfully [Chuckles]

(Written)

A: Oh my... Haha! I love this question. I can't tell you how many times I've literally dreamed of this scenario. Usually I just tell them "I'm not sure how you still walk around with that huge a** stick hanging out!"

(Spoken)

A: Ohhhhhh man hahaha! Well... I never really thoughta that but it's a good thing to work on I guess man... Might need it some day! [Laughs] Man I would go straight for the throat man... I wish I could thinka somethin' witty right here but I've got nothin' [more laughter].

(Written)

A: Welp... I'm my own boss. And... technically I *could* fire myself. But assuming I couldn't I'd probably tell myself what I normally tell myself mentally on a daily basis: "Pick up the slack you lazy bastard and try to at least put some pants on for your next Zoom meeting will ya?" This would be a lot more satisfying if I had a boss...!

(Spoken)

A: Oooh... [Laughter] Mmm mmm mmm... [Chuckles] I can't say his name can I...? No? [Laughter] Gotcha... Well... This wrong, I know it... [Laughter] But... this dude's style is whack. I can't even hold it back. Dude be wearin' a bowtie... You know, one of them little cute, tiny red lookin' ones too... He be lookin' like a damn Christmas present... [Laughter] And he thinkin' he look good... [Shakes head]

(Spoken)

A: Ohhh yeahhh [Chuckles] So I've got one person...one person... uh... "above" me right now... I'm not gonna say or give anything away but I'll tell you this—most of the stuff they've been pushing for the last two or three quarters is just absolutely wrong... Like crazily, wildly wrong... And not just in one sense of the word "wrong"... Yeah... So I'd really quite enjoy

poking the whole thing apart... showing them my strategy and everything. Is that realistic? *Hell* no. Would it be a hell of a good time? You better *believe* it... [Chuckles]

(Written)

A: I am retired now but oh I do have somebody in mind... I won't say his name so I will just call him 'H'. H was somebody who thought he was better than everybody else. I was a 20 something and a bit shy and timid. So H thought he could come bully me around. If H were here today—I would tell him 'If your pants sit any higher up your waist they would just cover up your knockers and then you could do us all a big favor and go take the day off at the beach you high strung bastard'! I learned this one from my husband.

(Spoken)

A: Oh sh*t... Hah! I love this one man. Look... my boss, he one of the most messed up people I know man... Like this a dude who will come over and mess with you just to do it. He does this with damn near everybody there too. If I had to tell him something finally it'd have to be 'Look man... You the kinda person that go to hell and gets kicked the hell out man... You the kinda person that after they kicked outta hell is all schemin' and plottin' to get back into hell and overthrow the damn devil himself man... You the kinda person that after he throw out the devil gets ganged up on by all them demons and people down there and thrown outta there again man... [Chuckles]

(Spoken)

A: Oh man... [Laughter] I've always kinda fantasized about that perfect moment, ya know... where everybody else has just packed up and left and it's just me and the boss standing there alone. He starts to open his mouth but I hold up a finger and go "Wait a second buddy" [Chuckles] "Wait a *second*." [Laughter] I'd have a ball with it [Chuckles] I'd go "Look here man... you open that mouth and you're fired." He'd go to open his mouth again and I'd be like "What did I say, Doug?" He'd finally get pissed and overpower me but then I'd just go "No... That's not really how it works, Doug... You're the one who's fired here." And... I figure we'd kinda just go back and forth like that until he finally gave up or physically assaulted me [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Ahhhhah! [Laughter] *Yeahhh...* So... I work for a psychology research “think tank” type thing, right? And... so the way it works is that there’s not one boss... there’s like *eight* of them... so this is gonna be *extra* fun. [Laughter] Ok I won’t even sugarcoat it... So some of these people are like really... I mean *really* stilted and out of touch with the world. They’ve basically never stepped foot outside of their office or off of their campus. So some of the stuff they suggest to us is just straight up stupid... and if we were to actually implement these in the real world, it would be a *total* trainwreck. [Chuckles] I’m basically always daydreaming of walking into a meeting and just grilling them like “Oh really...? Your research shows that spending 20 straight hours together actually bonds people and builds empathy? So you want our clients to start setting up 20 hour meetings and holding their constituents for ransom while citing that study?” [Laughter] Like come on people!

Q: What does depression mean to you?

(Written)

A: I’ve been depress for a while now, it feels like a black cloud hangs over your whole head. Colors really do get darker.

(Written)

A: Depression is not so much as a bad feeling as it is an absence of feeling. When you’re deeply depressed, the most startling thing isn’t that you feel “bad”, it’s that you barely feel anything at all. Complete and total numbness.

(Spoken)

A: Yeah man... Obviously being a veteran this is something you go through... All of the stuff you hear about the “PTSD” and all that... it’s a hundred percent real. It’s not normal depression though. It’s basically like never knowing what is coming next, what’s gonna hop into your mind or how long it’s gonna last...

(Written)

A: I actually had post partum depression pretty bad after my first. I felt super guilt on top of all that. To me it was like just being totally dull. It wasn't really even sadness. It was more just this sickening gray feeling if that makes sense. My eyes were open but my mind didn't feel "on".

(Written)

A: I've never been depressed but my ex used to be very depressed. From what I dealt with and helped her deal with, depression means a certain darkness that pulls everything and everyone into it. I know this might seem like a cruel thing to say, but depressed people can be some of the most self-centered people. A lot of times, everything you do wrong will come back to their depression.

(Written)

A: Depression is something that sort of creeps up on you and hits you before you even realize it. Both my myself and my friends who have been depressed have similar experiences... Usually it's not so much as being really really sad as it is just losing all interest in stuff you used to love. I always know someone is suffering if they just suddenly stop liking something they used to love.

(Spoken)

A: Depression's a really tricky thing... There's really so many different ways you can be depressed. Like some people just straight up don't feel anything at all... And then I've known some people who actually get like full-on emotional swings and like feel everything much more strongly. It all depends... For me personally though... I still don't really know if I can even call it depression, but I definitely go through these like... occasional bouts of... just like intense loneliness. And it's not even like I'm overly "alone" or like isolated or anything else. It's more like I feel that nobody really "sees" me, if that makes sense... It's a weird thing to describe...

(Spoken)

A: Well... It's like I was saying about the whole insecurity and success thing... if you have this missing piece or like "void" inside of you, then you're definitely gonna feel it. I think a lot of depression comes from that sort of feeling where you're just drifting and not really anchored into

your deeper or true self, you haven't found that yet or are too scared to embrace it. It's kinda like the whole Jim Carrey thing. I don't remember when but I guess a few years ago he came out and basically told everyone like "Look guys... I've been playing a character for years now... decades even... and I'm totally miserable. I have to get in tune with myself or it's gonna kill me." It's that sort of thing where if you're hiding yourself or masking things you hate, you're not going to end up feeling whole or healthy.

Q: Who will you never forgive? Why?

Nobody chose this question... Perhaps that's a positive sign for humanity?

Q: Where does your mind wander when alone?

(Written)

A: I might as well play off my previous answer... It sounds silly but I often think back to those days as a cadet and smile. Back then I thought it was the worst thing ever. Now I realize it was basically the best thing ever.

(Spoken)

A: So... If you haven't noticed this by now, I'm a *total* weirdo, ok? [Laughter] Yeah... I mean... Look man, you know the Lord of the Rings series right? Yeah... Way more times than any sane person should admit, I catch myself as Gandalf standing there all cool, with those white robes on. And I'm staring at some person I know in real life who's just done something really f*cking stupid and I go—"Fool of a took! This is a serious journey, not a hobbit walking-party!" Yeeaaapp... [Embarrassed laughter]

CHAPTER 8

The Personal

Politics completely aside, it really is all about *identity*.

How we identify as people comes down to three key ingredients—what we've *done*, what we're *doing* and where we *want to go*. Although we can never erase the *past* and our past choices comprise a major part of who we are, we can surely focus on what we're doing in the *present* and where we're headed in the *future*.

Of course, it's not only about what *we've* done, what *we're* doing and what *we* want to do. Who we are is a composite of both our own choices and beliefs and those of *the people closest to us* (by birth and by choice, for better and for worse). And although we can downplay and discount the influence of others on our own lives, we can never fully escape the impact that others have on us, both in the past and for the future.

In this chapter, questions like “How have you changed in the last decade?”, “Would your ten-year-old self be proud?” and “Where do you want to be in a decade?” set peoples' sights on that ever-present trifecta of *past, present* and *future*.

And after they have traveled through time, charting and re-charting their course through this chaotic, ever-changing world, questions like “Which person has helped you the most in life?” and “What would you regret most on your deathbed?” allow them to drop the anchor down and consider how their personal identity interfaces with those around them.

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

(Written)

A: With my loved ones

(Written)

A: In an Uber without a survey.

(Written)

A: I hope to be happy. I don't really remember what deep happiness is like, I really want to remember it.

(Spoken)

A: Well... I'd like to be a decade younger and better looking but I don't think that's how it works [Chuckles]

(Spoken)

A: Well... If we're still on the topic... I'd like to have a new job and a way better boss [Laughter] As for the rest... it'll all work itself out after that!

(Written)

A: I probably shouldn't be admitting this but I want to own my own cannabis store... I've been interested in this for a while now but I'm still saving up. We'll see!

(Written)

A: I'm an academic researcher, and I'd like to (hopefully) finally be done with my PhD by then. I know it's not very realistic either, but I'd also like to land a nice professorship immediately after that.

(Spoken)

A: So I've always wanted to have my own bookstore or something? Maybe like a coffee shop too. The thing is—I never got like a business degree or anything or really had any interest in

business. Soooo... I'm not exactly sure how that's gonna go down... [Laughter] But it's something I just always think about. In the next five-ish years I want to make a go at that.

(Spoken)

A: So... I'm still in my thirties so a decade seems like a pretty long time. But... definitely not as long as it used to seem like [Chuckles] I feel like once you hit 30 something in your brain sorta goes "Holy crap... This is all real man... I'm basically a third of the way dead!" [Laughter] And it's like all of the things you haven't done yet start hanging over you way more than they used to. Anyways... I definitely want to have my sh*t... let's say "more together" in a decade, that's for sure... In terms of specifics... I mean, one of the things I've always wanted to do is be a sort of like... kind of... I don't really know how to word it, but I guess some sort of "motivational speaker"? Basically I want to take what I've learned and put it all together for people who are going through rough times. Kinda like somewhere between therapist and like... chill dude who wants to pump you up and put a smile on your face kind of thing [Chuckles]

Q: How have you changed in the last decade?

(Written)

A: Well, relating to the anxiety thing above, I have changed so much in the last decade. I've come out of my "shell" and am now feeling comfortable in many situations that I thought I'd never be in.

(Written)

A: In the last decade I have conquered so many of my fears and transformed into an overall better and more powerful person and mother. It was anything but easy but I am very proud of myself and my daughter for getting through everything we did together.

(Written)

A: Well... I used to be a pretty lazy dude. In my 20s I basically traveled around and worked jobs that weren't really jobs, if that makes sense. When I hit 32 I sort of realized how I'd been living and had a major "oh sh*t!" moment. I'm 34 now and have finally settled into a career that I genuinely like and have stopped roaming around aimlessly.

(Spoken)

A: I'll level with ya man... I spent five years in prison. I don't even wanna talk about why I was in there... But I'll tell ya this—It starts out being the worst times of your life, but at a certain point you got a choice to make. Do I let this sh*t end me...? Do I let this sh*t go and eat me alive or do I take a look at myself and see what I've done. That's the hardest thing man... But look... This was a whole decade ago bro. By the time I got outta there man, I had so much changed in me that I was on a whole new path man. It's the best thing I ever did.

Q: Where did you want to be in life? Where are you now?

(Written)

A: When I was a kid I always wanted to be an athlete. I didn't know what sport but I always wanted to play something. When I got older I realized that this wasn't realistic and my dreams were basically crushed. I did however find an outlet that I never expected to find. When I was twenty five I started a sportswear company. I found I was able to satisfy all of those original dreams I had, more or less, simply by helping other people along the way to their dreams and goals.

(Spoken)

A: So I'm one of those weirdos who almost always knew what they wanted. I remember being 14-15 and knowing it all the way: I'm gonna be a programmer and computer engineer. The weird thing is... this actually lined up perfectly with what my parents wanted for me. See... that wasn't even the point of argument with them... They've got much more than that going on [Laughter] But yeah... So I always knew the basic idea of what I wanted to be and how I wanted to do it. But obviously when you're younger you never actually like flesh out the details of your dreams. I always imagined programming and software stuff being so much... so much "sexier" [Laughter] so much sexier than it actually is [Laughter] But hey... at least I stayed true and stuck with my initial plan. That does feel really good to look back at that.

(Spoken)

A: So... I went to college out of state, right... I went to Washington State on scholarship and was like totally on my own and everything. Back then I didn't have a clue what the hell I wanted from life and what I was going to do. I feel like I just... Like I sorta just spun a wheel and chose a random major? [Laughter] My parents wanted me to be a nurse or something medical (my dad's a surgeon... ugh...) but I hated that so I chose something basically as far away from the medical field as possible: English Lit. I remember my parents like freaking the f*ck out and basically demanding that I come back home because they didn't want their money wasted on English Lit... [Laughter] My dad called it "English Sh*t"... But actually... This ended up being one of my best choices... Two years in I ended up changing over to journalism and my Junior year I already got an offer from a really good magazine. My dad still hated it but at least I got the last laugh...!

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

(Written)

A: I don't know. It would depend on when my death bed comes and how much courage I've gathered to make a change by then.

(Spoken)

A: Man... I would regret not living up to everything I know I can be... and *need* to be. I would regret not loving my family as hard as I could, not giving them as much as I possibly could.

(Written)

A: I would really regret if I hadn't loved to the absolute best of my ability. In movies and books and things they usually make love seem easy and effortless. It's not at all... To love firmly and boldly is maybe the hardest thing any of us can try to do.

(Spoken)

A: I would just regret not experiencing everything I could. Don't get me wrong... I'm not one of those guys who needs to go crazy and like do cocaine with strippers and all that [Laughter] But I just want to make sure that I don't live as much as I could have and then just fade away forever.

(Spoken)

A: I mean... given that I don't really believe in any higher power or ultimate purpose... I think I would just regret if I hadn't experienced absolutely as much as possible—the good, the bad, the crazy, the incredible. Obviously I'd like more good than bad, more pleasure than pain... But I just want to experience the whole run of emotion, because I really doubt any of use get a second shot here.

(Written)

A: I will regret the time I did not spend with family. I had a prestigious job and spent much time away from them as food for my self-worth. I prayed to much to the God of money and lost the most important gift of all; time with the ones I love.

In other words

“I know that I will come to regret the moments I didn't spend with my family. While I had a prestigious job and often prioritized it over my loved ones, it was only for the sake of my own self-worth. In hindsight, I realize that I placed too much emphasis on worldly success and money, forgetting that the most precious gift of all is the time I could have spent with the people I care about the most.”

(Spoken)

A: Damn... I gotta ask [laughter] Has anybody actually picked this one to answer yet? Cuz this is kinda intense [Laughter] I saw it and it just jumped out though... I'm feelin' bold [laughter] Hmm... You know, it's not really something I like *actively* think about... But I guess I've always had it in the back of my mind. Like you know how they always say that people usually don't regret things they did but things they *didn't* do? I always knew that I was never going to be laying there in some white bed, wasting away, and thinking “Ah crap... Time's up man. What the hell was I doing?” If anything, I guess I always wanted to go out with a bang... I mean, not

like some big accident or something crazy... [chuckles] But I want to always shake things up in this little life here...

Q: Which fears have you overcome?

(Written)

A: Losing

(Written)

A: I was a shy young lady. It took me a while to feel comfortable with people. But I did it.

(Written)

A: I used to be really scared of planes. I remember being a kid and couldn't even make it through a plane ride without puking everywhere. It took me a good 10 years to get over that and be somewhat normal about it!

(Written)

A: Like I said, I used to be pretty overweight. I guess I had this fear that if I stopped eating and got skinny that I would have to start putting myself out there and doing more things with my life. More than anything I had a fear of fitting in with other people and finding my "people" I guess. In the last couple years I've gotten way better.

Q: What do you dislike the most about yourself?

(Written)

A: I wish I could live in the moment more, this is very difficult for me to do. It is a simple thing but it's anything but simple to actually do.

(Written)

A: This is hard because there are a lot of things that I dislike about myself. I feel like they fall into the same category. I am too much of a people pleaser. I can be a pushover. I don't always speak my mind. I wish I had more confidence. I hide too much behind my insecurities.

(Spoken)

A: So I already outed myself as a psychologist I guess... [Chuckles] Yeah... I won't even lie, one of the reasons I got into psychology is that I was really hard on myself and was like looking for reasons why I was so much different than everybody else. I felt so weird... And then like, come to find out, I'm really not as weird or crazy as I originally thought... [Chuckles] But yeah... I found that I'm actually quite a "normal" and balanced person, but I think that my biggest weakness is that I just can't stop analyzing myself and beating myself up. I usually just try and console myself by reminding myself like "Hey, it's a *super* common thing and everybody deals with the inner critic..." But I'm still at war with that little nasty critic...

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

(Written)

A: This

(Written)

A: I would never be interested in parachuting out of an airplane.

(Written)

A: I've never really been one to answer surveys or do questionnaires. That's one thing I will always steer clear of!

(Written)

A: I'll definitely never let somebody else choose how I live my life and the goals I set. For some reason, I always knew this. I never wanted to be living the life of someone else.

(Spoken)

A: Well... I'll be damned sure I never f*ck it up as baldly as I did with that Boston girl [Laughter] If I have that again, I'm going for it... Even if it ends in flames and destruction [Chuckles]

(Written)

A: I will never sell myself out and work in an office. I might not become a bigshot and I probably won't be an entrepreneur or anything, but I will find a way to get the hell out of the "rat race"!

(Spoken)

A: This is uh... probably a bit eccentric but I have no pressing urge or desire to ever go on a ship. Something about the open ocean just doesn't sit well with me. Planes are just fine... Boats, no way, no sir.

(Written)

A: I'll never pretend to be something that I am not. I will never sign my self up for a destiny that I cannot deliver. After all... we're not even sure what any of us on this quaint little "pale blue dot" are doing, are we? Why add to the confusion.

(Spoken)

A: One thing I'll never do is turn my back on my friends or my family. It's just the way I was raised, ya know... You don't gotta be a superhero or... or a saint or somethin'... but if you can't help out your friends and your family, you ain't livin' right. That's something I'll never do.

(Spoken)

A: I'm drawing blanks at the other ones here... I'll just take a stab at this one... This is a little out of left field... But I can guarantee ya that I'll never be eating *seafood* again... [Chuckles] A few months ago I basically overdosed on oysters up at "Truluck's" over there in Southlake. Never again man...

(Spoken)

A: I'll tell ya what... I'll never... No way, not *ever*... [Laughter] Jump outta a damn *plane*. I was jus' lookin' at my Facebook and saw one of my old friends posted all this skydivin' stuff, right? I was just scrollin' through goin': "Oh why the *hell* would anybody actually jump out of a perfectly good plane like that?" [Laughter]

(Spoken)

A: Hmm... Yeah... This is probably a common thing but there's no way in hell you're gonna catch me skydiving. My ex kept trying to get me to do it and kept saying that it would be fun. *Fun?! No, no, no* [Chuckles] Fun is like going on a vacation or something, not falling 20,000 feet and screaming your lungs out.

(Spoken)

A: Ok this one is easy—*Never... will I ever... Go hunting*. Yeah... [Laughter] Sounds kinda random but my husband will just beg and plead... Like, "C'mon honey; it's really not that crazy." [Laughter] I'm like... Um *Yeah it is pretty crazy*. I don't want to go slaughter some like 300 pound animal and then take its guts out! I will never get the appeal...

(Spoken)

A: I guess back to the family topic... One thing I definitely learned from the way my parents handled things is how much parents' actions and stuff actually impacts the kids. I feel like most parents don't really view it like that or they underestimate it to make themselves feel better about the responsibility, you know...? Anyways..., one thing I'll never do is let any of my crappy choices impact my own children. I will find a way to not force them into my own personal drama or pain...

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

(Written)

A: Woman mean to be healthy and gentle.

(Written)

A: So many people say what a woman is in the media but its really about not caring what they think and having you're own value. It is up to the woman to set her own value and goal.

(Written)

A: Being a woman is much more than looking good or being a good mom. To me, a healthy and balanced woman is someone who is both caring and driven. I've found in my own life that you can't truly have one without the other.

(Written)

A: Women have to be both kind and tough. If your too much of a woman then that's not good. If your too much of a man that's also not good. A good woman is someone who help the people she loves and also protect them if she needs to.

(Written)

A: Being a woman is about way more than just being nice or looking good. At the same time, so many women today have just taken things way over the top. I don't need to be a man with a ponytail... I think that above all a woman is someone assured in herself and also caring and loving for everybody important to her.

(Spoken)

A: I think a lot of the "feminist" type stuff today has gotten wayyy out of control... [Chuckles] I for sure like the idea of equality and getting women more respect, but I think a lot of the stuff today feels like it's more about turning women into men and making men weaker... I think a lot of women would agree with me too... But a lot of us are more or less scared of looking like we're not "strong women" or not on each others' team and stuff like that. Feminism is honestly hurting female solidarity in a huge way...

(Written)

A: I really hate to go on a whole rant about how analytical women are viewed differently. But I really can't help myself! Look, I know that it's not the 1950's anymore and women have rights and all that. But there's still this undercurrent of "Why isn't this girl more emotional, and why is she out analyzing and outperforming most of the guys?", especially in journalism. Of course there's been tons of super gifted and famous female journalists recently. But I can guarantee you that almost none of them are treated on par with their male equivalents. It really hurts a dude's pride to be out written or out thought by a girl! And look... if I were a dude I would probably hate that too. But I think we really need to get to a place as a culture where nobody even raises an eyebrow. This'll happen, I'm sure. It just may take a while!

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

(Written)

A: You have to fight and stick up for yourself. There aint no way around that. No easy way out.

(Written)

A: Being a man means simply that you stand you're ground. Especially when there's a lot of people going against you. Not very sexy... But it's what works.

(Written)

A: A lot of people say many different things but I would say being a man is being honest. If your tough but your not honest then you can't be that much of a man can you?

(Spoken)

A: Sh*t... I mean I guess most would say something like being all tough and hardcore, right? That's true. But you can't never be a man without a commitment. If you ain't committed to something worth being committed to then you ain't no man. That's for sure.

(Spoken)

A: Ya know man... I ain't even sure I know no more. You grow up... You're taught that a man is somethin' tough, somethin' strong and powerful... So that's what you do... You try to be all strong and tough. Usually you can pull it off... But I don't think nobody can be strong forever... That ain't all there is...

(Written)

A: Most men would say something related to strength or toughness. But I tell you... I've seen some pretty poor excuses of men act all strong and tough and even back it up. If you're all toughness and barbarian there's still no guarantee you're a man. A man is someone who can be tough and also honor his word, help his friends and family out consistently and be a man of his community. That's a true man.

(Spoken)

A: I think people have got everything so twisted around when it comes to this... A lot of dudes are made to think that they've gotta just be super hardcore about everything, super macho and just constantly impressing everybody around them, especially the women [Chuckles] It's this whole mindset that we're basically still hunter-gatherers and men have to be the protectors of the whole tribe, constantly running around and killing things and throwing sh*t around. It's also that same mindset that basically says that women need to be 100% submissive at all times and just let the men run the world.

(Spoken)

A: See... Alotta people gonna tell you that a man is somethin' all aggressive 'n sh*t, right? They gonna tell you that a man is only a man if he be out there killin' people or has some huge empire n' everything. Maybe that was a man in... in uh... in *ancient* times... Like a gladiator or some sh*t... But nah man... Look... A man is what he make of *himself*. You ain't a man jus' cuz you're actin' all tough. You only a man *if*... you only a man if you know that you *are* one, man. It's as simple as that... Once you know you a man... You are... It don't matter how it look.

(Spoken)

A: Back to the courage thing... It's one of those things that really makes you think. We're always brought up to think that a "man" is someone who is like... "fearless", you know? A man is someone who doesn't even feel the fear or the pain... and he's always aggressive and playing on offense... But somewhere... at some point you start to realize that this isn't really true. Look man... every man has this sort of "objective line" that he will cross... it don't matter if you're frickin' Superman or the Hulk... once you get into a bad enough situation: *you're gonna feel it*. What really makes a man is not that he's totally oblivious to all the bad stuff that's thrown at him... what matters is that he cares enough about what he values the most, what he loves... what matters it that he cares enough about these things to continue through that pain and through the sadness.

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

(Written)

A: My mom. 100% There was never a time where she took it easy.

(Written)

A: My dad. He taught me many things. But the best thing he taught me: never lie to yourself.

(Written)

A: I'd have to say my brother. He's my twin so it hasn't always been easy. But the bond we share is just something very special. We're different in our own quirky ways but always seem to know how to handle each other. He's great fun.

(Written)

A: This is probably a weird one but my childhood dog helped me the most, maybe more than any human (I know.... I know....!). She was a cream colored sheep dog, super shaggy and smiley. My 5 year old self named her "Sponge" but the name didn't stick. The rest of the family called her Lizzy; I kept on secretly calling her Sponge. I sure do miss my Sponge.

(Written)

A: I guess I'll go for the full physics sweep here... My grandfather was actually a physicist too. Way back before I was even interested in physics he showed me a lot of what he was working on. I remember wanting to be a geologist or some sort of naturalist. It took almost a decade, but my grandpa's persistence paid off with me LOL. It's almost like he knew how this would all play out... He was a really incredible human.

(Spoken)

A: This is kinda ironic, but it's probably my sister... the pretty older sister I mentioned a little while back... [Laughter] That's why it's such a weird thing too... I used to feel so guilty for envying her as much as I did. It's like... "This girl has basically raised me and shown me how to be a woman and yet I still secretly hate her guts. What the hell is wrong with me?" [Laughter] But yeah... Our mom was a single mother for a while and she was basically half mom and half

sister to me... She's really an amazing person and I think she's influenced me more than she probably realizes.

(Spoken)

A: I guess I have a pretty unique answer to this one... I'm gonna have to go with my dad, and maybe not for the most common of reasons... So my dad had me when he was only 17, right... And the girl he was with... my real mom... ended up dying in some freak accident like a year after I was born... So he and his family basically raised me solo until I was around like eight or nine years old, then he got married. It was such an odd feeling being in my teens and having my dad be like basically a kid himself [Chuckles] My buddies always wanted to like make him their own friend and get him to give life advice and everything [Laughter] And I used to be like "Guys... you know he barely knows more than we do, right...?" [Laughter] But yeah... That man helped me out more than he'll probably ever know... Hell of a guy.

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

(Written)

A: I like that I like myself less than I used to... I used to be a cocky little sh*t!

(Written)

A: I like that I'm usually honest, this is something my parents taught me and I never wanted to lie alot.

(Spoken)

A: Let's see then... I like that I ain't never done a thing that went against my own "code"... I ain't never bent or broke my own self for another's morals. That's no easy feat either honey [Laughter]

(Written)

A: I might as well relate this back to the previous question. I really admire that I didn't let my bipolar diagnosis drag me down (too far at least!). I pride myself on being pretty normal for a "crazy" person.

(Written)

A: I've always been really skinny. When I was little I always felt like I was too skinny, like to where I was always picked on for being a "rail". When I hit puberty I kinda realized that it's a good thing. People went from picking on me to complimenting and wondering how I stayed so skinny.

(Spoken)

A: Mmmm... I mean... I use to eat... I use to eat *a lot*. Then I started lookin' at myself like "What... are you... doing?" I lost twenty... I think maybe thirty?... I lost like thirty pounds this last year. It feel real good to do that and actually be able to look at myself and feel good.

(Written)

A: What I like most about myself is my passion and perseverance. These have helped keep me going through the most difficult journeys of my life. The energy to push forward and the passion to fuel it has made my life better than I thought it could be. No matter what I've been through or the dark places in my life, I've always been able to come out stronger and happier than I was before. I believe that these parts of me are leading me to live a happy life, which is all I could ever want.

(Spoken)

A: Let's make this one a little bit less gloomy... [Laughter] Uh... Yeah, I'd say I've learned to love being sensitive and emotional. Obviously when you're little... especially being a guy... that's not really a thing that's valued at all... most people are gonna be relentless and pick on you for feeling things deeply or wanting to be in tune with what you or others are feeling. But you finally end up reaching a point where you realize how powerful it is to feel... how powerful it is to feel deeply and be super sensitive. I just wish the world recognized that more.

(Spoken)

A: When I was little I was always made fun of for my brain... The things I liked that the other kids, *girls* especially, didn't... ya know? My parents never liked it either... They tried to get me to go into nursing or... or uh... teaching or something. I always knew that none of that was never for me though... What I'm proud of is that I stuck with what made me so different than the

others. I basically let everybody know that... yeah... I'm *different*... I'm not like you... And I'm not gonna be actin' like I'm like you or bein' all fake. It paid off eventually... But... *man*... It was a *really* hard thing to do for sure.

Q: Would your ten-year-old self be proud?

(Written)

A: Yes, I have achieve a lot.

(Written)

A: Honestly up in the air he was pretty mercurial.

(Spoken)

A: You know... I tend to think that your ten-year-old self would be proud of just about anything... [Chuckles] Like... If I told my ten-year-old self that I stayed at home all day and built Lincoln Log mansions and Lego forts, he'd be totally pumped [Laughter] Nah... really though... I think the younger me would be pretty proud of me. That little guy always wanted to do something out in nature, he always wanted to roam free and never wanted to go inside. I actually work on an oil rig... also do the drill engineering. And somehow, I think he would find that pretty darn cool [Chuckles]

PART III

People

CHAPTER 9

The Human Mosaic

We've seen the outliers, the brightly shining "standouts." And we've sampled the many unique flavors to be found in this wild human world of ours, according to those many "themes" that interest us and occupy our daily lives.

We've seen little bits and portions of the human experience. We've seen previews of personalities and flashes of faces. We've even caught quick reflections of ourselves and had visions of others.

But now it's time to see things in a bit of a different way.

Now it's time we assemble these little pieces and portions of experience into the picture that we see around us every day.

In this chapter we see the bits and pieces we've collected assemble into charming characters, inspiring individuals and familiar faces. This is where everybody unabashedly shows their face and all is revealed.

Aaron R.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can Humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: Because what is human nature but strife? Truly what is human nature is the real question.

Values

Q: What does courage mean to you?

A: What does courage mean to anybody. There are many embodiments of courage each faceted in their own way. So truly the meaning is endless.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: The time that's been lost and the time that is to come. As well as the things lost in that lucid concept of time.

Self

Q: Would my 10 year-old self be proud of you?

A: Honestly up in the air he was pretty mercurial.

Adara W.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: I would like to think yes but I'm not so sure. The dreamer, flower-child in me wants to shout "Yes, of course!!" But I think I know better by now. Maybe in the distant future?

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or to be right?

A: It's always better to be nice. When I was younger I used to be way too opinionated. It got me into a lot of situations that really could have been avoided. I also lost some friends who were dear to me. Always be nice instead of trying or needing to be right.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Oh my... Haha! I love this question. I can't tell you how many times I've literally dreamed of this scenario. Usually I just tell them "I'm not sure how you still walk around with that huge a** stick hanging out!"

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: I'd have to say my brother. He's my twin so it hasn't always been easy. But the bond we share is just something very special. We're different in our own quirky ways but always seem to know how to handle each other. He's great fun.

Adhar C.

(Written)

Deep

Does life have a purpose?

Yes, the difficult part is to find it.

Values

What is most value?

Respect, if you respect yourself and others you will leave a wholesome life.

Emotions

What is the strangest emotion you have felt?

Depression

Self

Would your ten-year-old self be proud?

Yes, I have achieve a lot.

Alexa A.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

A: No. I don't think it can change. If there is some miracle where people start to see threw others eyes then yes but I can't see this happening at all.

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: Being a leader means sticking up for those under you. If all you do is sit there and boss people around, no one will ever actually respect you.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: I don't know because I haven't personnel but I remember my friend telling me about how her mom went crazy. Supposedly it can change everything about that person, my friend's mom turned into a totally different person after.

Self

Q: Which fears have you overcome?

A: I used to be really scared of planes. I remember being a kid and couldn't even make it threw a plane ride without puking everywhere. It took me a good 10 years to get over that and be some what normal about it!

Amelia F.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: If you could be God for a day, would you?

A: Oh *this* one... this one is *good*. Ok... I *would* actually. Here's what I would do... So... like you make a world where everybody's good right? Basically you make 8 billion Adam and Eve's... You run the "simulation" for like a couple hundred of years. After that you see how deeply people *felt*, how deeply everybody *loved*. What was their world like? Then... you take 8 billion people and allow them to *choose*—be *good* or be *bad*. Run the simulation again... You see how everybody did, what they felt and how deep their love was again... Ok now here's the cool part... There is absolutely *no* way, just no way... there's no way that the 8 billion Adam and Eve's were able to love more strongly than the 8 billion "normal" people. In fact... and call me crazy because this is crazy sounding for sure... but I think... I think like you would find that the "normal" people... I think you would find that they loved *even stronger* and *harder* than the "good" people. *Why* though...? I mean... I can only guess... But I can only guess that it's the whole reason the bad or the "evil" exists... it exists to remind us of the value of the good. The evil pushes us past our boundaries... the evil makes us love so much more boldly. Loving in the face of evil is so much more brave.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: Hmm... Value's a tricky thing for sure... I mean... I guess I would say that value is connected to *community*. And not in some like weird, abstract sense either... Like, I mean that value is rooted in the systems of social support and love that we have around us, from family all the way up to our government. Obviously though... if we have a crappy society around us, it's gonna be hard for us to see any value anywhere around us. But... if we have a really strong network of support and a really healthy web of people around us, both our family and our broader social contacts... value starts popping up everywhere, everywhere you look you can see the meaning of things. And I think that's why we have so many people today we are struggling

so hard to find meaning, to find that sort of “purpose”, you know? Value is definitely something beyond money and beyond status... Value’s in our social world.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn’t fire you?

A: Ahhhhah! [Laughter] *Yeahhh...* So... I work for a psychology research “think tank” type thing, right? And... so the way it works is that there’s not one boss... there’s like *eight* of them... so this is gonna be *extra* fun. [Laughter] Ok I won’t even sugarcoat it... So some of these people are like really... I mean *really* stilted and out of touch with the world. They’ve basically never stepped foot outside of their office or off of their campus. So some of the stuff they suggest to us is just straight up stupid... and if we were to actually implement these in the real world, it would be a *total* trainwreck. [Chuckles] I’m basically always daydreaming of walking into a meeting and just grilling them like “Oh really...? Your research shows that spending 20 straight hours together actually bonds people and builds empathy? So you want our clients to start setting up 20 hour meetings and holding their constituents for ransom while citing that study?” [Laughter] Like come on people!

Self

Q: What do you dislike the most about yourself?

A: So I already outed myself as a psychologist I guess... [Chuckles] Yeah... I won’t even lie, one of the reasons I got into psychology is that I was really hard on myself and was like looking for reasons why I was so much different than everybody else. I felt so weird... And then like, come to find out, I’m really not as weird or crazy as I originally thought... [Chuckles] But yeah... I found that I’m actually quite a “normal” and balanced person, but I think that my biggest weakness is that I just can’t stop analyzing myself and beating myself up. I usually just try and console myself by reminding myself like “Hey, it’s a *super* common thing and everybody deals with the inner critic...” But I’m still at war with that little nasty critic...

Angel B.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: I would used to have told you bad. I learned alot though and made alot of mistakes, some things happened to me that changed my mind. Its not that people are good or bad, everybody is both... we just have to find the ones meant for us and do the best we can with them.

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: Good leadership usually means being strong. You don't have to be physically strong but that can help. Usually it is also helpful to be smart.

Emotions

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

A: When I was 16 I almost died. I jumped off a bridge into the water. It was almost a 100 feet in the air. I was lucky that I only broke my foot.

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: Women have to be both kind and tough. If your too much of a woman then that's not good. If your too much of a man that's also not good. A good woman is someone who help the people she loves and also protect them if she needs to.

Anna G.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: Oh boy... [Awkward grimace] I mean... I like this question but this is tough. I think, like, when you're little—like really little like five or six—you have this idea that everything's perfect, that you're perfect and have no concept of anybody being better or worse, you know? But... like at some point you start to look at others around you and compare. Especially for girls and women too... That's the really tough part. And obviously with stuff like Instagram and TikTok and everything all of this has just like spun out of control... But... Yeah... I mean long story short, I struggled with a lot of that stuff for a while. But I'm finally at a place where I can look at myself and stop comparing myself to others as much. I would definitely choose myself now [smiles with satisfaction].

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: Oooh this is a good one... [smiles assuredly] I'm gonna get a little uh... personal if that's cool [charmingly and disarmingly awkward laughter]... So yeah, last year I had a big breakup right... but this wasn't like a normal type of "Yeah I think we should talk" and agree to head our own ways kinda thing, ya know? This was like some intense a** sh*t [laughter] Yeah... So this dude not only cheats on me... Not only cheats on me with my *best friend*...! But he goes and pulls the "No I swear she's the one who started it" card on me. [Big exhale] Yeah...! [Laughter] Andddd...! After I broke up with him he's all talking about how he's gonna kill himself and how much he loves me. Eeesh! That sh*t is *cowardly*.

Emotions

Q: What's the one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: Ok... Like, honestly... This is gonna sound a little creepy but there's this guy I always see at the grocery store and usually we make eye contact. But none of us ever does anything. I wish I had the guts to get his number. Maybe this will motivate me to? [laughter]

Self

Q: Where did you want to be in life? Where are you now?

A: So... I went to college out of state, right... I went to Washington State on scholarship and was like totally on my own and everything. Back then I didn't have a clue what the hell I wanted

from life and what I was going to do. I feel like I just... Like I sorta just spun a wheel and chose a random major? [Laughter] My parents wanted me to be a nurse or something medical (my dad's a surgeon... ugh...) but I hated that so I chose something basically as far away from the medical field as possible: English Lit. I remember my parents like freaking the f*ck out and basically demanding that I come back home because they didn't want their money wasted on English Lit... [Laughter] My dad called it "English Sh*t"... But actually... This ended up being one of my best choices... Two years in I ended up changing over to journalism and my Junior year I already got an offer from a really good magazine. My dad still hated it but at least I got the last laugh...!

Annabelle G.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

A: I would definitely be a bit scared by that... But I think that if I knew that I lived as fully as possible and loved people as much as I could, things wouldn't be that bad after all.

Values

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: Being a parent is more than just being there and doing all the things your child needs. Its definitely easy to get bogged down and just go threw the motions with things but if you keep doing that then you're kids are going to feel that. People think that just because you kid's like 2 or 3 that they don't pick up on things like that, but they do.

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: I actually had post partum depression pretty bad after my first. I felt super guilt on top of all that. To me it was like just being totally dull. It wasn't really even sadness. It was more just this sickening gray feeling if that makes sense. My eyes were open but my mind didn't feel "on".

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: Being a woman is about way more than just being nice or looking good. At the same time, so many women today have just taken things way over the top. I don't need to be a man with a ponytail... I think that above all a woman is someone assured in herself and also caring and loving for everybody important to her.

Beatrice L.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can people genuinely care about strangers?

A: Most will say yes but I don't really think so, it take a lot to actually care and not just go threw the motion.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: Success is hard and you can't get none if you don't get that.

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: I've been depress for a while now, it feels like a black cloud hangs over your whole head. Colors really do get darker.

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: I like that I'm usually honest, this is something my parents taught me and I never wanted to lie alot.

Benjamin F.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: Usually one people share a goal on a large scale it's for a pretty sh*tty reason. Look at Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia... Tons of people were "unified" and "united" there but the goal was a horrible one. I think it's in theory possible to unite everybody under a common goal but making sure that goal is actually a good one is much more difficult!

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: When I was a young punk I probably would've told you love means passion and deep desire and feelings. I was such a dreamer. Now, as a happily married man, I can tell you what love *isn't*: it sure as heck ain't ooey gooey passion and romance if you make it passed the first couple years fellas... Ha! Lets hope she doesn't read this.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Welp... I'm my own boss. And... technically I *could* fire myself. But assuming I couldn't I'd probably tell myself what I normally tell myself mentally on a daily basis: "Pick up the slack you lazy bastard and try to at least put some pants on for your next Zoom meeting will ya?" This would be a lot more satisfying if I had a boss...!

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: Being a man means simply that you stand you're ground. Especially when there's a lot of people going against you. Not very sexy... But it's what works.

Bianca G.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

A: I can't resist this one! I'm actually a political journalist. I probably shouldn't say the name of the company I'm with, but it's a pretty cool place. Of course... as someone intimately involved in politics I'm probably not the most unbiased judge...! But I do think having an inside scoop, so to speak, on the matter helps me access certain things that others might not be privy to. To be totally fair, I think that there *is* a possibility that things change. But I can't really see how that would happen or when. I think the biggest impediment to political change is the human psyche. A fair share of what I write about deals in human emotions, societal trends and popular wishes. If things do change, it will simply be a matter of the currents diverting human nature into a different, less dirty tributary. I can't say I wouldn't like to see something like this happen!

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: I'll be a bit of a curmudgeon here... I don't think it's love or faith or strength that's most valuable. Sure, these are immensely important things. But I think a lot of the content of those things is emotional, subject to change in an instant. If we're going to be objective about things, I think we have to go with *knowledge*. Knowledge is the cornerstone upon which all other things are laid.

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or "gut?"

A: I might come across as a super analytical, almost hyper-rational sort of person. But I actually root most of my thinking in intuitive hunches and feelings. To be sure, intuition isn't a "feeling" in the same way that anger or joy are feelings. Intuition is a more subtle, shape-shifting sort of thing. Oftentimes the articles that I write begin with a vague sort of "picture" that flashes into my

mind all at once. It's this intuitive picture that I then file all of the details and specifics into. I think most people in creative professions will tell you: it all starts with that initial, intuitive view.

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: I really hate to go on a whole rant about how analytical women are viewed differently. But I really can't help myself! Look, I know that it's not the 1950's anymore and women have rights and all that. But there's still this undercurrent of "Why isn't this girl more emotional, and why is she out analyzing and outperforming most of the guys?", especially in journalism. Of course there's been tons of super gifted and famous female journalists recently. But I can guarantee you that almost none of them are treated on par with their male equivalents. It really hurts a dude's pride to be out written or out thought by a girl! And look... if I were a dude I would probably hate that too. But I think we really need to get to a place as a culture where nobody even raises an eyebrow. This'll happen, I'm sure. It just may take a while!

Breonia V.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: Well... I guess it depend on what it mean by "common"... what *is* common and what do it mean. And that ain't easy... It's "common" for people to be happy, motivated, helpin' others out. It also "common" for people to be nasty, straight up crazy... mean... and... and doin' they own thing... It all come down to whether or not people wanna try and change what they do... And change ain't easy.

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: A person only a "leader" when they actually stand up and admit when they wrong. Anytime you got someone who be actin' like they ain't never done nothin' wrong, you got someone who ain't leading. There way too many of these types... *'specially* today.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Oooh... [Laughter] Mmm mmm mmm... [Chuckles] I can't say his name can I...? No? [Laughter] Gotcha... Well... This wrong, I know it... [Laughter] But... this dude's style is whack. I can't even hold it back. Dude be wearin' a bowtie... You know, one of them little cute, tiny red lookin' ones too... He be lookin' like a damn Christmas present... [Laughter] And he thinkin' he look good... [Shakes head]

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: Mmmm... I mean... I use to eat... I use to eat *a lot*. Then I started lookin' at myself like "What... are you... doing?" I lost twenty... I think maybe thirty?... I lost like thirty pounds this last year. It feel real good to do that and actually be able to look at myself and feel good.

Brett S.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

A: Well... that's really a good way to put it... a "game" it certainly is... no doubt about it. But... look... is that really that much of a bad thing? There's that whole saying "Life is a game" for a reason. Literally any situation you can think of is some sort of game... it has a set of rules and there's moves people make that lead to certain outcomes... This really should be common knowledge [Chuckles] But... it's *not*. At any rate, what I'm getting at is that there's not some sort of special quality that politics necessarily has as a game that other games don't. You look at all of life, there's winners and there's losers... some win big and some lose big, some are just somewhere in the middle. So... if we're asking if the game of politics could ever change so that it's played more effectively or efficiently... It would really just be as simple as people working to change the rules of that game, people coming together and agreeing on a new set of rules to play by and making sure that everybody is on the same page. Do I think it'll happen? *No*... these

people have no reason to even want to change the rules... because... they play extremely well under them. But the basic idea is extremely simple. Politics is nothing special. It's a game just like all else.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: There's so much thrown around about success... especially with this whole social media, Instagram cultural thing going on. I think when you get to the roots of it though it's pretty basic... It's about one thing really and one thing only—*focus*. You look at the world's highest achievers, the total freaks of nature on this planet who do things that nobody else is even dreaming about doing... they've got one thing in common above nearly everything else: the extreme ability to focus and just tune everything else out. You're simply not gonna be anywhere near successful if you can't focus on what you're trying to become great at. Not all the talent or skill or charisma in the world is gonna make up for a lack of focus.

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or "gut?"

A: I think you kinda have to... I'm a lawyer... been in law for two decades now... and I'll tell you one thing for sure: you can't be a good lawyer if you're just reciting a bunch of book knowledge or just memorizing every case or term that's thrown at you. In law school you've got your two kinds of students... you've got those who think that throwing out more precedents and flashy names and dates is gonna land them the prize and then you've got the folks who have that type of mind that you simply can't train to have. To be truly great at law you've got to be creative and able to bring things together, mix and match, analyze and synthesize... all on the fly. And that basically all comes down to having a flawless intuition and a very deep understanding of the fundamentals of what you're doing.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: This is uh... probably a bit eccentric but I have no pressing urge or desire to ever go on a ship. Something about the open ocean just doesn't sit well with me. Planes are just fine... Boats, no way, no sir.

Cecilia C.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

A: Uhh... *Yeah...* yeah I *would* care... [Laughter] It would be like having the longest homework assignment of your life, doing your extra best, studying for years and years and years... with all these damn distractions and crazy ass sh*t popping up... and then you finally go to submit it and the teacher is like "Yeah... that was just a practice sheet. We don't have any more assignments left" Like come *onnnn*. [Laughter] I'm sure some people would be relieved and be all like "Oh my god thank you!!", you know, like this whole idea of "Now I'm free and there's no more stress" But I just don't get how that wouldn't mess with your head...

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or to be right?

A: Obviously nice, right...? But there's for sure also times where you just really can't be one or the other. Ok this just popped into my head... it's *horrible...* it's *sooo bad...* [Laughter] But I really can't help myself. So imagine a dude is out there standing on the train tracks... Like he's just ready to end it all, right? Imagine you're like walking by on the sidewalk and look over and see him. You're definitely not gonna just be like "That's awesome! You have free will and deserve to make your own choice with your life!" [Laughter] Right...? Or like you're not gonna be all like "Hey man, I love your shoes! Where'd you get them?" You're gonna have to actually not be that nice, or maybe even that right... Like maybe this poor dude really doesn't have much to live for in his mind, right? Maybe his situation objectively sucks and it may never get much

better... But you still have to be like “Dude, what are you doing?! You’ve got your whole life ahead of you!”... You can’t exactly be 100 percent “nice” or a 100 percent “right”...

Emotions

Q: What’s the weirdest emotion you’ve felt?

A: Oh I really like this one... And I’m not even sure why but I just had an answer just like jump right out at me. The weirdest emotion by far I ever had was when my parents divorced... [Chuckles] Like obviously people always joke about the “two Christmases” thing, right? But it wasn’t just that... Like basically ever since I could remember my parents were always fighting and just being nasty to each other. I think they could maybe, *maybe?* go *two* or *three* days without getting at each other’s throats...? But yeah... I was... uh... I think I was *16?* when they finally got divorced... 16 or 17... And I remember just being initially so happy, like just totally thrilled, right? And I was way past that whole “two Christmases” stage [Chuckles] But yeah, I was so happy because I felt like I could finally just live, in peace... and drama free. But then this weird sadness also started to hit me... It’s like all this stuff you don’t even think about until it happens too... You know... I started thinking like, “Now I won’t even have a home to come back to when I visit with my own family” and all that weird stuff... Not that I would have even enjoyed coming back... [Chuckles] It was just one of those weird things.

Self

Q: What’s one thing you’ll never do?

A: I guess back to the family topic... One thing I definitely learned from the way my parents handled things is how much parents’ actions and stuff actually impacts the kids. I feel like most parents don’t really view it like that or they underestimate it to make themselves feel better about the responsibility, you know...? Anyways..., one thing I’ll never do is let any of my crappy choices impact my own children. I will find a way to not force them into my own personal drama or pain...

Chelsea Z.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: Yes. We do not have much hope left on this planet in my opinion, we are quickly running out of time and energy on this world and we must find a way to address these problems fast.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: Time is most valuable. You can buy almost everything in the world but not time. What you lose in terms of time you lose in terms of everything else.

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: Anxiety is a feeling unlike anything else, it can make you believe anything, no matter how crazy it sounds. Anxiety is different to each person but there are also things that are common to everyone who suffers.

Self

Q: What do you dislike the most about yourself?

A: I wish I could live in the moment more, this is very difficult for me to do. It is a simple thing but it's anything but simple to actually do.

Cherry D.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: This one makes me think for real... I uh... I... A couple years ago I was in bad shape. Like really bad... I always done the right thing, more or less. But I just... There was a lot of really bad sh*t around me, you know... Anyways... I was dating this guy. He was a dealer. Like everything... pills, weed, coke. All that, right? And uh... long story short I guess... I was helpin' him out right. Basically uh... doing his bidding and helpin' set sh*t up for him, right... So he got busted... And I got busted... They put me in for three years... Holy sh*t... you know?

[Laughter] So I ended up not doin' full time, thank the Lord. But I remember a good... I don't know... two or three months in, jus' thinkin' to myself... "What the hell *is* all this?" I would pray damn near every night. Jus' kept turnin' it all over in my head, ya know?

So anyways... One night I had this dream, right? This was one of the most uh... *real*-feeling... dreams I've had. I remember I was just sitting there in my cell in the dream. And then I saw this little green light lookin' thing. It would like flash real bright and then get real soft-like. And then it started to glow and get real bright... Kinda like the sun bein' in your room. Alright... this sounds crazy I'm sure of it... But this lil' ball of light thing moved up near me, right? It jus' keeps gettin' closer... and closer... and then it sits right up, right up on my chest... like a damn dog or somethin'... it just sits right there on me. For whatever reason too... I wasn't even scared. I shoulda been scared sh*tless... But something about that light was so calming. It didn't say nothin' or do nothin' else but that... just sat right there on me... But after that moment I felt totally different. God... or uh... whoever it may be... Something was with me in there. And it wasn't just in there either... I just started thinkin' after that that whatever that was... It was always there with me. That little ball of light... That thing helped me a lot.

Values

Q: Is there an unforgivable deed?

A: Ah... Well I'm probably the right person to ask... [Laughter] I've done and seen some crazy sh*t... I tell ya... [Laughter] But uh... No. Look... there ain't a single thing that I ever done, or that anybody I know personally ever done, that can't be forgiven. There ain't no doubt about that one.

Emotions

Q: What is the strongest emotion you've felt?

A: Strongest? Hmm... Well... I uh... Strongest... [10-second pause] I wanna say love but that's a whole can o' worms there... [Laughter] I mean besides that I'd say the strongest thing I've ever felt is anger. You know, before that little story about that green light thing happened, I remember just feelin' really, *really* mad. It was somethin' I never knew how to handle. Usually that's a guy's issue... [Awkward laughter] But yeah... that was a strong... strong feeling for me.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I'll tell ya what... I'll never... No way, not *ever*... [Laughter] Jump outta a damn *plane*. I was jus' lookin' at my Facebook and saw one of my old friends posted all this skydivin' stuff, right? I was just scrollin' through goin': "Oh why the *hell* would anybody actually jump out of a perfectly good plane like that?" [Laughter}

Christian B.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

A: Call me a psychopath... but I don't think I would honestly care that much... [Laughter] I try to treat life like a game of sorts. There's stuff that feels good, stuff that feels bad... There's stuff that's challenging, stuff that's easy, stuff that's boring and stuff that's exciting. Basically it's just

about balancing all these things. I never really bothered too much about some bigger “purpose” or grand idea behind it all. That’s just how I’m wired though... I wouldn’t assume most people think this way [Chuckles]

Values

Q: Is there an unforgiveable deed?

A: Well... I think whatever is “unforgivable” is something that’s unforgiveable for the self. There’s never really something that’s unforgiveable unless there’s something you haven’t forgiven yourself for, is what I mean to say.

Emotions

Q: What’s one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: There’s this one girl... It’s always a girl, right? [Laughter] There’s this girl I was good friends with a couple years ago up in the Boston area. We were both in this Master’s program together... Long story short, I planned out super elaborately how I was gonna make a move and how we were gonna be together, this and that... I never ended up doing it though... It still pisses me off [Shakes head and chuckles]

Self

Q: What’s one thing you’ll never do?

A: Well... I’ll be damned sure I never f*ck it up as baldly as I did with that Boston girl [Laughter] If I have that again, I’m going for it... Even if it ends in flames and destruction [Chuckles]

Claire A.

(Written)

Deep

Q: If you could be God for a day would you?

A: No, I will allow God to do this job because he has the ability to do wonderful and important things that we might not understand.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: Time in the present moment is very valuable to me.

I try to balance my time by using it to relax, enjoy hobbies, work and connect with friends and family.

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: Many times anxiety has taken me out of my comfort zone and pushed me to continue working towards professional or personal goals. I am a better person by letting go of my fears.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I would never be interested in parachuting out of an airplane.

Codie C.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: If I was asked this question a few years ago, I would have chosen to be someone else in a heartbeat. Things were never that bad for me, but nothing was extraordinary one way or the

over. At the time that's all I wanted to be or experience. But these last two years have been the hardest of my life, but I've been the happiest I've ever been. I have no explanation for it. Now I've come to realize that every life is beautiful and unique in its own way. Experiencing what life has to offer from your own point of view is such a gift but I haven't learned to appreciate until very recently. I would always choose to be me and I strive to never be envious of someone else.

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: To me, love is everything. It's the meaning of life and it's what gets me up every day. Whether that be love for an individual or love for my work or the planet, it surrounds us and I've learned to search for it. Love doesn't always have to have someone else involved, loving yourself is one of the most important things someone can do. Love is what binds us together and helps us grow as a society.

Emotions

Q: What's one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: I always wished that I had the guts to love freely. For me, love is the most important thing that exists. But I've always been fearful of expressing it to others. That's been a part of the harmful side of masculinity, is that showing emotions is shown as a sign of weakness. Struggling with the self judgment I've had when I do feel strongly towards another person has made it more difficult to hold onto relationships and the people I care about. There comes a lot of fear with love, but I'm trying to be better at facing that fear.

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: What I like most about myself is my passion and perseverance. These have helped keep me going through the most difficult journeys of my life. The energy to push forward and the passion to fuel it has made my life better than I thought it could be. No matter what I've been through or the dark places in my life, I've always been able to come out stronger and happier than I was

before. I believe that these parts of me are leading me to live a happy life, which is all I could ever want.

Collin B.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Ohhh yes it does. The sad thing is, is that it's one of those things you can't necessarily prove to people... You can't just walk up to someone and fully convince them... beyond a doubt... that they're not just floating on some blue rock out in the middle of space for absolutely no reason whatsoever. It's basically one of those things that everybody needs to find out in their own peculiar, usually quite painful [Laughter] way.

Values

Q: What does courage mean to you?

A: Courage doesn't mean you're fearless... It doesn't mean that you've gotta be some kind of gladiator fending off lions or some soldier on the front lines risking everything without a second thought...Everybody's gonna feel fear... that's human nature. Courage is feeling the fear and yet still keeping on and not letting that emotion get to you or totally derail your mission and purpose.

Emotions

Q: What is the weirdest emotion you've felt?

A: I'm not really sure if this qualifies as an emotion... I guess it's more of an experience of sorts... But it was definitely an emotionally charged thing. So basically, when I was a teen I had this super bizarre experience. It's called "derealization" or "depersonalization" or something like that. It makes you feel like you're not even in control of your own body or decisions... it's like you're just kinda sitting there behind a screen, watching yourself move around and do things throughout the day. It sounds kinda weird and stupid, but it was by far the most terrifying thing of my life. What made it more scary was that I didn't really know how to tell anybody about it without them thinking I had just totally lost my mind [Laughter]

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: I think people have got everything so twisted around when it comes to this... A lot of dudes are made to think that they've gotta just be super hardcore about everything, super macho and just constantly impressing everybody around them, especially the women [Chuckles] It's this whole mindset that we're basically still hunter-gatherers and men have to be the protectors of the whole tribe, constantly running around and killing things and throwing sh*t around. It's also that same mindset that basically says that women need to be 100% submissive at all times and just let the men run the world.

Darrell G.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

A: I won't lie man... it would be one hell of a letdown [Chuckles] Obviously that's not something I try to think about a lot though... I think if you were to keep thinking about that stuff it'd really screw with ya... You'd probably have a schizophrenic breakdown or something [Laughter]

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Well... this might be, uh... kinda silly or effeminate sounding... but I think it's a powerful thing to *care*. A lot of times I think most of us are just sorta running around, forcing ourselves to act like we can about things. And then of course... at our jobs we kinda have to show that we care or at least act like we do in order to keep a job [Chuckles] But I think it's a hell of a lot easier to just pretend like you do. I mean think about... to actually care is a scary frickin' thing... It means there's no going back. And it means there's no guarantee that other people... your friends and family and every too... there's just no guarantee anybody else will actually be on your side.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Oh man... [Laughter] I've always kinda fantasized about that perfect moment, ya know... where everybody else has just packed up and left and it's just me and the boss standing there alone. He starts to open his mouth but I hold up a finger and go "Wait a second buddy" [Chuckles] "Wait a second." [Laughter] I'd have a ball with it [Chuckles] I'd go "Look here man... you open that mouth and you're fired." He'd go to open his mouth again and I'd be like "What did I say, Doug?" He'd finally get pissed and overpower me but then I'd just go "No... That's not really how it works, Doug... You're the one who's fired here." And... I figure we'd kinda just go back and forth like that until he finally gave up or physically assaulted me [Laughter]

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: Well... If we're still on the topic... I'd like to have a new job and a way better boss [Laughter] As for the rest... it'll all work itself out after that!

Derick A.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: One common goal... Hmm... Well, I think it's one of those things that definitely sounds pretty far fetched [Laughter] Humans aren't particularly good at coming together or agreeing on things [Chuckles] Especially when you've got so many different cultures and mindsets and all that... I mean I do think that if there were one thing we could all somehow converge on, I think it would have to be common access to the bare necessities... food, water, shelter and clothes. I think it should already be kinda self-evident that if we've got the supply to do it, we should make sure everybody is set up and not lacking bare basics like that. That shouldn't be too absurdly hard of a thing to agree on... You never know though [Laughter]

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: Most people think of all this intense stuff like war and death when they talk about being a coward... But I think the truly cowardly thing is to give up on your friends. I mean there are some cases... like if it's just more of an acquaintance or not a very good friend... but if it's one of your really good friends and you stab them in the back, then that's just about as low as you can get.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: Ya know... ask me this a decade ago or so and I'd tell you "death"... Ask me this now and I've gotta go with "life"... [Chuckles] Like it's one thing to get past that fear of death... And like when you do get past it, you sorta think that most of your fears are over with I guess, and that you're in the clear. But getting over that fear is just the very beginning of it all man... [Chuckles] That's where the real... real, uh... "fun"... starts.

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: I guess I have a pretty unique answer to this one... I'm gonna have to go with my dad, and maybe not for the most common of reasons... So my dad had me when he was only 17, right... And the girl he was with... my real mom... ended up dying in some freak accident like a year after I was born... So he and his family basically raised me solo until I was around like eight or nine years old, then he got married. It was such an odd feeling being in my teens and having my dad be like basically a kid himself [Chuckles] My buddies always wanted to like make him their own friend and get him to give life advice and everything [Laughter] And I used to be like "Guys... you know he barely knows more than we do, right...?" [Laughter] But yeah... That man helped me out more than he'll probably ever know... Hell of a guy.

Destiny E.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: This is really hard to say... But I think so, yes. My life has not been easy but I like to think that I did what I could and was a better “me” than anybody else could have been :)

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Power is a nasty word. But I think it can be redeemed. Power is all about loving boldly, especially when it’s hardest to do.

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or “gut?”

A: Even when I’ve been skinny, my “gut” is all I’ve got! I can’t imagine not going with your gut. I can be rational when I need to be, but that’s not usually how I roll.

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: Being a woman is much more than looking good or being a good mom. To me, a healthy and balanced woman is someone who is both caring and driven. I’ve found in my own life that you can’t truly have one without the other.

Diego G.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: I would used to say “no way” but in the last years I’ve learned to embrace it. It took me alot of work to get to where I’m at. I used to be pretty overweight and depressed like 2 or 3 years ago. But something happened where I looked in the mirror and instead of hate, I started to feel something inspiring. I’m still not sure how exactly it happened. But I’m happy to be me now.

Values

Q: What makes someone inspirational?

A: The times where I’m inspired are when I can feel alot of energy. People who love what they are doing and can’t help but share it are inspiring.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: I won’t lie... Dying still haunts me. The thought that there could only be blackness and nothing is a scary thing. I’m also not very religious. This is something I think about pretty often.

Self

Q: Which fears have you overcome?

A: Like I said, I used to be pretty overweight. I guess I had this fear that if I stopped eating and got skinny that I would have to start putting myself out there and doing more things with my life. More than anything I had a fear of fitting in with other people and finding my “people” I guess. In the last couple years I’ve gotten way better.

Dominic E.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Are you skeptical by nature?

A: You basically have to be in this kind of world... If you’re all naïve and just happily roaming about without any awareness of what’s going on around you, you’re gonna get seriously screwed over [Chuckles] Of course... you shouldn’t just be totally locked in and not open to possibilities

around you that actually crop up... But you definitely should have self-protection as your sort of “default mode.”

Values

Q: What is the most courageous act?

A: This kinda ties into the previous question here... The most courageous thing you can do is simply just stand up for yourself... even... or *especially*... if people are going against you in huge ways. It’s a hell of a lot easier said than done... Trust me on that [Chuckles]

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn’t fire you?

A: Welp... I *am* the boss [Laughter] I suppose I am known to say some pretty nasty stuff to *myself* on occasion though... I haven’t fired myself yet though thankfully [Chuckles]

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: Well... I’d like to be a decade younger and better looking but I don’t think that’s how it works [Chuckles]

Easton S.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

A: No. Politics is driven by two things—money and power—and the easiest way to obtain one or the other is by screwing someone over. It can happen on a small scale, like a businessman profiting off his partner, or on a larger scale, like politicians making poor decisions for their constituents. A wise politician recognizes the need for money and power to ascend in the political rankings and is willing to act completely out of line in order to achieve their desires. They may sugarcoat it, or even be straight up deceptive, but in the end, you can be sure your best interests are never on their mind. Additionally, the introduction of new cultures and ideals to a

community makes it even harder to appease the masses, inflating the disconnect from the constituents.

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: Not taking accountability for your actions. You are running away from your problems and making excuses instead of facing them. You are deluding yourself and disappointing your peers. It's a sign of immaturity. You are telling others you are too good for them. You are unable to learn from your mistakes if you cannot recognize them and adjust—doing so will only strengthen your character.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: That when I die my family will be forced to exaggerate and say things they think are true to the small audience of mostly family members as a result of the significant lack of personal bond.

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: I don't know. It would depend on when my death bed comes and how much courage I've gathered to make a change by then.

Eduardo Z.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: See... If you say they're fundamentally good, everything you see around you and everything you do is gonna be colored in that light... so people will appear "good"... or at least better. And if you say they're fundamentally bad, you're also gonna see everything through that lens are come away with that idea reinforced in the exact same way... I think either extreme... either side of the uh... *coin*.... either end is a bit unrealistic. People aren't just good or bad. There's

everything in between... there's all shades and colors between the good and the bad. And... I think if you take that sort of perspective, you'll find that you get a healthier, more balanced view of the world. You'll be able to see the good that's in the "bad", the bad that's in the "good" and everything else that's out there in this crazy world...

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: I think with social media and everything, people have started to get an even more twisted idea of what love really is... You know, we've got everything from The Bachelorette to people feeling the constant need to update everybody on the most intimate deals of their romantic relationships [Chuckles] I'm actually a therapist... and a lot of the younger people I talk to usually bring up romantic troubles... So, obviously, I ask them questions to get them thinking about how they view love and how this affects how they view their partner and the standards they hold them up to... stuff like that, right? I almost always... almost *without exception*... find that with my younger patients, there's this idea that love should just "work" and that it should just always be seamless and easy... no effort required *ever*. And... you know, that might very well be true for the first 1... *maybe 2?*... years... [Laughter] But yeah... after that you and your partner get down to business. And that's not even a bad thing... It just means that you start having to learn even more about what makes them tick and how the two of you can be on the same team as things evolve.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: Honestly...? Not being able to help the people I want to. Being totally ineffectual... totally unable to lend a hand to the people who need it the most... the people who are counting on me to help them out and pull them through. I don't know... I figure this is a common thing with therapists... Sometimes you get those people you see, the regulars, those people you get to know so well... You know their entire life and their mind maybe better than their closest friends and family do... And then sometimes they just drop off the face of the earth. Sometimes you guess it's because they got better... maybe they just realized they no longer needed to talk and they went about their life. Other times... other times, you just never know. It *haunts* me... it haunts

me everyday to think that maybe some of those people who stopped coming aren't still here with us.

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: Let's make this one a little bit less gloomy... [Laughter] Uh... Yeah, I'd say I've learned to love being sensitive and emotional. Obviously when you're little... especially being a guy... that's not really a thing that's valued at all... most people are gonna be relentless and pick on you for feeling things deeply or wanting to be in tune with what you or others are feeling. But you finally end up reaching a point where you realize how powerful it is to feel... how powerful it is to feel deeply and be super sensitive. I just wish the world recognized that more.

Edward N.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: That's definitely the question isn't it... [Chuckles] Yeah... I feel like once you get past like 40... hell maybe even younger than that... I feel like once you get around that certain age, you start to sorta wake up and find out like "Wow... Yeah most people aren't that great"...

[Chuckles]

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or be right?

A: So... It's never straight up "bad" to be nice obviously... But if you're being overly nice or like being nice just for the sake of being too timid to tell everybody what's actually going on, then that's basically worse than being outright rude or mean. This is true especially in jobs and in places where you need stuff to be super accurate and done right the first time. Trust me... No business person or engineer or doctor, lawyer, whatever else... None of them is gonna tell you that it's better to be nice than to be right and efficient.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Ohhh yeahhh [Chuckles] So I've got one person...one person... uh... "above" me right now... I'm not gonna say or give anything away but I'll tell you this—most of the stuff they've been pushing for the last two or three quarters is just absolutely wrong... Like crazily, wildly wrong... And not just in one sense of the word "wrong"... Yeah... So I'd really quite enjoy poking the whole thing apart... showing them my strategy and everything. Is that realistic? *Hell* no. Would it be a hell of a good time? You better *believe* it... [Chuckles]

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I'm drawing blanks at the other ones here... I'll just take a stab at this one... This is a little out of left field... But I can guarantee ya that I'll never be eating *seafood* again... [Chuckles] A few months ago I basically overdosed on oysters up at "Truluck's" over there in Southlake. Never again man...

Emmy O.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are you skeptical by nature?

A: I'm way too skeptical for my own good. I don't even mean skeptical of religion or anything like that necessarily either. I'm largely skeptical of people due to my childhood and upbringing overall. There's two sides to this. On the one hand, I feel like being skeptical has really helped me achieve things, because I tend to sniff out the "B.S." that most others are unaware of. Although... on the other hand, I also miss out on genuine opportunities and end up kicking myself later, realizing "Ah crap... that one was real and you just had your guard up way too much."

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: Cowardice is usually something associated with war or not wanting to face physical violence, but cowardice also applies to family matters. As a former single mom, I can definitely say that men who abandon their children or their families in general are cowardly.

Emotions

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

A: Back to the previous question, the scariest moment of my life was when my ex left me and our daughter. I had 0 idea how I would make it and what I was going to do. On top of that, there was the sadness and sense of loss too. This was quite a crazy experience.

Self

Q: How have you changed in the last decade?

A: In the last decade I have conquered so many of my fears and transformed into an overall better and more powerful person and mother. It was anything but easy but I am very proud of myself and my daughter for getting through everything we did together.

Esmerelda G.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: I think that most people are confused. We tend to call the most confused “bad”. And the ones that aren’t as confused we call “good”. I like to think that most people are just confused enough to not be saint-like but not confused enough to be satan-like.

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: The most powerful people, I think, are the ones who seem least powerful. The most “powerful” people I’ve ever known don’t seem very “powerful” to most around them. There is great power in silence. There is much power that is hidden in plain sight.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: For a normally quite rational person, it is especially hard. When I was 36 I got diagnosed with bipolar. It is very rare to be diagnosed this late, and I had no symptoms or signs of it before then. My husband first started suspecting something was up way before I did. It’s been a journey...

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: I might as well relate this back to the previous question. I really admire that I didn’t let my bipolar diagnosis drag me down (too far at least!). I pride myself on being pretty normal for a “crazy” person.

Esteban O.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: In my opinion yes we’ve already trashed this planet. I think people like Elon Musk are right that we need another place to go and to start making changes. Things won’t magically get better.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: I think success is something that is hard to achieve and nobody can take that away. If what you did wasn’t hard then you didn’t really have any success.

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: I have struggled a lot with anxiety in my life. Anxiety is a burning, itching feeling that only gets worse as the more you try to make it leave. Anxiety makes you think that you aren't yourself. That you aren't as good as you actually are.

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: A lot of people say many different things but I would say being a man is being honest. If your tough but your not honest then you can't be that much of a man can you?

Ethan H.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Welp... I hate to be the bearer of bad newsss... [Chuckles] But, uh... [Snort] The overwhelming odds are that nothing here really matters. I mean this has been the whole search of the last couple thousand years, right? People realize that this world is pretty messed up, people go off seeking for some sort of antidote to the "messed up-ness", people create a bunch of cool-sounding stories to distract themselves from the "messed up", yada yada yada... Whatever sort of "purpose" there is to all of this... Any sort of "purpose" would have to come from the self. If you're seeking any sort of big, grand, flashy "Truth" out there around you... That *sure* ain't gonna end well.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: Success... Yeesh... [Chuckles] Look, I suppose I already outed myself as a totally nihilist... [Laughter] So I figure I'll go for the jugular here. Look... if there's no meaning to life... if there's absolutely no right, wrong or way to measure how well you do at anything... then who

the hell is to even say what it means to be “successful”? Like this goes beyond the whole “success isn’t found in money” type thing... Success, uh... *technically*... isn’t found *anywhere* [Laughter]

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: So I haven’t technically lost my mind... But I did have this one acid trip that basically took me to the edge of all sanity [Laughter] I’m not sure if you’ve ever done acid, but there’s like times where you lose basically all sense of time. Other times, the “flow” of time, you could say... the “flow” changes completely. So like 10 minutes could feel literally like 10 hours or more. This one time... No joke... This sounds *insane*...! This one time I was trapped in the body of a *deer*... or like elk or something? A *moose*? Who the hell knows... [laughter] for what felt like a couple of days. I had my same, like... same “consciousness” and everything. I was just trapped in this moose body, wandering around this forest somewhere. I remember coming back and just feeling like crawling away and taking a break from life for a while... That was some really mind-f*cking sh*t man... [Laughter]

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: I mean... given that I don’t really believe in any higher power or ultimate purpose... I think I would just regret if I hadn’t experienced absolutely as much as possible—the good, the bad, the crazy, the incredible. Obviously I’d like more good than bad, more pleasure than pain... But I just want to experience the whole run of emotion, because I really doubt any of use get a second shot here.

Evie J.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Are you skeptical by nature?

A: I'll guess I'll go with this one... Nothin' else is really doing it for me there... So I guess I'm a natural skeptic. I'm not like super cynical or anything, but yeah... See stuff like religion and spirituality just never did it for me. The whole "faith" thing... None of that makes too much sense. I get that it helps people feel better about things, but I think it's better to just know what's up and not cling onto stuff that really might not even be there, you know?

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: Success... Eh... It's definitely a sort of dirty word. Like is it a bunch of money and stuff? Is it status or prestige? Is it being a CEO? [Laughter] Yeah... I don't think you can ever really just "define" success like that. Lots of people think they've like "made it" but have they really? It's hard to tell...

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: I mean... Obviously there's the like... *physical* symptoms, you know... Sweaty palms, heart beating fast, head spinning... And then there's like the doubts. That's probably the biggest thing I face, all those thoughts that just creep up and hit you with all this nasty stuff. Feeling anxious is one thing, but the doubts really just do me in...

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: Hmmm... Yeah... This is probably a common thing but there's no way in hell you're gonna catch me skydiving. My ex kept trying to get me to do it and kept saying that it would be fun.

Fun?! No, no, no [Chuckles] Fun is like going on a vacation or something, not falling 20,000 feet and screaming your lungs out.

Fernanda N.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: The short answer is... Probably not. I've always wondered about this sort of thing though. When I was younger I used to play this imaginary game where I would imagine being a soul like "before birth" or something. Kind've like the movie "Soul" actually. I would imagine trying on different looks and personalities and figuring out who I wanted to be. I remember coming up with some pretty crazy stuff! It's not even that I didn't or don't like who I am but I just really doubt I'd chose exactly who I am if I could chose from all of these different characters, you know?

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or be right?

A: Obviously nice. I think alot of people have some pretty bad memories of being bullied by someone who really just wanted to be right. Nobody likes a know it all.

Emotions

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

A: When I was 3 I almost got hit by a huge bus. I vividly remember my parents screaming and the wheels screeching next to me. I was trying to run but my little legs couldn't do much back then. I have never felt my heart drop like that since!

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I'll definitely never let somebody else choose how I live my life and the goals I set. For some reason, I always knew this. I never wanted to be living the life of someone else.

Graeme W.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: If God plays dice, then he's not very good at it, is he? The odds of dying in some senseless or totally unnecessary way or a freak accident are too high. The odds of a child dying are high; the odds of divorce are high; the odds of having an incurable disease are high. It is not a winning game we have here.

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: I'm not entirely sure what this society likes to call "love" exists. What I do know is that we are a species programmed with a certain set of rules that we follow, like robots in a certain way. What makes us feel good, what makes us feel positive-feeling emotions like "love", is something that has been programmed into us. There's no such thing as totally "selfless" or objective love when you realize this.

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: Depression is not so much as a bad feeling as it is an absence of feeling. When you're deeply depressed, the most startling thing isn't that you feel "bad", it's that you barely feel anything at all. Complete and total numbness.

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: I'm an academic researcher, and I'd like to (hopefully) finally be done with my PhD by then. I know it's not very realistic either, but I'd also like to land a nice professorship immediately after that.

Harley T.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: I think they totally can... Now, does that mean it's gonna be easy? Does that mean we can just slap some picket signs together, parade down the streets and then we get world peace? No way... But I think for the amount of effort we've put forth so far... uh... like basically next to nothing... [Laughter] I think considering that we've never truly tried in any huge way to come together on a global scale before... We just might be surprised what might happen if we start trying for that.

Values

Q: What makes someone inspirational?

A: I think it's inspirational to show that you actually care. And I don't mean like the whole "I can guarantee you personally... That I *care* for my constituents and the American people" type crap from the politicians [Chuckles] I mean those people who you can just tell eat, live and breath for whatever it is they're doing... And yet somehow they're still not douche-y or smug about it. That's always an inspirational thing to see.

Emotions

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

A: Scariest moment of my life is when I almost drowned in the Gulf of Mexico... [Chuckles] I can't remember if it was like Padre Island or Corpus Christi area, but it was somewhere around there... Anyway, I remember not thinking that I was that far out there, but then this massive group of waves just kinda popped up outta nowhere. My first instinct for whatever reason was to like dive under them to escape... [Chuckles] *Anddd*... I quickly realized that was a horrible idea [Laughter] I was under the water for probably a good minute, maybe more. I remember just trying so hard to struggle up back to the top to take a breath. After a while the waves started to

calm down and I was finally able to come back up. But... Yeah... I have no doubt that if those waves didn't stop I wouldn't be here today. Scariest moment I've had by far...

Self

Q: What haunts you?

A: This might sound kinda weird because I'm not exactly sure how to word it... But what scares me the most is being seen basically... Having somebody be able to look at me, into my eyes... and just somehow tell everything I'm thinking, who I really am and basically know more about me than I know about myself... I'm not sure if that even makes sense...? But yeah... I'm outgoing and everything but I'm also a pretty private person too. I don't like letting many people see who I am on a deeper level. Makes me feel... I guess "vulnerable" is the best way to put it...

Henrietta W.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can people genuinely care about strangers?

A: Oh gosh... This might give away my age, but I think yes. Yes people can for sure. I remember a time where people smiled to each other on the street. People were always helping people out. Something happened though and many things changed. But deep down I think we still have that in us some where.

Values

Q: What love mean to you?

A: Love is a marvelous thing. I wish more people got the chance to truly love. Love ain't t about all this stuff you see on the TV. A true love will never go sour.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: I am retired now but oh I do have somebody in mind... I won't say his name so I will just call him 'H'. H was somebody who thought he was better than everybody else. I was a 20 something

and a bit shy and timid. So H thought he could come bully me around. If H were hear today—I would tell him ‘If your pants sit any higher up your waist they would just cover up your knockers and then you could do us all a big favor and go take the day off at the beach you high strung bastard’! I learned this one from my husband.

Self

Q: Which fears have you overcome?

A: I was a shy young lady. It took me a while to feel comfortable with people. But I did it.

Jackson L.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Dude, I been thinking for years about this. I took some philosophy courses my freshmen and sophomore years and this a big thing we talked about. Most people use religion as they purpose, Christianity, Muslim, and so on... But when you break away of the religious stuff and you on you own. I know lots of people who ain’t religious but they still have they goals and values. But it definitely ain’t easy. I’m still not sure which side I on...

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: You open up Instagram and see all this stuff about making it big and making tons of cash really fast right? Everybody always want to make it big. I don’t really think any of that crap matters. I’ve know people that get all this money and guessed what... They still the exact same as they use to be. They still miserable a** people that can’t enjoy anything except drugs and sex man...

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Oh sh*t... Hah! I love this one man. Look... my boss, he one of the most messed up people I know man... Like this a dude who will come over and mess with you just to do it. He does this with damn near everybody there too. If I had to tell him something finally it'd have to be 'Look man... You the kinda person that go to hell and gets kicked the hell out man... You the kinda person that after they kicked outta hell is all schemin' and plottin' to get back into hell and overthrow the damn devil himself man... You the kinda person that after he throw out the devil gets ganged up on by all them demons and people down there and thrown outta there again man... [Chuckles]

Self

Q: Which does being a man mean to you?

A: Sh*t... I mean I guess most would say something like being all tough and hardcore, right? That's true. But you can't never be a man without a commitment. If you ain't committed to something worth being committed to then you ain't no man. That's for sure.

Jacob C.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Purpose is a loaded word. Ones purpose may not exactly be another's purpose. Some things that make a person's life could break another's, this life has purposes, that cannot be denied. But can we ever connect those purposes together into a Purpose? That's a tough question.

Values

Q: What makes someone inspirational?

A: Inspiration is all about emotion. Obviously someone inspirational is not over-emotional or an emotional wreck however, someone inspirational is someone who channels their positive

emotions into their passions. You can be passionate but not inspirational, but I don't see how you could be inspirational without being passionate.

Emotions

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

A: One moment especially jumps out for me. I was in 10th Grade I think, I was on the wrestling team. I was facing this dude everybody thought I was going to wipe the floor with, I'll admit that I got a little cocky to. Anyway, I was being lazy and he got me face down and had my right arm pulled back behind my back. Any time your arm is more than like 90 degrees bent in this position, the refs usually call it. But I remember feeling my arm get to 90 and this dude just kept twisting my arm even more. I started feeling my forearm really burning. Still no ref. Turns out the ref ran over to check on something and totally missed what was happening. I was trying to yell out but my face was jammed in the mat. Then I felt it... My bone in my forearm popped straight out of my arm. Holy crap was that scary!

Self

Q: Where did you want to be in life? Where are you now?

A: When I was a kid I always wanted to be an athlete. I didn't know what sport but I always wanted to play something. When I got older I realized that this wasn't realistic and my dreams were basically crushed. I did however find an outlet that I never expected to find. When I was twenty five I started a sportswear company. I found I was able to satisfy all of those original dreams I had, more or less, simply by helping other people along the way to their dreams and goals.

Jasmine L.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: Yeah... this one hits deep... Hmm... [5 second pause] I think the easy answer that everybody kinda like feels like they need to say is "yes"... But I don't know if it's that simple. Like imagine

instead of life and people it's a video game and you're choosing characters... You've got 8 billion characters to choose from and you're somehow, *magically*, gonna choose the exact same character you got randomly assigned to you...? Uhhh... [Chuckles] I really don't think so... So there's that. But then there's definitely also something to be said for standing firm and strong in who you are and loving every part of yourself. Like if we're being practical, obviously we shouldn't want to be someone else... But if we're being realistic... I think most people would... uh... *shake things up a bit* [Laughter]

Values

Q: What is the most courageous act?

A: So I come from a pretty strict and uh... "traditional" family you could say... And one of the toughest things about it is that everybody feels super, I mean *super* pressured to like "fall in line" and not question everybody's expectations. Some types of people actually like this I've found... it basically means less work for them and less decision making... if that makes sense. Other people hate it but just never gather up the strength to go against the grain or actually show their individuality in any way. And then there's some... if I can be so cocky to say [Laughter]... there are some who have the courage to stand up and basically say, "Look... I know you guys really want me to do this... But if I do that, I'm going to live a life that's only half lived; I won't trade my misery for your happiness." That's admittedly scary as sh*t... But oh my god does it feel so *good*.

Emotions

Q: What is the weirdest emotion you've ever felt?

A: *Weirdest*... Weirdest thing I ever felt for sure was after I told my family literally what I just told you... [Laughter] Because obviously it was *awesome* and *freeing* and all that *jazz*... But... ugh... the *guilt*. I came away from that basically as one big bundle of nerves, both from the excitement of finally being free and being like "Now what...?" and the crushing dread of like "Did I actually make a mistake here...?" [Chuckles]

Self

Q: Where did you want to be in life? Where are you now?

A: So I'm one of those weirdos who almost always knew what they wanted. I remember being 14-15 and knowing it all the way: I'm gonna be a programmer and computer engineer. The weird thing is... this actually lined up perfectly with what my parents wanted for me. See... that wasn't even the point of argument with them... They've got much more than that going on [Laughter] But yeah... So I always knew the basic idea of what I wanted to be and how I wanted to do it. But obviously when you're younger you never actually like flesh out the details of your dreams. I always imagined programming and software stuff being so much... so much "sexier" [Laughter] so much sexier than it actually is [Laughter] But hey... at least I stayed true and stuck with my initial plan. That does feel really good to look back at that.

Jimmy O.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever be united under one common goal?

A: This is an interesting one... One common goal... Yeah, so I think anytime you're talking about like rallying people around something, getting them to sort of share in this group-level thinking... You're probably going to have to *lie*. Like at least a little bit right? [Laughter] Like... if you're just totally boldfaced honest about things, you're never gonna get everybody to agree. What sounds good to one person out there is gonna sound freakin' awful to the next one. So yeah... I think the whole question of getting people to agree on one... just like one, blanket statement type thing... Isn't really gonna work.

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: So... If we wanna talk like war history... [Laughter] So Stalin, this was in World War II, right... Stalin had this crazy policy, Order... Order Number 229 I think? 227...? Anyways, something like that. Stalin had this order sent out to the troops on the front line—if you retreat,

you will be shot on sight! They called this the “Not one step back” order. Basically, Stalin had the idea to not even allow cowardice to happen. [Laughter] But like when you consider what that means... Ok, you’re gonna outlaw cowardice... But in terms of having to issue an order like that... Doesn’t that kinda mean, like, *Stalin*... c’mon... you’re a *pretty sh*tty motivator* man. [Laughter] Who’s the real coward then? The troops who are like “Hey... this sucks, let’s go back” or the dude so scared of “cowards” that he’s gotta kill ‘em all.

Emotions

Q: Where does your mind wander when alone?

A: So... If you haven’t noticed this by now, I’m a *total* weirdo, ok? [Laughter] Yeah... I mean... Look man, you know the Lord of the Rings series right? Yeah... Way more times than any sane person should admit, I catch myself as Gandalf standing there all cool, with those white robes on. And I’m staring at some person I know in real life who’s just done something really f*cking stupid and I go—“Fool of a took! This is a serious journey, not a hobbit walking-party!” Yeeaaapp... [Embarrassed laughter]

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: So I’ve always wanted to have my own bookstore or something? Maybe like a coffee shop too. The thing is—I never got like a business degree or anything or really had any interest in business. Soooo... I’m not exactly sure how that’s gonna go down... [Laughter] But it’s something I just always think about. In the next five-ish years I want to make a go at that.

Jing L.

(Written)

Deep

Q: If you could be God for a day, would you?

A: Yes. I would and try. But no way I could handle.

Values

Q: What makes someone inspirational?

A: Happiness make one inspirational. People inspirational as smiling and laughing.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: Death. The dying is what scare me most.

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: Woman mean to be healthy and gentle.

John A.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Oh you'd better believe it does fella... You'd better believe it. Look... you know... *everybody* doubts this in their life... at some time or another. But there's just those moments you can't forget. There's those little flashes of God that you can't mistake for anything else... Ain't nothin' else can do what He does.

Values

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: Man... My little baby girl was born 2 weeks ago [Big smile]... [10-second pause] The kind of man I used to be... I never knew... I really just never knew if I'd get that chance. It's an incredible thing to see for me. And I promise that little girl, with everything I've got in me, that her daddy's gonna protect her... love on her... and make her proud.

Emotions

Q: What's the strongest emotion you've felt?

A: Welp... This is an easy one [Laughter] When that girl of mine was born... There was nothing even remotely close man... not even close.

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: Man... I would regret not living up to everything I know I can be... and *need* to be. I would regret not loving my family as hard as I could, not giving them as much as I possibly could.

Johnny W.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

A: I do not believe so. I think that fundamentally all men have a strong desire for power over another and the game of politics is a very enticing means to the end. We are in my spiritual beliefs all born under the curse of sin, and without yielding to a higher power of God one remains under the control of his own self will. This will is not guided by anything other than survival of the fittest and one's own self-protection, and lusts for the things of the world. How more appropriate then to be elected into a position of power under the disguise of the voters worldly faith to lend credence to a life of self-righteousness and narcissistic power over others. Never doing good because one is incapable of shedding the cloak of sin, yielding to a life of

ruling for the greater good. Until all men surrender to Him men and women of politics (what ever system) will never change life for the better.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: I believe it is Time. Now that I am 60 I have a whole life to look back upon. I can think of no other commodity other than faith in God that is so underestimated in value. In my early years as a boy I often heard “appreciate each day”, “stop to smell the roses”, and other phrases. At that age we seem invincible and nothing, not time or aging will affect us. Oh how foolish we are not to take everyday as a gift. To wake up and live each day as if the end was closer then we dear look. To laugh and to love like each event could be it’s last. One can never appreciated time until it has slipped away. Regrets is the gift left behind by her slippage, and regret of lost hours, and lost love, and lost moments with the ones we love is a cruel awakening to the heart. Yes time; fleeting and heading us to the ultimate end and most if not everyone throws it away.

Emotions

Q: What’s one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: I wish I had the guts to face people in the streets and preach the Word of God. I must admit that I fear so much the spirit of looking foolish and uneducated on the subject. I have found my entire life to be one of the fear. I grew up feeling push around and unseen. I look back and realize that is why I’ve lived a life of many regrets, always trying to be seen, to be known, to be on in the lights, to be looked up to, to be important. It’s a terrible place to be. It takes much energy to hide this from the ones you love, or seek respect from others. To have to live a life of avoidance of confrontations, and stepping out of the heard; because someone might just discover how afraid you are. To be lit up “as the say” as a fake. I wish I had the guts to live in strength.

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: I will regret the time I did not spend with family. I had a prestigious job and spent much time away from them as food for my self-worth. I prayed to much to the God of money and lost the most important gift of all; time with the ones I love.

In other words

“I know that I will come to regret the moments I didn't spend with my family. While I had a prestigious job and often prioritized it over my loved ones, it was only for the sake of my own self-worth. In hindsight, I realize that I placed too much emphasis on worldly success and money, forgetting that the most precious gift of all is the time I could have spent with the people I care about the most.”

Jonathan L.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can people genuinely care about strangers?

A: Of course they can! It sure isn't easy but people do this all the time. If they didn't there couldn't be things like food banks or Goodwill.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: I'd say having a nice and supportive family is the most valuable thing anybody could have. All of the most “messed up” people I've ever met have missed out on good family. And most of the nicest people I've met have had pretty good parents and support.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: Death man... death. I don't believe anybody really knows what will happen. People love to act like they do but there is no true way to know.

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: I probably shouldn't be admitting this but I want to own my own cannabis store... I've been interested in this for a while now but I'm still saving up. We'll see!

Judith G.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you care if this life had no purpose?

A: No. The way I live my life. In faith and in Jesus. It wouldn't make a difference to me. Either way I tried my best and stayed faithful.

Values

Q: Would does love mean to you?

A: Love is sacrifice. Love is something that can push you past all things. Love conquers all things.

Emotions

Q: What is the strongest emotion you've felt?

A: When my daughter was born. All that pain was worth it!

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: My dad. He taught me many things. But the best thing he taught me: never lie to yourself.

Keegan E.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever achieve a theory of everything?

A: Hmmm... You mean like a theory of each little thing under the sun or one big theory that takes care of literally everything? [Chuckles] That's a pretty huge difference. I mean... I think that it's obviously possible to have a theory about each topic that we discover. Like I don't think it's possible for us to discover something and then never have the possibility to know about it, if

that makes sense... So... in theory... in theory if this is true then there should be no big deal with finding one big theory that explains absolutely everything... I don't really see why that would be impossible. It's something to shoot for at least!

Values

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: So I always had this idea that I never really wanted kids. I'm not really sure why I never did honestly... I guess I was an only child, a kid of divorce... Just didn't really want to bother with any of that, you know? But as soon as I met my wife, this instantly changed. The best way I can describe it is that all of those little things that were keeping me from wanting a kid just faded away. None of the previous reasons I had for not wanting any held up anymore. So... basically... you know, obviously there's the responsibility of being a parent. But on top of that, getting to be a parent, for me... for me it basically symbolizes this idea that "Hey... I can change... I can actually do a complete 180 and adapt to it." It was pretty cool for me to realize that.

Emotions

Q: What was the strongest emotion you've ever felt?

A: Well, I guess I can piggyback off of my last answer... [Chuckles] By far... The strongest thing I ever felt was when my son was born. I'm not even normally that emotional of a guy... But it was really something... Knowing that this is a completely new human being, a new soul... And this soul is now your responsibility and great blessing. It's a wild thing... Please don't tell my wife I didn't mention our wedding day though...! [Laughter]

Self

Q: Would your ten-year-old self be proud?

A: You know... I tend to think that your ten-year-old self would be proud of just about anything... [Chuckles] Like... If I told my ten-year-old self that I stayed at home all day and built Lincoln Log mansions and Lego forts, he'd be totally pumped [Laughter] Nah... really though... I think the younger me would be pretty proud of me. That little guy always wanted to do something out in nature, he always wanted to roam free and never wanted to go inside. I

actually work on an oil rig... also do the drill engineering. And somehow, I think he would find that pretty darn cool [Chuckles]

Kiri H.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: I really want to say yes but I don't think its so realistic... I have struggled with eating disorder most of my life, I don't really like how I look but I really try to. Its not easy being a girl today, especially with all these people around you telling you how you need to look.

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Being kind is powerful, I don't think people have any right to be anything over than kind.

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: It means wanting to hide away from the hole world not wanting anyone to see or anything to judge you.

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: I hope to be happy. I don't really remember what deep happiness is like, I really want to remember it.

Leland C.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: Dude... Look... I don't know about like, all the uh... all the "technical" side of things and stuff, right? But this Elon Musk guy is badass man. This ' a dude who literally has a company called the "Boring Company"... He's so big that they just let him name a company like that [Laughter] I think he's got like eight or nine different companies too... So like... if I remember correctly too, I think he's been talking about Mars since like 2012 or something insane. Basically he's like gathering all his companies together and testing them on Earth before he gets bold enough to be like "Alright, I'm out guys!" and hops over to Mars [Laughter] Look man... I'm inclined to believe anyone who has ideas that are that well put-together, who's got a track record like he does man...

Values

Q: What is the most courageous act?

A: So I'm actually a veteran... Three tours in Iraq... What they tell you about courage over there doesn't always, uh... let me just say it doesn't always "match up" with what you feel like courage should be. What you end up realizing... after a lot of really, really messed up stuff... What you end up realizing is that courage isn't about playing the right "side" or winning or any of that... People are *people* man... And you're a coward if you're gonna treat any one group of people as somehow beneath or not even deserving of life...

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: Yeah man... Obviously being a veteran this is something you go through... All of the stuff you hear about the "PTSD" and all that... it's a hundred percent real. It's not normal depression though. It's basically like never knowing what is coming next, what's gonna hop into your mind or how long it's gonna last...

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: Back to the courage thing... It's one of those things that really makes you think. We're always brought up to think that a "man" is someone who is like... "fearless", you know? A man is someone who doesn't even feel the fear or the pain... and he's always aggressive and playing on offense... But somewhere... at some point you start to realize that this isn't really true. Look man... every man has this sort of "objective line" that he will cross... it don't matter if you're frickin' Superman or the Hulk... once you get into a bad enough situation: *you're gonna feel it*. What really makes a man is not that he's totally oblivious to all the bad stuff that's thrown at him... what matters is that he cares enough about what he values the most, what he loves... what matters it that he cares enough about these things to continue through that pain and through the sadness.

Levi I.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Yes definitely. Everyone who comes to life carries a predetermined purpose - in my opinion.

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Knowledge is what makes someone powerful. Knowledge about self (our limitations and strengths) makes one powerful.

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or "gut"?

A: Yes. In my opinion, intuition is the collective inference of the knowledge one has acquired. This helps as a valuable parameter in the decision making process.

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: Being a (hu)man I can express myself through various means - language, expression and emotions are a few that come to my mind.

Lorena P.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: In my opinion, no. I don't really see how we can take care of a complete different planet if you can't even take care of our own... it seems to be missing the point.

Values

Q: What does courage mean to you?

A: Courage is something that is hard to define, but you'll know it when you see it. I think maybe the best way to explain courage is that it is something that is both inspiring and difficult. Of course, there's the idea that to be courageous you have to overcome your fears, but just overcoming your fears doesn't mean that you're courageous. Courage also requires a mission I think.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: It used to be my own death but I'm finding that the older I get the more I'm worried about my parents death. I have really awesome parents and I can't hardly bare to see them go. That's a very scary thought.

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: I would really regret if I hadn't loved to the absolute best of my ability. In movies and books and things they usually make love seem easy and effortless. It's not at all... To love firmly and boldly is maybe the hardest thing any of us can try to do.

Malia C.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Will the game of politics ever change for the better?

A: I mean... If people finally wake-up and understand. At this point it ain't even about the right or the left or what ever the hell else they have up there running for office. I think things only change, if we let ourselves move ahead and passed this whole set-up we've got going.

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: Love go beyond anything you can see. Love is just something that makes none of the BS around matter. A true lover won't ever judge.

Emotions

Q: What is the strongest emotion you've felt?

A: Love haha. I mean... it was crazy strong. For sure it also messed with me though.

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: So many people say what a woman is in the media but its really about not caring what they think and having you're own value. It is up to the woman to set her own value and goal.

Mari H.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: So... I'm a little "quirky," you could say... I'm very, very spiritual and into the spiritual world, and this is a question that I've thought a whole lot about... I've thought about it for like two whole decades [Laughter] There's uh... there's several schools or "streams" of spirituality out there that show that... in some sense or another... we actually choose to be ourselves... we choose to incarnate into these bodies, on this planet. There's even the idea that we also choose our immediate family, our friends and our spouse. Something about these ideas just really captivated me and I've been exploring them ever since I found them. So yeah... I think I just might have actually chosen to be me... and that's a really cool thing.

Values

Q: Is there an unforgiveable deed?

A: I'm gonna play into the last question a bit with this one... This is also another question I've thought a lot about... I told you, I'm weird [Laughter] So... there was always something that never sat right with me about some of the uh... more... "mainstream," you could say... religious ideas on punishment, heaven and hell and all that. I never really understood why someone could be punished an infinite amount of time for a finite misstep... ya know? That just didn't sound right at all [Laughter] So anyway... I poked around different mystical traditions and stuff, looking for something that would satisfy me. It was right about the same time I found the ideas related to, like, "choosing" to be yourself that I found this idea that nobody is ever truly "too far gone." And not in like some sort of inevitable cycle of "karma" or something either. Basically the idea is that each soul has an infinite amount of time to finally "make the choice" and get it together [Chuckles] I really like that idea.

Emotions

Q: What's one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: I wish I had the guts to be fully myself... That's always been a really hard thing for me. It's not that I'm fake or that I don't like myself either... It's just a very scary thing for me and doesn't come natural at all.

Self

Q: What does being a woman mean to you?

A: I think a lot of the “feminist” type stuff today has gotten wayyy out of control... [Chuckles] I for sure like the idea of equality and getting women more respect, but I think a lot of the stuff today feels like it's more about turning women into men and making men weaker... I think a lot of women would agree with me too... But a lot of us are more or less scared of looking like we're not “strong women” or not on each others' team and stuff like that. Feminism is honestly hurting female solidarity in a huge way...

Matthew U.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: I've been waiting a long time for a stranger to ask me this question...! LOL I legit got my PhD in Theoretical Physics two years ago. So this is super exciting for me... I remember one of my professors literally posed this question to us, maybe in a bit different terms. But it was the same idea. One of the biggest dichotomies in physics right now is this divide between randomness and determinacy. In other words, what are the the limits of what we can predict and what we can know for certain. To be totally fair, I never quite got a strong intuition one way or the other. And this is obviously an unanswered question. But basically what I came to is that whatever a “god” could be, it would have to abide by at least some principle of statistical causality. This is a roundabout way of saying—yes, God does play dice!

Values

Q: What makes someone inspirational?

A: I can't help but tie this back into physics... Haha! So basically the most inspirational theories to a lot of physicists (and mathematicians even!) are ones that draw on completely new *concepts*. That's basically why Einstein's relativity theories were so groundbreaking—he was explaining things not only in a “new” way, but he was using entirely new concepts to reason about questions posed many years ago. Any time you don't just rearrange things in a new way but you actually extend the very conceptual field that humans possess at any given time, I'd say that qualifies as pretty inspirational.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: Ok I'll take a break from the physics now LOL. To be totally frank, death scares the crap out of me. Ok I lied a bit with that first sentence... My fear of death only got worse the further I got into physics...! I mean not only are *we* gonna die, but the *whole thing* is gonna die too?! C'mon now...

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: I guess I'll go for the full physics sweep here... My grandfather was actually a physicist too. Way back before I was even interested in physics he showed me a lot of what he was working on. I remember wanting to be a geologist or some sort of naturalist. It took almost a decade, but my grandpa's persistence paid off with me LOL. It's almost like he knew how this would all play out... He was a really incredible human.

Maurice W.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: Ya know... I never really understand what this meant... It's like... If I'm God, right? And I wanna create somethin'... Alls I gotta do is reach down and... BOOM... Right? It's already right there. If God be "playin' *dice*"... If God have to play dice... *Then...* who is he playin' dice *for*? Right? Cuz you don't sit there playin' dice for nothin'... Who he playin' those dice *for*? That's all I'm sayin'...

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Ohhhh man... Yeah... Power... Power is somethin' that nobody can get all the way into they heads... Power... power to one man is money, right? Power to another man is fame. Power to the next dude is sex. It keeps on goin' man... See... and *today...* today, we somehow decided that power is what all those men have together... Power is, you know, the dude with both the *money...* the... the *fame...* the *sex*. There ain't no end to that. See... what *true* power is, true power is about the one who can sit there and lose *all of that...* lose *each and every one of those...* and *still* somehow make it and get sh*t movin'. *That's* power man...

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: Man... I'll tell ya... [Chuckles] I'll tell ya. Look man... I use to do some pretty messed up sh*t man... This was uh... This was when I was like 20... 22... Back then I was up in St Louis... Gravois Park man... Look it up... Uh... And yeah... I was out for that "candy"... ya know? I got me some candy and I get back to my place... Sit down, ya know, do my thing... I was feelin' good, everythin' was real good... And then somethin' snapped. I started floatin' up above my own head man... Can barely describe somethin' like that. Now... I wasn't one of them

“near-death” things, that’s for certain. But this was somethin’ wild man... I thought I was gonna die right there.

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: See... Alotta people gonna tell you that a man is somethin’ all aggressive ‘n sh*t, right? They gonna tell you that a man is only a man if he be out there killin’ people or has some huge empire n’ everything. Maybe that was a man in... in uh... in *ancient* times... Like a gladiator or some sh*t... But nah man... Look... A man is what he make of *himself*. You ain’t a man jus’ cuz you’re actin’ all tough. You only a man *if*... you only a man if you know that you *are* one, man. It’s as simple as that... Once you know you a man... You are... It don’t matter how it look.

Melissa H.

(Written)

Deep

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: Being a parent means sacrifice. You can try and idealize it all you want but you won’t truly know what it takes and the amount of time it takes until you become one. Some where along the lines though you start to get it... The sacrifice turns into something you would never trade for anything. No amount of free time in the world would do it.

Values

Q: Do you trust your intuition or “gut?”

A: I try to. I’ve always been a sort of “artsy” kid and person. So I think it’s easy for me to stick with my gut and intuition. Sometimes this gets me into a pickle though! Thankfully my husband is more rational and can help me think more strategically.

Emotions

Q: What's one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: This is a little cliché but I really wish I would have stuck with my passion. When I was a teenager I was an exceptionally good artist. I did everything from painting to sculpting and pottery. My parents even hired someone to coach me. I still sometimes dream about getting back into it but I'm not truly sure if I ever can. I do wish I had someone to help ease me back into it...

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: This is probably a weird one but my childhood dog helped me the most, maybe more than any human (I know.... I know....!). She was a cream colored sheep dog, super shaggy and smiley. My 5 year old self named her "Sponge" but the name didn't stick. The rest of the family called her Lizzy; I kept on secretly calling her Sponge. I sure do miss my Sponge.

Nathaniel J.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: This is a question I have been considering for many years. Sometimes I think having an overactive mind is a curse, other times it is a blessing. Yet, for all my thinking, I still cannot seem to narrow down an answer to the question. So many people go "Of course it does!" out of emotion and the self-fulfilling prophecy that is valuing life. But if you ask these people "How do you know for *certain*?", I am not sure I single one could tell you. The jury is still out, and it just may be out for ever.

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: In today's society we are so fixated on the glitz and the glamor, on the "sexy" things which appeal to our animalistic senses. This element of superficiality makes us think that leadership is

the handsome, enterprising person with 500 million in the bank, commanding a team of people to do his bidding. Yet, in less than 100 years both he and his team will have faded into dust. Then what is left of them? Sometimes there is some sort of legacy left behind. Sometimes there is a cultural impact. Oftentimes, however, there is not much remnant. True leadership arises from those who make cultural and intellectual impacts which reach far beyond their time. These are the guardians of our future, the beacons for future generations.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Truth be told, I'm self-employed and loving every second of it.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I'll never pretend to be something that I am not. I will never sign my self up for a destiny that I cannot deliver. After all... we're not even sure what any of us on this quaint little "pale blue dot" are doing, are we? Why add to the confusion.

Pandora C.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Would you have chosen to be yourself?

A: Ya know... All throughout my teens and even my twenties basically I wanted to be pretty so bad. It's not like I was hideous or like... outright "ugly" looking... But I just always knew that I was very plain and nothing special. My older sister is like.. *ridiculously* good looking... always has been... and that used to drive me crazy... everybody always complimenting her and then looking over at me for contrast like "Oh..." [Laughter] It was pretty rough for a while but once I started getting older... I mean like late twenties, thirties probably... I had this sort of revelation hit me all at once—"It would actually be *really* annoying to get all that attention... Why did you ever want that?" [Chuckles] It just kinda hit me that maybe there's bonuses to being just average

looking that most people just forget about because they want to be good looking so bad. My plain Jane looks let me hide out in the background... and I'm learning to *really* love it [Laughter]

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: You always hear these stories about getting rich quick, buying some fancy sports car and jetting off to some island... But it's like... When that dust settles and you're just sitting there alone in your mansion... what *next*? [Laughter] There has to be something more, some sort of passion or some sort of mission that you're on, I think. Also... and I know this from personal experience too... a special kind of hell that I put myself through when I was younger [Laughter]... If you're trying to get successful just because you hate yourself or are insecure about something... no amount of money on the planet is gonna fix that.

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: Well... It's like I was saying about the whole insecurity and success thing... if you have this missing piece or like "void" inside of you, then you're definitely gonna feel it. I think a lot of depression comes from that sort of feeling where you're just drifting and not really anchored into your deeper or true self, you haven't found that yet or are too scared to embrace it. It's kinda like the whole Jim Carrey thing. I don't remember when but I guess a few years ago he came out and basically told everyone like "Look guys... I've been playing a character for years now... decades even... and I'm totally miserable. I have to get in tune with myself or it's gonna kill me." It's that sort of thing where if you're hiding yourself or masking things you hate, you're not going to end up feeling whole or healthy.

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: This is kinda ironic, but it's probably my sister... the pretty older sister I mentioned a little while back... [Laughter] That's why it's such a weird thing too... I used to feel so guilty for envying her as much as I did. It's like... "This girl has basically raised me and shown me how to be a woman and yet I still secretly hate her guts. What the hell is wrong with me?" [Laughter]

But yeah... Our mom was a single mother for a while and she was basically half mom and half sister to me... She's really an amazing person and I think she's influenced me more than she probably realizes.

Rafael S.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: I think he has to, yes. The idea that even God would somehow know everything he was going to ever do is insane. I think he (she? It?) would become incredibly bored after a while. God wouldn't be his own slave!

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or to be right?

A: I won't even lie: it feels damned good to be right! But I've learned the hard way (way harder than it should've been) that being nice is way more important. Luckily my wife and her sensitive soul is there to constantly remind me of this!

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or "gut?"

A: I like to try to but it's a pretty difficult thing to do consistently. I'm an architect and sometimes there's times where I know I should just go with my gut for the design, but it's always tricky when you have to consider all of your client's desires too.

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: I like that I like myself less than I used to... I used to be a cocky little sh*t!

Rebel 1

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: No

Values

Q: Is there an unforgiveable deed?

A: Yes

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: No

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: This

Rebel 2

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: One word: Duality. It's a struggle we all have. As babies, we're born perfect, but as human beings, we're also corruptible. What it boils down to is how we let ourselves be affected by the circumstances we go through and the choices we make because of them.

There is a saying; "Saints and sinners are quite the same." This means that the tide can change at any point because neither one is better than the other and each person is a result of the choices they make. We are who we choose to be.

Rebel 3

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: Yup. He sure f*cking does.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: It means getting in an Uber and not having to fill out a survey.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: It's like getting into an Uber and having to write sh*t.

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: In an Uber without a survey.

Rebel 4

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: Good

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: Mars

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: Be an example

Q: What does being a parent mean to you?

A: Everything

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or “gut?”

A: gut

Q: What’s one thing you wish you had the guts to do?

A: love

Self

Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?

A: With my loved ones

Q: Which fears have you overcome?

A: Losing

Rebel 5

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: God would just let it roll and so far no one could not find out what God does. He should be more than probability, science, and universe.

Values

Q: What does love mean to you?

A: For me love is unconditional since I have been seeing parents do so. There are all kinds of love, but I believe loves conquers all.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: It is emptiness. You do not know what you are doing, neither there is a meaning in living. Also doing the same thing over and over again like some psychologist had said, madness is a loophole very hard to get out.

Rebel 6

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: I'm actually more of a Poker player now... But dice games can be pretty fun too.

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or be right?

A: Technically speaking, this question should read "...to be nice or right...". It's ok though... I'm not gonna point that out or make a big deal out of it. I'm a pretty nice guy.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: I'm a pretty put-together person and have never gone crazy. I would like to say that this is largely due to my best buddy Horace the purple penguin. Horace is a total character, but is really down to earth also. Sometimes he and I shoot the sh*t about how crazy this world has gotten.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I've never really been one to answer surveys or do questionnaires. That's one thing I will always steer clear of!

Rebel 7

(Written)

Deep

~~Q: Does God play dice?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh hiii Mark

Values

~~Q: What does success mean to you?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh hiii Mark

Emotions

~~Q: What is it like to lose your mind?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh hiii Mark

Self

~~Q: Where do you want to be in a decade?~~ Tommy Wizeau?

A: Oh hiii Mark

Reilly F.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: Isn't that something that "Elon" dude has talked about...? Right? What's that dude's name... Elon something... Oh! Musk, that's it. Yeah I remember reading some article thing about Elon Musk wanting to go terraform Mars, like turn the whole thing from red to green and have space colonies and sh*t... Dude, I won't even lie... That sounds really freakin' cool [laughter] I mean... I'm not sayin' we *should*. Buuuut... You gotta admit—that's pretty badass.

Values

Q: Is there an unforgiveable deed?

A: I mean... are we going with the Bible here or...? [Laughter] I mean I know tons of people that claim to forgive and forget but you can like just tell they don't... you know? It's way harder to actually forgive I think. But like... in terms of myself personally... Eeegh... [awkwardly crosses arms] That's a tough one bro. I would love to sit here and say that I've forgiven everybody man. But I guess there's some f*cked up sh*t that's happened you know? [10 second pause and a bit of a sigh] One thing I can't see how anybody can forgive is murder. I don't know anybody like personally related to this but I did have a friend when I was younger whose mom was murdered. I can't even blame the dude... He never forgave that. Still hasn't and he's like 40 years old now...

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: So this is a weird one I guess for a grown ass man to be talking about I guess but I've had my fair share of nerves. Like a lot of people are shocked when I tell them that I was this super shy kid right? [Chuckles] They're like "Nah... not *you* man...?" you know? But yeah... Dude, I sh*t you not... I couldn't even call someone on the phone until I was like 18 years old bro [laughter] See I was an 80s kid and we couldn't just Instagram or text or any of that. I remember my

parents wondering why I never took any calls. They'd be like "Hey Reilly, you've got someone asking for you!" and I'd just be like "Nah, it's ok!" [Laughter] Yeah... [laughter] I would've straight up *killed* for a cell phone back then man.

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: Damn... I gotta ask [laughter] Has anybody actually picked this one to answer yet? Cuz this is kinda intense [Laughter] I saw it and it just jumped out though... I'm feelin' bold [laughter] Hmm... You know, it's not really something I like *actively* think about... But I guess I've always had it in the back of my mind. Like you know how they always say that people usually don't regret things they did but things they *didn't* do? I always knew that I was never going to be laying there in some white bed, wasting away, and thinking "Ah crap... Time's up man. What the hell was I doing?" If anything, I guess I always wanted to go out with a bang... I mean, not like some big accident or something crazy... [chuckles] But I want to always shake things up in this little life here...

Ricky R.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: Ya know... if I uh... If I say "bad" that kinda makes me the bad guy, right? And if I say "good" that prob'ly means I'm just blowin' smoke [Laughter] I say... I say people are *both*. That way I ain't guilty of either way [Laughter]

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: You wanna know cowardly? I had this girl a while back... We'd been datin'... I'd say about four or five months... somethin' like that. She wakes up one day and looks me in the eye and is all "Babe... I slept with your friend. And I'm leaving you" [Shakes head] Come one man...

Look... I ain't that forgivin' of a guy... But I at least wanted to talk to her and stuff, right? Nope. She just closed the door right in my face like that [Chuckles]

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: My mother was crazy... like *real* crazy too. She used to walk up to me and my brothers with a uh... with a knife... and say she was gonna kill herself, that she'd had enough of all of us and our dad. It was jus' a whole differen' level of crazy man... I ain't talked to her in years... As far as I know she still the exact same way...

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: Ya know man... I ain't even sure I know no more. You grow up... You're taught that a man is somethin' tough, somethin' strong and powerful... So that's what you do... You try to be all strong and tough. Usually you can pull it off... But I don't think nobody can be strong forever... That ain't all there is...

Rob C.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: If you could be God for a day, would you?

A: Man... I always wondered what it would be like... no joke. You know, when you a little kid up in Bible school and church you don't really realize what's goin' on. You think there some white dude in the sky with sandals and a big ol' beard helping you out or somethin' right? Nah man... God ain't no human man. You just gotta wonder what the heck it's like... Seein' everything at once and all that crazy sh*t. Reachin' down and re-arrangin' whole countries...

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Ahh... power...? Hah! That's one hell of a word man. Look... it's... it's, uh... it sure as hell ain't easy to be the dude callin' the shots man. You know? Like we all wanna take shots at the big dude up there and make him out to be somethin' all wild, crazy and psychopathic and sh*t right? Nah man... I mean... Yeah sure. Some of these dudes are like that. But I think people gotta step back and think about themselves before they go talkin' about these dudes man...

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: Ohhhhhh man hahaha! Well... I never really thoughta that but it's a good thing to work on I guess man... Might need it some day! [Laughs] Man I would go straight for the throat man... I wish I could thinka somethin' witty right here but I've got nothin' [more laughter].

Self

Q: How have you changed in the last decade?

A: I'll level with ya man... I spent five years in prison. I don't even wanna talk about why I was in there... But I'll tell ya this—It starts out being the worst times of your life, but at a certain point you got a choice to make. Do I let this sh*t end me...? Do I let this sh*t go and eat me alive or do I take a look at myself and see what I've done. That's the hardest thing man... But look... This was a whole decade ago bro. By the time I got outta there man, I had so much changed in me that I was on a whole new path man. It's the best thing I ever did.

Ronda G.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: You know... I've known some real good people who did some real *bad* things... And I've known some real bad people who did some real *good* things... [Laughter] I know people who did thirty years for murder... thirty years... and they came out happier and better than you coulda ever imagined. This whole "bad" and "good" thing... it ain't as easy as it made out to be.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: It's family... *family*, ain't no doubt about it. You can be... you know... the richest man in the world, have a whole bunchy shiny things and pretty girls... but if you ain't got family or they all against you... You got nothin'.

Emotions

Q: What was the scariest moment of your life?

A: Scariest moment of my life is the day my daughter was born. She came out holdin' her breath... not breathin' at all. All them doctors came runnin' in and mess around with her and do all these tests... All that work, and all that hope that goes into havin' a baby, ya know? All of that and then you realize it might all be for nothing... That ain't easy.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: One thing I'll never do is turn my back on my friends or my family. It's just the way I was raised, ya know... You don't gotta be a superhero or... or a saint or somethin'... but if you can't help out your friends and your family, you ain't livin' right. That's something I'll never do.

Sam F.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are you skeptical by nature?

A: It's really hard not to be! There are so many things to be thinking about and so many unsolved problems in this modern world. If you aren't skeptical then I think you haven't thought about things enough.

Values

Q: What does success mean to you?

A: So many people are focused on money, but there's so much more than that. A few hundred years ago, success wasn't as tied to money as it is now. Success was found more in intellectual and creative pursuits than in financial endeavors.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: I'd probably point out all of the inefficiencies and stupidities that we do on a daily basis... I'm sure he wouldn't care though!

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: I will never sell myself out and work in an office. I might not become a bigshot and I probably won't be an entrepreneur or anything, but I will find a way to get the hell out of the "rat race"!

Sarah P.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can people genuinely care about strangers?

A: Yes. Hebrews 13:2 says “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Our world seems to get colder each day, but a little kindness goes a long way.

Values

Q: Is it better to be nice or be right?

A: Definitely better to be nice. Though wisdom is valuable, love is more important when it comes to people. Plus God hates pride. Being humble is a challenge at times, especially when you know you’re right and people can’t see truth!

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or “gut?”

A: Most definitely. There are times I can feel when God is showing me something. If I have a bad feeling about something, I’m usually right. I know discernment is real. It’s a precious gift from God.

Self

Q: Which person has helped you most in life?

A: Besides the Lord, it would be my grandmother. She knew what love was. She WAS love. And everyone loved her. She also had amazing faith. I believe because of her example, and most definitely her prayers for me, I am going in the right direction!! Without her love while I was growing up, I honestly wouldn’t know what maternal love was like. Thank God for her.

Sebastian A.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Can humanity ever achieve a theory of everything?

A: I don't believe so, no. I actually studied a bit of physics and philosophy in college, and it seems that there are just too many systems of thought and theories to ever unify into one thing. Also, people like Richard Feynman (a physicist who worked on the atomic bomb) always mention the fact that a "theory of everything" would prevent us from progressing in knowledge in the future.

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: Leadership is something way more than telling people what to do or how to do it... A big part of leadership, I think, is helping to ignite peoples deepest desires and motivations and then directing those in a mutually beneficial way.

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: I've never been depressed but my ex used to be very depressed. From what I dealt with and helped her deal with, depression means a certain darkness that pulls everything and everyone into it. I know this might seem like a cruel thing to say, but depressed people can be some of the most self-centered people. A lot of times, everything you do wrong will come back to their depression.

Self

Q: How have you changed in the last decade?

A: Well... I used to be a pretty lazy dude. In my 20s I basically traveled around and worked jobs that weren't really jobs, if that makes sense. When I hit 32 I sort of realized how I'd been living

and had a major “oh sh*t!” moment. I’m 34 now and have finally settled into a career that I genuinely like and have stopped roaming around aimlessly.

Sharon S.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Can people genuinely care about strangers?

A: Oof... Yeah this is a tricky one! [Laughter] Me personally, I was raised in, you know, a “good” little Catholic household... Where you’re expected to care about everybody, even if you don’t even care you’re supposed to put on that smiley face and go help out, you know? All I know is that it took me a while to actually start to care. That probably sounds a little cold or cruel... I don’t know... [Laughter] Anyways... I think people *can* care... For sure. It’s just that even if you see people who look like they really care and are all out at the foodbank and stuff. That doesn’t mean they’re actually loving what they’re doing. A lot of folks... I think... A lot of people just like the feeling of being *seen* for helping more than anything else.

Values

Q: What does courage mean to you?

A: Courage... I would say... It’s something so many people talk about and something that’s very valued in this world obviously. I think a lot of people have this idea that courage is being fearless, like not even feeling scared of anything at all... But to me—and what I’ve seen and done in my life personally—courage is really just pushing through that fear and keeping at it even when you least want to continue. I think if we would talk more in those terms about courage that there’d be less of this like “macho” bravado type intimidation attached to it, you know?

Emotions

Q: What is the strongest emotion you’ve felt?

A: Oh man... Strongest... [10-second pause] I think I’d have to go with my wedding day... I’m sorry kids... [Laughter] I should probably say when my daughters were born... [Laughter] I

mean that was very strong too obviously. But a different kind of strong. I think my wedding day was so special because the man I married helped pull me out of a really dark place in my life. I never ever expected to find something like that. It was a really cool thing.

Self

Q: What's one thing you'll never do?

A: Ok this one is easy—*Never...* will I *ever...* Go *hunting*. Yeah... [Laughter] Sounds kinda random but my husband will just beg and plead... Like, "C'mon honey; it's really not that crazy." [Laughter] I'm like... Um *Yeah* it is pretty crazy. I don't want to go slaughter some like 300 pound animal and then take its guts out! I will never get the appeal...

Stephan C.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Oh for sure. If there where no purpose there would be no reasons to live.

Values

Q: What is the most cowardly act?

A: Giving up on you're friends is cowardly. I've had this done to me and its very hard to forgive. Worst then getting into a fight or cheating.

Emotions

Q: What would you tell your boss if they couldn't fire you?

A: That she don't know how to talk to people and need a huge reality check!

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: You have to fight and stick up for yourself. There aint no way around that. No easy way out.

Susy L.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: Absolutely. I have always believed that my life has a purpose. I believe that as long as I can impact one person (hopefully positively) then I have fulfilled my purpose. You learn from everyone you meet and whether I have made a positive or negative impact on somebody I have altered their life in some type of way. We all learn and grow from each other. It's how we become better humans and the best versions of ourselves. Spread love and happiness.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: To me, happiness is most valuable. Happiness is one thing that money cannot buy. You can't really put a value on it. To me, this makes it the most valuable. It's something everyone wants but there is no set way to get it.

Emotions

Q: What haunts you?

A: I don't like to think about it but death is one thing that haunts me more than anything else. The idea of me dying and not doing the things that I wanted to do. Even though when I die it won't really matter since I'll be dead.

Self

Q: What do you dislike the most about yourself?

A: This is hard because there are a lot of things that I dislike about myself. I feel like they fall into the same category. I am too much of a people pleaser. I can be a pushover. I don't always speak my mind. I wish I had more confidence. I hide too much behind my insecurities.

Tai H.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: Bad I'd would say. I used to think most people were good but I'm not so sure. Sometimes people play nice just because they want something. Most people do this honestly.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: Love. Love is always something to help you up and get you where you are going. Doesn't matter who its from.

Emotions

Q: What is it like to lose your mind?

A: Very scary. I hadn't lost my mind but my ex did. She woke up one day and just started staring at nothing. I couldn't get threw to her. I tried.

Self

Q: Which person has helped you the most in life?

A: My mom. 100% There was never a time where she took it easy.

Tasha C.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does this life have a purpose?

A: I think the purpose is what'cha make of it honey... If you don't think there's any purpose, there won't be. If you sit down, have a come to Jesus moment, and get you your purpose... well then there it is.

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Power... power is also what'cha make of it... [Chuckles] *Except...* except if you think ya powerful... you ain't powerful. *But ...* but if you think you're weak, not powerful one bit... then you just might be powerful.

Emotions

Q: Do you trust your intuition or "gut?"

A: Oh you *have* to... you *got* to. Nobody ever made a decent decision by drawin' up all sorts of fancy maps and plans and things. You might land on somethin' that way, sure... But it ain't gonna be what's really best for you.

Self

Q: Which do you like the most about yourself?

A: Let's see then... I like that I ain't never done a thing that went against my own "code"... I ain't never bent or broke my own self for another's morals. That's no easy feat either honey [Laughter]

Thomas H.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: I mean, in theory we obviously shouldn't need to leave this planet. But it's looking like we're headed to the point of no return. I know lots of people are excited about the idea of taking on a whole new planet and transforming it and beautifying it with our own will. I'm still not fully sold but I do think we should keep open to that possibility (I'm an engineer so I'm always practical, ha!).

Values

Q: What does courage mean to you?

A: Courage is doing the difficult when you least want to do it and when you have a million excuses not to. Had I not enlisted in the Air Force as a young, bratty teen I probably would've never understood this!

Emotions

Q: Where does your mind wander when alone?

A: I might as well play off my previous answer... It sounds silly but I often think back to those days as a cadet and smile. Back then I thought it was the worst thing ever. Now I realize it was basically the best thing ever.

Self

Q: What does being a man mean to you?

A: Most men would say something related to strength or toughness. But I tell you... I've seen some pretty poor excuses of men act all strong and tough and even back it up. If you're all toughness and barbarian there's still no guarantee you're a man. A man is someone who can be tough and also honor his word, help his friends and family out consistently and be a man of his community. That's a true man.

Violet D.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Should we leave Earth for Mars?

A: Ugh... I honestly hate when people talk about this idea. I'm a biology and botany major and a total Earth nerd... I think its really simple actually; if we can't take care of Earth then how the heck are we supposed to take care of a planet that doesn't even have any trees or life at all. It makes absolutely zero sense.

Values

Q: What is most valuable?

A: I would have to say empathy is the most valuable thing. It's a really rare thing now, especially when it comes to politics and stuff like that. It's something you really can't have anything nice without though.

Emotions

Q: What does depression mean to you?

A: Depression is something that sort of creeps up on you and hits you before you even realize it. Both my myself and my friends who have been depressed have similar experiences... Usually it's not so much as being really really sad as it is just losing all interest in stuff you used to love. I always know someone is suffering if they just suddenly stop liking something they used to love.

Self

Q: What do you like the most about yourself?

A: I've always been really skinny. When I was little I always felt like I was too skinny, like to where I was always picked on for being a "rail". When I hit puberty I kinda realized that it's a good thing. People went from picking on me to complimenting and wondering how I stayed so skinny.

William D.

(Written)

Deep

Q: Are people fundamentally good or bad?

A: I would say neither... Some are "good", some are "bad" and others are some where in between. Any time, you ask if someone is "fundamentally" anything, you end up in a sticky situation. I don't really believe in fundamental things in that sense. It's not that simple.

Values

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: To lead people you first need to know who you are. I remember I took a couple leadership classes in college and the one thing they always said was “You have to always remember who you are and who the people you’re leading think you are. And those are usually two very different things.” That one really stuck with me.

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: You’ve come to the right person! LOL. When I was younger my anxiety was super bad and it caused me a lot of problems. I remember I couldn’t look anybody in the eye at all. Barely even my own parents. That was the most humiliating feeling of my life. Anxiety can really kill your self esteem.

Self

Q: How have you changed in the last decade?

A: Well, relating to the anxiety thing above, I have changed so much in the last decade. I’ve come out of my “shell” and am now feeling comfortable in many situations that I thought I’d never be in.

Xander R.

(Spoken)

Deep

Q: Does God play dice?

A: Well, uh... It’s always tough to talk spirituality and religion isn’t it...? That infamous “G word” really gets things pretty heated sometimes... and actually for pretty good reason I think too. I’m not sure if you’ve heard of Christopher Hitchens? Yeah... He put out a lot of books, most of which I haven’t gotten around to reading but I did finish his “God is Not Great” a few years ago. I was definitely an agnostic, agnostic/atheist... however you wanna call it, before

then... But this book really did something for me. I'm not even really sure it was from Hitchens himself, but I think it was like some sort of quote from someone else he included in there. I remember it basically saying something like "When I look up at the stars at night, I know quite well... That for all they care, I can go to hell." Yeah... [Chuckles] That one kinda struck me and solidified some things for me that I had been tinkering around with. So... long story short... I *don't* think God plays dice... Because... I don't think "God" *exists*... [Laughter]

Values

Q: What makes someone powerful?

A: Hey... this is a good one... Might as well tie this into the God question. So what do Christians... or uh... or any other religious people always tell you? They always claim that God is all-powerful, that He can do anything and everything he desires in an instant, right? But what does that even mean? You could look at it this way... If God, theoretically, could just start this whole thing over in an instant... then why isn't He...? And what does the fact that He hasn't like... hit the "reboot" button on this thing tell us about His power? Like imagine some King or ruler or something... Imagine that he goes around telling everybody, "Look... I have the power to change things and make everything better! But... I have decided not to exercise that power, because I am too good for that ... *And* I would like you to make *your own* decisions *instead!*" Uh... *what?* [Laughter] If you have the power to make things better but you're not using it... That kinda means you're not as powerful as you thought you were [Chuckles]

Emotions

Q: What does anxiety mean to you?

A: I'd be totally lying to you if I said death doesn't still scare the crap outta me... [Chuckles] Sure... there's some people... some atheists rather... who will tell you that you should feel free and bold after you've found the "truth" so to speak... But death is still this inherently scary thing to us... I mean that's basically why religion exists in the first place, right? Nobody wants to die. Everybody wants to have a safe, cozy place to go after this world and not some black void of total mystery.

Self

Q: What would you regret most on your deathbed?

A: I would just regret not experiencing everything I could. Don't get me wrong... I'm not one of those guys who needs to go crazy and like do cocaine with strippers and all that [Laughter] But I just want to make sure that I don't live as much as I could have and then just fade away forever.

CHAPTER 10

We've Arrived

And there we have it.

We've walked—well... more accurately, *driven!*—through the diverse landscape of human life, emotion and meaning.

And if you need to take a breather—nobody can blame you. The last two-hundred or so pages of this book are basically a distillation of... oh I don't know... *six-hundred million or so years* of human mental evolution and *ten-thousand years* of societal evolution. That's a lot to handle!

But I must confess... I might need a bit of a breather too. For all of my peppiness and optimism—for all of this talk of unity and positivity in the face of what can often seem to be a complete dumpster fire—it's always a supreme challenge to look out at this world we're in and remain confident in humanity.

We're told we live in a safer, happier and more successful age than ever before, but do we really *feel* it?

It often feels like we live in an age of paranoia and confusion.

Politicians (and their ardent supporters) are at each other's throats like never before. Cracks and fissures between our communities and cultures have cropped up that seem to grow ever larger by the *hour*. There's information saturation. Our minds are on overload. Depression rates are on the rise. Drug addictions have become an epidemic. Romantic relationships are trickier than ever. And our sense of community and togetherness has fallen by the wayside.

Make no mistake about it—we are a species aching for *meaning*.

And we've all got one question... *How the heck do we find it?*

For some, the answer to this question is easy, maybe *too* easy. “Just place all your trust in [X, Y, Z] and you'll be ok!” Or there's always the “Meaning is what you make of it. We all have our own unique sources of meaning,” approach.

Now... Neither of these approaches is even “wrong.”

But—for many of us—this doesn’t quite cut it. We know that individual people *can* find meaning; we see people find meaning every day. But how do we let all of these different meanings, all of these seemingly *separate* meanings and truths, how do we let them fuse together into something we can *all* get behind?

The *answer*...

...is in the *question*.

The answer is in the way we think of our quest—we’re *searching* for meaning, *seeking* a better tomorrow or a brighter mood. We eagerly wait to know: *what shall we seek?* But, in this light, the search shall never end. There will always be farther to walk; there will always be a longer road to travel. To those who seek a better world, “better” will never be good enough.

We’re told to strive. We’re pushed—by ourselves and others—to achieve. We await that grand hour when we’re called to the stage, that hour in which we “make it.” We drive onwards until we see change.

We *drive* onwards...

Indeed, we’re all driving, whether we like it or not. This planet of ours shuttles us through space, whatever we happen to be doing upon her blue and green speckled face. She drives us dutifully, and she asks of us no wage.

It matters not *that* we’re driving. There can be no stopping that as long as we shall exist. The only thing left to matter... is *whom* we’re driving with.

But in this age of seeking, this era of searching, we have so many things we *need*. If only this world were a *better* place... If only people were *kinder* and *nicer*... If only we had a *better* human race... These seekings are natural. The scars we bear are deep.

We are as a puzzle with scattered and tattered pieces. We wait for *some one* or *some thing* to reach down, put us together, and set things right. Sure, these people—these fellow pieces of the puzzle—may be driving along with us. But how on earth can we all *relate*?

Perhaps we've come to forget... that each one of us is a *moving* piece.

In this age of paranoia, anxiety and despair, it often seems like there are oh so many things we haven't got. It often seems that our fellow passengers on this wild ride are out to get us. It often seems that nowhere is safe.

But if this world is truly a puzzle... There can be no truly unconnectable place. We are all the pieces, and there is not a single unaccounted for face. In this great picture, there is not a single soul with whom we cannot relate.

There is a piece of the supermarket clerk in the lawyer. There is a piece of the depressed person in the joyful. There is a piece of the mother in the father. And there is a piece of the criminal in the clean-slated.

Now all we need...

...is to *put our pieces in place*.