

Kill Floor to Activist one man's story (2013)

My opinion is you are a product of what absurd situations life throws at you.

These situations are what made me what I am today. (A more compassionate man)

Younger years

I was born and raised in Northern Wisconsin. I still have all of my siblings. My Mom and Dad stayed together. over 50 years, until my Dad passed away recently. In my early years it was Mom, Dad and big sister who raised me. I have 5 sisters and one brother, the brother being the youngest. My older sister and I were real pals back then. As time went on, more sisters entered my life, the 2nd and 3rd. I cried when the 4th & 5th sister arrived. I remember thinking "Don't I deserve a brother"? Then kid number 7 came home a boy. By then I was more interested in girls than my brother. I was not around much for him which I regret to this day.

We had a very quiet household. My parents are deaf. No, I am not joking. It was a quiet upbringing. My first language was sign language. Looking back, we were very poor and I didn't even know it. The first house I remember living in did not have running water. The outhouse was very cold in the winter and "clothes pin on the nose" stinky in the summer. Growing up I remember making utterances/noises just like Mom and Dad did. My English speaking skills were very poor at best.

The following is not a bash on Catholic Schools, it is what it is and these are my experiences. I will not mention the nun's name other than Sister. My first day of school. It was the local country Catholic school. I remember being put into a room with many windows. The Nuns showed me a box with different types of cutout holes in it and wanted me to match the wooden blocks to the holes in the box. (Now, as an adult, I know they were some kind of aptitude puzzles) I did not like being watched so strangely. I was not being looked at with the affection that I was accustomed to in my short life from my Mom. I know now that the nuns were trying to explain to me what they wanted me to do to see if I had the capacity to learn but back then all I knew is that there were these strange people all dressed alike, 2 inches from my face, and talking so loud! Being raised in a deaf household it scared me when people yelled. I see people to this day talk louder to a person who does not know English. Like talking louder will make them understand? I remember crying and making my utterances and all I wanted was my big sister. She would save me. She would take me home, away from these strange people dressed in black. My sister is only 1.5 years older than I am. Back then I thought she was an adult. I must have been a fast learner because I was not put into a "Special School". I stayed in the Catholic School.

I remember being the butt of the jokes, being poked fun of, being called a retard. I remember the shock of the Sisters when our President was shot. I remember many times while my fellow classmates watched and laughed, while Sister was yelling at me stating how disgusting I was

because I stunk. I remember Sister kneeling me in the behind and throwing me down on my behind and stuffing me under her desk. I remember Sister saying in front of the class, "Because you smell so bad, you need to sit next to the trash can where all smelly things belong." I remember a proud moment that I had when I was selected by sister to go out on the balcony to clean the blackboard erasers. When I was finished clapping the bucket full of erasers, I brought them inside and presented them to Sister. "Oh Boy", I just knew I was going to bask in the warmth of my proudest moment. Sister dumped the erasers onto the floor picked one up in each hand and proceeded to clap the erasers about my face and head telling me what a terrible job I had done. Sister continued her rant/insults towards me but I do not remember exactly:::I just wanted to die.

I remember eating my lunch and playing on the playground ALONE because I smelled and my parents were deaf & DUMB.

I remember chuckling to myself when the Sister told the class about how Jesus fed all those people in the desert with just his will. It was not disrespect. I was thinking what a sight to see, biscuits and wine falling from the sky. I was slapped and spanked and told I was a terrible person and that God died for me.

I remember feeling especially bad because God died for me, the retard.

I remember hating the phrase "Peter's parents are Deaf and DUMB"! Everyone seemed to remember the DUMB part. I remember one Spring when Winter was melting and the ditches along the church were full of rushing water, I fell in. I knew it was all over. My rubber boots were full of water which kept me under water. I remember a hand pulling me out. It was the Father of the church. He was very kind to me. We chatted. He made me laugh. He shared some black liquorish with me and carried me back to my classroom, to Sister. When Father left, Sister told me to stand on my chair and said "How dare you get wet"! Sister started spanking me with her hand and when she hurt her hand she used the wooden pointer:::This is when my will to stay alive was born. I now was glad to be alive.

I remember the only fond memory I had of that school was the short time I spent with a man (Father) chatting, making me laugh and sharing his liquorish. I regret to this day never going back to thank him for being so kind:::to a retard.

I remember taking many walks in the woods, alone. I liked the animals. They were never mean to me. One of those walks I found what I thought were puppies. The mom of the puppies did not seem to mind me petting them.

Thinking the mom was thirsty, I put bailing twine around her neck and walked her home. I tied her to the tree in the back yard so I could get her some water out of the water cans. Before I got back she bit my big sister. Dad pulled my sister and me into the house. My dad shot the mom. I

was banned from going into the woods. Why I had a connection with the mom & puppies I will never know. I regret never going back to the woods to see if the puppies made it. My dad told me many years later that the "dog" that I was getting water for was a Wolf.

I remember picking produce for 50 cents an hour. I had to help my father by taking care of myself. My Father made \$50.00 a week with 7 kids. My Father was upset when people tried to give us things::::Pride is sometimes stupid.

I remember the first time I made someone laugh, it felt good.

I worked steadily starting at a very young age. The early years on a Produce farm. All kinds of veggies.

I remember the many times I had to interpret communications between my dad and the people who we owed money to. The hateful things they used to say about my dad like I was invisible. I remember on one of those occasions telling my dad what they were saying because I wanted him to kick all their asses. He calmly looked at me. He knew my feelings were hurt. He told me "Do not worry, I did not hear a thing". We laughed!

Through Jr. High, my skills on making people laugh improved. People liked me. I was physically strong. I had to be. My Dad's nickname throughout the county was DYNAMITE. I was never afraid to fight. It was always in defense of someone being picked on::::a fellow retard. I still ate animals I had a trap line, muskrats mainly. I had 10 traps and big ideas to have many more. There was money in fur. I remember the first time my trap drowned a beaver. My trapping days were over::::I still ate animals.

I used to break off ice chunks big enough to stand on and float down the creek. There were usually 5 of us, hanging out in the country. A dog approached us (beagle), obviously friendly. Before I could pet the dog one of the guys kicked the dog making him go airborne into the creek. After I helped the dog out of the creek I assume the dog found his way back home. My plans after helping the dog was to inflict some pain on the person who kicked the dog but he left immediately. We were never friends after that. In my environment, empathy and compassion for animals was somewhat ok, just don't over do it. People might think you are a PANSY!

My dad and I went on numerous hunting trips. I liked hanging out with my dad. I did not like him shooting deer. I liked deer. Because my dad is deaf he never heard the noises I made so as to scare away the deer. To this day I don't think he realizes that he never had an opportunity to kill a deer when I was with him. I felt bad because I know my dad was just trying to feed us, his family. I was so confused::::I still ate animals.

I worked on a local Mink Farm. Every year I was involved with killing thousands of mink. Murder of choice was suffocation by poison gas. There was good money in their fur. I remember how the Mink fought for their lives while they were being suffocated. I remember the few that got out I would help them "get away" if the boss was not looking. I remember the countless 50 gallon steel barrels overflowing with skinned mink carcasses:::I still ate animals.

I worked on a small rendering facility which picked up downed/sick cows. I remember the look in the downed cows eyes when the driver would wrap the steel cable around whatever extremity was available and drag their huge bodies off the ground and into the truck. I remember the painful cries the cows made. I remember the sound of breaking bones. I did not understand why they just were not shot immediately so as to put them out of their misery:::I still ate animals.

I remember grinding up these cows and feeding them to the mink. Killing animals so that they can be ground up to feed other animals we eventually were going to kill. I told my Dad that I have decided to quit school and did. There were things in my head that I could not figure out. I ended up in Galveston, Texas working on a Shrimp boat. I got the job because the Captain of the boat was deaf and believe it or not, knew my dad. I remember the 1st day we were heading out into the Gulf of Mexico. The waves were huge. I was scared and the captain told me that we were going out into those waves. I said so long and was ready to dive in and swim to shore when I saw fins. I stayed in the boat. (Later to find out they were porpoises not sharks).

I remember each time the huge net of dead sea creatures was pulled on board. There were some things left alive like crabs and shrimp but most of the catch was dead, suffocated by the sheer weight of their fellow sea beings. How awful it was to keep a few pounds of the "Golden Catch" shrimp and throw back/discard the thousands of pounds of DEAD sea creatures. I remember the people we sold our catch to thought I was deaf and I let them think so. The rude and hateful things they use to say about us. I worked this job for 4 months and headed back to Wisconsin::: and I still ate animals.

Back in High School and a new Meat Packing plant opened in the town next to us, "Packer land". My dad quit his job as a Hired hand on a local farm and starting working the KILL floor at the Meat Packing Plant. This was the most money he had ever made. In my opinion, he felt better about himself because of the increase of money he was making. He arranged a job for me and to make him proud I started working at the same plant. My 1st job was on the KILL floor. My job was to squeegee the coagulated blood down the hole in the floor. They blood was not to exceed more than 3 inches deep. I remember the smell, the uncontrollable shaking and the fearful cries of the cows while they were waiting their turn at death. I know they knew death was near. I remember the Kill Floor team high fiving each other because they broke the record and KILLED ONE HUNDRED SEVEN cows in 1 hour. I remember one cow that somewhat escaped the shoot and slipped on the blood of the others before. This cow was one of the many who survived the

bolt in the head and was somewhat stunned. The steel cable was wrapped around her back leg and she was being hoisted up so that her neck would be exposed for her turn at death. Before her being hoisted she aborted her calf and the sound that came out of her was something I never heard before or since. Her neck was slit and as the blood was draining from her the last thing she saw was her baby on the floor. Being a MAN, I dared not say anything or get emotional. A person who I went to school with (who I learned died of cancer) picked up the aborted calf and held it like a football and proceeded to pet it like it was his pet. How the Kill Floor team laughed.

I remember during the next break having a conversation with someone who accused me of claiming to be a cow whisperer because I dare to say that I now know what a fearful cry from a cow sounds like. After that shift I never went back. Yes she was a cow but her cry of what I believe to be a Mom losing her baby while dying is what I hear in my head every day of my life:::::AND I STILL ATE ANIMALS.

I don't remember much of the rest of High school. It was a haze of hard liquor and drugs. It was easier to be high than to deal with my head. I turned 18 which the state considered an adult. I partied way too much and dealt drugs. I was on a crash course with death. During this fog my trouble with the law escalated. I remember the Judge telling me to go to jail or join the Military. He said "The Military will make a man of you." I remember being such a punk that my thought process was to join the ARMY because the Vietnam vets would have access to good drugs. I spent 15 years on Active Duty in the ARMY. Yes the ARMY saved my life. This is where I met and married my soul mate, Ann, now of 30 years:::::We both ate animals.

We were raising 3 children. During my time in the Army I was the strongest I have ever been. I was into power lifting. But I was always sick. I carried pockets full of tums, Maalox, whatever antacids I could get. We shopped at a Flesh shop where we had our very own "Meat Man" cutting up animals for us to consume. This is the time period when we started to connect. The more Ann read and told me about what I already knew what the animals go through (animal agriculture), the more animals we quit eating. It took seeing the horror through my wife's eyes before I finally got it.

We quit eating flesh, within a month my need for antacids stopped. We went Vegan 19 years ago. I have killed thousands of animals during my earlier years on this planet. I never liked it and I still ate animals.

This affected my ability to demonstrate at Fur stores, Circuses, Rodeos, etc. I felt like such a hypocrite. Now I am proud to be an advocate for the animals along side my hero, my wife. She has taught me it is ok for a man to be compassionate. I NOW DO NOT EAT ANIMALS!