

Sometimes you find what you are looking for in the most unexpected of places.

I spent most of my life searching, trying desperately to find something that felt true, something I could believe in, something I could sink my teeth into - that didn't taste like rotten fruit, or leave me hungry again in an hour or two. Something that didn't fill me in a way that I'd end up regretting my choice or feeling like I swallowed one of society's sweet poisons.

I just wanted an experience that felt real, beginning, middle and end. I traveled far in search of that. God knows I traveled far.

First, I headed over to the college campus. Beautiful place, old buildings. The temples of our time. With high hopes, I knelt before the higher minds. I was more than willing to confess my ignorance, get their blessing, have them tell me what to do. Turns out they needed that too.

Before long I settled right in & I was loving it. Had my quiet little room and my stack of books on the table. Staying up late at night devouring the words of the wise. But these weren't the prophets of old, nothing profit-able about those guys. These were the words of the modern messiah's, the kings of commerce, sorcerers of science, wizards of Wall Street. The worldly wise, & their words were mine, (finally) - and I was eating them up - for a time, at least, I was eating them up.

But along the way something changed, a year went by, then two, and I had this growing feeling that the answers I was looking for, really looking for, weren't in those books. The words were filling but they just didn't satisfy. Like I was feeding my mind with undigestible food, or fattening myself up for a life of passionless pursuit. Either way, they'd lost their taste, for me. Like, whatever truth was coming down from the ivory tower, it seemed it was anemic by the time it got to me. I knew it was time for me to leave.

By this time, I was hungry and thirsty. So, I sought relief on the seedy side of town. I wasn't planning to stay long. I thought I'd just refresh myself and move on.

I watched the wayward wander the back alleys and cold dark streets. Trying to scrape up the currency to feed their raw desires, or be warmed by the flames of forbidden fires. I watched them chasing rushes & sporadic highs. & God they tried, so hard, to get as far from the pain as they could or to draw near to something that felt real. To change what they were feeling, for a while at least.

But the problem with that life, and those highs, is that nothing ever really changes. They might reach staggering heights, a cloud or two below where the angels fly, but they always came crashing down, landing on the same unsteady, sinking ground. Back to themselves, unchanged, apart from being a little worse off from the fall.

I have to admit, though, that their existence seemed more real than what I'd witnessed in other parts of town. Less pretense, less protest against their lower nature, they weren't in denial of their darkness, they knew that was real too. They were feeling for the pulse at least, getting closer to the heartbeat of life, albeit on the shadow side.

The reason I could watch them so closely, is that, for a time, I joined them. (I lived that life too.) I had stayed much longer than intended. Whatever money I had, I spent it, chasing highs, taking those trips. But (in the end) they just led me lower, 'til the vices had me in their grips. Sad to say, even when those

rushes seemed to work, they never really satisfied, not for long, at least. I knew it was time to move on, while I still could.

I had to make a living, had to survive, and God knows I was hungrier then ever. So, I took my college skills to the plastic part of town - hung with the Park Avenue crowd - the jet set, we had no regrets about living loud. But I was weeping silently at night when no one else was around. When the emptiness of my life caught up to me. Rich, but still not free. (Had to face) Facing the harsh reality that possessions are prisons if you pile them too high.

And I was hanging with the glamor gals, as we walked the crowded streets like they were aisles in a department store. Always reaching for more. Or at least something shinier than what we had before. I was looking my best, dressed for success. Just Insulated I guess. And those ladies, they never left home without their high heels, elevating themselves just a bit, keep things a little less real, those couple inches just enough to keep them safely off the ground, undisturbed by the heart beating just beneath the city streets. Seemed we were all elevating ourselves, one way or another. Just another type of high, in reality - this time I was out of touch, too. For many years, I lived like that. Had to find out that you can't buy truth.

God knows I wandered into my share of chapels around that time. I sat silently on Sundays, listening to the priests as they preached to the flock from their little perches. I could tell that they cared, as they offered comforting words about the far side of death. Or whatever was coming next. But I had to wonder if they'd ever really lived. Had they died, inside, as many times as some of the folks they were talking to, or some of the souls down on skid row that I knew.

& These priests seemed to be speaking about the divine as if it was all light and love, all up above - separate and mostly silent these days.. But I don't think he reaches down with his staff and his rod, I don't believe that. I've seen the dark light of God. I think he's part of it all. Through and through. Down in the mud, in the middle of the laughter and blood, and stirring inside of me too.

As much as I tried to convince myself otherwise, it seemed like truth had left these chapels years ago. So, I moved on as well.

I started to think that maybe I wouldn't find what I was looking for. That maybe it was nowhere to be found these days. I was losing hope, and faith in the promises that life had whispered to me in my youth.

But still, I kept on going. Held my head up and just kept walking. Then one day I met some artists. I hadn't known many artists before that but talking to them I felt renewed. They seemed alive, curious, engaged, in a way I hadn't been in years. & there was something different about them. It was in their eyes. It was like they had seen something. Caught sight of something, the mystery, maybe? I didn't know for sure. But I sensed that they had searched too, had wrestled with the truth, Like I had, and that they too had struggled, But in their struggles they had found something that I had missed. Like they'd been taken to the edge, the abyss, and had been changed by it. I didn't know exactly what had happened to them but that's what it felt like to me. I knew I had to stick around and find out. And I did. I followed them wherever they went. Found out my suspicions were true.

But these weren't the kind of artists that you find painting pretty pictures in gardens or on a peaceful mountainside. I guess they might spend time there, but usually they're closer to the busy intersections of life, or more likely still, camped out along the fault lines, the place where worlds collide. They're just waiting for the moment when all hell breaks loose, knowing full well that heaven is in there too. The violent collisions, throwing off sparks, made all the more brilliant by the surrounding darkness. These artists were caught up in this too. Being torn and twisted by these same forces. They didn't just witness this, they're also participants. Feeling the upheaval and extremes, the torture and ecstasy, in their own souls. And they're capturing this on canvass, blank page, or just strumming along, being changed, themselves, in the process. It was such a sight to see & that's the only place I wanted to be after that.

It's funny, all those years I wandered, looking for the answers, searching the places where I thought they'd be, But, it was these artists who finally showed me the way. Helped me find my way home.

They're the ones who taught me to stay close to the ground, and that it's OK if there is some chaos around; that's part of creation. If you push that away, you deprive yourself of something real, something vital too. They taught me that you don't have to be afraid of that. As long, of course, as you stay on the side of the sparks and don't go wandering off blindly into the darkness.

It's the artists who taught me about the mysteries of life. And taught me about death. They showed me how to die before dying, so at the end I can step lightly across, nothing really lost - while being fully alive on both sides.

But they didn't teach me all this, by trying to teach me, they just lived that reality, they radiated truth, beauty. and life, and it reached me. It touched me - deeply.

And I try to live like them now. Feet firmly on the ground, feeling my way through this world. & I can honestly say that I've never felt so full, and so alive..... So alive.