Saturday, June 8, 2013

SMC Final Friday

Today was supposed to be a shitty day.

Finals. And not just any finals. Physics. The one class I need in order to go to San Francisco. The class that I didn't want anything to do with. I wasn't looking forward to the final. I didn't even study all that much. Just the night before, and only a few chapters that I hadn't read. So yeah, I wasn't looking forward to it.

The final was all right. I know that I didn't know everything. But I felt comfortable enough, and finished the final swiftly. I was actually the first person done. Not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing. But I don't like to dwell on things when I'm not 100%, so I turned it in right away and left. Done with that class forever. And it felt like such a relief. Not such a bad day, I guess.

Then I went to the cafeteria. I had never been in there in the morning, so I didn't know until this morning that they serve breakfast. I got french toast, eggs, and bacon. Mm. Not such a bad day.

Then I went to the library. Had to kill 4 hours before my philosophy final. Some of that was going to be devoted to studying for the final. But I had time to relax. I logged onto Netflix and tried to figure out a movie I wanted to watch. Then I remembered that I can't download Silverlight on the school computers, so I can't watch Netflix at school. But I was in the mood for a movie, so I went on Youtube and searched "Full Movie." I scrolled through the movies, and found what I was going to watch: 21 Jump Street. I had intended to watch this movie a few times. It just never happened. And I had heard that it was funny. I popped it open, put it on full screen, headphones on, volume up, and was ready for a really fun time. Ended up being about 2 minutes.

It was weird. I saw sudden movements in my peripheral vision. People going down, people moving. I took the headphones on, with no idea of what was going on. And then I heard someone say it: "Someone has a gun." I didn't have any time to take in this idea. I instinctually fell to the ground. I had heard this happen so many times in so many places, always on television. It's like my whole life was leading up to this moment. I waited, trying to listen. I wasn't sure if it was true or not. SMC had had a lot of false alarms and threats lately, and I didn't want to foolishly overreact. But I also knew that even if someone didn't have a gun, it wouldn't hurt to call the police. So I dialed 911. It rang. An automated message told me that the next available operator would take my call. I looked at the table in front of me, where a girl I had never met before was lying on the ground facedown, with her phone out, a look of terror on her face. Something inside me wanted to tell her that everything was going to be okay. But I didn't. Probably because I knew that I really didn't know. I hung up my phone.

And there were to bangs, in the distance. It sounded a little bit far away, and maybe it wasn't a gunshot. But it got my attention. My adrenaline was pumping. This was making it more real. People were running towards the back of the library, where my back was facing when I was sitting at the computer. I wasn't sure if it was a good idea to peak my head up, from fear of some kind of cartoonish headshot situation that's so common in video games. Then a few more bangs, these sounding much closer (but still not close close. My thoughts are that the first 2 were in front of the library, the second group were inside). A mass group of people in the computer lab started running back at this point. I heard a male voice saying "Let's go, let's go!" I was hesitant to stick my head up, in case this guy was the shooter. But I saw him, a middle aged black guy that I had never met before. He looked at me, running forward with his head low, and he had a look of confidence. This guy was very level headed. This guy had his head on straight. And he was telling me to move. God bless him, because if I didn't have this motivation from someone who gave me strength, I probably wouldn't have gone back (not that I'd necessarily have had a different fate, since I don't believe the shooter went towards where I was or fired over there, but I could have potentially been in more danger). I ran back, crouched down, not looking back.

It was while running towards the back of the library that I really had to come to terms with what was happening. Someone had a gun. He was shooting into the building that I was in. I didn't know how close he was, but there was a possibility that my life could come to an end. This knowledge was in me, but at

the same time, something else. A detachment. A lack of belief. I had a brief moment of feeling like there was no way I was going to die. I mean, I've gone all of this way in life, how could I just... die? I felt safe in this confidence. But it saddens me to think of the fact that people have probably thought these thoughts right before death, time and time again. Not even just in school shootings, even though there have been so many lately. Not even in these mass shootings in general, school or otherwise. I remember reading about Sandy Hook and feeling so terrible. But at this moment, I feel even worse. I was so fucking scared, and I'm a 23 year old male that has a lifetime of learning to be prepared for danger. Those were children. Scared out of their little child minds. And some of those minds ended. It really makes me want to crawl in a ball.

There was a crowd of people around the exit door of the library. For some reason, they weren't leaving yet. Maybe they knew something I didn't know? I'm not sure. But since they were doing anything about it, I stood there, briefly, with this crowd. I was in this crowd, nothing could possibly go wrong. And then, a bunch of successive, loud bangs, clearly gunshots. Perhaps 10 in a row. People screamed. People panicked. All of those warnings about panicking in situations of disaster... yeah, people were apeshit. And for good reason. It was terrifying. But we managed to push our way out of the exit (we all had plenty of practice trying to get on the Big Blue Bus 7 after school everyday), and everyone just started running for their lives. I was running behind probably about 40 people. There was a brief moment of my thinking of the possibility that this was a trap; what if someone was firing in the school to get everyone to run out and then a second person just mows us down. I didn't have time to worry about such things. And thankfully, nothing like this happened. I made it off the campus proper. People were jumping into cars in the parking structure and speeding out. I really wanted someone to take me in, but didn't know how to ask someone and admit my vulnerability. Then it hit me: I have a friend who lives right down the street. I started running towards his place, calling him, and letting him know I was going to his house. "Why?" he asked. "I'll tell you when I get there," I replied, out of breath.

I was still jogging or powerwalking. I was off the school. I felt safe. But I also still felt terrified. I called my dad, knowing he'd probably hear news of this, and told him that I was safe, that there was a shooting at SMC, and that I had been in the library when it happened. I told him where I was going, and assured him I was safe. Met up with my friend, collapsed on his couch, and turned on the news. I sent out a mass text to people I thought would be worried, letting them know I was all right. Then, proceeded to watch the clusterfuck of news coverage for the next 5 hours. It was fine; I honestly didn't want to leave the house. I was scared. I was still shaken. It still hadn't sunk in. I learned all of the news about what had happened. I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't satisfying. I eventually walked with my friend, out of the closed down areas, to a bus stop to catch the 8 bus down Ocean Park. I took the bus home, and away from the proximity of the school.

Part of me, seeing all of the information on the news and learning about the context, wants to feel like it's not a big deal. Perhaps I wasn't in any real danger, because he didn't shoot in the area I actually was. There were lots of people there, the odds were that I wasn't going to get shot. But then I think about the people who were shot. I don't know who they were, but I might know them. And even if I don't, they're still just people like me, who were in the library. They just happened to be in the part of the library that I've spent many days studying. Just not today. And also, hearing the gun shots, seeing the people run... fuck this. It is a big deal. It was a traumatic event. I don't need to downplay this out of some feeling that I need to appear more, dare I say, manly? Fuck that. My feelings are real. If honesty isn't being a man, then maybe I'm not one. (For reference, I have a penis, not a vagina).

I don't think I can ever dissociate from news stories about mass shootings again. I always felt terrible when hearing about them. But today, I feel like I can empathize with the people at the places. I know the terror. I know the insanity. I know the fear. And I hate that I say "next time" as if another one like this is inevitable. But all signs point to it is. Unless something changes, something big, there's nothing to indicate that people aren't going to keep doing these kinds of things. We need to try to change something. Doing nothing is just disrespectful to the people who've died. Fuck the politics. Fuck the 2nd amendment. Fuck it all.