

**BEING YOURSELF ALONE
FOREVER**

MAXIMUS SOLO

BEING YOURSELF
ALONE FOREVER

by

Maximus Solo

a.k.a.
'Anonymous'

Yes, certainly this way of life can be satisfying, but it is terribly strenuous. And from what a sad angle one learns to know people.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD
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IT'S JUST ME AND ALWAYS WILL BE

(GRAFFITO SEEN ON A WALL)

INTRODUCTION

Q: What? Another book about being Alone Forever? I thought you already did one of these?

A: Hello to you, too. I *did* already do one of these. It's less than a year since I published (if I can grandly call it publishing) *How To Be Alone Forever*.

It was a sort-of *faux*-self-help book, you'll remember. You might also remember that I playfully said if I wrote a follow-up book, I would call it *Just Be Yourself*.

This book is that book.

Q: But it's not called *Just Be Yourself*...

A: It's not. I wanted to get 'Alone Forever' into the title – so I can do a trilogy that I can call The Alone Forever Trilogy, obviously.

But I also wanted to honour my playful commitment to the *Just Be Yourself* thing.

The title I ended up with – *Being Yourself Alone Forever* – is the outcome.

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Q: And what's with this Question-and-Answer format? Who or what am *I* supposed to be?

A: You're an imaginary questioner, for the purposes of Introduction. I did originally start writing this book in the conventional non-fiction essay format, but then I hit on the Q&A thing during the process of writing. It makes the content a bit more readable, doesn't it?

Q: Yes. I quite like it.

A: And there is a real-world justification for a Q&A format anyway. After the first book came out I received a steady trickle of emails from readers asking questions and making comments about various things. This book is partly inspired by those questions and the mini-conversations that developed from them. So it seemed fitting to do some portions in Q&A format. Gradually, I realised the whole book should be in this format. And here we are.

Q: How many readers got in touch with you after *How To Be Alone Forever*?

A: Uh... [*counts on fingers*] About eight.

Q: Oh. Not loads, then.

A: No. The Alone Forever are not a talkative bunch, on the whole.

Q: What did the eight ask you?

A: A number of things. Only a few asked outright

questions. Mostly they wanted to comment on what they'd read, and tell me where their experience chimed with mine and where it didn't.

They alternated between being curious, and sceptical, and delighted, and unhappy, and amused.

The most common response was good-natured chuckling and a thumbs-up. I've not heard of a single person being *angry* about the book in any way. So much for the angry loner stereotype.

Q: How many people do you think have read the first book in total?

A: No idea. I'd be surprised if it was more than fifty people or so. The book isn't at all widely-known.

Basically, if you were hanging out on a very obscure portion of the Internet – the /r/FA30plus subreddit of Reddit – in March 2018, when I posted news of the book there, you probably got to hear about it. Otherwise, you probably haven't heard of it at all.

Q: What? Didn't you post it anywhere else online?

A: I did post it on /r/ForeverAlone but the post was removed almost at once, no idea why. Most likely it fell foul of their spam policy. Or they just didn't like it.

I did create a blog site to host the book files – howtobealoneforever.wordpress.com.

I haven't posted it anywhere else.

Occasionally, in the months since then, I pop up in comments on Reddit to let somebody know of the book's existence, *if* it seems relevant to what they're saying. Younger FAs who are fretting about getting older – the book's specifically about that worry. But otherwise, *How*

To Be Alone Forever remains an obscure text within one of the most obscure subcultures in the world.

The present book will likely meet exactly the same fate.

Q: What is this new book actually about? Didn't you cover everything in the first one?

A: I only covered certain things in the first book, and only up to a point.

In this book I touch on a few new angles. Principally, how we urgently need to take the dreaded advice of 'just be yourself' at face value, for example.

The normies are 100% right.

We should be ourselves.

We should wholeheartedly be ourselves as we are right now.

I go on about that in this book a *lot*, so be warned if it's not to your taste.

Q: Warning duly noted. What else is there?

A: Oh, the usual. The world's complete and irrevocable incomprehension of us, for one. Always a favourite topic of mine.

Q: And who are all the questioners in this book? Are they all like me, just imaginary voices you've invented for a literary lark?

A: Not quite. Some of the conversations depicted in this book actually occurred, more or less. Some are amalgamations of several different conversations. And some, yes, are indeed just me rambling on with a made-up questioner.

Q: Your first book seemed quite organised-

A: Did it?

Q: Kind of... Is this one organised in any particular way? Do we have to read it from page 1 to page whatever?

A: No. The material is not organised with any grand principle in mind. Everything is scattered in more or less random order.

Sometimes, I have grouped together sections that could be seen as following a theme.

But mostly it is random. Any apparent throughline is a chance occurrence.

You can dip in and out of this book without worrying about picking up or losing any threads.

Q: Great. Any last words of Introduction?

A: Yes. I want to thank everyone who emailed me after the publication of the first book. Their comments helped to focus my thinking, even when they politely disagreed with my thinking. There are a few sections of this book inspired by those conversations.

Q: And what's with the author name-change? You were simply 'Anonymous' before. Now you're- I can't even bring myself to say it! Why pick *that* name? Seriously?

A: Yes, I have abandoned the 'Anonymous' pseudonym that I used for the first book. 'Anonymous' as a pseudonym is far too generic.

So I have followed the practice of one of my heroes, that great loner Soren Kierkegaard. I've taken epigraphs for both books so far from him. He loved to adopt playful,

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smart-ass pen-names, and clearly I imagine I'm just like him, so I'm going to do the same.

Q: And you settled on... Maximus Solo? Seriously?

A: *Tee-hee.*

Where is my authority? I am one individual. I am not rich or successful. I have no power in the world at large. No 'clout'. I am a fleeting name on the Internet. I have no credentials. The acid test for truth is whether it tastes true to you or not. Take what I say and swill it around your mouth. See what it tastes like.

1. WHAT IS ALONE FOREVER?

Q: Could you introduce yourself and the concept of Alone Forever?

A: Of course. If you need to be informed about the concept of Alone Forever, you're not it. Any non-Alone Forever person who picks up this book won't have more than a clue what it's all about. Or who I am. And nor should they.

Q: What's it all about, and who are you?

A: I am nobody, and this is about nothing in particular. I mean this in a very real, non-posturing way. I am nobody. I am nothing. I might look outwardly normal-

Q: I can confirm that you look completely normal.

A: You're surprised about that, aren't you? I can tell.

Q: I *am* a little surprised.

A: Go on. Tell the readers what I look like...

Q: You're a balding, bespectacled, middle-aged white man. Totally generic. Nobody would notice you anywhere for any reason.

A: Exactly. Sometimes when I am out in public I catch a glimpse of my reflection in a shop window or something and it sometimes makes me smile. If you were a casting director for a movie with a scene in a bank, and you had to cast the role of 'fifth bank teller', and you went looking for an average, bald, bespectacled man...

Q: You would be perfect for the role.

A: I certainly would be.

Q: So who and what are you? You never finished telling us.

A: I did finish telling you. I said I was nothing and nobody, and that really is the truthful answer. There is no posturing. It is the simple truth.

I turned 50 this year. A huge milestone in a person's life. By the time people are 50, they are expected to have done certain things. They are expected to *be* something or other.

I have not done any of the things that my society and culture expects me to do.

Q: What things are those?

A: I have not had any romantic and sexual relationships. You're supposed to have at least one of each before you're

my age. Long before. Ideally you should have them at the same time, but that's optional.

I have never had either. No romantic relationships or sex have ever existed in my life. The principal fact of my life, as a person in society, is that I am this strange thing called Alone Forever. Capital A. Capital F.

Q: What does that mean?

A: I just said what it means. I will say it again, because it's worth saying again. Alone Forever is a peculiarly difficult thing to keep in mind.

I have never had a romantic relationship, of any description or duration, with anyone.

I have never had sex.

I no longer even have any friends.

Q: Why is it something worth talking about? Why not keep quiet about it?

A: To be Alone Forever is to live in stark contrast to the majority of people.

Your immediate and wider family – plus any friends you might still have left – plus your fellow students or work colleagues – and the wider world of people as seen on TV: they all live in a particular way. Which is not your way.

You are expected to have girlfriends or boyfriends. You are expected to be sociable, to marry, to have children.

When you do not do any of these things, sooner or later it seems there is something 'wrong' with you.

The longer you live that way, the more acutely you feel a sense of internal exile from the people around you,

which only serves to exponentially amplify your experience of radical solitude. You get anxious about it, and you *stay* anxious about it for a long time, possibly for the remainder of your miserable life.

I call this condition: Alone Forever.

2. ON DEFINITION

Q: Just how common do you think Alone Forever is?

A: Ah, the old classic. It's one of the great questions of Alone Foreverology. *'How many of us are there?'*

I'm always bemused by Alone Forever people who claim to personally know several other Alone Forever people.

To read some of the FA subreddits, sometimes, you would think that every classroom, factory and office in the world plays host to at least two of us.

Q: Which seems incorrect.

A: It *is* incorrect. Maybe, yes, *if* you expand the definition of Alone Forever to include all people who have difficulty with relationships, then there are probably dozens of such folk within yelling distance at any one time.

But the classical definition of Alone Forever is the only meaningful definition for me.

Q: And the classical definition of Alone Forever is...?

A: Somebody who has never had a romantic relationship of any kind and who may have few friends, or even no friends at all. There are so few of us that it would be a rare event indeed to meet another one in the flesh.

Q: So it's uncommon to be Alone Forever?

A: Damn right. We're nearly always going to be the sole Alone Forever person in our immediate experience, for our whole life long. I've never met another one of us in real life, and I don't expect I ever will. I would bet nearly all of us would say the same.

The Alone Forever life is a long waste of time from start to finish. The best you can hope for are some interesting portions from time to time. But you'll have to make them up yourself.

3. ON ESCAPOLOGY

Q: Do most people who are Alone Forever want to get out of it?

A: Yes. Very few of us ever ‘come to terms’ with the condition. Fewer still actively embrace it. It’s difficult to imagine a young person, possessed of all their faculties, choosing to be Alone Forever.

Q: But you give helpful tips on how to successfully *stay* Alone Forever. Your first book was all about that.

A: Oh yes. It was baked into the title. *How To Be Alone Forever*. It does exactly what it says on the tin.

Q: But you also say it’s best to get out of being Alone Forever. Aren’t you contradicting yourself?

A: Yes. No. So what? Careful readers will understand that I recommend nothing. I advise nothing. Not *really*. I’m Alone Forever enough to know that many readers of the book will have nodded over it once or twice, perhaps

smiled a couple of times, and then got back to pushing their own boulders up their own hills.

The book is a snapshot of how the whole Alone Forever thing has gone for me until now.

I thought it would be interesting to draw back the curtain on what it's like to get older when you're Alone Forever.

Many young people just starting out on this path (a path that nobody wants to be on) will naturally wonder, with a thrill of panic, what it'll be like for them when they're in their thirties and forties and older.

Well, I present them with an example to mull over. Me.

I never did escape being Alone Forever. I have come to understand that I could never have escaped.

This is it for me: I am Alone Forever, *forever*.

Q: How many people have read *How To Be Alone Forever*?

A: That I know of? Approximately fifteen (15) people. Doubtless a few more have read it that I don't know of. Lots have probably skimmed it. Lots probably have it on their hard drive somewhere, and plan to get around to it one day, but won't. It doesn't matter, really.

Q: Your book doesn't offer any solutions to Alone Forever.

A: No. Because other than escape, there is no solution as such.

I speak a lot about growing into the Alone Forever role, and fully inhabiting it. That's a sort of solution, but not one with universal appeal, to put it mildly.

Q: If somebody who is Alone Forever wishes to reconnect with people, how would they best go about it?

A: I'm not sure there is a way. I think if you are Alone Forever, it is a finished fact. A done deal. It's already over. Remarkably soon, you get to a point where people cannot be part of your day-to-day life, nor you part of theirs. You're content to stay in your walled garden. Any anger you once had as a young person toward 'society' is long gone. You are *unbothered* in a very agreeable, damn-near-transcendent way. You don't hatch plots or dream up schemes, evil or benign, against anyone or anything. Society, and the life that goes on in society, is an abstract idea that is not your concern. Life is something you still read about, and watch on television, and hear people talking about. But it's got nothing to do with you.

Q: I don't find that acceptable. That is nihilism. That is *defeatism*.

A: If a person still wants to 'get out there' and join the life of the world and other people, then to them my stance will seem like defeatism, and to them it will be defeatism. Granted.

I have never recommended that anybody forces themselves into the position I am in. I have always stressed that it will flourish within you naturally, if being Alone Forever is your destiny. This was one of the least understood elements of my book. I had emails from a few readers who didn't seem to get that I wasn't urging them to adopt my standpoint.

How To Be Alone Forever was not in any sense my manifesto. It was just a description of a process that happened to me, and the various conclusions I've drawn from it, and some of the practical steps I take to live with it. That is all.

4. ON OTHER PEOPLE

Q: How do people treat you, day-to-day?

A: Good, on the whole, but sometimes there are patches that are not good. It helps when you believe, as I do, that other people are nothing to do with my contentment or happiness. That sounds incredibly conceited and arrogant, doesn't it?

Q: That's what most people would say, yes.

A: *Most people.* Exactly. People do not get to tell me – by word or action, or by the examples of their billions of lives – how I should live and not live. Which sounds like more arrogance and conceit, unfortunately, but there you go.

Q: So how *do* people treat you in daily life?

A: People always seem to follow the same trajectory with me. Only a few people take an instant dislike to me. Some

people actually seem to take an instant *like* to me... Very disconcerting, that one! They soon get over it.

But most people are somewhere between the two poles, with the needle quivering just below half-way.

Many people are wary of me. Suspicious. They can tell there's something 'wrong' with me, but they don't know what it is, and it bothers them.

I've mentioned before about the whole 'down to Earth' thing. It means being 'real' – being a natural, normal person, without obscure airs and hi-falutin' graces. Being down to Earth means being the salt of the Earth. People typically place great value on finding this quality in others. Where you register on the down-to-Earth scale is a precise measurement of the kind of person you are.

Q: Where do you register on it?

A: Low! But not zero. I was raised in the kind of working class background that automatically gives me, I hope, *some* degree of down-to-Earthiness. I don't have to try very hard to fake it. I can be 'real', which only deepens people's confusion about me.

Most people expect a certain level of social reciprocity that I am never going to deliver – not even in my younger, more sociable days, when I was trying my best, *genuinely* trying my best, to fit in and be like everyone else. That usually involved drinking vast quantities of alcohol. People liked me a lot more after I'd had a few drinks. And I liked people more when I was drunk. So we were quits.

A: Under normal conditions, people don't like you?

Q: Yes and no. It all depends on how successful my impersonation of a regular fellow is. People's most

common attitude toward me is one of exasperation. They don't like it that I don't have a readymade personal scenario for them to appreciate. I don't have a nice plump wife and children at home, and I don't have a visible reason for why I don't have these things. I get a lot of low-key scorn. A lot of sighing impatience. Just being near some individuals seems to provoke a peculiar kind of barely restrained, seething anger in them. These people are relatively rare, but they're common enough that I always seem to have one or two of them in my life wherever I go. These people cannot overlook or forgive anyone in their immediate experience for not being normal. There's a woman at my current workplace who is *incredibly* aggravated by me. Staying quiet around her doesn't help. Speaking up around her, trying to be down to Earth, doesn't help.

Fifteen or twenty years ago I'd have returned her anger in kind, with interest, and hated her and wished her nothing but ill fortune.

Now? Now *nothing*.

Now I am post-people in a very real, very wholesome, very welcome way. Being post-people is the only way for the Alone Forever to be. Hence the book(s).

A: You sound very sure of yourself. I suspect this is what some people find so aggravating about you.

Q: Yes. It's an unfortunate side-effect of how I express myself, but it doesn't match up to my actual attitude. Some of the verbal gymnastics I indulge in are an effort to counter the impression of cocksure arrogance. Arrogance is always about imposing oneself on others in some way – creating a sensation, and being a figure of consequence. That's simply not who I am. I don't want to

impose myself on others. I don't want to prove anything to anyone, or demonstrate anything to anyone.

But equally, I don't want to cringe and quail from other people. I want to push back against the unconscious societal assumption that my place is on the outer fringes of life, and that I should know my place when in the proximity of others.

Society does *not* get to define what a good life is. Absolutely fucking *not*.

Other people do *not* collectively get to pigeonhole me.

The Alone Forever person is at the very centre of life. His or her own life.

Okay, fair enough, it's a life without other people in it. Without love and sex and deep relationship.

What is such a life worth? It's worthless, in many a reckoning.

That view is what I would passionately argue against.

In the process of doing so, I will often sound arrogant, conceited, deluded, deranged. How could I not? I'm swimming against one of the strongest tides in nature. I make the case for the Alone Forever life being worthwhile. It's a crazy thing to do.

Other people are a problem of your own making. Think how much time you spend agonising about them. Think of how much time they probably spend thinking about you. What do you think you are doing?

5. ON 'IF YOU MET SOMEONE...'

Q: Let's say that a miracle happens. You accept that miracles do happen, right?

A: Sure, yes, miracles can happen. I think I know where you're going with this question.

Q: Let's say you meet a woman in the normal course of your everyday life-

A: I knew this was where you were going.

Q: -and say this woman is attractive to you. Say she's single, she's available, *and* she finds you attractive and interesting enough to potentially agree to go on a date with you. What's your reaction?

A: An attractive, single woman about my age? I would say something facetious like 'where is this unicorn?', but I do know from experience that such unicorns can exist.

Remember Ellie from *How To Be Alone Forever*?

Q: Of course.

A: Ellie was such a woman as you describe, around my age, single, attractive... but not interested in me.

Your question now is part of an imaginary scenario in which, unlike Ellie, some unicorn-woman would actually be interested in me.

Q: Yes. And your reaction to her would be? What would you do?

A: There would be no reaction. I would not do anything. In order to meet that opportunity head-on and embrace it, I would need to be a completely different person to the one I have ended up becoming. Ellie was the last-ever effort. At some point in the last six, seven years since the attempt, I have truly lost all interest in the pursuit of women in the romantic-sexual aspect.

It's difficult to explain this to somebody who still has that drive, that hunger.

Part of the problem is that I might be a member of a relatively small subset of the Alone Forever. I've never been overly interested in other people. I watch TV and movies, and I follow the news, and I'm happy to have a chat with my work colleagues, but that is as far as my interest in other people goes.

I am now, and I believe always will be, solidly adapted to a way of life that is totally solitary.

I can see incomprehension and scepticism all over your face.

Q: Can you?

A: I can. The bulk of the Alone Forever 'community' – let's call it a community, for illustration purposes –

automatically assumes that every one of their fellows yearns for a romantic-sexual partner in the same way they do.

But perhaps the deeper meaning of being Alone Forever is that we live for so long Alone Forever that being Alone Forever becomes simply who we are – forever. Let me think of an example. An illustration of my point.

Soldiers. Have you ever seen the way a soldier will iron a shirt?

Q: Yes.

A: Fascinating, isn't it? Such focus. Such *thoroughness*. A soldier irons a shirt in a totally different way to anyone else. Most of us get to a certain point in ironing a shirt and think 'yeah, that'll do'. Not soldiers. You're never going to stop soldiers from obsessively ironing every crease out of their shirts. Anybody in a soldier's life will have to accommodate themselves to that reality.

Likewise, I am never now going to stop wanting and needing to be alone for the overwhelming majority of the time. Sometimes I'm sitting in my workplace, and there's general cross-chatter going on, people are getting on with the business of being people, and sometimes I too am part of that general chitter-chatter – but I never think that this represents something I must have in my life outside. My real life.

I suppose this is a really long-winded way of saying 'no' to your original question. It's a long-winded answer because I know you don't believe me.

Q: It's not that I don't believe you, as such, it's that I think you should never say never. Don't you say that somewhere in the book?

A: I do indeed, and quite early on too. I even mean it. Let me put it this way. I am exactly who and what I have turned out to be. Nothing as such has gone 'wrong'. Look at me and you see a fairly average-looking man.

Q: Yes. I was surprised. I was expecting that you'd be odd-looking, because, well, lots of us are.

A: Lots of us most certainly are. And I *am* a bit odd-looking, in some ways, am I not?

Q: Yes and no. I've seen people much odder-looking than you in long-term, happy, successful relationships and marriages.

A: Indeed. There is somebody for everybody. Nature will find a way. And all that jazz.

So what conclusion should I reach when I know that a) there is nothing fundamentally 'wrong' with me; and b) I have not spent the past almost-fifty years living in a sealed compartment away from the general ebb and flow of human life in human society?

Does it not seem at least reasonable – pretty-bloody-likely, really – that I am what I am because... that is what I am?

In a given population of humans, there will be some individuals whose lives do not conform to the template of the majority. We can romanticise and glamorise and get all mythic-heroic about being Alone Forever as much as we like, but that should not obscure the simple truth that for those of us who 'make it' past the age of, say, forty-five, whose sex drives start to wane or vanish – is it not likely that Alone Forever is a faithful and true representation of who we are by 'nature'?

Q: I love the way you actually make the air-quotes with your fingers. And you keep hitting me with little drops of spittle.

A: My apologies for the spittle. I can tell that no matter how convincing I think I'm stating the case for Alone Forever, you are not convinced.

Q: Maybe I can never be convinced, where I am. Would you have been convinced, at my age?

A: Absolutely not. From my teens to my early forties, I lived firmly alongside the automatic assumption that I had to make a wrong thing right, somehow. I followed all the various methods of doing so. I dressed better. I smiled more, and smiled better. But I evermore came out by the same door as in I went.

Q: Omar Khayyam?

A: Oh yes. I am a pretentious Alone Forever. Look, the point is that we don't have to convince anyone of anything when we're Alone Forever. So much mental energy is expended on agonising about other people and what they think and why we're not like them, or not enough like them for them to be *sympatico*.

We're so eager to please. What is this insane garbage? Why the need for somebody else's ratification? For the love of God, man, we are *Alone Forever!* It's sort of baked into the name, isn't it?

Q: It ties in to what you say about the different nature of Alone Forever at different ages. I don't think a young person could simply adopt your 50-year-old attitude.

A: Of course they couldn't. It's a perspective that's arrived at, not taken off the peg and worn like a coat.

All Alone Forever people are heading for a similar destination, *if* they remain Alone Forever. What is true for me, a distinct individual at this time in my life, will not be true for a twenty year old, just starting out. That twenty year old should not listen to a word I have to say about being Alone Forever – why should he? Anyone who still wants to get out of Alone Forever should not listen to me.

My overall message (if I can call it such) is directed almost entirely at the more mature Alone Forever type. The ones who've tried everything and are still here. Even most of *them* won't be particularly receptive to it. But some will, and it's those who could benefit from facing up squarely, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to the possibility that being Alone Forever is not an anomaly, not a catastrophe, but the fair and just and natural reflection of their deepest, innermost selves.

All I know is that when I am at any social gathering, my manifested social self is a fraudulent creation that bears no relation at all to the person who I am *when I am alone*. That individual is the real me. The authentic me.

Uh, what was your question again?

Q: If you met a woman who-

A: I'm saying no.

6. ON REGRET OF REGRET

Q: Lots of readers were puzzled by the medical box section of *How To Be Alone Forever*.

A: And lots of readers were not puzzled by it. They knew what it was for. They're the readers the section was written for. When they go home and close their doors, that's it. Just them. Nobody else. They face up to a kind of perpetual, solitary reality that many of the younger Alone Forever don't yet know exists.

Medical boxes, and the kind of thinking that accompanies them, are for the Alone Forever who are literally so. Those who are completely socially isolated. *Alone. Forever.*

If readers were bemused by the medical box section (or amused by it), it was an indicator that they're not yet Alone Forever in the strictest sense. Good for them.

Q: Is there anything you left out of the first book that you regret leaving out?

A: Not really. Which is surprising considering there *was* a load of stuff cut out. I have a tendency to repeat myself.

Q: You've got that right.

A: What?

Q: Nothing.

A: Oh, I thought you said something.

Q: I was just clearing my throat. Carry on.

A: I do have a tendency to go on a bit, and I do repeat myself a lot. There's a solid Alone Forever reason for this. I briefly touched on it somewhere in *How To Be Alone Forever*, I think.

Q: Pray tell.

A: I repeat myself a lot because it's a habit I've had to acquire from dealing with people in everyday life.

People don't listen to me, and so I am forced to repeat myself.

I can always tell when somebody is thinking about something else when I'm speaking with them. Most often they're thinking about the fact that I'm talking in the first place. And then they might also be thinking about how I talk like a book. Then, once we're past those two stages, they're simply bored with and unengaged by whatever I have to say, and they're politely waiting for me to finish speaking so they can say their thing, and get the hell away from me.

All of which, taken together, means that on the occasions when I have something to say that another

person really does need to hear, I am forced to repeat myself.

I don't really blame people for this. They don't listen to each other much of the time. Uh... What was the original question?

Q: Is there anything you left out of *How To Be Alone Forever* that you wish you'd left in?

A: It's been a while since I read through the book, but I would bet there is something missing. Overall, though, no. I think I expressed what I wanted to express very well, if I may say so myself. My style could always be a little clearer. The organisation of the material could be a bit more logical. If I was doing it again, I would flesh out the Media section.

But overall, any person who is *Alone Forever* should find something in the book that's worth their while. It's a complete philosophy of our way of life. It's a self-help book. It's a sideways autobiography. It's a chronicle of catastrophe. It's a lot of things.

Q: Has it brought you any attention from publishers?

A: No. *God*, no. That would be... that would be very peculiar indeed.

Q: Why?

A: I've now been a failed writer for over thirty years. More, I'm an *Alone Forever* failed writer. That is my personal reality. I'm a failure on two big fronts. If I suddenly somehow got a girlfriend, or had some writing published somewhere, it would be extremely unbalancing. I'm not sure I could handle either scenario.

Q: What else are you still interested in that might be called 'worldly'?

A: I keep a close eye on world news. I wouldn't like the end of the world to sneak up on me. My Alone Forever way of life depends on the continuation of certain economic and social systems. Those systems are rather fragile. Something might happen to them, and I don't want to be taken by surprise. If a large-scale, permanent social collapse occurs, I have to be ready to go. By which I mean, ready to kill myself.

Q: You're not a survivalist?

A: Absolutely not. I'm the opposite, whatever that would be. An unsurvivalist.

If the End comes, that's the End of me. Post-apocalyptic movies are the only true horror films. They show me a world and way of life fundamentally at odds with the only way I can live.

I can only be who I am – I can only be solitary and self-sufficient – in the context of things like supermarkets, bus services, libraries, electricity, banks, and functioning economies. Take those things away, and I am taken away.

Look at the expression on her face when she interacts with a man whom she finds attractive and interesting. See how the experience is of a different order. She looks and sounds totally different, doesn't she? She is transformed. You will never occupy that level with anyone. It is a world you have never inhabited. Which is not to say that you never will inhabit it, no – but as the years roll by, a certain question grows in size and complexity. At what point is the doorway to that world irrevocably closed to you? Is it now? Is it now? Is it now?

7. ON NOT TELLING

Q: In *How To Be Alone Forever*, one of the themes you keep returning to is the incommunicability of being Alone Forever. You maintain that we are forever sealed away from the non-Alone Forever. Can that be true?

A: Yes. It can be true. It is true. They have zero comprehension of who and what we are. There will be exceptions among them, of course, but not enough to overturn the reality of the situation. There is no communication between us and them that amounts to anything. We crave their sympathy and understanding in vain.

Q: Yet you urged your readers to try explaining the concept of Alone Forever to the non-Alone Forever?

A: I imagine that pretty much everyone has already tried it at some point. It's a strangely alluring idea, isn't it? Somebody else who will understand! Other people are so numerous, so powerful. We have a stubborn idea that we

might get *help*. It seems to be within their power to give help, so why not seek it?

And the most frustrating thing is that you *can* get people to apparently listen to you – but when they inevitably tell you some or all of the following:

- 1) just be yourself!
 - 2) be confident!
 - 3) there's somebody for everybody!
- ...and so on – what do you do then?

What's your reaction to them, these other people in whom you have placed so much hope and trust, and expended so much effort and honesty in trying to give them a truthful account of who you are (rather than the person you might be pretending to be to keep them happy)?

My advice is to tilt your head slightly to one side, look thoughtful, and say 'you know, I never thought of it that way...'

But I still think it's always worth a shot, telling other people about your condition. It should always be tried. They might take you deeper into their social circle, which might be a route out of Alone Forever for those who are still capable of escape. I can well remember a time in my life when I almost physically ached to get out of the house and go to a party once in a while. For some of us, something could come of it all. You never know who you're going to meet, and what crazy circumstances will arise.

Q: Hang on. Now you're saying we *should* tell people that we're Alone Forever?

A: Don't be ridiculous.

8. THE 100

Q: You say that the condition of being Alone Forever is rare. Others say it's not all that rare. How do you know that you're right?

A: I don't know that I am right. What I am is deeply sceptical that anyone could ever establish how common or uncommon Alone Forever is. If you have the results of a comprehensive survey into the matter laying around, I would love to read it.

It doesn't matter in any case. It really doesn't. However many or few of us there are, we stand and fall alone. Whether I am right or wrong about this, or anything, doesn't matter. As one who is Alone Forever, I'm not part of any wider social or cultural framework in which being right or wrong *matters*.

It's a healthy step, when you admit to yourself that being right or wrong doesn't matter. It only matters from the societal standpoint, where people of substance compete for influence and prestige – and who exactly are you again?

The Alone Forever have got to get out of the habit of collectivist thinking.

It's just me, and it always will be.

Q: It's still an interesting question for us all to consider, though. How many of our tribe are out there? For most of my own life, I thought I was the only one.

A: Yep, same here. Throughout my teenage years and early twenties, my peers started to grow and change, but I didn't. I had nothing to compare myself to. I never thought I was just a 'late developer' (one of the normies' favourite brush-off buzz phrases). I always thought: wow, I am *different*. And not in a trivial way. It's not like having ginger hair or a big nose or being a bit shy. The Alone Forever way of being different is more fundamental than any other way.

My youth was all pre-Internet. I lived in a self-contained bubble. I still do, but at least I now know there are other self-contained bubbles out there – none exactly like mine, of course, but similar enough for me not to freak out quite so much about being this strange character. Just knowing other Alone Forever types exist gives me healthy perspective and odd comfort.

Alone Forever has happened to lots of people. We're scattered far and wide, in space and time, but we exist.

Q: Why do you think Alone Forever is so rare?

A: The interlocking factors that create it have to happen in the right order and at the right intensity. There has to be a strong biological predisposition to being Alone Forever, I think. I do think that predisposition might not be all that rare. The social machine is the all-conquering

system that irons everyone out. The difference with us is that the social machine has failed to smooth us out.

It's fairly common to have trouble with romance and sex when young. It's not even remotely common to *stay* that way for the entirety of your life – and for the condition to get exponentially worse the longer it continues.

After a certain amount of time spent Alone Forever, you can only ever be Alone Forever.

Q: I want to go deeper into this. This is one of the aspects of being Alone Forever that I'm most interested in. For good and bad reasons.

How does the process work? Why am I Alone Forever at 30, but my former school classmates are not? Is it all nature? Nurture? What?

A: Let's imagine one hundred 15-year-olds who might be considered Alone Forever. They're awkward, they're unsure, they're alone, they're worried.

A reasonably high percentage of *all* 15-year-olds would fit that particular bill.

Q: Definitely.

A: Of course. This is just a thought experiment. Now, let's wind those individuals' clocks forward so we can see them all at age 20.

Look at what has happened! It's been a busy five years, packed full of incident, for all of them. All but a few of those one hundred awkward teenagers have been gathered safely up by the great machine. They're nearly all now somebody's girlfriend or boyfriend (or somebody's ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend). A few of these

20-year-olds are even husbands and wives. Some have children of their own and mortgages.

Does this match your own memory of that time of life? Suddenly noticing, around the end of your teenage years, that everybody you knew was accelerating away from you?

Q: It certainly does, yes. One day I noticed that everyone I had been at school with was swanning around with significant others on their arms.

A: This is what I'm getting at. Let's say ten individuals from our original one hundred are still what we call 'Alone Forever' at age 20. That figure of ten is probably too high. But let's keep these numbers manageable for the sake of the illustration.

Q: Okay.

A: So, these ten individuals have made it to the age of 20 with no change. They've got the classic Alone Forever bundle of traits that we know so well. They're conventionally unattractive, or they're socially awkward, or they're unlucky, or they're just weird. Or they're all of the above, and more. They're whatever.

Fast-forward these ten individuals to age 25, and what has happened?

Q: Some of them are no longer Alone Forever!

A: That's right. It doesn't matter how it happens, only that it happens. They enjoyed a stroke of luck. They made a determined effort. They implemented a change of lifestyle, or living circumstances. They got a new job, and it changed their whole outlook on life. They went to

college, and ditto. Whatever happened, *something happened*.

It's a big, variegated world out there, with a lot of things going on. The normal everyday course of events is like a tide constantly washing against the cliffs. Eventually, some Alone Forever cliffs are going to crumble and fall. *Some*.

Now, how many would you say of the ten 20-year-olds get to age 25 while still Alone Forever?

Q: Probably not that many?

A: There could be a good deal of debate about this, of course, but for the sake of this ambitious illustration, let's say five of the ten make it to 25 still Alone Forever.

Q: That's probably a bit high.

A: I think so too, but the numbers aren't that important. We're sketching a natural process, first and foremost.

First, let's look at how many of the original one hundred teenage Alone Forever types we have lost in the space of a decade: *ninety-five* of the original one hundred are all gone into the world of light, away to become proper Normans and Normas. Good luck to them.

Relationships can founder on the rocks of reality, of course. Some of the ninety-five escapees will doubtless rebound back into an Alone Forever-type of life eventually, but they will never again be true residents of the Alone Forever zone. Once you have demonstrated to yourself (and to others) that you are capable of attracting another person and conducting a romantic relationship, you can never be Alone Forever.

There's sometimes a bit of controversy on the Forever Alone boards about this topic, and tempers are often lost.

Q: I'll say they are.

A: I support the argument that such people as our hypothetical ninety-five escapees could never again be considered Alone Forever, no matter what happens to them. Once you're out, you're out for good, no matter what. They are, of course, more than welcome to think whatever they like about themselves.

Q: So we're left with five of the original one hundred at the age of 25. This is the 'winnowing' process that you touched on in *How To Be Alone Forever*, isn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: After the age of 30, I guess there are even fewer left?

A: You guess correctly, my imaginary friend, you guess correctly. After a person's mid-20s, the Alone Forever calculus changes *massively*. If you get to that point without having escaped, then buddy, you are in *big* trouble. There is now a strong likelihood that the door will lock shut behind you with no chance of escape. Alone Forever is a locked room mystery without a solution, in most cases. Oh, you've still got time – you've always got lots of *time* – but having been Alone Forever for so long, Alone Forever is now a fundamental part of who you are.

Of the five sample Alone Forever individuals aged 25, some will be lifelong Alone Forever types such as myself.

Q: Me too!

A: Looking back at that time in my life, I can see how the trap closed around me. I can see what happened and

what didn't happen. I can see what should have happened that didn't happen, and eventually *couldn't happen*.

Q: What happens to your sample five Alone Forever people at 25? This is interesting.

A: Okay, let's now fast-forward the sample five people to the age of 30. Life is a whirling kaleidoscope of events. Somehow, in some way, two or three of the five will find themselves gathered up by the normal world, even at this late stage. At 25 a person is still young enough to be saved. You're still flexible enough in mind and soul, as well as body. You'll always be tainted by the memory of the youth you never had. There'll always be some residual regret. But you've done it, you've got out. In the nick of time.

Q: So how many of the hundred are left Alone Forever at 30?

A: Maybe only two individuals make it to 30 whilst still Alone Forever. Once again, even that is probably high. The true Alone Forever population is probably more like one in one hundred thousand, or more. I really do believe that.

Q: I can see where this is taking us.

A: Let's move more quickly now, as I need a break. Alone Forevering really takes it out of you...

Now let's fast-forward these two hardy Alone Forever individuals to the ages of 35 and 40.

The two are promptly reduced to one individual. Yes! One of the two who was still Alone Forever going into

their 30s has made it out! Talk about a last-minute reprieve. Online dating really can work.

And so we come to the end of the line as far as escape goes, I think. 45 is the key age – there or thereabouts. Plus-minus a few years, depending on individual temperament and circumstance.

If you get to 45-ish having been Alone Forever your whole life, Alone Forever is likely to be your whole life and you can never escape.

Of course, even here there will be bizarre exceptions – borderline cases of 50-year-olds and 60-year-olds who find true love and companionship, and all the rest of it. It's not impossible.

For the purpose of illustrating the great Alone Forever winnowing process, age 45-or-so is the end of the line.

Q: To sum up: as time passes, the Alone Forever populace is winnowed ever-smaller by natural social factors. Reaching middle age and old age whilst Alone Forever is an absolute rarity. Once you're there, your chances of escape are effectively nil.

A: I could not have put it better myself.

Becoming who you are is not something you do. It is something that is already done. You just take the long way around to learn it.

9. ON REACTIONS TO THE FIRST BOOK

Q: What's the most common reaction you have had to *How To Be Alone Forever*?

A: Overwhelming positivity, which is very gratifying.

Readers don't agree with everything in it. One of my favourite observations about the *Alone Forever* is the truest: We are not the same as other people, and we are not the same as each other.

The book is my idiosyncratic take on the whole *Alone Forever* 'thing'. There are many other takes on it.

A few readers said they disagreed with much of what I had to say about being *Alone Forever*, but they still love the fact that the book exists at all. That makes me feel good.

Q: What is the most common thing that people disagree with in the book?

A: My entire central argument! Which is that the *Alone Forever* life is *not* necessarily the worthless, pointless life

that we have been conditioned (and self-conditioned) to see it as being.

Society conditions us to see ourselves as worthless because of all the things we don't do, all the things we have never done, and all the things we will never do. All the things we lack.

We also condition ourselves to see our lives that way.

My point in the book is that there may come a time when you seem to wake up, as if from a lifelong dream. The Alone Forever life is not the same life at all times. It undergoes dynamic change with the passage of time. One of those changes took me by surprise in my mid-forties – a radical readjustment of my entire persona.

Alone Forever is no longer something I am struggling against. It is what I am.

That was the book's core message.

Q: The message isn't helpful to those who are younger than you and different from you. Can you see that?

A: Absolutely. I was young too, once. So the book was primarily aimed at older people. Those who are getting on a bit, and starting to wonder about certain things. Those who are ready to see themselves and their lives from a different angle. Those who have been Alone Forever their whole lives, who are now past their youth and on the cusp of middle age, or even older. It really can feel like it's all over for us. It seems *impossible* that there's anything left in life for us. But is that really the case? That's what the book asks, and tries to answer. The title of the book works on a number of levels.

Q: Are you comfortable with younger people not really getting anything from the book?

A: No, because anybody who is Alone Forever should be able to get *something* from the book. I did hear from a few younger people. A couple of emails. They tended to say that they enjoyed reading the book, and really got something from parts of it. They thought the book was funny too, which pleased me no end.

But my overall message didn't persuade them. They told me there was no meaning or value in the Alone Forever life.

They put it very politely, might I add. As I mention somewhere in the book, us Alone Forever types, generally speaking, are an extremely well-mannered bunch of people. No matter how much we rage and groan in our private selves, in public we are polite and self-effacing, always willing to do favours for others, always trying to accommodate ourselves to people.

We really are *nice* guys and gals. Maybe this is one of the problems we have.

10. ON MESSAGE

Q: About that central message of *How To Be Alone Forever*. You say we can emerge from youthful despair into a mature life of meaning and purpose, albeit a solitary one. How is that supposed to help a younger person in the grip of the despair that goes with being Alone Forever?

A: I don't think it *can* help them. Not much, anyway. I remember the nature of that despair very well, and there's no real help for it except to go through it and emerge on the other side.

I still feel it – that good old Alone Forever despair. Occasionally.

Once in a while, for no particular reason, I'll get a few hours, sometimes a whole day, when I feel as bad about myself, and the life that I've grown into, as I did at twenty-five or thirty. Back then, it was just dawning on me that *nothing was going to happen*. I realised, fully and comprehensively, that women did not value me as a potential romantic partner, and I was unable to change enough to do anything about it.

It's a staggering awareness to have about yourself and

the likely course of your life, at the age of twenty-five. When that awareness really blossoms in a young person... there's no pretending it's not difficult. There's no hand-waving it away. There's no 'it'll be fine, you'll see', which is just another version of the bullshit advice that we keep getting from the in-crowd.

Q: Hang on. Are you saying the book *doesn't* trot out a version of 'it'll be fine, you'll see'?

A: It does and it doesn't. Yes, I will have my cake, and I will eat it too.

It's all about overview, and perspective. You've got to cross some heavy ground to get to that perspective – a long and twisting road.

I go back to everything I've said about the particular type of Alone Forever that the book is specifically intended for: the *older* type.

When your despair has started to fade, started to blunt, when perspective starts to swim into focus, when you come to understand that being Alone Forever isn't some temporary aberration – that somehow, this is your *life* – that's when my message might help.

Q: So what can the younger ones *do*? Who is writing a book for *them*?

A: Maybe I'll write it, who knows? Looks like there's a trilogy of sorts in progress. Maybe the third one will be for the young 'uns? I do remember well enough what it was like. More likely, though, one of their number will have to step up to the plate and pull the sword from the stone...

Q: I don't think anything can really help younger Alone Forever people.

A: I think that might be unfortunately true. Maybe the only thing that can help them is coming to a cool, rational understanding of the position they're in. Even that might be difficult, because when you're in full-on, proper Alone Forever despair, there is no real seeing of anything outside it.

If I'd come across a book like *How To Be Alone Forever* when I was younger, I might have snapped it shut in disgust almost at the start. For most young people, most of the time, it can never seem possible to come to terms with being Alone Forever.

It seems self-evident that we *have to* find love and friendship, and we *have to* have sex and get married and have children and live long, happy, fulfilling lives – we *have to* do all these things, or we have failed.

The most common measure of the success or failure of a human life is the amount and quality of the relationships that a person creates with other people. If you fail on that front as comprehensively as the typical Alone Forever person has failed, then you have failed. *Period.*

Q: But you argue against that view?

A: I certainly do, although 'argue' is the wrong way to frame it. I describe the outlines of a possible *new* framework. Instead of pulling hard on the joystick, trying to pull out of the dive – why not push the damn thing *down*, or better yet, release it altogether and see what happens?

Let the world forget about you. Live out your solitary life. Let them forget who you ever were. When you die, leave them a mystery to ponder for five minutes.

11. ON NOT BEING CONVINCED

Q: How long has it been since you finished writing *How To Be Alone Forever*?

A: Let's see... It's currently late 2018, now. I finished off *How To Be Alone Forever* about a year, maybe a year and a half ago? Something like that. I started writing it about three years ago, so it's been a long time.

Q: You say the Alone Forever life is one that changes as you get older. You're a few years older now than you were when you started the book. Has anything changed in your thinking?

A: Yes and no. I know – another weaselly answer, but I'm thinking out loud here, so let's see where we go with this.

Q: Okay.

A: My thinking has changed in one aspect. Today I am even more convinced of one of my core principles: the mature Alone Forever perspective isn't something that

you *do*, it is instead something you *become*. No mental aerobics of any kind will take you to the Promised Land of peace, acceptance, contentment, and all that good stuff.

Which isn't what the many Alone Forever types who are still gripped by chronic despair want to hear. But it is the truth. You cannot get there from here without passing through all the terrain in-between.

Think of all those repeated posts on the Forever Alone message boards that ask questions like 'How do I stop caring that I'm a loser?', or words to that effect.

Those questions, those feelings, are going to keep coming. They cannot stop coming.

Somebody on the cusp of a Great Epiphany, somebody older, who reads my stuff *might* find themselves thinking and feeling in new ways about themselves and their lives.

But for the younger ones, a book – any book – will only help them to a limited extent. It might alleviate pain for a short time, in the way a headache pill alleviates a headache. But the underlying cause of the headache will not magically go away.

Time – sheer lived *time* – is the only thing that brings about the deep inner shift required.

Q: Are you sure that that point of the Alone Forever life – call it 'acceptance with age' – will come for *everyone*?

A: I'm as sure as sure can be that there's *some* measure of peace waiting for the Alone Forever who make it to middle age. We are survivors. There's a Darwinian angle to it.

There's also a what-the-fuck-does-it-matter angle to it.

When you get to middle age Alone Forever, what do you have to lose?

Q: Nothing much.

A: Nothing much indeed. Having failed to escape whilst young enough for escape to matter, and having refrained from killing ourselves, we find ourselves unexpectedly thriving on the stoniest ground.

As I have remarked already, exceptions will exist. There will be 50-year-old Alone Forevers reading these very words, I am sure, and shaking their heads in silent despair. '*Where's my peace and happiness in middle age?*' they'll be thinking.

But just about every Alone Forever person who 'makes it' to middle age and beyond will, I think, find that the outer garments of the condition evaporate rather suddenly.

You're shaking your head?

Q: Because I'm just not convinced. It seems so unlikely.

A: That's okay. You can't be convinced. It has to come by itself. You cannot summon it. Which is not very encouraging for the average 25-year-old who stares at four walls every night and wonders what the hell is ever going to become of them. *That* 25-year-old feels a very particular feeling about their lives. It seems impossible to them that they will ever not feel the way they feel. So there's an understandable scepticism about what I have to say.

12. ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

Q: How well do you think the online ‘Forever Alone’ community represents the condition to an outside observer?

A: Not very well, sometimes, but that’s only to be expected. We live peculiar lives. Quite a lot of us spend time in Crazytown. Stands to reason that a few of us will take up permanent residence there.

But any supposedly neutral observer who took the truly crazy ones as representative of us as a whole would be following another agenda. Most of the time, the average day’s postings on the average FA-themed message board *does* represent us rather well. Lost and bewildered.

Not that it ultimately matters whether people do understand or not. We don’t have good PR, people like us. It’s foolish to expect that we ever will.

I rarely concern myself with how the online FA community must look to the casual, non-FA passer-by. Regular people are never going to understand our fundamentally irregular lives, so whether they see crazy posts or meaningful posts doesn’t matter: to them, it’s all

just one bizarre mélange of losers sobbing in each others' arms.

We are not a coherent community to the outside world and we never will be.

Not one of us will ever emerge as any kind of public advocate.

There is far too much reflexive hostility and confusion in the public mind about us. Can you imagine trying to convey the state of being Alone Forever within a two-minute radio 'spot'? With the presenter interrupting and asking stupid questions all the time?

My books are anomalies in the Alone Forever world. And there is a reason for that. A sad reason.

Q: Which is?

A: Failure! Failure is the reason. *We are consistent failures.* Romantically. Socially. Vocationally. There is no public understanding of us because the public has no well-known examples of us to consider.

Where are the Alone Forever presidents and prime ministers?

The Alone Forever artists, the Alone Forever dancers?

The Alone Forever sculptors?

The Alone Forever footballers, the Alone Forever pop singers, the Alone Forever actors and directors?

Precisely where are all the Alone Forever public figures?

Where are the renowned and world-famous names?

Q: Er, Franz Kafka?

A: A strong candidate, on the face of it, but you cannot even begin to make a case for him being Alone Forever. Kafka had two long love affairs. He visited prostitutes

whenever he was in the mood. He also had a lifelong best friend, and numerous other friends.

The point is that everybody who does anything of note, in any field, tends to have somebody in their lives whom they do that thing *for*. Whether it's a spouse, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a friend or group of friends, or their own family – somebody *outside them* inspires them to create and achieve remarkable things.

We who are Alone Forever have nothing and nobody to inspire us. We don't even really have each other. We only have ourselves, and we're not much inspired by ourselves, as a rule.

Q: It would still be nice if the world at large was more sympathetic to us.

A: Never going to happen. And we shouldn't want it to. Away with this notion that the Alone Forever must engage in some sort of public discourse, or *debate!*

The life of the individual – what works for me, and me alone, in the isolated fastness of my Alone Forever life – is the first and only priority I can have.

The bottom line? To be Alone Forever means that you never mean anything much to other people. And in the end, other people never mean anything much to you.

13. ON THE ELEVATOR PITCH

Q: If you had to sum up your philosophy of being Alone Forever in a few words, how would you do it?

A: With difficulty. When speaking about Alone Forever I always hedge it with qualifiers and definitions that bloat the topic. I'm always mentally addressing myself to an imagined sceptic, who usually isn't Alone Forever themselves. One of the things that mentally paralyses us the most, I think, is our awareness that we are not understood by others. We are only ever misunderstood or ignored. A true philosophy of Alone Forever, if there can be such a grand thing-

Q: I think there can be. I don't think it's absurd to analyse and theorise about it. It's *weird* to be Alone Forever in this world. So what would the elevator pitch for your Alone Forever philosophy be?

A: I have to go back to my Grand Epiphany outside the hospital where my mother lay dying. A few moments that turned the whole world inside-out for me.

It's described at length in *How To Be Alone Forever*. I won't rehash it here, except to say that it turned my perspective on myself completely on its head. 'To thine own self be true.'

Look at who I was and what I was. I was in my mid-forties. I had never had a girlfriend. No friends either – I hadn't had any friends for twenty years. When you're Alone Forever in your forties, it's painfully obvious to everyone you know that you're lacking everything they have in their lives. It's stressful being among people when the conversation could veer at any moment toward areas you'd rather not discuss.

Q: Elevator pitch, remember...

A: Yes. It's this.

All at once, the years resolved themselves, and everything seemed to lock into place. Being Alone Forever is *not* an aberration, for me. It's *not* a great injustice that has been visited upon me by God, or fate, or society, or my family, or the nasty boys and girls at school who weren't very nice to me, or anything at all.

I am Alone Forever because of who and what I am in my deepest, inmost self. This solitary individual that I am *is who I am*. I can be no other. I am Alone Forever.

I have no will-to-sociability. In every circumstance where I had to choose self or others, I chose self. Which is contrary to the vast majority of human experience. Some people are simply born without the desire for regular human contact.

Q: Your Alone Forever philosophy is that you are thus by nature, not nurture, and you've just got to deal with it?

A: That's nearly it. The first part of what you said, yes,

definitely. It is nature. It is my nature. It is who and what I am. My Great Epiphany showed me this for the first time, and arrived complete with a kind of joyful certainty that has never gone away. Never faded – which is unusual for an Alone Forever-themed epiphany, as I'm sure everyone reading this would agree. Most of our epiphanies vanish overnight. This one hasn't.

Now when I see a nice romantic couple in the street, I don't feel any pangs of regret. I don't feel envy, or anger. Those are things that used to weigh me down in the past. The past is gone for me. Their lives are their lives. Mine is mine.

Q: So your message is that we have to get over other people?

A: You could boil it down to that, yes. Certainly. A fundamental experience of being Alone Forever is needing to impress other people in some way. We have to examine that impulse in ourselves. Drag it into the light and hold it to account. We have to stop craving the attention and recognition and approval of others.

We install other people at a privileged point in our inner cosmology. Other people are the collective Sun, and we are like dead minor planets orbiting their dazzling luminosity. We take all our cues for behaviour from them.

Other people need to be dethroned from that privileged position in our inner lives. It is a very difficult thing to do, so difficult in fact that I believe it is not something we *can* do. It is something that just has to happen in time. It has to loosen and fall away on its own, like a chrysalis.

I genuinely believe every Alone Forever who makes it to a certain stage will experience something like this. My

few contacts with others of a similar age to me support this view.

Q: You're in contact with other middle-aged Alone Forever people?

A: 'Contact' is too strong a word. A couple of emails, a few PMs on Reddit, that kind of thing. We're not big on sociability, for the most part, us people, are we?

Q: That's true.

A: In my entire life I have rarely embarked on any social contact that I didn't almost immediately wish was over.

Perhaps this is the secret of how there is a subset of Alone Forever people who don't die or go crazy as they age.

We're the ones who are predisposed from the start not to want to be with people. I remember as a kid sometimes having to go to somebody else's house after school because one or both of my parents was at work. It was usually an aunt or uncle's house, sometimes a neighbour's. I hated it more than I can possibly express. And then when you tell people something like that, they will ask 'but *why?*' and press you for a reason they can nod along to, as if you have to seek their agreement before you can legitimately dislike something.

When you do share something of yourself with other people – not a great idea, as a rule, but I think we're all gulled into doing it on occasion – then you often come up against that simple question.

Why? Why this, why that, why that other thing? Why didn't I like sitting in other people's houses as a child? (Come to think of it, I dislike doing it as an adult, too.)

Why? They really want to know – and such is the

arrogance of other people, manifesting itself right here. They're not seeking understanding. They don't want to know 'what makes you tick', even if that's what they explicitly say they want. They want you to give them a reason for your oddness *that they can agree with*.

They see themselves as the authorising authority for whatever specimen of weirdness they've taken umbrage at.

'Give me a reason for yourself that I can understand, or you are not entitled to be yourself. (Oh, and by the way, all you have to do is just be yourself...)

Q: And there is no point in debating it with them, is there?

A: None at all. It's not wise. Not unless you want to see real anger. Take people past the first outer layers of the mutually-supporting social layers that swaddle them, and they're quickly upset. I don't blame them for being so. Look at it from their point of view. Look at the operations of the great social machine. Normal everyday life *works*. Untold millions are born, grow, mate, reproduce, and all but a negligible few of them live rich, fulfilling lives packed with friendship and love. They are the numerical majority. Their actions make the world go round. If it was all left to us – the loners, the misfits – there wouldn't even be a world. From their perspective, we are the unreasonable ones. The aberrant ones. Faced with this monolith, it is no wonder we get a bit crazy at times.

It is vital to withdraw from other people the automatic authority we invest in them. We have to be our own performers, our own audience, and our own judge. If we're not satisfied with the things that we can do and achieve on our own, we're never going to be satisfied.

A commenter on Reddit once raised a point against

me, quite a reasonable one too. He said: but it's better to be part of the herd. Because it just *is*. It self-evidently *is*!

We might call this the pragmatic view. Whatever else might be said of being Alone Forever, however we might try to dress it up, to be Alone Forever is to be in a very bad place in this world. Not being part of the herd is difficult in so many ways. Alone Forever is a crippling disadvantage that there's no getting over, no matter what mental gymnastics are employed.

Q: You sound as if you agree with the pragmatic view.

A: I do agree with it. I totally agree with it – at the level of it. But that is not the level I live at.

14. ON BEING MYSELF

Q: What makes you content?

A: Solitude and silence. Peace and quiet. Space to think and breathe, and to really and truly *be myself*. People are not an agreeable context for me to be myself in. People force me to feel unnatural and not be myself, because of the levels of acting required to pretend to be the kind of person that they seem to need me to be.

Q: Oh, come off it. Why not just be yourself!

A: Why not indeed? Say, would you like to meet myself? My real, actual self?

Q: Sure.

A: Right. Get a load of this fellow...

[Maximus sits quietly for a minute, staring at the wall, not engaging with the Questioner in any way.]

Q: Okay, okay, I get your obvious point.

A: Do you? Do you really? Because that *is* what you mean, isn't it, when you tell me to just be myself?

You *do* mean that I should be the self that I really and truly am, right?

You don't mean I should be somebody else completely, i.e., some sort of crafted, false social persona who *isn't* myself, do you? Do you?

Q: Very funny.

A: It's interesting how badly you're taking that little skit I just did there. Even though you are, broadly speaking, a fellow traveller on the mellow brick road of Alone Foreverdom, you still don't like me demonstrating the foolishness of the 'just be yourself' meme that follows us around like memetic herpes.

When anyone, anyone at all, tells us to just be ourselves, they're really telling us to be somebody *other than* ourselves.

Q: I said I got your point. You don't have to ram it home like this.

A: Oh, but I *do*. This point is a very strange point. It has the mysterious property of being completely understood in one moment, but mysteriously forgotten about a moment later. Such is the power of 'just be yourself'. Despite its susceptibility to falling apart under close scrutiny, somehow it stubbornly endures.

You say you get the point I'm making, but I am absolutely certain that you will leave here today still convinced that 'just be yourself' is a cure-all for just about every Alone Forever ill going.

Q: Why do I feel like I have stepped on a landmine here?

A: Because you have.

My self – that’s my real self, the core essence of who and what I am – is the person who I am when I am alone. And that person is far from being the kind of person whom people want to be with.

So the very last thing that anybody who is Alone Forever should be, with other people, is *themselves*. Are you feeling suitably chastised, now?

Q: I am, yes. It was just a figure of speech. Of course I know that there’s a lot of derision in the ‘community’-

A: Good air-quotes.

Q: – thank you – a lot of derision and a lot of mirth about the constant recycling of the ‘just be yourself’ thing. Would you really call it a meme?

A: In the broadest sense, yes, I would. Taking meme in the broadest sense to mean ‘an unexamined cliché of interpersonal discourse’.

Q: You have a way with words.

A: And how the ladies have always loved me for it.

Q: So ‘just be yourself’ is always wrong?

A: As a piece of would-be-sage advice for the Alone Forever, absolutely, yes. ‘Just be yourself’ is *always* wrong. If you somehow think I am mistaken, go ahead and try to be your actual, real, Alone Forever self with other people for one day, and see what happens.

Who we really are is for us alone to know and understand. The reason a person is long-term Alone Forever – or Forever Alone – or whatever it's called – is because their very personhood, their true selves, is what makes them so.

Q: Which seems like common sense. So why do we go on saying 'Just be yourself'?

A: We don't, really. Other people say it to us, most of the time. 'Just be yourself' is one of those common phrases that comes easily to the tongue in certain situations. The person who says 'just be yourself' thinks they're saying a good and useful thing.

We are not understood. Our existence is not understood. Not only is our existence not understood, but there is a sneering contempt for the idea that we might wish to be understood.

Q: Don't you want to be understood? Wouldn't it be a good thing to be understood?

A: Two separate questions. My answers are no and yes.

No, I don't want to be understood by Joe and Jane Bloggs. The reason being that they can't understand me. If they could understand me, I would no longer be myself. Our best practice as Alone Forever persons, growing old in the world, is to live invisibly and quietly.

Q: Do you see yourself as one of the hardcore Alone Forever types?

A: Let's see. 50 years old. A whole life without a single romantic relationship of any description. No sex. No friends since my 20s. Hell yeah! I've got a gold-plated

Alone Forever badge. I hear ‘the guys’ are making me a t-shirt: *I spent my life Alone Forever and all I got was this lousy t-shirt.*

In a curious way, being Alone Forever, *forever*, is a remarkable achievement. Who else has done it? I know nobody who has.

But getting back to the second question, whether or not it would be good to be understood:

Other people are fundamentally unable to perceive what and who we are. So that renders the whole question of being yourself... moot.

You could sit down with one of your normie acquaintances and walk them through the whole Alone Forever thing. Spend a couple of hours on it. Spend a few *days* telling them things, giving them examples, shoring things up with supporting evidence and articulate observations. Give them my books to read. Show them the online forums dedicated to our accursed kind, even the nasty ones.

At the end of however long you spend trying to explain, they will still not understand – although they will say they do in order to forestall you going on about it any further. ‘*Poor old Dave,*’ they will think to themselves. ‘*Maybe one day he’ll meet a nice girl and settle down.*’

When you share with people the fact that you do not have their most fundamental experiences of life – friends, love, romance, sex, etc. – they’re not going to believe you at first, and then if they do believe you, they’re not going to understand why.

Q: But it would *still* be nice to be understood. *If* that was possible. You can’t deny that.

A: Yes, okay. It would be very nice indeed. Sympathy and understanding and all that good stuff. But... then what?

Q: Then what?

A: Then nothing. You would go on as you have always gone on. The understanding of others, if it were even possible, *wouldn't change anything*. Not for me. Maybe a younger person in the first stages of Alone Forever might get some substantive help from being understood. But for me, or for you, or for anyone else who has gone past a certain stage...

Q: We're past help?

A: We're long past the point where gaining the understanding of others could lead to help. Or so I believe, anyway. Other views are doubtless available. There's the popular mythos of miraculous last-gasp redemption, Hollywood-style, to give you comfort and hope, if you like that sort of thing.

Q: What if I *do* like that sort of thing?

A: You do you, as they say.

I've encountered many women in my time. Women of all ages and appearances and personality types. One might remark that she likes my eyes. Another likes my chin. A Classics student once told me admiringly that I have a Roman nose. Plenty of women like my rumbling deep voice. Others appreciate my sense of humour. Some even like the way I think. Sadly, I never met a woman who liked my eyes and my chin and my nose and my voice and my sense of humour and my mind, all together at once. It would be foolish to pretend such a woman could never exist. But I have now come too far alone to live any other way.

15. ON TYPES

Q: *How To Be Alone Forever* opened with a brief look at the different types of Alone Forever. That interested me very much.

A: None of us are the same as each other. We're all different types of Alone Forever.

Q: You described four separate types. Do you stand by there being only four?

A: I described four general types of *outcome* to being Alone Forever, rather than four distinct categories that we all fit neatly into... so yes, broadly speaking – *very* broadly speaking, because those were rather made up off the cuff, on the spur the moment; they're not deeply considered, or properly ruminated upon, or anything – yes, I stand by the four types of Alone Forever.

Do you remember what they were?

Q: Yes. I have them written down here.

Type 1: the ones who escape while they're still young.

A: Yes. Taking 'young' to mean until around the mid-20s. Type 1 will be the most common type. All the ones who eventually get out, and never look back. Most Alone Forever teens will have escaped by the time they're in their mid-twenties. More power to them.

Q: Type 2: those who 'succumb to despair', as you put it, and kill themselves.

A: Again, yes, a definite Alone Forever type. Unfortunately. I think we're most vulnerable to being a Type 2 when we're young and feeling *really* desperate.

At several points during my 20s, I might have ended it. I haven't always been sitting cross-legged on this lofty plateau of my post-Epiphany perspective, you know. There was one night in particular when I was about 28. I'd had a few drinks, and saw clearly how there was no hope for me, none whatsoever. It seemed to me that I might as well hang myself, that very night. My brain chemistry was in *just* the right configuration... I conceived the idea of hanging myself from a tree in some nearby woods. *I could actually do this*, I thought.

Q: Why didn't you do it?

A: The honest answer is that it was about 3am and it was cold outside and I couldn't be bothered. We sometimes want to kill ourselves, but we don't want it to be an ordeal. I went to sleep instead, and of course when I woke up the next day, the kaleidoscope of my self had been tweaked. I didn't feel the same.

Q: Were there any other similar occasions?

A: A few, maybe. I'd like to talk about them some other time.

Q: Sensitive topic?

A: Oh, no. Quite the opposite. It's just that we're talking about Types of Alone Forever right now, and I want to stay on-topic.

Q: Okay. Type 3: late escapers. Those who initially seem to be Alone Forever for life, but who manage to get out in their 30s or 40s.

A: Yes, or even later than that. By rights this lot should be lumped in with Type 1. *All* the escapees, whatever their age and circumstances of escape, should be considered a single Type, in the final analysis.

By separating the youngsters from the oldsters I was respecting one of the fundamental features of an Alone Forever life: how it *changes* its essential nature as you move through the years.

It's one thing to escape at age 25, quite another thing to escape at age 35. Or age 40.

If you escape at age 35 or 45, your life experience as an Alone Forever person up to that point is *very* different from being an escapee at 25. An older escapee will be proportionally tainted by the experience of having been Alone Forever for all those additional years. The young ones who escape will carry the burden too, but the older you get, the more the whole Alone Forever thing becomes indelibly marked on your character, your appearance, your very soul, no matter what changes might come your way.

Q: Okay. And finally, Type 4.

A [*raises hand*]: Me! Me! Me!

Q: Type 4: those who never get out. The ones who never escape. The ones who live their entire lives Alone Forever.

A: Technically, these should also be part of a previous Type. Type 2.

Q: What, they're in with the suicides?

A: Yep. The ones who live their entire lives Alone Forever. They're all one Type.

Q: Oh, right. I see. That's a bit... grim.

A: Yes. It is.

16. ON EXISTENTIAL STINK

Q: Was there a stage in your life, maybe when you were young, when you felt 'normal'?

A: Another yes and no answer, I'm afraid. I do recall being a boy and feeling more or less normal. I was enthusiastic about boyish things. Playing football with my mates. Chasing girls in the playground. It's only looking back that I see the seeds of Alone Forever being planted and watered.

At my primary school the children played a version of the classic kiss-chase playground game. Somehow I never caught any of the girls. Not even once. I only realised years later that the girls only wanted to be caught by some of the boys. They evaded the rest of us. My life is bursting with stories of petty failures with girls and women.

Q: Same.

A: Strange how we carry on, isn't it? How we can endure.

My instinct for solitude was apparent very early.

Countless times one of the neighbouring kids would knock the door to see if I wanted to go out and play. Sometimes I went out and played. Most other times, I didn't.

Q: You're anti-social by nature.

A: Yes, although *asocial* might be more precise. I don't mind either word.

I would say that I have always been like this. I believe that everyone who has ever known me, from early childhood all the way to now, would cheerfully back me up. *'Oh, that "Maximus" bloke? Likes his own company, that one. Not really a people person. Not at all.'*

Until relatively recently, I used to make the effort. I would pitch up at some social occasion and try my best to muddle through. Hating it all, but wanting to stick it out because I knew I was heading for middle age and 'other people' are really the only show in town.

So I'd perform the role of a social being for a few hours, then return to my own company, and feel wretched. Somehow, nothing with other people quite seems to stick. I made a couple of friends at school, but in all the years since, nothing. I could never get anything serious going with people, not really. Not past the most superficial levels. People are averse to me.

You know that feeling you get when you cautiously sniff a pint of milk and detect it to be sour?

Q: I do know that feeling.

A: You make a certain kind of face, don't you? Even if there's nobody else around. The scrunched-up nose. The furrowed brow. The face of displeasure.

Q: I know that face.

A: Me too. It's the face I tend to see on other people, sooner or later, when I'm doing my absolute best to be sociable with them.

It didn't particularly hurt when it came from people in general – you get used to it. But when it came from a woman to whom I might have felt a modicum of attraction – it hurt. Every time.

A lot of the time I'd be just making conversation, you know, the way normal people do. Then something in my tone, or in the content of my speech, or in the *context* of my speech – makes other people do the sour-milk face. I have come to believe that people like 'us' exude some sort of existential B.O.

Q: Body odour?

A: Yes, an abstract version of that. We exude existential B.O. Even if we're just sitting quietly and minding our own business.

When does the penny drop? At what age, and after how many trials, and after how much anguish, do we finally recognise that things just are not ever going to work out between us and other people?

It's about adjusting to the reality of your own reality. It's about coming to understand that there is nothing more. Even the days of yearning for something more are behind you. Which is hard to accept. For the longest time, yearning was all you had.

17. ON HAVING NO FRIENDS

Q: I often think my friends are all I will ever have in life as I grow older, and I am thankful for them every day.

Is it true you don't have any friends?

A: It is true, sadly. I really don't know what happened. You should hang onto your friends. Having no friends is the height of carelessness. Hold onto your friends! I let mine slip away.

Q: All of them?

A: Both of them, yes. I only ever had two friends.

By 'friends' I don't mean what many people today mean. I don't mean simply anyone with whom one is on casually friendly terms, at work or school or whatever. Acquaintance that does not run much deeper than surface-level isn't friendship.

Friendship should be a close personal relationship. Exchanges of deep confidences. Shared experiences. A sense of comradeship that mutually enriches. I once had

all of that. It feels strange to think of myself having once had friends.

Q: Who were your friends?

A: School friends. One of the friendships ended quite quickly after we left school. I haven't seen or heard anything of that one for about thirty years now. I have no idea if he is alive or dead.

Q: And the other one?

A: My other school friendship lasted a few years longer than that. We were well into our twenties when the dynamics of adult life fundamentally undermined things.

It was a true camaraderie. Losing that friendship is one of my life's biggest regrets. We once argued for an hour about the pronunciation of 'werewolf'. Does the 'were' part of 'werewolf' rhyme with 'beer' or 'lair'? We went back and forth about that one for an hour in a pub one night. No wonder we never met any women.

We were solid friends for several years after school. Us against the world! But time passed, as it always does, the bastard. Soon my friend was making plans to move away to university. That is unfortunately just how it goes. Time passes, 'real life' intervenes, and other people undergo significant change, while you stay pretty much the same. It's one of the hallmarks of the Alone Forever life.

Q: Wait. I thought you said the hallmark of the Alone Forever was that it *changes* over time?

A: There's no contradiction there. The *inward* experience we have of being Alone Forever changes over time –

undeniably, it changes. At age 50, I don't feel about my life the way I felt about it at age 40. At age 35, I didn't feel the way I felt about it at age 30. And so on.

What *doesn't* change for the Alone Forever are the specific outward conditions of life that make us Alone Forever. No romantic partners. Decreasing friendships – or decreasing intensity of friendships – as the years pass.

We can move around from place to place, change jobs, embark on hoped-for 'new lives' in other parts of the world, but the core circumstance of Alone Forever is unchanging.

We are people whose default experience of life is a solitary one. That is our fundamental reality. That is what does not change.

I understood something a while ago: it is not going to end well. Stands to reason. Other people's lives generally don't end well, and that's with the support structures they generally have around them. An Alone Forever life cannot end well.

Q: It's bleak.

A: Is that really what it has to be? Bleak? I have come to a different view.

But getting back to my last friend – he eventually moved away to university, hundreds of miles away. We met up for a farewell drink before he left. I remember the night clearly. I knew it was a massive watershed moment. I waved him off in his taxi. I can see myself standing at the side of the road with my arm raised in farewell, knowing how big a moment that was. Crazy how vivid that image still is. I *knew* how momentous it was. I knew that was it. My last friend, gone. I was twenty-three years old.

Q: Surely you met up with him again?

A: Yes, of course we did. We were still technically *friends*, after all. But our friendship was effectively over and done with from the moment he left our home city.

Q: You seem quite cheerful about it?

A: I am now. It was the making of me. The *coup de grace*. When you're Alone Forever and you have at least one friend whom you can socialise with and call up in an emergency, you're still rooted in the world. You're still invested in other people. Losing my last friend was the severing of my last real tie. I still had my parents, but the clock was ticking there too.

Q: How long before you and your friend didn't meet up again?

A: A couple more years. We continued to meet up whenever he returned home, but things were increasingly awkward. He was out there in the big wide world, having loads of significant life experiences. I wasn't. He was undergoing radical changes, emotionally and spiritually. I wasn't. We both had to negotiate a new way of dealing with the other. I don't know which one of us found it more awkward. Suddenly we were no longer equals. Not even remotely. He had surpassed me at being a real person in real life, and we both knew it.

We had previously talked about everything – but we never acknowledged this drastic shift in our friendship. Things limped on for a while, until eventually I began to detect something in him that caused me to be the one to finally bring it to an end.

Q: Which was?

A: His smugness at having escaped. He *enjoyed* telling me about all the women he was meeting and his romantic and sexual successes. He *enjoyed* seeing the involuntary dismay on my face. All it took were a couple of unreturned phone calls and that was the end.

It was the definitive end of a distinct phase of my Alone Forever life. While I'd had at least one friend, I had not been alone in day-to-day life. Now...

Q: It must have been huge.

A: It was. It was probably *the* moment. *The* inflection point in my life. The juncture at which I might have turned back, somehow. My friend had put together a plan and got the hell out. Why didn't I?

Q: You stayed where you were?

A: I stayed where I was. I stayed *what* I was. That was the key. I remained who I was, no matter how much I might have felt I wanted to become somebody else. Remind me, what is the normies' favourite nugget of wisdom again?

Q: Just be yourself.

A: It is great advice! Really it is. Especially when you take it literally, at face value.

Being yourself means being true to yourself.

Alone Forever is who and what I am. Forever.

18. ON FUNDAMENTALS

Q: What is the core principle of your so-called message? Boil it *right down* for me.

A: We keep circling back to this in various forms. I have said it plainly many times, and don't know how to say it any plainer – but I know why you keep asking. It is hard to keep it in mind, isn't it?

Q: It's the *strangest* thing to keep in mind.

A: The core principle: I am what I am by my inmost nature.

I had all the same chances as any normal person. I was not bad-looking as a young man.

I was and still am a bit peculiar to talk to, but I know of people with far more peculiar personalities than mine who had a dozen romantic relationships before they were twenty-five.

Why am *I* the great exception? Why have *I* been apparently singled out by society? Or by God, by fate, by fortune – by whatever?

Asking these questions is like asking ‘why am I five feet nine inches tall? Why is the sky blue? Why do objects fall at thirty-two feet per second per second?’

There is nothing unnatural or strange about my being Alone Forever.

Being Alone Forever is a faithful reflection of who I am at the deepest, most fundamental level of my being.

Q: But that’s not going to be true for everyone.

A: I would not claim that it is. All I would recommend is that the Alone Forever man or woman who is at or approaching middle age might want to consider my case and measure it against theirs.

And they might realise something surprising.

Something that they never considered until now.

Something that flabbergasts them.

Something that they instinctively want to deny *and* instinctively want to embrace, at the same time:

Alone Forever is who and what I am.

I think you will just know it, if it’s true.

Q: Is it comforting?

A: That’s a question with a loaded subtext. Don’t worry. I’ve considered it from every angle.

I was and still am suspicious of the ease and comfort of this ‘solution’ to the Alone Forever problem.

The answer to your question is *yes*, it certainly is comforting.

It was the discovery of the obvious. Of who I really am, after over four decades of trying and failing to be somebody else.

I obtained instant relief from the pressure of

constantly trying *not* to be Alone Forever. It was amazing, and it still is amazing.

But I do turn a critical eye on it.

Could I be wrong?

Is this all self-deception?

But even if it is: so what?

Q: Well. If it's self-deception then you're turning your back on your last few real chances. You're still just about young enough to change your life...

A: Self-deception is a slippery concept. If you take it far enough, what *isn't* a candidate for the self-deception woodpile?

Imagine a thirty-year-old Alone Forever person who finally lucks out – having taken the right shower at the right time, or something – and ends up meeting the love of his life, and she falls madly in love with him. Let's say that happens.

Q: Okay. That happens.

A: That certainly happens. Something like that is what will happen for most younger Alone Foreverers. Escape is the rule for us, not the exception.

Q: *Is* it the rule?

A: Well, we're not a very well-studied people, to say the least, so who the hell knows. It's just my subjective 'feel' for the situation.

Q: Okay. Say that escape is the rule.

A: Each escapee will find *comfort* in their escape, yes?

They powerfully wished to be out there in the world of regular people, experiencing romantic-sexual relationships just like the ones we've all seen in the goddamn movies. And that's what they've now got. And they're *comforted* by that – just as I am *comforted* by my discovery of my essential identity as one who is Alone Forever!

Q: I can see where you're going with this.

A: Why does my feeling of being comforted automatically introduce *suspicion* into the equation?

If I am comforted by the feeling that being Alone Forever is a true and faithful reflection of my deepest inmost self, why can't that be as real and valuable as the escapee's grand love affair?

Why must we always be second-guessing ourselves?

When will we truly wake up and... just be ourselves?

As social animals, we rely for much of our self-esteem upon others holding us in positive esteem. To be Alone Forever is to be ranked almost as low as a person can get. You can never articulate anything about your real life to others in a way that will not lower their esteem of you. You have to keep it to yourself. Don't worry about them figuring it out for themselves. They won't. You live in a twilit hinterland that nobody but you can perceive. This is what it means to be Alone Forever.

19. ON SUICIDE

Q: The future?

A: What about it?

Q: That's my question. I think it's *the* question for many of the Alone Forever. Your book addressed it a lot. You said that we have to consider the future and what it'll be like when we get there, and what we might ultimately have to do. You mention witnessing various prolonged deaths of others, among them your own mother. You say that you don't want that for yourself.

A: No sane, rational, humane, compassionate person would ever want to see *any* sentient creature lingering in the kinds of states that people with advanced terminal illnesses usually get into. Have you ever seen a cancer death yourself?

Q: I have. I think most people have by the time they're middle-aged.

A: How about seeing it up close? Day in, day out? Where your daily views of the person are like a time-lapse photo leading them from chubby health to being like one of the super-decayed zombies from *The Walking Dead*?

Q: I've never seen it that close, no.

A: Then you can't really appreciate why I'm so focused on it in the book. It is a *massive* issue for me. I think it's something the permanently Alone Forever have to think about. We might have to make arrangements for our own exit sooner or later. In my mother's final days I no longer dreaded that she would die. I dreaded that she would not die.

It's a common thought had by most people who witness a cancer death in its final stages. I need to be able to take care of business before that point.

Q: Again, this is bleak, but I can tell you don't think it is.

A: It isn't bleak. Not even remotely. Here and now, on this brilliant summer's day, this is my life and I love it. But introduce some dire circumstance that couldn't be dealt with and couldn't be coped with, and I would calmly and rationally do away with myself.

For me, it absolutely isn't bleak.

We have to be ourselves alone. That means not taking any notice of other people's thoughts and views. Other people's thoughts and views are not relevant to me. You think my stance on life and death is bleak-

Q: Well, I never said *that*... I said that the way you frame the question of suicide in the life of the Alone Forever is bleak.

A: Sometimes it is bleak. Sometimes I'm cruising along in the midst of a normal day. I'm happy, I'm sane, I'm healthy – and then a train of thought will occur that leads to a destination: I should kill myself. Not today, not now, but *soon*, while I've still got enough vim and vigour to motivate myself to do it, and can patiently seek out the most agreeable method. That's critical when it comes to suicide – the method.

Q: But surely if you're of a mind to kill yourself, the method doesn't matter?

A: If you're in so much painful despair that any form of death is better than life, yes, that's true. But the long-term Alone Forever have a different set of conditions to wrestle with. We *look ahead* to suicide. It's not something for the here and now. It's something for a time yet to come. A future time when suicide will be a practical necessity.

Q: You're saying the Alone Forever have a special, separate set of considerations when it comes to suicide. Once again, 'we' are special?

A: Yep. We don't have the kind of killing despair that leads people to hurl themselves head-first out of high-rise windows, or get up and hang themselves with a belt. We can never be sure it *won't* come to that for us, but we don't think it will. *I* don't think it will. I envisage my suicide being a calmly planned and coolly executed mini-project of my late middle age or old age. The context is likely to be some medical situation that will affect my capacity to live as I have always lived – Alone Forever.

Q: Are you saying you would kill yourself if you broke your leg?

A: No! Jesus, no. What kind of questioner are you?

Q: Just asking the questions anyone would ask.

A: They're good questions. No, is the answer to the broken leg scenario. It would be damn awkward, probably, but I could cope. No, I'm talking about something more substantial, something with long-term, permanent lifestyle changes and constraints. Most types of cancer would pretty much fit the bill.

Q: You come across as arrogant and self-satisfied.

A: By whose rule am I to be judged? I'm not trying *not* to come across as arrogant and self-satisfied. I'm not engaged in a PR exercise. I'm not seeking anybody's permission or agreement. How I sound or seem to others is not a consideration. When it comes to the question of one's own suicide, there is no sense at all in tugging the forelock to other people. My cap will never be doffed to you or to anyone when it comes to this. *Never*.

Q: It's still bleak. Suicide can never not be bleak.

A: I would partly agree. I suppose it all depends on what you have seen in your own life. TV and movies never show us the reality of how people can die – protractedly, horrifically. In TV and movies, when somebody dies, they deliver a heartwarming few words, give a little gasp and close their eyes. In reality when somebody dies of cancer or similar, they're progressively *eviscerated* – physically, mentally, and spiritually – over a long period.

Q: You've been properly scarred by what you've seen, haven't you?

A: Yes. Although I would frame it as being *educated*.

I've been warned. Life has been decent enough to show me a massive neon-lit billboard. '*Hey. Watch out for this thing up ahead. Get off the road if you see it coming.*'

You think suicide is bleak. I do not. From my side, I *know* it's not. The Alone Forever must look out for themselves.

Taking responsibility for my future suicide, if it comes to that, gives me strength. It gives me a peculiar, secret power.

I am *safe*. Whatever happens (unless I am very unlucky), I will be able to dispose of myself when the time comes to do it.

Let me ask you a question.

Q: All right.

A: How would you like to die?

Q: Without pain. Peacefully. With people I care about around me.

A: The storybook death scene. How many people have you known, in your life, who have died in that graceful fashion?

Q: Not many.

A: How many?

Q: Maybe two people.

A: And the rest?

Q: They all had varying degrees of the harrowing

scenario you describe. Hospitals, operations. Long, slow decline. Dependency.

A: I rest my case.

20. ON CONFORMITY

Q: Is there a problem with communication across the Alone Forever community?

A: Sometimes there is. For one simple reason. We are all different from each other. We might seem all to be in the same boat – or on the same remote headland, looking out at the boat, or turning our backs on the boat, or whatever the hell I was chuntering on about in *How To Be Alone Forever's* epilogue – but all of us are different from each other in various ways. Some of our differences are subtle. Some are gross.

The most glaring difference is between those of us who are no longer yearning to escape, and those of us who are.

Q: That will be the most obvious difference within the community, yes.

A: And then there are multiple shades of difference within each type.

In the non-escapee faction, where I am, there are at

least two additional sub-factions. There are the non-escapees who have grown so accustomed to their lives as they are that they would not escape even if it was offered to them on a plate.

The Alone Forever people in the other camp – the want-to-escape camp – cannot understand us in the non-escape camp, and they cannot understand (don't believe) us when we say: *I've got used to it here now, this is my reality, this is my life, this is who I am.*

They have to posit some element of self-deception in play.

And then, another sub-faction: the non-escapees who have given up only out of despair at their situation. For them the door is always standing ajar. They would gladly walk through it if the unlikely happened.

Q: And you wouldn't?

A: I couldn't! I absolutely, genuinely, could not now transition from being Alone Forever to non-Alone Forever. I couldn't sit myself down on somebody's couch and yak about the weather. I'm not going to turn up at a barbecue and have a good time.

I couldn't get involved with people now.

Alone Forever is not a misfiring of the natural order for me. It is my natural fate. It is the natural manifestation of who and what I am, in every aspect, from every angle.

This is what I am saying all the time, but it is the hardest thing to get across.

I was always solitary, always strange. I always knew that the majority of other people found me difficult to deal with. They found me dull. They liked me sometimes, right enough. Even today, people still like me

sometimes – but only to the extent that I can successfully mimic somebody whom they might like.

My default, natural state is one of silence and solitude.

This is not something that the majority of the Alone Forever community has a great deal of sympathy with, I believe.

Q: I get what you're saying, believe me, but... aren't you just giving up? Letting them win? Letting the world beat you? You can't deny that you have natural instincts.

A: Can't deny them and don't deny them. The sexual impulse is pretty much gone now, but it once was strong, and the social instincts still largely remain. I would like people to think well of me, just as I would like to think well of people.

I have no friends now and am unlikely to ever have any again.

There is also no way I am ever going to negotiate the start of a 'relationship' of any kind with any woman, young or old, crazy or sane, attractive or not.

Q: Some might say you sound like a robot and you have a rigid set of self-limiting beliefs.

A: Some might be one hundred percent correct on both counts. My life has made me robotic. I spend most of my time reading, in one form or another, and my speech patterns reflect that. My interests reflect that.

No doubt my beliefs are self-limiting, but what of it? Are they therefore automatically mis-aligned with reality?

Q: If they stop you experiencing reality, then yes, they are.

A: This is another branch of the 'believe and be saved' meme that has cursed humanity from the first moment somebody had an idea and decided somebody else ought to have it too.

Why should my life conform to another's template?

Whatever happened to... just being yourself?

Society will never acknowledge us or do anything meaningful to help us. It is wrong to expect help. We have many fantasies, and one of our wildest is that somehow the world will smack its collective forehead and exclaim: 'we have been wrong about loners for two hundred thousand years!' Some version of this delusion might always be with us.

21. ON CHANGE AND CHANGELESSNESS

Q: What would you say is the hallmark feature of the mature Alone Forever life?

A: That's a difficult question to answer off the cuff. The answer would change depending what day you asked me. Or what *year* you asked me.

For the last few years, the dominant experience of my life has been amazement at just how much it makes perfect sense that I am Alone Forever.

Q: But what can another Alone Forever person take from that that might be useful to them, or might even help them? Forgive me for always sounding hostile.

A: You are insta-forgiven. The question of forgiveness doesn't even arise. You should never *not* be sceptical about my whole '*Alone Forever is gr8 lol*' thing. It's an extraordinary claim that demands extraordinary supporting arguments.

Somewhere in *How To Be Alone Forever* I muse about what our reaction would be if somebody told us that they

don't breathe. It's a simple thought experiment with an obvious answer: we flat-out wouldn't believe them. We just wouldn't. Breathing is a fundamental prerequisite for living. It's impossible for anyone to be alive and not to breathe.

The same automatic disbelief applies to everything I'm saying when I say I've 'discovered' how to live as one Alone Forever. To most hearers of the message, it's a roundabout way of saying I'm just as full of despair and hot air as the next Alone Forever guy, but in a different way.

Q: That's the weirdest forgiveness I've ever had.

A: Why thank you. A more succinct way of putting it is, you don't believe any of my shit.

Q: I never said I don't believe you. Only that I'm sceptical. You keep strumming the same chord: it's the world, it's other people, it's never *me* who's at fault for anything. My scepticism is based on a suspicion that it's *not* the world that's at fault. It's *not* people. It is me.

A: Whether the situation of the Alone Forever is or isn't your 'fault'... it doesn't matter either way. Whatever the truth is, this is your situation. This is the reality with which you have to deal.

Q: But if it's my 'fault', then there's something that could be done about it. Some action that could be taken. A remedy that could be applied.

A person *can* change.

You have to admit that the potential for radical change is a fundamental quality of life.

A: That's a great point and it is true. Yes, change is the basic substrate of reality. Good one.

Q: Thank you.

A: Change is possible. Change should be pursued by those who desire change and are capable of change.

Q: I know what you're going to say. You're going to say that you don't desire change.

A: Correct.

Q: But your desires could change.

A: Also correct. 'Never say never' is a wise saying.

22. ON BEING BOXED IN

Q: How much of a role would you say is played by other people in making somebody Alone Forever and keeping them Alone Forever?

A: A hard question to answer, that.

Q: In what way?

A: Because I don't think it's answerable. All of the following answers would be correct: people play no role; people play something of a role; people play a decisive role.

People have not put me where I am. I have done at least half the work involved, probably more. To become Alone Forever is a collaborative effort between the individual and society.

Input from other people tends to be as maintainers rather than manufacturers.

Q: What the hell does that mean?

A: People don't *put you* into the Alone Forever box, but they sure as hell don't want you to get out of it.

Q: And what does *that* mean?

A: Example required? Okay. I took my computer with me to work one day. I'm a low-level Linux enthusiast. Just Mint and Ubuntu and the like. Light stuff. The day before I'd installed a big update to my Mint setup – the sort that changes things so fundamentally that when the machine reboots afterward, it takes you again through some of the basic computer setup.

Q: Ah, I hate those updates.

A: I dislike them if they take an age, as some do, but if they're over pretty fast, eh, I don't mind. Quite enjoy them, in fact. That's one of the plus-points of Linux, really. Gives me something to do.

Anyway, on reboot the day before, my computer had made me choose a new thumbnail picture for my login.

I picked a selfie picture that I'd taken a few years before for Tinder.

Q: Was it for that episode with Tinder than you mention in *How To Be Alone Forever*?

A: One and the same. In this picture I was standing outside and squinting into the sun.

One of my colleagues has the same computer as me, same model number, the lot. We sometimes talk about how our computing lives are going.

This day that I'm on about, I told her I'd performed a big new update to my weird Linux thingumajig that I sometimes try to tell her about. 'Let's see!' she said. I

opened my laptop lid, while she watched – and there of course is my new login screen, complete with the picture of me squinting in the low evening sun. To my colleague the picture had the appearance of somebody trying to look cool and mysterious and, God help us all, *attractive*.

Q: What did your co-worker do when she saw it?

A: She gave an instinctive snort of derision. The very *idea* of me pulling a face like that, striking a pose like that, was inherently risible.

Q: Did you say anything?

A: Like what? Should I have taken her to task for ‘dissing’ me? What would that have accomplished? This co-worker and I were on friendly terms. In any case, my public persona is not that of a man who stands up for himself. I’d have had to break out of quite a few boxes in order to say anything. It’s not a straightforward matter to stand up for yourself, when you have conditioned people into expecting that you won’t. More trouble than it’s worth.

Once or twice in my past I have broken out of my meek and mild character, and ranted and raved about things.

Q: What reaction did you get?

A: Incomprehension, mainly. Sometimes varying degrees of anger, scaling up to outright fury. People just will not have it, if you try to change.

If the person that you are to others is a meek and mild character, that’s the person you have to stay, forever.

Q: And you're happy with things like that?

A: Oh, my public self is just a character I play for others. Whatever they think or feel about that bozo, they're not thinking and feeling those things about *me*. I'm happy with being who I am within myself. Just as I'm happy for other people to be other people.

People are a crashing disappointment to me, on the whole. They pretty much always have been.

I think back across my life, and think of all the people I've met, in all kinds of places. A broad cross-section of humanity. I try to think of people that I'd be eager to spend time with now. There aren't many. Perhaps there are none.

Q: What about your two schoolfriends?

A: At the time that I knew them and we were friends, yes, I would happily spend hours in their company, talking about whatever it was we used to talk about.

Nowadays? Nope. I find the proximity of other people a considerable burden. They're a problem with which I have to deal, and I would rather not have to deal with that problem.

Q: Sounds like a case of Avoidant Personality Disorder, in my layman's non-professional opinion.

A: Yes, it does sound like that, doesn't it? And it sounds a bit like autism. Also a dash of depression. And any number of other psychological conditions that I've stumbled across which, when I read about them, I think: *at last I have discovered what I am!*

I doubt there's a single recognised personality

disorder or mental illness that does not in some way fit me, some very snugly.

But none of them fit completely. And none of them apply.

Q: None? How about Apserger's?

A: Is that even still a thing? I have taken a few autism tests, and scored more or less the same in every one. High, but just below the diagnostic threshold.

Q: Would you say you are happy?

A: Yes. Emphatically, yes. Without any shadow of the remotest doubt, yes.

Is it the kind of happiness that makes somebody skip and dance down a street? Of course it isn't.

My happiness is *cold* – so cold, it would burn most people. At times, it burns me. It's a grim happiness at times. At other times, it's warm and fuzzy.

I'm helped by various lucky factors.

Q: Such as?

A: I'm not at all close to my biological family, and so they never pester me about anything. I enjoy good general physical health, although there are some signs of wear and tear cropping up now I'm 50.

The point I would make above all others is that my happiness is *my* happiness.

It's not the kind of happiness that requires the agreement of others, or verification by them. I'm not seeking permission to be Alone Forever and happy. How appallingly self-absorbed of me, eh?

*Who are people to me? Who am I to people? I am nobody.
They are nothing to me. I am nobody to them. The gulf of
indifference cuts both ways.*

23. ON GIVING UP

Q: How do I stop caring that the world is getting on without me? That life is going on without me?

A: By recognising that your belief in the world and in life is just that – a belief. The Alone Forever person does not have to mentally invest in a world that he or she is not a part of. The meaning and nature of our lives is quite other.

When I see men my age with their wives and children (and nowadays, their grandchildren too), I no longer feel pangs of despair at not having those things. I feel... contentment. I have found the meaning and purpose of my life, and it is not the same as theirs. Why should it be?

The meaning and purpose of one's life is to be oneself.

I believe every Norman and Norma in the world would wholeheartedly agree with that statement.

For the Alone Forever, being oneself entails being oneself alone. This is simply how things are.

I don't know how to express it any clearer. I can tell you're sceptical.

Q: I do appreciate what you're saying, but I can't feel it. Sorry.

A: Don't be sorry. You can't come to this through reason. The FA forums and subreddits frequently feature posts that ask questions like '*How do I stop giving so much of a shit?*' You don't get there through effort. You are *taken there* by the natural unfolding of the process of being Alone Forever in your everyday life. The dripping water eventually wears away the rock.

Q: I think what you're saying is sensible, but I still have natural instincts, and regular life is attractive to me in so many ways. I would like to be a husband and father one day. It would be the greatest thing I could ever do. Your way seems like it's just giving up on that.

A: Because giving up is precisely what it is. Which is why the younger Alone Forever will never be receptive to the message. Everything in their lives and in the nature of online discussions is about escape, strategies for coping until you escape, techniques, tips, tricks for escape...

It's not possible to give up. Instead you hang in there until something rather peculiar happens: rather than giving up, *you are given up*. It is as if life decides to release its stranglehold: '*Okay, I'm done trying with you now. You can go off and do whatever weird shit you want to do on your own. I'll focus on the rest of them.*'

The Alone Forever life *is my life*. It's not an oppressive, unlucky burden that I have failed to shrug off and am still attempting to shrug off.

It is my deepest nature. It is who I am. There is no part of this that is forced, that is self-deceptive. This is the *opposite* of self-deception. My life before getting to here was one of endlessly primping and preening myself for

others, literally and figuratively – *that* was all self-deception. Me, trying to live that life, trying to be the man I thought they wanted me to be.

I remember when I was sixteen years old, I would try to talk to girls... and would see on their faces a particular sort of look. It was a look of... not precisely disgust, nor dislike, nothing like that. Just a look that said 'this one is wrong'.

I have never had anything that women seemed to want. I didn't look right. I didn't talk right. A kind of blankly astonished, nonplussed reaction from the opposite sex was all I ever encountered.

Finally, around my 45th year, something drastically shifted. I was no longer concerned about it all, in any sense.

Q: Will everybody follow you?

A: The majority of Alone Forever people who make it to middle age will experience a comparable transformation of their understanding of themselves. I honestly feel sorry for the few who won't ever come to this.

24. ON DRINKING

Q: How old were you when you were finally on your own? As in, completely on your own? Not even any friends left. Was there an exact moment?

A: Not a literal single-moment-in-time moment, no, but there was a day when the process of becoming fully Alone Forever kicked into overdrive. I count it from the day when my last friend moved away to university. I was then twenty-six years old.

Q: Did you know at the time that it was a big event?

A: Yes. And no. I knew it was big, but had no idea at all of just how momentous losing my last friendship would turn out to be. I was generally oblivious to the whole idea of being Alone Forever back then. This was the 1990s. Alone Forever hadn't been invented yet.

For some months before my last friend moved away I knew that my life was about to undergo massive change, but I didn't know how much.

Q: And you were alone from then on?

A: Yes.

Q: How long did it take you to adjust to life alone?

A: *Years*. Life alone as a young man is astoundingly dull and empty. And it's *frightening*. You're falling. You're failing. It seems unstoppable. I know exactly what all the youngsters on the FA boards are talking about. The fear that grips them. I've been there.

I drank a lot. Alcohol helped a great deal. Life might have been strange and difficult, but at least there was always a bottle of something nice waiting for me at the end of the day. Alcohol brought variation of experience. It also brought mood swings. Anger. Despair. And – hangovers! God, the *hangovers*...

I stopped drinking in my late thirties once my hangovers became unendurable. No effort was involved in quitting. No willpower. I simply knew that I no longer wanted to have any kind of hangover, ever again.

My real adaptation to Alone Forever life started to kick in then.

Q: That's interesting. So would you recommend sobriety for the Alone Forever?

A: Yes, because lots of us will be heavy drinkers and it's better not to be one.

I understand the impulse to drink. The need for it. Drinking used to work for me. Nowadays, not drinking works better for me.

One of the things I strongly hinted at in the book, but shied away from stating aloud, is that for many of us,

alcohol, drugs, and eventual suicide might be the only answers we will ever find.

For a few of us, suicide is eventually the sensible option. The humane, *self-compassionate* option. Which feels like a shockingly irresponsible thing to say-

Q: It is!

A: I know it is. But this is one societal taboo that we should not hesitate to disregard. To be an Alone Forever individual is to be in a singularly vulnerable position in life, in all sorts of ways. We should not tolerate half-measures and self-deception.

For those Alone Forever whose life is daily pain, suicide might be what they've been secretly voyaging toward for all these years.

Q: You've said it again! That is a shocking thing to say.

A: So. Fucking. What. I have no patience at all with delicate sensibilities in this area. No compromise. I have a one hundred percent right to suicide, and there is absolutely no debate to be had about it. There is no argument that could ever persuade me otherwise. We can do it, or not do it. It's all up to us. My life is the only thing I own.

I'm not surprised by your reaction to this line of thought. I occasionally catch myself feeling much the same.

Q: You don't know who will read this, what state of mind they might be in, and what they might be prompted to do.

A: I would hate anything I ever said to be a precipitating factor in somebody else's biggest decision. Suicide has to be a wholly self-motivated action, or it is not a legitimate act. *Never* kill yourself because of other people. Never, never, never, never, never. As I say in *How To Be Alone Forever*, if you do kill yourself, do it for *you*, not because of what somebody else has said or not said, or done or not done.

Q: But somebody still might feel inspired by your words to commit suicide, and so what you're saying is irresponsible.

A: No. I reject that view entirely.

The Alone Forever struggle against many things. One of the things we struggle against is being infantilised by the world at large. We haven't got boyfriends and girlfriends, or husbands and wives, or children. We often haven't got friends, or anybody at all. We're automatically looked down on. We're not treated as serious, substantive persons. And the world at large compounds matters by sternly instructing us that we're not allowed to depart at a time and in a manner of our own choosing. Fuck that. Fuck that!

I think highly of us, as a type. The Alone Forever are thoughtful enough and mature enough to handle anything.

Why are we not allowed to think about suicide and *possess* suicide for ourselves?

Maybe our absolute right to suicide is the only secret advantage we have. Age and infirmity and disease can never get at us then.

We have to give ourselves permission to get on and *do it* one day, if push comes to shove.

We should consider, every day, whether today might be THE day.

Life itself shows us that suicide is part of our natural estate.

Life teaches us a valuable pro-suicide lesson, when it shows us how people can die.

I have seen three close biological family members die of cancer. First an uncle, when I was a kid. Then my father, when I was a young man. And my mother, more recently. Each death was more harrowing and long-drawn-out than the last. Each could be called a 'natural' death – if terrible suffering is natural.

The lesson was clear enough and I have learned the lesson. When the time comes, I will not be hanging around. When I am ready to go, I am *out of here*.

25. ON BEING YOURSELF AGAIN

Q: I'd like us to reach some sort of conclusion here today.

A: I suspect you're still not totally sure what I am trying to say about this whole Alone Forever thing. What my *shtick* is.

Q: I was trying to think of a way of putting it that wouldn't offend you.

A: How could I be offended by something I know so well? Nobody knows what I'm trying to say. Only those who know it, know it. This kind of stuff, being Alone Forever, all of it – it's not really a mainstream kind of thing. Being like this entails thinking about things that we're just not trained to think about, as human beings existing in human society.

Take the thought 'I am what I am meant to be', in relation to Alone Forever, that I've been pushing hard.

It's a simple enough thought, on the surface. Any human being on Earth would be proud and happy to get to a point in their lives where they could truthfully tell

themselves – and others – that they are finally, authentically and irrevocably, the person whom they were always meant to be.

Q: Yes. All the myths about being true to yourself and so on.

A: Any normal person who could say that they are finally their real selves might be among the greatest people we know.

But *we* are somehow not allowed to think things like that, are we? Never mind say it out loud: *I am who I was always meant to be! I am my real self!*

Doesn't that sound strange in an Alone Forever context?

How can I possibly say such a thing? I am a 50-year-old failed writer who has zero friends and zero experience of any kind of romantic and sexual relationships. It's outrageous.

I heard from several sceptical readers of *How To Be Alone Forever* who politely queried the core message.

All of them were polite, because goddamn are we a polite bunch! (Maybe the answer to the eternal question 'why are you FA?' is 'because you're too polite'.)

Regular people are rarely so polite. Look around you and listen carefully. Beneath their surface-level mutual politeness, people are not all that polite. They'll say and do whatever it takes to advance their own agendas.

When I was eleven years old, I loved a girl in my year at school. I left that school five years later without having spoken to her even once. It always seemed wrong and impolite to bother her with my attention. So I never spoke to her. Sure, many a non-Alone Forever person would have similar stories to tell. Shyness and being

Alone Forever correlate to a degree, but are not mutually identical. You can be one without the other...

Uh, where did I get to?

Q: You were saying that it's considered wrong for us to think certain thoughts.

A: It's seen as being wrong, yes, by other people and most of all by ourselves. God knows it shouldn't be.

So there are two main challenges that face the matured Alone Forever person.

First of all, surmounting the insurmountable and understanding that, you know, perhaps you haven't really been unlucky all these years. Perhaps you were only obeying your deepest instincts. Perhaps you were discovering what other people are like, and what the lives they live are like, and discovering there's no comfortable place for you there.

But that is only half of it. Second comes the other half of it: allowing yourself to be the person whom you have discovered yourself to have been all along. Isn't that neat?

Q: It's not that easy, though, is it?

A: None of it is. First you have to accumulate the raw, lived experience that goes into the furnace that gets you far enough along the track for you to have your own Great Epiphany, or equivalent thereof.

How many of us will be carried away by madness or death long before that point?

There'll be plenty of escapees, of course. Let's imagine them jumping from a moving train, and landing and rolling in the fields. Some will break a bone or two. Some will break their necks. Some will dust themselves down, find themselves somehow whole and intact, and

take a few steps toward the nearest town – and promptly get run over by a speeding truck. Quite a few, though, will make it into town, and start living. That is their dearest wish. To be normal. Accepted. Loved. They'll get there.

Q: And the rest? The ones who stay on the train?

A: The rest of us timid train-travellers get to the kind of destination we never could have imagined in the raw crucible of our Alone Forever youths.

Being Alone Forever – and feeling fine.

But never forget this. Thinking that your Alone Forever life is perfectly fine is a rank heresy against human life.

Look at what you're saying. You're saying you can do without people. You're saying you can do without love and marriage and family. It's outrageous and wicked even to think such things. And no, I don't mean 'wicked' in its current street sense.

Q: So that's your core message? Just be yourself? After everything – people are *right*?

A: Yes. After all the to-ing and fro-ing. Just being yourself is the key to happiness. The normies were right all along...

Being a young man was very difficult, looking back. Alone Forever is some of the most hostile territory there is. There is no way round it but through. I stayed indoors. I knew nobody. I went nowhere. Did nothing. Why? Because that's what I had to do. I had to be what I was. This is the great paradox of being Alone Forever. We're constantly urged to just be ourselves, when our real selves are in fundamental opposition to everything that people are always urging us to be. 'Be more sociable'? How about less? How about not being sociable at all? Being Alone Forever, for me, is about being in alignment with my deep inner instinct for solitude, which is the unseen black hole at the centre of my cosmos. Lol.

26. ON FINAL THOUGHTS

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: All thoughts are final thoughts, if we only knew it.

Q: Whoah, is that deep?

A: Not particularly.

Q: What is day-to-day life like for you? Could you describe a typical day in your life? What do you do, where do you go, what do you think and feel?

A: My typical day is a working day. I have an office job that I go to five days per week. My job defines the rhythm and character of my typical days.

Q: How do you sleep?

A: I sleep well. You know how often the Alone Forever talk about 'crying themselves to sleep'?

Q: Yes. You see that said a lot in the forums.

A: It's a *very* peculiar-sounding phrase to me. I doubt anyone has ever literally cried themselves into the state of sleep. I don't think it's possible, personally.

Q: I think they're being figurative about it. They mean they've had a harrowing emotional episode and it's left them so exhausted, they've subsequently drifted straight into sleep.

A: Doubtless that is more or less what they mean. But not even that has ever happened to me. Not even when I was in the depths of true despair about being Alone Forever, as I often was during my twenties. By true despair I mean the truly abysmal *oh-shit-this-is-my-life* despair. We all know that despair, I am sure.

Q: I am sure. Breakfast?

A: Sorry, what?

Q: Do you have breakfast? In your typical day?

A: Oh. Yes, breakfast, then off to work, and eight hours of being around people, which is always draining. Especially since my epiphanic realisation that there is nothing left to settle between me and people. I am so over people. I'm post-people. I'm-

Q: Daily goals? Anything you have to do, to feel hale and hearty?

A: Just one. I'm a *very* diligent failed writer. I still turn up

at the coalface every day to chip off another little piece of failure.

So I have to get my writing done, every day. Sometimes I write before work, if I'm up early enough. Sometimes I write at work, during breaks. Sometimes it all has to wait until after work.

I always have at least one major writing project going at all times. Writing takes up a significant part of my attention every day. If you're looking for reasons why I can stand living the way I live, and why my thinking about being Alone Forever is so unusual (if unusual is what it is), this, right here, could be the reason. My writing.

With writing, I lay at least one solid brick in a substantive wall, every day. Whether or not anybody else ever looks at the wall does not matter to me. The building of it is what matters. I talk about this quite a lot in *How To Be Alone Forever*.

Q: You do – and that's not a universally popular angle of yours, either.

A: No it's not. A good chunk of the Alone Forever community sees anything by way of 'hobbies and interests' as a humiliating climbdown. As a defeat. I tried to make light of it with the recurring image of the matchstick cathedral.

Q: What if you didn't have writing? Or anything else?

A: Then – and only then – would I truly have nothing to live for.

Q: I'm really not convinced.

A: Why should you be. This is about me, after all. It seems so unlikely, what I'm saying – that we can 'make do' and get by. It's nothing more than *cope*, in the lingo of the fiendish incels...

I would be deeply suspicious if you were to tell me that you were completely on board with what I'm saying. You're, what, about 30 years old?

Q: I'll be 31 next month.

A: Many happy returns et cetera. At 31, and for many years to come, you'll still be focused on the world of people and relationships, and women and sex, and love and family, and all that good stuff. You'll still be obsessed about your 'life'. You'll never be able to shake off a feeling of 'this *can't* be real or permanent, something will change!'

Q: 'Just wait, something will happen.'

A: Hah, yes, that other favourite saying of our normie brothers and sisters. God love 'em.

Q: I just can't accept it. I can't live like this. How can anyone? What are your typical evenings like, after work?

A: Same as yours, I expect. Sitting on my own in a room. Walking from one room to another. Walking back and sitting down again. Watching a movie or TV show. Browsing the Internet. Some reading, if I feel like it. A spot of gaming, maybe. Got to love wandering around an imaginary world. Then bed and sleep.

Q: I can't imagine spending a whole lifetime that way. I

can't imagine doing what I'm doing now – nothing – when I'm 50.

A: I bet there was a time you couldn't imagine living the way you do at 30.

Q: Correct. If I'd known at 20 what was waiting for me at 30, I would have killed myself.

A: We all say that kind of thing, and we even mean it when we say it too. But time has a habit of passing. And living is the most ingrained habit of all.

So don't assume you won't reach my age the way you are now. Imagine who and what you'll have to be to survive it...

Q: I'd have to be a monster! I mean no offence.

A: No offence taken, because you have it exactly right. By 'monster' you mean somebody whose life could never be recognised as properly human by the generality of the population. That's me. That's who I am. That's us. That's who we are. That's what it is to be Alone Forever.

27. ON FINAL THOUGHTS AGAIN

Q: More final thoughts, please. What's the one thing you want to stress to others in our position that you don't think has been stressed enough?

A: Three things.

First, pay no attention to other people. Destroy your belief that their lives must be a template for your life.

Second, pay no attention to other people. There's nothing else you need to do to improve your condition. This one thing – curbing the attention you pay to other people, or ideally extinguishing it altogether – will improve your lot immeasurably.

Third, *pay no attention to other people*. Everything that every Alone Forever person needs to know, begins and ends with this.

When you're Alone Forever, the longer you remain somebody who is shaped *by* and *for* other people, the longer you're in big trouble. Their values, their realities, are for them, not us.

Q: How does somebody actually *do* that, though?

A: Just recognising the reality of the situation you're in will usually be enough to do it. You might have an earth-shaking Great Epiphany that will overthrow the citadel all at once. Or it might sink in gradually over a period of time. With me it was a gradual realisation that built up to one long, earth-shaking moment.

Give the attitude a chance to grow by giving it the space it needs to flourish. Overthrow the tyranny of other people in you!

Q: Why is it so important? And isn't it dangerous?

A: A big part of the Alone Forever experience is a prolonged *cringe* in the face of other people's judgements of you. While you're locked into *your view of other people's view of you* (my italics), you're not you, in my unhumble opinion. You're manifestly never going to be you as long as you're trying to be who you think other people want you to be.

In my case, I damn near broke my neck trying to be the cheeky, cheerful sort of fellow who seems to be the stock character these days.

There is no danger involved in facing up to being who you are. Alone Forever.

Q: So your final message to the general Alone Forever community – to all the FA types, all the wizard types, all the nasty incel types and the nice incel types, all the neckbeard types and niceguy types – is...?

A: Just be yourself. Funny old world, isn't it?

Q: Do you think your attitude has any chance of catching on?

A: Absolutely no chance whatsoever. Perhaps one or two people might receive the message and understand it and find themselves enacting it in their lives, and flourishing because of it.

Q: And the rest of us? The others? The younger ones who still want to live? What are we supposed to do? Are we just to be abandoned?

A: You will find your own individual fates. Most of you *will* escape from Alone Forever. Somehow, some way, in some fashion, *something* will happen for you, and you will get out.

Q: And don't bother you with our complaining? Is that what you're saying?

A: Is that what it sounds like I'm saying?

Q: It sometimes does.

A: I *might* be saying that, but I hope I'm saying it in a more subtle fashion than you suggest. Let me illustrate it with a crude analogy.

Q: I love a crude analogy.

A: Who doesn't? I'll pick something with sexual undertones to please the masses.

Remember when you were about ten or eleven, and you suddenly became aware that pretty soon, you were going to get pubic hair?

Q: I was a bit older than that, but yes.

A: Imagine that, as the next few years passed, for some reason you didn't get pubic hair. You are now 14 or 15 and in your own mind you are completely defined as somebody who hasn't got pubic hair. Everyone else has got theirs. But you haven't!

Imagine there are social systems in place that actively discriminate against you because you haven't got any pubic hair.

Let's enrich this by saying that, somehow, other people *know* that you haven't got any pubic hair. It's terrible, and embarrassing, and you feel miserable, and all the rest of it.

And then one day, *boom*, up sprouts a luxurious forest of pubic hair. You're now one of the gang. You were worrying over nothing.

Q: This isn't the greatest analogy in the world.

A: Indeed it is not. But it does the job. Sooner or later, the majority of the younger Alone Forever are going to experience a change in fortune. They're going to get their figurative pubic hair.

Q: I'm really not liking this analogy now...

A: It's awful, isn't it? What can I say. I come up with things on the hoof.

Q: So you're really saying the younger ones should just sit and wait?

A: Yes. No. Maybe you won't have to do anything. Maybe you will. Get up and do something if you want to. Do lots of things if you want to. Maybe you have to. The thing or things you do, whatever it is/they are, might work out. For

most, they will work out. Through shrewd action, or uncanny good luck, or both, you'll find the exit from the Alone Forever labyrinth. As mysteriously and unfairly as you were deposited inside it, you'll find yourself on the outside, wandering at liberty among all the passing figures and roaring traffic. Some of the escapees might turn and jump straight back into the labyrinth again, but most will not. It's obviously best not to be Alone Forever if you don't have to be.

For those who are past doing things... For those who are Alone Forever and know it... I espouse a doctrine of having confidence in yourself *as one Alone Forever*.

Confidence that you already are who and what you were meant to be.

Nothing has gone wrong with your life. Not as such.

Q: That's a dangerous destination to recommend to people. It could lead to all sorts of mischief.

A: That's why I emphasise: don't *follow* me. Don't follow anyone. Paying too much attention to other people is partly what's got you into the mess you're in. Sit and wait. Or get something to do. Let whatever is going to happen, happen.

Q: That is simply not satisfying to most younger people. Would it have satisfied you, at age twenty-five?

A: Nope. Not in the slightest! The restless energy that compels us to want to escape, to achieve, to strive, and so on, was powerfully active in me back then, and still was until comparatively recently. It didn't fade away until I was in my early forties. I could never have accepted what I am saying now until I hit that milestone.

Q: So what's the point of your book? Or *books*, isn't it, now...?

A: The point? That there's something else waiting for you. And whatever it is might not just be good. It might be the greatest thing possible. You were born to be Alone Forever. Who knew?

Much of the Alone Forever community, though, won't ever get to that state. We're committed as a bloc to despising the very nature of ourselves. We believe in other people far more than we believe in ourselves. We're subscribed to *their* values, *their* estimations of good and bad.

They own us, in every way, lock, stock and barrel.

To grow old as one Alone Forever is to slowly realise this truth.

You have spent your life attempting to fit yourself to a mass-produced template. You don't fit. Painfully, self-evidently, irrevocably, you *do not fit*. So what happens now? That is up to you.

28. ON NOT BEING BELIEVED

Q: I don't believe you.

A: Eh?

Q: I don't believe you. I don't accept what you're saying is true – for me.

When you say all this stuff about your lofty vantage point, and how you don't want anything from other people anymore, and how you're perfectly fine with ending up where you've ended up – Alone Forever – *I just don't believe you.*

Sorry.

A: Oh, that's fine. You do you, as they say.

One thing, though: I don't need you to agree with me, for me to be me.

We don't need external agreement to have the right to our own conclusions. To believe what we believe, and feel what we feel, and know what we know, requires *zero* validation from other people.

True independence of self is the most important thing to work on and make real in our lives.

We tend to feel unbalanced by other people, as a rule. They are so many. They are a gargantuan mass. Who am I alone, to stand in opposition to them?

But this disproportionate regard we have for other people is ultimately something that must be overcome.

Where does it even come from, this constant insecurity of self that afflicts the Alone Forever?

Q: Insecurity comes from our experience. Or our lack of experience. Humans are social creatures. You can't deny that. People need people. For practical support, if nothing else. We don't have any experience of people backing us up, supporting us, on *any* level.

A: That's exactly right. Solo monkey looks around, and sees group monkeys picking fleas off other group monkeys' backs. But nobody is picking fleas off solo monkey's back. Liking this analogy so far?

Q: Yes. Much better.

A: Right. Now suppose solo monkey gets to the stage where he no longer itches. His fleas are all gone. Maybe there never were any fleas. Maybe solo monkey just picked up from 'experience' the *idea* that he had fleas. He is only a monkey, after all.

The big question, then, is this:

Does solo monkey need to secure the agreement of the other monkeys before he's allowed to see himself as a monkey who does not have fleas?

Q: It's a good analogy, I suppose.

A: It's a great analogy! You can use it without attribution if you like.

Q: Thanks. But however good your analogies get... However eloquent your eloquence gets... I *still* just don't believe you.

I think one of the definitions of being Alone Forever is that you powerfully *want* the big, fundamental social experiences. Love, sex, friendship. Marriage. Having children of your own and raising them. Repute and renown within a community. These aren't dirty words, you know. It's normal and natural to have your own family, to belong to a friendship group, and to be part of a community. It's how people are meant to live.

A: You're not wrong in anything you're saying, except one thing.

Q: Which is?

A: I truly have left all of that behind me. The only thing I would argue against you about is the implication that I am misrepresenting myself. That despite all my bravado and all my bluster, I secretly *ache* for the social goodies you have just listed — very eloquently too.

Q: Thank you.

A: I know what you want to say. That any rising-above-it-all we might attain isn't worth a damn. Even if it's real! Even then, it just isn't worth it.

We're all a lot of loser-weirdoes, destined to die in failure and obscurity.

Nothing – *nothing* – can negate the essential, terrible truth!

Q: You're making my case for me now.

A: Because I know the case. Let's say I even *believe* in the case...

I don't always inhabit my lofty ascended realm, you know.

Q: No?

A: No. Every now and then... Imagine a calendar month, just for illustration purposes.

Q: Okay.

A: From the first of the figurative month to the penultimate day of the figurative month, I am the blissed-out Alone Forever guru you think I think I am.

Q: I don't think you think that at all!

A: I'm only playing. If we can't laugh at ourselves – and laugh at ourselves laughing at ourselves – we really are up shit street.

Q: Don't you mean shit creek?

A: No. I mean shit street. It's *worse* than shit creek.

Anyway, on the final day of the notional calendar month, I am visited by a spectre. Call it the Ghost of Alone Forever Past.

This spectre, this Ghost of Alone Forever Past, silently seats itself next to me. Walks around with me. Looks back at me from mirrors. Tinges my thoughts with itself.

The Ghost of Alone Forever Past tells me numerous things:

- that all my so-called perspective and acceptance is just a flimsy mental strategy that has hardened in place over the years;
- that my failure is absolute and irrevocable and will never be redeemed, in any sense;
- that my middle-aged equanimity is simply the *coup de grace* to a lifelong horror;
- that although I imagine I'm above it all, I'm actually deeper in it than I ever was before;
- that I have not gone *up* in any sense. I have instead gone so far *down* as to become walled in behind my own cleverness;
- that women no longer disturb my thoughts and feelings not because of any hard-won detachment, but because I have lost the true glory of the days when a lovely woman could matter to me;
- and finally – that my life will end in disaster, humiliation, and death by my own hand.

Q: That's quite a list.

A: It is indeed. But the Ghost of Alone Forever Past never stays for long. The next day comes along. Or the next hour. Or the next minute. And the spectre dissolves away.

Sometimes the spectre skips a month between visits.

I look forward to the time when it no longer visits me at all.

Conversely, I dread a time when the Ghost of Alone Forever Past follows me everywhere, all the time. This could happen. There's no denying it could. But I don't think it will.

How do you know it won't happen? That was about to be your next question, wasn't it! I can see you straining at the leash.

Just how total is your disbelief in everything I have to say about my perspective on being Alone Forever?

Q: I do see the sense in what you're saying. I wholeheartedly wish it could be true. It would be *awesome* to have this grinding daily burden lifted from me-

A: The unrelieved, clogging sense of failure.

Q: That's exactly it. *Clogging*. No matter what I try to do, there it is. Blocking the smooth flow of everything else. I feel utterly pathetic in the face of my failure. You can't just wish away that sense of futility.

A: I agree. I have never claimed that wishing it away is what happens. The most important part of everything I say is that it doesn't seem to be something you can *do*.

You cannot, as you rightly say, just click your fingers, wave your hands, and 'abracadabra!' the whole Alone Forever thing away.

It's not a decision you make. There is no mental strategy or exercise that is going to resolve the matter for you.

Q: Then how *do* you do it?

A: By waiting the bastard out. By outliving the fucker.

Q: But that doesn't help anyone who is suffering *now*. The Alone Forever need help right *now*, not at some time in the mythical future that might not even come. Anything could happen.

And anyway, your standpoint could all just be

individual to you! *Your* individual quirks might have led you into this thing that you believe is true.

For me, as for lots of the Alone Forever, it might not be possible.

A: I think that's true. I think my stance, if that's what it can be called, might only end up applying to a relatively small percentage of the Alone Forever.

The rest will find other solutions.

Q: Such as?

A: Lots of us will escape.

Q: Okay. Say I don't escape. What's next?

A: Alcohol. Drugs. Extreme hobbies. Extreme danger.

Q: Nope. Doesn't appeal. I don't like heights. Or speed. Or hangovers.

A: Suicide will be a solution for some.

Q: Again, not particularly interested.

A: This is what I am saying.

When you rule out everything else that could happen to you in the course of an Alone Forever life – what is left?

When you fail to escape, and fail to self-destruct in any of the many ways that self-destruction is possible, what actually happens?

Growing older, and gradually adjusting to the Alone Forever way of life, is all that is left.

Q: I still just don't believe in it.

Your angle on the whole Alone Forever thing sounds great, and if you're experiencing exactly what you're telling us, I am genuinely happy for you.

A: This has been a pretty intense session.

Q: If you want a break...?

A: No. Next question!

Q: How old were you when you realised you were Alone Forever?

A: In the formal sense of looking around and thinking 'oh, *shit...*'?

I was in my late twenties. Maybe even my early thirties. A lot later than would be the case nowadays, with the Internet around. I was in my mid-thirties before broadband was mainstream and affordable enough for me to get it. That wasn't until 2003.

Q: Wow. You really are old. No offence!

A: None at all taken. Age brings Alone Forever wisdom. Maybe the tough part of being Alone Forever is getting there with your physical and mental health more or less intact.

When I look back I see lots of stages when it could have gone a different way.

Q: You say in *How To Be Alone Forever* that your declining sex drive had something to do with it.

A: More likely a lot to do with it. Maybe even *everything* to do with it.

When you get to the stage when the most beautiful woman barely quivers your needle, if at all...

That might be the only true peace we will ever really know.

I have developed into something else.

You can interpret this as an *ex post facto* rationalisation, if you like. My mind seeking to protect itself, or me, or both, or whatever.

Not that it matters either way. Whether I'm deluded or not doesn't matter. It *works*.

But to get back to you not believing me-

Q: Yes, let's.

A: Which we keep drifting away from.

Q: We do.

A: And there is nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with wasting a bit of time how we please. It's not as if we have any pressing engagements elsewhere, is it? No dates to keep. No kids to pick up from school. No friends to touch base with. Nothing to do, nobody to see. Just one big, empty, Alone Forever canvas, all to ourselves.

The remarkable thing about how my perspective has changed – the thing that you are very candid about not believing – is that being Alone Forever does not greatly trouble me any more.

Ten years ago, the idea of myself being Alone Forever was *massive*. Today, it is *small*. I still do think about it, but I don't feel overwhelmed with anguish about it. Only when the spectre visits, and even then, not much.

I foresee a time when my Alone Forever life will cause me deep regret. In later life, in old age, if I make it that far – when decline really starts to take hold – is when I will most keenly miss the support structure of family and friends. That's going to be a tough time. I look ahead, and wonder about certain practical measures I might be forced to take (chiefly suicide), and that makes me feel sad.

Q: I cannot believe it's possible ever to be resigned to the fact that you will live your life alone and end up killing yourself.

A: You say *resigned* to the fact of living life alone. As if it – the mental act of resignation – is something I have done. Something I have worked towards and attained. Something I have approached via some means of rational contemplation.

I cannot stress enough that *this is not something I have done*.

Remember the bit of the first book when I described my Great Epiphany?

Q: Yes. Probably the best bit of the book, for me.

A: Thank you. A lot of *How To Be Alone Forever* is consolidated from separate elements and presented as a unity, but the Great Epiphany happened *precisely* as written, right down to the way I watched a movie when I got home afterward and didn't really think about having just had a life-changing experience.

The Great Epiphany wasn't me *deciding*.

It was me *seeing*.

I am alone. I have always been alone. Being alone is

who I am. It is what I am. There was never any prospect of me not being alone.

Here is where I belong.

Here is where I am myself, thoroughly, sincerely.

'Just be yourself!' they tell us.

Well, fucking hell, whaddaya know. Here I am. Being myself.

Q: But this real self – how do you know it's *really* the real you, and not a mistake?

A: When you get to the stage of second-guessing and third-guessing and infinity-guessing yourself, where is the sincerity and value in anything at all? How does the average married man and father-of-three know that *that's* his real self? How do I know this glass of lemonade really is as delicious as it tastes? How do either of us know we really are sitting here having this conversation?

Q: But if you still want to have a relationship-

A: This is precisely my point. I no longer want to.

Q: I can't imagine ever being like you. I don't want to be like you.

A: Then don't be like me. *Do* something. Claw your way out of Alone Forever as if you are clawing your way out of your own grave. Me describing my new reality is not me making a recommendation to others. It's only me describing what happened to me. I look ahead to my old age – or even to my late middle age – and I foresee a lot of tough times. A few hard decisions. And then, probably, one last *big* decision.

I might get lucky and die in a plane crash, but few of us will be lucky.

Q: I don't know what to make of what you're saying, but I know I don't like it.

A: And that really is the final word on the matter.

The most common form of despair is not being
who you are.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

