

I'd Have More Friends

When he was an old man, somebody asked baseball great Ty Cobb if he would do anything different and he was like *Yeah, I'd have more friends*. Now sure, Cobb was a notorious asshole, but it really got me thinking about the difficulties I've had with relationships.

I didn't have much of a home life and never had that loving bond with nuclear family members like a mother, for example. Combined with the fact that I'm autistic, means interactions with others has been complicated.

Therefore, I'd felt like a restless soul for as long as I could remember and as the years went by, drifting around and living out of a backpack seemed to be an easier way to cope. Maybe I was running from fears or perhaps didn't feel like I fit in anywhere or could've simply been trying to travel my way out of being lost. *Some day, if I just keep going, I'll find what I'm looking for* I no doubt and erroneously thought.

Getting older also meant becoming less social and simply hiding out with my little tent in the woods. As time passed, I found myself barely speaking to anybody for long periods. I didn't know it at the time, but can see it was terribly unhealthy and made me even more socially awkward and gave me even more anxiety.

Of course, there are also positive aspects to living by one's self in the forest such as the beautiful nature, peace and quiet, and having plenty of time to reflect on what is or isn't important. For example, I don't believe in a god. I'm not trying to be defiant or antagonize any possible deity. I just don't have any faith, which I think is related to autism. It's the way I'm wired and one of the reasons I also don't feel a need to have any intent or purpose.

In fact, I don't even ask questions like *Why are we here?* or *What's it all about?* It doesn't matter to me. I don't ponder huge philosophical queries such as *What's the meaning of life?* I'm just so grateful I finally understand the meaning of *my* life: people, connections, and relationships. It's the most valuable aspect of all.

It's hard to explain what snapped me out of this self-imposed anxiety-ridden socially awkward solitary confinement, but I found myself talking more, opening up more, and even smiling more. What's crazy is people were responding, talking, opening up, and smiling at me.

Now, I'm always going to need the alone time. Contemplative walks or simply sitting around for hours thinking about art, wildlife, or even recipes. However, the people in my life are irreplaceable and I'm so thankful for figuring this out before it was too late.

I'm getting close to being an old man myself and down the road if somebody asks what I'd do different, I can't really say how I'll respond. Maybe go on about how I could've been a nicer person or wish I'd never started smoking. Whatever the reply, I can tell you this. I won't be thinking or saying *I'd have more friends*. That's a regret I won't have to worry about.

Burns, Ken, et al. *Baseball*. Public Broadcasting Service, 2000.

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