

My Polar Opposite: A Blessing in the Skies

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B-day. (September 16th, 2016)

This was it. 26 years in the making. There was no turning back. A decision that would alter the course of my life forever. Tears welled up in my eyes as I descended into the waters. One of my favourite songs chorused in the background. I paused briefly and thought about all the events of my life that led up to this moment.

The Auction (12 months ago)

So I found myself once again in Dalston, East London at the Kingsland shopping centre. My trusty suitcase was in hand and contained a variety of wares, from electronics to random books. I posted up in the middle of the centre, carefully selecting the location that would cause the most chaos.

The owner of the popcorn stall to the left of me was up in arms as I was violating his prime location. I ignored his pleas and carefully unzipped the suitcase, revealing the contents to curious passers-by. Once I was happy with my set-up the auction began. I channelled my inner Sunday market trader and triumphantly announced that all items must go.

Slowly but surely a crowd began to emerge in a dome-like manner as people's curiosity began to grow. It wasn't a very good auction to be fair as I was giving things away for free randomly. The laptop was one of the first things to be given away.

At first, the people in attendance were apprehensive to take the items from me but once they saw that I meant business it became natural to them. The security guard was posted to the left of me, radio in hand. He wasn't sure what to make of the situation so he radioed his superior. I told the crowd that he was trying to end the giveaway and he quickly felt the wrath of the crowd. When his superiors asked him what offence I had committed he struggled to get his response out. Something along the lines of "he is in the middle of the market...giving away his belongings?" I couldn't help but laugh at their correspondence but I wouldn't let that stop me.

Next to go was the smartwatch. I removed it from my left hand and asked the crowd "who wants this smartwatch" the seeds of consumerism were strong in the crowd, the people couldn't believe their luck. My pre-requisite upon giving these items away was simple I would ask the people "am I crazy?" over and over again. If they said no I would hand the items over. With the smartwatch the lucky recipient was a teenager of South American descent, he was there with his friend. He took the watch rather reluctantly and headed off. A few minutes later the boy returned the watch to me saying that he couldn't accept it.

I was shocked by this as nobody else even hesitated to take the items from me, let alone return them. His conscience must have been working overtime. There was some hope in society after all. This dissipated quickly though as a lady who had already collected a couple of items wasted no time in stating that if he didn't want it she would be happy to take it off my hands. So I agreed and handed it over, clearly, she needed it more than me. It was interesting that the assortment of books that were in the suitcase received little attention compared to the electrical gizmos. Once the electronics had dried up I packed up shop, closed my suitcase and left the shopping centre.

Family Tension 1

The concern about my behaviour by my friends and family was frustrating. The more they pushed the more erratic my behaviour became. You want to see crazy, I can do crazy. Finally, I'm coming out of my shell and everyone is saying there is something wrong with me. I was told that I was displaying symptoms of bipolar disorder. When I heard the symptoms being read I said it sounds like you are describing a superhero. Reduced need for sleep, heightened senses, increased confidence, happy, euphoric, energised and creative. Who wouldn't

want to be feeling this? I was NEO in the matrix and the agents were trying to constrain my mind and keep me in the programme. Nobody could understand what I was going through. What I wanted the most was freedom to pursue my interests and I would become frustrated very quickly when people said things I considered foolish. Radio silence was one of my mantras and whenever somebody spoke nonsense I would introduce radio silence and stop speaking to that person for a specific duration of time. Sometimes 5 minutes sometimes more. Nobody was safe, people had to choose their words wisely or risk suffering radio silence.

I negotiated with my family members to get myself voluntarily checked out. I visited two medical institutions with one of my oldest friends and the response that I received was striking. They said that you cannot do walk ins and that you have to get referred. I told them that my parents are concerned with my mental health and they repeated their policy. Referrals only. I had to make an appointment with the GP in order to get a referral, which could take months basically. It only takes a moment to end one's life, not that I was suicidal at that point or anything. You tell the doctor you are feeling unwell and you can get treatment or an assessment very quickly, for whatever reason mental health is not given the same respect, urgency or funding as physical health.

I remember one argument between me and my family where I spoke about how worthless the qualifications that I had gained were. I remember tearing up my university diploma in front of my mother. I placed no value on the western education and they could not comprehend what was happening. My room was a mess and I also destroyed the printer which I had only just bought by smashing it across the floor in anger.

The best way to describe my emotional state at this point was the same level of intelligence but I had a childlike temperament. When I was happy I was euphoric but when somebody crossed me, the rage inside me had to express itself somehow. I would maybe jump up and down or walk around the room in agitation.

Section 136

Tensions continued to flare up in the household and this culminated with the abrupt decision to sleep in a hotel and collect my thoughts. Unfortunately, it was around 2:00am and I didn't understand the trouble that was to come. I collected way too many belongings and the journey to the first hotel, which

was in the immediate area, was exhausting. Once I got there I was told that there were no beds available.

Fair enough I thought, let me try the other hotel that is local to me. I was already beginning to regret taking all of these belongings but my pride wouldn't let me go back and drop some items back after storming out.

Luckily, we live in the age of the app and I was able to book a cab to the hotel. Once I got there it was the same story, no rooms available. At this point, I was beginning to question my decision but I was determined to find a hotel to rest in. Once again I found myself on my phone application browsing hotels that currently have rooms available. All I wanted to do was kick back, unwind and watch The Matrix, was that asking too much? My hotel quest led me to West London at a relatively snazzy hotel. I thanked the cab driver as he helped me unload my belongings. Immediately I was hit with good and bad news by the receptionist. He confirmed that they have rooms available however check-in is at 12:00. That was no good and so once again I was on my phone, exhausted searching for a hotel. Fool me once shame on me, fool me thrice...

This time, I would do things differently to prevent this situation happening again. I booked a hotel room in west London and made sure that the check-in time corresponded with the time on my watch. I used the scrolling interface on my phone to select 5:00 am. I received the confirmation email which specified the check-in time. At this point, I was sure that nothing else would go wrong and it would be smooth sailing from here on out. Oh, how I was mistaken.

I arrived at the 4th hotel and told the receptionist of my booking. To my dismay, he repeated the same thing that I heard at the last hotel. Check-in is at 12:00 am. I asked the man if I could at least stay in the lobby and he told me no.

At this point, I had reached my limit and decided rather spontaneously that I was going to wait right here in the lobby until it was time to check in. You can call it my version of a peaceful protest. What I couldn't understand was why you would allow me to choose my check-in time via the app only to be told otherwise in person. A whole bunch of hassle could have been avoided.

And so the war of attrition began, customers of the hotel were having to walk around me as a result of my belongings occupying the reception. I could see

how this was impacting the manager and he grew increasingly uncomfortable. I was just chilling, to be honest, biding my time and ignoring the pleas to leave as I felt that I had been misled through the application. About half an hour into the standoff the manager said he would call the police if I didn't leave. I encouraged him to do so as I have a right to be here. Within 10 minutes two police officers arrived at the scene. The manager explained from his perspective what the situation was and I was going about my own business, initially giving the officer radio silence. I was curious to see how much taxpayer money would be wasted dealing with this situation.

Eventually, I broke my vow of silence and began conversing with the officer. I explained what I was doing here and made clear my intentions to stay until I could check into my room. For a good 45 minutes, the officer was trying his hardest to get me to reconsider my decision, but I was adamant. I did, however, extend an olive branch to the manager and told him that if he apologised for the misleading hotel booking application and also for denying me access to the lobby that I would leave. However, the pride of the manager overwhelmed him. He refused to apologise. Instead, his employee gave me what I consider to be a sincere apology. However, it was not sufficient as he had done no wrong by me. The manager's stance was firm, he wasn't going to

apologise and I wasn't going to leave. At this point, the officer called backup and within moments there were about four officers in the hotel reception.

The stalemate continued until around 7:00 am when the manager told me and the officers that he has officially cancelled my booking and that I now have no right to be there. Now the police officers established their authority over me. He mentioned the breach of peace laws would allow him to remove me from the premises. I said, "do what you have to do officer." Before I knew it my wrists were encircled by the ice cold steel of the handcuffs. It was my first time under arrest and my immediate thought was that the cuffs were way too tight.

The officer then escorted me downstairs and carried my belongings down also. I thought this whole exercise was just a routine and that once I was outside of the building we would part ways. Once again I learned the hard way not to make assumptions. We had now left the private property and the officer stated that he is unarresting me from the breach of peace, however, I am now being detained under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act.

First, I was in awe, then I had to give the officer some respect for this sneaky manoeuvre. He could have made his intentions clear in the hotel lobby but the section 136 can only be applied on public property. Funny how the law works. My human right to liberty vanished by this simple application of the law. Looking back at things I have to commend the officer as he executed a perfect combo of laws, from breach of peace smoothly to Section 136. This was something one could expect from a game of Street Fighter.

Section 136 enables the police officer(s) to take an individual who they deem to be suffering from a mental disorder and to be in immediate need of care or control to a place of safety. This is supposedly done in the interests of that individual or for the protection of others. The two places of safety are a hospital and a police station. You can be held for up to 72 hours while you are assessed by an “approved mental health professional” with “specialist” training.

This whole saga was quite traumatising in itself. It wasn't as straightforward as it could have been. At one point I was in the police van waiting for about 40 minutes to be taken to the hospital. I repeatedly asked for my cuffs to be

loosened but my pleas fell on deaf ears. There was a young officer in the van and I asked him “why are you treating me like a criminal” “can you at least loosen these handcuffs, I am in pain.” I tried to catch his eyes but he could not bring himself to look at me squarely.

Eventually, the officer hopped in the van and we were off to the hospital. It was a rather bumpy ride, with no real care for my wellbeing. How come they have seatbelts and I am swaying side to side, bumping into the walls of the vehicle, with my hands cuffed behind my back? After 15 minutes or so we reached our destination and the officers and medical professionals spoke among themselves. I was un-cuffed and asked to sit down in this hospital over in West London.

The approved mental health professional from the NHS spoke with the officers who I dealt with at the hotel and gave their version of the whole ordeal. Their presence at the hospital was maintained for a few minutes. This was probably to make sure that I wasn't a physical threat or something. Shortly after that, they departed and I began speaking with the NHS woman. From the outset, she was convinced that I needed to be sectioned and taken to the ward. For this first time during this whole episode, I began to fear that I would lose my freedom. I tried my best to explain my actions, the situation at home that led

to this. Even the jokes I made with the officers were being used as proof of mental illness. Note to self, *do not joke with the police* what you say can and will be used against you in the court of mental health assessment.

What was interesting was the fact that in the room was two independent mental health consultants. They were sat to my right whilst the NHS professional was sat on my left rapidly typing away at her computer. I don't know what she was typing at the time but she could have at least addressed me face to face. At this point I thought it was a foregone conclusion that I would enter the mental health system and she was preparing the paperwork right there and then. What happened afterwards filled me with both relief and astonishment.

The NHS woman was adamant that there was something wrong with me, however, the independent consultants have the power to overrule her verdict and they deemed me sane enough to go home, sleep it off and make amends with my family. They listened carefully to my reasoning and they could see that my logic and cognition was indeed intact. This was shocking as it revealed the nature of psychiatry as a medical practice. On the one hand, I am being told that I am mentally ill and need to be sectioned and on the other front I am being told to go home. How can three specialists come to different

conclusions? If one has cancer and is diagnosed at one hospital and then gets a second opinion you would expect the doctor to come to the same diagnosis. Consistency is key, or so you would think. It seems opinions and biases can impact the conclusions that medical professions arrive at following the so-called assessment. No brain scans were taken or anything physical that could prove what she was saying. It is basically their opinion and observations against yours. It is a scary feeling knowing that you no longer determine your own fate.

Once I was discharged I was glad to be on my way home. Regardless of the drama that was occurring at home, I would rather be in a familiar environment with my freedom than to enter the mental health system. I was picked up by my friends and family who I was happy to see. They loaded up all my belongings in the car in a Tetris-like manner, not to mention the four passengers. I recall carrying electronics on my lap for the duration of the ride home. This whole episode occurred on September 5th 2015.