



Dropping Out With



By

Chris Daly

Editor's Note: *This story was published in a slightly different form by ArrowHeart Volume 2: INDENTY*

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

Chris Daly's, "Dropping Out with U," reminds me of the importance of scope and time and how the spectrum (specter?) of trauma creates a rapid that only interrupts your flow but may put you with the flotsam.

"Truth be told, I am he as you are he and we are U."

There is a lot to unpack in that statement, but the style here makes us a part of the action, a part of U's story, makes us U, and that, for me, was a key to why I liked this story.

I imagine there are countless people who have lived the same lives as U, not necessarily because they got punked in high school (probably someone...somewhere has), but because there was an event, a blip in our cosmos but the shattering of worlds subjectively, and escapism can come from excising your brain in language (and weed and alcohol).

You walk away with a degree in English, a substantial amount of debt, and part of your love for teaching dead, and are left to fend with the odd jobs that you may or may not be suited for while you most certainly know that those in jobs you are suited for are not as suited for them as you.

I guess sometimes as you drift through 2nd person you start to get a little lost in whether or not you are U or just ranting as yourself...

There is a good blend of story and life here that I think a lot of readers can relate to.

Enjoy.

QUALITY QUOTABLE:

For some time he had been exhibiting signs of informed Marxist paranoia while also being paranoid about Marxism. He felt that it was important to run away from and not towards. He believed his best material would evolve from a near-hermit level of self-garrulity that did not conform to currently acceptable product dimensionality. Either that or he didn't have his shit together.

Dropping Out with U

1.

I thought I knew the guy coming across the sand, I knew his white shoes. It was a beautiful night on the beach, there by a spray of three palms, with two girls possibly a little above my station, and I reached out a hand and the guy sucker-punched me and the girls screamed and he was gone. Truth be told, I am he as you are he and we are U.

For some reason U affected a righteous attitude as he strolled back to the group of friends who were cackling, etc. This guy doesn't fuck around, was said in various ways. Perhaps unsaid was, do you believe he's so clueless or desperate that he resorts to this level of self-aggrandizement. Later U's feelings would evolve to a kind of pure shame. In the high school moment, not to be melodramatic, it was on a standard ongoing level of trauma. The heat in that part of the world may be figured in, and the unmoored culture of the resort milieu. He did not hit the guy very hard, though the degree of the insult was measureless. That was over the weekend, and on Monday as he took a seat in study hall someone called his name and said they had a message from Kevin. It would not classify as tit for tat, as he took somewhat more than he had given. U's head almost bounced on the surface in front of him, and when he looked up the guy had gone and so he put his head back down on the table for the rest of the period. On that level of the education / social skill establishment he was not a big success, so it made good traumatic sense to cut his losses and drop out.

2.

After the incident on the beach on a beautiful night otherwise, U's life proceeded in a series of drops. He found the nowhere man role to be not essentially a big problem. In a couple years as high school outlier he went from the dark afternoon pool hall to a dope scene to county jail. There were plenty of good nights and early mindful thrills along the way, the teen violence culture had fallen out of the schedule, and was replaced by ongoing police trauma. Drop-out U became what was called "a head", a kind of critical nut, interested in interesting experience, to include a fairly modest level of psychedelics. Individuals with poor social skill sets had a better time in the stoner era, but one lived amongst a certain craziness, could be stressful, a request was made through the public d to consider granting defendant U (for a crime against the mind of the state) permission to relocate to the far side of the country with the intention of enrolling in a free community college, high school equivalency having been obtained at night classes, a drop out carnival where instant recognition took place at distance; in U's opinion this loser peer group was slightly more interesting than the acolytes of all that was national and good, and likely to be deadly; the judge sentenced and suspended and furthermore for the length of probation (three years) U the Felon from the draft rolls was to be dropped.

3.

As a consequence of being financially undersubscribed U dropped out and in and made it through four years of classes in six years of time. There was something else. Having been deprived of properly contextualized contact with literary culture U saw and U fell, and without proper thought to preparation he now really dropped out because in literature everything is allowed including complete failure while providing no explanations (excepting the cryptic), but with some thread of a lifeline that may or may not ever appear, eh? U entertained, to his mild shame, some attitude about less rigorous colleagues, targets of nouveau cliché witticisms a la Oscar Wilde, with maybe a true zinger here and there fired from the true other side, though who'd have guessed it to be happening there on the nice green lawn of the quad in California where students from the art department did nude streaks, and the literature students read everything under the sun and got drunk at the nearby beer bar, and that's another thing. It never occurred to U to stone-up on campus because he had learned early on down in the holy land at night, that consciousness was to be respected, especially if it might turn out to be one's thing. Now in the late hours in his domicile above a garage and overlooking an alley he could fire up and maybe reread something or other. One needed the proper setting and the freedom to free associate, and connect with a certain self. Alcohol is associated more with outward behavior, and the unleashing of some of the animal in one. One can come to possess imaginary social skills as one actually does give less of a fuck, and of course to hold one's booze, with the occasional slip more than allowed, is a minimal requirement. It was all sanctioned by world literature, and so the U model for the next half-century was set: beer, pot and poetry.

4.

There is always something else to not do, U came to realize, when one takes dropping out seriously as a vocation. He had a time as an incipient poet, in the little mags, and at the readings and a few parties, it was a necessary step away from but also into that regular life, when possible he appreciated the work of various others, and occasionally of himself, but it felt a little too much like a job and a job title; it's a great form to which he did not feel sufficient commitment; maybe someone he considered a bit dumb would get off as good a line as he ever could, and he interpreted this as a zen message. At risk of being utterly or ultimately self-deluded, and a little too desperate for reverse-recognition, he wrote longer and with less success, but more comfort and saner self-consciousness about the branding process. For some time he had been exhibiting signs of informed Marxist paranoia while also being paranoid about Marxism. He felt that it was important to run away from and not towards. He believed his best material would evolve from a near-hermit level of self-garrulity that did not conform to currently acceptable product dimensionality. Either that or he didn't have his shit together. U was never that big on free jazz, a measured amount of freedom was generally enough, but he decided to free-form it, and hope it somehow worked out. What the hell, see what was there; he did figure out that contact with the good or indifferent mendacities served to expose him to himself, which was at least somewhat to the good, a little could go a long way, to be a true freak one must not be merely backward or clueless, one must be able to pretend to know many things. U was drawn for a brief paycheck period to the theater, where he could not have even risen to the level of mediocrity he might have in poetry, but where neglected vectors of his soul and libido got a workout on the road to fair-trade wisdom that begins when one through a trap door in the stage drops.

5.

U fell for an actress who half fell for him and half for somebody else, much silliness ensued through one good year and one bad, it was the one time when U was willing and able to cheat and lie to himself without hesitation, and it was a Dickens thing, the best and the worst. She was a bit of a dummy, in the context of the drop dead dedication of the excessively literate, but had a certain wisdom about herself. You'll get tired of me, she said. U's non-urban-hermit skills had become somewhat sharpened, and he made a different kind of connection with an equally abstraction-sensitive writing colleague, they had plenty of good, casual sex, they set up and ran for a while a circus of witticisms; after a year he was ready to re-enter the hermit life for the next two decades. In another country he met a woman who was everything the philosopher might require in the way of comprehensive, intoxication allowed, logistical support. She was funny, sexy, talented and ambitious. Some might say that only for international reasons was the half-a-bum accepted, but that's not true, the drop out and the driven one connected. Good times were seasoned by long separations, but there was an issue. She was forgiving, but did not and would never understand his life, and it seemed silly to pretend this meant nothing. They remain friends at distance, she is now a property-owner on the other side of this country and he has been in the same one-bedroom for so long that he has acquired an aura.

6.

U the drop out was enough of a Confucian to be properly mortified about not dealing with a fundamental dynamic of human culture. That which works for you, and further, that which is disposable. By joining forces with another member of the community U was able to avoid working for anyone after the age of thirty. They worked long half days, starting later and later in the morning and into the afternoon, and U was safe at home each night in time for the beer, the pot and the poetry. They did not spend Confucian amounts of time building the paper or buying dirt when it was cheaper but they maintained a balance with a small margin. They failed to financially evolve to appropriate conversation levels required in the target demographic, they were good escapists, and lived versions of their own lives, and not somebody else's, Marxist exceptions noted, and even now often looked better than most of the various careerists who'd obliterated the finish line while taking a hit to the spirit; at a point they all started to blend, with the probable exception of the super-patriots in their vintage cars. U got in the habit, in the time when the museums were closed, of walking the grid of his "heights" neighborhood, from his apartment section on the avenue, into the mild, pleasant, late night wilds of single family dwellings, if a house has a soul it is revealed, and they pretty much all do, nicely on a sensible scale, Prometheus' brother in law unbound, from plain and crafted bungalow to large, un-graven solidity that U never liked, to the tripped out older school to new sophisticated to smoked up, with really rarely the full philistine outrage; there was a pleasing Confucian solidity to the proceedings and U the cynical bum on the late sidewalk took a sip of beer and moved on looking at the next effort. Con Fu the man was a bum, travelled with a motley ilk, stayed till the welcome was worn out, moved on, in denial of his own wisdom, an unreal estate artist. U cited him like a brother.

7.

U entered history through a back door in his marijuana dream life. He was tired of the usual oblique psychedelic worn smooth drop out world, and of being dropped, he'd carpe'd the diem for all he was then worth, and went for an extended detour from the present, into the reverse future of the overseas land of the war of his youth, the pursuit of which by his attached at birth nation-state was the cause of it all, including the punch on the beach and everything that followed. U imagined it was a blood debt, and anyway was ready for a lot of reading and re-reading, balanced by properly enhanced periods of reflection, this last ritualized to certain local area spots on Sunday when no one was around; he developed technique, and through that: appreciation of time, any old building might serve to float the mind of U the historian; it was fun to be drunk in the daytime and think about that which is long gone. Employing an organic free falling process that was hard writ in the innocent low level affluence of his under-soul he determined remote start and end points in time, he consulted the records, he carefully read all the books, good and bad, he received an education and a half from the long culture of the regional hegemon, he went and visited the area in question and then some, and connected with many who were crazy like himself, same melody different harmony, and met many more of whom he thought highly; he respected all drug laws of police states, but back home where anyway the information flowed more freely he continued his research and reach for a version of the stoned truth. This was an undertaking of some years, in the end he triangulated what he found out and could remember into six hundred and fifty pages of short remarks of many of the concerned, had it printed with a black cover, and sent out copies to no response, clearly a drop-out classic. ###

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *A news story triggered memories of a high school sucker punch era when "everybody was doing it." Or having it done to them, or both. From one incident among many it was easy to extrapolate the arc of a life. After pot it was more interesting to listen to a Doors album. My first literary influences were rockers of the period, then Aldous Huxley, Blake. Informed by the freedom and fun of the beats, who claimed their own "time", I encountered Keats, Byron and Shelley; from the first there's a line to Frank O'Hara, from the second to Edward Field and Charles Bukowski, and from the third to Allen Ginsberg. I decided I wanted to be a poet who didn't write poetry. I continue to read "everything", but the immortals one first read with a fresh mind have a special place. As do the events of one's period and associated trauma without end.*

AUTHOR BIO: Chris Daly resides West Coast USA. Publications include Rolling Stone, Wormwood Review, Tears in the Fence and Chiron Review.