

Adventure travel chronicle of an entrepreneur's reflection and self-discovery.

The Travelogue of Tommy Typical

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Recycling For Fun and Profit

In my previous book, *The Philosophy of Tommy Typical*, I shared my simple verse, unpretentious stick art and viewpoint about an average but no less than sacred way of living. In this book, I want to disclose the contents of my personal travel journal chronicled over a lifetime. It is factual in as much as flawed humans can be. It is often whimsical and chocked full of symbolism like its author. It is genuine because I believe in the uniqueness of life above all else. Trust me; it is not a detailed historical account of import. That's not me at all. It is basically my recorded feelings in different places at different times with different people and how they are mystically connected. Ultimately it about using my head, that old woodpecker logic, to navigate the ocean of life and end up from time to time on the sandy shoreline of serenity before tackling another good storm .

On my fortieth birthday, I did not use the normal method of blowing out the candles on my cake but instead attempted to snuff them out by using a modified version of the old Camp Pellissippi standby, the epitome of male idiocy, the arm fart. That art was acquired in between burping contests and distance spitting during my adolescent stint at the campground where legends were born. I have heard folklore about a kid who could pee over the top of a compact car. Men are impressed by such feats. I still test my body to see what it is capable of doing.

That night, I was gleefully surrounded by several handpicked friends and family at Ruth's' Chris Steakhouse

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in downtown Nashville to celebrate my big day. Of course, I had the largest cut of filet mignon in the house and all night long I acted as juvenile and carefree as the mischievous little boy that still lives in my heart and I hope always will. If there ever is invented an anti-curmudgeon vaccine, I will be first in line.

My primary birthday wish that day was to return to the ocean as often as I could for the rest of my life. I love water. I often tell people that 70% of the Earth's surface is water. That's remarkably close to the percentage of water in human infants. No wonder, we have such a strong affinity for the sea because we are water. Our bodies are actually a container of water walking around on the earth, another mass of water. Literally, by the time you are an adult, you have 45 quarts of H₂O in your body, or about 90 pounds of the liquid stuff. Therefore so I feel more at home, I try to swim, surf in a half-ass way with a bum knee, or simply go to look at the water any chance I get. I feel right at home on the beach where I vacation, near the lake where I live or on a cruise where I eat a lot. A good friend that previous summer had brought me a gift, a new hand-painted 9' longboard from Florida and all I could do was think about the host of unexplored beaches on my wish list. I imagined myself wet, smelling like the salty sea air itself.

Now I had always been torn between calling the mountains where I grew up and the shoreline where I ventured, my preferred place to hang out. I had proudly purchased some new Atomic skis when in Tahoe that spring, and at that time, it was the mountains that got the nod for my favorite place. The Sierras are some of the

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best mountains in the world and I get to return there from time to time as I have been fortunate enough to have recurring business in Reno and as a perk have gotten to ski the mountains around Tahoe, my favorite being the unpretentious Mt. Rose on the Reno side.

Mark Twain was one of the first writers to note the raw splendor of that mountainous area. He wrote in the illustrative *Roughing It*, Tahoe was "the fairest picture the whole earth affords." The lake approaches 6,200 feet above sea level and is so deep that it doesn't normally freeze. It has a unique blue color and was named after a Washoe Indian word meaning "water in a high place", the best of both worlds. God, like me, apparently adored both mountains and water and so He gave us this special throne on top of this distinctive part of creation though the locals now say the billionaires are running off the millionaires. We never seem to learn that beauty is for everyone or limitless. We're a selfish bunch.

In truth, the reality of it was wherever I happened to be; well that place seemed to be my favorite place, too. I am one of those individuals that can have multiple favorites. It's always been like that. My mom said I was always a contented baby. So I grew up and became a contented man, happy wherever I happen to find myself. I figure that peace doesn't mean there is no chaos, but it does mean the sense of serenity in spite of it.

Anyhow, over the next few years in an effort to make my wish come true, I took short sabbaticals as often as I could and sporadically roamed the coasts of Florida and the Carolinas, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Spanish Coast

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of the Mediterranean in between making and unfortunately losing a few bucks. Okay to be more accurate, once I lost a million bucks or two. So I know a little about chaos and instability, having and having not, lest you think I was a carefree full time beach or ski bum. When I'm on the upswing, I'm a business guru and when I'm rebuilding, I'm a mystical philosopher. That way I'm able to maintain a good deal of self-esteem and forget the losing times. Remember I'm constantly recycling myself.

I must confess that a major highlight of my decade long quest was spent indulging myself in a splendid week at a surfing school just south of L.A. after renting a Mustang Saleen convertible with a 32-valve 4.6 liter Supercharged V-8 at LAX. It was a glorious week, weather wise, and I stayed in La Jolla, and hit all of my favorite restaurants and watering holes up and down the Pacific Coast Highway. As was my custom, the highlight was my dinner at *George's at the Cove*, and I arrived plenty early for a good seat to see the sunset at the Pacific View Bar.

For a Tennessee boy, it was a dream come true. Most, if not all, of my dreams have come true in between getting my butt kicked and I'm no more deserving than the next guy but I like myself enough to say unequivocally that I am no less worthy of fulfilled dreams than anyone else. You have that same status.

I found myself playing many roles as I was in hot pursuit of those dreams, not the least of which was choosing a career as a recycling consultant. I am also a born entrepreneur and so I learned how to make money showing companies how to recycle for profit. Saving the

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world and paying my bills stroked the environmentalist and the capitalist in me simultaneously.

Sometimes I got paid just to tell people what I think. I really liked that a lot so I attached the fancy title “Consultant” next to my given name on my business cards. I have a catch all receptacle full of business cards with all kinds of names and titles on them. If you want to know much about a person, just look in their junk drawers. Says a lot about them.

Anyhow, I love the recycling business probably because recycling is also my general philosophy about life and unless someone proves me wrong, wise old Solomon and I will continue to work under the presumption that there is really *nothing new under the sun*. Now that doesn’t rule out the possibility that there are some variations and combinations that I haven’t tried and I do like the novelty of mixing things up like a bowl of Cracker Barrel’s beef stew.

But I figure for the most part, everything just gets repackaged so folks can think they’re getting something new and as long as this “new” stuff comes all wrapped up nice and pretty and as long as people buy magazines and newspapers and books that tell them about this “new” stuff, then there will be plenty of paper to recycle.

That’s my specialty, paper. Paper was first made known in AD 105 though archeologists claim that the actual invention took place as much as 200 years earlier and people have taken quiet a shining to it over the last 2000 years. Most people don’t think about it, but I am

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constantly aware of it all around me. Take a look yourself. I'm sure you'll agree that paper is good. Very good.

Nowadays, we make and use oodles of paper and my niche is equipment that bales it up and my partners resale it to paper mills and all that paper you use gets turned into tissue and toweling, so when you blow your nose, dry your hands, or wipe your butt, you are indirectly helping me make a buck and so I guess we are somewhat connected. That's good, too, because in this book, I'm going to be as honest with you as an old lie dog like me can be and we need to be linked on some level or another.

It's funny how you can look at a piece of paper with words and numbers on it and see how you're doing, but that's the way it is. And that's where I found myself one day, reading my monthly reports primarily to see how much money I had made. You see the bottom line in business is *the bottom line*. Altruism follows. But you have to have something to give. Rule #1 of living in a material world.

After scouring the financial details, I sat there thinking about all that paper shipped here and there to be recycled, literally thousands and thousands of tons of it and the idea occurred to me that I too, personally, had been recycled both literally and metaphorically many times already and of course there was *death* looming out there in my future, arguably the biggest recycling undertaking that human beings encounter.

For reasons hopefully revealed in this manuscript, I began a conscious effort to recycle all my memories or at least a good portion of them and transform them into this book.

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But just you remember that while it may not be something completely new, lest your expectation levels get too high, it might be something interesting and fun. And kindly remember that recycling is, after all, good for the ecosystem, inner and outer.

Owl Query

Ever notice that the years seem to accelerate the older you get, which explains why it took forever for Christmas or the last day of school to come when you were a kid and why you can barely blink between birthdays and holidays these days. That acceleration is a cause of concern for immortals playing the temporary role of earth bound mortals, whether it is real or imaginary.

On my fiftieth birthday, after blowing out my candles in the traditional way, I made another wish to visit and revisit the mountains that shaped me as a youth. In addition to those real peaks there were the mountains in my magazines and dreams, especially the ones with sweeping panoramic views. I was temporarily partial to snow and plenty of good skiing, though trout streams did have huge appeal. That's where I found myself one morning, thinking about trout.

As I lay in bed, I was reflecting on the stack of internet information I had gathered about a trip I was planning to Alaska. That would be my fiftieth state to visit and, if God was willing; I would be there by the end of the upcoming year. Fifty states in fifty years was just one of those many life goals, set in motion by a gangly teenager who rarely roamed more than a few miles from his home. My travels occurred in my head while looking at National Geographic magazines in a school library in a small town in Appalachia.

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When you get to the stage of your life when you start to see your times in decade size increments, big bites of the apple so to speak, it seems so compressed in a way, like a zip file. While resting there trying to adjust my back which aches just a little nearly every day, I remembered fondly that I had just gotten married for the first and thank goodness the only time when I celebrated my thirtieth birthday, two decades earlier. Time flies when you're having fun. It also flies when you're not. So make your choice.

Only a mere decade before exchanging vows, I had finished a two year vacation, under the guise of attending college, roaming around the southern part of the U.S. of A. on my motorcycle, a fun way to turn twenty. A rented doublewide was my home at the time.

Beforehand, on my tenth birthday, I was riding on a cheap skateboard I named Malibu instead of riding on a real surfboard at Malibu. But I am creative and God always shows me a way. So I celebrated that big day on Saturday at the Norris Theatre watching Frankie and Annette in a hit at the time, *Bikini Beach*. I was there living it in Technicolor.

And if you allow me one more digression, ten years before that, I showed up here on the Third Rock squealing like a banshee, wet and hungry as usual. Multiples of ten are easy to calculate but hard to swallow when contemplating your life cycles. I had pondered going back to *snoozeville* earlier, but now I was wide awake feeling like I needed to do something. A Cat Stevens morning had broken outside my sleeping quarters as it had for over 18,400 days for me

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on this planet called earth. At any given moment, I was hovering somewhere between 91 and 94 1/2 million miles from the sun and still risked getting skin cancer. Every twenty four hours, my spherical home simply spun around and if the clouds didn't block it, brought the sun into full view once again. I liked that consistency.

Nearly every morning, in Andy Jackson's home state, where I now specifically reside during the third quarter of my life, from the first signs of springtime throughout the long hot summer and well into the chilly mornings of a Tennessee autumn, my reliable feathered friend, Mr. Woodpecker, much to my chagrin, starts off most days between five and six a.m. He does so by banging out a soulful tune on one of the tall thick trees outside my humble abode. The rat-a-tat-tat echoes through the less than soundproof walls of my bedroom.

A few bushy-tailed squirrels join in most mornings by nervously tap dancing across the wooden planks of the adjoining back deck. This spontaneous wildlife ballet is generally followed by a cacophony of bird life, singing and chirping their way to high heaven. Above the little creek, in a huge walnut tree, down by my property line the inquiring owl repeats his ancient and probing question, "Who?" He sounds like the sage he is reported to be. I doubt that he thinks about the fact that he is wise. I wonder if he even knows that he is an owl for that moniker was merely assigned to him by the featherless and wingless creature with the idle curiosity.

As I strolled again down Memory Lane, I concluded that this had been one of those "interesting" years. I had

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successfully survived an extensive IRS audit and began my financial life anew with a sizeable accountant's bill just paid. The silver lining in that pecuniary cloud was that I had been forced to recreate in the greatest detail an entire year of my life, where I had been, what I had eaten, and who I had seen. Fortunately, my benevolent CPA worked out an easy payment plan for his services and my records were for the most part in extremely good order. The overall experience, like most challenges, was ultimately cathartic. I laughed when I remembered what Ben Franklin said, "Nothing in life is certain except death and taxes." Damn Skippy!

I figure if I live long enough I'll end up doing most everything once. I sure hope so as far as the good stuff is concerned. With me, it's *always something* and I don't have to nowadays nor have I ever pinched myself to see if I'm alive. Life invariably grabs me by the *cojones* every day to let me know. All I have to do is check the post, either the snail or "e" mail, or else answer the phone or peruse a smidgen of media and there it is; *something* to remind me that there's *something* left to do. And if you have kids, then the list is quite exhaustive.

How anyone can be bored on this planet is way beyond me. There are always questions to be answered. Some are new and easy and some are deep-rooted and difficult. For instance to finish my wise feathered friend's interrogatory, "*Who, indeed might I be?*", I considered my response, like I do each time I hear the query, the same question I have often asked myself repeatedly for a long, long time.

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I was able to return my sticky eyelids to their fully upright and locked position and yawned. I've read that the average duration of a yawn is about 6 seconds. I am quite sure that I have had a few that have lasted much longer, perhaps twelve seconds or so, putting the part of my brain responsible for yawns, the hypothalamus, in overdrive. Transmissions and brains work better in overdrive I think.

One thing's for sure, neuroscience or life can't be delved in too deeply until I have a large cup of hot java in hand. Caffeine is my preferred drug of choice in the morning. I was trying to drop a few pounds but here I was totally awake and hungry again and a Krispy Kreme doughnut sounded real good right now. Their stock had peaked but the product was still so good.

Nevertheless as I said, the owl's request for me to identify myself wasn't a new one. He began the oratory when I was a skinny lad many years ago on a very aged sacred piece of ground that I took for granted at the time. It seems like yesterday in some ways, but also like a thousand years in others. Maybe it's been an eternity or perhaps it just seems like forever. Anyhow, I have awakened and I smelled the coffee, figuratively and literally and it was a darn good thing.

Usually, after I have my Columbian brew and on favorable morns recline in the white Adirondack chair on the front porch, the rest of God's creation on my street stirs along with my thoughts and my thoughts nearly always go to the same starting place. Here I go again now as a matter of fact thinking about the places and people that have shaped me and my thoughts. I can't resist trying to solve puzzles

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like that, not unlike a good crossword, particularly the N.Y. Times and frankly any other brainteasers that stimulate frontal lobe activity in my head where human intelligence, according to some scientists passes through.

I love science, but the tedious nature of laboratory studies and the like is for more meticulous types than me. I have always felt more connected to the philosophical “big picture” sorts and the practical *applicationists*. Via my abundant episodes of caffeine and meditative front porch analysis, though less rigorous than controlled lab studies, I have developed a working theory for me and this book is reflective of my supposition. So without further adieu...

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