

CHAPTER TWO

MERRY FUCKING CHRISTMAS

ON THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS 2018, KISH AND I HAD BREAKFAST with my brother, Trunnis Jr., my mother, and my niece Alexis at the aptly named Loveless Café in Nashville. It was the perfect place for a Goggins family breakfast, considering our history with the so-called happiest time of the year. Growing up, my friends made such a big deal about Christmas. They talked about it and their wish lists for weeks ahead of time. They watched the same old Christmas movies and sang the same corny-ass songs. To me, it was just another day on the calendar, no different than the rest, because of how I came up.

In Buffalo, Christmas was a marketing opportunity for my father. While most kids were playing with their new toys and slipping into fresh gear, we were scraping gum off the skating-rink floors, then polishing them and prepping the building for an all-night skate. Once we escaped to Indiana, my mom was so shell-shocked that she couldn't have cared less about any holidays. Consumed with finding work, a place to live, and having a social life of her own, Christmas—and my experience of it—did not register on her priority list.

It had been three years since I'd last seen and communicated with my brother, in the days after his eldest daughter was killed. We've always had an awkward relationship because our perspectives on our childhood are so different. When my dad was abusing us, my brother always attempted to be a peacemaker, and that required him to make excuses for our father no matter how vicious he was. He wanted everything to be kumbaya. When our dad came after our mother,

Trunnis Jr. made it a point to escape to his room, while I made sure to watch. I saw things as they really were, and that made me a fighter. Trunnis Jr. remembers things as he wished they had been. I've never blamed him for it. We were all doing our best to survive somehow. My mom couldn't protect either of us. She was getting her ass beat just as badly as we were. It was as if there were four different versions of the same reality show streaming from the same house all at once. The dissonance was impossible not to feel and absorb.

When I was nine years old, my brother chose to leave us and our new life in Indiana to live with our father, and we were never close after that. However, he will always be my only brother, so when I heard Kayla had been killed, I dropped everything to be with him. I will always care about him, and I admire him for surviving our fucked-up childhood to become an amazing father and earn his PhD. Still, we share too much history and experienced it too differently for it to be anything but awkward when we get together. So, when he told me what he had planned after breakfast, I wasn't the least bit surprised.

"We're driving to Buffalo," he said with a grin, "to show the kids around and pay our respects to the old man." I glanced at my mother, who would be accompanying him and his family on their trip down memory lane. She couldn't look me in the eye. Although she and I don't always remember every little thing the same way either, we know we survived hell. Like any good revisionist historian, Trunnis Jr. is still trying to convince himself otherwise. Which is why Buffalo remains his favorite city. He makes the trip as often as possible, and whenever he does, he visits the grave of our tormentor.

For survivors of trauma, denial is a tantalizing numbing agent. It allows you to rewrite your past and sell yourself some fiction. In my brother's tale, Buffalo was a happy place, and our father was a pillar of the community. When we were kids, he forgave our father quicker than a priest in a confessional, and as an adult, his selective memory gives his childhood a brighter sheen, which makes him feel less damaged. But whether he wants to acknowledge it or not, damage was done. If he had experienced things the way my mom and I had, he wouldn't subject her to a stroll through his personal fantasyland, as if Buffalo weren't the torture chamber she'd had to escape many years ago.

By 2018, I'd mastered my childhood demons. I was the puppeteer, and all the skeletons in my closet were on strings I controlled. My mother didn't deny what had happened to us either, but like my brother, she preferred to avoid her pain. She hated discussing her experience with my father or even thinking about it, and later, when she described that trip back to Buffalo with Trunnis Jr., she said that she'd felt dazed. Everything looked unfamiliar. Even the house on Paradise Road. She didn't recognize a single building or street name. It was as if her memory had been wiped like a hard drive, and she was seeing it all—the house, Skateland, all of her old familiar haunts—for the first time.

Trauma will do that. It redacts places, names, and incidents if you don't do the hard work to process the difficult shit. If, like my brother, you stash it away in the way back of your mind—deep enough that it becomes impossible to reach—or, like my mom, try like hell to ignore it because it's too much to confront, one day, it won't just be the bad memories that are repressed. Entire chunks of your life will have slipped through your fingers.

My mother could have gone to Buffalo with a game plan. It should have been her victory lap. When we left, Trunnis told her that she'd become a prostitute and I'd become a gangster. Instead, she became a Senior Associate Vice President at a medical college in Nashville making six figures. Trunnis Jr. is a college professor and family man. I'm a Retired Navy SEAL who had just been honored by the VFW and was the author of a new book. But she didn't go to Trunnis' grave to tell him any of that. She floated above the moment in a bubble she'd built to survive another weekend in Buffalo, New York. Like most of us, she didn't want to feel her pain, so she failed to find the power in it.

A lot of us are trapped in our own brains, shackled by long-gone demons who might even be dead. We refuse to discuss or acknowledge what happened, so when we overcome it all, we fail to recognize it or even feel it. My mom left Buffalo a shell of herself and became a successful, professional woman, but she was still cowering before the demon that stole her soul. She should have written Trunnis a letter telling him what he'd missed and who he'd unleashed. She should have read it out loud to him at his grave. Not so he knew what

she'd become, but so she knew it! She needed to take her soul back and introduce herself to herself!

Denial is self-protecting, but it's also self-limiting. Accepting your full truth, including all your faults, imperfections, and missteps, allows you to evolve, expand your possibilities, seek redemption, and explore your true potential. And until you unpack your baggage, it will be impossible to know what your potential really is. The whole truth can't haunt you if it serves you.

Kish and I were scheduled to fly to Florida that night to celebrate a belated Christmas with her tight-knit family. Christmas had always been a big deal to Kish, and though a cozy holiday house sounded soft as hell to me, she's the greatest woman I've ever met. We'd become partners in life and in business, and I wanted her to be happy. If that meant a trip to Norman Rockwell's Florida Christmas, so be it. But there weren't gonna be any fucking matching pajama pictures, I promise you that!

We had several hours before the flight, and Kish spent them digging into the sales numbers for my first book, *Can't Hurt Me*. It had been out for less than a month and already sold more copies than I ever imagined possible. After more than five years and multiple setbacks, the book I'd envisioned was finally out in the world, and it was a hit.

While some people may not be surprised by the book's success, there are countless others who most definitely are. Prior iterations of the book proposal had been passed on and turned down by numerous publishing houses that didn't see the value in my story. Case in point: in 2016, I presented a one-hundred-plus-page book proposal to Ed Victor. He was a legend in the literary world and was introduced to me by none other than Marcus Luttrell, who had worked with him on his bestselling book *Lone Survivor*. Ed also repped rock stars, like Eric Clapton and Keith Richards, and some of the biggest novelists in the game. He was once quoted as having grown up "... perceiving life as a long highway littered with green lights." In a different article, he mentioned that the criteria he used to determine the publishing potential of a given project boiled down to three questions. "Is the person fabulous? Is the work good? And is there a lot of money in it?" My book proposal did not pass that particular

evaluation. But I give him credit. He didn't sugarcoat the bad news in his rejection email.

From: Ed Victor

Date: June 27, 2016, 6:46:16 AM PDT

To: David

Cc: Jennifer Kish

Subject: Your book

Dear David

I said I would get back to you on Monday, so here I am...but you are not going to like what I have to say.

...my assessment of its value—and its sales potential—are in no way aligned with yours. I could be wrong—I certainly have been in the past! —but I don't see this as a book that will command a big advance and sell large amounts of copies...

When I told you I would be honest in my reaction to this project, you warned me that, if I said No, I'd then see it high up on the NY Times Bestseller List and deeply regret my decision. You may well be right, but because my assessment of the value and commercial prospects of the book are so far below yours, I would not be the right agent for it. You need someone with 101% enthusiasm who will go out and prove me hopelessly wrong (not for the first time).

...

All best

Ed

PS I will tell Marcus about my decision, since it was he who tried to bring us together.

It shouldn't have surprised me that the guy who grew up with nothing but green lights couldn't relate to a life stifled by red lights,

potholes, and stop signs, but he was the industry expert and didn't see my story as accessible. That was a problem, and it was discouraging in the moment, but it didn't make me angry, and I never second-guessed my own value. I knew that my life, my story, and my approach were non-traditional. Their cookie cutter didn't work on me. I couldn't be boxed and packaged to industry standards. Roger that. When had I ever been the perfect fit for anything at all? Never. But I still managed to find success.

What Ed Victor saw as a disadvantage—the fact that I couldn't be easily defined and sold—was actually my greatest asset. My approach, background, and accomplishments all proved one thing: I am the ultimate underdog. That's been the truth my whole life, and if no one could see my potential, it would be up to me to show them what they missed.

There are libraries packed with books on how to be happy and the power of positivity, but nobody prepares you for the dark ages, and the power of my story was in my grind through tough times to become the one straight-faced motherfucker inspiring you to never be satisfied. Ed and all the other industry experts I'd met weren't interested in that because they didn't get it. That didn't mean that the book wouldn't sell. It just meant I had to double down on what made me unique, maintain faith in myself and my vision, and work harder.

In 2017, I signed with a new literary agent and put together another proposal that earned me a \$300,000 advance from a major publishing house. That's good money, but while I waited for the contract to come through, I became conflicted. Was I ready to sell my story to someone else? Did I want or even need an editor to help me tell it?

I was the only one who knew how much blood I'd shed and how many times I'd been baptized in sweat to get me to this point. There were too many all-nighters and pre-dawn wake-up calls to count. I'd been knocked down hundreds of times. I'd pushed my mind, body, and soul to the very edge. Like Andy Dufresne in *Shawshank Redemption*, I'd spent more than twenty years scraping away at the prison wall of my mind with a blunt hammer, and I needed the final say when it came to the edits and who made money off of my story.

After many days and nights of turning it over in my head, I realized the only way to ensure that was to publish the damn book myself.

Once I killed the deal, my agent cussed me out. He told me I was off his client roster and that I would be lucky to sell ten thousand copies. Basically, he said, “Merry Fucking Christmas, Goggins,” and cut me loose. He wasn’t alone. Almost everybody I turned to for advice—people who knew how the industry worked and what it took to succeed—said I was a fool.

So be it.

You cannot be afraid to disappoint people. You have to live the life you want to live. Sometimes, that means being the motherfucker who can put a middle finger up to everyone in the room and be totally comfortable with that.

Now, does that mean you won’t be nervous or that it will all go smoothly? Fuck no. When you’re on the ramp of a C-130 at twenty thousand feet, it’s okay if your knees start to buckle because you know time is short and freefall is imminent, but the second you leap from the aircraft, you must commit to the jump. If you don’t, you will flop around, dangerously out of control, and fall too fast. You need to commit in order to focus on keeping a stable body position. And never look down. Focus on the horizon. That is your perspective. That is your future.

Instead of receiving a big advance, I spent 90 percent of my life savings—more than the advance I would have received—to put out a book of the same quality as anything the major publishers release, and I produced my own audiobook with an entirely new spin. It was risky, but trailblazers never take the smooth roads thousands of others have already traveled. They go cross-country and dig their own path forward. I’d been outside the box my whole life. I’d been smashing cookie cutters for damn near two decades, and this was the biggest bet I’d ever made on myself.

“You’re on the *New York Times* Best Seller list,” Kish said. She looked up from her laptop and flashed a smile. She was proud, and I was too. Not because I gave two shits about the *New York Times* Best Seller list, or even that it was selling at all, but because I knew the book was an honest reflection of my life and all I put into it. And, admittedly, after being told that making any best seller list was

“absolutely not going to happen” and “impossible” for a self-published book by a first-time author, it was satisfying to defy the odds one more time.

I was borderline illiterate in fifth grade. That night, I imagined sitting down with that eleven-year-old kid who struggled so much in class and was so hungry for acceptance. If I told him that one day he would become a bestselling author, he’d have laughed in my face.

I shook my head, chuckled to myself, and swallowed a handful of vitamins. Without warning, my heart began to race. I put two fingers to my carotid and checked my watch. My pulse shot from a steady fifty beats per minute to 150 beats per minute and back again without any set rhythm.

As an EMT and someone who had recovered from multiple heart surgeries, I knew right away that I was in atrial fibrillation, or AFib, which is when the upper chambers of the heart, the atria, are out of rhythm with the lower chambers, the ventricles. I’d experienced a similar episode nine years earlier after my first heart surgery when one of the patches failed. Did another patch fail, or was this something new?

I didn’t tell Kish right away. She’d worked for months without a break to help turn *Can’t Hurt Me* into a hit, and she couldn’t wait to go home and be with her family. Instead, I tried to control my heart rate through vagal maneuvers, like equalizing the pressure in my sinuses with the Valsalva technique and squeezing my knees into my chest, forcing a gag or a cough, and massaging the carotid sinus. Those techniques had been proven to reset the pressure in the body and click the heart back into rhythm. Deep breathing can help too, but nothing worked, and the longer it went on, the dizzier I became and the graver the danger.

AFib can turn blood clots into embolisms that block blood vessels in the brain or heart, causing strokes and heart failure. People with sickle cell trait, like me, are at a higher risk for blood clots. Hours passed. I pretended everything was cool while my pulse sketched a dire electrocardiogram in my mind’s eye, but when Kish zipped her suitcase and turned to me, ready to roll to Florida, she could see something was very wrong. We weren’t headed to the airport. We were going to the emergency room.

The day after Christmas is dead in most public places, but holiday season in the ER is always bumping. Maybe it's the alcohol, the family strife, the loneliness, or a combination of all three. When I was fourteen years old, my mother's fiancé, Wilmoth, was shot and killed the day after Christmas, which is why whenever the calendar leans into late December, I think more about trauma than Santa.

The ER was packed when we walked through the sliding glass doors. I slumped into one of the few spare seats in the waiting room, dizzy as hell. Medics, doctors, and nurses blurred as they hustled between treatment areas, wheeling patients around the squeaky tiled floors on gurneys and in wobbly old wheelchairs. The PA system crackled. Fluorescent lights buzzed overhead. Kish sat beside me and filled out paperwork as I closed my eyes and took yet another deep breath.

Minutes later, or maybe it was hours, I did the same thing in front of a young doctor in a curtained-off treatment area. He wasn't a cardiologist, and when I explained I'd had two heart surgeries, he took the news a bit too casually. He listened to my heartbeat, tagged me up with sensors, and watched my pulse scratch out a rhythm on his ECG monitor. Then, he told me what I'd just told him.

"You're in AFib."

"Roger that." I shot him some side eye. Kish caught it.

"What can you do for him, doctor?" she asked.

"We're going to put you on a drip and see how you respond."

A nurse came in and tapped my vein, and the meds seemed to work. Within minutes, my pulse relaxed and my dizziness eased, but when the doc strolled back in an hour later, he looked confused as he read the monitors.

"Well, your pulse has calmed down, but you're still in AFib," he said. "I'm going to call a cardiologist upstairs and see what we can do here."

I didn't need to hear what the cardiologist had to say to know my fate. I'd studied AFib cases, and if breathing techniques, equalization, and meds don't sync the chambers, the next step is to shock the heart, to restart it like you would a frozen computer. I'd seen videos of it, and I was terrified.

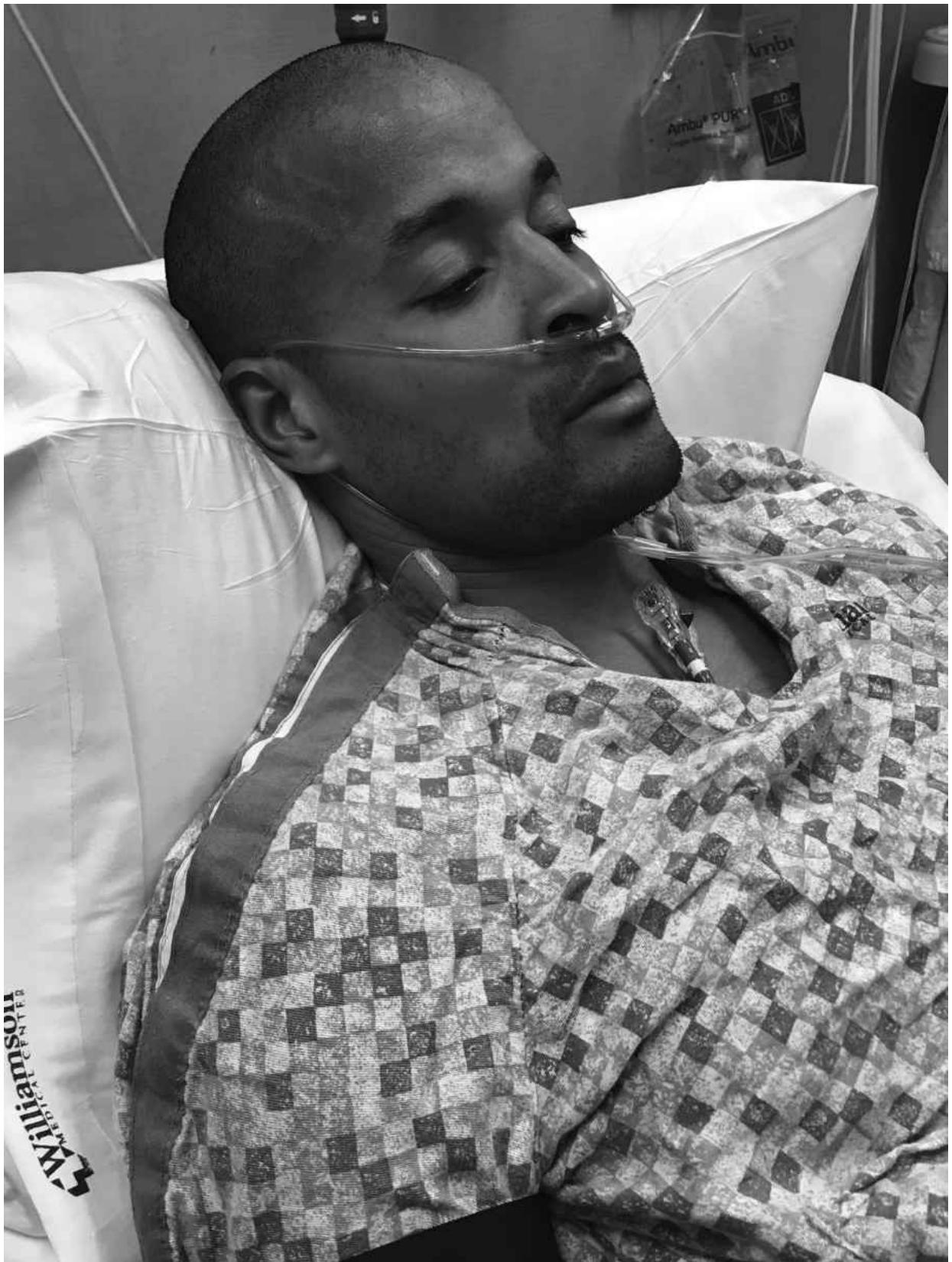
It's funny, my two heart surgeries never scared me. I knew death was a risk with both of them, but my mortality didn't register at all back then, and I greeted them with a shoulder shrug. That night in Nashville, I felt differently about life and death.

Can't Hurt Me had changed me, and my latest metamorphosis ran much deeper than commercial success and the public's enthusiasm for my story. Writing that book allowed me to process the hell I'd gone through one last time, and publishing it myself gave me a clean slate. People had always assumed a lot of things about me. *Can't Hurt Me* finally allowed me to speak my truth, and I felt vindicated. I could finally be at peace with my life and all that I put into it and accomplished. Then, right on cue, my heart skipped like a scratched record and there I was, back in life's crosshairs.

Merry Fucking Christmas, indeed!

While Kish called her parents and wiped away tears, I confronted a bitter possibility. I believed my role on this earth was to suffer and overcome so I could teach others how to do the same, but now that that period of my life appeared to be over, I had to wonder: was I suddenly expendable? My self-talk flip-flopped between feeling sorry for myself and being royally pissed. My anxiety was off the charts. I was not sneering at death like back in the day. I was afraid. Desperate for more life.

A technician arrived and shaved my chest. She put one electrode on my chest and another on my back. Then, the doctor strolled in and asked Kish to grab a seat in the waiting room out front. He read the monitors, glanced over at me, and hit the switch. Two hundred joules flowed through me, and everything went blank. For a fraction of a second, I was suspended between heartbeats. He hit me again, and I screamed like hell as I came to. Kish heard me take the Lord's name in vain all the way in the waiting room, something I never do. That's how much it hurt. But it worked. I was synced.



Trying to control the fear of being shocked

The doctor sent me home with a normal pulse, a battery of tests to be scheduled to make sure there was nothing structurally wrong with my heart, and a tweaked-out soul. This is how life works. One second, you are talking about the *New York Times* Best Seller list, and the next, you run the risk of not being able to live to see tomorrow. It literally happens that quickly.

This shit ain't permanent. Life is the ultimate competitor. It takes no days off, and it won't care if you've made some money or got a promotion at work. All that means is you are good to go for a moment or two. No matter how badass and successful you think you are, trust me, there is a semi coming around a blind curve, ready to smack you in the fucking mouth when you are comfortable as all hell.

I knew that, but I also thought my heart issues were in the rearview mirror. Now, I could see how ridiculous that was. When you are always in the grind, you think there will come a time when the rough road, blitzed with potholes and littered with blown tires, will smooth out, but that is never the case. In fact, if you go through life expecting that smooth road, you won't be prepared when a pothole opens up on freshly laid blacktop and rocks you sideways one warm and pleasant evening. That's what Merry Fucking Christmas is all about. It has nothing to do with the holiday. It's about the surprise "gifts" life has wrapped up, just waiting for you to stumble into.

Which is another way of saying I lost something essential in that emergency room. As dawn broke on the drive home, I felt like Samson running around bald in the hamster wheel of my mind. I didn't know who I was anymore. Was I still a savage, or was I just another squawking head?

Some people might be put off by the term, but to me, calling someone a "savage" is the highest compliment. A savage is an individual who defies odds, who has a will that cannot be tamed, and who, when knocked down, will always get back up!

If the doctors told me that I had to stop running and working out hard in the gym, I would cancel everything. I'd pull the plug on all future speaking engagements and on my social media channels. I've always been a man of action and service, and I know I would not be able to inspire people by simply talking about the things I did in my past. I gave myself one rule before joining social media: if I can't live

it, I won't speak it. Before I bedded down that night, I decided that if my body wouldn't cooperate anymore, *Can't Hurt Me* would be my swan song, and I would disappear.

EVOLUTION NO. 2

NEVER WASTE A FUCKING THING. IT WAS A LESSON I FIRST LEARNED in Brazil, Indiana, when a classmate brought me a gift after school. I didn't get a lot of presents growing up, so when he handed me that one, I was a thirsty little motherfucker. I wanted to tear that bitch open and see what I got. The first loud rip got my grandfather's attention. He poked his head into the room and surveyed the scene. "Calm down," he said. Then, he handed me a pair of scissors. "That's good wrapping paper. We can reuse that."

A lot of us grew up with grandparents seasoned by the Great Depression, who knew we were working with finite resources. Even those who made a nice living didn't take comfort or plenty for granted, and I guess that rubbed off on me. To this day, I abhor waste. I eat all my leftovers, and when my tube of toothpaste flattens out, I don't just roll it up to squeeze out the remainder, I cut that bitch open and put it in a Ziploc baggie until I've used every last drop.

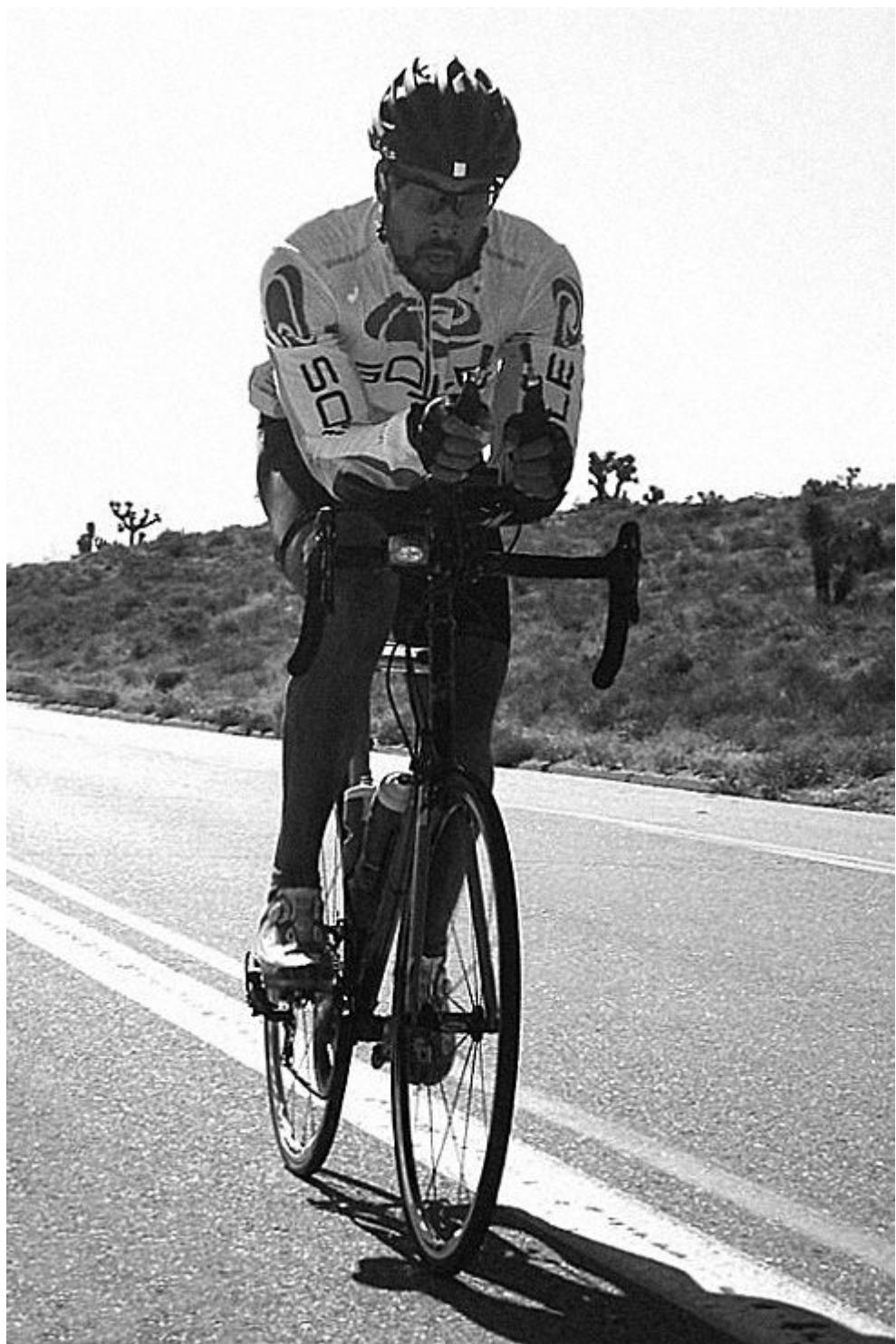
Everything must be utilized. Especially the energy in volatile, potentially damaging emotions like fear and hate. You have to learn how to handle them—how to mine them—and once you master that craft, any negative emotion or event that bubbles up in your brain or gets lobbed your way, like a grenade, can be used as fuel to make you better. But to get there, you must literally listen to yourself.

In 2009, I was training to ride in a three-thousand-mile cycling race called the Race Across America, better known as RAAM. I was still full-time in the military, so I had to wake up extra early to fit in my fifty- to one hundred-mile rides before work. My weekend training rides stretched out over two hundred miles—sometimes I rode upwards of five hundred miles—often on the narrow shoulders of busy highways. I did all that because the RAAM's distance scared

me. The monotony of being able to stay locked in on a bicycle for days at a time without sleep freaked me the fuck out. The race burrowed so deep into my psyche that I wasn't sleeping well. To demystify the experience, I made a point of chronicling each ride on a handheld tape recorder. I described everything I saw and felt in granular detail.

It was mostly just me on a bike with cars, Harleys, and semis zooming past. I smelled all the exhaust, felt the wind slap me upside the head, and tasted the grit of the open road. When I veered onto the blue roads, I wouldn't see a single car for fifty miles, but that white line was ever-present. Whether the shoulder was wide, thin, or nonexistent, the white line was always there.

I listened to those tapes at night and visualized the white line a thousand times. I became entranced by the simplicity of it, which helped minimize everything else about the race. And though I didn't enter RAAM that year because of emergency heart surgery, I knew I'd stumbled onto a system to minimize my fears and build confidence that I'd use for years to come.



I can't possibly fathom the hours spent alone riding the white line

When I started speaking to Fortune 500 companies and professional ballclubs for a living, I had to be willing to reveal my fucked-up life story to successful people—including millionaires and billionaires

who had heard it all. This wasn't some simple recruiting trip to a high school where students were easily impressed, and all my anxiety around public speaking resurfaced. Once again, I broke out the tape recorder. I spoke my fears and my trauma—which not that many people knew about—into that microphone and discovered a strange, unexpected alchemy. My fear and trauma were transformed into energy and confidence.

Many people write out their darkest moments in a journal or diary and hope to gain some leverage on whatever it is they survived or are struggling to overcome. I've kept a journal for years, but there are levels to this shit, and a written archive is the entry level. Audio recordings are more interactive and accessible and have a more profound effect on the mind.

If you were bullied, abused, or sexually assaulted and are willing to speak the unfiltered truth into the microphone and listen to it over and over, after a period of time, it will become just another story. A powerful story, for sure, but the poison will be neutralized, and the power will be yours.

This is not a task to take lightly. If you've survived acute trauma, you don't want to think about what you were doing on the day it happened, what you heard and how you felt, or how your life capsized afterward. Do it anyway. The more color and context you can add to the track, the sooner you will walk the streets with your headphones on and your head held high. When people see you coming, they might think you're listening to an Eminem jam. But no, it's your deepest trauma, the scene of your supposed destruction, on repeat. With each subsequent listen, you will claim more and more power and gain enough transformational energy to change your life.

Most people don't even want to think about their darkest shit, much less talk about it. They refuse to speculate in the harsh wilderness of their past because they are afraid of exposure. Believe me, there's gold in them there hills. I know because I was the Black dude in the cowboy hat, hip deep in the icy stream panning for nuggets. And if you find the courage to paint the picture of your worst nightmare in the spoken word, then listen to it until it soaks in and saturates your mind, until you can hear it without any emotional reaction or spillover, it will no longer make you cower or cry. It will

make you strong. Strong enough to walk out on stage and tell the whole world what they did to you, and how it didn't break you. It made you powerful.

Recording yourself isn't just a reliable tool for neutralizing trauma. It can change the dynamic of almost any situation or mood. If you use it properly, it can also keep you honest. One day a couple of years ago, not long after ramping up my training from ten miles of running per day to twenty or more, I felt drained and sore, too tired to run, and kept telling myself that I needed a day off. As I relaxed on the couch, I tuned into my self-talk. Then, I grabbed my recorder and whined into the microphone. I wanted to hear how it sounded out loud. I was real with myself. I cataloged my recent runs and nagging injuries and described how I thought a day off might help me. I made a solid case for a much-needed rest day, but when I played it back, the jury of one was unconvinced. Because my inner bitch was suddenly the emperor with no clothes. Buck naked in the light of day, he was impossible to ignore and even harder to stomach. I was off the couch and out on the road in a matter of seconds.

Many people wake up with dread or doubt day after day. They dread their workouts, their class load, or their job. Maybe they have a test or presentation that makes them nervous, or they know that the day's workout will hurt. While they linger in bed, they tune into their soft, forgiving self-talk, which doesn't make it any easier to get up and moving. Most people rise up eventually, but they remain in a daze for hours because they aren't fully engaged with their lives. Their self-talk has made them numb to the moment, and they sleepwalk through half the day before they finally perk the fuck up.

The way we speak to ourselves in moments of doubt is crucial, whether or not the stakes are high. Because our words become actions, and our actions build habits that can coat our minds and bodies with the plaque of ambivalence, hesitancy, and passivity and separate us from our own lives. If any of this sounds familiar, grab your phone and record your inner dialogue as soon as you wake up. Don't hold back. Spill all your dread, laziness, and stress into the mic. Now listen to it. Nine times out of ten, you won't like what you hear. It will make you cringe. You wouldn't want your girlfriend or

boyfriend, your boss, or your kids to hear your unfiltered weakness. But you should.

Because then you can repurpose it. You can use it to remind yourself that changes must be made. Listening might inspire you to commit to your life in a deeper way, to be your best at work, at school, or in the gym. It can challenge you to rewrite the narrative so that when you bed down, you won't feel like you wasted another valuable day.

Do it again the next morning, but this time, once you get through listening to all your whining about the shit you don't want to do, sit up in bed and lay down a second take. Pretend you're motivating a friend or loved one who is going through challenges. Be respectful of the issues they face, but be positive, forceful, and realistic too. This is a skill that demands repetition, and if you do it regularly, you'll find that it won't take long for your self-talk to flip from doubt and dread to optimism and empowerment. The conditions of your life might not change a whole lot at first, but your words will make sure that your approach does change, and that will eventually enable you to shift everything. But you must speak the truth and be willing to listen to it. Don't be afraid of your weakness or doubt. Don't be embarrassed and pretend it doesn't exist. It surfaced for a reason, so use it to flip the dynamic of your life.

Lately, I've used this technique with the hate that comes at me online. Most people in my position don't read negative comments or emails. They have someone else screen and then erase them. I see hate as just another fuel source. I see the beauty and power in it, and I never let it go to waste. When the negative comments come in, and they always do, I capture them in a screenshot and speak them into my microphone. In 2021, I posted an image of my swollen left knee, which inspired a flood of negative comments. Some claimed to have seen my breakdown coming and counted it as a personal win. Others simply liked seeing me in pain.

"I'm tired of hearing you run your fucking mouth," one of them wrote.

"I hope I never see your Black ass run again," wrote another.

They were trying to salt my wounds. They wanted me to feel the sting, which I did, and hoped it would bring me down even further. It

didn't. I loved those comments. I loved them so much I made a mixtape. I printed them all out, recorded myself saying each one, and then I looped that bitch. Whenever I have a bad day, I listen to it. Sometimes, I walk around the house savoring it in full stereo.

Most people only mine the positive shit. They want everything and everyone to be nice and hunky-dory. They get filled up on sweetness and recoil from the dark, bitter pill of hate. But there's not nearly as much fuel in ass-kissing, atta' boys, and accolades as there is in hate. Luckily, the world is filled with jealous, insecure haters. If you don't get negative comments on social media, find your fuel in the thoughtless comment of a friend or the doubt of a teacher or coach. I'm sure it stings when you feel slighted, underestimated, criticized, or excluded. Just know that the heat you feel is free energy waiting to be burned. Don't crawl up in a corner worried about the people who disrespect you. Repackage what you're hearing and feeling until it works for you!

That is a winner's mentality. Winners in life see everything they experience and everything they hear, see, and feel as pure energy. They train their minds to find it. They drop into the gnarly crevices to mine golden nuggets of trauma, doubt, and hate. They do not live disposable, single-use lives. They discard nothing and refurbish everything. They find strength in the bullying and heartbreak, in their defeats and failures. They harvest it from the people who hate them personally and from the online trolls too.

Some people go to sleep with a meditation app. Others open the windows to the night sounds or stream white noise, whale songs, or the lullaby of the sea lapping some lonely shore. When I bed down at night, I listen to my haters. And it's obvious those punk-ass bitches don't have the slightest idea who they are dealing with.

I'm the person who turns their every negative word into my positive progress. I take what they serve me, roll it up in that wrapping paper I saved way back when, and shove it right up their fucking asses in the form of another work-out, another long run, and another year of leveling the fuck up. Honestly, I should thank them. They make me stronger and more determined to achieve my goals. Which only makes them hate me even more.

| It's time to make your own mixtape. #TapeRecordYourself #NeverFinished