

Intro

What follows are a group of stories, relatively short ones, about growing up or existing in the realm of New York City. I say "realm" for it occasionally appears as if it was/is an entity onto itself (yes, like the phrase in Annie Hall). This opinion has been magnified significantly after having spoken to people from other locales and traveling a bit within other places. There is indeed nothing like it, and when I described growing/existing in New York - detailing the various things that happened to me when I was there - invariably no one would believe it. The situations seemed too normal (deviating from what people expected took place there), or too far fetched, or perhaps (I think) a bit too raw.

The format of the stories is more or less true to the way that I recollected feeling them. As a consequence, some are poetic in nature, some are straightforward descriptions, some are old-folk-tale-like, some are performance-artish, and some are just a bunch of words in succession (not in following each other mind you, but rather in open rebellion).

The order of the stories followed my various stages of New York existence. These tend to be identified with different geographic markings, but also chronological order. The early part of my life (stage 1 - from ages 6 to 12) was more or less centered around central park. The innocence and exploration of the age was well complemented by the circus contained within the 4 foot high black walls of the park itself. Between 13 and 20, life was more centered around the lower east side. I know it is broken up into various sub-sections: SOHO, Tribeca, the Village, and so forth - but I kind of adopted the whole thing. This time period (stage 2) coincided with the burgeoning sexuality of teenage life and the equally compelling desire to explore the city. After going away to work in Houston, TX and later Boulder, CO, I no longer identified within any one part of New York. Rather, during this time (stage 3), I tended to adopt the whole thing - basically all of Manhattan Island. Each section of the book begins with my descriptions of these different geographic locales.

Now, it should be understood that I am a Manhattanite and as such New York for me has generally revolved around the core of the apple. I do not consider the Bronx, Staten Island, Queens, nor certain parts of Brooklyn to be New York City. This is somewhat of an orthodox position (as far as New Yorkers go), but I figure I should be as clear with my biases as possible, upfront-like.

Stage I - Central park

CP - A splendiforous explosion of green grass,

black and brown rocks,

castles,

prostitutes, flowers (some are one and the same),

crannies, nooks, dope fiends, half naked bee-bopping folks with
wheels, music to musak, shakespeare to winos (sometimes shakespeare
by winos), views of ebullient 5th avenue penthouses to pissy green filled
aquatic prisms,

gang-bangers and gentlemen (sometimes at the same time),

taking up space and sometimes making some,

enter here,

exit there,

never the same,

always the same,

kids,

dicks,

swings,

swingers,

hot dogs,

statues (rocks as well as humans),

merry-go-rounds,

merry-go-downs,

mary go run your ass home cause brenda's gonna kick it,

tavern on the green,

carol on the white (boy that is),

pavoroti, miles, woody, madonna, shaquanda, mathew -

they all in there,

wolman skating rink, horse shit, dog shit, bird shit, his shit -

they all in there.

Where are those damn monkey bars?

Winding hills, peaked rooftops,

oh yes and fine, sturdy wooden benches randomly distributed throughout the whole thing.

st. nicholas parade

It always seemed to start the same way. Over the phone, or over dinner while at the house, I would hear my grandfather belt out, “let’s get the boy some clothes long ride up to his home at the Bronx at some ungodly hour, only to take an equally long train ride back downtown – to Barneys for a little underwear, a little shirt, a little suit (2 if he hit the numbers), and a little humiliation (normally mine).

We would get in the store (the one downtown on about 19th street or something), walk to the men’s department and walk straight up to the same guy. Now year after year we went through the same ritual, the same guy was there, and I swear he wore the same suit [sneaking into the store years later without my grandfather I saw the same guy, the same suit, but a new head of hair].

Now, I could only complain so much here: the clothes were free, food was forthcoming (again free), we were “bonding,” and hell what did I know about life to complain about anyway between my grandfather and the tailor they had gone through world wars, the holocaust, jim crow, the depression, marriage, divorce, children and grandchildren. Sheeesh, I was lucky to just be standing there.

The clothes selection was a ritual all in itself.

We would start with the shirts. He would walk around, with me following, pick up some shirts, push them up against my chest – either to see what the color looked like or to display some form of masked affection, and then put them under his arm if they passed inspection. Colors – white, what are you stupid? What would you want other colors for? What do ‘ya want blue, well maybe when you’re buying but not today. Now, none of this would be spoken allowed, but it was going on, you could tell. The guy could play poker for days, but on what was going on in the noggin otherwise, clear as glass.

Socks – a bit more simplistic: black, just black, no stripes, no colors, no swiggly lines in the pattern, not too short – like around the knee-caps, no these had to straddle the testicles.

Underwear – white, fruit of the loom – no boxers, no colors, no calvin, no nonsense. The man was on a mission.

The suit – well this was the coup d’ Feinberg – the tailor. He would pull suits out – blue suit stripes - no, gray suit stripes no, black suit plain, sleeve pulling - no, blue suit plain, put up under my face - no, grey suit plain - no, double breasted black no, tweed suit, check hem - no, black suit, double breasted – try it on. Phew.

With that I go into the little dressing room, trying not to step on the bottom of the pants, while at the same time trying not to let the pants touch the floor, while at the same time trying to hurry up. I get out, he spins me around, mr. Feinberg spins me around, the tailor downstairs spins me around, the manager spins me around – and before you know it the suit is pinned, marked up and ready to send off to be completed. So was I but the day was just getting started.

Off we go, back onto the train, uptown, to harlem – sugarhill. We get off and I am whisked into the barber. Now, I don't know if you have been to these old, black barbers in harlem, but boy I tell you the only thing that they have more of than the wrinkles on their face is the number of pictures on the wall of people that came in over the last 70 years or the back log of jet and ebony magazines thrown in the corner. In fact, if all of the archives of trite, meaningless, and empty black culture are burnt down (god forbid), all of the material could be replaced quickly by walking up and down this block.

The barber looks at my grandfather. Hell, I don't know what for, it's the same thing every year. mess. I can't believe..." same o, same o. The barbers hand jiggles profusely as he brings the razor closer to my head. I learned not to complain or whince, cause that just seemed to insult the old guy, who would then proceed to nick my head "by mistake." Once he got into his groove, however, as happened after a few minutes, everything was fine and he was zipping around like he's been doing this his whole life which of course he has.

After the buzz, a cigar, some bs, and some large talk, we go back outside to hit the avenue. John Travolta might have had his strut in Saturday Night Live or Fever, but to see the old black men walk around harlem with their hats, canes, hankchiefs, and polished shoes - was something that you did not soon forget. Massa might have been kickin their ass at work, they might have been duckin bullets trying to walk down the street, they might have been just chased by some cops – but I tell you those harlemites could look GOOOOOOOOOOOOD!

Stop number one – or I should say bar number one – we would walk in, he would say hello to who he knew, lean at the bar, play a number or take a swig, go – you remember my grandson don't you?, to which I would stand up straight while responding to the line of upwardly-mobile-negro-questions: yes sir, seventh grade sir, an engineer perhaps or a lawyer..... sir (oops got a glance, I was a bit slow on that one).... And so it went on.

The ritual got repeated about 5 or 6 times.

On lucky days we would go to my "uncle bens" restaurant on 125th. He was a huuuuuuuuuuugggggggggggggggge man with a big grin and an equally big heart. He would give me a hug, mumble something about my size and then instruct someone on what to bring me to eat. I would sit at a table, while he and my grandfather would sit at another table talking, drinking, smoking and carrying on.

Then it would be over. The plate of food would be empty and taken away, some of my new clothes would be a little wrinkled, I would say goodbye to my grandmother back at the house, and I would return downtown – aching from all the walking, smelling from the smoke and alcohol filled rooms, and truly confused about what the hell had taken place all day long.

Evil and the supermom

I just got it - a little rubber white man, in a white shirt, white boots, and an american flag in the shape of a "v" on his chest. You could bend him back and forth, throw him, and he would just bounce. Unlike the real one, however, this evil knievel didn't break.

The toy was pretty simple:

put evil on his cycle,
put the cycle in the launcher,
wind it up,
stop winding,
watch evil zip around,
crash,
fall off the bike, and
bounce around.

Amazingly simple actually, but unless you had one, you have no idea how many hours of fun this could provide. Really. You could send evil into a wall, off the kitchen table, down the stairs, only to watch evil come back for more. And, of course, after all else has been tried, you could send evil off the huge rock in central park on 103rd street (across the street).

I tried everything in the house and now it was time. I got evil ready - got dressed, and went across the street. I went into the park, made a left, and walked up to the clearing at the top of the hill. I had the whole field. It was mine.

I loaded evil, revved him up, and let him go. He lasted only a few seconds (poor evil), before he hit a bump, flipped off the bike, and was dragged a few feet as he held on for dear rubber life.

I was getting evil back "in the saddle" when, as always, some kid showed up. He was black, about my age, wearing some sneakers, jeans - usual gear. He watched me wind up evil, let him go, and flip around. This time evil lasted a little longer.

The kid asked if he could try it. Sure I said [this attitude changes later in life]. He loaded evil, wound him (much harder and faster than I), and off went evil. And yes, off went the kid after evil with the winding thing in hand.

After about a few feet, he swooped evil up and was off down the hill. By the time I came out of my I-Don't-Know-What's-Happening-I-Don't-Know-What's-Going-On-Oh-He's-Got-My-

Toy-What-Do-I-Do syndrome, He was already half-way down. I did the only thing that I could think off - I screamed for my mother at the top of my lungs. [She had the window open to catch the breeze off the park.]

And with the resounding echo, faster than evil shot out of the winder, more limber than the rubbery white man, and clearly pissed at the kid who was beating me down the hill, there she was.

The word "MOM" had barely come out of my mouth but it still echoed off the building, seconds (no minutes) in duration. I'm sure the word propelled my thief on even faster.

She blew by me on the hill, dressed in clogs, a big flowered shirt (half open), a flowing (billowing as cesca would say-) skirt, and a big 1970 afro. And with this vision (a kid with evil and my mom on his tail), they went off into the distance, up and down hills, stretching for blocks. In that moment, my first superheroine was born - NYC MOM. More real than wonder woman (bullet proof bracelets that covered all parts of her body just in time), more spry than batgirl (who hardly got any airtime), and clearly better dressed than supergirl (blue and red - please), off she went - making the world (or at least our little part of it) safe for her son.

Woolworth detainee

1 Rubber ball. That's all that it was about. Ok, Ok, 2, maybe 3 - alright no more than five rubber balls. That was what's involved. We walked in to woolworths, John Cherebin and myself (self-consciously I'm sure). In to the aisle with all of the toys.

We had been there a million times before reading comics and messing with the etch-a-sketches (leaving nasty things - curse words, penises, breasts and stuff for other kids and their parents to check out). This time we were on a mission: I don't recall talking about the mission, planning the mission, or thinking about the consequences of the mission - I just knew we were on one. Theft: in my case those pinkish rubber hand balls that people smacked upside handball courts with one wall in front, a cooler in the back, and at least 2 girls on the side. I don't remember what john was after. Now, I didn't play handball, but - well that's another story, I'm on a mission.

We stand in the aisle, look back and forth - nothing. Clear. We giggled and stuffed our goods (or booty - john liked pirate flicks) into our shirts. With that, we headed for the door - past aisle 2, aisle 1, s l o w l y p a s t t h e c a s h r e g i s t e r, opened the front door, walked out, and closed the door. Whew.

The projects loomed in the distance - 1 ½ blocks away. Now, I didn't live in the projects. I lived about 4 or 5 more blocks away. But I knew those projects on the corner about as well as the roaches, and once there...

"Hold it!" - the voice was firm and he sure seemed like he knew something was up.

So did we - we were off down the block as fast as we could go. This is exactly when a plan would have come in handy, an escape route, or in my friend john's case - a diet and some exercise. Little fat butt was about to get caught after only about 8 or 11 steps.

Nobody was catching me. After starting to run, I was already way ahead of john, but I couldn't just leave my friend (this was my cue that I would never be a good thief). I stopped, ran back and tried to pull john along.

Now I suppose if we had the kind of math in school that taught you about pulling fat kids with rubber balls in your shirt, while being chased by an angry white man, with a plaid tie, staples in his pants (I find our later), and - as we would know shortly - bad breath, I wouldn't have tried it at all. But alas, public school did not prepare me...

We got caught about 20 feet from the front door. The chase seemed to last much longer than 2 minutes, but it wasn't. The man shook our stuff out of our shirts, letting them fall on the ground (I picked one up later on the way home), and he dragged us back to the store like Amos and Andy or Abbott and Costello or the little mouse with the cat - whatever.

Peeing on myself should have been an option. If not that, screaming or tears, but nothing came - I was in shock: post-traumatic theft syndrome. The man walked (no paraded us) through the store, to the back, opened up a door and put us in the basement. He told us that he was calling the police and that we should just sit there. It was about 3:15 and as the door closed we realized it was completely dark (and it was really, really quiet).

Now, I don't recall the transition point, but after a while we just got kind of sad. We talked about going to jail, missing relatives and TV shows, running faster (well I mentioned it, John was quiet on this point), missing school, and being on punishment.

Hours later, at about 8:30, the man came back downstairs. We didn't ask about the police, but both of us kind of looked over the man's shoulder to see the cops - none. He told us to promise never again to come into the store, to get out, and that he called our parents. The rest went blank. I didn't recall giving him my number, but I did and so did John. My mom. Damn. We agreed to his deal and left.

This time when we left, there was no excitement, no thrill, no energy in our step. It was time for the long march, the goosestep to the beat down, the trek to the flagellation, the time to pay the piper, the time to go home. Well halfway home, for standing in the middle of the street was my mother - hands on the hip, feet a tappin', and belt a missin' from the loops. Man - my butt hurt already.

John just kind of stopped and looked at me - the I-know-brother kind of look. Later, he said that he couldn't go home, because if my mom (the calm, mellow one) was in the street waiting with the belt; his mom would be in the house, ready to lock all the doors, with a machete. He preferred to stay in the park and wait it out. [Richard Severin - an old classmate - told me upon meeting 15 years later, he thinks John is still there. When I laughed, he just kind of looked at me seriously and said, "did you ever meet his mom?" With that comment and a vivid memory of a hard west Indian woman, I knew it had to be true. John had become "PARK-Man" - a resident of the green pastures and dejected jet set.]

fao spells foul

The park was full of snow. I had careened back and forth from about 87th street between the eastside and the westside, until I started to emerge around 50-something street: the fifth avenue side (the side with the money).

Now, this is clearly a simplification. You had some money on the other side of the park (in the 80's, maybe also around the 60's) - but in terms of real prime real estate, the east side of the park wins hands down.

And december coming out of the park, you see it all - furs, minks, limos, bags upon bags upon bags. It's usually like this of course, but in december the volume exceeds all normal amounts. You even see doors opening to those stores that it takes an appointment to get into.

Everybody has got lights, silver tuff, gold stuff, white stuff (snow people), santa's, elves, freezing homeless people, and plenty of kids. The town is a feast for the eyes - especially fao swartz.

Stepping out of the park, every kid knows the direction. Like radar one is led to the big glass

doors, the huge red letters - **f** **a** **o**.

One just becomes transfixed by the window display - trains, planes, automobiles, dolls, candy, swinging things, running things, mechanical things, squishy things, you name it - it's in the window.

I start at the far left and basically squeak my nose the whole way across the glass, working my way to the entrance. Once there, however, I'm in a totally different space.

The guard steps in front of me and asks if I have \$50. Well damn, he might as well just ask for \$5000. "no" I tell him and he proceeds to tell me that I can't go in.

Denied. Dejection is huge but even as disappointing is when I look to the other side of the entranceway and see a whole bunch (busloads) of little white kids (unescorted) walking right by the same guy. No conversation, non embarassment, just entry. Hell, he even opened the door for some of them and smiled.

The guy caught me looking at him and he just looked right through me - so did I, but I couldn't seem to find where the door was and I sure tried cause I just wanted to go in there and cry.

I turned, amidst a slight snowfall, and schlepped my way home. Even the park sucked that day.

yo cuz

A million streets, a million - no 2 million people, 8 million stories - one corner, one day I was walking on 125th. Kinda looking, kinda shoppin', kinda not. I really never went to Harlem, and this was one of my first solos.

Walking by his thin black kid, couple of years older than me, he steps in front of me quickly (catching me off guard).

"Yo, nice watch" he says.

"Thanks" I say (hey I'm from a different era).

"Give it up" he says and with that phrase another kid walks up behind me.

The first kid tells me to keep quiet. The second kid tells me not to turn around. A third kid seemed to be moving us all into the block, away from the corner. The block seemed quieter now and much darker. The faces of the 3 kids were serious, real serious - they all moved in like storm clouds: silent, forboding, with purpose.

The watch! I couldn't give it up. It was my first real gift from my father (well one of the first that I really liked). Can't give up watch, can't give up watch, can't, give, watch, give, from family, from, fam, fam, familiar?

"Randall?" It was my cousin randall (kid number one). He kind of squicked his eyes as if switching levels of existence.

"Chris?" and with that the world went back to normal.

The clouds parted, gestured off by my cousin. The other 3 guys (I hadn't seen the fourth) disengaged as disinterested as if they just found out a pigeon farted 200 feet above them. Yes, the clouds parted and for a few hours I just hung out with my cousin on the ave, talking about how dangerous it was, "reading" potential victims, eating ice cream, and chillin in the midday sun.

Sailin'

There is a certain chaotic brilliance to putting your boat into the boat pond in central park. The rituals vary:

some walk up and dunk;
some walk up, clean it, put it in, and push it along;
some just watch the others and wait for that moment - that right moment - before
they put it in; and
then you have me and my mom who just had no clue what anybody was doing.

We just thought that the pond was nice and that the sun was warm.

We would just walk up and put our boat in the water (we weren't dunkers mind you, but rather a delicate plunk). We would watch the boat mingle with the other boats - as a child does when they first enter the schoolyard for the first time. And then... Off it went to the center (or occasionally off to the side).

The other boats in the circular pond were 4 ft long monstrosities with huge sails; 2 ft long submarines; machine operated or natural; bright vivid colors or drab gray. Ours was a small (1 ft) green bottom boat with 6 inch sails, and as we remembered after the boat was about four feet from the side - it also had no string attached to it. We would have to wait for the boat to decide that it was done for the day.

It wasn't the first time. We had done this before and with that acknowledgement we kind of just looked at each other, laughed, and watched the bizarre dance of multi-class aquatic splendor and social jockeying taking place before and around us.

kick me. lick me. 42 times

Before cable, before the mall, before censors, before morals and the moral majority - back in the day forty deuce (forty second street) was truly the place where the ball dropped. Yeah the ball - John Holmes, Vanessa Del Rio, Jackie Chan and Jet Li.

3 could get you five, five could get you ten: chicks with dicks, dicks with janes, grasshopper with king kong fist, praying mantis with monkey.

Forty deuce was the home of films the likes of which most only dream about. A walk down the street, after 6th ave and before 10th gave you enough spine-tingling-heart-pounding-ball-breaking action that a return trip could not be taken for at least 3 to 8 weeks.

Amber Lynn, Veronica Hart, Long Dong, Ebony, Jade - these jewels far exceeded the value of those held merely a stones throw away in the district.

Kung Fu, Tai Chi, Karate, Jeet Kun Du, BS style #43 - they were all there.

Back to back, side to side, hours of expurgated delights for the eyes - before they closed them down. Damn those seats were sticky though.

fortifide at fordham road

There are places, mystical places, wondrous places in the Bx (the bronx) I tell you. Places that amidst the horror, amidst the blood, carnage, underemployment, amidst the arson victims (big black/red monstrosities too stubborn to fall down) - that stand above it all, as a castle stands above the surrounding fields.

Fordham hill it was called. The towers are a mile (if they were a foot), huge ivory canyons turned upward into the sky - well you know what I mean. Atop them, for those lucky to make it, large tree-like configurations could be seen that move in all directions at once - it was believe this gave those who resided there 555 eyes on the world [all seeing, all knowing were the lords of the hill].

Entry for the unworthy, the unkempt, the unencumbered, the passerby, the meager - not likely. It be told that surrounding the towers lay a metalurgic jungle of wires, cameras, night-stick-wielding-neophytes with large heads (or helmets I cannot remember now, the legend has grown weary with time). Regardless none gained entrance that were not invited.

The view - the lords of the hill sat like hawks (or vultures) above the territory (or prey). They sat goutful, filled with epherphasant memories of a bronx long past - the conquest of sugar hill, the defeat of mighty jim crow.

Yes, it be told that the towers of fordham hill were built on the ashes of diasporadic longings for celestial acquaintance. The architects were bred of landless, rightless beings who toiled for 387 years, 10 months, and 7 hours under rock, under soot, underlash, under - fed (except for those in texas who toiled another 6 months for they found out about the transformation late)

From the ground, they emerged - slowly, night-of-the-living-dead-like, zombie-like they dispersed to toronto, to paris, to timbuktu (only to find a holiday inn), and yes they (some) went to the bx, fordham, hill.

It be told, not one did speak. Nay, not one of the hundreds, thousands that came to this barren rock - barren not like empty, but like south africa or north america when europeans found them. Similar to these encounters, the zombie cared nothing for existing residents - they had much to do.

Amidst the silence did they fall back upon the same ground that they were freed from. Amidst the silence did they dig there hands in.

Amidst the silence did they toil (again) and handful, by handful, they began to form what would become Fordham Hill.

It be told the task took 333 days - on 334 it stood shining, glimmering, above and to the surrounding plains.

It be told that lately the towers have been subject to marauding hordes - by brigands, infidels.

The response - justified hostility.

Enter not where ye have not toiled - they say from the tower.

Enter not where ye have not toiled. Yuppie.

Yes, I listened to spoony gee. What's wrong with that?

Yeah, and the treacherous³, busy b – why you goin all back there?

No, I do not own a gatt. This ain't cali what's with this guy.

Yeah, I saw beat street. Hell no – I would never see that whack breakin movie.

No, I never owned clarks.

Gazelles? Nope – to expensive.

Leather bomber – you watchin’ graffiti rock or sumpn? No, I didn’t have a job and my parents

Yes, I’ve been to nells.

Hey, that’s enough. That’s enough already. No! You name 3 black people on sugarhill, corny-ass records! Where’s my lawyer? Oh, you quiet now..... Bob.

uptown exodus

"I think it would be good for you to live with your father for a while" - and with that my bags were packed and the cab was downstairs. Now, I've been told that there were numerous conversations. I remember them not. I remember the statement, my bags, the cab, and the ride downtown.

My father lived on the lower east side - a world away: no central park, no east river drive, no harlem. It was the same as saying yuppies, condos, and freaks to an upper-west side kid. I heard the phrases by people in the park and some adults that came over to the house.

Simply: I was Banished, as in to ban, or be banned, or to be shed, or ished. The upper west side gave me a stiff kick in the butt and sent me away.

The ride was slow, as it was extracting all of my upper-west sentiments. We appeared to go by everything that I knew: statues, stores, people, you name it. With each pass I felt another layer go away and with it the glances became even more pronounced. They all glanced at me as if I was an outsider - a traitor, an untouchable, an other. I had not felt this before, and, no, I did not like it.

The ride was especially unfriendly. Not the permanently dented seats, or the non-speaking driver, nor the stench within the back as well as front seat. No, the cab just kind of slithered through the city as if it were trying to sneak cargo through a dangerous area and conceal its movement. As if were the contents to be revealed problems would arise.

People have gone there whole lives without going beyond 59th street - no worse for the wear they would suggest. Until that time I was basically one of them. I had not ventured, except when being pulled from my domain by some event that required my presence.

With my departure, tears did not streak down my face. I could not have managed a one. No, tears would suggest that I had fluids in my body and as we exited the park down third avenue, it was clear I had none left.

brother with another planet

My mother was dancing in some Broadway musical up the street and I had nothing to do for a couple of hours. The musical was fine for a while, until the day I caught myself looking at the show, knowing the dance steps, mouthing the words and catching when someone missed a cue – I had to get out.

All I had before me was Broadway and 3 blocks from 42nd street. Most times I didn't bother with the freak show, however, I just went up one ave and a block over.

At this location was a black man with a glass eye, the good one on the door, and a comic book store. I cannot remember if I took advantage of him cause I knew he liked my mom or if he was just kind of lonely, but he let me go in, read all that I wanted, and let me have 1 comic of my choice each time I went in.

To say that my world got turned around at this point would be an understatement – this man – whose name I could never remember and whose store was bricked closed years later – introduced me to galaxy, upon galaxy, upon galaxy.

I began with the Fantastic Four – Stretch, the Invisible Girl/Woman, the Human Torch, and Ben Grimm. I then moved on to the Inhumans – Black Bolt was too cool – when he spoke things crumbled. Then the X-Men. This was before all the hype, and when they had really corny uniforms. Then the Silver Surfer – a slave with superpowers, whose master ate planets found by the slave, who kept complaining, please! Then Luke Cage, Negro for Hire – it was really hero for hire, but he was like Clubber Lang with a full afro and a whole bunch of black folk who were either pimps, prostitutes, drug pushers/addicts, or the district attorney. I then got turned onto Kamandi, Ajax and then the Black Panther. The Black Panther got on my nerves though cause his little aristocratic attitude started to bother me cause it seemed like although he was a hero and even got accepted to the Avengers (an affirmative action hire actually), he never talked to or hung out with any black people in the states. He just wandered around, helped people, and hung out with white superheroes. I guess if my only choice was Luke Cage, I would hang out with Dr. Strange too. The Falcon I thought was whack because all he could do is fly, talk to a bird, and stand behind Captain America.

All stuff kinda changed when I got into thor, galactus, and the watcher. The first was a norse god – forget hanging out in harlem, homeboy was all over the galaxy; the second was a planet eater, and the third was another god-like figure who just watched everything. With these characters, I began to truly get a taste of what power could be. Forget getting enough money for a rock ‘em. Sock ‘em robot – I want a whole planet; forget staying up late – I want my hammer to fly me to other universes.

In the meantime, back on the planet earth, I settled for every number 1 comic in the man’s store. He kept to his word about letting me have what I wanted and I, well I didn’t know much about the value of pop culture, but I wasn’t new to the rodeo. I could not foresee the madness that gets comics to create spinoffs/crossovers, new characters just to get a number 1 in print... no, I just liked to find out about where the characters came from, who they were, what they did to get their powers. Simply, I liked the myth making aspect – the joseph campbell thing.

The symbolism of the situation in the store, passed me by for years though – a one eyed black man - kind to me but really indifferent or hostile to everybody else; a treasure guarded by the one eyed man – his only possession; allowing me to take bits and pieces of it – knowing that I would return; always entertaining the stupidest of questions, regardless of its relevance/answerability or tone.

Thinking back - I wish I had just known to go up to him and give him a hug, thanking him for the world of fantasy, mystery, creativity, and possibility that he happily and willingly delivered to some little kid just looking for a place to hang out for a while between show toons. Alas my eyes were just on the treasure between the pages, I missed the larger one.

it has far far more.

- you got the leather clad ganster-like homozeuxals,
- you got b-boys of ever nationality (ya haven't lived until you've seen a chilean b-boy with 3 english words in the repertoire, a kangol on the head, fat laces, and the whole nine),
- you got art galleries (from the fugly to the divine),
- you got movie theaters on streets that dogs wouldn't pee on,
- you got architectural delights as well as monstrosities,
- you got 4 parking spaces for 15,000 automobiles,
- you got thestrandbookstore, the twin towers, the ferry, wall street, canal, nyu, da new school,
- you got the rivers (not the singing group thank god they're done, but the east and the hudson),
- you got pretense,
- you got incense,
- you got indiana-jones like archival shit,
- you got buster brown shoes,
- you got artists,
- you got commies (find that on the westside),
- you got bluenote, the cnote, the carnote,
- you got lil italy, chinatown, the brooklyn bridge,
- you got lofts, wigs, digs, sushi, vegans, erotic bakeries,

and damn straight to da roots – it got me.

Rising or Descending from 7-10 to 9-1

In junior high school 104 on 20th street and third ave they had this interesting system of classifying students. It was kind of simple really - you were either in an "SP" class (special person) or you weren't. SP or whatever you were, that was it. The SP classes basically started from the number 1 and it stopped about the 5. So, in seventh grade if you were in an SP class, you would be in 7-1 or 7-3.

At the opposite end of the scale, as far away from the SP students, you had the whatever you were categories. At the number 7-13, the highest or lowest number you could achieve, you had the really non-special-whatever-you-were categories.

I was luckily never in this class. I did walk by it one day, on the way to 7-10. The teacher had there head out of the window, smoking a cigarette, while behind them sheer chaos reigned supreme: stuff was being thrown (books as well as students), people were sitting on the floor, and music was playing. What was perhaps most memorable was the fact that no one seemed to speak english in the room and that there seemed to be something like bars on the windows. The no english part made sense, but nobody had bars on anything. I never returned to this part of the school, and remarkably after 3 years in that institution (and I do not use the phrase lightly) I never had to.

7-10 wasn't much better. The students, by and large, sat in their chairs; fewer items were thrown; the teacher (Ms. Krum - a bright, red haired woman that we all called Lucy) only ducked out for smokes when we weren't supposed to be around; and (more or less) everyone spoke something close to english.

The kids in the class were representative of every ethnic group and geographic part of New York. It was actually rumoured that our school was pretty good - at least relative to other buroughs, so kids were trained in from everywhere. Remembering the scene from Annie Hall, where all of the children stand up and say what happened to them - in my class this would have turned into a relatively 7 deaths (out of 22 kids), a long listing of different types of felons, one murderer, 6 pregnancies that turned into repeat offenders, one writer, and me (a professor of political science).

The usual day: we would be sitting in class, Ms. Krum would come in and we would also say "Lucy, I'm Home!" This got very tired after about a month, but we kept on doing it. If she beat us into class, each of us would repeat the same phrase - getting more and more cuban-like by midterms. Following the introductory ritual, we would sit down, go through attendance, she would try to teach us english, and we would go onto other classes.

The other classes weren't much better: some guy would try to teach us math, some woman (Ms. Block - who later retired early because of my 8th grade class) would try to teach us science, Ms. Savapolis would try to teach those non-spanish speakers in the class (about 5) how to speak spanish, and so on. Neither teachers or students really seemed to care. We were all punching in our time like the coyote and the dog in the cartoons. Bla, bla, bla ring. Bla, bla, bla, ring. Lunch. Gym. And it continued.

The only thing that would disrupt the sequence was a substitute teacher. This would always be interesting, and upon coming into class and seeing one of these target - I would go to the farthest seat in the back because I knew what was going to happen. By far the most remembered experience was Ms. Hanson (we immediately called him Kenny Loggins cause that's who he looked like).

Hanson had no clue. He had everyone take out a piece of paper and pencil (except for manny who had his taken from luther). He then said that we should write down our pet peeves. Between his lisp and the phrase, the class just let loose and laughed uncontrollably. At first Hanson kind of joined in and then he got the clue that he was the joke and got serious. This made everyone laugh even harder. I laughed because this guy actually expected the class to know what a pet peeve was - now that was funny.

the roar died down, some girl in the first row asked him what he meant. He looked puzzled and responded, it is something that you don't like. Richie mumbled why didn't you say that in the first place. Cesar just stood up and said "oh you mean like you?!" This led to more laughter. Hanson kind of stood there, awkwardly looked around, mumbled something about wanting to help, started to cry, and left the room. At this point, it was all over. The roar exceeded anything that had come before it. It would only stop to allow one of the students to mimick him, which inevitably increased the roar even further.

I went into the hallway at one point to see what was going on. We all expected the dean or the principal or something, but nobody came. When I looked in the hall, Hanson had his head in his hands and was sobbing loudly. I just kinda looked at him, and went to get the dean. Now the dean's office knew that I really didn't get in trouble, but they did recognize my facial expression and they knew that Ms. Krum wasn't there. With that, the dean just got up from his office, walked with me back to the classroom, chastised the class (with a grin), and collected Mr. Hanson from the floor and took him to his office. We had no substitute that day - no one could hold us.

By the midterm, it was clear that someone had made a mistake. I had 90+ averages on everything and I read far above the rest of the class. Mr. Jenkins a fat, slovenly man at PS 40 across the street had classified me as "Low Keyed" because I didn't speak in class and because I did poorly on some childish assignments that he subjected me to. Nobody questioned the fact that I just went to go live with my father after having been with my mother my whole life, nobody seemed to look at my reading or writing ability from previous schools, or the fact that I spent a great deal of time by myself and wasn't used to the public school - detention camp - environment. Nope, I was just low keyed and stuck in 7-10 to rot and fester. Thanks Jenkins.

Well, I was sent into 7-6 (not quite SP but clearly more important than I was) with Ms. Whitehorn, a gorgeous, thin woman, with short hair, infinite patience, and a caring smile. My grades went up immediately. The class was different. They had homework that people seemed to care about, they had nicer books, they had orderly classes, they had teachers who did not seem afraid or disinterested in the students. And with this I was sent to 8-5 (the margin of the SP).

8-5 was governed weakly by Mr. Meilek, a heavy-set, happy-go-lucky, non-mathematical oriented individual. I call him non-mathematical because despite the fact that he was the math teacher he didn't seem to mind that some of us (me included) didn't get stuff. He would kind of be content with giving us bad grades and pushing us along. The other people were not like this at all. Indeed, the other people were some of the finest teachers I have ever come across.

Most notably was Mr. White, the science teacher. He made everything sound absolutely fascinating and was extremely interested with teaching. This along with this youthful appearance, and flowing white hair, seemed to make him extremely appealing to all of the girls in our class. He didn't seem to mind this too much. The other teacher of note was Mr. Petrozelis who taught history. The first day of class he said, "Hello, George Washington had wooden teeth and slaves." We all just kind of sat there. He then repeated his comment and proceeded to detail the fact that history is not something that should be looked at without critical thinking, nothing is sacred, dig, dig, dig, and reveal the truth. After this, I was probably never the same.

Performing poorly and then rebounding extremely well, by ninth grade I finally hit the big time 9-1. I was it, with the best of the best, the special of the special. The teachers were not managing students, they were whipping us into shape; the students were not just passing time, they were preparing for careers; the parents were not distant figures, they were constantly seen around the school bothering the hell out of everybody.

[What of the others, however, 9-2 through 9-13? I could not even imagine what 9-13 was like. I never seemed to see these people any more. My life was filled with the next days assignment, the book to read, the punishment I was subjected to at home, the future. We didn't even appear to exist on the same plane - the doors we used must have been different for I never saw them; the classrooms were clearly different because the one's I saw now seemed pristine and

clean - brimming with the promises of empowerment/ success through education. It was a separate place, a separate beginning, a separate ending.]

washington square park

two hand touch football players arguing, leaves on the ground - marijuana, rap musak, cancerous coughing, dog walkers, threesomes, onesomes, musclebound roller bladers, dreadlock lovers taking a causal stroll, book readers, break dancers (or some shit that looks like it), jugglers, birthday gurls, comedians, physicists, bochi ballers, tamborines, sex-laden creatures of conneticut, pakistanis, mexicans, harlemites, termites, monotonous drones, yelps, children keeping balloons on the ground, victims keeping oldtimers in the park, cannibus carnivors, betty boops, daisy dukes, feet, shoulders, chinese food, retirees, why can't the wind blow the ganja this way.

especially if one was conveniently and purposely left open by myself. As yes, the pleasure of a good sneak.

Of course, things didn't always go that well. Once I broke my father's neon light that spelled out his name. I had no excuse for that one. Then there was the time that Fran had pulled out her shotgun for from her terrace I looked like I was a criminal. Hell from our terrace I looked like a criminal and that sure would have been one stupid way to die. Then there was the time that one of the trees almost fell over the terrace and I had to catch it, hold it, and slowly bring it back onto the terrace. This was compounded by the fact that I was wearing all white, which I wasn't supposed to do on the weekends because it was my "special outfit," and I got in the door the same time as my parents. I had to run into my room get changed and come back out in a matter of minutes, but luckily I was fast.

And please don't let Bob be alone, cause he would want to talk, or play chess, or give me some book to read. I wasn't ungrateful and indeed I learned a great many things from both Bob and Carol, but what they never seemed to understand was that I had to get into my house as soon as possible before it was discovered that I had lost another set of keys. And if Bob and Carol weren't home – forget it. Fran and Ellen would only take so much of my coming through the house, pet the dog, go out on the terrace, and do my highwire act. You could only go so far with the neighbor stuff. After a while...it just gets tired.

Once I had an absolutely horrible time. I did the usual through Bob and Carol's apartment only to find that my windows were locked. My father was in his bedroom, and the middle room (the living room) was empty. He walks through and in the darkness I step back a little (to prepare myself to go back to my terrace) – not too far cause I am already on the edge. This wasn't as scary as you might think and I wasn't that brave because the way the building was constructed, unless I jumped away from the building I would only fall about 3 floors.

He walked back again and like Indiana Jones trying to time an entry I first found an open window and then prepared myself to make a break for it. At a close of the bathroom door I made my play – the window slid open, I came through (ok so far), I closed it, tipped over the rug, opened my door, and closed it just as the toilet flushed. I slid off my sneakers, pulled off my shirt and just as I turned to my bed, I was stunned to find that I was given a brand new one. The bed was a loft, which had stairs on the side and a little gate leading to the bed at the top. Halfway up the latter and 4 minutes from figuring out how the heck the gate opened, the door swung open.

There I was half naked, standing on the latter, looking like a deer on the crosshairs. Hell, I didn't even try to say anything. I just walked back down the latter, and prepared myself for a lil spanking. Wrongly, I thought that by clearly identifying the fact that I willingly understood that I would be subjected to some form of oppressive injustice, that out of a Gandhian revelation – he would give me a stay and send me to bed.

nope.

anarcho-methodist halflife day

Right before I was sent away (what I called “limousined” as opposed to “bussed”) to preparatory school, I was racking up some major absences from the public high school I was in. My absent rate was something near 70%, but nobody seemed to mind because I had a 96.5 average. Given that the school really didn’t have homework assignments, give the students books, or bother to engage the students this was pretty easy to do. I would just find out when an exam would be given, take it, get an A, and go home. I was a soap junky – ryan’s hope, all my chitlin, one life to squander, general hospitable, and the one that came after that. Yes, five straight hours – I couldn’t stop.

The routine –

- 1) go to the basement and wait for the parents to leave; or
- 2) go to school for half a day and return home in time for the theme song.

The apartment was all mine when I finally got in: beverages, pop tarts, chips, a brew, pixie sticks, blow pops, bit o honey – the store was open. After procuring the necessities, I pull up a chair and/or pillow and prepare for the onslaught of mushy, non-contemplative, fluff that has made this country a great place to live.

Ryan’s hope – well of course a story about a bunch of irish families falling in love and fighting. There was never any ethnic conflict however. The irish never went at the italians, and there were no blacks on the show (like all the rest of them at the time). The irish on the show did seem to go at it with the wasps however. It was interesting though how they never said it.

All my chitlin had it all: thad, erica, morgan – well that wasn’t her name, but she looked like one, two black people (the woman with the round face and the brother who – of course – kept getting into trouble until he finally became a cop), and a bunch of other people.

One life to blow – well sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of vicky and dorian, they hated each other, and fought all the time, and between the fights they showed other folks, the skipper was a fat old dude name ace – oops wrong show.

General Hospital – hey, this was the time of luke and lara, the cassidines, the real cryptic-doctor guy whose wife (monica) always seemed to be bossing him around, they said demi moore was on the show – but I don't remember her, blackie the troubled white kid who ends up on some sitcom, Mcgiver – well I think his name was jeff at the time but he becomes Mcgiver later, and lukes sister – the very hot red head who 15 years later gets kinda heavy, oh and the real real real old nurse who wore far too much make up, and

Ooops key at the door, rents are coming. I gather my goodies and head to the room.

Now, this was the tricky part and it happened every now and then. Sometimes I run, sometimes I tell whoever it is that was a holiday. The latch-key kids revenge or benefit, what do they know: they come home in the afternoon, between meeting number 6 and 7, they don't have time to really inquire about what I'm doing. All they know is that I'm getting good grades sucker.

Oh, its George Washington's Burfday, or Martin Luther King's Burfday, or Ground Hogs Day yeah of course it's a national holiday, or mayor la guardia day he was important to new yorkers, or Balthus memorial day, or Saddy Hawkins day, or ralph ellison day in remembrance of his great literary gifts to all of us – big :) . They bought them all. I guess in an attempt to see how far I could go I even once came up with anarcho-methodist halflife day, and with this one I almost got busted.

My father came back out of the room, and said “what did you say it was?” I repeated it anarcho-methodist halflife day and then brilliantly added “or something like that.” That was all he needed. He looked at his watch (massa callin), went into the room, changed, came back out, barked something about doing my homework, and left.

All I could think was – Suit. I don't have homework. I go to a public high school in the middle of hell, where everybody is either ducking or preparing to duck, teachers run around as if they are trying to throw up random patterns of travel so as not to be picked off by the thousands of delinquents that have been locked in the building with.

Brook!!! – that was her name, not Morgan. Where's the remote.

Taxi-hoe

Cab ride.

2 am.

Jusst hugged one of my best friends, steve and got in.

Driving downtown.

*FAS*t – really fast.

: Eyes of driver meet mine : Infrequently.

Close to home he says, “you looked closed to him.”

I ignore.

He continues, “you know we could go somewhere.”

I’m really tired and don’t really hear him.

He stops the meter and continues, “you don’t have to pay, d’you wanna go somewhere?”

I’m really tired but I’m not deaf and I get my new york on.

“What the fuK is your problim? You... are BE-ing paid to drive me to my destination. So... Just shut the fuK up and do it.” I lean forward to read the name

Son-jun... whatever the hell your name is.... R450Q4.
Just get me home.”

He shuts up and continues to drive.

I don't tip him. [Hey, like I said..... I was really tired.]

just a bad call

Kadeem's mom had tickets to the rick james concert. Not the fat, corny guy now looking all like elvis and stuff. No, the fire and desire, superfreak guy – looking like elvis and stuff. He had that song with sheena easton, sheila e... whoever the square biz woman was and besides that he had the jams.

I showed up at his house and we were told that the bus left from a hotel on madison and sumpn street in about an hour. We both thought it was like a shuttle or something, but when we showed up it was clear that this shuttle was a bit more special than your average, everyday greyhound – this shuttle was rick james' bus. His name was on the side, there were tv's in the front, bunk beds in the middle, a huge tv and in the back, and a bassy sound system kicking through the whole thing. We were in.

The people on the bus were groupies, musicians, druggies, managers, and sexpots – they wore buttons, we didn't have to guess. We just grabbed a corner of the bed in the back, got a brew, and held on for dear life – it was going to be a rough ride. The bus pulled out, superfreak was playing, and the party began.

Once at the concert in joisey, we were guided back stage to fruit, beverages, a side-stage view, t-shirts, comfortable chairs and privacy. There would be no pushing to get a view here. Nor would there be a fight to get to the bathroom. Hell, with this crowd you could probably get someone to go in there with you, free willy, and wipe him afterwards – it was just that kinda party.

nope, that was downstairs in the coke room and I would never,ever,ever,try any of it. Nope – champagne, chips, music, a view, lights (girls are attractive – check), dip, pate, and denim (the girl, not the pants).

But then I done did it. Kadeem told me not to. Denim held my hand during, but.... I called home to check in. after 2 seconds, my father told me to come home. I believe at that moment all internal organs fell downwards. The room pulsated as the phone stayed pinned to my ear. Denim’s teeth pulled on my neck. All I could think about was why? Why did he tell me to come home? Why did I call?

Kadeem and Matti (the other girl) were chilling with rick, 2 models, and some suits. I got introduced and kadeem just knew – “he wants you home huh?” I just nodded.

Damn, what do I do? Denim wanted to dance.

“Yo man, forget it. Stuff is just getting started here” Kadeem added correctly. I just nodded, while going to the dance floor with denim.

Unfortunately for me she could really dance too. You know those first few seconds when you’re wondering if the person that you just walked out to the dance floor with can move or if you have to fake a cramp – not necessary, she had it all. her legs moved in curvaceous sporadic patterns, complemented by her delicate smile and cascading locks. I just nodded – this only made it worse.

After one dance I got denim’s digits, hugged Kadeem (who whispered that I should just stay), and went home.

dat's hour ass.

Like the character in the invisible man, we jus go from a to b. modern day footdragging

with easy access to facilities, to beverages, and other conveniences. And what does this do for multicultural relations? There we are/is walking in from the raging inferno, toward some silk panty hose wearing, demure, manicured person, with a delicate suit, suede shoes, with little cushions underneath the toes, only to be paraded through some area – seen by a whole bunch of other folks. Colorless, of course (bizarre phrase).

They are comfortable, relaxed, clothed. We, on the other hand, are still sweating profusely, agitated, and partially naked – are we in a situation here where they will see us as equals? Frequently, we are the only people of color in the whole building – except for security (to potentially remove us) and the door-holding guy (to make sure we either can't get in or to make sure we go to the right door). Can we all get along when one of us is degraded, tired, stinky and riding around town deliverin' lil parsels?

Will poor clarence find happiness outside of the bottle? Will juan be able to save enough money to keep his village alive? Will khaleem be allowed to pray several times a day – frequently in companies lobbies or parking lots? Will karen's skin clear up so that she can become a receptionist and get off the streets?

Tune in next summer for the answers to these and more exciting dramas... I'm going back to college to get the hell out of this...

kadeem's house

Everyone has at least one friend's house like my friend Kadeem (if not well...). Kadeem lived in an apartment building a little smaller, "homier" than mine. It had a rotating number of aspiring models going in and out, it was a little closer to the park, a little bit more furniture, a little bit less parental supervision, a few more games, and yes a lot more fun. I would just go over to the house – as much to see him as get away for a while from the real world in my own.

I would run up to the door, get buzzed in, go up the elevator, and prepare myself. Now, I have always been about medium height, stocky build for my age (at this time early to mid teens), but opening the door I could be standing either to eye to eye with someone, eye to breast, or eye to navel – you never knew.

At one visit, the door opened and I was ready for about anything (truly been there, truly seen it). This time, however, it was different for the being in the doorway was about 6'6, jet black skin, jet black clothes (making me believe for a second that they were naked), nipples protruding out of holes in her shirt, nose ring, bangles from wrist to elbow, and extremely high heel shoes. Her voice was quite bassy as she let out a booming hello! I just swallowed, squeaked something about seeing Kadeem, she stepped aside, I squeezed by her leather-clad thighs – looking at her face the whole time. Mid-way past her she smiles, lighting up the hallway and with that all her severity was dismissed and I continued around the corner.

In the living room, more of the same – literally, 6 more sames: each as tall, each as black, each as friendly (a video shoot I'm later told). Kadeem sat on the couch, between two of them

talking away, introducing me and continuing with his conversation. I sat down, fascinated, scared somewhat, but clearly pleased to have a place like this to go to.

steve

By far the toughest human being I ever saw in real life was steve. He wasn't tall, built, angry, or especially prone to violence. No, in his case (and maybe even in his defense although he probably wouldn't need it) he was just gifted.

Once we were in a pizza parlor and we had ordered, paid and awaited our food. Steve found that he had been short-changed. He walked up to the counter and confronted the cashier. The person denied having done it and suggested that steve was mistaken. Steve screamed: SLICE! SMALL COKE! HOW MUCH?!! The cashier gave the amount – somewhat surprised. Steve screamed – CHANGE?!! HOW MUCH?!! The cashier gave an amount. Steve opened his hand, reached over the counter and grab the guys collar and told him to count. He then preceded to jump over the counter, punch the cashier in the chest (3-4 times, hard), opened the cash register, took out the quarter he was owed, jumped back over the counter, and left. Me and Robbie just stood there.

Another time, steve was playing basketball and some kid just kept calling foul. Now I'm not sure how it is done in your town, but in new york, on the lower east side, or brooklyn – you don't call fouls. The kid did it again and then it started – it was the usual at first, both people screaming at each other, pointing, carrying on. Steve stops in mid-sentence, walks off the court, grabs a small, 5 foot bench, comes back, and hits the kid in the head. The kid falls, steve hits him with the bench about 4 times, screams FOUL, asks those people who have the next game to remove the baby from queens or middle america so that the rest of us could resume play.

And, the last thing I remember, establishing steve as an urban legend, 2 guys bust into his apartment – retribution or theft (nobody knows). They did nothing for steve killed both of them:

1 with a bat (steve's nigga-be-good-stick he called it) and 1 with the gun that the guys brought with them. Steve did not escape entirely however: upon discovering steve at home, he was shot two times, stabbed once, and had his jaw broken. Since he did not have a phone (he was against modern technology of all forms) and as he later described he did not like his neighbors, he dragged himself 5 blocks to Bellevue hospital to get treatment.

cosmos diner

The only time that cosmos was closed in my 32 years of existence, and about 20 years of new york consciousness, is the day that the owner had a heart-attack, a fire next door restricted access to the block, and a large part of the neighborhood was in the midst of a blackout. [I still think I saw one of the cooks in the kitchen] Other than that, cosmos diner was (as the sign said) open 24 hours (in a row to preclude any steven wright jokes).

The drill: we would play in the park til nine, get dressed (jeans and shirts), go to a club at about 12:30-1:00, stay til 3 or 4, go to the garage til 6:00, and then go to cosmos before collapsing.

Now despite the size of the menu and the seemingly wide variety of items, I never recall anybody ordering anything that was not comprised of beef, fries, a milkshake or water. I once remember somebody in the restaurant ordering something at about 5:15 that was not one of these items. The next thing you heard was a lot of clanging, cursing in greek (we asked), and all of the waiters going into the kitchen (there were about 8 of them – we didn't ask). After 21 minutes the person gave up, ordered a burger, and was served in about 7 minutes – his rebellion against the system was short-lived.

We all joked around that the chef probably didn't know what the item was and had to consult with everybody to see if they knew. None of them did and knowing that there were no other places for the person to go, sooner or later they would come around – in the wee hours you can't be picky and everybody is more than a little testy.

seward park: high school. hellhole

After junior high school I had something of an attitude problem. I knew I was doing well and also knew that I was going away to a private high school - somewhere. To control me/punish me/prepare me - or whatever the explanation was, for half a semester I was sent to seward park high school.

School? This place is toward the lower, lower, lower east side and in it were all of the kids from the 9-13 classes all around the 5 burroughs. This was not a place of learning. Rather, it was a halfway house for homicide, halfwits, and hormones.

At the place, I had something of a mixed record:

Absence rate - 84% (whenever I got caught at home I would invent a new holiday);
fights - 4 (and that was low for a first year student);
fights observed - daily (the other 16% of the time I went to school);
friends - none;
comrades in arms - several;
tips - duck frequently;
books - none (they wouldn't let us take them home);
number of teachers seen beaten up - 13 (several of the fights were even for a while);
number of items seen stolen - 21 ("thou shall lose stuff" was the school motto);
grade point average - 96%
(that should tell you something, other than jenkins was an idiot).

Daily experience:

ride train to school,
walk there from station (passing by junkies and bankers);
stand in front of huge metal doors (built to keep us in I'm sure not to keep us out),
crowd forms,
fight begins,
fight ends,
doors open,
stroll to class,
duck crackheads,
avoid bullies (the school population),
get to class,
watch people in the front of class hand out books,
watch people in the front of class walk back and forth while talking to themselves and
the board of education,
watch people in the front of class handout tomorrow's assignment (which was never
collected the following day),
go between classes and watch the people in the front of class in different clothes, wait
for bell,
hear bell,
leave huge doors,
watch continuation of morning fight,
watch police come, and
go home on train.

[Sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don't]

rear windows

"Go to your room" - I heard this a great deal living with my father. Like Scott and Kelly tell us, however, amidst the oppression I had squeezed out a zone, a space of/for freedom. In the zone oppression turned into exploration, chains into telescopes [does one thank the oppressor for this or condemn them?]

In this case, the planets under observation were the apartments across the street. 20 floors, 6 apartments on my side of the building - 120 mini-dramas. One Hundred Twenty Separate Lives to be invaded, interrogated, feasted upon - think of the possibilities. Well this is a slight exaggeration. Since I was on the 20th floor, I really couldn't see the bottom 8 floors. Thus I was left with about 72 (59 - if we consider those that never had their blinds open). The remaining ones were my little bundles of joy, my windows of opportunity, my shit to behold. I was putting the y, o and u into voyeur.

And boy were the gettin's good. I would spend many evenings with these folks (I was on punishment a great deal it seemed): we ate dinner, watched movies (video as well as cable), read books (and on Sunday newspapers), went to the toilet, took showers (or just came out of them together), did homework, played, and by far the most informative (and frequently watched) was had sex.

I know what you're thinking: - pervert. Well yes and no. Yes because I was looking, and no because I WAS LOOKing. Regardless, I am sure that New York sex was/is not average. I

do not assume nor have I seen while traveling the array of paraphernalia, positions, or atmospheres.

They had the regular missionary position stuff, you had the missionary and the native position, you had the missionary, the native and the conquistadore position; you had leather, egges, oranges, mango, chains, nylon, poodles (walking on top of or being rubbed), big dogs (on floort 11, 12, and 19), kids, surprise guests, unexpected spousal returns (which led to 3somes, fights, and one time to watching tv), masturbation in front of the tv, the cat, a mate, a mirror; you had anal insertion of fingers, penises, hands, arms, dildos, sticks, vacuum hoses, mouses, funnels (followed by liquids), pinnaeple slices, and wire hangers; there were pirate fantasies, school-girl, space adventure, indiana jones, bank robbery, plantation/slave, prison break, nazi war criminal; stuff was going on in the kitchen, in the bathroom, on the terrace, the roof, the livingroom, in the hallway, and in the bedroom; you had blacks with whites, whites with asians, blacks with latinos, and some undefinables; you had anorexics and well built people, little people and basketball types, russ myer babes and twiggy, even an occassional amputee.

After this, most stuff seemed kind of tame. More than that, the words "go to your room" just never quite meant the same thing again.

Sherman's locked down groove

Been to the cage?

The walls are brown. It was told they was white in the 40's.

The glass is brown too - used to be clear in the 50's.

The people are of color - maybe because of the glass.

But the food - the food, the food - is the shit, ain't no joke and they just take cash.

Ribs stick to the bag, not the ribs - they can't even get there.

Macaroni - you be lookin through the glass for yo mama in the kitchen.

[in fact that's probably why the glass is so dark, cause rather than go to heaven or hell sherman probably collects dead black people - the best of the best to stick grub on your plate]

Food is only for takeout - cause they ain't got no seats.

Better have your car runnin' - cause them thieves outside sure got feets.

Know what you want - cause whoever takes orders sure aint got no time.

Better hold your food tight when you leave - cause what you ain't strong
enough to hold, damn straight is sure mine.

When you get it, one cannot help but grab a pinch or a bite - cause dat smell sure be fucking
with you and the pang sure aint light.

By the time you get there, your stomachs in your throat.
By the time you leave, you know sherman's aint no joke.

Stage 3 - the whole enchilada

Some salt at the battery

My sister was turning 13 – big one I'm told. I came in from upstate where I was going to grad school and I got my ny vibe. Upon arrival I get sent to the store: ice cream, plastic stuff, misc. items.

No problem – new apartment (nice place if you can get it, but ya can't even if you try), new neighborhood. After I get directions, I'm out.

All the surrounding buildings are bran-spanking new, insulated or segregated from the financial district – I can't tell which.

Money, upon money, upon money – versace clad joggers, even the homeless look like undercover cops (probably sent to add that underclass element, but there to serve, service and protect).

Simple necessities are elevated to excursions into modern epicurean delights – ya get whatcha pay for I suppose. Pomp needs circumstance. Its ok though stepmom gave me the necessary bills to acquire, and acquire I am ready to do.

Supermarket – enter, items – obtain, basket – filling. After about the 3rd aisle I see that the guard is at the end of the aisle, standing in the middle looking straight at me. Diagnostic – 5 or 6 customers, all white, mixed outfits, me in a leather jacket, new jeans, new sneaks, bandaid under my eye (b-ball injury). Normal????!! The guard is black.

Next aisle – same thing. Next aisle – same thing. Next aisle – “are you following me” (the deniro reference escaping me at the time). I said this while walking straight to him. He disengages and goes to the front of the store. Are You Following ME!!!!??

No acknowledgement. I’m about to spend \$300-400 dollars in the store and you follow me from aisle to aisle, what is that? The complaint goes on, rather it drones on but the guard cares not. His face is non-committal – typical nuremburg defense. The BS talk to the manager shit doesn’t bring satisfaction for it brings forward some child of 20-28 who carries no weight. [1st defense, black capitalism; 2nd defense, civil rights adjudication – the practices run deep].

Was I clearly viewed as a thief? - I ponder. Was sambo on automatic? How many slights do you take? Class affiliation paradoxes fill me mind – the guard must be working class, cause nobody in this neighborhood would take a job like this. As a way of striking back/out at the frustration of the economic situation, he then terrorizes a supposedly uppity nigger in the white-folks neighborhood.

The knowledge/theory offers me no solace. Nor does the ice cream, my sisters joy, or the view of the east river from the penthouse apartment. Was education the key to freedom or to the cage (somebody remind me, for I seem to have forgotten)?

[where was danny glover when I needed him?]

retrograde colonialism

driving around harlem with wycuie we see a whole busload of people get off of some bus. That they were tourists was clear – they all had those leather pouches that you were to keep your wallet in, fanny-packs, and maps. Upon getting closer we realized that these were not regular maps. These were not maps to the stars homes. There were none there now. These were not maps to historic landmarks. Every block had one of those. No, these maps were real estate maps that laid out exactly where all the available brownstowns were.

“Yellow” was a broken down fixer-upper, “red” was a cheap, effed up has-been, will-be for those with deep pockets, “Blue” was prime rib, and “Green” well do I need to say.

The crowd oozed out from the bus and spread out like a virus, or like some fluid coming out of a bottle on to your nice new carpet. Swedes, Fins, Danes, Germans, Austrians – out they came. Cameras wizzed, plans were made, residents were avoided, and the europeans were back in town. No negroes on the block this time. Nope, just some of their property.

ethnomanhattanism

Most will not discuss it who are on the island, but the concensus is clear - there is really no view of new jersey that is not somehow condescending. The skyline is always grayer, the buildings always smaller, the sense of the otherness – across the water – is always prevalent.

With opulent arrogance the closeness of the statue of liberty and ellis island to new jersey is lengthened, while its manhattaness is assumed, presumed, consumed.

New jersey not the only location of ny scorn however – it extends to queens, north bronx, staten island, upstate, and basically the rest of the world.

As if competition in the city was not enough to concern oneself with, perhaps to legitimate the kow tows, the sweat, the 18 hour workdays, the travel by rail to some pink dungeon in the sky, to comfort boot-licking, ass-kissing, tongue-biting, back-watching, paranoia-filled, chipping at the rock, to make chains look like bracelets – the myths of ny superiority have been woven – like the delicate clothes of southern bed covers.

The world is scorned, cast below, everyone wishes to be where I am. Things are tough, but I aint in wichita, east timor or ghana. No, I'm in new york (the logic goes). 180+ countries diverge in the world, I happen to live in the best and it has made all the difference.

depositing at citibank

Saw a woman once open a slot for deposits, pull down her pants, and take a shit. It was in the middle of the day. She was bright eyed and looking straight ahead. Pee made a path down the wall and snaked down to the street in front of her. Nobody seemed to pay her any mind. How do you file that one away?

mr petrozelis

In junior high school I had this teacher – mr petrozelis. He was a hefty guy, with glasses, disshelved clothing, but fully shelved brain. He was the first to tell me about the nobility of searching for truth, the power of a fact, and the sheer joy of the unmasking of a falsehood.

He began with attacking the founding fathers. We were told of slaves, concubines, the philosophical hypocrisy of these people being the framers of a democratic polity. And through it all, he maintained a diligent presentation of evidence – articles, books, films, ancient newspapers, photographs, slides, pamphlets, knapkins – with notes on them. He was Poirot, columbo, charlie chan, and holmes [not the detective, but the guy on the block]. He opened pandora's box, her diary, her dresser drawer and occassionally her braiserie. We just ate it up.

One day, after meeting a friend of mine uptown, I saw him on my bus. He was the same – hefty, glasses, disheveled, but for the first time sitting and looking old. Many years had passed. I sat down next to him, introduced myself. He pretended that he remembered, but it was not essential that he acknowledge me. I proceeded to tell him how important his class had been for me and that he had initiated my quest for knowledge and truth. As the bus careened down and into the theater district, the lights of 42nd and seemingly parts of my life reflected in his glasses.

We passed by the theater where my mother had danced years before, and the sushi restaurant that we had gone to a million times.

sorry.”

- Take the seat in front of me, and I'd stand looming over you, apologetically getting in your way as you hurriedly try to make a connecting train.
- Turn the page of the newspaper, before I'm done, and I'd clumsily knock down your briefcase (repeatedly) or I'd help you redistribute your coffee to your pant leg.

The place just seethes with calculation, tension and outright disgust. How can I navigate between 24 people in order to get through the door and across the platform? How can I check out the map without looking like a tourist – drawing every criminal to me in the process? Is my bag open? Did someone just pick my pocket? What train do I take to get to the Botanical gardens? Should I try the east or west side train? What stop is this? Would an elbow or a shoulder be more effective at moving that guy? Should I stick my briefcase or foot in the door to hold it open?

What's the best way to get uptown by 6? It just goes on and on... Now, I just sit back, missing my stop if it's too busy, giving my seat to shocked old people, and smiling at people as I hold the door open. Ahhhhhhhhhh. The joy of visiting...

dining with dap

My stepmother's a high muckety-muck, corporate, wheeler-dealer. Well whatever precedes the wheel actually – I think the company she runs makes them too. Regardless, to have access, status, flowing capital, and taste in new york is like nothing else.

All this became revealed to me one day at lunch in her company. We walked in off the street, not dressed particularly well. If you looked carefully you could see my stepmom's extremely expensive watch and pendant – it was subtle (but hey in ny this is what people are trained to look for). We had just been stopped outside by some guy who, if he had not stepped outside of the store identifying himself as the owner, would have looked like a hobo (but hey in ny nobody cares). Its what you got in the bank, not your drawers.

So we step in and its like we were on a gameshow and had just cracked the bank. The restaurant appeared to open up (like the price is right). What was at the back and side, came right up under our noses. What was at the front appeared to recede. Vanna and the others parted as though it would have been rude for them to even stand where we might gaze. From the cat-walk we had waves and small talk from ceo x, sportstar y, and financier j. Seats fell up under us, shoes were removed, and other vannas emerged to attend to big and little toes – well it felt like it.

Discussion quickly got obscure and way over my head – something about cheese and wine and colours. I smiled so as not to give away my total ignorance, It was irrelevant, however, for I forgot that once one lived outside of new york it was just understood that you were ignorant. You could live in new york for 45 years, and just move out, and those still there have this air about them that you just stepped of the boat [wink at table 7], you were an oakie, and you were to be treated kindly (if at all).

This attitude did not extend to servers – they were as compliant as you could get on two feet, with no orifices exposed. They all looked like they were on tv and displayed a wit unlike anything since robin williams (when he first started).

The rest of the meal was a blur. Food was displayed, not served; wine was distributed delicately, not poured; people purred, not spoke; and everybody sauntered about, not walked. Like the sting song, however, I was fascinated by this guys ring on table 3 – it was silver, coursing around his index finger, he seemed to be moving it in slow circular motions – taunting the room. There was some thing written on it [smile at table 1], but I could not make it out.

One of the vannas knocked me out of my trance as she brushed me (eversodelicately) and escorted my plate into the other room, and then behind door #5 desert.... Five fabulous women in white and black displayed themselves with desert seemingly attached strategically to their gowns.

I don't think I was finished eating though. I guess movement is more important, then having food on one's plate. Just then it occurred to me - we were eating outside and there was a rug that covered the whole thing. Well, what do I know about design – I'm living in colorado now.

vomiting to the battery

I hadn't been home for a while and after walking around the village for a few hours, all I wanted to do was go to a club, see some people, hear some music and dance. The plan was agreeable to my friend Wycuie, but not interesting enough – he said he would fill me in later. We got some food at BBQ's – ¼ chicken, fries, killer sauce, huge drink for about \$6.00 heaven.

The meal was interspersed with our conversation about new york, being, the plan for the next ten years, hanging out, and trying to get some money. The latter normally revolved around abstract theories of capitalism, comparing/contrasting the alternative experiences of different ethnic groups, and discussing personal histories of particular people we found interesting [this time was Armand Hammer].

As it got dark, we found ourselves driving around the lower east side. Out of the loop, we careened around old hangouts, but alas they were now gone. Windows down, we did the next best thing – we listened for some thumping base. After a while we heard the call – a low grumble at first, but the noise slowly erupted into a multi-color explosion of 15 to 40 year olds, getting down, dirty and funky.

Finding the spot (or in this case a spot), we park the ride, get on line, and get inside. [it was funny, years ago we wouldn't have liked the line thing too much, but now it was ok just somewhat happy to be back in the scene]. When there the crowd is wild –

Party over here,

minis over here

party over there

where we earlier obtained permission for a late night drop.

On the ride, I feel that familiar gurgle in the back of the throat. It had been many years since I had to lose it, but the feeling is not one you soon forget – eta five minutes.

I start to roll down the window in preparation – slowly at first and then faster as I realize the handle mechanism is old and that 2 spins equal 1. It then happened, I hit the nyc-cab-window-jam. About 3 ¼ inches from the top, the window just stops moving – eta 3 minutes.

Now, I don't know why this is – for rather than climb through the window, someone would just as soon jimmy the lock or shoot the driver. But after a few seconds of trying to squeeze my face through the space, I just conclude that it just doesn't move eta 1 minute.

I look over at Wycuie (eta 30 seconds) and all he could do was move over in the seat and laugh. I also thought it was funny, but after the first heave the seriousness of the matter hit a little harder. 1st dry, 2nd nasty, 3rd and 4th - the same.

By the time we got to the battery, Wycuie is crying from laughing so hard, I am spent, and the cab driver is screaming – what are you doing (in a very thick indian accent). It occurred to me that another cab driver would have an excuse not to pick up an African-American – despite the fact that we were going to one of the wealthiest new money areas in ny and despite the fact that we gave him \$30 for his troubles.

Upon getting out of the cab he insisted that we get back in there and clean it up. I would have sworn I heard him say “black asses” somewhere in there, but my mind was elsewhere. But in response, from our somewhat slouched positions, we stood upright, looked at the cab driver, and calmly suggested that he take his money and go before we hurt him. With that, he took off, we went upstairs, laid on the floor and spun around looking at the statue of liberty, the twin towers and the toilet.

brief handball game in the village

ta-clop,

ta-clop,

ta-clop,

doom!

ta-clopta-clop,

doom!

ta-clopta-clopta-clop,

doom!

phffffffiffew

– fuck!