

# 1 I Can't Unring the Bell

January 1, 2005

PH5

15 Rowes Wharf

Boston, Massachusetts

The birth and growth of the Internet have been good to me, beyond my wildest dreams. I'm living respectably in a \$2 million penthouse condo with harbor views and polished marble floors. Miraculously I managed to make a number of sound financial decisions from the late 90s into the millennium, despite my burgeoning alcohol and drug addiction. I allocated a fairly large investment among small-cap Internet service providers, broadband infrastructure companies, and data storage hardware and software developers.

From January into early March of 2000, I took some of my profits earned on the Internet bubble, and by the time the NASDAQ closed at its all-time high of 5048.62 on March 10, half of my portfolio was sitting in cash. I decided not to be greedy, and took most of my remaining profits soon enough to circumvent the pain of the dot-com bubble's implosion. I have spent the intervening years training in Hapkido, performing some special assignments I'll say more about later, traveling, and exploring options for living the rest of my life. Today I decide to write another book, and this is it.

May 16, 2005

PH5

15 Rowes Wharf

Boston, Massachusetts

In late March, I receive a wake-up call. Severe hyperplasia, possible uterine cancer. Tomorrow I go in for surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital. The pathologist's report says that my biopsy is loaded with atypical cells and that my surgeon has a 40% chance of finding cancer when she opens me up. My BFF Ramone is up here from Miami Beach, and today we visit Best Buy, to find a new television to entertain us with movies during my recovery. Up on the wall we notice a 60-inch, high-definition plasma TV. It's a Philips, and it is awesome. An African big cat safari show with leopards and cheetahs is playing on it, and I am amazed by the color accuracy and resolution. I ask the sales manager the price of the set, and I'm shocked at the answer: \$6,000. "Shit," I mutter to Ramone under my breath, "I can't justify spending that much on a damn television." We end up going home with a modest, 24-inch Sony Trinitron flat-screen, an SVHS VCR, and a DVD player.

May 17, 2005  
PH5  
15 Rowes Wharf  
Boston, Massachusetts

My chances of cancer are 100%, and I wake up minus three body parts and some plumbing. I am grateful that no one can discover they're missing when viewing my body with the naked eye. Thanks to my rocket-scientist surgeon and laparoscopic assist, I have just one barely visible 1/2-inch scar to tell the tale. I am also grateful to learn that the cancer is Stage 1.

I may have a life, after all.

August 1, 2007  
10 Black Bear Mountain Rd.  
Munson, Vermont

As of May 17 I've been cancer-free for two years. To celebrate, I sell my Boston Harbor condo at a modest profit, buy a four-bedroom cedar-sided house here on a pond, and move my two Bengal cats, Nitro and Astro, and myself into it. An exquisite balance of rustic and contemporary, it's the ideal home for me.

March 11, 2008  
10 Black Bear Mountain Rd.  
Munson, Vermont

This morning I lose my beloved Astro to inflammatory bowel disease. He has been dreadfully sick all week, despite all the treatment options we have tried, with both Western and holistic medicine. I have to take him to the vet for the last time, to end his terrible suffering. He dies in my arms, and the vet cries with me. I am still walking through the devastation that has followed. Sadness continues to wash over me in waves. Intense periods of crying last too long. Way too long.

As though my heartbreak over losing Astro isn't enough to cry about, my mind takes errant, unbidden trips down Memory Lane and explores what would, could, or should have been in my relationships with various partners, if only I'd been a better person.

May 17, 2008  
10 Black Bear Mountain Rd.  
Munson, Vermont

Time has passed, and fun has flown. Today I am three years cancer-free. I still miss Astro terribly, but I admit I'm grateful to be alive. I still have Nitro,

and more fun is to be had in this life, as long as I open my mind up to the possibility.

I've made some great friends here in Vermont. Jade is one of them. We grew up in parallel universes, she in Westchester County, New York, and I in Weston, a suburb of Boston. We were each blessed with a pair of certifiably insane parents who shaped our lives in ways that have necessitated numerous healing modalities over the years. One that Jade, her husband, and I share is the practice of Zen Buddhism. We sit together a couple of times a week. The practice (when I do it) effectively relieves me of the excruciating walks down Memory Lane and the crazy-making desires that I obsess about when I'm stuck in the foot-sucking mud of Fantasy Land. Jade shares her husband, Jake, with me, too. She doesn't like to shoot guns, but Jake enjoys it immensely. Shooting and the martial art of Hapkido are my drugs of choice today—far healthier, I have found, than my drug choices of yesterday.

This afternoon I meet Jake at one of the gun clubs I belong to, in Littlefield, about 15 miles north of here. It's in the valley between two mountains, alongside a large, spring-fed lake. I like to use the outdoor range, amidst the flora and fauna characteristic of spring in Vermont. Deer and moose visit often, and recently I've seen a mother black bear with her two cubs, exploring the perimeter of the property. There's also an indoor range here, which we use during the inclement weather that is a frequent visitor to Vermont.

Jake pulls into the gravel lot and parks his Jaguar XKR roadster next to my Porsche. He unfolds himself from the driver's seat, exits the Jaguar, and locks it. His is the appearance of the quintessential mountain man. He's a well-muscled 6'3" or 6'4", in faded blue jeans held up by a Sam Browne belt, heavy cowhide "shit-kicker" boots, and a worn pigskin jacket. He's got shoulder-length brown hair and a brown beard, and his head's topped off by a thick ostrich cowboy hat with a wide brim. His hat, belt, jacket, and boots are all brown. Unless words come out of his mouth, one would never guess that he has a Ph.D. in computer science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) and an IQ off the charts. His Sam Browne has two holsters attached, holding Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum and .44 Magnum handguns. Long barrels, both, which increase accuracy, appreciably. The rule of thumb that I learned early on is the longer the distance between the sights, the better the accuracy. It's particularly noticeable at longer distances between the shooter and the target. "Man," I say, "I'm sure glad you're my friend today, because you're one tough-lookin' hombre." Jake smiles and laughs at me.

I unzip my gun bag and make my selections for today's practice—a Colt .45 ACP 1911, and a nine-millimeter Glock 26, also known as the "baby Glock." Over the last couple of months I have observed that my scores have

been creeping downward, even with “my most beautiful gun,” the Colt .45. Jake’s laconic comment has been, “You’re trying too hard.” Very Zen. He has been beating me consistently at all distances, and my visit to the ophthalmologist last week has resulted in my first pair of progressive bifocals. Ruefully I acknowledge that if I find myself in a combat situation I won’t have time to tell my enemy, “Hold on a sec, let me find my eyeglasses.” If I want to stay in a state of preparedness, I’ll have to keep the damn glasses on my face much more than I’d like. I have chosen the Safilo brand—the lightest possible rimless lenses, with titanium hardware. The damn bifocals are sitting on my face today, under the safety goggles, and I think they make me look like an old fart. I share this opinion with Jake, and he treats me to an example of his droll humor. “You’re probably better off being an old fart than a dead fart.”

“Save that thought,” I tell him as I snap a custom-ordered ten-round magazine into the Colt .45 for my first group of ten rounds at ten yards, from a right-handed stance. I finish with a perfect score. My second group of ten rounds from a left-handed stance yields another perfect score, and I tell Jake, “I’m still trying too hard, so it must be the damn glasses that are making the difference.”

“Sherrill,” Jake replies, “get off the cross, we need the wood! You have to live with looking like an old fart, and I have to live with telling my wife that I got beat by a girl again!”

Being ambidextrous has its merits. I can fire for a good two hours before I’m tired enough to lose accuracy. I have a great day, and Jake’s is only slightly less good. I think one reason I’m addicted to shooting guns is that this activity keeps me living and breathing steadily, in the moment.

August 20, 2008  
10 Black Bear Mountain Rd.  
Munson, Vermont

Today’s my birthday. My present to myself is a top-of-the-line Panasonic high-definition plasma TV. I hook it up, with a Blu-Ray player and satellite box, to my Bose Lifestyle® 48 Home Theatre System. I make the Internet connection work, first try. Then I calibrate the color, which takes four pages of scroll-down settings menus. I do all of this without calling a man. Now I’m watching my own 60-inch plasma, here in my living room, for about \$2,500. My beloved Nitro curls up on the couch next to me, and purrs. I consider his pelted white coat, his striking black rosettes, and his beautiful, brilliant blue eyes; and I ask myself if I’m happy. The answer comes lightning fast. *Happy is too strong a word.*

Our story begins when I click-surf through the hi-def Dish Network channels, and land in the middle of a live concert recorded at the Staples

Center, in Los Angeles. There you are, a young man playing the guitar, with sidemen on rhythm guitar, keyboard, bass, and drums. Up to this point you have been beneath my radar with a name I don't recognize: Daniel Marin.

I blame the HDTV for my reaction. I am spellbound. In five minutes I hear myself muttering under my breath, "This kid is good. Maybe as good as Clapton... No. He's phenomenal. Better than Clapton." You play like you've laid down about eight Les-Paul tracks, but this is live. You are doing it all, on what looks like a custom-built Fender Stratocaster, with a sparkling enamel coat of abstract stars and planets. Four of the songs are covers of artists before you—Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, B.B. King, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. The others you have composed yourself, and I love them all.

"Yes, well, damn." My head bobs up and down with the drum strokes and bass notes bouncing out of the Bose subwoofer. "He's dynamite. He's blowing the doors off all the guitar gods before him. Holy shit!" The baritone that forms the words is breathy with a raspy timbre, and resonates with at least a three-octave range. Deep, hard-driving hoarseness alternates with falsetto, riding on facile, tactile waves of vibrato, or not. Virtuoso hands and fingers mix exquisite licks with foot-stomping chops. I'm as tight as high E-string stretched just short of snapping, and I suspend my disbelief.

Our story begins again when I absorb the visual impact of you, the maker, singer, and player of the tunes. Behind the music, you are the most amazing animale I've ever seen; I've lived long and played plenty. I feel a pulse of complex, electrical explosions, from my solar plexus down to Vladimir Nabokov's secret, somewhere between my belly button and my knees. My mouse hand trembles as I wonder what words I will write next.

An overhead, medium long shot circles the quintet, with you front and center and the four sidemen behind you. The five of you whirl lazily before me. In tight black jeans and a tank top, you are a long man, a lanky 6'3", but a brick shithouse with abundant muscle that flexes gracefully as you rock my world. One arm is covered with a sleeve of tattoos; the other contains several more, separate inked objects. Your dark brown underarm hair is thick and fluffy. I lose my next breath; the crane video camera stalls, and then nose-dives like a pelican aiming for its dinner. I breathe now, and the breath catches in my throat with the burst of an extreme close-up. It's a full frontal assault. It's you from the neck up, larger than life, singing.

Timing. Your voice is all about the timing. Sweet softness strokes my skin repeatedly with a mink glove, then the next split second brings a body slam with a deadly rasp that ends in a basso-profundo growl. My visceral response to your voice reverberates deep in my core. There's a faint metallic hiss of a circular saw at the edges of your singing that excises my skepticism and lays me wide open. My opening exposes my truth, for what it is. Pent up

and kept under deep cover since I lived and wrote the story of Samuel John Carmine Lauria, Joseph Robert Rossi, and me, in *Herstory: A Woman's Book*. Years of unbridled, crying desire. Marin.

“Oh, Goddess.” I mouth the words. Pillowy and bee-stung, your lips stay parted between your phrases. Zyderm®? Restylane®? Radiesse®? Cosmoderm®? I wonder who does that to you, which of your handlers force you to sit for the painful injections. A flash of fury stings me with laser precision, and then retreats as quickly as it comes. Your mouth might be natural, the way you're made. Made for love.

“Oh, baby. I could die of this,” I tell you as I stare into the two liquid velvet brown orbs atop prominent, high cheekbones. Your almond-shaped eyes are larger than life, too, and they're staring back at me. Ah, the beauty of high definition. There is sweet peach-fuzz on your smooth, light olive skin, and short, dark stubble along your lower jaw, across your chin, and above your upper lip. Oh, your hair. It's tousled but shiny, with loose, springy curls bouncing off the back of your neck and surrounding your face. Full-bodied, it is brunet with red undertones dancing in the stage lights. *I wonder if his stylist used a henna pack on him*, I muse. Again, I blame my pretty plasma Panasonic with the 60-inch screen.

I recall the Federico Fellini film, *Juliet of the Spirits*, particularly the scene in which a tall, dark-haired Adonis wearing a white robe walks into Giulietta's room and sits beside her bed. He offers her the opportunity to experience her sexuality and claim her independence from her philandering husband. I have searched for the dark-haired beauty since seeing the film, that is, until now. I've found him; he's in your body. I smile at you, and chuckle softly with the most dulcet, sultry tones I can muster. “Hello, Daniel Marin. You've got my attention. I'm Sherrill Meleney, and I'm pleased to meet you.”

When the concert ends, I open my MacBook Pro and Google *Juliet of the Spirits*. Several scenes from the film come up. The dark-haired beauty is in one of them, sitting alongside Juliet's bed as I've remembered. You and he could be twins.

There's magic in this moment. It occurs to me this is no accident. This may be my chance to get it right.