

My Twisted World

The Story of Elliot Rodger

By Elliot Rodger

Introduction

Humanity... All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity, particularly women. It has made me realize just how brutal and twisted humanity is as a species. All I ever wanted was to fit in and live a happy life amongst humanity, but I was cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificance, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me.

This is the story of how I, Elliot Rodger, came to be. This is the story of my entire life. It is a dark story of sadness, anger, and hatred. It is a story of a war against cruel injustice. In this magnificent story, I will disclose every single detail about my life, every single significant experience that I have pulled from my superior memory, as well as how those experiences have shaped my views of the world. This tragedy did not have to happen. I didn't want things to turn out this way, but humanity forced my hand, and this story will explain why. My life didn't start out dark and twisted. I started out as a happy and blissful child, living my life to the fullest in a world I thought was good and pure...

Part One

A Blissful Beginning

Age 0-5

On the morning of July 24th, 1991, in a London hospital, I was born. I breathed in the first breath of life as I entered this world, weighing only 5.4 pounds. My parents must have been filled with happiness and pride that day. They had just witnessed the birth of their first child, and they named me Elliot Oliver Robertson Rodger.

I was born to young parents. My father, Peter Rodger, was only 26 when he impregnated my mother, Chin, who was 30. Peter is of British descent, hailing from the prestigious Rodger family; a family that was once part of the wealthy upper classes before they lost all of their fortune during the Great Depression. My father's father, George Rodger, was a renowned photojournalist who had taken very famous photographs during the Second World War, though he failed to reacquire the family's lost fortune. My mother is of Chinese descent. She was born in Malaysia, and moved to England at a young age to work as a nurse on several film sets, where she became friends with very important individuals in the film industry, including George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. She even dated George Lucas for a short time.

My mother and father had been married for a couple of years before my mother became pregnant with me. In fact, her pregnancy was an accident. She had been taking pills to prevent pregnancy, but when she visited my father on one of his film sets, she fell ill and the medication she took for that illness thwarted the effect of the anti-pregnancy pills, and so their lovemaking during this period resulted in my life.

Only a couple of months after my birth, I went on my first vacation. My parents took me on a boat to France. I was already a traveler! Of course, I have no memories of this trip. My mother said that I cried a lot.

At the time that I was born, my mother and father were living in a house in London, but shortly after my birth they decided to move to the countryside. We moved to a large house made of red brick in the county of Sussex, with vast grass fields surrounding it. The house even had a name: The Old Rectory. This was where I spent my early childhood, the first five years of my life, and it was beautiful. The memories I have of this period are only memories of happiness and bliss.

My father was a professional photographer at the time, just in the stage of becoming a director. My mother gave up her nursing career to stay at home and look after me. My grandma on my mother's side, who I would call Ah Mah, moved in with us to help out my mother. I would spend a lot of time with Ah Mah during these years.

This was a time of discovery, excitement, and fun. I had just entered this new world, and I knew nothing of the pain it would bring me later on. I enjoyed life with innocent bliss. I can remember playing in the fields and going on long walks with Ah Mah to pick berries. She would always warn me not to touch the stinging nettles that sometimes grew in our fields, but my curiosity got the better of me, and I got stung a few times. There was a swing in the back of our yard, which I had many good times on.

The first birthday I remember was my 3rd birthday. My parents threw a party for me in our field. I had a helicopter birthday cake. I can remember one of my friend's parents cutting off the first piece and giving it to my friend. I threw a tantrum because I was expecting to get the first piece... It was my birthday after all. My father bought me a toy tractor that I could ride around in, and I would play with it all the time after that.

Sometime after my 3rd birthday, we all went on a vacation to Malaysia, my mother's home country. I have only flashes of memory of that vacation. I enjoyed it very much. We visited a few of my mother's relatives.

For preschool, I was enrolled at Dorsett House, an upscale all-boys private school in the countryside, near where we lived. I was forced to wear a uniform, which I hated because I had to wear uncomfortable socks up to my knees. I was very nervous and I cried on my first day there. I can remember two friends I made by name, George and David. I would always play in the sandpit with them.

I didn't like school at Dorsett House very much. I found the rules to be too strict. My least favorite part of it was the football sessions. I never understood the game and I could never keep up with the other boys in the field, so I always stood by the goal-keeper and pretended to be the "second goal-keeper". My favorite part was playing in the woods after lunch. There was a particular climbing structure that I had a lot of fun with.

My preschool class once went on a field trip to the park, where I had the misfortune of getting lost. As my class was eating lunch, I ventured off to another area of the park, and when I returned, my class had moved on. I remember panicking and asking strangers for help. It was a terrifying experience for me. I was eventually led to my class by the strangers I talked to.

I remember one funny incident when we were taking school pictures. They forced us to sit cross-legged, which I hated doing, so I absolutely refused to sit that way for the picture. The teachers eventually conceded, and the picture was taken with me being the only one sitting differently.

The holiday season was the best part of the year for me. It must have been very cold in England, but I don't remember the cold. I just remember how much fun I had. I was filled with joy when it started snowing outside – I loved playing in the snow. My father helped me build a snowman once. We would start with little snowballs, and roll them around our field until we formed the body, and then we would decorate it.

During Christmas, my parents always had parties and gatherings. My father's best friend, Christopher Bess, who was also my godfather, came to our house frequently. We would often go to my father's parent's house in Smarden, Kent. I would call my grandmother on my father's side "grandma Jinx". My

memories of my grandfather, George Rodger, are faint; he had fallen very ill at this period. My father's brother, uncle Jonny, had a son one year younger than me, who was named George, after my grandfather. I always played games with cousin George in grandma Jinx's garden. The two of us got along well.

On New Year's Eve our neighbors once set up a bonfire party in the field next to our house. I was fascinated by how big the fire was. I had never seen anything like it, and it astounded my little mind. This was also the first time I saw fireworks. My father gave me one of those sparklers to play with, which I was enraptured by.

There was one very special place that my father would often take me to. It was at the top of a range of beautiful rolling hills that I termed the "London Hills", because I thought that London was on the other side of them. We would go there to fly kites. I can remember these experiences vividly. The hills were full of tall straw-like grass, and the weather was always windy – perfect for kite flying.

It was a time of utmost happiness and joy for me. My father taught me to fly a kite by myself. The wind was so strong that I feared it would lift up my frail little body and carry me into the clouds. Once I got the hang of it, it was exhilarating. We would fly our kites together and run with the wind. I will never forget that place.

My favorite childhood film was *The Land Before Time*. I used to watch that movie all the time with Ah Mah. It was about a baby dinosaur named Littlefoot who had just lost his mother and was journeying through a dangerous world to find the "Great Valley", a land of prosperity and peace. I remember the feeling of utter sadness I felt during the scene when his mother died, and the triumphant and happy emotions that swept over me when he finally discovered the Great Valley, after going through all the hardship to get there. I watched this movie so many times that just thinking about it brings the emotions back. It was a big part of my childhood.

Already a world traveler, I went on a trip to Spain with my parents and my parent's friends Patrick and Lupe. It was the fourth country I've been to at such a young age. We stayed in an exquisite castle-like house that I believe was owned by a friend of ours. The house had a tower that I was extremely curious about. At one point, my parents and their friends ventured up to the top of it, but they made me stay below because I was too young. I was sorely disappointed. As they were climbing the tower I went outside to look at the cacti surrounding the house. These cacti also sparked my curiosity, and I foolishly decided to touch a cactus. I ended up getting cactus needles all over my hand, and it took a long time for my mother to remove them.

Shortly after my trip to Spain, we went on another trip to Greece. We stayed at a hotel near the beach. It was very hot there. The weather was new to me, as I was used to the cold British climate.

The trip to Greece was significant because during this time, my father received the news of the death of my grandfather George Rodger. He died of natural causes on my 4th birthday, at the age of 87. It was the first experience I had of the death of a close relative, and the first time I saw my father cry. My 4 year old self could not imagine my father ever crying, and so when I saw him cry that day, I knew how shaken he was. It was a very sad day for all of us. We immediately flew home.

I believe that it was during the time after my 4th birthday that my father came to the decision to eventually move to the United States. As he was just becoming a director, he believed Los Angeles would offer more opportunities. We took a short trip to California to gain an initial look at it. I don't remember much of this trip, but I do remember having a good time. At the age of 4, I, Elliot Rodger, had already been to six different countries. Who can claim that, eh? The United Kingdom, France, Spain, Greece, Malaysia, and the United States.

It was also during this time that my mother became pregnant again. I was going to have a sibling. My parents decided to have another baby, this pregnancy being planned, so that I can have a sibling to grow up with. We later discovered it was going to be a girl.

Before my 5th birthday, my mother went into labor to deliver the baby. I can remember the night vividly. I was very ill that night, a bad omen. I stayed at home with Ah Mah while my mother and father were at the hospital, and we watched movies together. I was fraught with anticipation the whole time. And then my parents came back late in the night, and with them they brought a little black-haired baby wrapped in a bundle. I had a baby sister, and they named her Georgia.

I have no memories of what happened on my 5th birthday. Shortly after it, we were making plans to permanently move to the United States. The news excited me, but I was sad at the prospect of leaving my life in England behind. My father took a short trip to the U.S. by himself to scout out houses. I remember talking on the phone to him while he was there. He told me he found a very nice house for us to move to. I asked him if it had a swimming pool, and he said it did. This news made me very happy.

And then the time came. We started packing everything up at the Old Rectory. On my last day at Dorsett House school, my teacher was giving all of us candies when my mother came to pick me up early. I said goodbye to all the friends I had there. That was the last time I saw them.

My father was given the offer to buy the Old Rectory for about 400,000 Pounds (we were only renting it at the time), but he declined, a decision he would regret later on, as it would have been a worthy investment.

I cried as we drove away from the Old Rectory. All the experiences I had there; playing in the fields, driving my toy tractor, tending to my garden, going on walks with Ah Mah, swinging on the swing; all those experiences were gone. I was about to start a new life. We boarded the plane and took off to America.

Part 2

Growing up in America

Age 5-9

The plane ride was like a dimension between worlds. I was about to enter a whole new world. A whole new life. But none of that went through my little 5 year old head at the time. I slept for most of the journey there, and I can remember looking out the window at the vast stretch of clouds below us. I wondered what it would be like to go down there and run along them as if they were a landmass, not thinking about the fact that I would fall right through!

When we arrived in America, I was very tired. We collected our luggage and loaded them onto a new SUV that my father rented. The image of us driving out of the airport is still fresh in my mind. I often think of it as my first step into my new life in the U.S.

I was so sleepy when we reached our new house that I didn't even bother to look around yet. The house was partly furnished, and we already had a sofa and a television. The first thing we did was watch a movie. The movie was Independence Day, and I fell asleep at some parts, but managed to watch most of the movie.

In the morning I was full of energy. I eagerly clamored up the stairs to search for my new room. I looked at all the rooms before singling out the one that I wanted as mine. When I told my mother about my decision, she told me that the room I picked was meant to be my sister Georgia's room. I got a bit upset, but eventually settled for the room next to it.

The house was quite big, with white walls and a beautiful backyard that led to a gated swimming pool area. It was located in an upscale part of Woodland Hills. The town of Woodland Hills has great

significance in my life. It would be the town that I grow up in. A large portion of all my life experiences, good and bad, would take place in this town. I can recall the first time I said the name on my lips... Woodland Hills... my new hometown.

Soon after settling into our lovely new home, we were disturbed by a problem typical of California: An earthquake. My mother woke me up in the middle of the night, and we all hid under the kitchen table. The earthquake actually turned out to be very small, with even smaller aftershocks following it, but I was still scared. Having never experienced an earthquake before, the only impression I had of earthquakes were the huge, land rupturing earthquakes I saw in *The Land Before Time*. After this experience, I began to see earthquakes as common, minor disturbances.

And there I was, a young 5 year old boy who has so far lived a happy and joyful life about to embark on a new journey; the journey of growing up in the United States of America. I felt a surge of enthusiasm at the prospect. I now considered myself an “American kid”, as I told my parents. I got accustomed to all the American T.V. shows, and I started to adopt an American accent. I was looking forward to my new life.

Soon enough, I was enrolled in school. My father did some extensive school-searching after our arrival, and he found a small private school on Shoup Avenue named Pinecrest. I was to attend kindergarten there. Pinecrest... My 5-year-old self at the time could not imagine how significant this place will eventually become for me. A great turning point of my life will eventually take place there, a tragic turn for the worse. But that will come later, in a darker chapter of my story, when I enter my pre-teen years. For now, I was a kindergartener who was enjoying life to the fullest.

Kindergarten at Pinecrest didn't turn out so well. I had a very unpleasant teacher who was impatient with how far behind I was in my schoolwork, as I had missed a couple months of school due to the move. During playtime, this teacher would keep me in the classroom to do extra work in order to catch up. My parents didn't like this teacher, and one of their friends recommended another school for me, a private school nearby named Farm School; it was named after the farm that was attached to it. After only a couple of weeks at Pinecrest, my parents took me out of it, and I would not return again until I go there for Middle School six years later.

My first day at farm school turned out to be a good start. I had two teachers, and they made an effort to introduce me to the other kids. There was one particular boy named Joey who they assigned to show me around. He was nice to me at first, but would soon turn out to be a rotten little prick who I would always get into fights with. He then became my greatest enemy at the school.

The first real friend I made in the United States was a girl named Maddy Humphreys. Isn't that ironic? The first friend I made in the United States was a girl! She was the first female friend I've ever had, and she would be the last. Maddy and I started playing together at Farm School, and eventually my parents became very good friends with her parents. Maddy's father is the famous British musician Paul Humphreys, and her mother is named Maureen, though we would call her Mo. They had a nice house in Hidden Hills. Our families got together often to have barbeques and dinners.

I was a 5 year old boy playing with a girl my own age like any normal boy would do. I was enjoying life in a world that I loved. I was happy, and completely oblivious of the fact that my future on this world would only turn to darkness and misery because of girls. This girl who was my friend, Maddy Humphreys, would eventually come to represent everything I hate and despise; everything that is against me, and everything that I'm against. I was playing innocently with this girl, in the manner that all children play. We even took baths together; it was the only time in my life that I would see a girl my age naked. When I think about the experiences I had during my friendship with her, it makes me think ominously of the fact that all children, boys and girls, start out the same. We all start out innocent, and we all start out

together. Only through the experiences and circumstances of growing up do we drift apart, form allegiances, and face each other as enemies. That is when wars happen, and that is when the true nature of humanity rises to the surface. At this stage of my life, of course, my war hadn't started yet, and it wouldn't start for a long time. I was enjoying my life without a care in the world, not knowing that all of my joy is destined to turn to dust.

My Kindergarten year at Farm School was filled with exciting, new experiences, all healthy for a growing boy. I had friends, I had playdates, I socialized with the other boys at school, despite getting into lots of conflicts with Joey. I only got into trouble once, over a quarrel with another boy during playtime, and I was sent to the principal's office. Having never been in such trouble at school before, I recall being overcome with nervousness and fear, which caused me to cry for an hour. I especially enjoyed our arts and crafts time, and I loved it when our class would go on visits to the school's farm.

After a bright and joyous school year, it was time to graduate. I was swelled with pride as I wore my graduation cap at the ceremony. I loved that school very much, and I was sad to leave it. Kindergarten was over, and soon enough I would enter elementary school.

My 6th birthday soon followed. My parents arranged a Disney-themed party at a play center that my mother had been taking me to frequently. I invited everyone from my Farm School class, all the boys and the girls, except for Joey. I deliberately omitted Joey as an act of revenge for being mean to me throughout the year, and I felt a sense of satisfaction in doing so.

The party was cheerful, and there was a man dressed as Merlin to host the festivities. I sat at the end of the table during my birthday meal, wearing a wizard hat. As my cake was presented to me, I felt only elation and glee as I took in a breath and blew out my candles. Life was good.

6 Years Old

My favorite part of the day during this jubilant period of my life was our afternoon trips to the park. Specifically, Serrania Park. This park was beautiful and green, with concrete pathways cutting through fields of grass and a fun playground for us kids to play in. I always took to playing on the slides, and sometimes I would go on the swing, though my father had to push me. I remember getting jealous of other boys who were able to swing by themselves, boys who were even younger than myself. It was the second time I realized my lack of physical capability. The first time I had such an inkling of my shortcomings were those disastrous football sessions at Dorsett House.

Eventually, my father got around to teaching me how to swing by myself, and after some practice, I was able to do it. After that, I would always soar up and down on that swing in the Serrania park playground well into the hour of twilight.

I was very small and short statured for my age. I never gave this much concern during my early childhood, but this fact fully dawned on me the day my family took a trip to Universal Studios. At the time, I loved dinosaurs. I was fascinated by them. I had just recently watched the movie Jurassic Park, and when I found out that there was a Jurassic Park themed ride at Universal Studios, I couldn't wait to go on it. We queued up in the line and waited for an hour. When reached the front, the park staff presented me with a measuring stick, and I didn't fit the requirements. I saw other boys my age admitted onto the ride, but I was denied because I was too short! The ride that I was so excited to enjoy at the theme park was forbidden to me. I immediately fell into a crying tantrum, and my mother had to comfort me.

Being denied entry on a simple amusement park ride due to my height may seem like only a small injustice, but it was big for me at time. Little did I know, this injustice was very small indeed compared to all the things I'll be denied in the future because of my height.

We resorted to trying out the E.T. ride, which I was admitted to. I had a miserable time on this ride, however, because the dark atmosphere and the mechanically moving alien statues that lined the queuing area scared the hell out of me. By the time we got to the actual ride, I was crying in fright, but later calmed down as the ride turned out to be mild and relaxing towards the end.

I always enjoyed my family's get-togethers with the Humphreys. These get-togethers became a common occurrence in my life. Maddy became a very close friend of mine. She was the only friend from Farm School who I continued to see after I graduated. They had a huge back yard area, and the two of us would go on adventures. She also grew up watching *The Land Before Time*, and we would watch the sequels together whenever they released a new one.

Sometimes when I went to her house, she would have other female friends there, and I played with them too. I had no trouble interacting with girls at that age, surprisingly. My six-year-old self was playing with girls, unbeknownst to the horror and misery the female gender would inflict upon me later in my life. In the present day, these girls would treat me like the scum of the earth; but at that time, we were all equals. Such bitter irony.

It was now time for me to start First Grade. My parents enrolled me at Serrania Avenue Elementary School, which was just down the street from Serrania Park. I wouldn't remain at this school for long, however, because only weeks into my First Grade year, my parents decided that they were going to move to Topanga.

Most of the kids at Serrania Avenue school will end up going to Taft High School nearby, a place that will cause me great suffering in the future. Perhaps some of the kids in my class at Serrania will end up turning into those who would bully me at Taft. I don't remember any of the kids from my class there, so I will never know the answer to that. It's very disturbing to think about.

I quite enjoyed my brief time at Serrania. My parents sometimes made me stay an hour after school; I believe this was because they figured it would help me make friends. I can remember this after-school playtime being a positive experience. There were always games that I played with the other kids. And thus I was a bit frustrated when my parents told me they were going to transfer me to another school after only a couple of weeks of settling into Serrania. That frustration would soon cease, because the years that I would spend at Topanga Elementary school would be some of the best years of my life. The last years of being a carefree child.

I started First Grade at Topanga Elementary School a couple of weeks before we prepared to move to Topanga. Topanga is a secluded, mountainous community surrounding a canyon that runs through the Santa Monica Mountains, located in between the San Fernando Valley and the Pacific Coast Highway. We had only passed through this community a few times, when we would take trips to the beach. It has a certain rugged beauty about it.

On my first day at Topanga Elementary, I was very nervous. Since it was about a month after the first grade term started, I was going to be the "new kid" at school. I remember the nervousness taking over my body as my mother drove us up the steep road that led into the school proper. My new class was just lining up to start the day as we walked onto the main courtyard. My teacher, Mrs. Matsuyama, was very nice and understanding. My mother said goodbye and I got in line with the other students. The first kid I saw there was a chubby boy named Bryce Jacobs, who was staring at me strangely.

As we got to class, Mrs. Matsuyama assigned one of the students to show me around and help me adjust. This student happened to be none other than Philip Bloeser. Philip was always very mature for his age, and he was nice to me on my first day. He became my first friend at Topanga Elementary.

The day turned out to be one of great fun. Class time was not too boring, and we did some fun arts and crafts activities. For recess and lunch, there were two playgrounds: the Upper and the Lower. The

first and second graders would go to the Lower playground, and the third, fourth, and fifth graders would go to the Upper. The Lower playground was smaller, but it had some nice amenities, especially the sloping hill to the side of it, where I would enjoy running up and down “kicking dust”, a game I instantly created due to the dust-like dirt on this hill. When my mother came to pick me up, I recall having so much fun that I didn’t want to leave! That’s a first. In the past, I was always eager to go home after spending hours at school.

The drive to and from school was a long one, or at least long for my six-year-old self. My favorite part of the drive was the descent from Topanga into the Valley. The view of the broad expanse of the Valley was breathtaking as it opened up before us after clearing the final hill. I would make that trip through the winding roads of Topanga Canyon every day for the next couple of weeks, before we moved to the new house. Sometimes my mother would pick me up, and sometimes my nanny would. I don’t remember the name of this nanny, as she was only with us for a brief period of time.

I loved the new house the moment I laid eyes on it. It was a beautiful, round, wooden house located up the road from Valley View Drive, in the better part of Topanga. It had two stories, a swimming pool, and a lovely deck that provided a view of the lush mountains. I instantly named it the “Round House”.

I was sad to leave our house in Woodland Hills, our first house in America. I would miss the good times I had there, playing with Maddy and my other friends, swimming in the pool, the close proximity to Serrania Park where I spent a lot of time enjoying the elations of a carefree childhood. Our new Round House in Topanga, however, turned out to be a worthy replacement.

My room at the Round House was a bit smaller than my old one, but I remember it being very cozy. Shortly after we moved in, Ah-Mah came to visit from England, and she baked my favorite peanut cookies. We had some very happy times during the beginnings of my life there.

My father’s new directing career was taking off quite well too, and he would go away a lot to direct commercials for prestigious companies, leaving my mother and the nanny to look after me. The only downside of this was my father’s absence from my life. Despite this, I always looked up to him as a powerful and successful man.

Adjusting to my new environment in Topanga was quite easy for me, especially since school was so much fun. I was now a Topanga Kid. During recess at school, I started noticing this boy with slightly long blonde hair who also enjoyed kicking dust. Before I met him, I always mentally nicknamed him the “King Arthur Kid”, due the regal look his hairstyle gave him. It was only a matter of time before our dusting kicking antics would collide with each other. We then teamed up and starting playing the game together, and this was the start of a long and interesting friendship. This boy’s name was James Ellis, and he would become my best friend for the next 14 years of my life.

Sometimes, the two of us would join with Philip Bloeser and some other boys, and play fun games like handball, war games, and tag.

Soon enough, I would start having frequent playdates with James Ellis. His house was just down the hill from mine. James’s father was named Arte; and his mother, Kim, became one of my mother’s best friends.

Christmas arrived quickly, and for my present I got my first video game console, a Nintendo 64! I had little knowledge of video games before this. I barely knew what they were. My father is the one who introduced me to them. With the Nintendo 64, my father bought the games Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire, and Turok: Dinosaur Hunter. I was fascinated with this new form of entertainment, and my father and I would bond a lot over our video game sessions.

Of course, while playing these video games, my innocent, happy self knew nothing of the significant role video games would play during a large portion of my life... and the sanctuary such games would

eventually provide for me from the cruelties of this world. For now, they were just a form of entertainment like any other hobby.

Life was good at the round house, but soon enough I had to witness my mother and father get into a lot of arguments. I was too young at the time to understand what they were arguing about, but I knew they were not getting along. It didn't really concern me all too much, because every other aspect of my life was wonderful.

I had playdates with James Ellis every week. Sometimes he would surprise me with a visit after school, as we lived so close by. I went over to Philip Bloeser's house a few times as well, and I met his younger brother, Jeffrey. The Bloeser's also became good friends with my mother. They lived in a nice house up the road from our own, with a deck that provided an extraordinary view of the Topanga mountains.

At some point I learned about the possibility that parents can separate... divorce... no longer live together. The prospect baffled my little mind. I once sat down with my mother on our outside deck and asked her if she and father would ever divorce. She told me it will never happen, and that I had nothing to worry about. I was relieved by that. Little did I know, such a thing would happen in only a few months time.

My first grade year ended splendidly. I made a few lasting friends, and I had a blast at Topanga Elementary. I always considered myself a good, well-behaved student, so I was a bit disappointed at the few times I got in trouble. My class had a system where if we do something wrong, we would change our card color from green to yellow, and then to red if we did any more troublemaking. I thought I would never have to change my card, but I had to change it to yellow a few times for minor things. When first grade ended, I made the resolution that in second grade I will never be forced to change my card.

After my last day of school, I was looking forward to a long summer break, my favorite time of the year. I was a bit dismayed when my parents made me attend summer camp. My father had to go away a lot for work, and my mother needed to have some time to look after baby Georgia. Summer camp wasn't all that bad, I had some fun. It consisted of kids from First through Fourth grade, and we played lots of games and watched movies.

7 Years Old

My last memory of my parents being together was my 7th birthday, and I would always cherish it. We didn't have a party for my seventh birthday, but more of a small get-together for lunch. Maddy and the Humpreys were our only guests. We celebrated it at Gladstones, my favorite restaurant at the time. It was in the Pacific Palisades, right on the beach. I had my favorite meal, lobster.

It was a very happy day for all of us. I was turning seven. That was a big number for my little mind. I had spent seven years on this fascinating world, and my life was at a good start. I had loving parents, I had friends to play with, I was having fun at school, and I had all the toys a little boy could want. A stranger would look at this seven year old boy and think that he has a great life in front of him, that there is nothing to worry about. Indeed, there shouldn't be anything to worry about... But I was just a child. I still had a few more years to enjoy life in carefree bliss before I would eventually discover how twisted and cruel this "fascinating world" really is.

My parents seemed happy that day. I remember them laughing and having a good time. It would be the last time I remember them being happy together. Perhaps they really weren't, perhaps they were

just putting up a front so that I could enjoy my birthday. I couldn't even fathom the possibility of my parents separating.

Very shortly after my seventh birthday, the news came. I believe it was my mother who told me that she and my father were getting a divorce; my mother, who only a few months before told me that such a thing will never happen. I was absolutely shocked, outraged, and above all, overwhelmed. This was a huge life-changing event.

My father was to stay at the round house, and my mother would move to another smaller house in Topanga. It was arranged that me and my sister will mostly be living with our mother, and we would go to father's house on the weekends. My father was required to pay child support to my mother so that she can look after us.

My life would change forever after this. The family I grew up with has split in half, and from then on I would grow up in two different households. I remember crying. All the happy times I spent with my mother and father as a family were gone, only to remain in memory. It was a very sad day. Just like the move to the U.S., it would be like starting a whole new life with a new routine.

Despite the initial sadness I felt from my family splitting in half, my new life situation wasn't all that bad. It was still practically the same life, though I lived with my mother in one house and my father in another.

My mother's new house was small and red in color, located up a steep driveway from Topanga Canyon Boulevard. I would call it the "Red House". It was the smallest house I've lived in at that point. It only had two bedrooms, and I had to share a room with my sister Georgia. We had a bunk-bed, and I slept on the top. I was quite uncomfortable with this change at first, being used to having my own room and living in bigger houses. My mother's kind and loving nature, however, made up for this, and she turned the household into a fun environment which I enjoyed living in.

After spending the first week at mother's house, father came to pick me and my sister up for the weekend. Georgia had become very attached to mother after this week, and she burst into tears when we drove off. I too, was a bit distressed at having to go from one house to the other every week, but I would soon get used to it.

The Round House was very different without mother being there. When we entered, I felt a wave of sadness creep over me as I was reminded of my life when mother and father were together. The house was full of memories; happy, cheerful memories that were lost in the past. With my mother missing from it, there was a sense of bleakness and loss to the place. Father did his best to cheer us up. I could tell that he, too, was very saddened by the recent events.

My father soon rented one of the rooms of the round house to his good friend Dan Perelli, one of his first friends in America. Dan used to live close to our house in Woodland Hills until he was struck with financial troubles, which I'm assuming is why he started renting a room from my father. I would always call him "Uncle Dan". From this point on, Uncle Dan would stay with us as a lodger for a few years.

The time to start Second Grade arrived. My new teacher was named Mrs. Weisberg, and she was very kind. The students in my class were mostly the same as my First Grade class, with only one or two new students who transferred from other schools. I made a few new friends, such as Shane and Tommy.

I was very disappointed to find out that James Ellis would not be returning to Topanga Elementary for second grade. In fact, his family would be moving out of Topanga to the Pacific Palisades, where they would be renting a house from their friends, the Lemelson's.

My father's stay at the round house was very brief. He suffered some temporary financial setbacks on top of the divorce, so he decided to move to a smaller house on Old Topanga Canyon. It was a very

abrupt move, and I would never see the round house again. One day, after he picked me and my sister up from mother's, he took us to the new house and that was it.

The house was a small, two-story house in a more rustic part of the Topanga mountains. The upstairs portion had only a bedroom and bathroom, and it was rented to Uncle Dan. All around the outside of the house were very small hills and hiking trails that led up to the mountains. Overlooking these hills was a massive, imposing rock called "Big Rock". When I first saw Big Rock, I told myself that one day I'll climb to the top of it!

I took a liking to this new environment, and every time I visited father on the weekends, I would always be outside, exploring and adventuring. There were always new places to discover in that secluded region. I didn't venture too far into the wilderness, however, because of the danger of coyotes and mountain lions.

After only a couple of months since my seventh birthday, a new and very important person would come into my life. After father picked us up from school one day and took us to his house, I saw a woman with dark hair and fair skin standing in the kitchen, and she introduced herself as Soumaya. She would become my stepmother. Father told me she would be living with us from now on. At first I thought she was just another friend who was temporarily staying with father, similar to what Uncle Dan was doing. My father having a girlfriend so shortly after divorcing my mother didn't even occur to me. I couldn't understand it. Soon enough, though, I realized that Soumaya was, in fact, his "girlfriend", and they were together just like how my father and mother were together. It was the first time I learned the concept of a "girlfriend", and it was hard to grasp. Before that, I always thought a man and a woman had to be married before living together in such a manner, and that it would take a long time for such a union to happen. Father finding a new girlfriend in such a short amount of time baffled me. I was completely taken aback.

Because of my father's acquisition of a new girlfriend, my little mind got the impression that my father was a man that women found attractive, as he was able to find a new girlfriend in such a short period of time from divorcing my mother. I subconsciously held him in higher regard because of this. It is very interesting how this phenomenon works... that males who can easily find female mates garner more respect from their fellow men, even children. How ironic is it that my father, one of those men who could easily find a girlfriend, has a son who would struggle all his life to find a girlfriend.

I soon became accustomed to Soumaya being part of father's household. She hails from the Akaaboune family, a very prominent family from the country of Morocco. For the initial period of her being a new member of the family, we got along well, and she was quite fun. But soon she would start to discipline me in a harsh way that I wasn't used to. I felt that because she wasn't my real parent, she had no right to discipline me in such a way, and so I rebelled. That's where the first conflicts arose. There would be many more to come in later years.

Along with the addition of Soumaya, I had two new nannies. The first nanny was a French woman named Celine, though she was only with us for a brief period, so I don't remember much of her. My second nanny was a German woman named Christine. Christine would stay with us for a year, and I became very fond of her. She would always look after me during my time at father's house, and whenever I went on my adventures into the hills, she always accompanied me.

Halloween this year marked my first time going Trick-or-Treating. My mother took me to my friend Shane's house, and we walked around his neighborhood collecting candy. Still obsessed with dinosaurs, I dressed up as a dinosaur for that Halloween. Trick-or-Treating was a new thing for me, as it wasn't so popular in England. When it was all over, I was amazed that I had so much candy.

Even though James Ellis no longer went to Topanga Elementary, he was still my best friend, and I saw him a lot. Mother would take us to his house in the Palisades almost every week, where I would play with James, and Georgia would play with James's sister Sage. He got me interested in a new phenomenon that gripped many children of the era: Pokemon.

When I got my first Gameboy console, I started playing Pokemon Red Version, and I was hooked instantly. I then started collecting Pokemon cards, and James and I always compared and traded them. The Pokemon anime cartoon became my favorite show on television. It was a very fun, captivating hobby, and every boy at my school had a folder of Pokemon cards. It provided something to have, something to show off, something to talk about. The best cards were the "shinies", and everyone coveted them.

Mother was still friends with George Lucas, so we got invites to the red carpet premiere of Star Wars Episode 1. I always was and always will be a huge Star Wars fan. I had already seen the original trilogy many times, and I considered myself very lucky to be able to go to the premiere of the new Star Wars movie.

It was an absolutely astonishing experience. It was just me and my mother – Georgia was too young, so she stayed at home with a babysitter. Episode 1 is infamous for being the lesser movie of the three new prequels, but as a kid I enjoyed it very much. Afterwards, I met some of the actors, and I shook the hand of Jake Lloyd, the actor who played Anakin Skywalker in the movie.

My Second Grade year flew by like a breeze. I don't remember much of it, but I did have a blast. During recess and lunch, I played a lot with Shane and Tommy. We would play Pokemon on our Gameboys, and sometimes we would have playdates where we played Nintendo 64 games such as Banjo Kazooie, Super Mario 64, and Donkey Kong 64.

I failed in my goal of never having to change my card, which really disappointed me. I went through most of the year without changing my card, but right when the year was about to end, I was caught talking in class with a friend named Danny Dayani, who sat next to me, and I had to change my card to yellow. I blamed Danny for it, because he was always talking in class, but I still had to change my card.

After a fast and fantastic year, summer came quickly, and with it my 8th birthday. My 8th birthday was mellow, but pleasant. I remember my mother inviting a few of my friends from my second grade class and we had a cake. During my weekend at father's house, we all went to the restaurant Typhoon in Santa Monica to celebrate it. It was quite a fancy restaurant next to a small airport, and they had a lot of exotic dishes that I tried.

8 Years Old

As I was now eight-years-old, father decided that I was old enough to climb Big Rock. Whenever I was at father's house, I would always see Big Rock looming in the distance, and I was just itching to climb it. I had already conquered every other rock in the area... there was only Big Rock left. And so I set out with father and a few of father's friends to finally climb to the top. The furthest I had climbed on this rock was about half way up with Christine. There was a very steep rise which I wasn't able to ascend without some help. The second half of the journey was quite a challenge, but it was so exhilarating! I was very nervous the higher we climbed. The best part, of course, was reaching the top, and the sense of accomplishment I felt. I finally did it! Looking down, I could see the vastness of the Old Topanga Canyon region, and father's house looked tiny down there. I was too scared to venture close to the edge, and I felt a sense of dread at the prospect of falling from such a height. The way down was even more challenging, but I felt so proud of myself for climbing that rock that it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be.

I was very excited to start Third Grade. As Third Graders, we now got to play in the Upper Playground of Topanga Elementary, and I considered myself one of the “big kids”. The Upper was vast, with a bigger playground, more handball courts, and four basketball courts. My classroom was located in a bungalow adjacent to the Upper, and my teacher was named Mrs. Buntin. She was a young teacher; I believe she was in her late 20’s. Being used to having very old teachers, I was surprised at how young my new teacher appeared.

I continued to play with the same friends during recess and lunch, where we would spend our time comparing and trading Pokemon cards. In the midst of elementary school, I didn’t interact with girls much, but this was normal. I was at that period of life where the boys played with the boys and the girls played with the girls, completely separate from each other. Girls were the last thing on my mind. Maddy was still the only friend I had who was a girl, and I only saw her on the occasions when our families would have a get-together, which became more and more rare after Maddy’s parents divorced and Paul Humpreys moved back to England.

It was as if the girls in elementary school were part of a separate reality. Despite not having much interaction with them, they treated me cordially, as they treated all other boys of my age. This was fair, and I was content with this. I hadn’t gone through puberty yet, and so I had no desire for female validation. My eight-year-old self had no inkling of the pain and misery girls would cause me once puberty would inevitably arrive and my sexual desires for girls would develop. Sexual desires that would be mercilessly spurned. Some of the boys in my class would grow up to be embraced by girls, while I would grow up to be rejected by them. But at that moment in time, we were just innocent children growing up together. All innocence is destined to be shattered and replaced with bitter brutality.

I was living in ignorant, innocent bliss. *And I was happy with it.*

This period of my life, aside from my early childhood in England, was one of the best periods. Life was fair and life was satisfying. As kids, proving our self-worth and gaining validation among our peers was achieved in a fair manner, by how good we were at the games we played, or how big our collection of Pokemon cards were. No one had unfair advantages. This was perfect, and this is how life should be.

And... boy did I have a lot of fun. James’s family had to move to yet another house in the Palisades, and mother would always take us there. She became great friends with James’s parents Kim and Arte. James and I would battle on our Gameboys, trade Pokemon cards, and walk to the recreation center down the street to play in the pool, and then for dinner we would all go to the restaurant Mott’s in the center of the Palisades.

I was quite proud of my collection of Pokemon cards. I had gained a few “shinies” over the last few months, and I enjoyed showing them off to other boys. Shiny cards came randomly in card packets our parents would buy for us. The card that I coveted the most was the Charizard card, and one morning when my mother opened a packet for me and I looked through the new cards... there it was. It felt like the best day ever, and I was swelled with excitement. I jumped up and down all around the Red House, and I couldn’t wait to show it to James, who already had a Charizard himself.

Through being friends with James Ellis and going to his house a lot, we became acquainted with the Lemelson family, who were family friends of Kim and Arte. The Lemelson family is a very wealthy family who has been financially helping James’s family for a while. Rob Lemelson is the son of Jerome Lemelson, the inventor of the bar code, and his net worth is in the hundred-millions. Rob’s son, Noah, is our age and great friends with James, and eventually I became friends with him too, though we would never be close friends. Sometimes we would all go to the Lemelson’s house, also in the Palisades, and the three of us played together.

For Halloween, we went to the Lemelson's for Trick-or-Treating, and from then on it would become tradition to go Trick-or-Treating with them. I dressed up like a dinosaur again, because I couldn't think of anything else to be. I wanted to dress up as Ash Ketchum from Pokemon, but no store had that costume in stock. The Palisades was full of wealthy families, so the candy they gave us would be in much larger amounts, obviously. I remember competing with James and Noah as to who would get the most candy at the end. Afterwards, we would have dinner at Rob's house, and then we would dump our candy in piles on the floor to examine what we got. That was my favorite part of it.

Early in my Third Grade year, my mother would often take us to a festival near Topanga Canyon Boulevard, where small concerts were held and people barbequed great food. A friend of hers had something to do with these events, and I played with the son of this friend. He was named Riley Anapol, and he was two years younger than me. A First Grader. I played with some other younger kids there as well, peers of Riley, and I had a good time. Riley became a common friend for a while. The significance of this is that Riley Anapol would eventually become someone I would harbor a great hatred for. Riley would grow up to get lots of girls, and I would grow up to be rejected by girls. But back then he was a friend, a peer, and we were playing together as equals. It's funny how the world works.

When the holidays arrived, my father announced that we were going to take a family vacation to Soumaya's home country of Morocco and meet her family there, and afterwards we were to stop by in England. I wasn't excited about Morocco, since I didn't know much about it except that it was in north Africa, and I wasn't too excited about the fact that we'll be staying there for six weeks either, which meant that my entire winter break would be spent in a foreign country that I knew nothing about.

But of course, I had no choice in the matter, and Morocco was added to the list of the many countries I've been to at such a young age. I looked forward to visiting England afterwards and seeing family there.

Morocco was very strange and foreign to me, even more so than Malaysia, which was more westernized. I found it to be very backwards, though it had a lot of culture and the people were friendly. I remember disliking a lot of the meals, but enjoying the deserts and pastries. Soumaya's parents were divorced, though they lived walking distance from each other in the Kasbah, a historic community located in the center of Tangier. Soumaya's mother, Khadija, has a small but elegant house, and her father, Abdesalem, has a very large, almost castle-like house that is famous for being a location where a scene from James Bond: The Living Daylights was shot. This fascinated me, as I was a huge James Bond fan at the time. In the center of this house there was an open courtyard where I always played with a kid named Ayman, and his two younger brothers. They were adopted by Soumaya's father a few years ago and live with him.

After a long stay in Morocco – too long in my opinion – we made our stop in England to visit relatives. We stayed at grandma Jinx's house, and I was able to play with my cousin George for a few days. On one of the days we stayed in England, my mother's sister, Aunt Min, and my grandma Ah Mah came to visit and brought me a lot of English chocolates which I relished.

All in all, it was a good trip and I was glad to be able to experience it, though the length of the trip cut into my school schedule, and I missed a couple of weeks of school.

After the holiday season, my nanny Christine had to leave back to Germany, and this saddened me deeply. Christine would always be my favorite nanny, and I was in a sullen mood on the day she left.

The remainder of my Third Grade year went by quickly. I continued my Pokemon endeavors, increasing my card collection and progressing on the Gameboy game.

I had a conflict with my friend Shane during this time. Because of some arguments we previously had, I started to play a game with him in which he would become my enemy and rival at the school. For me, I

was just playing with him, but he took it seriously and the conflict escalated a lot more than I thought it would. We once got into a small physical fight in which I hit him on the arm and was sent to the principal's office. That was the biggest trouble I've been in at Topanga Elementary. This little conflict with Shane lasted for the rest of Third Grade, but we would later reconcile and play again as friends in Fourth Grade.

Before summer came, my father's spontaneous career as a commercial Director took off once again, and he became very successful. At this point, he was probably the most successful he's ever been. With this success, he decided to move to a bigger and better house. After doing some searching, we moved to a house in an upscale area of West Hills, near Woodland Hills. I loved this house at first sight. It had five bedrooms, which was more than enough space for our family along with Uncle Dan who was still staying with us. It also had a huge swimming pool with a spa, a large grass field to play in, a basketball court, and a nice view of the Valley. I was a Valley kid again.

Despite father's move to a much larger house and all the benefits that came with it, I still preferred my time at mother's house, just because of her gentle and fun attitude and the energy of her household. My mother indulged in me more than my father and Soumaya ever did. She knew what I liked and what I didn't like, and she would go out of her way to make my life pleasant and enjoyable. I was quite annoyed with the recent decision between my mother and father to extend my stay at father's by two days of the week. From that point on, me and my sister would only be at mother's house from Monday to Thursday, and on Thursday night we would go to father's house until the following Monday.

My 9th Birthday was spent at father's house, and father and Soumaya threw a party for me. They invited a few of my friends from Topanga Elementary, though the only friend I remember being there was Philip and his younger brother Jeffrey. James was invited, but he wasn't able to make it. They also invited a few of Georgia's friends, which really annoyed me, since it was my birthday, and not Georgia's. It was quite an eventful party, and it took place in our backyard. My father hired a magician to perform tricks for everyone.

9 Years Old

My ninth year was very interesting, and I went through a lot of changes emotionally and intellectually. It was the year in which I matured to a point where I would start observing the world more conscientiously. Before I turned nine, I was living life as a carefree child in a world that I thought was only good and pure. From this point onwards, I would gradually discover more about the world and society. I would face problems and frustrations that I wouldn't even think about before. My life would still be positive and bright, however, and I would live it to its fullest.

The first frustration of the year, which would remain for the rest of my life, was the fact that I was very short for my age. As Fourth Grade started, it fully dawned on me that I was the shortest kid in my class – even the girls were taller than me. In the past, I rarely gave a thought to it, but at this stage I became extremely annoyed at how everyone was taller than me, and how the tallest boys were automatically respected more. It instilled the first feelings of inferiority in me, and such feelings would only grow more volatile with time.

I desperately wanted to get taller, and I read that playing basketball increases height. This sparked my brief interest in basketball, and I would play it all the time during recess and lunch in the Upper. Most of the basketball courts were unused, so I would play it by myself, or with anyone who cared to join me. During my time at father's, I would spend hours playing basketball at father's basketball court, shooting

hoop after hoop long into the evening, and I also remember lying on the ground in the basketball court trying to stretch my body as much as I could in between basketball sessions.

When I played basketball at school, some boys would join me, and when they did I saw that they were much better at the sport than me. I envied their ability to throw the ball at double the distance than I could. This made me realize that along with being short, I was physically weak compared to other boys my age. Even boys younger than me were stronger. This vexed me to no end.

My fourth grade classroom was located in the center area of the school, and my teacher was named Mrs. Gill, who had an assistant named Mr. Devine. Fourth grade was a strange year due to the emotional problems I would go through, and I didn't have as much fun at school as I did in previous years. In class, I sat near Keaton Webber, and I got into a few conflicts with him. We weren't quite enemies, but I disliked him intensely and I would always consider him a foul prick.

By nature, I am a very jealous person, and at the age of nine my jealous nature sprung to the surface. During playdates with James, sometimes he would have other friends over as well, and I would feel very jealous and upset when he paid more attention to them. Feeling left out, I would find a quiet corner and start crying. My mother and Kim were very understanding, and did the best they could to console me.

On the rare occurrence that my mother would have Maddy and Mo over for dinner, or if we would go to visit them at their house, Maddy often played with my little sister Georgia instead of me, and this too made me jealous. I remember all the times I cried when this happened.

Jealousy and envy... those are two feelings that would dominate my entire life and bring me immense pain. The feelings of jealousy I felt at nine-years-old were frustrating, but they were nothing compared to how I would feel once I hit puberty and have to watch girls choosing other boys over me. Any problem I had at nine-years-old was nirvana compared to what I was doomed to face.

A few months into fourth grade, it was decided by my parents to change me and my sister's living arrangement yet again. This time, we would be switching between mother's house and father's house each week. One week would be spent at mother's, and the next at father's. This was a fair split. At first I wasn't so sure about it, because I always disliked any change to my life, but I found it to be a better arrangement. This enabled me to spend weekends at mother's house, during her week, and I was very excited about this. I've only ever spent weekends at father's beforehand.

During father's week, I would mostly be looked after by our two new nannies, Rosa and Amparro. They were of South American origin and didn't speak much English, but they were very kind.

I started to have intense conflicts with Soumaya. I hated the rules she imposed on me, which I believed she had no right to impose, as she wasn't my true parent. I hated how she would force me to drink milk every morning and very foul-tasting soup for dinner. I made such a fuss about having the soup that she used it as a punishment. Whenever I did something wrong, she would force me to drink the soup. I once had a playdate with Philip at father's house, and when I yelled at my sister because she was annoying us, Soumaya punished me by sending me to my room for an hour, embarrassing me in front of Philip. After this incident, I never had a playdate at father's house ever again.

This conflict with Soumaya started a trend in which I would love being at mother's house and dread the weeks I had to spend at father's house. On top of the conflicts with Soumaya, father was rarely there, as he was always out of town for his work. After spending a nice week at mother's house, I would cry when Sunday came and I had to go to father's on Monday. I would then spend the entire week at father's house looking forward to going back to my mother's. I remember those Mondays when my mother dropped me off at school for the first day of father's week... I felt so sad that I cried when I saw my mother's car driving away. Of course, I would hide the tears to avoid embarrassment at school, but I would feel miserable for that whole day.

I always had a pleasant experience during mother's week. She always arranged playdates for me, because she knew I was too shy to initiate them myself. She always made everything fun. On weekends after dinner, we would have "treat time", where she would bring out a box of candies for me and my sister to choose from.

I had a lot of playdates with Philip, and through Philip I also played with his brother Jeffrey, who was two years younger than us. While Philip was calm and mature, Jeffrey was the complete opposite. Jeffrey Bloeser was wild and boisterous, which often brought a lot of fun to my playdates with Philip.

My mother once had a party at her house and invited all of our family friends. James Ellis came over, and so did Philip and Jeffrey. It was the first time I saw all of them together, and it made for an interesting experience. I got a bit jealous, however, when Philip and Jeffrey seemed to respect and pay more attention to James than they did to me. When we were playing on my Nintendo 64 and I was competing against James, they rooted for James, which really upset me.

As my fourth grade year approached its end, my little nine-year-old self had another revelation about how the world works. I realized that there were hierarchies, that some people were better than others. Of course I was subconsciously aware of this in the past, but it was at this time of my life – at nine years old – that I started to give it a lot of thought and importance.

I started to see this at school. At school, there were always the "cool kids" who seemed to be more admirable than everyone else. The way they looked, dressed, and acted made them... cooler. These "cool kids" as I called them, included Keaton Webber, Matt Bordier, Michael Ray, Trevor Bourget, Zalman Katz, John Jo Glen, and a few more. They were cool, they were popular, and they always seemed like they were having a good time.

The peaceful and innocent environment of childhood where everyone had an equal footing was all over. The time of fair play was at its end. Life is a competition and a struggle, and I was slowly starting to realize it.

When I became aware of this common social structure at my school, I also started to examine myself and compare myself to these "cool kids". I realized, with some horror, that I wasn't "cool" at all. I had a dorky hairstyle, I wore plain and uncool clothing, and I was shy and unpopular. I was always described as the shy boy in the past, but I never really thought my shyness would affect me in a negative way, until this point.

This revelation about the world, and about myself, really decreased my self-esteem. On top of this was the feeling that I was different because I am of mixed race. I am half White, half Asian, and this made me different from the normal fully-white kids that I was trying to fit in with.

I envied the cool kids, and I wanted to be one of them. I was a bit frustrated at my parents for not shaping me into one of these kids in the past. They never made an effort to dress me in stylish clothing or get me a good-looking haircut. I had to make every effort to rectify this. I had to adapt.

My first act was to ask my parents to allow me to bleach my hair blonde. I always envied and admired blonde-haired people, they always seemed so much more beautiful. My parents agreed to let me do it, and father took me to a hair salon on Mulholland Drive in Woodland Hills. Choosing that hair salon was a bad decision, for they only bleached the top of my head blonde. When I indignantly questioned why they didn't make all of my hair blonde, they said that I was too young for a full bleaching. I was furious. I thought I looked so silly with blonde hair at the top of my head and black hair at the sides and back. I dreaded going to school the next day with this weird new hair.

When I arrived at school the next day, I was intensely nervous. Before class started, I stood in a corner frantically trying to figure out how I would go about revealing this to everyone. Trevor was the first one to notice it, and he came up to me and patted my head, saying that it was very "cool". Well, that

was exactly what I wanted. My new hair turned out to be quite a spectacle, and for a few days I got a hint of the attention and admiration I so craved.

My interest in Pokemon faded away at this time. In third grade, Pokemon was considered “cool” and everyone was playing it. Towards the end of fourth grade, I found out that everyone was growing out of Pokemon, and the only ones who played it were the geeky kids. I heard some kids joking about how lame Pokemon players were, and I decided it was time to quit.

I talked to James about this. He was still interested in Pokemon, so I gave him my Charizard card as a gift, and as an act of my resignation from the game. Pokemon gave me some really happy and memorable experiences, but it was time to move on.

I then started to notice that all of the cool kids were interested in skateboarding. I had never even ridden on a skateboard before, but if I wanted to be cool, I had to become a skateboarder. I expressed this to my parents, and my father was glad that I was showing an interest in an active sport. He took me to the store Val Surf on Ventura Boulevard to buy me a new skateboard, and I was fascinated by all of the different choices. I settled for a red Val Surf branded Skateboard, and they took it down from the wall and built it for me.

I was thrilled to have this new skateboard and the possible chance it gave me to be a cool kid. It was time to start practicing. I found it very hard to even ride on it in the beginning, and I spent many hours outside trying to get the hang of it. And that was that, I was now a skateboarder, though not yet good enough to reveal myself as one to the kids at school. This was the start of an obsession to copy everything the supposed “cool kids” were doing.

Part 3

The Last Period of Contentment

Age 9-13

Fourth grade ended, and once the summer started, I took a vow to mold myself into the coolest kid I could possibly be by the time Fifth grade began. I anticipated the approval the other cool kids would have of me once I reveal myself as being similar to them, and I looked forward to it.

After about a year and a half of living in the house on Hatteras St. in upper West Hills, my father decided to move into an even better house. This time, all of us spent a day looking at open houses together as a family. We went with a real estate agent and examined some beautiful homes around Woodland Hills. My favorite one was a 3-story house on Llano Drive, in the Woodland Hills Heights, the most prestigious area of Woodland Hills that bordered Calabasas. It didn't have a pool, but it had a sloping backyard almost three-times as large as our current one. The house had six bedrooms, and I took an intense liking to one particular bedroom that had its own bathroom and a personal balcony. My father showed extreme enthusiasm about possibly buying this house, and I became obsessed with getting that particular bedroom as my own room. When I brought it up with father and Soumaya, they said that the room would most likely be Georgia's because it was closer to the master bedroom. They said that I would get a bedroom downstairs, one without my own bathroom or balcony. I was furious, and I threw a huge crying tantrum.

Soon enough, father went ahead with the decision to buy this house. I made a big deal about the possibility of not getting that lovely bedroom I wanted, and I kept sulking to father and Soumaya about it. When they finally moved and the first week of father's at this new house started, I was very anxious. But then, as we entered, father and Soumaya surprised me and revealed that they decided to give me

the room I wanted. I was so happy! I danced and leaped with joy all over the house, and then I went to my new balcony and looked out at the beautiful view of Woodland Hills for an hour.

After the move to this new house, father would never move again, and he still lives there to this very day. I would have many important experiences there for the next decade, both good and terrible.

I needed a skateboard for mother's house too, and so my mother took me to Val Surf and bought me a gray Val Surf skateboard. I would use this skateboard much more than the red skateboard I had at father's house, since I had all of my playdates during mother's week, and mother would make more of an effort to indulge in my new interest, eventually taking me to skateparks every weekend.

I became very excited about my new hobby, and I shared it with James Ellis and Philip Bloeser, my two main friends. I wanted to get them interested in skateboarding as well. It was tricky to get James into it, but he soon got his own skateboard, and we would start skateboarding together around his neighborhood.

As I now considered myself a skateboarder, I wanted to dress in the clothes that all the cool skateboarders were wearing. My mother took me to Val Surf once again, this time to shop for new shirts. I picked out a few that had the logos of skateboard companies on them. Later that day I put on one of my new shirts, and I was thrilled to start going around in it. I felt cool.

At father's house, I was introduced to a new nanny who would be living with us. Rosa and Amparro left back to their home countries a few months before we moved house. This new nanny was an African American woman named Tracy. She had a very fun personality, and I always had a pleasant time when she looked after us. She was able to drive, unlike my previous nannies, and so she would be the one who would always pick me up from school during father's week from that point on.

Uncle Dan had a quarrel with my father, and he was forced to move out. I would never see him again after that. Tracy would, in a way, replace Uncle Dan as the lodger who would live at father's house.

Early in the summer, father forced me to attend summer camp at an elementary school nearby our new house. This school was Bay Laurel Elementary School in Calabasas. I hated the prospect, and I vehemently protested it. The last thing I wanted to do was spend my coveted summer at a school where I didn't know anyone.

I was starting to like going to father's house a lot more after moving to our lovely new house with my exquisite new room, but this decision of father's made me dislike my weeks there again. At mother's house, I had it my way more often, and that's how I wanted to live.

I hated having to go to camp during the summer, and I was miserable at the start, but a couple weeks into it I made friends with two brothers named Thomas and Tyler.

On mother's week, I spent more and more time practicing skateboarding, and I had lots of playdates with James where we would skateboard together. We also had a lot of fun playing Nintendo 64 games, such as Donkey Kong 64, Banjo Kazooie, Banjo Tooie, James Bond Goldeneye, and many more. He also got me interested in collecting Beanie Babies. At first I thought such a thing was very lame and girly, but we used them to fuel our imagination and have mock battles and wars with each other. It was our secret hobby that we told no one about.

I was relieved when summer camp ended, and once it was over my 10th birthday arrived. I had been on this world for a decade, and what a decade it was... full of discovery, fun, and happy adventures. I can't say the same for the following decade.

I didn't have a party for my 10th birthday, and I believe I celebrated it during mother's week. We went out with James and his family to a restaurant in the Palisades.

10 Years Old

I was eager to re-bleach my hair to a fully blonde color, after the disastrous failure of my previous attempt. This time, Soumaya took me to the right salon, and they gave me a short haircut and bleached all of my hair blonde. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt an intense level of satisfaction.

I went to James's house soon after I acquired my new hair color, and the look of surprise on his face when he first saw me gave me a good laugh.

A couple of weeks later, my hair started to grow and my black hair would show at the roots, but the blend turned out to suit me well, and this would become my hairstyle for the next year.

Mother took me and my sister on a short vacation towards the end of the summer. We drove up the 101 Freeway to Ventura, where we stayed at the Holiday Inn (which has now been replaced by the Crowne Plaza). I found the hotel to be comfortable and luxurious. It was located right on the Ventura Promenade, a beautiful walkway along the beach that led to a long pier.

At this stage, I was very enthusiastic about my new interest in skateboarding, and I took my skateboard with me. I enjoyed practicing on my new skateboard all along the Ventura Promenade. During this trip, mother took me to my first skatepark, which was called SkateStreet. It was humungous, and I was awed by all the towering ramps. I attended a beginner's class, and the instructor taught me the basics of riding on these ramps. I was absolutely terrified at first, but by the end of the class, I was able to go up and down the smallest of them, and I had a blast.

When we got back to the hotel, we had a nice room-service dinner, and then the three of us watched the movie Finding Nemo on the hotel television. It was a lovely little trip.

Before Fifth grade started, I went with my father and Soumaya to a dinner party at their friend's house. I forgot who these friends were, but it was a nice house in Beverly Hills. There were lots of guests, and I did what I usually did at such dinner parties... I sat around eating snacks and talked with my sister, sometimes going to father and to ask for a sip of wine.

During this party, I found myself having a conversation with father, Soumaya, and one of the party guests, a boisterous middle-aged man who I can't recall the name of. Father and Soumaya were talking about how I just turned ten years old, and we discussed life and what the future had in store for me. This man we were talking to... he patted me on the back and told me that I have a great life ahead of me. With a grin on his face, he told me that "in the next ten years, you'll have a great time... a great time". I had no idea what he meant by that. I wasn't even thinking about my future at that point; I was living in the moment.

Now I know what he meant. Childhood is fun, but when a boy reaches puberty a whole new world opens up to him... a whole new world with new pleasures, such as sex and love. Other boys will experience this, but not me, it pains me to say. That is the basis of my tragic life. I will not have a great time in the next ten years. The pleasures of sex and love will be denied to me. Other boys will experience it, but not me. Instead, I will only experience misery, rejection, loneliness, and pain.

At that moment in time, I didn't think much about this man's comment. I don't even remember who he was. But after those ten years have passed and I've experienced what I've experienced, I can't help but think about that moment. If only I knew what was in store for me, right then and there.

It was time to begin Fifth Grade. It started out excellently. My teacher was named Mrs. Damart, and she would always be very kind to me.

For the first week of Fifth Grade, I was at mother's house. I considered myself to be very "cool" by now. I had gotten better at skateboarding, I had blonde hair, and I dressed like a skateboarder. I felt great anticipation for what the cool kids would think of me once they saw my transformation.

To my disappointment, no one really cared. They were all in their own worlds. I don't remember any kids showing recognition of my new "coolness". Eventually, I was regarded differently than I was in Fourth grade, which I became content with. The cool kids talked to me more, and I started hanging out with them during recess and lunch.

When father's week came, I felt frustrated because I didn't have enough cool clothes there, and it took a while for me to get father to find the time to buy some for me. Mother always got me what I wanted, right when I wanted it. At mother's house, all of my needs were met with excellent precision, whereas at father's house, there would always be a time delay because father and Soumaya had less time for me, and paid less attention to me.

Shortly after my Fifth grade year began, my mother decided to move out of the Red House to a small house in Woodland Hills. This new house was located on Topanga Canyon Boulevard, near Dumetz street. Father's house was just up the hill from there, so it was practically walking distance to father's house.

I would miss the Red House, despite its smallness and the fact that I had to share a room with my sister. I had some very good times there. This new house was more convenient. It was still a two bedroom house, but one room was big enough to be split in two, and so by having a wall built in the middle, my sister and I each got our own room.

As I got better and better at skateboarding, my mother made an effort to take me to a skatepark every week. By now, skateboarding wasn't just a sport I was doing to copy the cool kids. I was truly interested in the sport. I even had hopes and dreams of becoming a professional skateboarder. That became my life goal. I loved skateboarding so much. I pictured myself doing amazing tricks in front of a cheering crowd, just like I saw Tony Hawk do in some videos. I pictured the admiration on their faces, and it was awesome.

The skatepark my mother took me to was Northridge Skatepark, and she would take me there every Friday. Northridge Skatepark was an average-sized outdoor skatepark with fine wooden ramps. First, we would have dinner at the Northridge Mall, and then I would sign up for the 7pm to 10pm session at the skatepark. I usually went alone, but after a few weeks of going I made a few acquaintances there, and people knew me. This became a Friday tradition during mother's week.

On the following Saturday, James usually came over for a sleepover. We would play Nintendo 64 games like Tony Hawk's Pro Skater and Donkey Kong late into the night, and then on Sunday morning mother would take us both to Skatelab, an indoor skatepark in Simi Valley. James had become really interested in skateboarding too, or so I believed. I was always better at it than him though, and I liked it that way.

This was the way every weekend went during mother's week, and I had the time of my life.

I was so interested in skateboarding that I took my skateboard trick-or-treating for Halloween. My costume, of course, was myself as a skateboarder. We went to the Lemelson's for a nice dinner and then set out to collect our candy. It was quite tricky to hold a bag full of candy while skateboarding, but I had fun. I remember some teenagers seeing me on my skateboard and saying "why didn't I think of that". Hah, that was gratifying.

For Christmas, my mother bought me the new Playstation 2. I had been wanting it for a long time, and when I unwrapped the present and saw the box, I felt so elated. Beforehand, the only video game

console I played was the Nintendo 64 (and the Gameboy, if that counts). The Playstation 2 was much more advanced in graphics, and it amazed me.

When mother announced that I would have to share it with my sister Georgia and that I can't keep it in my room, my excitement turned to indignation, and I threw quite a tantrum. After crying for a bit, I calmed down and settled to sharing it with Georgia. She wouldn't be using it much anyways, I told myself.

Even after getting a Playstation 2, I still played my Nintendo 64 a lot because I loved the games I had for it, and I had an emotional attachment to it. The Nintendo 64 was the first video game console I played, and it would always have a special place in my heart.

One day during winter break at father's house, father and Soumaya went out for a few hours and left me and my sister with Tracy. When they came back, they had a little puppy with them, and announced that it was our new pet. It was mainly a present for Georgia. Georgia had been desperately asking father for a pet puppy for the last year, but I didn't think he would actually go through with it. I was so shocked that we now had a dog. I was always afraid of dogs when I was little, and I never imagined having one as a pet. The only pets I've had previously were my turtle and iguana, who both died within a year of acquiring them. Georgia was given the choice on what to name the puppy, and she named it Lucky. I thought this was a very lame and stupid name.

When I returned to school after the winter break, I noticed that all the cool kids had another interest: Hacky sacking. It was a simple sport consisting of kicking a bean-sack into the air as many times as you can without it landing on the floor. They all had hacky sacks, and they would spend recess and lunch kicking them with each other, since skateboarding wasn't allowed on school grounds. I didn't have a hacky sack, and I decided that I needed to do something about that. Mother took me to the store Pac Sun where I got a hacky sack with an orange and green design. When we got home from the mall, I started practicing. I remember struggling with it first, but I spent the next few afternoons concentrating on getting good at it. I spent many hours well into the night practicing in my backyard.

Once I was able to kick the hacky sack properly, I made a big deal of the fact that I was now interested in it. I would go up to the group of cool kids and show off my skills, and I played with it every single minute I spent outside during school time.

The Upper playground was rebuilt over the break, and there was a brand new playground to play on. I always loved brand new things, and the new playground was quite engaging. On the very first day that we were allowed to use it, I played tag with Philip Bloeser, Addison Altendorf, Bryce Jacobs, and a few others.

I never really became good friends with the so-called "cool kids". I would see them more as competitors than friends. During recess and lunch, I mainly played with Philip and his little clique which consisted of Addison Altendorf, Kevin, and T.J Tassone.

I made a few Fourth Grade friends through hacky sacking, though I forget their names. I mainly played with them during recess and lunch. One day, after I stayed an hour after school at the Upper, I was hacking sacking with them and I kicked my hacky sack up onto a roof. It wasn't first hacky sack, thank goodness, but I was quite fond of it and I was sad to lose it. I wonder if it's still up there... No, it would have been cleared away by now.

I still refused to have any playdates when I was at my father's house due to the incident with Soumaya in Fourth Grade. Because of this, my father and Soumaya became concerned that I didn't have any friends.

Soumaya forced me to befriend some of the neighbor's kids who lived just down the road. They would often skateboard outside of their houses. I was aghast... the prospect of walking up to a bunch of kids who I didn't know and asking to play with them was terrifying to me. They were "cool" skateboarders, and that made it even more intimidating. Of course, I *wanted* to be friends with them and join in their fun, but I was too scared that they would think I'm weird. I have always been shy by nature.

Soumaya didn't understand this, and she gave me no choice in the matter. She sent me out of the house and wouldn't let me back in until I introduced myself to them. I tried pretending that I was playing with them, but instead I would hide in a quiet street corner. To my surprise, Soumaya somehow knew I was doing this, and she came to confront me. She then got Tracy to take me down to where the kids were playing and push me into it. Tracy went up to the kids and asked if I could play with them. I felt embarrassed and timid, but they welcomed me.

I always had the subconscious preconception that the coolest kids were mean and aggressive by nature, which is quite true, and I was shocked that these kids were being nice to me and letting me play with them. After a fun afternoon skateboarding around the streets of Woodland Hills, I regretted not befriending them sooner. They went to Woodland Hills Elementary School, the school my sister would soon go to.

A couple of weeks later, Soumaya forced me to befriend yet another group of Woodland Hills kids. This second group lived nearer to my house, and they weren't skateboarders, however they liked riding bikes and scooters. One of them was a black boy named Lucky Radley, who I thought was very nice at the time. I found it strange that he had the same name as my dog. He was a fourth grader, and he would later go to the same middle school as me, where he would become an object of my extreme jealousy and hatred. Looking back, I can't believe I actually played with him as a friend in my father's neighborhood.

In the spring, uncle Jonny and the cousins came to stay at father's house. Cousin George bunked with me in my room, and the two of us became instant friends. I hadn't seen him since my last trip to England, and back then we were little kids. I enjoyed having a friend to play with on a daily basis without having to arrange a playdate, and the week that they stayed with us was great fun. I once took him along to play on scooters and skateboards with the neighbor kids, and we also went to the beach a lot.

Indeed, it was a great week, and I was sad to see them go. I looked forward to seeing him again when we were to go on our vacation to France and England in the coming summer.

After Jonny and the cousins left, Soumaya's mother Khadija came to stay for a few months, and I was made to share my room with her, because father had converted two of the guest rooms into his office, and Tracy was staying in the downstairs room. I had an extra bed in my room, so I suppose it made sense to them. I was a bit annoyed with this at the start, but I bonded well with Khadija, so I soon became ok with it. She was like a third grandmother to me.

My mother attained tickets to the red carpet premiere Star Wars Episode 2: Attack of the Clones. We received four tickets. Georgia was old enough to go, and I persuaded mother to let me give the fourth ticket to James. I was awestruck by the time the movie ended. It found it to be absolutely phenomenal. James and I talked about it for hours afterward.

My life at school was starting to become mediocre again, and I became frustrated with my struggle to be cool. I didn't have a regular group of friends who I always played with. I was like a nomad, moving from group to group and trying to fit in with each one, but never fully integrating. I feared that the cool kids didn't regard me as one of them, and even Philip's clique never considered me one of their core

friends. Despite all of my attempts to be cool, I didn't feel as if the other kids respected me as such. I was still quite the outcast, as I always will be.

My social life changed somewhat when Mrs. Damart announced that we would have new seating arrangements in class, and the process of deciding on who sits where was up to us. Our class consisted of tables that seated about five to six people, and when our name was called randomly, we could choose anywhere to sit, meaning that everyone had a chance to sit with their group of friends. I didn't have a core group of friends, so I was thrown into a state of panic.

Originally, I was sitting at the table where Philip's clique sat, but all of their names were called before me, and I was booted from their table. At this point, I just chose to sit anywhere, and I ended up sitting next to John Jo Glen. Matt Bordier and Danny Dayani also sat at our table. These were kids who I regarded as cool, so I was content with sitting with them.

I never really interacted with John Jo Glen that much in the past. He was one of the biggest jerks of the school, next to Trevor and Keaton. We quarreled a bit at the start, but soon enough we started socializing, and I talked with him about some new games I got for my Playstation 2. We became friends when John Jo suddenly asked me if he can come over to my house. I felt happy that he asked me this... it would be the first playdate I would have without my mother arranging it for me. This would spark a fun new friendship that would last well after Fifth Grade. The random seating arrangement next to John Jo was the best thing to happen to me in Elementary School.

Despite my struggles to be regarded as "cool" and my obsession with attaining such recognition, Fifth grade was my favorite school year in Elementary School. I played with more people than I ever did in previous grades, I was less shy, I wasn't a dork, and I had an awesome time learning how to skateboard and hacky sack. It was memorable year filled with joyful experiences.

I didn't want the school year to end. Once Fifth grade was over, I will have to go to Middle School, and the prospect filled me with anxiety. My little innocent mind always looked at Middle School as something far in the future, when I grow up. I didn't want to grow up. I was enjoying my life as a kid right at that moment. I didn't think about the future.

Kids in my class told many rumors of Middle School life that filled me with fear and sent a shiver through my spine. Even through watching movies and T.V. shows I got a glimpse of what was in store for a Middle Schooler. There was talk of girls, and how it would soon be "cool" to be popular with the girls. Girls were like completely foreign creatures to me. I never interacted with them... I wasn't expected to. In Elementary School, boys played with boys and girls played with girls. That was what I was used to. That was my world. I heard stories of how boys are expected to start kissing girls in Middle School! Such things overwhelmed me. I tried to dismiss it as much as I could and enjoy my life in the present moment.

My school arranged a camping trip for the entire Fifth Grade class before graduation day. At first I didn't want to go because I would be away from my parents for five days, something I was never used to. I was afraid I would get too homesick. I never spent more than one night away from my parents. On the rare occasion that they had to go out of town for a few days and left me with a nanny, I would cry at night.

My teacher Mrs. Damart came up to me one morning before class started and persuaded me to go, saying that the graduation trip was something I wouldn't want to miss. It would be a once in a lifetime experience, and after some hesitation I agreed to go along.

I forgot exactly where this camping trip took place. It was located at a special camping retreat somewhere in the forest to the north of Los Angeles. It was very secluded... a small village of cabins and tents surrounded by wilderness and hiking trails. For the trip there, I decided to go with my friends Bryce and Charlie in a car instead of taking the school bus with everyone else. This was much more comfortable, and I was glad to have snagged a spot in the car with them.

Everyone was assigned to groups of five to share a cabin or a tent. I was originally placed in the group with Charlie, Bryce, and a few others... but that group was given a tent to sleep in. I was appalled by how drab and uncomfortable the tents looked. I wanted a cabin. So I went to my teacher and asked to be transferred to a group that was sleeping in a cabin. She placed me in a group of some cool skateboarder kids, including Michael, Sam, Trevor, Matt, and Stephen. I felt a sense of pride to be part of this group.

During the daytime on this trip, the whole Fifth Grade class participated in games, outdoor activities, nature hikes, and barbeques. It was great fun. Nighttime in the cabin was like having a sleepover with five people, and it was a new experience that excited me. Before bedtime, Michael Ray took out a magazine that had pictures of beautiful model women, and all of the boys gathered around and looked at them. So... even at the early age of ten, boys were starting to be attracted to the female body. I didn't understand this... I hadn't yet reached that stage. I pretended to be interested just so that I wouldn't appear uncool. All of those boys probably lost their virginity by sixteen. Damn them.

The trip ended up being so fun that I didn't cry at all about being away from my parents for so long.

And finally, it was time to graduate from Elementary School. Before the ceremony, our whole class watched a video full of footage of school life throughout the year. I saw a few glimpses of myself caught in the footage, and I felt gratified. My life at Topanga Elementary School was a blast, full of memorable experiences and wonderful times.

I dressed in a nice shirt with a tie for the ceremony. All of the Fifth Graders lined up and walked down an aisle through the center of the Auditorium, with the audience of parents and siblings on either side. When I saw my parents, they looked so proud of me. Each student had to walk up to their teacher on the stage and receive a graduation award. We weren't required to give a speech, to my relief. I would be too nervous to talk in front of an audience. The graduation theme song was "Time of Your Life" by the band Green Day, one of my favorite bands. Whenever I would hear this song again, I would think about that glorious day, and the memories would make me feel an extreme sense of nostalgia. In the afternoon, there was a graduation party at the Top of Topanga community recreation center, a lovely place that provided a view of the whole Valley.

My mother took me to have dinner at the sushi restaurant Kabuki afterwards. It was just me and her. As we sat down at the restaurant after all the excitement, I took a moment to fully ponder over the fact that Elementary School was all over. It was done. I felt so accomplished and proud... I was happy, things were good. But along with that happiness was a feeling of sadness that I will be leaving all of those experiences behind. A whole chapter of my life had just passed, and a new one was beginning. That day was such an extraordinary day. A day to remember, a memory to cherish.

For the first few weeks of summer, mother arranged playdates with various friends and acquaintances I made from Topanga Elementary, including Trevor Bourget, Matt Bordier, Charlie Converse, John Jo Glen, and Philip Bloeser. It was interesting to have Trevor and Matt over. I never thought I would have playdates with them. Matt was one of the coolest kids in the school; he was a skateboarder and a baseball player who seemed to garner respect from everyone. I envied him during Elementary School even when we were friends, and I would deeply envy and hate him later on in life, when I find out how much success he would have with girls.

Again, I repeat, that as children we all play together as equals in a fair environment. Only after the advent of puberty does the true brutality of human nature show its face. Life will become a bitter and unfair struggle for self-worth, all because girls will choose some boys over others. The boys who girls find attractive will live pleasure-filled lives while they dominate the boys who girls deem unworthy. Matt Bordier will go on to live a life of pleasure. Girls will throw themselves at him. And I will go on to be rejected and humiliated by girls. At that moment in time, we were just playing together as children, oblivious to the fact that my future will be dark and his will be bright. Life is such a cruel joke.

My mother continued to take me to Northridge Skatepark every Friday, and I also attended a skateboard camp at Pedlow Skatepark for a couple of weeks. At this camp I bumped into one of the kids I played with around father's house.

I had been trying very hard to get better at skateboarding, but when I saw that there were boys a lot younger than me who could do more tricks, I realized that I sucked. I was never good at sports or any physical activity, and when I discovered skateboarding, I thought that finally here was a sport that I could excel in and even become a professional at. It crushed me a little inside to see that I was a failure at skateboarding after more than a year of practicing it. I could never master the kickflip or heelflip. All I could do was the ollie jump and ride down a few ramps. I saw eight-year-old boys at the skatepark who could do a kickflip with ease, and it made me so angry. *Why did I fail at everything I tried?* I asked myself. My dreams of becoming a professional skateboarder were over. I felt so defeated.

Because of this, my interest in skateboarding slowly faded away during this summer. James had recently told me that he was no longer interested in the sport, so I no longer had him to skateboard with anyway. I just decided to forget about it for the moment.

James's family moved to a new house in Malibu. The house was owned by the Lemelson's, and they were staying in it temporarily. Mother took us there a few times where I adventured with James in the wilderness area that surrounded the house. We would often go to a small plaza in the center of Malibu. There was a playground there, with a few shops and restaurants surrounding it.

It was time for my 11th birthday. I was at mother's house and just decided to have a small playdate for my birthday. I invited James over, along with another kid who I had befriended at the Woodland Hills recreation center. My mother made a small cake, I blew out the candles, and that was it. I was eleven years old.

11 Years Old

The trip to France and England began shortly after my birthday. We had been talking about it for a while at father's house, and I was really excited to go. We traveled on Virgin Atlantic Upper Class. I was extremely enthusiastic about this, as I always loved luxury and opulence.

We stopped by in England for a couple of days to say hello to grandma Jinx. The cousins weren't there, they were already in France, so it was a bit boring. When we arrived in France, the feeling of wonder and curiosity swept over me as it always did when I visited a foreign country. The last time I was in France, I was only a few weeks old. This was the first time I was able to truly experience the country. France was a whole different world, and it was a world that I liked. French culture is so exquisite and refined compared to American culture.

After booking a couple of rooms at a small Inn near the town of Toulouse, we met up with Jonny and the cousin's at Aunt Jenny's house. Aunt Jenny is my father's sister, and the last time I saw her was when I lived in England, before the move to America. She had a few kittens in her house that I loved to play with.

George and I immediately resumed our friendship that started in the spring. There was a vast forested area surrounding the house. George told me there were lots of wild boars in the forest, so we went "wild boar hunting". It was just a game, and we never ended up seeing any boars at all, but the suspense of possibly finding one was what made it fun.

We stayed in Toulouse for about a week, and then we said goodbye to the relatives and set off to tour the country. We toured many cultural towns and stayed in castle-style hotels. This should have been a great experience for me, but my conflicts with Soumaya soured it. There were a few incidents in

which she punished me by making me stay in my hotel room while she, father and Georgia all went out to dinner at a restaurant. I hated her for this.

On the way back, we stopped at grandma Jinx's house in England for a week. The cousins were there this time, and it was a lot of fun. We all slept in one room, so it was like having one big sleepover. One day we went on a trip to a museum, where I had an argument with Soumaya. She shouted at me in front of George and threatened to punish me. This was so embarrassing that I fell into a miserable mood for the rest of the day. I always loved traveling, but I learned that traveling with Soumaya just ruins the whole experience. And this wouldn't be the last time I would be forced to travel with Soumaya either, to my utmost dismay.

The trip lasted three weeks in length, the perfect length of time for a vacation, in my opinion. I quite enjoyed it, if I don't count the times Soumaya ruined it.

It felt nice to be back home after a long, cultural vacation. At father's house, my nanny Tracy got into an argument with father, and she was forced to leave. I was sad to see her go. She was always pleasant and fun to be around. Once Tracy left, Georgia and I would no longer have any nannies. We were getting too old for it. I wasn't a little child anymore... having nannies became a thing of the past. From now on, if father and Soumaya had to go out to a dinner party, they would just hire a baby-sitter to look after us, and soon I would be old enough to stay by myself in the house.

I got a haircut, and this time I decided not to bleach my hair blonde. The black hair always grew out anyway, so the full-blonde look only lasted for a couple of weeks. Having blonde hair seemed to have lost its spark, so I just didn't bother with it anymore.

The summer was pleasant and relaxing, but it quickly came to an end. The time for Middle School had come. My fear of this day haunted the back of my mind all summer. I was enrolled at Pinecrest Middle School for Sixth Grade. I had mixed feelings about going to this school because I didn't like my experience there during kindergarten. Father said it's the best option for me, because it was a small private school. I didn't want to go to a large school like Hale Middle School... that would have been too overwhelming for me.

On the first day, I was shaking with anxiety and fear. I didn't know what to expect. Transitioning to Middle School was a big deal for me, even more so than starting elementary school. I was much older and I cared more about what people thought of me. I was no longer an innocent little child who didn't have to worry. I had to worry about a lot of things, and oh, did I worry! It was a whole new school full of people I didn't know. They all previously went to elementary school together, so most of them already knew each other. That made me even more nervous. The only person I knew who was going to Pinecrest was a geeky kid named Nate Grossman, who I didn't really interact with that much in Topanga.

I also felt an intense fear of what Middle School life would be like. I didn't know how to act around girls, I didn't know what was cool anymore, I had no friends there. I simply didn't know what to do. I felt like I was walking into a snowstorm without a coat.

My parents led me into the school to say goodbye, and then it was time for me to start my first class. I had to take multiple classes with different teachers now. This was also a new concept for me and it made me extremely uncomfortable. Since this was a private school, I had to wear a uniform, something I hadn't done since going to Dorsett House in England. I thought of this as a good thing though... I didn't have to worry about what I would have to wear on the first day.

For the first few days, I withdrew into a defensive shell and didn't really talk to anyone. I did observe, however. I observed how everyone acted, who the "cool kids" were, what they were like... and it was all so intimidating. The social challenges that I faced in Fifth Grade were intensified tenfold.

I noticed that there were two groups of cool, popular kids. There were the skateboarder kids, such as Vinny Maggio, Ashton Moio, Darrel, Wes, and Alex Dib. And then there were the boys who were popular with girls, including Vincent, Robert Morgan, and Oren Aks. They all seemed so confident and aggressive. I felt so intimidated by them, and I hated them for it. I hated them so much, but I had to increase my standing with them. I *wanted* to be friends with them.

I also observed the girls. I was still very short for my age, and most of the girls were taller than me. I hadn't reached puberty yet, but I was starting to admire female prettiness. There was one group of pretty, popular girls, and they all seemed to like hanging out with that boy Robert Morgan. I didn't yet desire girls sexually, but I still felt envy towards Robert for being able to attract the attention of all the popular girls. *What was so special about Robert Morgan?* I constantly asked myself.

I thought all of the cool kids were obnoxious jerks, but I tried as best as I could to hide my disgust and appear "cool" to them. They were obnoxious jerks, and yet somehow it was these boys who all of the girls flocked to. This showed me that the world was a brutal place, and human beings were nothing more than savage animals. Everything my father taught me was proven wrong. He raised me to be a polite, kind gentleman. In a decent world, that would be ideal. But the polite, kind gentleman doesn't win in the real world. The girls don't flock to the gentlemen. They flock to the alpha male. They flock to the boys who appear to have the most power and status. And it was a ruthless struggle to reach such a height.

It was too much for me to handle. I was still a little boy with a fragile mind. Thinking about such things would only crush my innocence, and it eventually will. *But not at this point.* I subconsciously wanted to enjoy my childhood as much as I could, so I tried not to think about this new revelation and enjoy life in the moment. I put it all aside, to be pondered over later.

My whole world had changed. The "cool" thing to do now was to be popular with girls. I didn't know how to go about doing that. Skateboarding, I was able to do... dressing well, that was simple... But attracting attention from girls? *How in the blazes was I going to do that?* I didn't even understand what was so special about it either, but everyone seemed to place so much importance on it. This made me even more shy, and I became known as the "shy new kid."

Thankfully, some kids started reaching out to me, and I had a few chances to integrate within a couple of weeks. The first boy to talk to me was Brice Miller. He asked me if I had any friends at the school, because he always saw me alone. I admitted that I had no friends, and he offered to be my first friend. I was very grateful for this.

Once again, I used skateboarding as a way to increase my standing, telling the skateboarder kids that I knew how to skateboard and that I could do some tricks. This got them to treat me more cordially. I even talked to Robert Morgan a few times, who I hated and yet subconsciously revered for being so popular. Whenever a so-called popular kid would say a word to me or give me a high five, I felt immense satisfaction.

Inevitably, I started to become known to the girls of my school; and surprisingly, they treated me quite well. It was a huge relief. Middle School would be the last time in my life where I wouldn't be completely invisible to girls. All of the pretty girls had a peculiar habit of hugging boys they knew as a form of greeting, and some of them hugged me. I didn't understand why, but it felt like the best feeling ever. I was one hundred-times more satisfied from getting a hug from a pretty girl than getting a high five from a popular boy. It was a new experience that enraptured every fiber of my being.

The 7th and 8th grade girls were especially kind to me. I guess they thought I was "cute" in a boyish sort of way. This made my initial experience of Middle School much better.

I decided to attend the school dance in early October. A school dance was completely foreign to me. Elementary Schools didn't have them, of course, and I only knew about them from watching typical American shows on television. I thought it was something I had to do in order to be cool. I was very nervous, naturally, but I pushed myself to go ahead with it.

When I got there, Robert Morgan saw me and asked me if I wanted to hang out with his group. I was grateful for this, and I ended up having a nice time. I was shocked that some 7th and 8th grade girls offered to dance with me. They came up to me in a group and taught me how to "slow dance". I had to place my hands on their hips, while they placed their hands on my shoulders, and we would move slowly with the music. They were all taller than me, and I was terrified, but it felt so... good. That would be the only time in my life where I would have a satisfying experience with girls. The *only* time.

Halloween of this year marked the last time I would ever go trick-or-treating. After this year I would be too old for it. Mother took us to the Lemelson's, and I decided to not dress up in any costume. I went as myself, sporting my black Pinecrest sweater. As it was my last time trick-or-treating, it would be the last time I would have any sort of fun on Halloween. And I did have a lot of fun. It was nice to go out collecting candy with James and Noah, like we had been doing for several years past.

My father cut off a portion of the child support he had been paying my mother, which forced my mother to move house. We moved to a small blue house on Glade Avenue in Canoga Park. I didn't like Canoga Park at all. It was a very ugly and low-class area to the north of Woodland Hills, and I felt it demeaning that we would have to live there during mother's week.

The house did have some upsides. It had four bedrooms and a bigger living room than mother's old house. My new room was a lot larger than my old one. And of course, my mother always had her own ways of making everything better. I would still enjoy my time at mother's small house more than my time at father's big Woodland Hills house.

Along with this move, there came a new change in our rotation schedule. My parents decided that we would stay at our mother's house more, instead of switching one week-one week. Mother would have us for all of the weekdays, and we would go to father's on the weekends when he was in town.

Around the same time that my mother moved, James's family moved as well, to another Lemelson-owned house in the Palisades. They would only remain in this house for a very brief period, because a tragic event would soon occur in James's family.

One day at school, I was sitting in my class when I was suddenly called to the office. My mother was there, waiting to pick me up. I got into her car, and the three of us drove out of my school and parked on the side of Shoup Avenue. She told us the dire news. James's mother, Kim Ellis, had just passed away from breast cancer. I cried for a bit. Kim was a very kind-hearted person, and the mother of my best friend. She had been suffering from breast cancer for several years, but I never thought she would die from it. I immediately thought of how James must be feeling. He just lost his own mother! It made me think of how horrible I would feel if the same thing happened to my own mother, just the thought alone filled me with pain.

There was to be a get-together of family friends at James's house that night, in honor of Kim. On the way, I thought about how I would approach James on the subject. The amount of grief he must be feeling... I couldn't even imagine it. The last similar experience was the death of my grandfather, and I was only four years old then. When we arrived, I looked for James, and found him sitting in his room. I gently offered my deepest condolences for his loss. He remained very strong, obviously hiding his emotions. He looked very sad, in an extremely stoic sort of way. He told me he fully accepted what had happened, that his mother was dead and that was the end of it. That was all we spoke on the matter.

We tried not to think about it for the rest of the night, and later on I played tag in his backyard with him and some of his friends.

I remained very shy during my Sixth Grade year, and I would always be labeled as a quiet kid. I wasn't able to establish any friends that I could have playdates with, so the only playdates I had was with old friends from Topanga Elementary. This filled in the social void, and I was content with it.

I tried my best to improve my social situation during school time. A few girls continued to pay attention to me, saying hi as I walked by them and occasionally giving me hugs, but I felt bitter at the fact that I wasn't able to truly hang out with them like the popular boys were doing.

In order to not be seen as a complete loner at school, I ended up making friends with a kid named Connor Hanrahan. Connor was not a popular kid, because girls didn't like him. Despite this, he was one of the most pompous assholes of the school, even more so than any of the most popular boys. Connor was a true bully. I started hanging out with him during recess and lunch, and we made a few jokes with each other and had a few good laughs, but he would always push me around and act tough. I was so timid back then that I didn't care. I just wanted someone to hang out with.

When I stayed back after school one day, my mother saw me with Connor when she came to pick me up. She has been concerned about me not making any new friends at Pinecrest, and I suppose she was relieved to see me with a "friend". She invited Connor to come over to my house, which he accepted. I was a bit hesitant to invite anyone from Pinecrest to my mother's house, because it was located in Canoga Park, a bad area, and most of the kids at Pinecrest were upper-middle class who would look down on me for living there. But I couldn't back out of this once my mother invited Connor. He came over and all went well, we played a few video games for a couple of hours. But after that playdate, he would always rip on me for living in a "poor" house. He would also tell other kids at Pinecrest about it. This infuriated me to no end, and I would keep proclaiming that my father lives in a prestigious three-story house in the Woodland Hills Heights. I became vehemently obsessed with proving to Connor and everyone else that I wasn't poor. I went so far as to bring pictures of my father's house to school. I even considered inviting some people over to father's house, but I remembered my vow of never doing that due to the possibility that another incident would happen with Soumaya, like the one that occurred years ago.

It was at eleven years old when I first started using the internet on a regular basis. The internet was still considered a new phenomenon at the time. Before eleven, I roughly knew how to browse websites and use email, but once I fully immersed myself in it, it really fascinated me.

The popular social networking tool at that period was AOL instant messenger, or "AIM". I made my first AIM account on my mother's computer, and she would let have one hour a day to explore it. I joined a few chat rooms. The prospect of talking to strangers from a computer was new and astounding to me.

Towards the end of sixth grade, I still hadn't made a group of friends who I could see outside of school. The only social interactions I had outside of school were playdates with old friends from Topanga every now and again. Joining chatrooms through AOL temporarily filled in the social void for a few weeks. This will definitely not be the first time I would try to fill in that void with the internet.

Once I established myself in the chat rooms, I made a few friends who I instant messaged frequently. Most of them were in middle school and some were in high school. I also talked to a few people I knew from Pinecrest over AIM.

One friend who I met through a chat room suddenly emailed me pictures of beautiful naked girls, telling me to "check this out". When I looked at the pictures, I was shocked beyond words. I had never seen what beautiful girls looked like naked, and the sight filled me with strong and overwhelming emotions. I didn't know what was happening to me. Was it the first inkling of sexual desire in my body? I

was traumatized. My childhood was fading away. Ominous fear swept over me, and I stopped talking to that person.

As the Sixth Grade year came to a close, I felt dissatisfied and insignificant. Indeed, a whole new world had opened up before me, and I had no idea how to prevail in it. I still wanted to live as a child.

I never established any proper friends at Pinecrest, and the only playdate I had was the one with Connor that my mother arranged, and that turned out to be a disaster for me. My mother and father both showed concern that I wasn't making any friends, but because I still saw some friends from Topanga, they didn't make a big deal out of it.

I consider Sixth Grade to be the better year out of the three years I would spend in Middle School. Girls actually paid attention to me. They knew who I was and I didn't feel like I was completely invisible. I was extremely shy with girls and could barely have a conversation with them, but I still interacted with girls more during this year than I would for any following year. The cool kids treated me nicely, despite my reputation as the "quiet kid". I always felt like a loser compared to them, and I hated them for it, though I still wanted their approval. I wanted to be one of them... I wanted to be their friend.

The closest I came to truly being one of them was when Vinny and Robert both invited me to their birthday parties, which were only a couple of weeks apart at the very end of the school year. Both parties were at Skatelab skatepark. I hadn't been to Skatelab for about a year, and when I walked in, all of the memories of going there with James filled my mind. I hadn't even skateboarded for a while, but after a few minutes on the ramps my ability came back like magic. They were all quite impressed. I bet they thought I would end up sucking at it. I was happy to prove them wrong.

Indeed, Sixth Grade was the peak of my life at Pinecrest. It would only go downhill from there.

My mother bought me a brand new video game console, the Xbox. I heard a lot of kids talking about how great the Xbox was at school, so I was really eager to have one. I liked the Xbox much more than the Playstation 2. The graphics were better and the games were more to my taste. With the Xbox, I got the game Halo. At first, I found Halo to be very difficult and I gave up on it a few times. I had no idea that Halo would soon become one of my favorite video game series that I ever played.

I was extremely happy and relieved when summer came. Middle School was much more stressful than Elementary School, both socially and academically. Summer would provide a well-needed break from all of it.

I started seeing some old friends from Topanga more frequently. Among these were John Jo Glen and Charlie Converse. Charlie wasn't really one of my main friends at Topanga Elementary. I had a few playdates with him here and there, but not that many. It was only until after Fifth Grade graduation that our real friendship began. He always had a charming and humble personality, and he was well-liked by everyone at Topanga. He came over to my mother's house a few times after I got my Xbox, where he tried to help me get past the hardest level on Halo. John Jo and Charlie were very close friends with each other, and eventually I would start to see them at the same time.

John Jo invited me to his father's apartment in Hollywood for a sleepover. I found his apartment to be very dingy, but I had so much fun that I didn't even care. He lived just across the street from the huge Scientology building. We got together with a group of his friends and snuck into the building's courtyard at night to play hide-and-seek tag. This was the first time I had been out having fun with a group of kids my age without any adult supervision. It was very amusing. When we went back to his apartment, we played Conker's Bad Fur Day on the Nintendo 64. The Nintendo 64 was a very old console at this point in time, especially after I now had an Xbox and a PS2, but I was entertained by Conker's Bad Fur Day so much that I asked my mother to buy it for me the next day.

James Ellis moved yet again to another house in the Palisades. After the death of his mother, James's father Arte quickly made the decision to move again. Arte rented a small house on Temecula Street, near the renowned Palisades Bluffs. There they would remain for a very long time, and all of the most significant experiences I would have with James in the future would take place there.

At this time, though, I wasn't seeing James that much. We slowly drifted apart after we lost our common interest in skateboarding. We still considered each other friends, and we would still see each other occasionally, almost as a courtesy. But our friendship would be at a standstill during our middle school years.

I was enjoying a lovely summer, but suddenly my mother said that I had to go to summer camp at Pinecrest. This was a decision she made with my father, because they thought it would be healthy for me. I didn't like this one bit. It was a last minute decision. One moment I was relaxing and enjoying my summer break, the next my mother is waking me up early to take me to my first day of camp at Pinecrest. Gratefully, summer camp would only last for four weeks.

Summer camp at Pinecrest was located at the Elementary School section, and I recognized my old kindergarten class. It was a mix of middle school and elementary school kids, and I made a few friends with some kids who were younger than me.

At this camp, an incident happened that would scar me for life. The first time that I was treated badly by a girl occurred at this camp. I was innocently playing with the friends I made, and they were tickling me, something people always did because I was very ticklish. I accidentally bumped into a pretty girl the same age as me, and she got very angry. She cursed at me and pushed me, embarrassing me in front of my friends. I didn't know who this girl was... She was only at Pinecrest for summer camp... But she was very pretty, and she was taller than me. I immediately froze up and went into a state of shock. One of my friends asked me if I was ok, and I didn't answer. I remained very quiet for the rest of the day.

I couldn't believe what had happened. Cruel treatment from women is ten times worse than from men. It made me feel like an insignificant, unworthy little mouse. I felt so small and vulnerable. I couldn't believe that this girl was so horrible to me, and I thought that it was because she *viewed me* as a loser. That was the first experience of female cruelty I endured, and it traumatized me to no end. It made me even more nervous around girls, and I would be extremely weary and cautious of them from that point on.

Before summer camp ended, I saw that same girl hanging out with Oren Aks a few times. Oren Aks was one of the popular kids in my grade. I hated Oren so much when I saw him with her. It made me feel so inferior... that this girl was mean to me and yet she liked Oren. Thankfully, Oren wouldn't be returning to Pinecrest for Seventh Grade, and I would never see him again. I wonder what became of him... I bet he lived a good life.

I felt relieved when summer camp ended. That experience with the mean girl ruined it for me. Hell, it ruined a part of my life. Whenever I think about summer camp I would think about that girl, and my emotions would flare up.

My 12th birthday followed. I decided not to do anything for it. Mother took me and my sister out to a Japanese restaurant to celebrate it. Twelve seemed like a big number to me back then. One more year and I would be a teenager. It was hard to believe.

12 Years Old

For the rest of the summer, I resumed my routine of relaxing and having playdates. I tried to forget about what happened at summer camp as much as I could.

John Jo came over to my house, where he slept over for the first time. We played a few video games, and then he told me that he wanted to take me to a place called Planet Cyber, a cyber café that had all of the best online PC games. I knew nothing of the sort, but it was just down the street from my mother's house. I walked there with him, eager to experience something new.

This was my first experience with online gaming. Playing video games with people over the internet invoked a whole new level of fascination in me. Talking to people over AIM was fun and new, but this... this was tremendous. I always loved playing multiplayer mode on video games when I had friends over. With online gaming, I could do it whenever I want. I was a novice to these new games on the PC, but I got the hang of it after playing with John Jo for a few hours. The games we played were Day of Defeat and Counter Strike.

Mother took me and Georgia on two little vacation trips in the same week. For the first trip we went to Long Beach, where we stayed at the Hyatt hotel. It reminded me of our little trip to Ventura two years previously. We visited the Harbor and the aquarium. The three of us really bonded on this trip.

We went home for a couple of days before going on the second trip. For the second trip, we went to Legoland and stayed at the resort there. The resort was exceedingly beautiful, with a huge swimming pool and spa. We met up with a family of one of Georgia's friends and explored the entirety of Legoland.

When we got home from our marvelous trip, I had another sleepover with John Jo. He loved the fact that I lived near Planet Cyber, so he would soon be calling every week, asking to come over.

I saw Charlie a few days later. Charlie was also familiar with Planet Cyber, and when the two of us went there, he introduced me to an RPG game called Diablo 2. I didn't know what to make of this game, it was like an adventure game similar to Banjo Kazooie and Donkey Kong, but much more mature, with the ability to interact with other players online.

It was only a matter of time before I started inviting John Jo and Charlie to sleep over at the same time. When the three of us went to Planet Cyber as a group, I had an absolute blast. It was one of the best experiences of my life.

At father's house, father would frequently invite his new friend Alexander Bubenheim over. Alex Bubenheim was a boisterous German man who worked as a composer and lived in the Top of Topanga community. Alex had a son named Lukas, who was a couple of years younger than Georgia. Lukas was a very girly and immature little boy, but I found him to be very amusing. They would come over almost every weekend that I was at father's, and become a big part of my life there.

Seventh Grade began. My coveted summer break was all over. On the first day, I noticed some people I met during summer camp start school there as Sixth Graders. One of them was Patrick Dib, the younger brother of Alex Dib. I would always view Patrick Dib as an obnoxious, rude lout. He was very ugly too, and it annoyed me that he carried himself around as if he wasn't a freckled, chubby-faced imbecile.

I said hello to everyone I knew from last year, including Robert Morgan and his clique of popular kids. There were also a flock of new kids who transferred from the Pinecrest in Van Nuys. I was soon to meet them. Among these were Alfred Graham, Anthony Glukov, Jonny Noone, Derek Olsen, Garrett, Rafael, and Edward. They already knew each other and always hung out together at the start of the year, but I soon noticed that each of them soon integrated into the already pre-established cliques of Pinecrest. I was jealous that Jonny Noone, an obnoxious Mexican kid, immediately became popular with the skateboarders because of his cocky attitude.

Alfred Graham, a half-black boy whom I would have a semi-friendship with throughout the years was intensely disliked by everyone, mainly because he was ugly and had a habit of intentionally annoying

people. He would eventually become friends with the skateboarders, however, due to his interest in the sport.

My reputation as the “shy kid” continued, and I still didn’t make any friends who became close enough to see outside of school. I did socialize with various groups during school hours, so I wasn’t a complete outcast during Seventh Grade.

James Ellis started middle school at Paul Revere Middle School as a Sixth Grader. Though he is the same age as I am, he was held back a year in elementary school. Coincidentally, he went to the same school as John Jo, Charlie, and a few other friends from Topanga.

After this point, I would stop seeing James Ellis for a while. Our friendship became temporarily stale and would remain so for another year. The only time we saw each other during this period was when we had family get-togethers. James’s sister, Sage, often came over to play with Georgia, while James didn’t bother to come at all.

John Jo and Charlie started to come over every Friday. This would soon become a tradition. Fridays were always my favorite time of the week, and this tradition made me always look forward to Fridays with intense eagerness. They would be dropped off by their parents shortly after school time, and then we would all walk to Planet Cyber and play games for hours.

After a few of these Friday sleepovers, Charlie introduced me to his friend Elijah. Elijah was temporarily staying at Charlie’s house, and the two of them were like brothers. I immediately took a great liking to Elijah, and we became instant friends. He helped me beat some of the hardest levels of Halo. Elijah would then come over with Charlie and John Jo, and the four of us became a close group of friends. This was the only true social group I would ever have, and I had a great time with them.

We sometimes hung out at Planet Cyber until 3:00 in the morning, the latest I had ever been out without parent supervision. We would switch between playing Halo at my house, playing games at Planet Cyber, or skateboarding around the neighborhood. I briefly got back into skateboarding for the sake of enjoying it with these friends. On the following Saturday morning, we would wake up by 9:00, have breakfast at Krispy Kreme and spend a few more hours at Planet Cyber before my friends were picked up by their parents. I would then go to father’s house for the weekend, if father was in town.

My sister Georgia’s birthday was in November, and on that day my father hired a limo to pick up Georgia and her friends from mother’s house. Charlie and Elijah came over, though John Jo was absent that day. When the limo returned, we all celebrated Georgia’s birthday at the house together. I introduced father to my friends. It was a very happy experience.

When the winter break finally arrived, my grandma Ah Mah came over from England to visit, and she stayed in the fourth bedroom at mother’s house. Ah Mah is just like my mother, she always knew what I liked and went out of her way to get it for me, just to put a smile on my face. She brought with her some of my favorite English chocolates, along with her famous peanut cookies that I loved so much.

Mother had a party at her house, and a lot of family friends came over, including Maddy and her mom, James and his family, Philip and Jeffrey and their family, and a lot of mother’s old friends whom I hadn’t seen for a long time. Ah Mah, who is a professional cook, made some of her special dishes, and we set up a bouncy castle in our backyard. I invited John Jo, Charlie, and Elijah over, and we walked to Planet Cyber for a little bit, then walked back home and had some fun on the Bouncy Castle. James never really liked my group of friends... he told me he thought they were jerks. I suppose he was right about John Jo, but Charlie and Elijah were always nice people. Oh well, I never really liked James’s friends either, so that made us even, I guess.

I had a great time during this party. James and Maddy were the last ones to leave. Me and my sister played with them for a while on the bouncy castle. It made for an interesting and peculiar experience, playing with both James and Maddy at the same time, my two oldest friends. It had been a long time since I had seen Maddy, and it would be the last time that we would ever play together as friends. Before the night was over, we all took a picture together outside my mother's front door. James made a funny face for it, while I stood behind him awkwardly waving my hand. To this very day, my mother still has that picture in one of her photo albums.

One time when John Jo, Charlie, and Elijah came over for our traditional Friday night sleepover, we met up with Armando and his younger brother Gus. I hadn't seen them since Topanga Elementary school. We had a good time skateboarding with them at the church parking lot near mother's house, and all over that area. Afterwards, we had some video game competitions at Planet Cyber.

My mother took me to watch Lord of the Rings: Return of the King in the movie theatres. I already saw the first two movies, but I wasn't a huge fan of the series until I saw this third one in the movie theatres. Watching that movie in the theatres was such an epic experience, and I will always remember it. Though it wasn't as exciting as going to the red carpet premieres of the Star Wars prequels, it came quite close.

After the movie, mother and I ate dinner at TGI Friday's. When we got home, as I was getting ready for bed, I heard a knock on my door. It was Elijah asking if I wanted to go with him to Planet Cyber, which I did for a few hours.

That day marked the last time I would ever go to the movie theatres with just my mother, except for premieres. Growing up, I always loved it when my parents took me to the movies. The large screen and loud surround-sound immersed me into the movie, and I liked that dizzy feeling I would feel when I walked out of a movie theatre and entered back into the real world. It was always a remarkable experience.

Soon enough, the movie theatres would turn from a place of joy to a place of dread. Once puberty arrives, I would start getting jealous of all the young couples or groups of boys and girls who go to the movies together. That day that I saw the final Lord of the Rings movie was the last time I enjoyed the movie theatres in peace, without fear of humiliation.

Aside from Fridays, I always met my group of friends at Planet Cyber on Wednesdays, because they were charging only one dollar per hour on Wednesdays. Usually my mother wouldn't let me play video games for such a long time on a weekday, but she made an exception for Wednesdays.

On one such Wednesday, Charlie introduced me to the game Warcraft 3. It was like no game I had ever played before. It enabled the player to build an army and battle against other players online. After the first round of Warcraft III, going up against John Jo and Charlie, I was captivated. The game was so much fun. I couldn't help but think about it every second for the next two days. When the following Friday arrived, we played it for most of the day and well into the night.

My initially happy interest in the game Warcraft 3 had an ominous tone to it. This was the beginning of a long relationship with the Warcraft franchise. In less than a year from that point, they would release their ultimate game, World of Warcraft, a game that I would find sanctuary in for most of my teenage years.

Seventh Grade flew by very fast. My school life was a continuation of Sixth Grade. I mingled with acquaintances here and there and behaved nicely with everyone. The difference is that I was having so much fun outside of school with my friends at Planet Cyber that I didn't really care about getting popular at school or getting attention from girls. I was enjoying my very last year of childhood. My twelfth year

was one of the best years of my life, and the last year that I was happy. I'm glad that I can at least say I made the best of it.

I gave no thought at all to my future, or the fact that puberty was just around the corner. I barely even knew much about what puberty was. With puberty, my whole world would change, and my entire life would collapse into utter despair. I wonder how I would have handled things if I knew... If I was prepared...

This summer was long awaited. I was having the time of my life, and once school was out I couldn't wait to spend the summer relaxing and doing fun things. I was relieved that neither of my parents made me attend summer camp. I suppose I had gotten too old for it. This summer was mine to enjoy however I wanted. It was like a coveted treasure that I could only hold for a few moments, but those moments would last forever in memory. It was my last summer before puberty. My last summer of innocence. My last summer of true happiness and satisfaction with life.

I continued my traditional Friday sleepovers with Charlie, John Jo, and Elijah. Because there was no more school, they would sometimes come over on other days as well. I managed to beat the entire game of Halo on legendary mode with Elijah's help, an impressive feat.

Philip and Jeffrey came over quite a lot as well. Philip was always the mature and insightful brother, while Jeffrey was the wild and funny one. Seeing the two of them together always made for an interesting and excitable mix. Their mother, Kathy, brought them over on weekdays quite often. We drank a lot of soda, ate a lot of candy, and played with scooters and skateboards around my mother's neighborhood. I took them to Planet Cyber one time and showed them some of the games there.

On the weekends I spent at father's, we usually did something with the Bubenheims. They lived in the Top of Topanga community, where we often spent afternoons. I played with Georgia and Lukas in the swimming pool there, and being one who admires great views, I spent a lot of time looking out at the Valley. Going to that place would always remind me of my Fifth Grade graduation party, a good memory.

Soumaya told us extraordinary news. On one sunny afternoon at father's, me and my sister were asked to come to the dining room for a special announcement. It wasn't announced by words, but by Soumaya indicating us to feel her stomach. She was pregnant! She and my father were having their first baby together. I was going to have a baby brother.

I felt elated. I remember when I was a bit younger I always asked my father and Soumaya if they were going to have a baby, and they said they would like to. I still felt surprised when it was actually confirmed. It was that warm feeling that would envelop me when a good change happened in my life. I had no idea what it would be like, but I welcomed it.

My step-grandmother Khadija came to stay with us for a second time, mainly to help Soumaya prepare for the birth.

In the middle of the summer, mother took me and my sister on a vacation to Malaysia. This was the first time we would go on an overseas vacation with just mother, and I was pleased at the thought of it. We took off on my 13th Birthday. I spent my birthday on the airplane, a much more exciting birthday than the previous few. We traveled on Singapore Airlines, and though we weren't traveling first class on this trip, I found it to be just as comfortable. The staff of Singapore Airlines knew it was my birthday, and they brought me a cake with a candle during the middle of the flight. It was a very nice gesture.

We had to spend eight hours at the Singapore Airport. I thought this airport was such a pleasant place that I really enjoyed just spending time there. It was all part of the vacation experience. The airport was huge, and much more entertaining than LAX or any airport in Europe that I've been to. The three of us

walked around and explored, went shopping, visited all the common areas, and had a nice meal at one of the restaurants. There were a lot of foreign candies and sodas that I was curious to try. Traveling with just my mother and sister was a lot less stressful than traveling with father and Soumaya. It was wonderful.

When we arrived in Malaysia, we met up with my grandma Ah Mah, my mother's sister Min and her husband Jack, and cousin Emma. They were also visiting Malaysia from England. We all stayed at a tall hotel building near the beach. After we unpacked everything at the hotel, some of my mother's relatives who lived in Malaysia came to see us. We had a birthday celebration for me at the hotel that night. Before I went to sleep, I pondered over the fact that I was now a teenager.

I had a lovely time on this vacation. Our hotel suite was on one of the highest floors of the building, and it had an exquisite deck that provided a view of the ocean. During the trip, we toured around the island of Penang, visited Georgetown, went to a fun waterpark, and had very delicious meals at many exotic restaurants. Just relaxing and watching movies at the hotel was a joy in itself. The vacation was so nice that I didn't even miss my life at home. The three weeks flew by very fast, and I cried a little when it was over. It was a good sadness.

I celebrated my birthday again at father's house on the night we returned to America. I was allowed to have my very first glass of beer for this celebration. I always thought of alcoholic drinks, such as beer and wine, as mysterious drinks that were forbidden to children like myself. Father would let me have only a small sip of wine from time to time. Having my first glass of beer felt like a big honor.

For my present, I got my first cell phone. During this era, cell phones were like a rite of passage for kids my age. I always envied the kids who had a cell phone. John Jo had a silver Sprint phone with green lighting that I always coveted. To finally have a cell phone of my own made me feel so proud. My phone was a silver T-Mobile phone with blue lighting. I loved the satisfaction I felt when I opened it up and saw the pretty lights.

13 Years Old

I enjoyed the rest of the summer as best as I could. On the first Planet Cyber session after being back from vacation, I met up with John Jo. They had the new Warcraft 3 expansion available to play, and the two of us tried it out.

I had a sleepover with Charlie and Elijah, and they introduced me to their friend Julian Ritz-Barr. Julian went to Topanga Elementary with us, though he was two grades lower, so I never knew him beforehand. I thought he was very cool, but a bit stupid. We competed with each other at Planet Cyber. I continued to see him with Charlie and Elijah a few more times after that.

Coincidentally, Julian's parents were friends with Rob Lemelson, and I didn't know this at the time. A few years down the line, I would cross paths with Julian again at one of the Lemelson's parties, where I would spitefully envy him for being so confident with everyone.

When the summer ended, I cried a little. It was such a great summer. I went on a vacation, I saw lots of friends, played lots of games, and enjoyed life to its fullest. Of course, I didn't know at the time that this was the last good summer in my life, but I still cried... as I always do after a joyful experience comes to an end.

Eighth Grade began on a very mellow note. For the first couple of months, I continued on with the life I've been living, and things seemed ok. The main people I hung out with at school were Alfred Graham, Gavin Dowd, and Brice Miller. Alfred was just getting good at skateboarding, and he was starting to become popular with the skateboarders. He once brought his skateboard to school and landed a kickflip,

the move I was never able to master in the past. I was secretly jealous, even though I insisted to everyone that I was no longer interested in skateboarding.

I started to take more notice of the kids in lower grades, specifically the Seventh Graders. There was one who came in from Topanga Elementary, the older brother of one of Georgia's friends. His name was Neil Davis. I observed the popular kids of Seventh Grade... In a way they visually mimicked the popular kids of my own grade. They were all the same, though the Seventh Graders seemed a lot meaner. I noticed that Neil Davis was starting to be friends with them, even with the pretty girls. I would gradually develop a great envy towards him. Another one was Lucky Radley, the black kid I played with in father's neighborhood. He transferred to Pinecrest during that very year, and he immediately became popular with the pretty girls of his grade. I hated him for it.

Things were getting more intense every year we grew older, and I didn't want to grow up. I wanted to live the life I was comfortable with. I wanted to live in a world of fairness, and I tried not to accept that it would soon come to an end.

The games I enjoyed playing at Planet Cyber were too powerful to run on my mother's computer, so Planet Cyber was the only place I could play them. That was until I asked my father to buy me Warcraft 3 to install on his powerful laptop. I got the Frozen Throne expansion to go with it, and once it was installed I was able to play it on his laptop whenever he allowed me to. I thought it was really cool to actually play an online game from my own home. Father's house became a lot more fun after this, though I hated it when Soumaya set limits on my playtime.

When father invited the Bubenheims over, Alex sometimes brought his friends Gary and Antje Twinn. They had a son named Vincent, who was the same age as my sister and a good friend of Lukas. Vincent was a kind-hearted and sweet little boy who was a bit overweight. I showed him Warcraft 3 on my father's computer. He was very interested in the game, and he would watch me for hours. He really looked up to me. We got along well.

One day, I was looking up things on the internet about Warcraft 3. That is when I found out about a new, revolutionary Warcraft game coming out, called World of Warcraft. I didn't think much of it at the time, ignorant of the effect it would have on me in my later life.

Gradually, my friendship with John Jo, Charlie, and Elijah started to wane. They no longer came over as a group anymore. Our usual Friday sleepovers stopped happening, as they got more busy with other things. John Jo and Charlie slowly started to get bored of Planet Cyber, which caused them to lose their interest in coming over every week. I continued to see them individually; sometimes I would see Charlie and Elijah together, sometimes just Elijah, and sometimes just John Jo.

Due to them coming over less often, I began to walk to Planet Cyber alone. I never did this before, because my friends came over so much and we would go together. I would usually play Diablo 2 or Warcraft 3 there. For a time, I did this as a routine without getting bored. Sometimes I would meet John Jo there and we would have intense Warcraft 3 competitions with each other.

After a few more weeks into autumn, I began to get a bit depressed over the fact that the good times I had with my main group of friends was fading away. I started to walk to Planet Cyber alone just to reminisce such times. Sometimes I would stay there for hours into the night. I never thought I would get bored of the highly entertaining games there, but after playing them so much on my own, I was surprised that I was getting a bit bored. Good times always come to an end, and I always had a hard time accepting this fact.

One time while I was alone at Planet Cyber, I saw an older teenager watching pornography. I saw in detail a video of a man having sex with a hot girl. The video showed him stick his penis inside a girl's vagina. I didn't know anything about sex at the time. I barely even knew what sex was. I was slowly

starting to develop sexual feelings for hot girls, but I didn't know what to do with them. To see this video really traumatized me. I had no idea what I was seeing... I couldn't imagine human beings doing such things with each other. The sight was shocking, traumatizing, and arousing. All of these feelings mixed together took a great toll on me. I walked home and cried by myself for a bit. I felt too guilty about what I saw to talk to my parents about it. I was quite shaken for a few days.

This was among the very first glimpses I had of sex. Finding out about sex is one of the things that truly destroyed my entire life. Sex... the very word fills me with hate. Once I hit puberty, I would always want it, like any other boy. I would always hunger for it, I would always covet it, I would always fantasize about it. But I would never get it. Not getting any sex is what will shape the very foundation of my miserable youth. This was a very dark day.

Soon enough, I would inevitably find out about what sex was, whether I saw that foul video or not. Boys at my school started talking about it. Connor Hanrahan and his friend Jordan Carlton one day told me exactly what happens when a man and a woman have sex. Finding out about sex was just the beginning of my horrific downfall.

My father and mother arranged to change our routine back to one-week, one-week. Father wanted to spend more time with us, and it was agreed that this would be the way. I was angry about this, because I felt satisfied with the way things were. If it went back to one-week, one-week, I would have to spend time at father's even if father wasn't there, and I hated that. I didn't see how it enabled father to spend more time with us, because he was always going away for work anyway. But alas, I had no choice in the matter, and the arrangement was set. This is how it would remain from that point on... My living arrangement wouldn't change again until I turn 18 and Soumaya kicks me out.

When Christmas came, I told father that I would like a new computer game. Father took me out shopping for my new present. We first went to Comp USA on Victory Boulevard, but they didn't have a large selection of games. I was on the verge of just choosing to buy Diablo 2, a game I had already spent hours on at Planet Cyber. But then, I decided that since Best Buy was just across the street, we should go and have a look at the games there.

At Best Buy, I saw the game World of Warcraft. It had just come out a few weeks ago. I picked up the box and looked at it for a few minutes. The game looked amazing and alluring, so I decided to choose World of Warcraft as my Christmas present. I spent more time looking it over and reading about it on the way home.

The only computer I could play World of Warcraft on was father's laptop, but father was always using his laptop for work. I had to wait a long time to get a chance to play it. After reading the game manual, I got extremely excited to play it. It was a whole new type of game for me, an MMORPG that would enable me to make my own character in a huge online fantasy world, and it was a world I was already familiar with through playing Warcraft 3. This game was a hundred times bigger than any game I've played in the past. The more I read about the game, the more anticipated I became.

After almost a month went by after getting World of Warcraft, I was finally able to play it. I made a WoW account with my father, and then I created my first character, a night elf druid. It really blew my mind. My first experience with WoW was like stepping into another world of excitement and adventure. It was a video game world, but they made it so realistic that it was like living another life, a more exciting life. My life was getting more and more depressing at that point, and WoW would fill in the void. It felt refreshing and relieving. I was only able to play it for a few hours for my first session. It was all I would think about when I wasn't able to play it.

Mother didn't have a good enough computer to run World of Warcraft, so I felt a bit frustrated because of that. I thought of how awesome it would be if Planet Cyber had the game, but I doubted that

it did. One afternoon, I walked to Planet Cyber with my WoW disks and asked them if they can install my disks onto one of their computers. The owner told me the game was already being installed, and I was thrilled to hear those words. It wasn't ready yet, however, and I had to wait. I kept going back to Planet Cyber every day to wait for it, and played other games there while they were still processing it. It was a fun wait, and I knew I will eventually be able to play it. Finally, after spending three days at Planet Cyber waiting, it was ready. I loaded the game and logged onto my account. I was completely ecstatic. I spent all of my free time in the next few days playing it. The owner of Planet Cyber came to know me because of this series of events, and he named me his best customer.

I invited Charlie over, and he came with Stephen, an old friend from Topanga Elementary whom I hadn't seen for a while. I found out that they both had their own WoW accounts, and we went to Planet Cyber to play it together. I made a new character on their server just to play with them, though I would eventually discard this character.

I saw Charlie only a few more times after that. Elijah was busy with some life problems and stopped coming over. John Jo simply vanished from my life at this point, for no particular reason. I can't recall the exact last time I saw him, but it was around this period.

My mother decided to move to an apartment in Woodland Hills. I reacted indignantly. *An apartment!* I had never lived in an apartment before, and I always thought of apartments as being poor and low-class. I would be embarrassed to admit it to anyone.

The apartment building was called the Renaissance Apartments, near the Warner Center area of Woodland Hills. We moved into a two bedroom apartment. Mother knew I was too old to share a room with my sister, so she gave me the second bedroom, and she and my sister shared the master bedroom.

Leaving the blue house on Glade Avenue was hard. I had so many good times with my friends there. And to move out of it at the very time that I stopped seeing those friends... it was quite emotional. I cried on our last day there.

My mother's new apartment was not walking distance from Planet Cyber, and I was a bit embarrassed to show that I lived in an apartment, so I stopped seeing any friends. Elijah was the last person in the group who I saw. I was at Planet Cyber and he tapped me on the shoulder. It was a random meeting. The two of us talked for a bit about the new Halo 2 game, and I showed him my WoW character. That was the last time I saw him.

Eventually, I lost all contact with Charlie, John Jo, and Elijah. The friends I had such a good times with for the last two years were no longer my friends. They were lost to me. I also stopped seeing Philip and Jeffrey... they simply just forgot about me, I assumed. The only friend who remained to me was James Ellis.

The upside of moving to the apartment was that my mother acquired high speed internet. I was able to play World of Warcraft on her computer, along with Halo 2 on Xbox Live.

This was the point when my social life ended completely. I would never have a satisfying social life ever again. It was the beginning of a very lonely period of my life, in which my only social interactions would be online through video games, with the sole exception being my friendship with James. The ability to play video games with people online temporarily filled in the social void. I got caught up in it, and I was too young and naïve to realize the severity of how far I had fallen. I was too scared to accept it. This loss of a social life, coupled with the advent of puberty, caused me to die a little inside. It was too much for me to handle, and I stopped caring about my life and my future. I even stopped caring about what people thought of me. I hid myself away in the online World of Warcraft, a place where I felt comfortable and secure.

Part 4

Stuck in the Void

Age 13-17

James Ellis also acquired Xbox Live with Halo 2. I started to play it with him online, and our friendship reignited after being stale for the previous year. We would meet up online after school, or on Saturday mornings. The two of us battled on Halo 2 over the internet, just like we did with our Nintendo 64 games when we were children.

James would be my only friend throughout the next depressing and lonely period of my life. My friendship with James helped me cope with the loneliness. The very few fun times we would have were like a light in the darkness for me.

Now that I was able to play World of Warcraft at my mother's house with no limitations, aside from school and homework, I became very addicted to the game and my character in it. It was all I cared about.

I was so immersed in the game that I no longer cared about what people thought of me. I only saw school as something that took time away from WoW. I became very bored at school, mainly due to the fact that I was still the invisible quiet kid. To alleviate this boredom, I started to act weird and annoying to people just to gain attention.

I became known as the "weird kid" at Pinecrest, and people started to make fun of me, but I didn't care. I had my online games to distract me from the harsh realities of life that I was too scared to face. The only time I did care was when a group of popular Seventh Grade girls started teasing me, which hurt a lot. One of these girls was [REDACTED] a pretty blonde girl [REDACTED]. She must have thought I was an ultimate loser. I hated her so much, and I will never forget her. I started to hate all girls because of this. I saw them as mean, cruel, and heartless creatures that took pleasure from my suffering.

At father's house, I was forced to change my bedroom to the downstairs room that Tracy once occupied. My old bedroom was to be given to my baby brother... Soumaya was due to give birth to him very soon. I was quite annoyed at this. That room was the room that made me so enthusiastic about moving to that house. Father and Soumaya thought moving me was the best solution. The new baby would get a room close to them, and I would have the much bigger downstairs room.

When I moved to the downstairs room, I slowly agreed that it was the sensible thing to do. My new room was twice the size of my old one, I still had my own bathroom, and I also had the hallway that led to it. Technically, I had the whole bottom floor of the three story house to myself. The only bad thing about this was that I would get scared to walk down those stairs at night when it's dark... the light switch was at the bottom of the stairs. I've always been afraid of the dark.

Soumaya gave birth to a newborn baby boy, and they named him Jazz. It happened during father's week. While father and Soumaya were at the hospital, Alex Bubenheim picked us up from school and we stayed at his house in the afternoons. This occurred for three days, and finally, on the day of the birth, father showed up to announce the birth of Jazz. We had a little celebration, and the song "Jessie's Girl" played from Alex's sound system. Whenever I heard that song in the future, I would always think of that day.

It was an exciting day. I actually had a brother... It was hard to believe. Technically he is my half-brother, but I would always term him as my brother. I wasn't as impacted by his birth as I expected myself to be, possibly because I was so caught up in my own personal and emotional changes that I was going through at that stage.

Spring break came up, the first break from school since I started playing WoW. I considered myself extremely fortunate that I was at my mother's house for that week. I disliked being at father's house, because I had so many limits on the amount of time I could play my game. On the onset of spring break, I planned to spend the whole time on WoW, leveling up my character and forgetting about my horrible school life.

I invited James to come over to my mother's apartment for the first time. We played a round of Halo 2, and then I decided to show him World of Warcraft. He knew nothing about it. I was very eager to get him into it. WoW was his kind of game, after all. He seemed very interested.

We went to father's house for Easter Sunday. He took us to a party held by some new friends of his, the Thompsons. Alongside the Bubenheims, the Thompsons became frequent guests at my father's dinner parties. They consisted of John Thompson, a successful film producer, and his wife Tatiana. They had three children: Isabella, the oldest daughter, was two years younger than me, and the twins Josh and Alessandra were the same age as my sister.

On the first day me and my sister met them, and I believe it was on that Easter Sunday, we played with them splendidly in their backyard. But soon, after they came over a few more times, I began to have uneasy feelings of nervousness and fear around the two girls, mainly because I thought all girls hated me. The way I was treated by girls at my school played a big part in my resentment towards all of them during this time. This resentment would only grow larger the more I am treated unfairly by the female gender.

Mother took us to the premiere of Star Wars Episode 3: Revenge of the Sith. As a huge Star Wars fan, this was a big day for me. Episode 3 would complete the whole Star Wars saga. It was the most anticipated movie. To be able to see it before everyone else made me feel special. I really liked the character Anakin Skywalker, and I was amazed to see his epic transformation into Darth Vader on the high quality big screen.

Finally having something to brag about, I told everyone at school the next day that I went to the premiere because my mother is friends with George Lucas. The problem was that most Eighth Graders thought of Star Wars as being a "nerdy" interest, and they didn't really care. I was left frustrated and disappointed by their reaction.

As middle school approached its ultimate end, I was having a miserable time there. I was extremely unpopular, widely disliked, and viewed as the weirdest kid in the school. I had to act weird in order to gain attention. I was tired of being the invisible shy kid. Infamy is better than total obscurity.

The teasing I received was bittersweet. It felt horrible to be teased and bullied... it caused me a lot of pain and anger... but at the same time I got a kick out of getting so much attention. It felt good to be confident enough to pick fights with the popular skateboarder kids. It was either that, or continue to be ignored by everyone like I was in Sixth and Seventh Grade. I never knew how to gain positive attention, only negative.

My experience during Middle School really darkened my view of the world, and it would only get darker from then on, as I suffered more and more. The way I was treated by girls at this time, especially by that evil bitch [REDACTED] sparked an intense fear of girls. The funny part of this is that I had a secret crush on [REDACTED]. She was the first girl I ever had a crush on, and I never admitted it to anyone. To be teased and ridiculed by the girl I had a crush on wounded me deeply. The world that I grew up thinking was bright and blissful was all over. I was living in a depraved world, and I didn't want to accept it. I didn't want to give any thought to it. That is why I immersed myself entirely into my online games like World of Warcraft. I felt safe there.

I was so obsessed with playing WoW that I never gave much serious thought to the fact that I would have to go to High School soon. As the end of middle school neared, the prospect started to loom over me more and more. At one moment I pictured what my life in high school would be like, based on how things have been for me in middle school. It was not a bright picture. I didn't want to have to deal with the cruelty of girls in high school, and I imagined that it would be much worse than anything I've ever experienced. I begged my parents to send me to Crespi Carmelite High School, a catholic all-boys school.

Father took me there for a tour, and it didn't look so bad. It was a very prestigious private school. At least I wouldn't have to deal with any fear of girls there. We submitted an application. A few weeks later I received the news that I had been accepted to Crespi.

Eighth Grade Graduation was a nightmare. Everyone was required to go up on stage and speak to the whole audience. We had to say our name, and tell everyone what school we were planning on going to. The audience consisted of all of the student's families, as well as any siblings or friends who wished to attend. Both of my parents came, as well as Soumaya, Khadija, my sister, and even my baby brother Jazz.

It took place in the evening. As I lined up, I could feel myself shaking. I was scared even to speak in front of a classroom. To speak in a microphone to hundreds of people was too much. I didn't understand how everyone else seemed to be fine with it. I envied their bravery. When my name was called, I didn't want to go, but it was required of me, and I pushed myself to do it. I walked up to the microphone and nervously said "My name is Elliot, and I plan on going to Crespi High School". I heard my own voice in the speakers and saw everyone staring at me. It made me cringe. I quickly walked away for the next person to go up. It was over. Eighth Grade was over. Middle School was over.

I said a few farewells to the people I knew. Alfred Graham and Brice Miller told me they were going to Crespi as well. At least I will know two people at Crespi on the first day, I thought. The thought of going to High School sent a shiver through me. I put it in the back of my mind to deal with later.

After the ceremony, I said goodbye to the principal, and she congratulated me on completing middle school. On the way home, my family seemed very proud of me. I didn't feel proud. I didn't feel like I accomplished anything. Middle School, though it started out ok in the first two years, ended up being a disaster.

For the summer break, I planned on spending the whole time playing WoW and forgetting about everything else. I reached the highest level on my WoW character: level 60. I actually considered this to be a huge and important accomplishment. I joined a guild with my character, and I made a few online friends though it. I couldn't wait to play my character further, exploring everything the game had to offer and collecting more armor pieces and trinkets.

In just a week into my summer break, my mother told me that father and Soumaya were going to Morocco, and I would be forced to go with them. This news upset me tremendously. I then asked how long this trip would be, and I was told it would be *eight weeks*. EIGHT WEEKS?! I could not believe what I was hearing. I threw a big tantrum.

For one thing, I was never enthusiastic about Morocco. The country is very backwards, and that made me very uncomfortable. They didn't even have the latest video games. And to be forced to go there for eight weeks? That would take up the entire summer and the first two weeks of high school. It was even longer than the last time we went, and I thought *that* was too long. I wouldn't be able to play WoW at all for two whole months. The prospect devastated me. I begged my mother to not let me go, but father and Soumaya insisted on bringing me and Georgia, and my mother was probably looking forward to having two months without children to look after. The decision was made, the plans were set. They

already had a plane ticket ready for me. I was going to Morocco. I bet they all knew I would protest against going, which is why they told me last minute.

The last day of mother's week was the day before we would depart. Mother took me and my sister to a barbeque at the house of her friends Alan and Rebecca. I was very sad for the whole day. I didn't do anything at the barbeque except swing on their swing in misery. When we got home I played WoW for the very last time. I took advantage of the few hours I had left on it. My mother allowed me to stay up until midnight playing. I acquired a very nice piece of armor for my character. I didn't want to leave it.

When we arrived at father's house the next day, I heard even more upsetting news. Father had to work for the first few weeks of summer, so he would be joining us in the middle of the trip. It was only Soumaya taking us to Morocco! I always hated traveling with Soumaya. She made everything so difficult. Baby Jazz will be coming along with us, of course, and the stress of looking after a whelping baby while traveling will put Soumaya in a bad mood. I was not happy at all.

As I expected, the journey there was a disaster. Baby Jazz cried a lot during the trip, and Soumaya wasn't at her best of moods. We didn't take First Class, and we had to make three stops; once in Michigan, again in Paris, and yet again in Casablanca, before taking a small plane to Tangier. It was a miserable journey, the complete opposite of the great time I had a year ago on the trip to Malaysia.

We took a taxi to Khadija's house right after we arrived. Khadija went home to Morocco on a different plane a few days before us, and she was already settled in. After unpacking at Khadija's house, we walked to Soumaya's father's huge house where I met Ayman again. I remembered playing with Ayman on my last trip to Morocco... He grew up a lot since then. To my dismay, he was taller and stronger than me, despite being two years younger. I was always short and physically weak... that's how it's been all my life. We instantly became friends again after catching up a little, and I played hide-and-seek tag with him and his two younger brothers.

I disliked having to be in Morocco for the whole summer, but I tried to make the best of it. Ayman made the time I spent there more fun. We often went out by ourselves to explore the city of Tangier. Ayman knew where everything was, and Soumaya trusted him to show me around. Georgia sometimes came with us. We had a few good times together, and we got along well.

The Thompsons joined us in Morocco a couple of weeks after we arrived. Georgia was happy that Alessandra, Josh, and Isabella were there to play with her. I was not happy about it. I was so scared of girls at that time that I kept my distance from Alessandra and Isabella. I didn't want to admit to Ayman that I was scared of girls though, that would have been embarrassing, so I just told him that I thought they were too immature. He didn't understand this, because I myself was very immature at the time.

For my 14th birthday, Soumaya organized a small party at her father's house. Most of the guests were her Moroccan friends, and some of them didn't even know that the party was for my birthday. I was a bit annoyed by this. They had a cake arranged for me, and when it was brought out everyone gathered to wish me a happy birthday. That would be the last time I spent my birthday with more people than just my family. I was amazed that I was actually fourteen. Fourteen sounded like such a big number. I didn't feel fourteen. I still felt like a kid, and in all appearances, I was.

Father couldn't even make it for my birthday. I was a bit upset about this. He came a few days after it. Once he arrived, we toured around Tangier and a few other areas as a family. Khadija and Ayman sometimes came along with us. Soumaya's father owned a house on the beach, and we usually went there for beach trips. I caught a virus while swimming in the ocean once, which caused me to get extremely ill. I spent a whole week of the vacation in bed, aching and vomiting. I was never that ill before in my life. Whenever I would think about Morocco in the future, I thought about that horrid experience.

At one time towards the end of the trip, when I had a sleepover with Ayman at Soumaya's father's house, he showed me some European porn videos in the middle of the night. I could observe the act of sex in much more detail than that one glimpse I had at Planet Cyber. I didn't want to look, but my

curiosity got the better of me. To see a video of human beings doing such weird and unspeakable things with each other revolted me. I couldn't understand what I was seeing. And yet, I noticed I was feeling aroused. I felt desire to do those things, to have sex with the naked women I saw in the video. It was a funny feeling that overwhelmed my whole body. I could feel my penis getting hard. This is when I noticed that I was finally going through puberty. *Heavens save me.*

The trip was way too long, and towards the end I felt depressed and homesick. All I wanted was to go back home and play WoW, and yet I had to accept that once I did get home, I had to start high school right away. I supposed that being able to play WoW again would make up for that, though. And it would sure beat staying in Morocco for any longer. I was growing tired of it.

14 Years Old

I felt a wave of relief when we arrived back in the United States. We had to travel separately from father again because he had a different flight schedule, but it wasn't that bad on the way back because I was looking forward to playing WoW again.

I only had one free day before I had to start school. When I got back to mother's house, I gave her a big hug... That was the longest time I had been away from mother. After that, I immediately asked if I can go on her computer and play my game. I logged onto my character, which was just the way I left it two months ago. I said hi to all of my online friends and tried to catch up on everything.

The dreaded day arrived all too soon. I had to start High School. School had already begun while I was still in Morocco, so I would be the "new kid" again. That made it so much worse. My father drove me there on the first day. When we got there, I was intimidated by all the huge high school boys, and I cried in the car for a few minutes, telling my father that I was too scared to get out.

I had to go, and eventually I did. We walked to the main office where I ran into Brice Miller. We greeted each other before I was led up to join my first class of the day. Alfred Graham was in that class, and he helped me settle in.

During lunchtime, Alfred showed me around the whole school. I started to feel a lot more comfortable. He introduced me to some of the other freshmen. In the courtyard, I met Pascal and his clique of friends. I immediately took a disliking to them. Pascal was cocky and popular, so I felt intimidated. He was like the Crespi equivalent of Robert Morgan. As I met a few more people, I ran into Keaton Webber! I didn't expect to find any more people I knew at Crespi. It really took me by surprise. I hadn't seen Keaton since he left Topanga Elementary at the end of Fourth Grade. Keaton was still the arrogant jerk he always was at Topanga, and he had his own clique of skateboarder friends, such as Andy Moussa and Aaron Amman.

As I expected, I failed to make any new friends. I was so overwhelmed by the brutality of the world that I just didn't care anymore. On the very first week, I had my first experience of true bullying, not just the teasing I had at Pinecrest. Some horrible Twelfth Graders saw me as a target because I looked like a ten year old and I was physically weak. They threw food at me during lunchtime and after school. It enraged me, but I was too scared to do anything about it. *What kind of horrible, depraved people would poke fun at a boy younger than them who has just entered high school?* I thought to myself.

After the first few weeks of high school, I concluded that my time at Crespi would not be pleasant at all. I withdrew further into the World of Warcraft, neglecting my homework and spending all of my free time playing it.

As a late birthday present, father bought me a new laptop that was able to run WoW. It wasn't a very powerful laptop, but it performed adequately. This enabled me to have more time playing my game. During father's week, Soumaya was always on my back about how much time I spent on WoW, but since

my room was on the bottom floor, secluded from the rest of the house, I was able to sneak as much time on it as I could.

While I was playing WoW after dinner at mother's house once, I heard my sister watching the new show Avatar: The Last Airbender on the television. I decided to check it out. I soon found myself really enjoying it. It was a magnificent story set in a fantasy world where people can control the power of the elements. Once I watched the first episode, I was hooked on the story. Prince Zuko was my favorite character; he was a banished prince who was trying to regain his rightful place in the world. I always related to him. Avatar: The Last Airbender became my favorite T.V. show.

My mother informed me that she was just on the phone to Arte Ellis, and he told her that James now played World of Warcraft. I was very pleased to hear this. I could now share my greatest interest in the world with my good friend... my only friend. I then went over to James's house for a sleepover, which I hadn't done for a while. He showed me his WoW character, who was only level 20. We weren't on the same server, so we couldn't play it together. The only way would be for one of us to start over, and we were too immersed in our characters to do that. I was fine with that. James was really fascinated by my level 60 character, and most of the time he would just watch me play, anyway. We also played a lot of Halo 2 together.

Having these common interests with James reminded me of the good old days when we were children; when we were both interested in skateboarding, and before that, Pokemon. This nostalgic experience provided a small respite from my sufferings at school.

My life at Crespi got even worse. Alfred and Brice apparently told everyone how weird I was at Pinecrest, and people in my own grade started to tease me. They found out that I didn't like being called a skateboarder, and it was true. Because I failed to become good at skateboarding, I developed a hatred for the sport, and whenever someone called me a skateboarder, it reminded me of my failure and I got very angry. The whole school started calling me it just to anger me, along with other insulting names. They teased me because I was scared of girls, calling me names like "faggot". People also liked to steal my belongings and run away in an attempt to get me to chase after them. And I did chase after them in a furious rage, but I was so little and weak that they thought it was comical. I hated everyone at that school so much.

It got to a point where I had to wait in a quiet corner for the hallways to clear before I could walk to class. I also took long routes around the school to avoid bullies. My parents began to consider not letting me continue there after Ninth Grade.

When winter break came, I felt like I had just landed on a peaceful island after swimming through a horrific storm. It was such a fine relief. The break was to last for three weeks, and I was sorely disappointed that two of them would be at father's house, while only one was at mother's. I hated being at father's house because Soumaya became more and more suspicious of how much time I spent playing WoW, and she would place limits on my playtime whenever she caught me playing it. I wasn't able to do my five-hour-long events to collect rare armor pieces for my character while I was at father's house.

It was during this winter break that I experienced my first masturbation and ejaculation. It was one of the most peculiar and memorable experiences of my life. At this point I was officially going through the stages of puberty, and I had lots of sexual urges. I often fantasized about hot naked girls while rubbing my penis against my mattress at night. One time, while doing this, I felt an intense stirring numbness all around my fully erect penis, and it extended all over my body. It felt magical and ecstatic, and I kept rubbing my penis on the mattress. That was when the orgasm happened. I couldn't believe how much pleasure I felt from that. I looked down at my penis to see that my semen had poured out all over it, like

a volcanic eruption of white, sticky fluid. *What was happening to me?* I thought to myself with nervous excitement. It was like nothing I had ever seen or experienced before, something completely out of my world. I felt really guilty afterwards, so I refrained from telling anyone about it.

I started to masturbate on a regular basis. At first I only did it by rubbing my penis on my bed, but it eventually escalated to looking at pictures of girls online while rubbing my penis against my pants, fantasizing about doing sexual things with them. I didn't know how to access any porn sites, so I would just browse regular websites until I found a picture of a hot girl to masturbate to.

I developed a very high sex drive, and it would always remain like this. This was the start of hell for me. Going through puberty utterly doomed my existence. It condemned me to live a life of suffering and unfulfilled desires. Even at that young age, I felt depressed because I wanted sex, yet I felt unworthy of it. I didn't think I was ever going to experience sex in reality, and I was right. I never did. I was finally interested in girls, but there was no way I could ever get them. *And so my starvation began.*

The boys in my grade talked about sex a lot. Some of them even told me that they had sex with their girlfriends. This was the most devastating and traumatizing thing I've ever heard in my life. Boys having sex at my age of *Fourteen*? I couldn't fathom it. *How is it that they were able to have such intimate and pleasurable experiences with girls while I could only fantasize about it?* I frequently started asking myself. This was an all-boys school... *How in the hell were those boys even able to meet girls to have sex with?* I wondered. I hoped they were lying. I hoped against all hope. Hearing that really shook me to the core. Words cannot describe how much hatred and envy I felt for those boys. That hatred would only fester the more I suffer from my sexual starvation. I was too scared to tell anyone about it, and I hid it well... for a time.

These recent events cause me to withdraw even further away from the world. I drowned all of my misery in my online games. World of Warcraft was the only thing I had left to live for. My grades at Crespi dropped dramatically. I just didn't care anymore. I hated that school. I didn't think about my future. The only thing I gave any serious thought to was my WoW character. I had become very powerful in the game, and I was in one of the best guilds. With this guild, I participated in lots of five-hour raid events to collect better gear and armor for my character.

Mother moved to a new house with a swimming pool that she was able to lease for a fair price. She picked me and my sister up from father's house and took us there as a surprise. It was located near the old blue house, though in a nicer area. This was on a day that I had an event on WoW in the afternoon, and I was very concerned about whether or not I would make it in time, so when we got to the new house I didn't even look around and immediately hooked up my laptop to play WoW. I was *that* obsessed.

After being bullied so much in Eighth and Ninth Grade, I became more shy and timid than I ever was in my life. I felt very small, weak, and above all, worthless. I cried by myself at school every day.

The very last day of Ninth Grade was the worst. I was having P.E. at the gym, and one of my obnoxious classmates named Jesse was bragging about having sex with his girlfriend. I defiantly told him that I didn't believe him, so he played a voice recording of what sounded like him and his girlfriend having sex. I could hear a girl saying his name over and over again while she panted frantically. He grinned at me smugly. I felt so inferior to him, and I hated him. It was at that moment that I was called to the office. When I got there, my mother was waiting for me to take me home. I cried heavily as I told her about what happened earlier. That was the last day I ever set foot in Crespi Carmelite High School.

Crespi was finished. I thought I could finally relax. Little did I know that the worst was yet to come.

My parents shocked me with very horrible news. They were planning on sending me to Taft High School. Taft had five times as many students as Crespi, it was a public school, it had girls in it, and it had a bad reputation. I had never been so scared in my entire life. *How could they do this to me, after knowing what I went through at Crespi?* Taft High School would eat me alive and spit me out. I felt so betrayed by my parents.

On top of that, they told me I had to go to summer school at Taft very soon. I failed a few classes at Crespi and I had to make up for them. The summer was supposed to be a time of peace and relaxation. This was turning out to be the worst summer of my life.

I went with my parents to the Taft Orientation event, and it was a horrific experience. I felt so dismayed at how large the school was, and how intimidating all of the tall students were. I even begged my parents to send me back to Crespi, because I knew Taft would be much worse.

I had a foul time at summer school. I remember how I used to hate it when my parents made me go to summer camp. Summer camp was like heaven compared to summer school at Taft. I got lost on the first day. I was so terrified that I hid in the hallways during break time. I spent my time at summer school gruelingly waiting to go home so I could feel safe playing WoW.

My 15th Birthday was in the midst of this summer school term. I was so miserable during this period that I didn't even give much thought to it. It was so uneventful that I barely remember anything about it. I believe I just had dinner with my mother and played WoW afterwards.

15 Years Old

Toxic is the word that describes my first day of Tenth Grade at Taft High School. It was a toxic nightmare. Every single second of it was agony. I continued to beg my parents to not make me go, but it was to no avail. My father drove me there, and I didn't want to get out of his car. He almost had to drag me out. I somehow found the will to put one foot in front of the other and walk towards that awful, ugly front building.

The first week of Taft was living hell. I was bullied several times, even though I didn't know anyone there. After being so used to wearing a polo shirt with khaki pants as a school uniform at private schools, I continued to dress like that even after leaving Crespi. I didn't give any thought to how nerdy I looked. I was too withdrawn, like a turtle tucked into his shell. I was still in the process of going through puberty at the time, so I still looked and sounded like a ten-year-old. Such a persona attracted zero attention from girls, of course, but it did attract bullies like moths to a flame.

I was completely and utterly alone. No one knew me or extended a hand to help me. I was an innocent, scared little boy trapped in a jungle full of malicious predators, and I was shown no mercy. Some boys randomly pushed me against the lockers as they walked past me in the hall. One boy who was tall and had blonde hair called me a "loser", right in front of his girlfriends. Yes, he had girls with him. Pretty girls. And they didn't seem to mind that he was such an evil bastard. In fact, I bet they liked him for it. This is how girls are, and I was starting to realize it. This was what truly opened my eyes to how brutal the world is. The most meanest and depraved of men come out on top, and women flock to these men. Their evil acts are rewarded by women; while the good, decent men are laughed at. It is sick, twisted, and wrong in every way. I hated the girls even more than the bullies because of this. The sheer cruelty of the world around me was so intense that I will never recover from the mental scars. Any experience I ever had before never traumatized me as much as this.

I couldn't do it anymore. On the morning before the second week of Taft started, I broke down and cried in front of my mother, begging her not to make me go to that horrible place. I was so scared that I

felt physically sick. I continued crying in the car on the way there, and my mother gave in. Instead of taking me to school, we went to the café at Gelson's in Calabasas where we had a big talk. I tried to explain how much I was suffering there. She just could not take me to school after that. When we were finished with Gelson's, she drove me to my father's house and told him about what happened. They agreed to take me out of Taft.

I didn't go to school for a month while my parents decided what to do with me. I took advantage of the time to rest and recover at home, playing my online games. The pain and suffering I had to endure at Taft was all over, but the scars would remain. I tried to forget about it as much as I could. I took a deep breath and relaxed.

After a month of recovery, my parents took me to look at two continuation high schools, which operate like home-schooling because you only spend three hours a day there and do the rest of the work at home. One of them was right next to El Camino High School, the other one was in Van Nuys. My parents preferred the one in Van Nuys because they felt it was more structured and organized. It was called Independence High School, and they decided to send me there.

Independence was a very small school with only three buildings and 100 students. The teachers were all very nice and understanding, and it had a relaxed and calm environment. I figured this was the best option for me.

A week later, I started going to Independence High School. I didn't like any of the students there, as they were all slobs with the exception of two or three boys. This wasn't a major concern, because I didn't care about having a social life at the point. All I wanted to do was hide away from the cruel world by playing my online games, and Independence High School gave me the perfect opportunity to do just that. I only had to be at school for three or four hours per day, and all of the work was very easy with teachers available to help me with anything. After those short school hours, I had all the time in the world to do whatever I wanted, and I spent it playing World of Warcraft.

One drawback was that I had to take the bus to school because my parents couldn't pick me up at such an early time of the day. Though it was embarrassing, I didn't care about appearances anymore, so I didn't make a big deal out of it.

This was the perfect set up for a World of Warcraft addict. After school, every day, I fully indulged myself in my addiction to WoW. My only social interaction was with my online friends and with James, who would occasionally come over to my house to play WoW with me.

My father's career as a commercial director hadn't been as successful as it was a couple years before. He foolishly decided to invest all of his money in his first feature film, a documentary named "Oh My God". In the film, he would interview various people about their opinions on religion and God. To make it, he took off to travel all over the world for a few months. Despite this, the one week-one week arrangement remained, and during father's week I had to stay at father's house with only Soumaya. This frustrated me tremendously, because Soumaya has always been a pain to live with, and she would obstruct my time on WoW. I was hopeful about father's movie, however. He kept talking about how he will become very rich from it, and I fostered a hope that he would become rich. How naïve I was... the movie would only bankrupt him in the future.

On top of this, I had to deal with another change at father's house that angered me to no end. I had to give up my lovely, huge, and luxurious downstairs room. It was all because baby Jazz got a new nanny. Once again, Jazz's existence caused me to lose my room at father's house. This time, father made my room into his new office. He split his old office into two bedrooms, in which I got one of them and the nanny got the other. My new room was much smaller, and it didn't have its own bathroom. My downstairs room was the best part of being at father's house, and it was all gone. I started to really hate going there.

Father came back shortly for the winter break, before taking off again. A new expansion for World of Warcraft, called the Burning Crusade, came out in the beginning of January. I was extremely excited for this expansion. It added many new features to the game, new areas to explore, and raised the level cap to 70. It was like a whole new WoW game. I asked my father to buy it for me as a Christmas present. I can still remember the intense anticipation I felt as I installed it onto my laptop.

I decided to transfer my WoW character to the same server as James, so that we could play together online and level up our characters in the new expansion. Through doing this, I met two of James's friends from his school, who also played on his server. They were two brothers named Steve and Mark. Steve is our age, and Mark is a couple years older.

Me, James, Steve, and Mark would then always play together online as a group. I found them quite fun to play the game with, and it was nice to have some friends to play WoW with on a regular basis. Eventually, Steve and Mark decided to make new characters on a PvP server, which had play settings that were more to my liking. I chose to make a new character with them. I made a blood elf character that I leveled up very fast, and this became my main character in the game. James stayed on his old server for a while, but within a few weeks we persuaded him to join us on the new one.

I had heated conflicts with Soumaya during every week that I was at father's house. All I wanted to do was play WoW, and Soumaya strictly limited my playtime. Because my new room was just across from hers, she knew what I was doing at every single second. She was breathing down my neck the whole time. She kept making me do chores around the house. I despised doing work around the house, especially since we had a nanny who was supposed to do it. If I made a scene about doing the work, she took away my laptop for a day or two. This was the most horrible thing she could do to me, to take away my only source of joy left in the world. She sometimes did it even when father was at home, and father didn't lift a finger to stop her.

My first year at Independence high school came to an end very quickly. Nothing eventful really happened there, and I barely interacted with anyone. I would just go there for my required time, do my work, and go home. I was too absorbed in my game to care about anything else.

At father's house, in the beginning of the summer, I was introduced to someone who I would hate for a very long time: Leo Bubenheim. Alex Bubenheim married a German woman named Karina who had just moved to the U.S. with her two kids: Leo and Pollina, who became Alex's step-children. They would then always come over as a family. Leo was 12 years old, and Pollina was a year younger than me. My fear of girls made me keep my distance from Pollina. She was a total bitch anyway, and her attitude would only get worse. She is a true representative of everything I hate about women.

When I first met Leo, I didn't think much of him. He was only twelve years old. I just thought of him as Lukas's new older brother. I had no inkling of how much I will envy and hate him later on.

Soon enough, my jealousy of Leo began to manifest. He had just moved to the U.S. from Germany, and yet he was already able to make lots of friends and had a great social life. He was tall, good looking, blonde-haired, and a skateboarder; the type of person I've always envied and wanted to be.

Me, my father, and the Bubenheims all went on a camping trip to Big Bear. It was just the boys. We drove deep into the wilderness in my father's big, formidable Lexus SUV. After setting up our tents, we built a nice fire to gather around and tell stories. It was quite fun, and it made for a small respite from my lonely life, though I had to suffer the presence of Leo and deal with my jealousy of him. One time