

2000: Homelessness

I perfected fearlessness. Insanity helped. It coiled itself around my feelings and squeezed. Whatever fear was exuded, insanity consumed. It left me fearless.

I lived in a one-bedroom downstairs apartment in a fading neighborhood. The hardwood floors and fireplace mantle had been the home of an old, old lady. She died. The neighborhood died. The bushes outside my living room windows had died. Armed with paint, shellac and hardware, I strove to rejuvenate the flat. I succeeded to a point.

As my mental illness crept over me, a shadow entered my sweet nest. I lost my job at the university English department. I sold my bed. I couldn't write a paper for my class on British literature of the 1880's. I dropped out of school and sold my TV. I ran out of cigarette money and had a garage sale out in front of the building. I sold my kitchenware and linen. The bedroom lay bare. I set up my tent in it to fill the space. Then one day, I shitted on the bedroom floor in anger. What better way of showing my anger?

A couple of days later, I cleaned up the mess and closed the bedroom door with resolve and finality. Nobody liked me enough to sleep with me. And that meant that nobody liked me enough to love me. Therefore, I'd remain alone. More anger.

I closed the blinds and slept all day. I didn't want to be around people. They hurt me, just like light hurt my eyes. I no longer had strength to suffer the multitudes. I wanted only darkness and rest.

I slept all day and ate once a day, at night. I made cow kidney and beans, grilled with lots of Crisco and wrapped in tortillas. I had little appetite. I wanted only cigarettes and pot, if I could get it. I'd watched the late-night news programs till two or three in the morning. Then I'd go out for a walk.

I usually walked to downtown, L.A., a walk of about three miles one way. I walked at a brisk clip. I didn't want anyone to speak to me. I wanted to look busy, like I was running an errand, rather than running from life. There were plenty of people to speak to, bums, drunks, nuts and the assorted refugees from the daylight hours, caught in the night by bus schedules that kept them from their warm, peopled lives.