

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: JEREMY RENNER

A candid conversation with the indie darling turned action star about the important stuff: work, love, tabloid rumors and real estate

Moviegoers tend to like Jeremy Renner best when he plays two-fisted, daring, close-to-the-vest tough guys. He was, after all, so convincing as *The Hurt Locker*'s Army maverick defusing bombs in Iraq that he snagged a 2010 best actor Oscar nomination. Playing a hot-wired, nothing-to-lose Boston bank robber in *The Town* the next year, Renner clinched a best supporting actor Oscar nomination. He's no less watchable when he dials down the macho, as he's shown as *American Hustle*'s shady New Jersey mayor and as *Kill the Messenger*'s persecuted whistle-blower. But he's completely in the zone drawing a crossbow as Hawkeye in the *Avengers* superhero flicks, busting out Muay Thai moves as a member of the *Mission: Impossible* spy team and running up the side of a three-story building as a genetically enhanced black-ops agent in *The Bourne Legacy*. That's why this is the summer of Renner: He's in two epics: *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, which topped the box office, and *Mission: Impossible—Rogue Nation*, coming in July.

Offscreen Renner is equally colorful. He caused talk for commenting on the bodacious breasts of Jennifer Lopez, his co-presenter, at this year's Golden Globe Awards. He and his *Avengers* co-star Chris Evans stoked the internet outrage machine when they jokingly referred to

their fellow superhero *Black Widow* as a slut. Evans apologized, while Renner pointed out the obvious: He was talking about fictional behavior of a fictional character. He has also flipped the bird at those who speculate about his sexual orientation. On one subject, though, he has been tight-lipped: the gnarly ongoing divorce from his wife of 10 months, 24-year-old actress-model Sonni Pacheco, with whom he recently came to a joint-custody agreement concerning their two-year-old daughter, Ava.

Jeremy Lee Renner (nickname Renni) was born in working-class Modesto, California on January 7, 1971 to a mother who ruled a roost of four kids and a father who managed a bowling center and later became a college administrator. (They divorced when Renner, the oldest, was eight.) After graduating from Beyer High School, where sports and playing in a rock band helped him overcome shyness, he attended Modesto Junior College, gravitating toward computer science until he discovered the school's theater department.

In 1992, after studying at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, he moved to Los Angeles and landed the lead role in 1995's *National Lampoon's Senior Trip*, starred in a series of beer commercials and did TV movies and series guest spots including a

role as a vampire on *Angel*. His 2002 Independent Spirit Award-nominated performance as the people-eating serial killer in *Dahmer* helped pave the way to his big-budget breakthrough role as a dirty cop in *S.W.A.T.*, followed by *28 Weeks Later*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* and a stint on the short-lived 2009 NYPD cop series *The Unusuals*. But once Renner collected multiple award nominations for *The Hurt Locker* and *The Town*, he moved up to legitimate stardom.

PLAYBOY sent Contributing Editor **Stephen Rebello**, who last interviewed Joaquin Phoenix, to catch up with Renner. Reports Rebello: "Jeremy Renner's experience augmenting his acting by dabbling in real estate has paid off. We met at his sprawling, sleek home, sitting on a terrace that rings the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired house. The view was spectacular. Renner has a watchful gaze that many people mistake for a suspicious nature. But during our long conversations I found him to be unexpectedly bighearted, philosophical and thoughtful. It's astonishing to watch Hawkeye turn into Mr. Rogers when he's playing at home with his two-year-old."

PLAYBOY: You've grabbed attention and critical acclaim for roles in indie-minded movies as different as *The Hurt Locker*



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"I was so small-town that when I won my first lead, in *National Lampoon's Senior Trip*, I called my mom and told her, 'I'm going to Toronto to film a movie.' But I didn't even know where Toronto was."



"I want to learn to fly a helicopter. Has having my daughter stopped me from that? We can croak at any moment doing the stupidest things. What message would that send? That living life with fear is a good thing?"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MULLER

and *Kill the Messenger*, but audiences know you best as an action hero in *The Avengers*, *Mission: Impossible* and *The Bourne Legacy*. Are you anywhere near as fearless as those characters?

RENNER: Fear is a huge part of most people's lives. It's a very oppressive human emotion, the most powerful human emotion. Every day from when I was 22 to 32, I deliberately and consciously did things to fight fear. Things I was afraid of, like guns, sharks, heights, success, intimacy? I've checked those off the list. Even in the beginning of my career, my confidence always came from being fearless. I always went in to auditions with the attitude "I dare you not to cast me." I went in and did what I thought was honest, truthful and just different. Maybe it was wrong. I didn't care. Maybe they thought it was the worst. I didn't care. I just went in, and still go in, with absolute fearlessness. It's my strength as an actor.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned guns. Many of your characters use them. Are you still afraid?

RENNER: A gun is a really easy and terrifying thing to be afraid of. I like guns now, but I have only a couple—a couple at this structure and one at another. I got good at them, and then I found a love for them.

PLAYBOY: Do you carry a gun?

RENNER: No. For me it's for home protection or sport shooting or target practice. I'm not a hunter. I spent a lot of time training for movies, shooting and getting comfortable with weapons. There's no fear for me *ever* in a weapon now. I also have a few swords, but that's because of what they mean to me; there's a lot of history behind them. They're all tucked away and hidden now that I have a baby.

PLAYBOY: What risks won't you take?

RENNER: None. I've been riding a motorcycle for a long time. I used to be kind of daring on it. Now I ride because I enjoy the experience. I'm not a daredevil doing wheelies, and I don't ride fast. That's not because of my daughter; it's because that's where I'm at in my life. I'm not jumping out of planes. But would I, if I had the opportunity? I've wanted to do that for a good 30 years, so I would consider it. I want to learn to fly a helicopter. Is that dangerous? Sure, I guess it's just as dangerous as anything else in life. Has having my daughter, Ava, stopped me from doing that? We can croak at any moment doing the stupidest things. It would be a great disservice to her if, when she was older, she thought, Dad stopped riding motorcycles or started getting soft and protective of his own life because he wanted to be around for me. What message does that send? That living life with fear is a good thing? I'd rather that she knows I'd go out with a smile on my face living ac-

countably, consciously and responsibly in my actions.

PLAYBOY: When was the last time you had to defend yourself?

RENNER: I've never been in a real physical fight. There's no reason to fight—unless I have to protect my life or the life of someone I care about. I've been in altercations, and there have been a few moments when I had to put someone down.

PLAYBOY: Who?

RENNER: A drunk guy in a bar—it's always that scenario. A guy got really drunk and pushed Julia Stiles, my co-star [in the 2005 movie *A Little Trip to Heaven*]. I kindly choked him out and remedied the situation. I've also had to choke people out because they pushed my mom or knocked my sister down, but I've never felt like a badass.

PLAYBOY: Those sound like physical fights to us. Let's talk about the incident involving your sister that you mentioned in a 2012 interview about a Christmas Eve bar fight. You said,

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"This guy choked me with the scarf I was wearing. He called me a fag because I was wearing a scarf! Then he shoved my sister and I got behind him and I choked him out—put him to sleep." That same interview was one of the few in which you've addressed rumors about your sexual preference.

RENNER: I was mad at the interviewer and was kind of hammering him, saying, "I thought we were doing the cover of *Hollywood Reporter*, not *OK!* magazine." And while I was hammering him, I figured, Okay, I'll speak to this. But as a general rule I don't respond to questions about my personal life. I'm not going to try to prove what I am or am not. It's silly, right? When you google yourself and the first thing that comes up is "Jeremy Renner gay," it's like, "Oh, now you've arrived. You're now a giant movie star." So I just had a big laugh about it. I don't care, ultimately, if that's what people want to think, read and care about.

Fucking say whatever the hell you want about me. Look at where we're at socially—leaps and bounds ahead of where we started. That's an amazing thing. To suggest that it's negative, that being gay is a terrible thing, a perversion or whatever—I just don't get it. Don't you wish we were in a world where we're not shaming, judging and boxing people in?

PLAYBOY: Unlike many actors, you've managed to maintain a profitable side career for years, flipping houses with your longtime friend and business partner Kristoffer Winters.

RENNER: In 2003 I had no money, but I had a contract to do *S.W.A.T.* My brother Kristoffer—he's a family friend forever, but I call him my brother—came into a little bit of money, 10 grand or something. We'd lived together prior to *S.W.A.T.* and kept talking about how paying rent was such a dumb thing because you can't write it off on your taxes. It's like throwing away money. We always wanted to invest in property. It became a situation where I could get a condo in the Valley and he could do the same, or since we already lived together, we could buy a house together. That's what we did, and we fixed it up the way we wanted for 30 grand.

PLAYBOY: You flipped that house, right?

RENNER: We had a little wine shindig at the house. Our real estate agent was there, and someone who was at the party offered twice what we paid for it. We turned that money into a bigger house and kept rolling from there. Being actors, we thought if it all went to hell, at least we'd have a roof over our heads. We didn't want to do the stock market or anything else, so we kept acquiring bigger structures, and now it's 20-some houses later between the two of us. Some we did on our own, but mostly we did them together.

PLAYBOY: And your MO is to live in the houses before selling?

RENNER: Each house has always been our primary residence. We never considered ourselves flippers. We were just investing in the next home we were going to live in. We live in the houses while the work's being done. Most people couldn't do that, and we've done it umpteen times. It's like going back to camping and caveman days—no electricity, no running water. [Director-writer] Preston Sturges was the first owner of the last house we were in, and Charlie Chaplin was married there. We wanted to preserve some sort of Hollywood history in a very transient town.

PLAYBOY: You guys made headlines in 2013 for selling for \$24 million a redone art deco-style mansion that you bought for \$7 million. By now someone must have pitched you two on doing a reality-TV series on celebrity house renovation.

RENNER: I haven't done a house with

Kristoffer in a while. I don't have a lot of time for that stuff anymore. He went off and did that big house on his own, then started a design firm. My mother and sister work there too. A lot of TV offers have come in. Ellen DeGeneres talked about me coming on as a judge on one of her shows. Kristoffer and I considered putting together our own TV show that I was just going to produce but not appear in.

PLAYBOY: What about the house we're in right now?

RENNER: The builder-owner of this house really had it pimped out for 1960, when it was built. It was like a *Star Trek* home with panels and buttons. It just needed to be brought up to today's standards, and I wanted to keep the integrity of the home of this amazing couple who raised their two girls here. I have another home in Tahoe where I spend half my time, but this is my home now, and I'm pretty sure this is my last structure. It's something I built, and it's a representation of every house I built and pretty much every movie I've done. This house represents a lot of who I am spiritually. This will be my daughter's place in the future. I own it now, but Ava owns me. When she drew her first breath and with that palmar reflex grabbed my finger, the thought came to me, If all goes well, this same scenario will happen when I take my last breath.

PLAYBOY: After you appeared as a presenter at the Golden Globe Awards in January, some criticized you for making a quip about your co-presenter Jennifer Lopez's cleavage in her low-cut gown. When it came time to give out the award, she asked, "You want me to open the envelope? I've got the nails," and you said, "You've got the globes too."

RENNER: I'd just watched the show's opening monologue, thinking, Those girls, co-hosts Amy Poehler and Tina Fey, are so funny, awesome and pretty racy. So I went out, and then that happened. It's my sense of humor. I don't take things too seriously. I didn't watch any of the Globes. I went to have a drink at the bar, and I kept hearing people all night saying, "Dude, that was the funniest thing," "Bro, that was the best part of the show." I was like, What are you talking about? I was clueless.

PLAYBOY: It blew up on social media.

RENNER: Actually, Jennifer thought it was fucking funny and got a little sweaty and maybe even turned on by the whole experience. We partied at a couple of events afterward and had a good time. Other people started running their mouths about it. Everybody's entitled to an opinion, but I can't be bothered. We gave zero fucks. I would have made a public apology if it really hurt her feelings. It was the complete opposite, and she's gone on record as saying she thinks Renner's hysterical.

PLAYBOY: You've been going through a

highly publicized divorce from Sonni Pacheco, your wife of 10 months. You've settled the custody issues regarding your daughter, but some of the accusations that were made public from the court documents must be especially uncomfortable for someone as private as you are.

RENNER: I haven't slept more than four hours a night in the past week. My skin's breaking out. I've got dark circles under my eyes. I'm dehydrated. I look like shit. I felt pretty insecure walking into a photo shoot this morning, and I was running late because I had just gotten out of my fourth deposition for the divorce. I see anything that takes me away from my daughter, whether it's something good like making *Mission: Impossible 5* or something bad like my divorce, as a distraction and an obstacle. Now, if anything takes me away and I don't get to see her, I just won't do it. I don't care what you pay me. All my energy goes toward her and her well-being. We split the time with Ava equally now. When it's

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Daddy and Ava time, that's all I do.

PLAYBOY: Your parents got divorced as well, right?

RENNER: When I was eight and in third grade. They didn't have a lot of money, and after the divorce, we moved around a lot. Up until junior high, I thought a new grade meant a new school for everybody. Maybe that contributed to my shyness. I had to constantly either be very gregarious and go meet new people or just be the observer that I was and still am. I was the oldest of four kids, and my mother had her hands full at home. At that time, when I was young, my dad was managing a bowling center and ended up becoming a partner in another bowling center in Lodi. After the divorce, he went to get an education and worked as an administrator at California State University, Stanislaus, where he's been for the past 25 years or so. We're a very close family, all of us.

PLAYBOY: What early jobs did you have?

RENNER: I started working when I was

10, delivering papers, working summers washing cars and then in high school bagging groceries. If I wanted something, I had to go earn it.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever work at your father's bowling center?

RENNER: No, but I started bowling when I was three and had a 225 average at the age of 12. I toured a lot as a semipro and bowled against grown-ass people. Out of 500 competitors, I would take 17th place. I was very competitive and played a lot of sports—baseball and especially soccer. I was nimble, fast, small and wiry. In bowling, you have to beat your own score, though. If I didn't get 225 or break 200, I couldn't deal with it. I always joke that the game put me in therapy. It didn't really, but it was something I had to pull away from because I was not enjoying it anymore.

PLAYBOY: What memories do you have of growing up in Modesto?

RENNER: It was a great place to grow up in the 1970s. We didn't lock our doors. I was a latchkey kid, given a lot of freedom, and all my friends were either doing good things together or getting in trouble together—stupid stuff like making bottle rockets or toilet papering a house. Or maybe I threw a water balloon at a car driving 50 miles an hour or shined mirrors in people's eyes while they were driving. A cop would come by the house, "Do you know what your boy did with his group of friends?" and slap us on the wrist.

PLAYBOY: How do you most remember yourself back then?

RENNER: As a very late bloomer, even physically, I was still always confident when it came to sports. I dominated in a lot of things. I knew I had separated myself from the pack. I was always light-hearted, funny, mischievous and didn't take things too seriously. I didn't feel confident until my senior year in high school, when I really was putting myself out there and being gregarious and funny. I was always driven. Even if I didn't always like school, I had a practical sensibility about things. Getting good grades would get me more freedom. I never allowed myself a bad emotion or thought. That was all suppressed. [laughs] Hence, look at the characters I play now. All those roles are therapeutic.

PLAYBOY: When did you discover sex?

RENNER: When I stopped kicking and chasing around the soccer ball, I started chasing girls. It was later in high school that I blossomed in that realm.

PLAYBOY: How did you lose your virginity?

RENNER: My story is awful, just like everybody else's. It was just this random, uncomfortable thing, and I was so nervous. I remember my dad's sex talk was "Son, no glove, no love." When I was a teenager, he was a single dad, and I'm sure he was kind of prowling around. He opened a drawer. "Here are the condoms."

PLAYBOY: When did you first use them?

RENNER: I was a senior and my girlfriend was a freshman in the same high school. She and her mom would come into the store where I was bagging groceries. They were new in town. We were having a little teenage party at my dad's house—some of my bandmates, my girlfriend's twin sister, some of their friends. It started at five in the afternoon. We had music going, had a couple of beers, and then, cut to midnight. Knowing the opportunity was finally going to present itself, I had put on the condom well before we were actually going to do it.

PLAYBOY: How long is "well before"?

RENNER: Like four to six hours. I was so nervous, I didn't want to put it on inside out or upside down or anything. It happened on my dad's water bed, where we both sort of passed out. I'm pretty sure it was uneventful for both of us. I woke up to her mom calling on the phone. I felt bad that her mom was angry with me—as I think any parent would be. I'd still see them when I was bagging groceries. I'd see her at school. But she certainly wasn't allowed to hang out after school anymore. They kiboshed it very quickly.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever wonder if your ex-girlfriend has seen you in movies?

RENNER: I think she's still in Modesto, married and has some kids. But I have no idea what she thinks. Maybe she goes to the movies and thinks, Okay, Hawkeye was my first. Or she could have a voodoo doll of me, for all I know.

PLAYBOY: How did acting enter the picture?

RENNER: It was out of the blue. I finished high school and knew I should go to college. I've got a buck-75 IQ and was accepted to some good schools—the University of California, Berkeley was one of them. I would have had to borrow money to go to school without even knowing what I wanted to study. My dad was working as a counselor for kids coming out of high school. He recommended that I stay in Modesto and get my undergrad work in math and science out of the way. He said, "For the rest of your units, go play. Pick a class and suck at it. Try the shit you never thought you would ever want to do." He gave me permission to fail. He had no judgment about whatever I wanted to be. What a gift that was.

PLAYBOY: So theater was your chance to go play?

RENNER: I majored in computer science, but I also took a speech class. Terrifying. Finally, like throwing darts at something, I checked out an acting class. I thought, "I like Michael J. Fox on *Family Ties*. He's funny. That's what acting is." Luckily, I had an amazing teacher, Charline Freedman, God rest her soul, who exposed me to what the life of an actor really is. Acting gave me a community, a communion of people—a very exposing and

vulnerable place but also a safe one because you're hiding in a character when you're onstage. Suddenly I went full-tilt boogie into it. I was like, *This is what I want to be doing.*

PLAYBOY: There's a 1990 video of you on YouTube playing the Scarecrow in a junior-college production of *The Wizard of Oz*.

RENNER: That was the first play I invited my family to come see what I was doing—acting, singing and dancing in front of 1,500 people. For my family it was a case of "Who is this guy?" I started doing tortured, heavier roles in emotional family dramas—*Orphans*, *Ordinary People*—and that's when I really dug in with psychology. Studying psychology sent me on a journey of self-awareness. I had guidance from my father, who has studied psychology. He's also a theologian who introduced me to a lot of religions and exposed me to higher thinking and various philosophies. Psychology was

Psychology was the subject I clung to. Acting and human behavior became one to me.

the subject I really clung to, and acting and human behavior became one to me. That helped me realize I needed to take off the blinders of a small town and go explore myself, my fears and my artistry.

PLAYBOY: Were your parents okay with your serious acting ambitions?

RENNER: They were supportive, but they didn't know quite what to do with me. I found out later that my parents were freaking out. Within this two-year period, I went to San Francisco and studied, did play after play and said, "I'm moving down to Los Angeles." I'd never really spent any time there, but I knew that's where I needed to go. I didn't want a career in theater, because I would always struggle and not make much money, which wasn't the best scenario for me to be able to raise a family one day.

PLAYBOY: In your early 20s you already had a goal to raise a family?

RENNER: Well, to get married later in my life, but yeah. Like Jed Clampett,

I packed up the old truck and moved a bunch of shit down. I got an agent quickly. I was very driven and even kept an organizer with a calendar. I worked enough to call myself a working actor. But it was difficult for me to communicate to my family in Modesto what it was like here in L.A. They didn't see what we called "the suck" of it all—that I was living on 10 bucks a month, trying to stay warm, eating doughnut holes and living a few nights in my car. I leaned on the family. I made down here—people who were doing what I was doing. I was so small-town that when I won my first lead, in *National Lampoon's Senior Trip*, I called my mom and told her, "I'm going to Toronto to film a movie." But I didn't even know where Toronto was.

PLAYBOY: How quickly did you find your social groove in Hollywood?

RENNER: Quickly. I was also in a band here as a side project with a bunch of rock stars from Tonic. We met up doing karaoke at the now sadly not with us bar J. Sloan's in West Hollywood and wound up doing a bunch of acoustic gigs around town. It had an Eagles kind of sound but edgier. It was fun, but that's when *S.W.A.T.* happened. I found a brother for life with Colin Farrell on that one, and my movie career really took off.

PLAYBOY: Did casting people tell you that you had the face and vibe for darker roles?

RENNER: My resting face can be very stern, like "murderous resting face." I inherited that from my mom, a nurturer, protector and tough, tough woman with a soft goopy center. She's like a mama bear: You poke her with a stick and you'll get a claw. My father has much more of the almost female energy—very emotional and communicative. My higher self is more tuned in with my dad. I still don't know how people perceive me, and ultimately I don't care. They seem to think I want to murder them or I want to fuck them.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned earlier that you've recently had some distractions that have kept you from your daughter, including *Mission: Impossible—Rogue Nation*, which of course stars Tom Cruise. Were the reports of production difficulties exaggerated?

RENNER: This *Mission* was like all the *Missions*—great action set pieces with an idea of a story somewhere in there. There have been four successful versions before this one, so why would I fight the process? I just went and gave to the best of my ability in the scenario I was in. Now, was it the best scenario for me? The best at what I'm good at? Fuck, no. Not having any information about what the heck is going on doesn't empower any artists to be at the best of their ability. I trusted Tom Cruise, [director] Chris McQuarrie

(continued on page 145)



JEREMY RENNER

Continued from page 52

and the studio, and I went with it.

PLAYBOY: Any gut feeling on whether the trust was well-placed?

RENNER: I love Tom, Simon Pegg and everybody else who is in that movie. I love my character. I was happy to be doing it. The ultimate challenge and difficulty on that movie and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* was that they both shot in London, which took me 11 hours away from Ava. That was what caused any cantankerousness, agitation or negative feelings I had about the whole moviemaking experience. All I worried about once I landed in London was, When do I get to see my little munchkin next? If I knew it was in two weeks, fine. If they said, "We don't know how long you're shooting," well, Mr. Renner's not going to be a happy man in that makeup trailer in the morning. If I did not have my daughter, I would have enjoyed being in London, and I would not have come back to the States hardly

at all. But 40 flights from Los Angeles to London and back nearly killed me.

PLAYBOY: You went public with your frustrations in 2012 about how little your Hawkeye character had to do in *The Avengers*. There's more of him in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Are you happier?

RENNER: Not to be a dick, but I actually get to *spea*k in this one. I have not seen the whole movie, but I just saw a scene the other day that I loved because all of a sudden it made me think, Wow—that's who Hawkeye is. Not that I want to go do a separate Hawkeye movie, but there's a lot to explore there. It's a near impossibility to be able to put that many huge characters in a movie and still have everyone be happy. There's a lot more for me to do in this new one, among an even bigger cast with new baddies and new goodies. Everything that kind of worked in *The Avengers* is exponentially bigger in this one.

PLAYBOY: This one's a much more team-oriented ensemble movie.

RENNER: I saw Robert Downey Jr. twice on the last one, including off the set. Being together a lot more on this one made the experience more fun. We got to make fun of each other's costumes. The challenge for director Joss Whedon was that putting Downey, Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth, Scarlett Johansson, Mark Ruffalo and me together is like herding kittens. All of us in one room? That's like a bunch of kids running around. It's perfect because we play a ragtag band

of broken, flawed heroes. If it was just a bunch of guys flying around in suits and shooting shit—like, who gives a shit? With these characters, there's something to actually root for and fight for. You really care about these people.

PLAYBOY: Are you planning to do any follow-ups to *The Bourne Legacy*?

RENNER: There's a huge, quite complicated history and backstory with that franchise. People are very precious about wanting to keep it highbrow and smart. To continue doing those movies, there's got to be a good reason to keep telling that story. Those are things I have no part in, so I'll let the people who are good at what they do figure those things out and figure out the timing. But yeah, I would love to do another one.

PLAYBOY: Adding things up, what kind of time is this for you professionally and personally?

RENNER: I feel it's always an amazing time. You're talking to a guy who's really happy in his fucking flip-flops right now with his little daughter in her pajamas running around in the house, waiting for me. I've been born with a lot of love and still have even more love in my life. I'm a man like anybody else. I'm accepting of my flaws and of the good and bad things in my life. Even though there are some crappy things going on in life, I know there's a light at the end of the tunnel.



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