

Confessions of a 35-year old - wait a second, I'm 36

by kris kemp

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Old Town, Florida - 8/7/2005

Sunday night, August 7, 2005

A few months ago, I bought a trailer in Old Town, Florida, a postage-stamp sized town about 40 miles west of Gainesville. This town is terribly tiny, consisting of rundown trailers and scattered houses that litter the streets that branch out from Highway 19/98/27. Here, in North Florida, the Suwannee River sets the border between Fanning Springs and Old Town.

On Highway 19, the speed limit is reduced from 65mph to 35mph as the road winds through Fanning Springs, a loose collection of bars, restaurants, auto shops, a drive-thru convenience store, and realtors. Most of these businesses are independently owned. And the town is so Americancentric that all the hotels, on their advertising marquees, advertise "American owned". The signs on other stores boast "locally owned". This place is crawling with the proud-to-be-American types. Most of the cars seem to be in a competition for the biggest-sized American flag on their vehicle. As if to say: "My flag is bigger than your flag".

Call it flag envy. Here, when it comes to flags, size matters. It's almost cartoonish in a way, as if the denizens of this small town are participating in their own myth, relegating themselves, unknowingly, to hyperbole. One flag I saw nearly covered the entire back gate of a large pickup truck. It was so enormous as to be absurd. I started laughing when I saw it. The irony lies in the fact that the flag they're willing to defend a flag that's made in China.

In Old Town, the only chain stores are the bank, Capitol City Bank, the gas station, BP, or British Petroleum. This stretch of businesses lasts for about one mile, maybe a little more. Adjacent to the bridge, on the west side, is Fanning Springs State Park, a 4,000-acre parcel forested with giant oaks, wooden walkways, and Fanning Springs itself, a first magnitude spring populated by young teens and parents with kids. The spring has a lifeguard. I visited the spot on my third trip up here. It looks like a swimming pool in the middle of the forest. White limestone sand bottom filled with clear water. Surrounding the perimeter of the spring is a

boardwalk, occupied with locals sitting on blankets, drinking cold beverages, watching their friends swim. The Suwannee River branches off into the Fanning Spring, but a thick cement wall divides the two, allowing boats to dock on the Suwannee side and protecting

Once you cross the bridge, after you've passed the stores on shops on Highway 19 in Fanning Springs, you are in Old Town. Immediately on your left, you'll spot Suwannee River Campgrounds, a ten-acre parcel of land, 900 feet which borders the Suwannee River. It's for sale. I drove through there once. It's a beautifully rundown place overgrown with weeds, dotted with arthritic wooden structures, two big ones that appear to have been a gathering back in the day, maybe a dining hall and perhaps the other, an stage for live music or dramatic performances. As I'm here to do research on real estate, particularly For Sale By Owner land, FSBO's, I called to see how much it was selling for.

When I called two months ago, the broker, who's selling it for the owner, said the owner was selling it for 1.5 million. When I called recently, about two weeks ago, the broker said: "Someone offered the owner 2.5 million for it, but he refused. He wants to get more."

Prices are shooting up here in Dixie County, called the Nature Coast, because of it's swampy land and low-lying areas, and no doubt, because of the inability to build near the beach as it's protected wetlands. Yeah, right. Wait 'til developers hear that. They'll just laugh and throw some money to the city commissioners. Progress has no conscience.

Two small towns are in Dixie County, Old Town and Cross City.

I'm up here to try to put some deals together, find the hole in the donut-- find an undervalued piece of land, buy it with the help of an investor, then sell it for a profit. My cousin Ronnie and his wife, Maria, who live in Canada, are the investors. I'm their pointman. I look for the deal, call FSBO's, dig through records and maps at the property appraisers office in Levy, Dixie, and Gilchrist counties, drive my beaten-up 1988 Honda Civic around the bumpy dirt roads looking for the hole in the donut, the piece of gold that's been overlooked, because, perhaps someone was delinquent on their taxes because of financial difficulties, maybe a divorce, sickness, or death. I'm not trying to rip people off.

Ideally, if we--Ron, Maria, and I--can find something going to foreclosure and buy it outright from the owner, not only do we save his credit, but he gets some cash as well. That's what we're hoping for, that's what I'm praying will happen.

But, I'm running out of money. As searching for real estate deals is my only work while I'm here, I have to live economically. I'm here in Old Town, in the trailer, without TV or cable service or a phone or internet. So, even though I'm in the center of the action, it's like I'm stranded on an island without communication.

Still, I have my cell phone, and, for internet access, I use the computers at the library, or at SVIC, a computer store/gaming store that has about ten souped-up computers with T-1 lines for fast access internet for \$4-an-hour. SVIC sits in a strip mall in Chiefland, about nine miles from Old Town.

So, I manage to get by, driving around connecting the dots, rubbing two twigs together trying to make fire, then, yelling for others to join me once the fire is good and hot, for stories on investing in Northwest Florida land. Okay, so I'm an imposter. As an outsider, I'm getting used to the role. I'm not complaining, I'm merely expressing how I feel.

Years ago, when I lived in a bad area of town, at 307 Sapodilla Street, the second floor, sharing an apartment with my then-girlfriend Carrie Cutlip, a brilliant hair stylist and waitress who I met at O'Shea's Pub on Clematis Street, I produced a film festival at Respectable Street, a dance club in downtown West Palm Beach. Even then, on the opening night of the film festival, when 300+ people poured through the doors and crowded the room watching independent films and eating complimentary Pop-Tarts, I was still an outsider. I remember running around the club, sweaty, with a giant smile, as I welcomed filmmakers who'd driven miles to see their film and witness an audience react to their work. Francine Bernard, a film buff, mother, and wife to a wealthy investment banker, and a resident of Palm Beach, had introduced me to anonymous-faced bigwigs in the local film/video community of the area, people whose names I promptly forgot seconds after meeting them. She peddled me from person to person as if I was an upcoming artist of some sort, some shooting star in a pre-emptive launch across the horizon, when, I was some smelly goof, a 26-year old romantic with a dead-end restaurant job, an old ten-speed for wheels, who

lived in an apartment on the edge of the ghetto with a girlfriend, who became more of a best friend, that I was trying to help. Even then, I was an imposter. The hilarious aspect of life, though, is that in the eyes of Francine Bernard, I was a renegade filmmaker and promoter who'd decided to start his own film festival. In her eyes, I was a maverick.

How did I get here, in Old Town, Florida, a po-dunk town, living in a trailer on 9-acres of swamp, surrounded by young families, older folk, a general confederacy of benevolent rednecks. Everyone here drives trucks, big trucks, Ford F-150's or F-350's, they cost \$25,000. The trucks are peppered with BUSH/CHENEY stickers, monster-sized American flags as if they're in a competition - my flag is bigger than your flag - and those "support our troops" ribbons. They should turn off Fox News and read "Crossing the Rubicon", a heavily-footnoted book that charges Dick Cheney with involvement in 9-11 and foreknowledge that Iraq and Sadaam had no weapons of mass destruction. Basically, the book indicts Cheney. And, if the allegations are false, why hasn't Cheney sued the author? Because they are true. You can't find it at most libraries. Go to your library and request it. Or go online and order it.

These flag-bearing luxury cars and SUV's driven by happily ignorant conservatives who believe that their vote for Bush is a vote for our troops are an embarrassment to America. Not only does it make me angry, it makes me sad.

All the damage this so-called president has caused, his lies that he refuses to acknowledge or apologize for, the unnecessary deaths of thousands of American soldiers, Iraqi soldiers and Iraqi civilians ... According to the Lancet, a respected British medical journal, some 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed so far. 100,000 civilians. Does anyone care? Those that do, those that carry signs at protests or ridiculed, pepper-sprayed, arrested for standing up for the rights of others. How sad. I am ashamed to be part of America, with all its excess, gluttony, materialism, and noise.

When people are dying for lack of food in other countries, we are spending billions on weight-loss pills and diet products. Those billions could be used for food to feed the world. But we can't help it, we're in a cycle that we can't escape. Consumerism. And we're being conned. I am embarrassed to be part of this ongoing emperialism that Bush and his business cronies use to justify wars to set up businesses in countries

that, conveniently, have oil beneath their surface--Iraq, Iran, South America. He's trying to paint a bad picture of Hugo Chavez, the democratically-elected leader of Venezuela, that he's a communist, in order to have a reason to install an American dictator. Why? Venezuela, like all the other countries our presidents invade, has something they want, in this case, oil.

But enough about politics. What can I do? I can live differently. Consume less. Buy less junk that's been made by underage slaves in China for thirty-cents an hour. Drive only when necessary. Bicycle when possible. In the state of Florida you might expect there to be bicycle-friendly sidewalks to grocery stores and shopping plazas. Keep dreaming. Ever bicycled in Florida, on a sidewalk, exercising your right-of-way to cross traffic at an intersection once the sign flashes "walk"? Be careful. Cars don't care. They'll continue to make turns. You're just a speed bump on their way to the mall. They've gotta buy that piece of junk before the sale ends. You don't want to get in their way. They'd hate to get a dent.

What can I do? I can save money and make plans for the great escape, to leave the United States and head for Belize. They have cheap land over there. Perhaps I'd start a farm, or buy property with houses, rent one while living in another one, maybe get a part-time job and in my off-time write and explore. Everyone who participates in the American way of life, the consumption of cheap material goods that relies on cheap labor elsewhere, is guilty. The question is: What are you going to do about it. Ask not who your country can exploit for you. Ask what you can do to avoid being on the receiving end.

Monday night, August 8, 2005

It smells like someone farted in here. Maybe it's a ghost. More than likely, some swamp creature has scaled an oak tree up to my roof and has relieved itself to the sound of crickets. It's August and the air temperature is cool enough to forgo air-conditioning. That's a benefit of being in North Florida--there are trees all over my 9-acre property, and the Suwannee River's only a mile away. The trees act like nature's air conditioning filters, pumping out carbon dioxide, and the river cools the surrounding air along its banks. The Suwannee River has a terrific history, as it was a means of travel back before roads. Indians used to use it for travel. It originates out

of Georgia and cuts through Hamilton County, Florida where it slithers like a cautious snake, creating Class 3 rapids, the only river rapids of its kind in Florida.

Tonight, I have the windows open, the blinds down but folded open to let the currents come through, and the ceiling fan is on--an older ceiling fan with four speeds forward and, get this, four speeds reverse. Old appliances really do it for me. They're built to last and they have character. The desk I'm sitting at has character, too. It's like a 60's or 70's style table that juts out from this trailer wall. Above it hangs an egg shaped lamp.

When I bought this mobile home, this place was disgusting. The carpet was filthy, the walls were yellowed, the windows needed cleaning or replaced. The single air conditioning unit was about to fall out the living room window. Not only was the place dirty, but it needed major interior work. The exterior was in a similar state. The entire trailer needed a paint job, the roof was thick with pine needles, and home to a large, broken branch that straddled the roof and a nearby power line. Frustrated by the mess, I attacked the place with a determined vigor. Each day, I worked for 12-to-15 hours or more with a measured cadence, completing one task before attempting the next. Now, the trailer looks, and is, livable. That's why I've got to leave: It's all cleaned up, and it doesn't need me anymore.

Besides, if I buy the VW van that that lady is selling in Gainesville for \$1,000 dollars--if I can get it for eight hundred--that can be my new house. Okay, I'm restless. My dad was restless, too.

I told him to get a VW van. "Maybe this'll cure you," I suggested. "You'll never have to settle down. Wherever you travel, that's where you'll live. Think of the beauty of that!" It was a gleeful pitch at best, a naive conclusion at worst. But if I did buy the VW van, I could live in it, and rent out the trailer to cover the monthly mortgage payments. Sure, perhaps it's a romantic notion, only seeing the good side of everything but the adventure is in the chance, is it not? Living in the van would force me to reduce my worldly possessions which cry out for my attention as they need inevitable maintenance and upgrades. Answering their whines will only further consume me with guilt for bearing the burden of living as an American consumer. Consume, consume, consume, consume, consume, consume. When you live in a VW Van, you don't have room to consume.

Then again, can human nature be changed by outside circumstance?

Another thing, if I had a girlfriend or gal pal to share this trailer with, then I could justify it. But, by myself, living here alone, I cannot. By girlfriend, I don't mean sex partner either. I'm talking about something more real, a good friend, someone to bounce ideas off of, someone to be there for, to help, someone that will care about me and help me and need me. That's what I've been missing--someone that needs me.

For the most part, most of my girlfriends have been good friends. Relationships have always befuddled me. I usually gravitate toward girls with problems. "You have a messiah complex," my sister Kim says. Maybe she's right. I'm always looking for someone to help. At the same time, maybe I'm looking to control someone by finding people that are needy. Maybe I want to feel superior to them, because they have problems that are foreign to me.

One of the last girls I slept beside was a recovering heroin addict who worked at America Restaurant. I don't think I ever told you this story, so I'll tell it now. I worked as a cook there, running the kitchen on the late shift, from 9pm or 10pm 'til 3am or 4am. One night this new girl walks by, a leggy, attractive girl with big eyes, a nice smile, and curly hair. She had an ethnic look about her, maybe she was Jewish or Israeli or part Commanche Indian, or all three or pick your favorite two, I don't know, and she had a wild look in her eye, full of heat and life, like a propane stove that's left on medium-high, waiting for something to cook. Maybe someone to cook.

It's late and I'm stocking the kitchen, walking from the walk-in (cooler) to the line (kitchen area consisting of different stations--sautee, grill, broiler, fryer, pantry) when I see her approach. "Hi," I say politely as I pass her. She continues walking, without a word.

"Hey," I comment to her. She turns around.

"You are rude," I admonished. "I walked right by you, said 'hi', and you didn't evensomuch as say 'hi' back."

I pause for effect.

"Whatever," I shrug.

She looked at me with patient eyes. Those eyes, whoa, big brown eyes, with dabs of yellow and green that flickered with intensity.

"I'm sorry," she burst out in a sincere tone. "I wasn't even paying attention. I'm sorry," she repeated.

"Okay, let's do that again. Go back there and walk by me and I'll say 'hi'." I instruct. She backs up in front of me about ten feet, then starts walking in my direction.

"Hi," I greet as she passes by me.

"Hiiiiiiiiii!" She responds enthusiastically, her eyes melting into copper pots of chocolate love mixed with drops of golden wild honey and sprigs of fresh green mint.

I approach her and give her a big hug. She responds in kind, hugging me. I lean in to kiss her and kiss her on the teeth and gently on the upper lip.

"It's so good to see you," I exhale, absorbed in those giant brown eyes.

"You too," she replies. We unglue ourselves, chuckle, and return to work.

It turns out she was the hostess, and that was the first, maybe second or third time I saw her. That was a bold move on my part. Usually, I'm terribly shy and hate myself as I can't even bring myself to talk to a girl that I'm attracted to, even remotely. That's why I've always related to the song "There is a light that never goes out" by The Smiths. There's probably a million-or-so kids of all ages that relate to that song, trapped by shyness, snails in their own shell, anonymously writing love letters to faceless strangers in chat rooms over the internet, scribbling poems to future husbands they hope to meet, tapping the keys of a piano as they pour their longing into a instrument of wood and strings.

Later that night, I walked the girl home. We walked side by side, talking about her past, her poetry, and life in general. She lived in The Strand, a fancy apartment building on the corner of Olive and Datura, a block from

Clematis, and about 150-200 walking steps from America Restaurant. Nothing was weird as I waved to the desk clerk, and we walked into the elevator, ascended to the 14th floor, and walked her to her apartment.

Inside, the place was a mess, strewn with beer cartons, clothes, plates. Empty liquor bottles and beer cans crowded the kitchen table. And inside, we continued talking.

For the most part, she talked. I listened, saying stuff like "yeah" and "I know what you mean" and going through the entire wheel-of-answers common to a one-sided conversation. You spin the wheel and arrive at answers like "yeah" and "I know what you mean" and "really?" and "no kidding" and "huh" and "so, what happened?" and "wow" and "are you serious" and "right, right" and "did you call the cops?" and "that takes courage" and common verbal grenades detonating among the silence or following some confession.

As the conversation continued, it didn't grow toward a fond conclusion for a hopeful answer. Instead, it became more sad. A cave looks beautiful until you're lost inside it.

"Let's go on the porch. It's not as hot," she said. She lit cigarettes and brought out her journal, a book of poetry and thoughts, her musings about life. She brought me a glass of wine.

"Read it. Tell me what it means," she asked, handing me her book.

I read it while she looked out over the balcony, relaxing to her cigarettes. Outside, the air was humid, and the view consisted of 5-story buildings, empty and forlorn, jutting up like tombstones over the washed yellow of the street lamps, solemnly guarding the empty streets of downtown West Palm Beach. In short, the view was uninspiring, and served to match the lonely melancholy that had the atmosphere between us.

As she stepped outside with her cigarettes, handing me the glass of Merlot, and putting the pacifier to her mouth, she looked sexy. Silently, she inhaled, her lovely cheekbones pursing, the cigarette glowing brightly, her eyes becoming squinty. Her uninhibited nature was attractive to me.

"I think what you meant by this line ... " I rambled, piecing her puzzled words together. By the end of 30-to-45 minutes, I was exhausted.

"I'm tired, can I crash here?" I asked.

"Sure. You can sleep on the floor, or you can sleep in the bed, if you don't mind sleeping beside me. But you have to sleep on the wall side."

"Okay," I replied drowsily. I stepped inside.

She closed the sliding glass doors to the balcony. I stepped inside, took off my chef pants. Then, I take off my shirt. Standing there, in boxer shorts, I slipped under the covers of her bed, with my back toward the wall.

She walked to the corner of the room beside the couch, where a black guy slept peacefully underneath a sheet, and took off her clothes. Carefully, I watched her strip. She slid off her skirt, revealing silk panties, and pulled off her shirt and slipped off her bra. Her breasts fell out, both her nipples were pierced.

Seeing her undress so carelessly in front of me turned me on. She didn't seem to care if I was watching her. Then, she slipped into bed in front of me, her butt squarely in the space of my midsection. Already, I had an erection.

"Mmmmmm," she squirmed her butt into my boner.

"Mmmmmm," I returned, feeling horny and curious and cautious at the same time. I put my hand on her shoulder and rubbed it softly. I kissed her shoulder a few times.

At this point, I'm on the tightrope. If I turn her towards me and start kissing, if I put the key in the ignition, we're gonna end up having sex. But, I don't have a condom. And I'm a Christian.

And, she used to shoot heroin.

If I sleep beside her, I can continue the friendship without the trauma of guilt. I chose the latter option. I stroked her soft, brown delicious girls

until I fell asleep. Two needy adults, snuggling under the sheets, refuge against this world of bitter aloneness.

Often, I am alone, but it doesn't really bother me. The last few girls that I encountered, potential relationships, seemed more like a distraction than anything else.

So many girls are boring. They want to be fed, taken to the movies, driven around, entertained. They don't want a guy. They want a television set with legs. And they want the remote control.

Think of it. It's absurd, really.

Even David Knight, the enigmatic Bahamian entrepreneur that let me live in his kitchen last year so I could save money to buy my own place, said that girls are meal delivery systems.

"They always want to be fed. That's why Rodney (Mayo, the owner of Howley's Restaurant, a revived 50's diner in West Palm Beach, and Dada, a neo-bohemian coffee bar in downtown Delray) is the perfect date," David concluded. "He owns two restaurants, so he can always be feeding a girl."

I laughed when David mentioned it, while nodding in agreement. At this point in my life, meal delivery systems are a luxury that I cannot afford. There's work to do, dreams to fulfill, and people to save. Those who fail to understand the gravity of life can pay their own way.

I don't long for a girlfriend, but, having someone to share my charmed and uncertain life would help me to remember it. Of course, I journal. That helps. And even writing does help me understand this: I do have friends, even if they're 7-hours away in West Palm Beach, or scattered abroad like Laura Lee, the massage therapist in Manhattan, or Joe Malone, the camera assistant in Brooklyn, even Phil Gilmoure, in Brooklyn. Then there's Chad in Conifer, Colorado and Susie Vajtay in Littleton, Colorado. Those two I met when I drove Sue's car, a loaded Nissan Maxima Limited Edition out to Denver, from Jupiter, Florida, driving 30-hours straight, pausing for a 2-hour nap under the glaring lamp in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Texas? Arizona? Kansas. For some reason, I couldn't sleep. I had to continue driving. When you're driving a luxury automobile like that, you feel like

you're in a living room on wheels, and forget how fast you're going. I had it between 90 and 100 miles per hour most of the way there. As I'd driven I-10 before, that long stretch of road that runs west-east, along the lower United States, from Florida to California and through the neverending nightmare of Texas, I decided to take I-40. So my route was I-75 north to Atlanta, Georgia, where I jumped to smaller roads that ran west to Memphis, Tennessee.

At that point, I veered onto I-40 driving through Little Rock, Arkansas, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, through Amarillo, Texas and into Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I jumped on the I-25, roaring north a few hours into Denver, Colorado.

By the time I arrived, crazy-eyed, my hands glued to the wheels like broken popsicle sticks, I was hallucinating. Trees were running across the street. And, I'm not kidding about this, I ran over a chubacabra somewhere in the high desert mountains of Colorado. I had the car at 90, gunning it down into a valley. At the bottom of the valley was a turn and peculiar intersection with oncoming cars. Instead of slowing for the traffic, I put the pedal to the floor. For a half-second, a thin creature stood in my path, looking like a cross between a kangaroo and a wolf, but it had large eyes and the face of an alien. It stood directly in front of the car, Susie's loaded Nissan Maxima. Bap! That was the only sound I heard. I know what I saw. By the time I arrived at Chad's grandmas house, some 45-minutes later, I felt like I had entered some other dimension, shed off my preconceptions of living, taken on life in all its horror and humor, a grand tragedy worth documenting for a later time.

Wednesday, August 10, Bronson, Florida

Funny how taste triggers memory. Am sitting in my beautiful beater Honda Civic hatchback, 88, at the drive-thru at Shaker's. The cute clerk, freckled, a wonderfully honest smile offered my Pepsi at no charge because I was waiting for two minutes. This would never happen in West Palm Beach.

And the Pepsi reminded me of warm nights at a King's Academy High School football game, the 10th grade, walking out in single file during

half-time, dressed in red, white and blue, carrying 18' Zildjian cymbals with the high school marching band, sweating beneath the highly flammable polyester uniforms, that used velcro to fasten the sleeves. We must have looked like patriotic pirates dressed in disco-era polyester. The smell of bent grass, sweat. Then, later, after performing, hanging out at the concession stand and smelling the sweet fountain drinks--Pepsi--and salted popcorn, then watching the game but more watching cute girls, crushes, as we passed by--me and my strange friend Darrell Higgins, a writer and loner like me.

Tuesday night, August 9, 2005

This morning, I attended a tax deed auction at the Dixie County courthouse, in Cross City, a town about 9 miles south of this trailer, on Highway 19. Four tax deed sales were at the auction. I was the high bidder on three of them. After the auction was over, some locals, Herbert, Jim, Solomon, and Herbert's wife, told me that I paid too much on one of the parcels, a Suwannee Gardens subdivision property that I bid \$4,000 for.

At noon, Ronnie, my cousin who lives in Canada, called. I told him what happened. He got excited. After the conversation with Ronl, though, the locals told me that I paid too much for two of the properties. Taking their advice seriously, I later talked with Ronnie about it. He and Maria decided to pass on the \$4,000 property, but they wired me \$5,000 to my bank here in town, \$4,000 for the propety, which I'll use for another property, and \$1,000 payment for my research, which was very kind of them.

Later, I arrived at the courthouse and told the clerk what happened, that I didn't have the money for the \$4,000 parcel. Because I was the high bidder, I had to pay a \$200 fee, which is the downpayment for winning the bid, even though I backed out of buying the parcel. "Usually," the clerk remarked, "we take the downpayment immediately following the auction." She was friendly, though, and I paid for the other two parcels there, along with doc stamp and filing fees, along with the \$200 fee, which I paid in cash.

Now, it was time to look at the parcels. One of them happens to be nearby. I think it's off of a paved road. It's 50' x 100' in Suwannee Gardens

subdivision. My bid, the high bid, was \$2,000. The drawback is that you need two lots that size, side by side, in order to build. So, I'll work on getting a lot beside it.

The other lot is in Cross City, about two miles from the courthouse. It's a corner lot across the street from a park. It's located in a black area, but the blacks seem to be friendly enough. This is the country, or at least, northwest Florida. I visited the lot and it is on a corner, heavily wooded, and it has a concrete block house on it. Guess how much I paid for that? \$2,800. Isn't that funny.

After I bought it, someone warned me that it's a black area and to be careful going over there. Later that afternoon, when I told the clerk I might have made a mistake, she said: "It's probably a good lot, because the guy who was trying to get it, who you outbid, he's an investor. And he wouldn't have bid on it if it was bad."

Turns out she was right. Because it has a house on it! Isn't that hilarious?! A house for \$2,800 with the property that's on a corner lot, parcel size of 55' wide and 120' feet deep. Visiting the house, I walked up to the window. Inside, it's destroyed, dismantled, being used as a homeless hideaway.

Over the next few weeks and months, I plan to work on it, using local help, fix it up, rent it out. Thank You, God, for my wonderful and wacky life and for blessing me with a house for \$2,800. May I use this rent money to support missions overseas. Thank You, God! My life is an adventure.

Thursday night, Friday night?

... driving along 27/19/98, the asphalt disappearing beneath the snout of my dilapidated Honda Civic, rusting from the bottom, lowered perhaps to reduce wind drag but maybe it was once owned by car enthusiasts who race imports. One afternoon, I'm scooting along the same highway in Chiefland and a monster truck passes with two kids in the cab who look at my car, then give me a wave as if I'm cool or something because I drive a car that's lowered ... ha, ha, ha. Comedy show, comedy show, my life's a giant comedy show. A, ha, ha, ha, yeah! Woo-hoo!

Thank you, God, for my wonderful life! When I praise you in song throughout the day and the evening, you shower your blessings on me. I can tell because the feelings of isolation that sometimes descend come eveningtime on weekend nights no longer surface.

And at the end of the day, girls, women, ladies, like any other mirage, look good from far away. Once you're up close, once you're in it, then you wonder why you wished for it so badly. Give me freedom any day. The small feelings of loneliness are greatly outweighed by the freedom. Besides, I'm not interested in slowing down for someone, and so far, I've met few people who can keep up.

Why does everyone remain on the same treadmill, working the morning-to-evening shift with the great American chain gang, only to go home and spend what little money they have on entertaining themselves with monthly cable bills, movie rentals, take-out food, collecting slave-made trinkets to decorate their houses. And the more they watch TV, the more they buy, for TV is one massive sales catalog with silent and subliminal pitches pounding at you to dress a certain way, to eat a certain food, to use a certain toothpaste, to see a certain movie, to smell a certain way, to sculpt your body to match that of someone in a magazine. They make toothpaste for you to feel less alone. What a tragedy.

There's no punchline to the common life. Consumerism is the real hostage crisis. The question is not what you can buy. The question is, why buy anything at all? Name brands put names on a nameless desire. Grabbing at the wind. Trying to hold a cloud.

If people could live a little cheaper, they could feed the entire world. What gives? What happened to living conscientiously? Thinking about how that \$4-cup-of-coffee-every-two-days-a-week habit could, over the course of two weeks, buy a cow for a poor family so they could eat for the REST OF THEIR LIVES.

Does anyone care? What's going on? If I can't put out fires, maybe I'll just start my own. Those that are drawn by the light, and stay for the heat, and the warmth of conversation and the sense of family, they will experience the joys of participating in this life of living with less, so that those with

less can merely live. Perhaps I may be over reacting, but we've gotten so lazy that hyperbole is necessary to correct the balance.

Saturday morning, 5:44 am

I've been up all night. Arranging notes regarding upcoming tax deed sales, typing out a letter, a summation for Ronnie and Maria, who plan to bid on some of them. If they get a winning bid, once they sell their property, I get 25%. I hope they do win a bid and so sell something and do make a lot of money. I've been working really hard.

Yesterday morning, sometime after 9am, I was at the Levy County property appraisers office in Bronson, FL, where I drew maps in order to do drive-bys on the upcoming tax deed sale. Sometime after 3pm, I was finished. From there, I sat in my car and drove around until after 9pm, all over Levy county, finding the properties, taking notes, even shooting pictures. Lots of work.

And tonight, I wanted to type my progress report. I'll wait until I get the pictures developed, hopefully by Tuesday and pay the extra fee to have them put on disc. That way, I can e-mail the pictures, numbered with the corresponding notes. Lots of work. But I'm motivated. If we can pull this off, we can make some serious cash. I hope so.

Maybe the way to face the future with a sense of familiarity is to be there before everyone else arrives. The key to finding real estate deals, the hole in the donut, is to go to the county that's in the path of progress, start buying cheap, and wait for the crowd to move your way.

What I'm doing is being a real estate and property consultant. It's challenging, a game of Monopoly, more complicated, with more at stake. If I cared about money, I'm not sure if I could do it. The fact that I don't, makes it easier. The goal is to get your money working for you. How? Buy undervalued properties and sell less than market. Leave something on the table for the next buyer. Or, buy a trashed abode, do some cleaning and repairs, then rent it out. Tell the prospective tenant you want \$200 above what you really want for rent. When they object, let them bargain you down to your original rent fee, providing they don't bug you constantly

about minor repairs.

It's 2-minutes before 6am. I think I'll shave, brush my teeth, head out to McDonald's for a hot tea, better yet, visit Hardee's for a hot chocolate, if they have that. Then, drive to these properties as the sun is rising, and shoot pictures of them. Possibilities. My life is really going well. As long as I keep praising God for everything, I feel happier, less anxious, less lonely. I'm happy. Seriously.

Sometimes I look at guys with girls and I pity them, only for a moment. They have to chat at restaurants for an hour-and-a-half, then go out for coffee, sit in living room couches and snuggle with their honey as they watch the latest horror flick on DVD so she'll collapse into his arms for safety and he'll feel needed, while satiating his ache for human touch.

In West Palm Beach, when I saw girls and guys dressed in nice outfits, costumes, walking hand in hand or arm in arm in City Place, I felt a little bothered, for it reminded me of how alone I am. Here, though, as I have a goal in front of me--becoming the point man in property transactions--and beautiful trees and air and butterflies and springs and owls around me, I don't feel alone.

Sunday night, 8/14/2005

It's a good feeling to make a list, do everything on it, then cross it out. My list for today consisted of driving the streets of Suwannee Gardens subdivision, taking notes about the area, and cleaning up the trashed 2/1 I won at a tax deed sale last week. Early this morning, around 7, I scouted the streets across from my trailer, noting the general areas of this subdivision in categories:

vacant, forested land
owner living on property (trailer most often, occasionally a house)
trashed neighborhood (junked cars, trailers, garbage)
abandoned trailers

About an hour ago, I finished a hand drawn map of the area, color coding the areas mentioned above, a different color for each category. Cleaning up

the debris at the Cross City property was difficult. Numerous thorn vines, tree limbs that needed pruning. After a few hours, I decided to leave. I'll sell the place "as is", "handyman special" as soon as I get the deed. Hopefully, I can sell it for \$25,000, but in all likelihood that's probably too high. \$15,000 would be alright.

Spoke with cousin Ronnie earlier. He sounds stressed. He's buried in paperwork from the Port Charlotte properties that he purchased over the last two years. He's sitting on two million dollars worth of real estate. Problem with his being in Canada is the taxes. Once he sells, they take 30%. Plus, he's busy with his piano tuning business. You think a millionaire would learn to enjoy his wealth. Maybe they just have more to worry about. Maybe poverty is the price of sanity.

I'm tired and feel kind of weird right now. Not sure why. Two days ago, I stayed up for two days straight, typing out a review of properties that I looked at in a marathon driving trip all around Levy County.

I arrived home buzzing--physically tired but focused and ready to put it all together, make sense of it, crystallize the entire day in a written summation. Thank God! I stayed up for hours, writing it, then making plans, condensing my notes, throwing out unnecessary notes and thinking, thinking, thinking. Strangely enough, I'm not lonely. And I spend so much time alone. As long as I have a goal in front of me, I'm not distracted by my own singlehood. Girls are such a distraction, too. If they weren't such a waste of time, I would pursue them. But I haven't found anyone worth pursuing. Then again, I haven't really been looking.

Two weeks ago, I visited Krissy Iverson, a beautiful girl, a friend of mine, who moved to Orlando. Sure, she's beautiful. But, she acts slightly retarded. Talking like a little kid and trying to be cute and agreeing with everything and saying inane comments like "it's all good".

After two days, the inside came out. She went from beautiful to common. Physically, she's stunning--terrific figure, slim with curves in the right places, big blue-green eyes, nice smile, great red lips probably from her Irish heritage. And she sleeps alone every night.

Despite my change of feelings for her or my awakening to senses that rise

above the lusts of the flesh, I called her after the visit, suggesting that we--Krissy, myself, her roommate Erin and her boyfriend, or just Erin as she's cute, an artist, and conversationally engaging--go on a camping trip to Hamilton County, Florida. This county is home to the only class 3 rapids in Florida. The Suwannee River enters Florida through this county and winds its way south, gathering speed, creating the rapids. Krissy, as she's impetuous, happily agreed to go and said she'd tell her roommates.

I'm looking forward to the trip. Even though I don't work, I am doing research on properties and trying to get investors to bid on these sales and auctions which is tedious physically and challenging mentally. So, I'm up for a trip to the woods, north where it's cooler. Being near the Suwannee and under those trees will make it really nice and cool. Nature's air conditioning. Praise God!

Monday, August 15, 2005

Praise God! Mom called. She said she would give me \$10,000 dollars as a donation, a gift, "seed money" she called it, to help me bid on an upcoming foreclosure here in Cross City, Florida. Thanks Mom! Awesome. Thank You, God, for your blessings. May I use them for you glory. Hallelujah!

The residents of this area--Old Town, Florida and northwest Florida, in general--are different. They have a kind-of raw humanity to them. Back in West Palm Beach, about six, maybe seven hours south depending on the speed of travel, people are trying to be something. Here, they are something--themselves. Less pretentious, more polite. Lacking the urge to fight gravity. Here, they succumb to it.

Living in West Palm Beach, I tended to bury myself in distraction, burning money on coffee coolatas at Dunkin' Donuts, or other necessary pleasures of the flesh that enter the mouthgate, looking for kicks, roaming around restlessly for some new thrill, dogpaddling in entertainment. David Knight, a friend of mine who like myself was born in the Bahamas, acted similarly, except only the the tenth power (as he's rich), spending money wrecklessly on \$4 cappuccinos, a "bump" he called them, gobbling up takeout sushi like it's fast food, always buying the best of everything including a Boche dishwasher that truly sucked and a \$400 vacuum cleaner that looked like a

set-piece weapon for "Buck Rogers in the 25th Century". (The dishwasher worked poorly. I lived in his kitchen for five months, so I know.) That guy could've fed a small village in Africa for a week for the lifestyle snacks he dropped in his belly.

Watching him led me to realize what a responsibility we, as comfortable Americans, have, considering the fact that 90% of the world is in poverty. One day, I'm convinced, we'll have to give an accounting for how we spend our time, our money, our lives. Did we use it to benefit the less fortunate, and humanity in general? Or did we feed potbellies while glazing over in front of a reality show?

Last night, I turned off the fridge. I'll donate the contents, a bizarre mix of organic stuff--coconut oil, tabasco sauce--to a local mission. This is the deep south, even though it's north Florida. They'll probably end up rubbing the coconut oil on their face, shining their hubcaps with it, maybe the old-timers will grease their hair with it before they visit the livestock auction.

In Old Town, Florida, I'm happy with less. And I feel less restless, more centered. Most of the time, I don't eat. Instead, as I'm driving around visiting county courthouses to research tax deed and foreclosure sales, I gulp water from a gallon jug that sits in my car. I don't have a TV, nor do I have internet access. For communication, I use my cell phone. At night, I study real estate, look over Platt maps, read, pray, play piano, worship God, talk on the phone. TV is a waste. In real life, there are no reruns. For internet access, I visit the library or, when they are closed, use SVIC, a computer repair store with about twelve computers with high-speed internet access for \$4-bucks an hour.

Romantic notions aside, the locals seem to have a meekness to them. Having experienced bullies and con artists in West Palm Beach, I feel like I'm in recuperation by being here. Driving around, I notice that even families sit down and eat at tables inside McDonald's. They enjoy their meals, even if they can only afford fast food. In West Palm Beach, the insides of McDonald's are deserted. Everyone uses drive-thru. Even the employees are different, they're nicer. The clerks that work fast food act genuinely nice, smiling, with a presence that belies the false humility so often found in bigger cities.

Perhaps it's the amount of trees of up here in north Florida. Forests, comprised of large pines and scattered oaks, line both sides of Highway 19, providing greater amounts of oxygen for mental health (happiness?). The Suwannee River winds its way from Georgia into Florida through Hamilton County, eventually snaking through Fanning Springs and Old Town, acting as a dividing line for counties. That flow of water, I'm sure, bringing both oxygen and beauty, an interstate for aquatic creatures and a source of inspiration for writers, artists, fisherman, recreational boaters and travelling campers, also helps to keep this place grounded. Even though I don't know too many people and I'm an outsider, I am content. When I asked an interesting acquaintance, Faith Nelson, if she was lonely, writing this question on a napkin, she wrote her response on a napkin and slid it across the bartop at O'Shea's.

"lonely or Alone - There are different definitions for both words? - Im neither. CONTENT is the best way to describe how I feel. Thanx for asking ? --

Living here, I feel that way--content.

Thank YOU, GOD, for your wonderful blessings and my beautiful life. Use me for your glory in all things. Thank YOU.

Friday, August 20, 2005

Been meeting a lot of people here, mostly at the courthouse in Cross City (Dixie County) at tax deed sales. About an hour before the sales, the usuals congregate the courthouse steps. Then, after the sale, they sit around and chat. That's how I meet them. They refer me to as "young fellar" even though I'm 36 years old. Perhaps it's because I dress like a kid, in shorts and stained v-neck t-shirt. Maybe it's because of my unassuming nature, which I hope they don't mistake for coyness. In any case, they are a friendly lot.

But I'll get back to some stories about my interactions with them in just a bit.

Over the last few days, I've been practicing a kind of ascetism, living simpler, reducing my expenses, and eliminating the clutter--mental, physical, and emotional--by living with less. It started when I noticed the old fridge that I bought for \$20 at a Rick's Trading Post, about nine miles away in Chiefland. It's insides are broken, but it's a cooler box and it works.

Rick, the owner, brought it over in his truck and the fridge seemed to grow in size as we approached the trailer door. They always look smaller among the flock of other fridges at the store. So, we're fighting with the fridge, trying to wiggle it in the door and Rick's getting angry, cussing, huffing, puffing. He wreaks of alcohol. We finally manage to get it inside the trailer. I pay him the delivery, another \$20-spot and he leaves. And I'm glad, because I don't want my trailer to smell like alcohol.

Anyway, though, I don't use the fridge. It's cooling a collection of condiments: molasses, mayonnaise, aloe vera gel. Most of the food items were from the distro, a surplus food pickup that a collection of free-spirited activists organized in downtown Lake Worth, that they later called the "Dorothy Day Food Distribution". So, I unplugged it. Took everything out, bagged it, drove it to the dump up the street from me. Then, I cleaned the entire fridge. And I don't miss it, because I usually eat at fast food restaurants.

And, because so many people here in Old Town eat inside at fast food places, actually sitting down to eat, I figure I'll relax and sit among them. Quietly, I find a booth, and eat my meal slowly while reading a good book, sorting through property information, or chatting on the phone. Life is short. Vacation isn't a destination. Vacation is a state of mind. Happy!

Another way I've been reducing my expenses, is by eating one meal a day, usually a value meal at Hardee's (they have good food, way better than the other three fast food places), then snacking at night, eating fruit, buying a chocolate milk, and drinking gallons of water. If you want to save money, drink water. You won't be hungry as much.

Today is Saturday. I spent the early part of the day driving around, checking on a property prospect--2 acres with a rundown trailer for \$7,000. Lenora, a lady at the tax deed auction told me about it. I couldn't find it, though.

Arriving home, I called her. She sounded tired when she picked up the phone. Then she said she just got out of the hospital. Poor lady. She has cancer. Going in for treatments, surgeries, chemo. At the courthouse I offered to help her with nutritional therapy but she said the familiar line "I have a good doctor". The door slowly closed. How can you call your doctor good when he will kill you, by prescribing medication that only creates worse side effect, unnecessary operations that will only spread the cancer and further to weaken the immune system, and the start the continuous cycles of more meds and more treatments.

Listen to Hippocrates. He said: "Let food be your medicine". Sad, I feel so sad. I've heard it before. I want to help. Seriously. I want to help. But no one wants to listen. Some do. In a few days, once she's rested, I'll call her back and try to find the exact address. \$7-grand for 2 acres is a really good deal. Later, when I finally reached the guy who was selling it, he said it wasn't for \$7,000, it was for a lot more, and that it had already been sold.

I like my 9-acre property, full of creatures--snakes, spiders, racoons, owls, woodpeckers, bluejays, bugs that swim, spiders that walk on the skin of the water, even dogs and stray cats roam the land, and there's the four turtles I rescued from the road and brought to my property. They're hiding somewhere. I'm building a treefort in the swamp, near the spring. I have to be careful. I don't want to wreck creatures homes or scare them off. They are necessary to the swamp, to the land, a living organism that sustains life and keeps them here. I want them to stay. They are welcome here.

One day, I'll bring everyone here--JR & Heather Lawson and their family, Viviana Lang and her entire family, Carrie & Matt Snyder, my entire family and extended relatives, Alan Patrusevich and Henry and Wendy LaShane and Faith Nelson and Andy Cotter and the whole gang of intentional misfits that congregated at the edge of civilization by that

warehouse by the railroad tracks, the acquaintances that I rented a loft in Williamsburg with--Sue, Joe Malone (assistant cameraman), Mike Gorga (guitarist, Christian), some other guy whose name I forgot--others whose lives I've intersected, the PBA (Palm Beach Atlantic) kids Ryan, Dianna, others whose names have flown south for a very long winter, Ryan Cedar, this skateboarder kid who I'd wander downtown witnessing with, the revolving door of activists that roam Lake Worth and New York--the Jennings sisters, Denae the hippie writer artist model full of life, joi di vivre', Blaine, the girl who I rode bikes with from Lake Worth, dumpstered food behind Wild Oat's, then made out with for about a 1/2 hour, and Marta, the Polish friend of Natasha and Mike, and I'll bring them all together here, push them on the swings, chat, eat Cheetos, drink IBC cream soda out of the bottle, chug water, swim in the spring, hike the property, try to find the turtles, climb around the treefort ... it would be beautiful. Because it will never likely happen makes it even more beautiful. There's so much beauty in my dreams. What the real world has to offer cannot even begin to compete.

I'm not interested in the property much for myself, rather, I'd like to have it be a gathering place for a collection of friends, acquaintances, kind human beings who need a sabbatical or hiatus of sorts. No one's really visited yet, except for Clint Miller, a friend of the family's, and Kylie, this enthusiastic Irish girl who's on her way to Scotland to live in a tepee and crash at a relative's house who has a castle. If Europe is as good as everyone tells me, I'll probably stay when I visit there.

Time is a sniper. I'm aware of my own mortality. This recognition serves to make me more sober in my conduct. Maybe that's why people drink--because it helps them to forget their age. When they're inebriated, they can act like a kid, without having to explain themselves. Alcohol enables people to bypass protocol. That's why people bond when they drink.

Okay, what next. Finish my screenplay. It's coming along slowly. When I'm surrounded by people that interest me, who live life without apology, have a passion for something they refuse to surrender--I tend to write every day. Eventually, these characters become characters for future plays, screenplays, and real life characters in my journals. Here, in Old Town, Florida, a strip of highway 19 that runs a few miles between Fanning Springs and Cross City, the people fail to provide inspiration. So I rely on

memories of old friendships, acquaintances, experiences to fuel the fire, to stoke the coals, keep the pistons firing me to write.

I'm really happy with the screenplay, though, the plot, the step outline, the characters, the dialogue, the entire thing. I hope I can sell it. I'd really like to see it made into a movie. Even an independent movie, on a small budget, \$250,000, would do. The movie has no special effects, and a small cast. Jim Wheeler, the pizza driver, the main character; Rick Bottom, his friend, the sidekick, the reflection; Wendy LaShane, the activist, the romance; Edith Wharton, the friend, the sage; Sandra Wheeler, the jigsaw puzzle enthusiast, the pragmatist, Jim's mom; Dobbs Gentry, the hunter, interested in Sandra; Andy, the drug dealer, caterer at the high school reunion; Natalie Jennings, the news reporter, Bryce Jennings's wife; Bryce Jennings, the doctor who cheats on his wife, Jim's nemesis. Okay, that's a lot of people, 9 is it? Jim is the main character, and Wendy the secondary lead. Rick and the others are minor characters. I imagine that when Jim's alone, driving in his car delivering pizzas, that his head has a running commentary, indicated by a voice over and low volume background music, similar to "The Thin Red Line", the film that showed war through the eyes of an introspective and dreamy soldier. Jim is also like Calvin, in the Calvin and Hobbes comic script, in that he lives in a world of his own imagination. The world is a cave of my own imagination.

I love it here, in Old Town, Florida. It's beautiful. Lots of trees. Right now, I have the door open to the trailer as I type. The wind is coming in, feels like it's in the 70's. Nice and cool. About twenty minutes ago, Aarold called, this guy who I met at The River Church of God who used to live in West Palm Beach. Now, he lives in Alexandria, Virginia, does website design. He's glad he left, too. West Palm Beach has all the crime without all the coolness. Everyone wanders around in a daze clinging to \$5 cups of Starbucks, roaming City Place, shopping, seeing movies for \$9-bucks a pop. What a waste of money. The city's so boring that everyone has to spend money to convince themselves that they're having fun. They're all trapped. The only difference is that the cages come in different colors.

West Palm Beach needs a big community pool stationed with lifeguards and deejays and free snacks, along with a free movie night and volunteer classes that taught entrepreneurship skills. If the city had left some of the beautiful trees and allowed the woodframed homes that were in downtown to be

occupied by locally-owned businesses, a nice vibe would have set in, breathing life into the dead corners. Something organic could have happened. But the developers came, followed by the chain store gang. Is it beautiful? No doubt. Is it interesting? Possibly. My rant is more hyperbole than anything else. But, you get the point.

9/10/2005

This morning, I ran around the trailer in a mad rush to get to Madison County on time. Understanding that there was a tax deed sale at the Madison County courthouse, and that courthouse was about an hour-and-forty-five-minutes away, I quickly showered, grabbed my notebooks that contain information about the tax deed/foreclosure sales, pocketed my cell phone, and jumped into the car. Highway 19, a four-lane strip of road that connects a number of cities here in northwest Florida, intersects with Highway 349, at Old Town's main intersection, cornered by an anonymous shopping plaza on one side, a gas station on the other, a locally-owned auto repair shop on one corner, and a vacant lot on the last one. At 349, I headed north, gunning it, hitting 70-miles per hour in my eggbeater-on-wheels, an oversized go kart, the late eighties Honda Civic hatchback. 349 leads to 27, where I veered left, west, until I hit 53, taking that north into the city of Madison, Florida. At the courthouse, I parked across the street, under the shade of an enormous oak tree that lines the edge of an incredible park complete with a gazebo, a fountain, and other oak trees that appear to be relatives of this one.

The courthouse was open and I wandered through the halls. It was empty, though. Is this a holiday? I thought. I knew it was September 14 and this was the day of the auction. What happened? I check my cell phone for the date. 9/10/05. What? Where did the last two days go. I knew this was the fourteenth. What happened? Where's the missing time? Did something happen to me? Was I kidnapped by aliens, experimented on, then returned several days into the past? Am I day sleeping? This is weird.

A trailer's going up for auction, a tax deed sale, on the 14th, so I figured I might as well visit it, see it's condition. After getting directions from two friendly employees at the Ladybug Cafe, a positively nostalgic soda fountain set in the back area of a pharmacy, I drove to find it. A few miles

outside of town, near the top of a hill, lies a paved road with trailers on both sides. The trailers are slightly run down. The residents are black. The tax deed trailer sits on a corner lot adjacent to a park. Visiting it shows the reality. The park is an abandoned piece of land, appearing to be an acre. No trees. Scattered patches of grass. Mostly dirt and limerock. The trailer itself, painted an oops green (oops being the mistake paint, \$5-for-5-gallon, sitting among other orphaned merchandise in the corner of the floor in the paint department) appeared to be sagging on one side. The yard, though, was nice, a thick carpet of bright green grass, fenced, large lot - about 1/3 of an acre, fenced. In the backyard sat a trampoline with some kids on it.

Not wanting to bother approaching the house, or even talking to the residents, I turned the corner, slowly drove past it, and shot two pictures. I returned to the courthouse and made some notes on it, then spotted a realtor's office and decided to get some advice. The realtor said that he wouldn't go above \$7,500 on it, as it's only gonna sell for 10 or 11. Listening quietly, I jotted down notes, asked about some properties his company had for sale, took some brochures, thanked him, left. Back in my car, I thought about what to do next. Clint called. I told him about the property. He said that he'd prefer to get two different properties with this ten-thousand than have one, unless the one is a really good deal that he could flip fast. Sounds good, I told him.

On the way home, I got lost. I was pretty hungry and kind of out-of-it. I felt like I was in a dream. I wasn't worried or frightened, rather, perplexed as if I was waking up from a reality, only to wake up from another reality five minutes later, like re-awakening to find yourself somewhere else, but you're not sure of how you arrived there. Do you understand? Hungry, I visited the drive-thru at Hardee's and ordered a spicy chicken sandwich for a buck and change. It's so cheap they don't advertise it on their outdoor menu board. At least I haven't seen it. They made it fresh, and I nibbled on it carefully while driving. It was delicious, steaming, buttery chicken that melted in my mouth. Eating it, I felt like a refugee, a crazy 36-year old escapee from the treadmill of the 9-to-5 racing around the rural roads of northwest Florida. As long as I spend a buck or two on lunch, I don't feel that guilty. Besides, soda and french fries, brings up the price to \$5 bucks, an incredible rip off, unjustifiable in the face of human suffering here and abroad. Like most everything, food, too, can be a drug if you misuse it.

So, I have to ration it. I can't let food be my master.

At home, I raced up the stairs to my trailer, unlocked it, and sorted my collection of papers, placing the real estate information in a stack to be read over later, stashing my receipts in my shoulderbag, and returning my bank information and credit card to my briefcase. Then, I raced outside, dragged the jon boat to my car, and heaved it onto the car roof, tying it down with a web of bungi cords and nylon ropes. Pretty hilarious looking.

Slowly, I drove onto 317 and headed to 19, making a left, and heading northwest, through Old Town, Cross City and towards Steinhatchee, a town that I describe as Key West meets Loxahatchee. At 358, I made a left and drove toward Jena, a tiny town near the Gulf of Mexico. 358 turns into 361.

I have a mortgage on the 8.48 acres, on the corner of 361 and 391. 361 is a two-lane paved road. 391 is a two-lane dirt road. My mission was to paddle the canal about 5 miles west of my property that, apparently, leads to the Gulf of Mexico. I arrived at the bridge and slowed my car, then steered it down towards the canal. I heard clicking sounds, looked out my window, and saw hundreds of tiny crabs scurrying for cover. Even though they're tiny, they have this one humongous claw. Even a small creature like that has it's own arsenal. Pretty hilarious. I began to untie the ropes.

Nearby, two guys that appeared to be in their mid-twenties, with an SUV and two kayaks on the bank, had gotten their truck stuck in the soft mud sand. I offered my machete so they could use it to dig out the back tire, then helped them push their car out. They told me it was two miles to the ocean. Pushing my aluminum boat out into the canal, I stepped into it, began paddling. It was very hot. One or two flies, big flies, continued to attack me.

For an hour-or-so, I paddled, until I finally reached the Gulf of Mexico. In the distance, sat an island that appeared to border the waters of the canal and that of the ocean. I began paddling, but gave up. The current was taking me away from the entrance to the canal. Expecting this, I took a mental snapshot of a white piece of wood on one side of the canal, to use as a guide.

Only thing is, I couldn't find it. Ru-ro. A minute later, I found it and began my journey back. This time, the current was with me. Is this how Chris McCandless felt as he paddled around the waters of Pacific, below southern California? A part of me, at that moment anyhow, identified with him. Funny how I identify with dead people, isn't it? Jack Kerouac, Chris McCandless, Keith Green.

On my paddle back, I met with Nillo, a thirties-looking guy, and his family, his young son and his wife. They waded around in the water scooping up crabs in their nets, dumping them into buckets. He was extremely friendly.

"Here. Try it." He coaxed me. I stepped from my boat and shuffled near him.

"There. There's a big one. Don't let him go. Go this way," he pointed, gesturing for me to put the net on one side.

The crab, by now, seeing the legs of two people approach, was paranoid. It had its claw up, and was beginning to run sideways. I dropped the net on top of it, upside down, then pulled the net up and sideways, bringing it up from the water. The crab sat inside.

"Good. Good," Nillo commended. "I give you some crab." He said.

"Thanks. I'll be over there, tying up the boat. You guys need a ride?"

They declined. I returned to shore, tied up the boat. Nillo arrived and offered me some crabs. Rummaging around the back of my car, I found a garbage bag. Nillo instructed his son to hold it out. Then, he dumped about ten crabs inside. "Wow! Are you serious?" I queried. "You take them. No problem." Nillo smiled. Wow, this guy was nice. Thanking him, I jumped in my car and drove up the hill, where he and his family stood.

"You guys need a ride?" I offered. "Can you give me ride to my car?"

Nillo asked. "Sure." He pointed to a small blur down the road. Because of the ropes used to secure the boat, he couldn't open the door.

"Get on the hood." He did. I drove him to his car and waved goodbye.

Back home, I didn't know what to do with the crabs. I called Julie and Steve, two Christian musician friends that I play music with, to see if they wanted the crabs or could lend me a pot. Neither were home. I called Dave Lewis, my neighbor, to offer him some crabs. He declined.

Slightly broke, and not wanting to drive 9 miles to Wal-Mart and purchase a pot, butter, and bottled water with which to cook the crabs, I decided to let them go. I carried the bag to the spring behind the feed shack and dumped them into it. Two of the crabs were dead. The rest crawled along the bottom, cautious, casting furtive glances with their antenna eyes at their new home.

Wait a second. I plan to swim in that spring, once it's cleared. What about the crabs? They can always be moved to another part of the swamp. Or, if I get a net, and have a pot by then, I can catch them and steam them fresh. Probably not, though. Even crabs deserve a second chance.

It's later tonight. 1:09 am in the morning, Sunday. Then again, does the time really mean anything? And I'm thinking about my dad. I remember the night he passed away. I was working at Papa John's, on a delivery, when I got the call from my mom. She sounded completely sober when she told me that dad was dying, probably had an hour to go, and asked if I'd be alright.

"I'm gonna go visit him. I'll be fine," I told her.

Before visiting him, I had two deliveries. Both were to hotels. On the ride up the elevator, I could feel the tears coming, so I pulled my hat low, wiped my eyes. At the delivery, I remember standing in front of the hotel room door, handing the customer his pizza, accepting the money and tip.

By then I was crying, tears falling to the ground like homesick earthworms. The man didn't notice. He was happy to get his pizza, probably an out-of-towner that had finished a long day of sales presentations, pitching overpriced new-improved software that renders last year's software obsolete while trapping the customer in a five-year contract. On the way to Hospice, I called the store manager, Pamela, to explain my absence. She said she

wouldn't take any more deliveries. Ten minutes later, I arrive at the hospice parking lot, a sea of asphalt splashed by the lonely glow of cement-columned lamps.

It was so quiet that the silence seemed thick, as if it had eaten any noise nearby. Kim's car and Kevin's car were in the lot. Inside the room, Kevin and Gina were standing on one side of the bed, near Halina, dad's wife, his third, a Polish woman, beautiful, smart, and an excellent cook. On the other side of the bed stood Kim, silent, stoic, strong. Dad laid in the bed, gasping. His face was like a skeleton with skin. His breathing was labored. He appeared thirsty.

"I think he needs some water. Seriously. He looks thirsty." I said, a frantic edge rising in me.

"No. He's not thirsty. He has water right there." Kevin pointed to a cup on a table near the bed.

I wanted so bad to do something, to make things right, to save him, to take action. He was so thin I couldn't bare to look at him. He was an old man, about to die. This didn't look like my dad, a handsome Bahamian; a swimmer, a tennis player, an athlete. Bursting out in tears, I threw my head on the bed. Halina walked over and put her hand on my shoulder, so did Gina.

Ten minutes later, I left. Was there any reason to stay? I wanted to help in some way, but I couldn't do anything. It was so frustrating. Besides, I'd tried to help, using a number of alternative therapies that I had read about on the internet.

None of them worked. But, had I really tried hard enough? Probably not. What's the price of hope? It's more than anyone can afford. That being the case, spending all the money you have, and putting all the knowledge you have into action in order to save someone is the least you can do. But, in the real world, is that possible?

Later, back at work, washing dishes, I received a phone call from my mom. "Dad's gone. He's in Heaven." She said. "Are you gonna be okay?" She asked. "Yes. I'll be fine. Thanks."

I continued washing dishes, tears dropping into the suds. Watching my arms move, my hands scrub the baine-marie containers, I felt so disconnected from my own body, as if I was watching someone else's hands below me, carry out the menial work of someone that had gotten stuck in the revolving door of restaurant jobs for the last eighteen years.

But, they were my hands, calloused, bony, strong. Those were my arms, skinny, strong, with veins prominent enough to make a heroin user jealous. What was I doing with my life, working these shitty jobs, running my car into the ground to deliver pizzas to people who lived in suburban prisons, whose entrance required pass codes through front gates, front doors, hall door?

Was this my life--a series of broken-down cars and dead-end jobs? Why couldn't I save my father? I tried. I prayed, I spent money on alternative therapy devices. I printed information about dietary recommendatons. At the end of the day, it didn't work.

Maybe I didn't try hard enough. And that night, standing there in the back of Papa John's, washing dishes int a narrow room with overhead flourescent lights above me, the death of my father seemed to birth something inside of me--that life is short. Wasting time working at a job you don't like to buy things you don't need to be part of something that's not real only brings wrinkles without reward.

What was I doing with all my ideas, journals, plays, the screenplay, the musical, the book of quotes, the songs, the poems, the ideas for products and services? I know that I am more than a pizza delivery driver. But, does anyone else? Reaching my dreams will require a power move, positioning myself into a place where I can grow. If you're not growing where you're planted, then plant yourself where you will grow. Letting your talents atrophy is offensive.

At home that night, I remember being so angry. Angry at Viviana, a girl who I thought had been my best friend, but who, after I developed feelings for her, quit calling, quit being there as a friend during a time when I needed her most, when my father had been dying. At the time, I was renting a room from Lynelle, a talented artist and deejay who rented an

historic house in Flamingo Park. Lynelle had broken up with Tom, her longterm boyfriend of eleven years, and was heartbroken herself and in recovery. The only two people there for me were Lynelle and Ryan Cedar, a kid in his mid-twenties who was in the midst of finding himself as well.

No one else in the scattered collection of acquaintances I knew really even bothered to ask me about my dad. Except for Andy Cotter, an old friend that I used to load furniture with, a trivia junkie, helpful and kind.

After that experience--enduring my fathers death on my own--I came to a realization. And, ironically, it was a realization that my father had issued before. "No one really cares about, Kris. My son, I'm telling you the truth. Your father and mother care about you." This lesson I learned following his death.

During the long days where I slowly went mad, dropping further into the well of introspection and the comfortable respite of fantasy, I told myself that I would prune the tree of my life, cut off the dead branches in order to allow the good ones to receive more nourishment. After my recovery, I remembered this and didn't let those old friends or acquaintances get to close. The strength of friendship is forged by anvil of crisis.

9/12/2005

What I did today. Emerged from the fog around 7'ish am. Outside the windows facing the backyard, the sunlight streaked through the tree branches, shafts of light piercing the early morning gray, the birds chirping, the sound of bugs screeching. In the forest, the creatures come alive at dawn. I went to the bathroom, made a deposit, shaved, showered, then flipped through today's notebook titled "incoming" that lists upcoming tax deed and foreclosure sales for different counties in northwest and north Florida. In Levy County, at the Bronson courthouse, three foreclosure sales were scheduled. Two of them were lots in Williston Heights Subdivision.

According to Ronnie's research, these lots sell for anywhere from \$35,000 to \$45,000. If you can get a good deal, they're worth bidding on. The third lot was a description of measurements, something like "start the NW corner of the SE corner of the SW corner, continue E for 453.12 ft,

continue ... " A few weeks ago, a patient property appraiser clerk explained how to find these on the corresponding platt map, but without the map, and the available help, I was lost. I made a list, jumped in my car, and headed southeast on 27 toward Bronson, a small rural community about a half-hour northwest of Gainesville.

At the courthouse, Phyllis, the property appraiser clerk, helped me find the properties on the maps. Using some scrap paper, I sketched maps of the individual properties, referencing the lot size and nearby roads. While doing this, I kept checking the time. At 10:40, I thanked Phyllis, took my information and notebooks, and wandered down the steps and through the hall to the indoor lobby of the courthouse, finding a bench, staking a corner spot, and watching the bidders arrive. Around 11:10, the clerk strolled out, and announced that she was waiting for a certain bidder who was stuck in traffic. About fifteen people were present when the bidding started.

The first Williston Highlands property sold for \$20,000. I could've bid up to \$25,000, but I had a feeling the lady who was bidding against me would have went higher. To be honest, I was afraid to even bid that high-- \$20,000--as it would've depleted all of my funds. Ronnie would've sent the difference, but I know his money's tight at this time, too, because it's tax time for his Port Charlotte properties. The second Williston Highlands sold for \$55,000. Crazy, huh. Then again, winner could probably sell it for \$75,000, if he's bidding that high for it. The last lot, the one I researched only forty-minutes earlier, turned out to be a 5.63 acre lot right on 27, a main, four-lane highway that connects most of the towns in northwest Florida. The winning bid? \$125,000.

The guy beside me was running up the bid, but decided to let it go a few thousand dollars shy of the winning bid, told me it was commercial. He said he'd heard it was nine acres. Hmm. So, that excursion, the courthouse trip, swallowed 9pm through noon. On the way home, my stomach was growling, but I decided to starve since I was broke. Right now, my mortgage gets fed first. That's an investment. That's an asset. For a few hours anyway, I can ignore my stomach.

On the way home, crossing the Suwannee River, which serves as the dividing line between Fanning Springs on the east side and Old Town on the west side, I saw something crawling around the highway, on the the

eastbound side of the road. Approaching a turning lane, I slowed my car, entered the turning lane, and looked closer. The something was a turtle, about a foot in length, with a crack in its shell, flopping around in circles, waving limply its front left arm. I put up my right hand to stop the oncoming traffic and attempted to pick it up. It hissed. It was breathing heavily, as if it was injured. Sounded like a baby dragon. After a few failed attempts at picking up the turtle, I put my foot under the belly and launched it a few feet in the air, trying to move it to the side of the road. It landed on the road. So, I moved closer and scooted it off to the grass to let the cars pass. Circling the turtle, I tried to pick it up, but it was hissing, extending its head in a superfast motion, snapping its mouth. Jogging over to my car, I popped the hatchback, retrieved a light sweatshirt that Wendy Mosier, my cousin, gave me, and returned to the turtle. Gently, I rolled the turtle onto the shirt and, lifting the sleeves, carried this makeshift gurney and its patient back to my car, where I set it in the back. At the trailer, I backed up the car, cut the engine, popped the hatchback and eyed the poor creature.

Five minutes later, I had the creature in the makeshift stretcher. Quickly, I walked toward the swamp. Was this a swimmer turtle? I'd find out soon enough. Lowering the gurney near the bank of the swamp, I released it. The turtle rolled out. Using my foot, I nudged it toward the swamp. It sat there. Using my hand, I pushed the turtle into the swamp near the spring, a drop of about two-to-three feet. When it fell into the water, the turtle came to life, spreading its claws and wiggling its tails, gliding toward the bottom with ease, then disappearing as it swam away. Watching the turtle find its home--that was a good feeling.

Now, it was round noon-thirty. Returning to the trailer, I heated an MRE (Meals Ready to Eat), compliments of Auggie, a Hatian man that I worked with at Papa John's back in West Palm Beach. One day at his house, when he was repairing my car, he gave me two buckets of them. Nice guy. Watched some TV.

Around 1pm, I drove to Cross City, nine miles north, visiting the courthouse to find out about the ownership status of this 9-acre property. Apparently, on the Dixie County website, I'm not listed as the owner. Ronnie discovered this and urged me to correct this as soon as possible. According to Carla, at the tax clerk's office, I needed to get this recorded

for a \$2-dollar fee. I paid her the \$2-bucks and got it recorded. She said my next step was to visit the property appraiser's office and let them know of the recording. When I visited the property appraiser office, however, the clerk in the front room, who usually responds to my questions in a terse manner, as if she hates newcomers to the area, told me that the Dixie County website is only updated 2-to-3 times a year. Her face, when she told me this, registered no expression, as if she'd trained herself not to care. Her eyes, though, seemed to be vipers ready to strike, feigning indifference but waiting for the moment to react to any comment of disapproval. Strange folks, these people. Friendly enough, but guarded, as if they're suspicious of you, even though they have no reason. Perhaps they consider you untrustworthy until you meet some unwritten standard.

"They're very clanish here," a lady at the tax deed sale told me. According to her husband, R.P. Tedder, she's been living here twelve years and she's still considered an outsider. "They're inbred. Everyone here's married everyone else's cousin."

After the visit to the property appraiser, I walked the courthouse hall to the Voting Office, where I registered for to vote, using my Old Town address. This, along with getting a local driver's license, is one of the steps toward homesteading, which saves money on property taxes. Also, I plan to apply for an agricultural land use exemption, by growing blueberries in my yard. That should be cool, too.

Now, it was around 1pm. I drove to the Cross City library, located in a strip mall about a mile north of the courthouse, and used the internet, checked e-mails, read some news at www.rense.com. Around 3-ish, I returned home, changed into work clothes--dirty shorts and a t-shirt, grabbed some tools, jumped in the boat, and paddled toward the fort. An hour-or-so later, I'd completed two more steps on the landing. Praise God!

This evening, I showered, put on clean clothes, and drove to Hitchcock's, a small grocery store in Old Town, on the corner of 19 and 349, and bought some groceries--wheat bread, honeybaked ham, three gallons of spring water, Miracle Whip mayonnaise, two cartons of fruit juice, two quarts each, neither of them has corn syrup or any other sweeteners, wheat Saltine crackers. On the way home, I dropped into BP gas station/convenient store and purchased four cans of Dr. Vess soda (like Dr. Pepper) and a bag of

Cheetos Puffs. Now I'm here, typing this.

Financially, I'm dog paddling. I've gotta sell that ghetto property in Cross City and pay down my loan on the 8.48 acres in Jena. Originally, I was going to follow Ron's advice and sell Jena, but after visiting it, and seeing that it's only five miles from a canal that leads (two miles) to the Gulf of Mexico, understanding the potential of this area, I'm going to try to keep it. I have a good feeling about this property. It's on a corner lot. It has 329 feet on County Road 361, a paved two lane road. The other side fronts a two-lane dirt road. If I can get \$20-thousand dollars from the Cross City sale, I can use that to reduce the mortgage, substantially, on the Jena property.

That's about all I did today. Is it fun being here? Yeah, it's okay. I roam around trying to make it happen, trying to find the hole in the donut. Will it work? That remains to be seen. In the meantime, though, I'm enjoying myself. It's beautiful here--lots of trees, the Suwannee River, nearby Fanning Springs. My own yard is a nine acre park. Am I lonely? No. Whenever I'm at the library, whether it's in Cross City or Chiefland, I'll hear the ladies chatter away, gossiping about something that's so boring that's it's not even worth mentioning. These ladies are housewives and mothers and all they do is run their mouths. Sure, they're probably wonderful people, but the fact that they talk so much bothers me. They're like televisions left on the Home Shopping Network channel, chatting nonstop about the things they've bought, the newest piece of junk that they have for their shelf. What's the point? Okay, you've bought some junk--something to dust, something to rearrange every few months, something to take up space. If you don't have the shelf, then you won't be buying the junk to put on it. So, pull up the root. Don't buy the shelf. Don't buy the trinket. Oh, but you have to, because then you wouldn't have anything to talk about. It's downright depressing. Do you get the idea? Sure, girls are fun, sometimes. They're fun for deep conversations, bicycle riding, cooking, making out. But all the hoops you must jump through to maintain the relationship makes it seem more like a job than anything else. If it works, fine. Judging from the number of married people, I suppose it does. Maybe I'm the odd man out. Whatever.

9/13/2005

I received the purchase contract from Vera White Hardesty, a lady in Indiana who owns a lot in Suwannee Gardens Subdivision. She agreed to sell it to me for \$1,800 dollars, but wanted the entire amount before agreeing to sign anything. After speaking with her, and praying about it, I decided to send her the whole amount in the form of a bank-certified check. A risk, no doubt. But those were here terms--send the entire amount. She returned the contract, signed. Everything seemed squared away, but when I showed the contract to Carla at the tax clerks office, she said I needed to have "her sign a Contract for Deed" and have it notarized for legal purposes.

So, I took that bit of info and crossed the street, visiting "Southern Abstract and Title" to verify what Carla had told me. A lady there said that a purchase contract only shows that I've agreed to purchase the property, but doesn't show ownership on my part, that I needed to send her a Warranty Deed and have her sign it in the presence of two witnesses and a notary. One of the witnesses can be the notary, she said. Trying to keep this straight in my head--the tent in which the carnival never stops--took some serious concentration.

To tell the truth, I'm a very visual person. Sitting there, in the little office with its fabric, brown couches and paintings of mallard ducks flying over some forgotten landscape--the room seemed to be hemmoraging nostalgia. Against the far wall, a little TV sat on round table, bleating like an electronic sheep.

The painting of the ducks held my attention. Where did it come from? Who painted it? When was it done? Maybe it came from some kid in art school with big dreams who's now working the cafeteria at a hospital in Minnesota and this picture, his creation, ended up at a yard sale, bought by someone moving to Florida who resold it at another garage sale to the owner of this title company. This has been its home for the last eleven years.

At one point, people gave it their attention. Then, the electronic sheep was carried in, parked on the table nearby, and plugged in, bleating a low volume roar eight hours a day, spitting out electromagnetic low frequency waves toward its watchers, retarding the cell growth in and around the

hypothalmus.

The television set, on any given night, controls the minds and captures the attention of millions of people across the globe who happen to stray into its gravity field. So many lonely people watching television, while their lives drift away into the phosphorescent fog, the alluring glow, the warm fuzz of channel surfing, the mind numbing seduction, bathed in the colors of everchanging images unloaded from the gun that doesn't require a license. Ironically, we hold the trigger whenever we click the button the remote control. Yet, we are not in control, we are being controlled. We are the slow moving targets in the shooting gallery. Watching the TV alone, I'm reminded that we're going to die. In life, there are no re-runs. This being the case, you might as well watch TV once you're bed ridden. If you're going to live long enough to earn lines on your skin, a roadmap of wrinkles with a history to share, you might as well have the experiences to back it up, not the excuse that you spent your healthy years glued to a glowing box. The reward for TV addicts is a potbelly produced by an addiction to junk food peddled by advertisers.

After getting some info from the title company, I drove a 1/2 mile to the library and checked my e-mail. Then, I visted Hardee's and ordered two hot ham & cheese sandwiches and a soda, Dr. Pepper, for the free refills and the sugary taste needed to accompany the salty taste of the ham and the cheese.

A slow gobble while I read "the subterraneans" which I've ready twice before. That's a book by Jack Kerouac, describing his antics with a group of poets and music fans that roamed the hangouts of San Francisco in the mid-fifties. Specifically, the book details his relationship with Mardou Fox, a black girl who he met at a social gathering in North Beach. Kerouac's narrative is open and untamed, like a fire hydrant, a muscular rush.

After eating, I visited the ghetto property in Cross City to assess if I could drag out the bed and shelf from the inside of the house. But, looking at it through the broken window, I realized I needed help. So, I jumped in my car and headed to the Post Office to get a stamp and envelopes to send Vera White Hardesty a Contract for Deed. Then, I returned home, wandered around quietly, thinking about what to do next. I wanted to get something

accomplished today, besides sending a letter. So, I grabbed the shovel and trudged to the swamp, watching the spring bubble up the water through the muck which comprised the swamp floor. On one side the swamp, along the bank, I noticed two railroad ties, heavy pieces of wood that appeared to be 6" on all sides. Carefully, I stepped into the water and shook them loose, pushing them underwater toward one side of the spring, where I laid them on top of each other, creating a barrier for the spring which I intend to clean out once the water level drops.

9/14/2005

I'm almost forty years old. I'm 36. I act 20. I have the energy of an twenty year old, too. Sometimes, though, I feel like I'm eighty. It's not that the mileage has surpassed my years, rather the burden of introspection, which has grown unchecked for the last three years like an untamed kudzu weed somewhere deep inside me.

Half the time, at least, probably more, I walk around so deep in introspection that I don't even know what day it is. It's clouding my perception of reality. One time, driving, I was so deep in thought that I was in a different place. When I came to, the car was slipping off toward the side of the road into grass. Then there was the time I drove to Madison County for a tax deed sale on a Saturday. Of course, the courthouse was closed. I thought it was Monday. Where had the last six days gone. Was I going ahead in time, or am I ahead of my time? It doesn't bother me, but maybe it should. It's just weird.

I'm almost forty years old. My cousin, Jana, is having a baby. I'm going to be an uncle. I hope I can make a difference with my life.

"Did you ever expect, to be this way at 25 years old?
Do you ever regret, not taking the advice your parents told?
Have you even noticed, that the hands of time will sink into your skin?
You can't get back, to where you've been."
- "the hands of time" from Dumpster Diver ... the musical
by Kris Kemp

I've gotta finish that musical, started it six years ago and it's gotten lost in

the swirling laundry load of younger ideas which serve to crowd it out.

9/26/2005

I have the 8.48 acres (on the corner of CR-361 and 391 Ave) for sale with Diana, a realtor in Steinhatchee. I'm trying to sell it for \$250,000. Diana will get 6%. If I sell it, I'll pay her 2% to help me with the closing, signing papers and stuff. That's \$5,000 for a days work for her--the 2%. If I sell it for that much, and invest the money wisely by investing in smaller parcels purchases at below market prices, I might not have to work again.

Hilarious. I sent a contract for purchase to Sev, a guy in New Jersey who expressed interest in buying the ghetto property, in Cross City, in the quarters section. He offered \$20,000, with \$2,000 non-refundable downpayment and payments of \$300 a month, with the balance paid off at the end of six months. In writing the contract, I asked for 5% interest, which makes his payments of \$300 negligible, as most of that will go toward interest. My feeling is that he won't sign it until I give it to him for zero interest over six months. As the house is basically a concrete shell with a good roof and everything else destroyed, maybe I should do this. Then again, Ronnie said this is a business and you have to be firm, play hardball, so I'll probably follow Ronnie's advice. Never appear anxious. He said something to that effect. And Carrie said, the first one that talks, loses. In other words, the first person to appear needy gets taken advantage of.

9/26/2005

Today is Monday. It's around 11:30 pm. Stuff is falling on the roof. An old oak tree twists and curves like a shellaced piece of taffy above the trailer. I guess it's branches are dead or something because a few times a night, another whack! as the branch hits the trailer. Maybe an enormous branch will come crashing down, fall through the trailer roof, and kill me. Kris Kemp. Killed by a dead branch. Hmm. When Robert came by to help with the electric a few months ago, he brought his friend, this short, thin man with the biggest ears I've ever seen on a human being. So big, that I expected them to start flapping and carry him off into the clouds. The ears made his face look small. The guy seemed angry. He told me that I had to cut the entire tree down, that the branches were rotted, and if I didn't it's gonna fall on the roof. It'll probably crash through, he guessed. I

nodded and tried to express interest, spitting out words like "wow" and "really" and "thanks for letting me know, i'll get to that", hoping he'd finish his lecture. Instead, though, he seemed to get angrier, his eyes grew smaller and he continued his pedantic rant. As I'm a visual person, though, his words were swallowed up by his peculiar, nearly cartoonish features. His angry demeanor and subtle tones best defined as threats-on-training-wheels turned his criticism into expired alphabet soup--bearing no value, easy to dismiss.

This morning, I arrived at the Cross City library at 9am and left around 1:30'ish. I spent the entire time, except for a cookie break at the Subway next door, on the internet, researching upcoming foreclosure and tax deed sales, printing the information, filing it in my notebook. Afterward, I returned to the trailer and threaded the extension cord through the feed shack toward a hole in the back, where I dropped it outside. Then, I looped on the 120' extension cord, gathered the remaining end into a ball, and tossed it over a tree limb. Grabbing that, I found another tree limb that was pretty high, so I took a hammer, tied it to the cord, and tossed it over. I repeated this step until the cord reached the landing. The next several hours were spent sawing wood to use as trusses for the 3/4 plywood sheets. Evening, I quit working. Exhausted, and filthy, I showered, threw on boxer shorts and watched television, driving to the BP down the street for Frito's, then returning to watch more TV. Maybe I'll unplug it, eventually. For now, though, it's a good nightlight. Helps me to settle before going to sleep. Takes my mind off my mind.

10/8/2005

Tonight I had sex with a bag of Fritos. I'm 36, and General Mills is my pimp. That's the disadvantage of not being married at my age--you succumb to your sexual desires. Especially when you have Dish Satellite TV with pretty much all the movie channels. The three-or-so channels of Cinemax, late night on the weekends, plays some pretty graphic porn. I don't get aroused by the tanned girls with fake boobs and dyed blonde hair. But when those natural corn-fed girls with pale, milky skin and lovely breasts and soft eyes and buttery shoulders enter the scene, I'm reduced to a puddle of desire and fondness. They arrive few and far between, but when they do, I'm captured by their loveliness because for me, it's about who they are in the parenthesis of my mind, the bubble of my imagination. Eventually, I'll lose the TV, return it to Wal-Mart, and let the bills pile up

on the Dish Satellite until they cut it off. I don't need that artificial junk to stimulate myself.