I Was Much Further Out Than You Thought

By: Steven Cheak

1.

Sometimes I like to walk outside just to clear my throat so other people can't hear me. Sometimes I smoke my cigarettes too fast and I kind of get high. Sometimes I clench my fists so tight that my fingernails leave indents in the palms of my hands. And sometimes, I just cuddle my pillow, pretending that nothing is in the way of wants and desires.

My motto is very simple: I simply don't care.

I'm not an overly complicated man.

2.

Dear Jim,

Our son is a complete screw up. I love him, but I just don't understand what went wrong. His sister shows me his Facebook, and he looks stupid and acts like he doesn't care about himself. Does he at least know God?

Best,

Miriam

Dear Miriam,

You did this to him. Not saying you are completely at fault. But Jesus, get some damn perspective. The kid has been through hell, and it all started when you up and left. And now the only thing he has to show for it is blind hatred for everything. And while we're on THIS subject, would you like to kick in some money for the therapy bill? I'm almost broke over all of this.

Jim

Dear Jim,

You do realize that I haven't spoken to our son in months, maybe even a year? I only get hand-me-downs from members of the family. I honestly don't think I should be held responsible for any 'issues' you and his quack therapist thinks he has. You might think he is crazy, but I think it's a cry for attention.

Mir

Dear Miriam,

Maybe YOU should talk to him for once. Maybe then YOU could actually come to me and logically talk about our son. Until then, don't write me.

3.

Sometimes I like to hit walls, not because they deserve it—that would be stupid. I like to hit them because I deserve it.

There really isn't anything terribly interesting in my life, outside of the fact that I pretend to love people. This is all and act. I can't even carry on a conversation without thinking of at least six different ways a person can die. It makes the chat seem relevant. The only person I never had these thoughts about is my great-grandfather. I only talked to him a handful of times, but he always said I was meant to change the world, and I know be believed it. He was the kindest man I've ever met. He was in the concentration camps in Germany. He is dead.

4.

Last night I licked the floor, not because I wanted to, but because I was told to. The S.S. officer held a gun to my head. What was I supposed to do? You do what you are told in these camps. They treat us like we are less than animals. They treat us like scum. But I tell you, if I could slit Hess' throat, I would do it in an instant. That man is more than a bastard. Sometimes I think he is worse than Adolf himself.

5.

"Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:"

6.

Another bill: you owe me an extra $100. I'll just go ahead and tack that onto your account balance. Miriam, do you even care? I'm doing everything I can here, but I really need some help.
Jim
Dear Jim,
Again, and for the final time, I'm not going to pitch in for something I don't think is wrong. You'll find that all the medication you and that therapist thinks are helping him…well, they are just causing the problem. He needs to find God and be done with it.
Mir
Dear Miriam,
Please Google: You are a horrible mother. Thank you and good night.
Jim.

7.

There are things that set me off more than others: the fact that I live in what I call Mid-Western Hell: Chicago, Illinois; the way I stumble over words when I'm trying to get my point across; the way I never seem to have an independent thought; the way my therapist blinks every time he says the word "alright", which is more than you would think a guy could get out in a conversation; and the way nothing ever seems to be in my control.

I've thought about what it would be like to be one of the people walking down Cicero. I picture myself going to work – doesn't matter where, but I seeing as it's China town, we'll just say something mundane like a waited at a Chinese restaurant. I then picture myself smiling and interacting with customers and fellow employees. We laugh and joke about our crazy nights, our love lives, and the funny re-run of Seinfeld. We then go out for drinks and I order myself a Manhattan, and I buy everyone a round. I then see myself at home with my wife of three years; she is pregnant with our first child – just about four months in. I kiss her. We make love and fall asleep.

When I was young, my great-grandfather would tell my parents that you can't love who you want to be – only who you are. Sometimes I wish I had him around to talk to. Sometimes I wish he was here so he could help.

8.

It's hard to sleep in the camps. I'm not sure what the temperature is, but it's the middle of winter and there is no heat in the bunkers.

I met a boy named Hebel today. He was crying because he couldn't find his parents, so I sat the boy and gave him my only blanket. At first he was frightened by me, but he soon warmed up. I'm sure the guards have abused him so. Hell, there is no regard for human life out here. I just hope Doctor Mengele never gets to him. It seems that every child that is taken to see the doctor never comes back.

Some nights I have to just pound my fist to the ground to keep from crying. I don't know why the Germans hate us so much, but I'm just as frightened as little Hebel, and I long for this to end, even if it's by my life ending. May God bless us all.

9.

"I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning."

10.

I guess in a way, I've lived a pretty full life. I lost my virginity before my twenties, I made some great friends,

and I was engaged for a bit. But something just seems to be missing in general. I'm misanthropic, and my daily apathy is almost to the point of complete-lack-of-feeling. I sometimes think that if I stabbed myself in the arm, I wouldn't feel anything. I don't even think I would bleed.

Don't get me wrong, I do have good days, but they are very few and far between. Last week, for instance, I took a trip with my friend Phil and we went rock climbing. I had a surprisingly good time. Sure, I often thought about letting go and ending it, but I didn't. And once we reached the top of the mountain, I saw a beautiful flower growing all along, and it reminded me if where I'm at these days: alone, even in such wonderful scenery. I had to grin. That night I couldn't stop thinking about what I saw and my good mood never lifted. That's until I awoke. Like I said: very few and far between.

11.

Last night, Mengele took the little boy. The blankets were not helping him, even though most of the bunker gave him theirs. I feel so bad for the boy. His parents never returned, and I fear the worst has happened to them. I asked an officer for an update on Hebel's condition and the whereabouts of his parents, but I was kicked in the face for my effort. The only thing I can do it pray.

12.

Last night I wrote a note and placed it on my father's bedroom door. It said:

Yesterday I felt sad.

Today I felt annoyed.

Who knows what tomorrow brings, but I'm sure it's much of the same.

I made sure to stick around to see his reaction, and it was something I was not expecting. He came up and hugged me, which is something he has never done (It's been rough for him since mom left all those years ago. Sometimes I catch him crying in his room, and I begin to feel a distant connection to him). He sat down and asked me if the lithium was doing any good. I lied and told him yes. He asked me if the therapy was working. I lied and told him yes. He asked me if I have had any thoughts about suicide. I lied and told him no. It's pretty easy, this lying thing, when you have a blank expression almost all the time. After Dad left for work, I went back to my bedroom and stared at the snow on the TV.

13.

"Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead"

14.

They have moved me from the bunkers and placed me with the workers. Our job is to dispose of the dead bodies from the gas chambers. I'm told that the officers need the extra help because there is an inspection of the camps later this week, and the inspectors have no clue about what is really happening here. I wish I was that lucky.

While moving the bodies I came across the remains of Hebel and his family. His parents had been shot in the head and I noticed some bruising around the face and torso. I will not describe what I noticed on the boy, because if I make it out of here alive, I do not want to remember it in detail. It's days like today that make me question whether God actually exists, and if he does, I must ask him why He would allow this to happen.

15.

Today I read the bible. I do not know why. I got through three pages and threw it down and out of sight. I remember when I was a kid and my mother would take me to church every Sunday. I always felt out of place and awkward, like everyone in the room was damning me to hell. Funny, I feel like that about everyone in the world these days.

A few weeks ago my therapist asked me how I have been coping with all my feelings. He seemed really sincere, but I could say the same about me, and it's all an act. I told him the truth. I told him that I've

been "coping" for so long that I learned how to turn off all my feelings. I could tell he didn't believe me, and that's why I know therapists are not worth a shit. But I'll keep going if it makes my Dad happy. And I'll keep lying to him because the man needs something to make him smile.
Great-grandfather always told me that the key to being happy is looking at the positive. He told me this the day after my mother left. A few weeks later he was gone.
16.
Dear Jim,
How is the boy doing? His sister hasn't seen any status updates on Facebook in a few weeks. I did try to call him a few times, but he ignored me. I know he is still bitter about our falling out and my remarriage, but I had hoped he would come to his senses and at least talk to me. I hope all is well at home.
Miriam.

Dear Miriam,
He and I had a nice conversation a few weeks ago and he told me that the meds are working and that he hasn't thought about suicide. I would call that progress at its finest. Maybe I can get him on his feet and into his own apartment. One step at a time, as his therapist would say.
I've been doing a lot of thinking lately, and I've come to the conclusion that I need to get over what happened between us in the past. I know I wasn't always there for you, and that is the reason you left. It's always been hard for me to show how I really feel, but I know that I did love you, and I'm sorry for pushing you away.
Maybe we should come out for a visit? I think it would help him if you two got to reconnect. What do you think?
Best,
Jim.

Dear Jim,
I think the visit is a lovely idea. It's been years since I've seen you, and I would like you to meet my daughter.
And thank you for the forgiveness. I've carried a lot of guilt for leaving like I did, and I'm so sorry for the way it happened.
Love,
Miriam.
17.
"It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said"
18.

I watched this movie last night, but I didn't catch the name. It was about this thirty-year old woman who was depressed and on the brink of suicide. Anyway, her mother realizes her daughter is not doing so well and she ends up trying to make the most of the night. They play board games, watch old movies, eat great food, and talk about the past. All seems to be right with the daughter, and she tells her mother that she is going to bed. As the mom is cleaning up the kitchen, the sound of a shotgun is heard. This was on network TV.

Dad wants to take a trip to Minnesota to see my mother. He thinks the reunion is long overdue, and that it might help my "recovery". I'm not onboard with this idea, and I expressed this with a blank stare. That woman just makes me feel awful about myself. I thought about her when I was watching that suicide movie, and I just kept wishing I had a mother like that; someone who actually gave a shit and wanted to help. I guess

I'm asking for too much. Hell, I don't even know why I let her bother me, since she is the one who decided that our family wasn't important to her anymore.

Sometimes I wish someone would actually get me and understand what is actually going on. I mean, Dad and the dipshit therapist have a rough idea, but I don't think they know the extent. I no longer care about anything. I no longer care about myself. Nothing, not even this idea I have of a perfect life, will bring back who I was, because that person is a figment of everyone's imagination; it's their way of coping. Jokes on them.

19.

The guards ransacked every bunker and every building that contained records of what is going on here. I saw some of the officers, who were once so confident, take their pistols to their mouths and pull the trigger. I feel something is happening. Maybe the inspection didn't go as planned. I must say, all of this is giving my fellow men hope.

20.

Dear Jim,

I can't believe this happened. I can't stop crying. I put my fist though a wall last night. I thought you said he was doing well? Please, please tell me this is all a dream! I never had a chance to say goodbye. I never got to tell him that I loved him. I never got to see how much he grew.

I'll fly in first thing in the morning. Can you pick me up from the airport?

Love,

Mir.

Dear Miriam,

I can't even bring myself to type anything of importance. I thought he was doing alright and this is all so sudden. I need you to be here right now. I'll pick you up in the morning and we'll talk.

Love,

Jim.

21.

The Reds have invaded and the camps are being destroyed! We will all soon be free! I praise all that is holy for this! May God bless every last one of my brothers who did not live to see this day.

22.

"Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning."

23.

Dear Dad,

I'm so sorry you had to stumble upon this. I've been a burden to you for the last few years, and I know that this just makes it worse. You are a great man, and in some ways I wish I would have turned out like you. Gramps always said I was going to change the world, and I so wanted that to be true, but I now know that will never happen. You win some and you lose some, as you would say.

Dad, if my heart could love, it would have loved you for everything you have ever done.

I feel I must explain to you why you are reading this and why I could not find the strength to go on. You see, my days are filled with so much anxiety that I can barely face the world, and the night terrors fill up my dreams, and I have to force myself to stay awake. I lied to you when I told you everything was alright. I just didn't want you to worry. You've done enough of that since Mom left. There was no way for me to be saved; not by God or any medications I willingly swallowed.

Tell Mom I forgive her and that I hope she has a great life.

Thank you for trying to help. And I'm sorry I never changed to world – maybe in another life.

Your son

Hebel.

24.

Looking back on my life in those Godforsaken death camps, I realize that I'm lucky to be alive. There were times where I wanted to end my life, and I had the means to do so. But I knew, I just knew that there was something more to life and that we would be rescued. I'm still haunted by the memories, but I do my best to make every experience a positive one. Nothing will ever take the pain away, but I can stand tall and proud and say that the Nazis never took away my pride, and the never beat me down to my lowest point. Hell, I'm able to carry on the legacy of one person I met in those camps. My granddaughter, Miriam, just gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, and she named him after the little boy I tried to save all those years ago; she named him Hebel. I hope he grows up to be strong and full of life, something I know that little boy would have been if he had had a chance. I know my little Hebel will grow to change the world. May God bless us all.

(Sections 5, 9,13, 17, and 22 "Not Waving but Drowning" by Stevie Smith)