

1996

**Journal: 12 December 1996 through 15 January 1997**

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**Journal: 12 December 1996 through 15 January 1997**

12 December, 1996 (Thursday)

First day in a new city—I'm trying not to be too much Kerouac, but. Phoned Mother with news of my safe arrival, she was out with Rachel. Seems like they've been doing a lot of things together lately. This makes me nervous.

Unpacked some but it's just so much. I kept stopping, seized by annoying little questions. What if I can't do the job? How will it be, living alone? When Mr. James called to say he had an opening, I'd rushed to take it. I couldn't imagine spending anymore time at home, working for Frank. But now that I'm here it just seems so . . . bold. I guess it's time to grow up, Ryan.

I feel like talking to my father, but I don't really know what I'd say. Ours has never been the type of relationship where you can just call because you feel like it. You basically have to have something planned. Anyway, he and Libby are in Cabo San Lucas.

12 December, 1996—later

Went to get groceries, and I ran into no one I knew, anywhere. So many different types of people—not sure if this whole thing is right, but you know, it's really too late. Tired. Off to bed.

12 December, 1996—later

Too tired to sleep. Having horrendous moving dreams—I'm that second grader at a new school, the one nobody would play with. Don't worry, you'll make friends. You'll make friends. . . Go to sleep, counting friends.

13 December, 1996 (Friday)

Mother called, wanted to know how things were. I didn't have much to report. I start work on Monday, and I met with Mr. James earlier today. We discussed "business," and I pictured myself turning into an old man. Not just any old man, but an old man that sells nautical supplies.

I've been reading too much and consequently thinking too much.

15 December, 1996 (Sunday)

Went for a walk yesterday and found a great bread shop. Bought a honey-wheat loaf and ate it with some Country Crock. Rachel hates Country Crock, won't eat anything but real butter. Turned the TV on again to have voices in the room—I have cable left over from the guys who lived here before. Please, I need to sleep tonight, but the car horns keep me up with myself.

Spoke with Rachel earlier—does it matter whom called whom? I did. Just wanted to talk to her, hear a familiar voice that would be happy to hear mine. We said that we missed each other. She reminded me that Chicago's only six hours by car, one by plane,

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seven and a half by bus. Somehow I feel a lot farther.

18 December, 1996 (Wednesday)

I've been working so much; there's a lot to learn. Mr. James has lately taken to calling me "Rye," or "Rye-Guy," for some ungodly reason. We've had exactly two drinks exactly one time after work. In a bar with very thick glasses and waiters in black tuxes. He paid. You can't even call it a "bar," it's more of a chic restaurant with a small bar inside of it.

Get up, catch the "L," eat a doughnut with coffee, work, go to lunch, work, go home, watch TV, eat, shower, get to bed.

I've taken to reading the newspaper and laughing wryly to myself at the injustice and sheer crime of the world, especially in cities. I've taken to becoming my father.

19 December, 1996 (Thursday)

Libby called today from Boston. They're *finally* back from their trip, and Father is so relaxed now. I *simply* have to come up for the holidays, it just wouldn't be the *same*.

This entry looks and sounds like a Salinger character. Am I so sarcastic? It's very difficult to hand-write italics convincingly.

If I were a Salinger character I would shun italics, snub them, and I would instead talk in bold. I would marry Franny Glass and I would be happy, because bold.

20 December, 1996 (Friday)

Wrote a very bad poem today about a memory of my Creative Writing professor in college. Professor Ruiz, he was about sixty-five, and one day in class he read a poem about old age. His hand was shaking so much that he finally had to set the poem down to finish it. I just remember the sound of the paper in his hand, shaking with such a painfully embarrassing rhythm. Shutting my eyes so tightly, hoping that would distract me from the incessant sound of old age.

Should probably think about getting home for Christmas. Flights are probably booked up. Mother called today to remind me of this. Oh yes, and I must find something very wonderful and personal for Rachel, too. Oh, yes.

Won't be heading to Boston for the holidays. Mother would die, and Libby's family'll be there, anyways.

22 December, 1996 (Sunday)

Still not sure how I'm getting home. Mother called again, absolutely furious with me. She decided I couldn't handle it myself, and called all the airlines, trying to find me a spot. There's one, tomorrow night. I'll have to take off at least three days from work. I hope Mr. James'll understand.

Still don't have anything for Rachel.

23 December, 1996 (Monday)

Spent all day at work worrying about Rachel's gift. Ran to a nice jewelry store to shell out too much money for something she'll like, and also something that doesn't

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come in a box that would remind one of a ring. The saleslady made a sizeable commission on a small gold watch. I wonder if Rachel needs a watch?

I'm on the plane home, and I think we're almost there. Flying is always so inspirational. Going home for the holidays and all that, there's snow on the ground in Chicago and Cleveland. And in the air, between.

25 December, 1996 (Wednesday)

Nothing's changed at all here. Mother and Frank are still extremely happy with each other; Rachel is still beautiful and perfect and on the verge of too much. We ate Christmas Eve dinner at her parents' house, and spent today with Mom and Frank, just like we do every year. The word "marriage" came up in conversation yesterday, in front of everyone, at dinner. I think it was Rachel's mom who started it, or her Uncle Eli. I don't remember.

Rachel said she loved the watch, wanted to know "how did [I] know?" and assured me twenty times that it's "perfect, absolutely." She ran around showing everyone, and they smiled tight smiles. They'd all asked Santa for a ring.

26 December, 1996 (Thursday)

I'll admit it is kind of strange to move to a new city and not have met one new person worth mentioning. Rachel drove me to the airport and we talked. She's concerned, wants me to meet people, but I know that "people" means only other men, especially those in the corporate track. I still don't know what I want, so I said not much. Just that she should get out more, too. And I mean that sincerely, in every way, as much as she would like to patronizingly think I don't, really.

I'm on the plane back, trying to be glad to be going somewhere, doing something. I make small talk with the child next to me, despite the potential for child molestation accusations.

28 December, 1996 (Saturday)

Everyone in the city is making their New Year's Eve plans. Rachel called; she's going to the Flats with some friends from college. I tried to make up some party or something, but I don't think I sounded too convincing.

Is this a movie of one man's depressed life? I'm trying to get back in the habit of literature, although there's really no one to talk about it with. I have chosen Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. His characters are full of unfulfillment, lust, and complications of emotions, so I'll stay at home for New Year's Eve with an infernally devastating cold.

30 December 1996 (Monday)

Didn't speak with Rachel today and so I thought about her. The absence of her voice was strange, in the way that I missed it.

Ate at a Thai restaurant tonight and saw the indifferent glances of restaurant employees who often see people eating alone.

I feel like a big, empty cliché. I've looked in my college and high school year-

books, thought about calling old girlfriends, and decided that they've married and changed their names by now. For some reason all this has made me extremely sad.

1 January 1997 (Wednesday)

Last night, or early this morning, I sat on my couch and imagined myself sitting on a couch. I was a contemporary short story, a twentieth century poem. I would be distinguished by my conceited self-consciousness. In universities and colleges they would discuss me as an example of an era.

This was after midnight, I think. Through my window I could see that everyone in the city was very sequins and black ties. I was wearing some old sweatpants and my rugby shirt. I longed for people who knew me like some did in college, those that could tell from the set of my jaw that I was feeling sad.

I watched T.V. until my eyes failed and I was just staring. When I woke up the next morning, I was sleeping beside a banana peel.

3 January 1997 (Friday)

Called in sick yesterday and today. I'm reading autobiographical fiction by Hispanic-American women. My father wanted my mother to treat him like that, and she got very tired.

3 January 1997—later

I miss Rachel, but. She has sunny hair that's so freshly trimmed, it turns up at the ends. Like her nose, her lips, her little earrings. She was my first sex, and I was terrible. I felt so old yet young, so gangly and heavy pressing down on her. The movements and sounds were too loud to be discreetly ignored.

There had been girls in high school; after the movie I would drive them to abandoned parking lots and put my hands up their sweaters. And then it would be almost 11:30. Tuck in your shirt, sit up and think about ordinary things that would relax you: basketball, schoolwork, a fight with your mom over your curfew. Drive her home, Goodnight. See you Monday at school.

It was/is never about sex with Rachel—no pressing deadline but we'd been dating steadily for six months or so. We were safe, clinical even, to take the point off the sheer naked Puritanical exposure of my penis inside her vagina.

Boys have penises, girls have vaginas.

This conversation is insane.

4 January 1997 (Saturday)

Re-read yesterday's entry. Is this a dialogue or a dialectic? I *am* insane. I want to adopt a child from an underdeveloped nation. I want to get an unlisted phone number, and give it to no one. I want to be one of the Beastie Boys, and join them on tour.

4 January 1997—later/5 January 1997 (Sunday)

I am now becoming attracted to women with short hair and tongue piercings. They speak in very childish voices. They hang out in coffee shops where you can access



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the World Wide Web. But in Chicago, even they talk on cell phones, and loudly.

6 January 1997 (Monday)

It's been one week since I've spoken with Rachel. Does that mean we're fighting? Maybe it's just my turn to call. Maybe tomorrow.

7 January 1997 (Tuesday)

After two years of being next to her, I'm finally not and my head understands that of course I should feel a little strange. But actually, I think I don't feel anything.

9 January 1997 (Thursday)

I sat down yesterday to write and my hands cramped to drop the pen. My mind stalled. I looked at all the blank space on the page and wanted to peel off the layers of my skin. It's just dead, anyways, you know. Everything you can see on the outside is dead.

Mother keeps calling, leaving long messages on the answering machine tape, taking up too much space. Begging me to call, come home, write, anything. She tells Rachel to call and so she does, with a short voice. Buffered by my down comforter, I listen to her talk to the machine. "Ryan, it's me. Your mom's worried, dear. We're all worried. Give us a call."

11 January 1997 (Saturday)

Today when I went outside earlier, the wind cut the skin off my cheeks. I went to Tower Records and I took one copy each of all the free postcards they had. Mr. James' secretary was there and she asked me when I was coming back to work. I was surprised because I couldn't even think of an answer. A small boy got trapped in a well in Colorado and I've been following the updates on the twelve, five, six, ten, and eleven o'clock news. I've just been waiting, in between. There seems to be more important things than getting in to work every day. But still when Betty asked I was kind of happy. She was listening to the Gypsy Kings' Greatest Hits on the headphones. She didn't even turn them off or down to talk.

Betty also asked why I didn't come to the company's New Year's Eve party. I didn't even know about it. I just stood there like an idiot and said "Well, I don't know."

11 January 1997—later

I read an article that said some beggars make up to \$1,500 per week. I have no idea what Rachel would say about this. I think it's great. So if I get fired from selling nautical supplies, I know what to do.

14 January 1997 (Tuesday)

Rachel's stopped leaving terse messages on the machine. She's gone to not leaving any. The thing is that I want to hear about her brother, Carl. He's seven and very smart.

Betty came over today and we watched reruns of "Three's Company." She told me that she lives with a man she met on the bus last year. They're planning on having a

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kid, but Betty won't allow that until she has the ring on her finger.

I told her that in college I'd played rugby and studied economics. But all that seems so unimportant now. Betty didn't tell me to come back to work. We actually didn't even talk about it.

15 January 1997 (Wednesday)

I'd like to make my living watching reruns with people and talking about books. It's weird how we analyze what people don't say as much as what they do. I called up Mr. James himself today and quit. He didn't really sound surprised, just sad, like my father when I got a bad grade in high school. I don't think I'll become a beggar, but that's always a possibility.

I spent the afternoon in a used bookstore, and my nostrils are still filled with the dust of old thoughts. I bought *Twenty Under Thirty*; it's a collection of twenty short stories written by people under thirty years old. These are people I could know, or could be.

There's more to life than this.

—Lynn A. Tramonte '98