

Solidarity In Slowmotion

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Between sips of Miller High Life I glance down the length of the bar: there is a twenty-six-year-old PhD candidate in mathematics; the assistant to the dean of the graduate school in her early thirties; a girl with more tattoos than fingers; our 53-year-old elder statesmen, and me a window cleaner.

It is Monday evening and after we finish this round of drinks at The Jubilee we will begin our weekly shuffleboard tournament. More than likely these same people will be in the same bar at least three more nights this week. None of us are married, only one of us has ever been, and none of us seem to feel any pressure to do so.

Outside observers may accuse us of living a prolonged college existence or wallowing in some kind of slacker lifestyle. Yet these people have serious work ethics, spending our energy on personal progress instead of professional goals. This is a choice we have made and continue to make despite sacrificing things like financial security and health insurance. Throughout this night and other nights the people that come by and say hello, are people who have, like I have, chosen this life of quiet autonomy and solidarity over doing what we have been told for a lifetime we ought to do.

To really understand how this life that I and so many around me here live is so different than what the American public thinks life ought to be, I only have to look at my brother. He graduated college a year after I did; during his sophomore year an older friend from church suggested he get a summer job with his company. My brother took him up on the offer and by the time he graduated they had offered him a professional position. He's been promoted and transferred several times. He's married to the girl he dated in college, they own a house, and in August they had their first child. Most of their college friends are married and have 'real' jobs. The ones that don't are whispered about when they all get together. My brother has a good life and is happy. His social network is small and doesn't really grow. He probably has a couple of Bud Light's in the fridge but he couldn't tell you when he last had more than three in one night. His life is as normal to him as mine is to me.

These are the choices he has made and so most days he is pleased with them.

This essay is not about how much someone in this town can drink and on how many consecutive nights without being ostracized. This is not an essay about the ability to work below your qualification level without whispers of a life wasted. And this essay isn't about me saying that my life is superior to someone else's.

There aren't any bras being burned in front of the courthouse here, and no one is sticking flowers in the barrel of a gun, but this doesn't mean the way people are living isn't revolutionary. Slowly, significantly transformative.

Like the clothes I tend to wear and my general approach to life, this is a casual revolution. One without organization or manifesto and certainly without membership dues, or listservs. One's position isn't changed by the quality of their employment or any external factors. Actually there are no positions whatsoever. No one at the weekly shuffleboard tournament wants to live differently, and these lifestyle choices that have been made are made based on the only criteria that matter: their own pleasure, their own affiliation and affinity.

Some Mondays there are as few as six players in the tournament and some nights there are as many as 16, but the number of participants doesn't much matter. Neither does winning, as I am often a loser, but hate to miss a week. This doesn't mean that I'm a terrible shuffleboard player; if there is a beer or tequila shots on the line I can

take out most anyone in the room. But the point of the shuffleboard tournament is a good time, is friendship, which always extends longer than the actual matches.

Winning doesn't necessarily mean I advance to the next round of the tournament, winning is a condition of fulfilling the standards and expectations I place on myself. This is how the shuffleboard tournament and life in this town intersect. The people around here that I associate with are winning because they are fulfilling the standards and expectations they place on themselves. We have chosen to place personal progress above societal standards.

We are living here; in the manner that we are because we have found what we are looking for. Of course there are some living here that are living lives nearly identical to mine because they haven't found what they are looking for yet, and the difference in the two is merely in attitude.

There are people around here that leave, marry and have children or get 'real' jobs and don't get out as much. In the same breath we envy and pity them. The only standard on which we base our judgment of their decision is their contentment.

As a window cleaner my status falls somewhere between glorified housecleaner and unskilled construction worker. But it is the job I have chosen and the job I continue to show up for. I could wax nostalgic about the Zen qualities of the window cleaning profession, because they are there, but there are more significant reasons why I like my job. Almost everyday is different and I am able to see inside of people's homes and lives without feeling like a stalker or voyeur. It is a job that allows me to be outside and away from a cubicle, and it is a job that I can leave at the job site. I could tell you that I take pride in clearing the view to the outside for my wealthy customers; that I hope giving them clean windows will change the way they view the world. These things are more or less true, but they are not the reason I go to work everyday. I go because I see a pane of glass differently than anyone else in this town. I go because I'm good at it, because it is something I do as opposed to who I am. I go because I know what a worse job feels like; one that strangles the life out of you and replenishes you with nothing more than a meager paycheck. I go because it allows me to enjoy the more important things in life; like Monday evening shuffleboard tournaments.

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