

Kids, remember this survival fact: Shipwrecked survivors, who have no fresh-water to drink, die of thirst drinking seawater sooner than those who drink nothing. It's just as true that you will kill yourself, waste so much time as to have been maimed, or at the very least make yourself miserable drinking from the cup called *I Want*. Being a little hungry or thirsty won't kill you. Comfort in this world is not your objective—living is. (*Extreme close-up of a choir singer's mouth, so extreme the screen is black. Very slow pull back in the shot to reveal woman's face, choir, tabernacle, then the television the choir video is being played on.*) There are a million verses to the song of want. We all have our favorite one and one of the most famous refrains is *I deserve it*. It is one of the main verses sung by the choir singing down at the First Church of the American Dream. (*Fade to Black.*)

(*Black screen, slow fade up of The Rolling Stone's "Can't Always Get What You Want." White text reversed out on screen.*)

No, you can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
And if you try sometime, you might find,
You get what you need

—The Rolling Stones

(*The music plays over a sequence of stock, vintage, or appropriated images of anything being thrown from a height. Cars go over cliffs to explode in mid air; bad guys losing their grip and falling from a height.*) Everyone has some recurring image they are compelled to consider from every angle, in wakefulness or sleep. Much of my life seemed defined by falling. (*Montage of Chevy Chase's Saturday Night Live skits where he falls down.*) I'm not talking about the overtly clumsy stumbling Chevy Chase built a career on, rather the full-bodied, terminal-velocity kind. I'm talking about, "Hey-we're-not-connected-to-a-damn-thing-and-it's-still-a-while-before-we-land" kind of falling.

(*Montage of scenes including all manner of industrial or stock shots of parachuting, including the 1960s TV show Ripcord.*) As a child, I saw some old war movies and I began dreaming about parachuting out of airplanes. Boom, just like that you're in someplace you've never been, action, adventure, love, danger—boom, just like that. (*Insert clips from The Rat Patrol, Jericho, Combat! Men of Valor and Victory at Sea!*) Most of us kids in my neighborhood fought the Russians, Indians, Klingons or the indispensable, generic Nazi in those hot, logy afternoons with the cicadas whirring. We would occasionally fight the North Vietnamese, but it wasn't often. When somebody would get a "good letter" home from kin fighting in Vietnam, then it would be OK. Bad letters could come any-

time, and nobody wanted to think about it, so mostly, we stuck to old wars or ones that didn't exist.

(The Brian Setzer Orchestra plays "James Bond/Mission Impossible/Peter Gunn Themes Medley" over the chase scene from The Third Man where the writer Holly Martins [Joseph Cotten] stalks his thoroughly corrupted college friend Harry Lime [Orson Welles] through the sewers of post WWII Vienna.) When I played alone, I would usually parachute in and get some MacGuffin or another and struggle to a safe place. I would search for countries on my little, dented four-inch metal globe. Most of the names I had never heard of, until occasionally the news would report some huge natural disaster or war. *(Clip montage of silent films representing other cultures in blackface, in tribal masks, fixing to boil white colonists. Clip: Tribal scenes from King Kong and tribal dancing in Zulu Dawn.)* What the folks did in those countries, how they lived, their dreams, were all unknown and mysterious to me. All I had to go on was what the local news was amped up about, so I figured they wanted their own football teams to win, and better soybean and hog futures. *(Montage sequence of "America's Bountiful Harvest" stock images. Extender shot of Norman Rockwell's famous "Freedom From Want" where the fat old white lady is presiding over the filleting of a turkey the size of a 1939 Oldsmobile.)* Like everyone else in this world, I just wanted to be loved, noticed, appreciated, useful, needed.

(Voiceover black and white montage of public domain barnstorming and early flying machines.) Kids, here's another survival fact: Children unconsciously know that when you are doing something, anything—the whole world looks better. Adults tend to forget this. It may be play, but it is not inactivity.

None of the various one-story structures on my relative's farms were safe from children jumping off them. My brother and sister, my cousins, the neighbor kids and I would all stretch out and jump onto a soft spot of dirt, land on our feet and roll like we thought paratroopers would. It was just a moment, but we always felt so much more alive afterward. *(Montage of stock images of gymnasts, kids in physical education classes, Jackass and Fear Factor reality television show stunts.)* I would flatfoot jump, cannonball, belly flop, watermelon, and butt-bounce low-boards at swimming pools—in those days before insurance companies ran America, every pool seemed to have one. I'd bound up the ladders of high-boards if a pool was big enough to have one. *(Repeat image 3 times of an Olympic diver slicing deftly into a pool of water.)* It was years before any of us kids would care to arc out and gracefully pike in, leaving a small splash in a widening set of ripples. I wanted the rush, the feeling of living. I wanted to fly. *(Fade to black.)*

(Black screen, John Lee Hooker's Never Get Out of These Blues Alive plays in on a slow fade capturing his hypnotic guitar riff and text reversed out in white come on with the first vocals.)

Drinking black coffee and smoking cigarettes
Drinking black coffee, yeah, and smoking cigarettes
I can't see no use to try
I'll never get out of these blues alive
No, I'll never, I'll never get out of these blues alive

—John Lee Hooker

(Clips from David Copperfield where the master and Fagan respectively beat the child. Fade to black. Montage: scenes of despairing serfs from Sergei Eisenstein's Strike! Fade to black.) My love for heights and jumping would be cured with whatever kills childhood, with age, with pain. *(Clip of Hitchcock's Vertigo where Jimmie Stewart is wiggling out in a bell tower. Warren Zevon's "Prison Grove" plays over looped scenes from Fritz Lang's classic silent movie Metropolis. The Masses entering and leaving the work lifts. The Masses entering and leaving the work lifts. The Masses entering and leaving the work lifts. Jump cut to the scene of the worker trying to keep up delivering electricity in the bowels of the Metropolis. Jump cut to the Masses entering and leaving the work lifts. The Masses entering and leaving the work lifts. The Masses entering and leaving the work lifts. Fade to black.)*

(Mungo Jerry's "In the Summertime" plays under the stock footage of hobo camps circa 1930. Insert the California auto-camps footage from the film of John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath and Tom Joad's [Henry Fonda] reaction shot.) After high school, I fell in with the unemployed leisure class. *(Insert scenes from Reefer Madness.)* Work when it rains; grow some weed in a ravine with a southerly exposure somewhere, and a sunny day is best experienced with no bosses and loud music. *(Insert scenes from Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.)* This was a sweet devilish time until that inevitable day that you know is coming when the cops catch you doing something. *("Dragnet Theme" plays under voiceover.)* They didn't have a good case, enough to talk shit on, but not too solid. And so the detective proposed a deal, and I fell in with it. The detective had his name carved on the biggest, ugliest US Navy desk name sign to ever be perpetrated on the seven seas. I knew which recruiter to visit to get this guy off my ass. *("Anchors Aweigh" plays under voiceover.)* The next Monday I am at the recruiter's office.

"Master Chief Geerdes, how do you join the Navy, and avoid those claustrophobic ships?"

"Glad you asked, kid. I myself am a Seabee. It's a good way to go. We can deploy a battalion anywhere in the world in seventy-two hours and within six hours of landing the beer WILL be cold, son."

"Yeah, that one, man."

I just wanted out of my hometown. I wanted to see the world. (*"Song of the Seabees" plays in on a slow fade. Fade to black.*)

We're the Seabees of the Navy
We can build and we can fight
We'll pave the way to victory
And guard it day and night
And we promise that we remember
The "Seventh of December"
We're the Seabees of the Navy
Bees of the Seven Seas

Ry Cooder plays slide guitar under voiceover. Montage of Navy boot camp stock footage—first haircuts, drill instructors in their "Dixie Cup" hats, folded in the manner of veteran sailors screaming at shaved head recruits.) In the Navy I started falling to my hands and giving pushups a lot. We fell in and made various lines for all sorts of things. I never fussed with clothing so much as in the Navy. A good company commander can put the most fascist queen of the 5th Avenue fashionistas to shame. Early on, it all seemed a bit prissy worrying so much about your clothing and folding the contents of a sea bag all the time. It all turned out OK—they just wanted attention to detail. By the time I got done with boot camp, some basic electrical training, and eight weeks of the Naval Construction Training Center in Gulfport, MS—the only thing I wanted was cold beer and hot leg.

(Footage of Navy SEALs movie, machine guns blazing. Footage of professional wrestlers talking shit and whacking each other with chairs, footage of pro football players tackling and hitting each other.) You can truly have a lot of macho shit going on—but for sheer natural, testosterone-laden manhood the Navy Seabees are strictly industrial strength. *Clip of government archive footage of the grim conditions on Wake Island, WWII Pacific Campaigns, and Vietnam construction conditions. Jump cut to James Bond footage.*) Yeah, it's true, a Navy SEAL can train up for a mission and swim miles underwater, navigating hazards and keeping an eye on time and tide tables in order to take out some objective with a ballpoint pen. He'll also need some debriefing and R & R afterwards. *(The Grateful Dead's "Easy Wind" plays under the voiceover.)* But what person can ball a ninety pound jackhammer eight to ten hours a day in tropical heat, pave asphalt in the desert, run a power plant in the Antarctic, and in all cases not break stride at quitting time, get piss drunk and fight with Marines, make-up with the same Marines, then go on some sad mission to try and get laid, take two hours of sleep then do it all over again until they run out of money or collapse out of exhaustion? The Navy Seabees. If it's about arduous labor, the con-

struction of jobs so shitty no civilian contractor will bid them, endurance under harsh conditions and the blithe ignorance of pain—put your money on a Seabee every time. They may not be the “tip of the spear,” but they are damn proud to be the big-ass shaft. Sharp points break off and dull down, but you can plain-old beat somebody to death with a good shaft. Or use it for leverage on a jack handle.

(Mountain’s “Mississippi Queen” plays over the Montage of NCTC Gulfport. Extender shots of many historical photos from the Seabee Museum in Port Hueneme, CA.) In Gulfport, and God did love that city before the gambling took over, I learned the trade of electrical work. A huge field of empty utility poles laid out in a grid about twenty feet apart, looms large in my mind. They would throw volleyballs at us and have us volley to each other twenty feet above the ground. If the ball fell, you climbed down and got it. When I froze up on top of the pole, scared to come down, Chief Wenzel took a splitting maul from the line shed and started chopping at the base of my pole to “unfreeze” me. To this day I ponder whether Chief Wenzel was either the best psychologist in the entire world or the very worst. I never “froze up” again, so . . .

Occasionally, I would fall off the poles, landing on my back in the red clay. Usually my hands would slip out of the gloves I climbed with from so much sweat. The sweat of Mississippi in July, the sweat of fear mingled and became too much. I would lie at the base of a pole to see my glove hanging on a splinter fifteen feet up or my hardhat rolling in a lazy arc toward the instructor’s boots.

(Industrial training film footage of Ready Kilowatt the industrial electrical training films.) Other services specialize their MOs. In the Seabees, if you are an electrician and electrons flow through it somewhere, you are responsible for that equipment somehow. It’s your bag, Dad. *(Stock photos of items synched with voiceover.)* Stoves, power generators, telephones, high voltage, low voltage and interior wiring: If we didn’t train on it, we read about it in a book somewhere. At this time all I wanted to do was fall in and turn to. I wanted to be useful, to be a good sailor. My best efforts only made me average, adequate, and OK. But there was a cold war on and I wanted to be ready.

Whenever the Seabees wanted to be more ready, it seems like we always rappelled. We rappelled from towers, rooftops, from helicopters and down sheer-faced terrain. We trained regularly, and wherever we were. We often trained with the Marines or Army. We practiced the Australian crawl, going down a rope, walking facedown the side of the feature you were scaling, practicing sweeping our imaginary automatic weapons to suppress hostile forces that may wait for us there. We always landed on our feet and felt a little more alive. We cheered each other and smoked non-filtered cigarettes. Our pocketknives were razor sharp, because Marine Kabar knives were just too cumbersome and impractical for getting on and off heavy equipment all day.

It started as an assumption on some forgotten chief’s part. Being called “tractor-

boy” as a sometimes handle by my peers in reference to being from Iowa didn’t help. It’s kind of like how some folks get called Ace, and you know they never shot down five enemy planes. As a kid from Iowa, the chief obviously knew that I knew how to drive a tractor, and thusly I knew how to operate heavy equipment, and was the best man for the job. So that’s how, in my unit, I became the Mozart, the Stan Getz, and the fucking-A Jimi Hendrix of backhoes and rough terrain forklifts. I once cleared eighty years worth of industrial debris from a field in a few days, weeks ahead of schedule, so the Navy SEALs could do a bunch of whatever it is they do. It wasn’t spraying the enemy down with a fifty-caliber, but hey—take that you commie bastards.

Kids, here’s another survival fact: Two pair of boots will last you three times as long. I don’t know where that fits in, but I wanted you to know it.

As a workingman in a trade like this, my mortality was always hovering about my head waving its hands. I started to look out for stoners, deadheads, and drunks. I became less tolerant of fuck-ups, tormenting them and finding ways to remove them from around me. I hadn’t cared before, but now I did.

(Insert stock footage of conveyances mentioned.) Electrical work took me onto bucket-trucks, scaffolds, ladders, scissor-lifts, cherry pickers, catwalks, rooftops, antenna towers, and even into tall trees. There was no time to leap, jump or fall. *(Insert clip from Hitchcock’s classic cut on image where Janet Leigh’s eye mixes with the drain in Psycho.)* It was during this time that falling became an internal activity for me. Because of the work schedules, I trained myself to fall asleep in almost any position, almost anywhere. At first I’d lie down flat, splayed out, as if I’d already landed safely—then I would fall into the great nothingness. I would sail downward deeper and deeper into sleep, nothing, my unconsciousness, everything—*(Clip: Star Trek landing party transporting or appearing on an unknown planet phasers ready, looking warily about.)* a parachute insertion into that place of dreams, a bewildered soldier trying to make some sense of all the unknown and mysterious things around him. I wanted recognizable order. I wanted to understand everything. I wanted outcomes to match my desires. I wanted to live . . . like . . . like I don’t know . . . Just better than I was. I had begun to drink want.

(Black screen. Slow fade up on The Kinks’ “Catch Me Now I’m Falling” text reversed out in white)

Now I’m calling all citizens from all over the world
This is Captain America calling
I helped you out when you were down on your knees
So will you catch me now I’m falling (falling)

—Ray Davies (The Kinks)

(*Stock footage of eagles flying, banging on updrafts forever.*) Falling, to descend freely by the force of gravity is a powerful human metaphor and experience. The Phoenix fell down into ruins and rose from its ashes. (*Clip from Fractured Fairy Tales Cartoon of Icarus and Daedalus.*) Icarus flew too high and fell to his destruction. (*Clip from Commercial for Medic Alert Panic Button.*) We are fearful for the poor lady on television who falls and can't get up. You can fall unawares into bad company. You can fall into a fortune, a shit bucket, in love, out of love, and you can fall down drunk. There are fallen women, fallen clergy, fallen angels, and all of those fallen persons can talk about fallen cakes, leaves, and markets. Dynasties, Reichs, Empires, capitals, and military objectives all fall within the abstractions humans create that rise and inevitably fall. I never meant to fall so many times. I just wanted to fly under my own control.

(*Extender shot of British Socialist Agitprop poster "A Bayonet is a Tool With A Worker at Both Ends."*) Kids, another survival fact: Guess what? You're always a worker. Remember that and it will put you on the right side of the issue every time.

(*Blues riff from Savoy Brown's "I'm Tired" plays over montage of news broadcasters, reporters, commentators, and politicians.*) Here's yet another survival fact: *Everybody* on this fragile planet is looking for good things for themselves and the ones they love as they each freefall irrevocably, inevitably into the dust of nothingness. Ask them, they will tell you this themselves.

If somebody tells you something different, tells you other people are going to do unspecified evil—beware. They will probably speak of a higher power abandoning you to convince you of their own fearful beliefs. Or they may be paid, under-informed commentators, trying to make you feel that a steady drum-beat of body bags coming from some place where the people are cursing fate in some language you don't know is an acceptable thing. They will convince you to fall out with your conscience, your allies, to fall silent against the outrages of unknown and mysterious intrigues of multi-national corporations. They will try to break your connections to others, these spider-hair thin cords that bind us together, bind us to the unknown and mysterious world that rains down hate and love in the same day.

(*Extender shot of a Norman Rockwell-esque painting of me, with each of you at age three sitting at my feet on a Sunday afternoon.*) Last survival fact, Kids: Peace is inside you. Nobody can conduct you to the great halls of yourself. Folks will take advantage of you if you do not know this. They will sell you special texts, access to a social group, crystals, and you name it. Trust yourself. Nobody owes us an explanation and none is forthcoming. There is no answer other than creating your own peace. Listen to a lot of music. Learn to play a few songs on a few instruments. Learn another language. Rock and roll is about fixing to jump.

Country music is about after the landing. Blues observes the inescapability of the whole cycle of jumping and landing. Trust yourself, it's in there, though you may need to look hard.

(Extender shot of a soft-focused cornfield with the sun rising.) Do your best—and remember, believe it or don't, everyone else is trying to do theirs. I had an ass-kicking good life. I was and am a wealthy soul. Those things that mattered, I took on my own terms. Like that film we played you guys when you were little, *Toy Story*. Buzz Lightyear tells Woody, "It's not flying. It's falling with style." Finally, what I really want is for you to be happy. *(Tom Waits and Allen Ginsberg reading "America [Closing Time]" then Lou Reed's "There is No Time" plays over various clips of the famous parachute team The Flying Elvi jumping, falling, deploying chutes and landing.)*

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