

# **LIVE FOR A LIVING**

**B Y B U D D Y W A K E F I E L D**

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A publication of Write Bloody Publishing, Nashville, TN

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\* indicates journal entry

# INTRODUCTION

There's this gracious intangible thing with lots of names like "Peace," "Love," "God," "Salvation," "Happiness," "Equanimity." Call it anything ya wanna call it, but everybody – whether they admit it or not – wants it. It doesn't speak or move or invade or deny or convince. It just is, like air. Exactly like air. Whenever I find I've trailed off too far from my awareness of it, I know that I can write my way back inside. It's why I write. When it's time to heal and bring chaotic thoughts to resolve, I write. It's so much the answer for me that my body wants to tell you too. So I perform what I write.

You are reading the words of a sucker, a sucker for solution, and catharsis, and clarity, revival, redemption, and release. Taking the time to write my way back Home, through any given space that might slip between me and Happiness, is my life's work. And for a moody guy like me, there is much work to be done.

But be a little leery of people like me in my current state. Despite my proper intentions and inherent good will, I am addicted to revival and redemption and release. In order to be revived one must first be exhausted. In order to be redeemed one first has to fail. In order to be released we have to first be trapped. Inspiration can turn into a tricky cycle if we're not careful. Sometimes I'm ignorant to the rest of my elements when I show so much preference to inspiration, like massages, or waterslides. Those things are expensive.

Upon fully realizing the circle I've been allowing myself to run in, I wrote myself the following garbled note:

*...so don't come to me, poet, with your ink and your holy experience  
sittin' there all raw pretending not to be,  
all that vulnerability bubblin' under yer surface  
actin' unconscious of how awkward you make things at the dinner table.  
You scathe your observations, then bathe 'em then  
Call 'em all out on stages*

*reaffirming that you're right about a thing or two  
because you didn't get enough confidence  
from the people who swiped you through school.*

*Approval junky.*

*Pressure cooker.*

*Smoke stacker*

*steady whistles*

*speed tears streamin'*

*exhausted from excuses*

*still hopin' we can hover on*

*holy*

*when you're finally finished claiming*

*THERE IS NOTHING WRONG!*

*THERE'S NOT ANYTHING WRONG!*

*IT'S JUST YOU AND ME, BUDDY*

*AND A TICKING TIME BOMB!*

*THERE!*

*Right THERE*

*inside the lie,*

*the one you've been telling yourself*

*the entire time you were dying to walk away,*

*Heart Wormer,*

*Mr. Self-Murder,*

*walk away.*

*Still yourself.*

Then, fter tubehopping through alotta thoughts that night about how much due credit I'm capable of withholding from myself (e.g. I've never really walked around pretending there's nothing wrong), I interviewed my strengths and ended with a series of statements:

*You ever get the feelin' that one day you're just gonna snap?*

***No, I don't.***

*Anybody else in here feel like a ticking time bomb?*

***No, it's just something interesting to say.***

*I'm no longer interested in watching you rise from the falls you keep taking in vain just for a reason to stand.*

*My favorite thing to do is see things clearly.*

*I ain't sayin' revival, redemption and release are unnatural or bad, I'm just sayin' that when you're tired of the rise and the fall and the ensuing circle, walk away.*

*Still yourself.*

*Nothing more or less happened than what happened.*

This book is for those of us who've experienced the moment and did not need any other answer than what happened.

While others are losing trust that it is possible, it is still possible.

The pace of my career up to the summer of 2006 was still manageable enough that I was able to answer most of the emails from people who support my art. At a certain point, though, after Sage Francis and his fans also put their trust in my CD, *Run on Anything*, I began receiving more messages from folks than I was able to answer with quality of thought (even though I still had time to at least read them), so I made this journal entry on my website:

## ***Inward Bound***

July 6, 2006

*Spread me out and run highway lines up my throat. Tire eyes. Sleepless. I feel like a prick when I don't answer to each person individually, because I see you. It feels good to know you noticed and that you give a shit. Sometimes I'm juggling too many skyscrapers on full plates to respond. It don't mean I'm not thanking you directly from the goose bump in my heartbeat. Much Love & Respect, Bed*

It should become obvious that regardless of the titles throughout this book, anything with a date is a journal entry and anything with only a title only is an intended poem. Journal entries have been edited for grammar, succinctness and coherency, not so much for creative writing. I wanted to leave who I was in the moment intact. Despite whoever I claim to be in the varying signatures after each journal entry, it's me.

There are an immeasurable number of individuals to whom I owe thanks for contributing to my ongoing account of waking up, so I will herein stick to a very select few who have most immediately affected my career and made this book possible:

My mother, the Guitar Repair Woman, who personifies the words *won't give up*.

My producer, Jon Berardi, who happens to be about as close to a perfect friend that anyone could ask for.

My publisher, Derrick Brown, for being my creative role model, for inflating me with laughter, and for showing me the good that comes from not trying to be perfect.

Sage Francis, for believing in me enough to chuck me way the fuck outta my comfort zone into a genre I would otherwise have never fully experienced, and gifting me with immeasurable experience and exposure.

Ani DiFranco and her mother, Elizabeth, for grace unspoken, and for granting me the opportunity to see all my delusions of rock star grandeur come to life.

And to Remond Liesting for revealing the friendship and Love I aspire to. Though any given circumstance can be a catalyst for “The Butterfly Effect,” Remond’s wings seem to have caused my greatest tidal waves. I would say he is the reflection and teacher I trust more than anyone in my life, but he taught me how digressive it is to speak in superlatives.

I feel very fortunate indeed that life has led me here. Welcome. Thanks very much for taking the time to support my work. Means the world to me to get to do what I love for a living. Hopefully you’ve arrived here in an effort to see more, with new eyes, and not just in terms of how naked everything can get. Let’s try doin’ this openly human, together, adjust the tuners, go vulnerable (big symptom of individuality), cards on the table, big me big you.

Confidentiality does not exist here, just respect.

With Much Hope and Excitement for Right Now,

Buddy Wakefield



# WHEN YA GET BACK HOME

NOVEMBER 27, 2005

It's 5am Sunday morning. Just woke up from a nightmare. I was parked on the side of a neighborhood street with two cop cars that kept shifting their parked positions around me. There was a pick-up truck parked ahead of the rest of us. All four parked cars were on varying sides of the street.

There was someone in my passenger's seat telling me to do things like turn off my bright lights, take my foot off the accelerator, things to keep the cops from gettin' out, comin' over and effin' with me.

It was dark and I was paranoid. I've always resented the fact that when a cop drives by I feel paranoid instead of protected.

I realized we were parked on a street, across from the house where an old friend from high school lived. Said friend was quite likely the most impacting person in my first twenty years other than my mother.

I did not look over to see the voice of reason in my passenger's seat but I'm sure it was the man in the mirror.

My paranoia balled up like a sweaty fist. Don't take your eyes off the road or the speedometer or the gauges, and *hold steady*. I kept telling myself these things. But we were still parked.

The passenger in my car finally encouraged me to pull out and go around the cops and the pick-up truck and just drive. The truck turned on its headlights and pulled out behind me as I passed it. I grew very fearful. At the end of the street I came up on the stop sign too fast, braking just [cross] hairs from the perpendicular traffic. I worried how the truck would not have enough time to stop before ramming into me from behind.

No damage. I signaled proper and turned left. So did the truck.

*Stop following.*

*Leave me alone.*

In a fraction of a second and a fracture of light, the truck threw on its high beams just before I hit some kind of thick unseen slick in the road. My car spun around fast, screeching, whiplash, stopped, stillness. The entire time, of course, death was upon me and – just as I suspected that the moment would murder me – I woke up with the man in the mirror asking why I did not for one second realize that every single person in the dream was intending good on me.

\*\*\*

I had just finished a mini-tour in the Northeast, had flown from Buffalo to Atlanta, and was awaiting my connection flight in a packed airport restaurant. There were two older men sitting at the bar next to me with their computers open, talking about which companies to buy out. Their immediate net gain on any given purchase would be no less than \$300,000.00. They were impressed with themselves (or maybe that was me), and trying to be professional as opposed to giggly about having the upper hand in their situations. Their puffy chests were invasive. They spoke loud enough for others to hear about all that money and status. Both they and I had ordered the same meal, which – of course – required sauce.

They did not touch their sides of sauce. So, as they volleyed job-specific terms and kept their backs straight, my inner classicist kicked in. I (poorly dressed and lookin' a little rugged from travel) leaned over, pointed at their sides of sauce and said, "You kids gonna eat your sauce?" I said it in the tone of Big Me - little you. I said it so they couldn't necessarily tell, but I was looking for one of them to be weak about it.

What the hell was that? My way of condescending to two people I believed probably talked down to everyone around them on a regular basis. Was I trying

to get back at them on behalf of poor people everywhere, or was I entertaining myself? I was filled with such judgment that they were just another pair of corporate sluts. I didn't even think to consider how they might have been funding a school for altruists, or lepers. Realistically, my instincts probably weren't far off, but who the hell am I to create such catty animosity? And why the hell would I want to?

They gladly gave me one of their sauces.

\*\*\*

I walked out of the restaurant bar and headed toward my gate. The first thing I noticed at a glance was two different men in conversation, both unkempt in sloppy jeans. One had an untrimmed mustache, worked hands and an aged windbreaker. He says to the other, "You get a real toughness growing up in the navy..."

As I passed them and giggled, visions of navy uniforms in mind, I cranked my neck around to size them up, to get a better look at the supposed tough guy. The back of his windbreaker read: GIRLS SWIM TEAM.

I pegged his stupidity for a moment, then recognized it as my own.

\*\*\*

I was a good Texas son for Thanksgiving. There was only one day when my mom and stepdad and stepbrother and I would all have a whole day off together. I was ready to embrace the week with a great attitude and went for the last thing any of them would expect... I suggested we all go get family portraits! I was hoping for the old school Olan Mills type situation... but, even better: SEARS.

It was a wonderful time. Our photographer had a wonderful time. We had a wonderful time. We were dressed in variations of red, white and blue, no less. I felt appreciation for the folks. The pictures came out perfect. We ate at the aquarium in Kemah that night, raced remote-controlled boats, strolled, saw sunset.

I worked out every morning to start the day. Filled up Mom's gas tank. My stepbrother and I went out a couple nights together for the first time in our lives, had drinks, talked eye to eye. I had gifts for my stepfather's side of the family that I bought because I really wanted to, and felt joy picking them out. They had always thought of me on the holidays. There was even a dinner date with an old friend. We had gone to her senior Prom together and had watched each other grow up through a phase or two. We met in Baytown, where I lived from 6th-12th grade, mostly.

\*\*\*

I drove into Baytown four hours early to have a look around, observe changes, visit folks, and remember back to where I slaughtered the inner lamb. The moment I crossed over the bridge, that familiar smell of copper/diesel/leather/sulfur/sex seeped in, caked on, and all my insecurities came with it, highlighted, pumped my stomach.

*Everybody gives me reasons why their town will be bombed first.  
It's a souped-up sense of self-importance...*

Everybody's got a story. So does everybody's town. Most of us pretend we had it the best or worst through some aspect of where we were brought up. It's foolish pride. I get it, so I'm not vying for bragging rights when I tell you that Baytown is a place where mostly packs of wolves take pride in being the worst of the worst; a place where no child – if presented with the facts – would ever choose to grow up.

Despite all the greatness still in my friends who continue to live there, and the good-hearted people who taught me good-heartedness, Baytown itself is an infection. As well as having one of the largest ports in the world (6th), 75% of the town is owned by Exxon/Mobile. Formerly in the Guinness Book of World Records, Baytown boasts the largest refinery in North America (now second in the world, behind a refinery in Scotland). But it doesn't end at just one of the world's largest refineries... Collectively, it is part of a mammoth chain of Texas towns that cannot be stopped except by law of nature. Refineries spill out of Baytown in every

direction covering the 45-minute drive down to the Gulf of Mexico, across to Houston, in every direction. Exxon/Mobil, BP/Amoco, Motiva [Shell/Texaco (Equilon)], Monsanto, Crown Central, Lyondell Citgo, Brown & Root (Halliburton), Valero, Total Petrochemicals, Atofina, Haltermann Products, Premcor, Marathon Ashland, Chevron... Smoke stacks as far as the eye can see. When ya grow up breathing the stink, watching the sky squat overhead just suckin' it up, it's easy to become it. Iron lung.

It has always seemed strange to me when the root of the problem is where the least number of people act to heal the situation (e.g. Hitler's Germany). Maybe they're too close, hopped up on co-dependency and fear, fooled by the cattle drive. It's a harmful environment to say the least, but they will defend it to the death. The bonds I held growing up in Texas were incredible, and we took great pride in the shit we endured, the drugs we absorbed, the fights we created, the uninformed rebellion, and in the deep limits we imposed on ourselves.

Combined with the Houston smog is scorching heat and humidity, biting insect and critter manifestations I do not know how to name, toxic dumping with untold side-effects, awful smell, rampant misinformation among the foolishly prideful (*many* of whom *still* tout rebel flags and use N-words with zero consideration of their snowball effect). There's the far-right conservative base, the racial tension, the embrace of trashy attitudes, the creativity-smothering machismo, the blind group-think... Baytown fed my hostility in all its dismal, violent and life-sucking forms.

As I sat at a neighborhood pool hall, hearing all the updates and rundowns from and about my close classmates and childhood friends, I'll admit to the heartbreak. I'll admit to giving myself some extra credit for the kick-ass choices I've made. I'll admit to thanking my constantly-changing lucky stars for ever leaving that place with so much hope and a smile in the first place.

It was incredible to hear and learn of the ones who turned (or are turning) out to be content, happy, alive. Some are still there in Baytown, and their own experiences outshine any narrow blanket statements I can make...

\*\*\*

Finished “Knulp” by Hermann Hesse and have started Ken Wilbur’s “A Theory of Everything.”

The best part of my trip was petting sting rays under the Kemah Aquarium with my mother and Jeffrey, my brother.

Great Day Ahead, Hoss

*The following was written as an introduction to the poem My Town. I didn't know it would be so well-received as a performance piece able to stand on its own. I wrote this intro in September of 2006 so I could banter with audiences then seamlessly start the actual poem "My Town" during live performances. Now I'm able to use both the intro and the poem at shows individually or as a whole.*

## MY TOWN INTRO

My town is cute  
like a bumper sticker  
like when Christians sport **POWER OF PRIDE** bumper stickers.  
What is it you don't understand about pride being a deadly sin?

My town is cute like **GOD BLESS AMERICA** bumper stickers.  
Judging by our excessive luxuries, those stickers really work.  
Now if we can just get God to bless the whole world.

Alix Olsen's bumper sticker reads **I LOVE MY COUNTRY.**  
**I JUST THINK WE SHOULD START SEEING OTHER PEOPLE.**

But my town doesn't see other people.  
We're just too cute  
like the difference between what we say and what we do  
like the fact that violence in any form  
is sanctioned by the government as criminal or insane  
unless they're the ones who commit it.

My town is cute like people who still shop at Wal-Mart and claim to be patriotic.  
Stop it.

My town is cute in the way we worry about the gays  
fuckin' up our family values and the sanctity of marriage  
yet we still let our children watch television shows like *Wife Swap*,  
*The Bachelor*, *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*, *American Idolatry*  
and *Fox News*.

My town is so cute that – check this out –  
*once, six years ago,*  
there were some brown people (*boogity boogity*),  
they attacked two of our tallest buildings  
and killed a shitload of our innocent citizens,  
kinda like we did  
in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador,  
Tanzania, Mozambique, Vietnam, Afghanistan,  
Hiroshima, Philippines, Kosovo, Bolivia,  
Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Dresden,  
Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti, Indonesia,  
East Timor, Cambodia, Iraq, (what the fuck  
are we doing with Israel?)  
and my cute town pretends we never saw it [or had it] coming  
so in a perpetual attempt to save cute face  
we've waged a war on terror about as effective as the war on drugs.  
My town is cute when we wage these wars in the name of God.

As many as 20% of the polar bears on the Northern Ice Cap are hermaphrodites  
due to PCBs being dumped into the ocean.  
You won't hear about that shit on the news because it's too cute,  
like a wolf giving birth through its penile canal (*True*).

My town is cute like a 300lb tumor manifesting hair and teeth inside of it  
grown from the body of a 210 pound agoraphobic woman,  
cute like competitive poetry, the history of Scientology, plastic surgery,  
and refined sugars, cute  
like a man swallowing an 8-ball of cocaine  
then jumping from a 5-story building to escape police,  
getting up and running away from it all.

Y'all, *this*  
this is a true story:

The first time My Town saw the sky  
it sucker punched us in the throat  
left us breathless  
said, "I'm gonna keep you awake some nights  
without touching you  
you'll make it up, *the pain*,  
you always do."

