

Timeline and Modus Operandi

by
Todd Brendan Fahey

The core of this collection was tapped out on a failing 80386 IBM "clone" during the winter months of 1992 and into early 1993, Salt Lake City, Utah, riding an adrenaline wave from having just finished *Wisdom's Maw* and still with the majority of a sheet of LSD, which had -- to that point -- fueled nearly all of my works of fiction and "creative nonfiction."

As then-adjunct Professor of English at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah, I was facing an unpaid stretch of weeks through Christmas and the New Year and had no intention of getting a part-time job, as I knew that I would not see the new semester if I did not get that novel done. *Wisdom's Maw* had been sitting 1/4 finished since 1990, and it would take a couple of close friends who knew of my needs to supply me with what I needed to finish the bastard thing. Having suddenly come into a parcel of very fine blotter acid, I carved out a schedule and a List of Rules & Regulations for the house that I knew would allow for ample progress; barring a nervous breakdown or an intervention by the good members of the Salt Lake City police department, I was hopeful for the first time in ages.

I would rise with my then-wife in the mornings of that (for me) winter vacation, cook and eat breakfast together, and -- as soon as I heard the car start up in the driveway -- implant between 500 and 1,000 micrograms of Sandoz' finest between my cheek'n'gum, say why don't we? There would be *no more than one phone call* to the house during my Writing Day; she would enjoy lunches downtown with office colleagues or church members, and, by 5:15pm -- to a heavy awareness of the sliding of the tumblers on our deadbolt lock -- I would have completed between four and thirteen pages of a story of which I am still very proud and have come back to Consensus Reality (or, as close to it as I ever am). As a southern California transplant, I had almost no friends in Salt Lake City and, hence, no reason to fear a knocking on the door to jar me from out of my phantasmagoria. I had kicked booze two years earlier, was in complete control of my surroundings and had, during idle time in what was most of my earlier stint as a paralegal for an LA law firm, mapped out every scene, character sketch and venue in which the drama would take place. I simply had to sit in solace -- to strains of the Grateful Dead, Van Morrison and Roxy Music -- and get the bugger done.

And I did. In a white heat, basically smashed on acid and to endless mugs of herbal tea, and with enough incense and speaker volume to worry the neighbors, wrote 150+ pages in less than eight weeks. And still I had about 60 hits lurking in a filing cabinet. And is when I decided to begin writing the *Dogshit Park* stories.

I was on fire. Those four months stand as the most sustained stretch of creativity I have ever come into. A pleasant change of pace from the byzantine construction into which I had wrenched myself with *Wisdom's Maw*, the stories came as almost a cut-and-paste from the Beyond--fat slabs of dialogue and narrative would simply come to me, and the days were that of joy. Each evening, the old white Honda would pull up behind our flat, and she would be greeted with an exuberance and laughter and a, "...You've *got to read this*," and I can understand now why she suspected nothing.

It had become routine; and who knows how artists work, anyway? At least I was *producing something*--which, to her, nearly compensated for the weeks of fiscal non-reward.

Not written in that eight-week stretch are "Family Circle" and "Going Down the Road Feeling Bad: A Report on the Health of the Amerikan Spine" -- the latter, again, hammered out to a sustained chemical harvest (dextromethorphan hydrobromide, it was, this time). The former is the only thing I have ever written whilst drinking -- a nasty weekend at a condo with my then-wife in Destin, Florida, the key to which her employer was kind enough to lend to us, as an escape from Lafayette, Louisiana, into which we never quite settled after leaving Utah. I had seen enough adjunct Professors clutching their Master's degree diplomas and wondering when they would need to return to the Auto Parts counter of Hanley's Lube & Exhaust, for lack of a Ph.D.

Having run out of drugs and, sadly, back to the bottle; into a doctoral program in American Literature (the last "literature" course I had taken having been probably in high school -- my undergraduate degree being in pre-Law; the Master's, in the form of creative writing over which not a book was ever assigned), a depressive wreck, I was left alone in a windy beachside condominium by a frightened wife who let me have it to myself only hours after arrival and who, instead, drove further into Florida to stay with a brother and sister-in-law, such was the fury of mine temper. I remember killing off a lot of wine and a catfish left in the refrigerator for indeterminate days; I remember little else. No sleep had come to me between the time she had jettisoned the loaner home and having reappeared on a Sunday afternoon, to drive us back to Lafayette. When she did, and after finding many empty bottles in the kitchen trash and a bathroom in a vomitus state, begged of me was an answer. I shrugged, pushed across the table the handwritten sheaves of "Family Circle," then watched a good-hearted woman nearly crack.

Days later, after recovering from the binge and of salmonella, I reread what I had conjured and laid down the pen.

Divorce papers were served to me in November 1996, by which time I had sacked two quality New York literary agents, set up a small press imprint of my own and published

Wisdom's Maw. I would again quit drinking, but, again, by switching my poison. There were the expected phone calls, once review copies had begun making the rounds of magazines both mainstream and underground. I would "go on tour" for Boston's *Lollipop* magazine -- a trainwreck exhibition slated to go 'cross country, to join the Grateful Dead's "Furthur Festival," but got as far as Atlanta, before turning tail. Sometime around Halloween 1997, *Smoke* magazine -- a glossy, expensive affair -- sent me to Amsterdam. I thought I had been issued a pardon; a Higher Court (*Smoke* owner Robert Lockwood) decided otherwise.

Now, in the waking hours of 2010, I've learned enough about the mechanics of The Publishing Industry to know that some writers are destined -- largely to a clash of Puritan v. Nonconformist -- to *never* being "accepted." Spending thousands of dollars to fell trees in Indonesia for to get these things to you, the Reader, in Book Form -- and what with shipping costs per copy from my station as an expatriate abroad to what will be largely an American audience -- makes little sense to me. The format you observe here is both a case of "Necessity being the mother of invention" and a fair guess as to the "future of book publishing."

I feel as if "I am on to something" again. (Whereas, for many years, I was mostly just "on something.")

Don't ever give up.

Todd Brendan Fahey
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