

I wanted to write a self-help book because I wanted to read a self-help book and I didn't have any money so writing one seemed like a better idea than stealing one because I really needed help and if I was thrown in jail for stealing a self-help book I would not be in a very good place to get help so I set out to write this self-help book in exactly one week because that's how long I had before my fingers would fall off.

If you're reading this, it means that I accomplished what I set out to do and I am probably a millionaire best-selling author who still has all his fingernails.

Thanks.

–VH

Impractical Essays
or
Tapeworms Ain't Scapegoats!
-HOW TO FIGHT FOR CHANGE FROM WITHIN-

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¹ Part One has five stories with four-letter word titles and Part Two has five stories with five-letter word titles; *all* the stories have much longer alternative titles, just like the title of the book.

Chapter 1 – Book, or *Everyone Should Write a Book*

Everyone should write a book about their childhood so they don't have to talk about it or hear about anyone else's. You just swap books when you want to get to know each other better. If a memory is sparked, maybe you say, "reference Chapter 6?" And then a few minutes or an hour or a week later, they'll say, "Ah yes, Chapter 12 in mine is similar to that thing you told me to reference Chapter 6 about." If it isn't in the book, too bad. You can't talk about it. It obviously wasn't that important.

Old couples don't talk much because you eventually realize how annoying it is to tell the same stories over and over. It's easier to not speak than to worry about whether or not you're repeating yourself. With the book idea, maybe you'd see your wife looking at something on TV with a sad expression on your face, and later—after she goes to bed—you open up to Chapter 25 and remember that her dog got hit by a car on the way back from a trip to Baltimore.

"We had stopped to let Marnie go pee at a rest stop off 95, just north of the city. We'd been driving through heavy traffic and Dad was so impatient. I don't remember the name of the rest stop—some dead politician or football coach probably—but the skyline was out of view and it was dusk. Baltimore

doesn't have much of a skylight to begin with though. Marnie was on the long retractable leash and darted for a chicken bone in the road (the rest stop had a KFC). Some equally impatient Dad was driving too fast and squashed her in a flash. It was sickening."

You were watching the Yankees play the Orioles at Camden Yards and Derek Jeter's son Ereik had just hit what would be the game-winning homer. It was the last pro baseball season to be played in America. It was also "bark in the park²" night, which is when you're allowed to bring your dog to the baseball game. A real emotional double whammy, you thought. Her tears were warranted.

² see Chapter 5 – Bark

Chapter 2 – EreK, or *Daddy IS Best*

What can we learn from the downfall of EreK Jeter? Was he just like his daddy if his daddy hadn't gotten the "D"? And by that I mean, what can we learn from a name? EreK Jeter is a fictional character I've created. Let me tell you about him. He's going to be the main character of this book within a book, which is actually just a short story compilation called "Impractical Essays" disguised as a collection of nonfiction 'think-pieces' or something.

The saying "daddy knows best" is a good one, I had always felt. But, when I interviewed EreK Jeter for this book of essays (wink), my impression of it turned on a dime, just like his daddy turning two (aka a double play).

"First of all, that expression is rendered meaningless when you're the offspring of Derek Jeter," EreK—or "E" as he preferred—said with a chuckle. "How can daddy know best when daddy is best." This wasn't a question.

I've been writing books for decades, on sports and other great topics. And I can say with absolute certainty that Derek Jeter was the best ball player who has ever lived.

What happened in his retirement is another story altogether, of course. I think we can all agree

joining ISIS and getting blown up in an Iraqi mosque were not the best post-career moves.

E had a lot to live up to... on the baseball diamond. And a lot to live down in the game called life.

"You never had the chance to turn two. Does that bug you? You know, given it was your daddy's signature move?"

"Not really. I think being a career DH helped ease the pressure a bit.

E-Jeets is obese. In fact, when he retired in the middle of the 2039 season for the Montreal Moose he was officially the heaviest player of all-time, weighing in at close to 600lbs.

"A lot of people don't realize I won more World Series titles than my dad. Six. One for every hundred of my pounds," he said, jiggling his stomach in a comic manner. "Of course, the layout of the league is different now, with just the eight teams, and all the games being played in tiny-ass, former Canadian minor league parks. But... just the same. Major Leagues is Major Leagues."

"Can we talk about ISIS," I ask, attempting to address the elephant in the room.

"I thought we made it clear that was off limits," E sneered at his publicist/wife Sharon in the corner of the room.

The rumors had been swirling for years: that E had secretly taken over ISIS after his father had been killed. "The answer," he said with a devilish grin, "is no."

There would be no more questions. I was soon shown the door and was on a plane back to Bangor in the only inhabitable state left in America, beautiful Maine. And I left that interview with Ere Jeter thinking about the nuclear fallout to the south of me. Would it be more toxic than the fallout when I publish this piece? I wondered.

As I exited the E-Jeets residence, he started blaring the minor 1962 hit song "Ginny Come Lately" performed by Bryan Hyland (most famous for "Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polkadot Bikini"). I'm not sure how he knew my wife's name was Ginny and I took this as a threat.

Chapter 3 – Sans, or *The Sans of Comic Times*

Comic Sans is one of the best fonts out there and just because some folks with clout, or swollen with the idea of such, decided it was bad now nobody gets to use it? This is not a world I wanna live in. When are people gonna realize that there is no good and there is no bad. There aren't even opinions because we can't truly think about anything outside of the context of how every other human being on the planet could potentially frame said opinion. Ergo, no opinions.

When you say or think "Comic Sans is bad" you are simply affirming your personal brand. "Having a personal brand" is a meaningless but extremely popular concept in today's media-drenched age. The effect of personal brands is twofold. On the one hand (the hand that feeds you), you are subconsciously reinforcing the corporate, capitalist mantra that everything and anything (even your life) is a commodity worth sculpting in the same way advertising works to sell you toothpaste or underpants. On the other hand (your hand), you are perpetuating the great delusion that having a specific personality is important (ie, Snowflake Theory) and not simply the byproduct of chance and boredom.

A typeface can't be good or bad just like a terrorist can't be good or bad.

Take EreK Jeter's retirement letter. Posted on the internet in Comic Sans. That's all anybody focused on. Not the fact that he retired on the day after his daddy Derek died in Iraq following a season where he led MLB in home runs for a third consecutive year. Hmmm. Seems fishy to me.

Chapter 4 – Clam, or *Keep Clam and Carry OMG*

Sometimes I think about life inside a clam. But that's because I think of the clam as the shell and not the gross, slimy organism inside the shell. When someone says "clam," what do you think? You probably think of a slightly ajar shell with two cartoon eyeballs peering back out at you. We have only the entertainment industry to thank for our distorted reality.

Memes are like the clams of the internet.

When the glorious photos returned from Iraq after the assassination of Derek Jeter he was in fact wearing a meme T-shirt that read "Keep Clam and Carry OMG." This stupefied a large segment of the populus, including me. Nobody knew what the hell it meant. Was it simply a 'shitpost' fashion statement, or was it something deeper?

Most people assumed that it was a reference to the hit Pixar film *Clams*, starring that loveable scamp³ Bertrand in the lead role. Little did I know I would find the truth soon enough.

³ This is not a reference to shrimp scampi or it's lesser beloved cousin "clams scampi," though both are delicious.

Chapter 5 – Bark, or *My First-Hand Account at The Bark in the Park Day Massacre, Toronto, 2042*

I didn't want to be the one who discovered the truth. The real seekers seldom are.

When EreK Jeter announced his unretirement, I booked my first-class flight to Toronto for the game between his former squad the Montreal Moose and his new team, Toronto's own Frisky Ferrets.

The Frisky Ferrets were penciled in as the odds-on favorites to win it all after it was revealed that E-Jeets had gone through triple gastric bypass (he actually had his stomach replaced with that of a large sea otter's in an experimental surgery that could fill of the pages of its own book). In a nod to his final game in the states so many years ago, Toronto decided to stage a "bark in the park" night. It was also announced that Jeter the Second would be providing each canine friend with their very own 'wearable water bowl'. Perhaps the pet owners should have known something was amiss when their dogs were all outfitted with the strange contraptions in large tents outside the stadium. Many of the survivors recall the pained yelps when the apparatus was literally stuck into their mouths and around their necks.

What happened next is well-documented so I will spare you, dear reader, the gory details once again.

For weeks, and then months, nobody knew what made the dogs go crazy. It was of course assumed that it had something to do with the 'wearable water bowls' and, in turn, Erek Jeter — who suspiciously drove one of the batting helmet shaped golf carts right out of the building when the chaos broke out, allegedly running over several fans and possibly a few mad dogs in the process.

Of course they made the (correct) decision to implode the stadium in honor of the dead (212 mauled by canine, and another 456 killed in the ensuing stampede). And the entire league soon shuddered. In Morris Brimhold's book *The Last Baseball Game*, he writes:

And where was that faded, newly trimmed-down star, Erek Jeter? Was he responsible? Rumors started to swirl that he moved back to the Lower States — he was born in Florida, after all — now a decrepit nuclear wasteland. After years of theorizing that nothing survived and no living things remained, recent drone footage has begun to paint a different story...

In the short time since that bestseller's publication, technology has vastly improved. You can now get an Amazon Basics Lower States-Approved Biosuit for under \$300. So that's what I did.

When I found Erek Jeter down in what used to be Fort Lauderdale, he was not in good shape. Roaming alongside the other unrecognizable mutant people and animals, I confronted him and asked him for an interview. He denied my request of course but he did hand me a plastic full of tiny dot-like creatures darting around in liquid. "The last of their kind," he mumbled through the hazmat mask⁴.

When I returned home to Canada, I had the contents of the bag examined by a top-notch science lab. The results were stunning. There were over a 100 microscopic clam-like animals swimming in the water. When the scientists enhanced the view, we could see that they each had unique cartoon, Pixar-esque eyeballs and seemed to be chanting, "ENTER DOG BRAINS. DOG KILLS PEOPLE."

I had cracked the case and hit a grand CLAM.

⁴ Full disclosure: I think this is what he said but cannot be 100% sure

Part 2

Chapter 6: Poems, or This Isn't Actually a Self-Help Book, It's a Book of Poetry (Sorry)

I was lost. That's for sure at least. I was constantly wondering why humans needed food instead of the desire to author self-help books. And then I found a tapeworm in my dog's poop. The little white guy was barely moving. What is this odd piece of rice doing here? My dog hasn't eaten rice. It's a strange thing holding a piece of dog poop in your hand, just a few inches from your face, staring intensely. Waiting for the thing that isn't supposed to be there to show you it's alive.

I imagined myself as a tapeworm. A little white guy barely moving in the excrement of some other, massive beast. But that metaphor was so bad I needed to take a shower.

*INSERT AN IMAGE OF THE AUTHOR TAKING A
SHOWER UNTIL ALL OF THE HOT WATER IS GONE*

Fully clean, it hit me. I am the tapeworm *and* the host. We all are. We're all harboring little villains and, like in any good movie, these little villains only want to be our friends. But only the fully realized protagonist can make that happen. Would you like to make that happen?

Chapter 7: Scape, or On the Origin of Scapegoats AKA “Escape Goats”

It’s about time we talk about scapegoats.

That’s for sure at least. We could talk about time, perhaps the ultimate scapegoat, but let’s save that for a later time, specifically Chapter 88 (if you want to skip ahead, and by all means, please do⁵).

The word “scapegoat” is actually a modern bastardization of the phrase “escape goat.” I’m talking about the Escape Goats of the Mahi Mahi Tribe circa 1947. The Mahi Mahi were a Caribbean tribe of little people who lived on a small island that’s currently owned by [REDACTED]. To escape political persecution, the Mahi Mahi inserted themselves into the colons of a rare breed of goats and fled the island under the guise of the great migrating ocean goats’ trek across the Atlantic to the Florida Keys.

Unfortunately, none of the Mahi Mahi survived the trip. They all drowned inside the bodies of the rare goats, furry coffins on the ocean blue. Of course, in their honor, we named the fish after them. A fact lost on the masses enjoying a fish taco or a blackened Mahi Mahi sandwich with a spicy tartar sauce. But maybe it hasn’t been lost. Maybe people don’t want to think about the corpses of little people lodged up the butts of wet goats. It’s all so terribly sad. All of it.

⁵ There is no Chapter 88 — this is also a metaphor.

Chapter 8: Smart, or You Think You're So Smart, Don't You?

I'm going to connect the dots quickly. I'm not going to string you along. You're quick, though. You might already be there.

There are always things living inside of you: ideas, parasites, dreams, worms, etc. Dead little people? Sure. What happened to those sea goats in the Caribbean, those unwilling hosts? Extinct. Things dying, inside and out, real and abstract, sometimes in unison, forevermore: that will always be the crux of the human condition.

INSERT AN IMAGE OF A DROWNING SEA GOAT

We're beyond metaphors here, pal. You're either with me or you're not. Everything is one. If you disagree, put this book down right now. If you're reading on an electronic device, turn it off. Get some lighter fluid and cover the book or device. Let it burn.

Personally, I hope you're reading on an electronic device. I'm imagining some blue sparks among the flames. They look cool.

**Chapter 9: Bible, or Boyo's Bible —
A Terrible Parable (Penultimate Interlude)**

I wonder if I'll ever be attacked by an animal?

Is what Samuel Boyo wondered as he noticed streaks of dark yellow on the dead grass of his front lawn. This was the kind of grass that died on purpose during the fall and winter months. It has a name, this type of lawn, but Sam didn't know it. *Are these spots, which are clearly from the dog's piss, going to remain when the grass turns green again? Can dead grass die if it's already dead? I have the seppuku of lawn types.* Funny he knew the name for the ancient, ritualistic Japanese samurai suicide act by way of disembowelment and/or beheading but not what breed of grass grew in his front yard.

There were other words he was destined to never know how to spell without the help of technology. For example, "diarrhea." He would type "D-I-A" and let the computer take it from there. This is the apex of human intelligence: to know and trust in a friend who realizes you already know how to spell words like "diary" and "diamond" — you're no baby.

"We live in wonderful times," he told his daughter (without expounding on the thing about spelling diarrhea). Then the asteroid hit.

Chapter 10: Snoop or How Easy It is to Forget the Hot, Unholy Idea

He could only remember having been taught one thing —

Snoop Dogg is on TV every second of the day. if you don't see him, change the channel. He will exist in this fashion for perpetuity. In 500 years an A.I. Snoop will be in even more commercials, hosting every show and occasionally rapping. There will be microscopic Snoops in every pixel in every image on every screen. Mark my words.

— but he didn't learn it and he didn't remember it. It was a constant, living strain that boiled within, something he created or was, as is more likely the case, indebted with at birth: the need, the feeling, the impulse, the urge, the desire, the many entangled base emotions which amount to the now, the need to see and catalog everything as an artistic event, worth-poetry in an ever crumbling economy of the mind, the persona, both ego and id united. This was literally everything: not just the words but how they looked on the page or screen, the air, every passing

bird, unsent social media replies, the number 431 (or better yet: 4,312), a photo of sweaty laundry, several thousand photos of strangers compiled into a gif and displayed so fast it became an unrecognizable blur of humanity, zombie moose and the clickbait he'd clicked on about zombie moose, lasagna, how "the crow king" wasn't his idea, the seemingly innocuous lies that add up, did I mention lasagna (apparently, yes, and recently so — I must be hungry), being antisemitic towards semicolons, this moment (up to this moment right here and no further, for now), dead bugs in a mason jar, solving for n and why n and why italics and why even MATH (*man*), the ugly list(s) itself/themselves, a meatball parm sub (half or whole, it always come back to food — don't you see), the holy idea, the unholy idea, the hot, unholy idea.

***iTunes Exclusive Bonus Track or Here's an
Extra Piece of Writing at No Charge***⁶⁷

Homeowner Billy and Homeless Man Bobby were enemies. But it didn't have to be that way. Landlord Lance was secretly stirring the pot and creating animosity between the two neighbors (if you can call the unhoused 'your neighbor' and I think that you should). Part of the reason is that LL Lance kept poking the earworm (via SSM text message) that HM Bobby wanted to be referred to as 'unhoused' and not 'homeless' deeper into HO Billy's canals until the thought, a lie, was cold hard fact, stagnating in the lake of his brain. So when HO Billy would sarcastically call him 'Unhoused Bob', HM Bobby would fume, wondering what this otherwise brotherman had against him. He didn't care about the name. He didn't care about branding. It was the tone. There was a time they got along.

In fact, when they were boys, Billy and Bobby had been best friends and Lance was just a pest on the hill. LL was so jealous of their friendship. He would secretly spy on them when they went down to the river to kill frogs and sometimes he would inject super steroids into the frogs before they got there

⁶ Which is ironic because this book is free!

⁷ You could also call this a 'hidden track' and maybe that works better in this book .'. music analogy?

so that the frogs had a fighting change and one time actually a frog did in fact punch the shit out of Bobby and put him in the hospital for a week (whether or not this is why he became homeless and Billy became a homeowner is fodder for another discussion).

Needless to say, Lance was still jealous all these many years later. Perhaps more so than ever before. Even if Bobby and Billy weren't necessarily 'friends', they had a rapport. Billy actually would watch Bobby take shits in the woods by his house, which he owned, not because of any weird sex thing but because he was happy that his old friend was keeping regular out on the streets and he wanted to make sure nobody else was watching who might call the cops for indecent exposure or whatever the crime is for public pooping even though wild animals did it all the time without penalty. (Oh, to be reincarnated as a goose! Billy secretly thought.)

So one day, Lance went down to the local pub and walked up to Billy — who was outside flicking cigarette ashes onto Bobby and the other unhoused or homeless, in a ploy to 'fit in' — he said, "Did you know I'm your landlord Lance?"

"Holy shit," Billy said. "I didn't. What's up dude?"

“Well,” Lance said, shyly. “Do you think, oh I don’t know, in this crazy world we call life, that maybe a landlord and a renter could be, well, friends?”

And with that something instantly sparked in both Billy, his friends (all blue-collar and/or middle-class type worker dudes), as well as Bobby and the rest of the homeless guys. They surrounded Lance, tied him up and threw him into the back of Chet’s pickup truck. They chopped off his hand so that they could unlock his phone (even though they could have just pressed his finger up to the phone) in order to map out GPS directions to Lance’s house on the hill. When they got there, Bobby said to Lance, who was bleeding to death, “a landlord never shows his face, silly.”

The group started a fire and began to sing Bob Dylan’s “The Times They are A-Changin’” as they stomped around the flames. Lance began to cry a little, though — truth be told — it was the least lonely he’d felt in years.