

Deluded

My crummy little Jersey City apartment. Baldwin Avenue. Near Journal Square. Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers, lived less than a mile from me. It wasn't the greatest section of town (Jersey City isn't the greatest section of town), but for six years, give or take, it was home. And by home, I mean: it was where I slept and wrote (and sometimes I ate). I worked and lived in Manhattan.

That one word up there is the important one: I wrote. I was a double major in college while completing a novel twice over. Saint Peter's, all 2,000 students of it, wasn't a party school. 80% of everyone left during the weekends.

I didn't. I wrote.

Back then, my goal was to be published straight out of college. Sell the book before I graduated. Best-seller by 25. (I'm 27 now. We see how well all that worked out. "Life is what happens when you're making other plans.")

Writing was all I'd ever done or wanted. Captain Doctor Brian, my best friend then, once told me that if I lived like I wrote, life'd be made in the shade for me (he told me that because I was shy and awkward and . . . well. Twenty, really. It happens, at that age. Or it happened to me at that age, anyway). I cast my novels in my head. I wrote my papers, but everyone on campus (all thousand students) knew me as the writer. The sometimes poet, the editor of the literary magazine: everything short of the tweed jacket with the elbow patches, basically.

During my senior year of college, I began to write a novel. I began it at an interesting juncture in my life. When I was engaged. When I stopped pretending I wanted to be a doctor, decided against medical school, switched my degree from a BS in bio to a BA in Lit (I'm six credits shy of that second degree, actually. One day I'll get it).

It was after my ex and I had broken up. It was when I'd started temping, and then producing. It was when I was living in the City, working on Madison Avenue in midtown, fresh out of college. I was like an incontinent puppy back then: I was so excitable one was never sure when I was going to piddle over myself.

I'm exaggerating, but only just.

I put everything I had into that novel, then. I was three months out of that relationship, I was six months into a job I knew I didn't want for the rest of my life: it was time to put up or shut up, and I put up as hard as I could. I wrote and I wrote and I wrote and I wrote and I wrote and I wrote, and then, finally, I had something I was . . . well, proud of. I had told this story that, before me, hadn't been there before. I'd thought I'd nailed it.

I finished it in the middle of December. I went home for two weeks. The moment I went back, the beginning of January, I started sending it out to prospective agents.

It was dumb, I know, looking back. I should have sat on it for a few weeks beforehand. Revised. Because, yeah, it basically was a first draft I was sending to agents.

Fuck did I know? (fuck do I know?)

I did all the research, and I sent queries and the first three chapters to seven agents.

And I sat back to wait.

I didn't have to wait long.

I don't remember the day I sent it out, but the week following, it started. Within three days, I got six of the seven rejection letters.

I wasn't devastated, though.

Six of the seven meant there was one out there still. By golly, that was the one who'd represent it (I told you I was deluded).

I went down south that weekend. My buddies were playing. I busted out my leather pants and danced and drank and let someone else drive me home.

Sometime during the evening, my buddy Tim mentioned a CD called *Glee* by Bran Van 3000. I trust Tim's music recommendations. I don't know why, because we never, ever agree, but if Tim mentions a band, I want to hear it. He mentioned *Glee* was one of his top-5 albums ever.

I'd just been rejected six times, and I decided I deserved a CD out of it. And a good one. And if Tim loved it so, it had to be. So I picked it up in HMV Times Square on my way to the PATH from Port Authority's Greyhound station.

When I got home, there was a letter waiting for me. It was from the last agent.

It was thick.

Now, generally, when you get a letter from an agent, it's a single slip of paper. A single page is all it ever takes to say, "Sorry, this isn't for us." Which is what 9 out of 10 of them say.

But this envelope: it wasn't a single slip of paper. I could feel that much.

Yes, I got excited.

I did not, however, open it straightaway.

Because, you see, I'd been waiting for it for so long. And I totally and completely believed that was it. That was how certain (deluded) I'd always been.

So I could put it off a few minutes. It was the start of something brand new. I had my whole life to be a best-seller:

I was only going to get that “We want to represent your novel” letter one time (kinda like realizing, “This is the last first date I’ll ever go on.” I hope I realize that someday).

And besides, there was my new CD. Celebration!

I put the CD into my stereo. Cranked it.

Went about a couple of other things. I no longer remember what.

What I remember is finally thinking, “Okay,” and going back into my bedroom, and picking up that letter.

Hefting it one last time before opening it. Before reading that someone was finally recognizing my creative genius and wanted to sell my novel for a bazillion dollars.

I slid my finger underneath the flap thingy.

I got a papercut.

So I bled on the page. And I thought: “How fitting.” I pulled it out. It was several pages. One cover, and then: What? An order form?

Dear Author:

Thank you no thank you blabbidyblabbidyblabbidy you suck etc. ad nauseum. No, we don't want to represent your shite. Seriously.

But:

If you'd like to represent your own shite, please find attached an order form for my book How to Be Your Own Agent.

Signed,

Soulless asswipe guy

Talk about defining moments.

I can't describe how I felt (I'm laughing too hard about it right now).

If I had known then what I know now, I would have not washed my hair for a week, put on my nonexistent girlfriend's jeans, and single-handedly started the emo movement. Chris Carraba can scream his infidelities, but he's got nothing on what I felt right that moment.

And I'll admit it: I was beyond religion, then, but that moment drove me to my knees. Crushed me down.

I hadn't prayed in years. I'd been to church a couple of times in the previous couple of years, but it was those Gaelic masses.

I don't know if I prayed right then.

But I did something, and I guess it amounted to prayer. It was: "Look, man, I've been doing this for so long, and I want this so badly, but maybe I'm wrong. Lord knows I could help more people, do more tangible good by becoming a doctor. Or something. Maybe a nurse. I don't know. But I'll figure it out. No problem. This . . . this is just a bunch of words. And what the hell does that mean? They're just characters on a page, and what difference is that going to make? So yeah, I'll walk away. Except . . . I've always thought this is it.

So look: if this is it, if this is what I should keep doing, fine, but give me something, here. Anything. I don't give a shit what, and I swear to Christ I'll never, ever ask for anything again, but I just need something to go on here. A sign, a message, whatthefuck ever. I'm not asking for fucking Gabriel and trumpets, or anything, but give me something."

And I stopped.

And that was when I noticed my stereo was still going. And when the next track on the CD started. I can't quote the song for copyright issues, and I'm just a broke grad student who really can't afford to pay whomever would want the money for a license to quote it, but it was a song called "Carry on."

And it basically told me to do just that.

Carry on. Don't give up.

As such things go, I'd say that moment could've been slightly more subtle. But, then, that's probably just because I'm still completely deluded.

-Will Entrekin