

Just Being Me.

Opinionated experts advise us on how we should live, and whatever that person says is supposedly valid for whoever reads or hears their words. But there are too many opinions now.

What is the actual human condition supposed to be? And why do some people think they know that answer? I believe that some writings and sayings speak truth; I also believe no writings or sayings are singularly true for everyone.

Each of us is the progeny of generations of people before us. The math is this: in the beginning, there were two humans, and now there are eight and a half billion.

So, speaking for myself, I am the son of two people, Albert and Kathleen, and they are the son and daughter of four people. Every branch on the family tree before me is older than me. My family's tree covers experiences from so long ago that they now only exist in my DNA: evolutionary times of learning fight versus flight, how to light fires, how to kill for food or to defend oneself or family, how to till the earth and grow food, and how to build shelters. Some branches of my family tree broke off; others grew sturdy and strong. Some branches perished in hard times while others strengthened.

I grew up hearing firsthand stories of my grandparents' Irish immigration to Angel Island and the signs in North Beach that read "Irish Need Not Apply". The Great Depression, World Wars, and the Korean War were often talked about, as were the stories of poverty, food rationing, and the long soup and bread lines that my parents, as children, needed to stand in. All of this shaped my life, as did seeing too many broken, alcoholic War Veterans. One man was missing both legs and homeless, and he traveled on a flat board with wheels on the bottom. He sold pencils on the streets in San Francisco's Tenderloin District for a nickel. As a boy, I sat in my dad's car

dumbfounded, unable to phrase the question: who was this man with no legs, and why was he rolling up to us to sell pencils? Instead of using his palms on the asphalt or concrete to propel himself, he held two blocks of wood. At the time, he was the most tragic person I had ever seen.

I listened as neighborhood men cried, screamed, or both as they relived the stories of men they had killed, and I watched the panic and fear in their eyes as they relived fighting the battles they fought or prisons they were detained in. To see men locked in timeless, guilt-ridden, devastating emotional struggles with no possibility of escape left me feeling scared for them.

My parents trained me in manners, respect, and politeness; when I didn't behave, there was corporal punishment. There were no limits on my parent's ability to enforce their parental controls because America's post-war society as a whole was emotionally deranged, and the saying "A man's home is his castle" meant no one was to bother him. The only cure was going to be organic time.

My life from childhood to young adult drastically changed when, at seventeen, I dropped out of society because my life had no deep meaning. I traveled abroad, hitchhiking or walking through every country I could. Strangers sometimes fed me; I found work on farms, the ships in Rotterdam, or as a nude model in Amsterdam at the Art College. I often tied macrame handbags and necklaces using colorful glass beads or carved beautiful pipes, selling them on street corners in the towns I passed through or camped outside of.

Later, I would find quiet and solace living off-grid in the Pennines, the mountains between England and Scotland. I rented a house for two and sixpence a month with a half-acre vegetable garden, caught trout in the local streams and rivers, poached pheasant and hares, and taught myself how to make snares to catch some of the abundant rabbits.

After sixteen years of living a curiosity-filled, mostly transient life abroad, I returned to America, married, and started a family. Most friendships stalled before they could become anything more than superficial because no one had any idea how to integrate my gypsy/hobo life with their very secure lives. I found happiness in being a successful businessman, the myriad pleasures society offered, hiking for hours in the mountains with my dog, and during my times thirty and more miles offshore, in my boat, alone.

My grandchild is being raised as her parents want her to be. Some parental norms of the past are defined as abuses now. I am guilty of yelling, though, as I tell my children, I wouldn't have yelled as much had they just listened and behaved better.

All generations did the absolute best they could. They lived, loved, and raised their young. Mistakes were made, and each generation learned from their mistakes. If the parents didn't change, their children did, just as all generations have done.

Millennials and Gen X generations tend to blame and shame their parents for not raising them how they wanted to be raised. Without forgiveness, blaming will only create division; when that happens, family members stop speaking to each other.

As I sit, it occurs to me that responsibility feels like a microwave oven awkwardly balancing on my head, and my purpose is to keep it from dropping off and shattering.

I gathered my experiences, morals, ethics, and money and decided to drop out again, only this time for good, because I no longer felt a part of society. I wanted to be true to the deeper meaning of my life.

Living as I have and living long enough to be an older adult transformed the goals and nonsense I learned earlier in my life. Living the life I chose taught me to be mindful and meaningful.

I remain curious, happy, and optimistic, traits it seems I was born with.

Do I have good opinions about how to live life? Yes.

Should I mind my own business? Yes.

Written by Peter Skeels © 2-3-2025