

# THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED

By: Shawn Robinson

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I was just a boy when it all happened. An innocent boy. A boy who took the world he'd been born into for granted.

Things were different in those days. Love overcame hate. Fear was dispelled by faith. People believed the world still had a chance.

I was so naïve.

We all were.

Memories of my past are imprinted on my mind like the burns of hellfire on my hands, my back, and my face. All thanks to the wars that waged in the wake of what we found out that day. What we never thought possible suddenly became our reality.

Now, I am in the final act of my life. My days are fleeting and frail to the touch. My nights are filled with a somber anguish as I strain my eyes to look far, far back into the haze of a long-gone contentment. I try to remember what it was like to feel hope.

With the last of my will, it is now my time to speak. It is time to tell my story.

I was five or six years old when it started.

The other neighborhood boys and I had just gotten home from Mr. Marlow's Candy Shop. Every day after our stickball game, we would take the dime we had earned from our morning paper route and pay it to Mr. Marlow for a Peppermint Popper or a Bubaroo or one or two Gaybos. (I know this sounds like a slur to you youngins, but back in those days, gay was in

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reference to homosexual people). I had gotten a Boysenberry Bar and my little brother Alfie grabbed a handful of Liquid Diabetes Bites. When we walked in, Ma and Pa were huddled around the radio, trying to precisely tune it.

Alfie ran up and tugged our mother's skirt excitedly. "Ma! You'll never believe what we saw this morn! A colored man was shot by the police right on the sidewalk!"

"Alfie!" Pa chastised in his booming voice. "You know better."

Alfie, suddenly embarrassed, corrected himself: "Sorry, Pa. A 'criminal' was shot by the police."

"That's my boy," Pa said, ruffling Alfie's little brown locks. Alfie and I both grew up knowing he only lectured for our own good. "Now go to your room you two. Your Ma and I are about to listen to Mr. President speak to the entire nation."

Alfie and I did as we were told, but it wasn't long before we had cracked the door back open and crept into the hallway to listen to what Mr. President had to say.

Just then the town milkman, Mr. Hermeier, tapped twice on the screen door. "Mr. and Mrs. Richardson? Your evening milk is here!"

Pa went to the door. "Hello there, Mr. Hermeier. Haven't you heard the news?"

"Why, no, I haven't," said Mr. Hermeier, nervously twisting his handlebar mustache.

Pa nodded sternly. "Mr. President is about to address the nation. Even the forty-two states that don't matter."

"Hush, darling! It's starting!"

Mr. Hermeier and Pa walked over to the radio, both making a mental note to give my mother a stern slapping later for having told a man to hush. Mr. Hermeier would go first, as our guest. Back in those days, hospitality still mattered.

The radio went quiet for a moment, and then a grand, confident voice filled the fuzzy sonic space. It was Mr. President.

"My fellow Americans, I apologize for the abrupt timing of this message, but something highly pertinent to the well-being of this country's national security has just come to my administration's attention. These brief words are to educate and prepare every family in every state—even the forty-two that don't matter – of the active and real danger that exists in our midst."

Mr. President paused. Pa caught Alfie and I hiding in the hallway and quietly gestured for us to join them in the living room. As we approached him, he made an utterly bizarre and terrifying move to put a hand on both of our shoulders. In the years since, I've been told this is referred to by loosey-goosey liberal degenerates as a "hug." Mr. Hermeier gasped and grumbled to himself, but stopped himself from calling Pa a Flaming Nancy until he was out of the man's house. Back in those days, respect still mattered.

The President continued.

"There is no easy to say what comes next. I look to the great men who have held this highest office before me for guidance and strength. Zachary Taylor, James Garfield, but most of *all of course, the damn-near omniscient Martin Van Buren.*"

Ma closed her eyes and clutched her Rosary tightly on hearing Mr. President say the word "damn."

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"I ponder how those great men would have handled a situation as dire and immediately troublesome as the one I find myself having to communicate to you. But no more stalling."

Another pause. The entire world, the simple truths of my childhood, the lofty hopes of my future, all of it swirled like static in the still air.

"Around noon this morning, the Federal Bureau of Investigation set a report on my desk that claimed definitively...it...it...claimed definitively...that the band Yellowcard...has released ten full-length studio albums."

We could hear our neighbors crying and screaming next door.

"Oh, Lord, no..." Ma said, grasping her Rosary as tightly as she could manage. Pa yanked it from her hands and stomped it into the ground.

"WHAT GOD WOULD ALLOW THIS?" he screamed.

Mr. Hermeier straightened his bow-tie nervously. "Wait, a second folks. Who even is Yellowcard?"

Pa turned on him, huffing and puffing like a madman. "Can't you see, you bastard? That's the point!"

Alfie and I hadn't seen our father that violently upset since earlier that day when he was drinking his morning whiskey.

Mr. President, voice trembling, continued on that note. "For those all around the nation surely asking right about now, 'Who the hell is that?' You probably remember them as that shitty mid-2000's band who made that whiny teeny-booper anthem Ocean Avenue."

"No! Them?! THEM?! Those kids sounded like if every awkward middle school dance that's ever happened joined together into some personified monstrosity and wrote horrible, horrible music." Mr. Hermeier cried at first, and then, manically, he began laughing.

Pa grabbed him and slapped him hard — about half as hard as he still needed to slap Ma when this was all said and done. Back in those days, keeping your promises and staying true to your word still mattered. "Get your shit together, Hermeier! Yes, they sound like a twelve year old boy with a bowl cut ejaculating in his cargo shorts as he has his first kiss. We all know this, but we need to stay strong for the lady-folk."

Ma had indeed fainted from the emotional weight of the announcement. Who can blame her? It was well more than any human female could ever hope to handle. As she lay on the ground, light headed and hazy, she simply said over and over again: "Two or three albums? Sure, why not. But ten? Ten albums? Maybe a fourth one just to wrap up whatever shit-storm you started, but ten? Oh my...."

Those were the last words I ever heard my mother say. She died on that wooden floor. Just one of many casualties of that day.

In her casket at the funeral, Pa and Mr. Hermeier still gave her the slaps she had earned that day. Back in those days, honoring the dearly departed still mattered.

People took to the streets. Even the colored people seemed scared, and they were the scariest people I knew!

All world powers and their peoples came to the conclusion that this life was an absurd, meaningless vacuum of consciousness for which no purpose or reason to carry forth could be found, and so nuclear holocaust broke out within hours. As the bombs fell, the people ran out into the streets, preferring instant vaporization to spending another second in the world they found themselves in.

Others of us weren't so lucky. All the men with the nuclear codes offered themselves before finishing the job, leaving us sorry sons-a-bitches to carry on in this ugly, godforsaken wasteland we once called Earth.

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A young boy once asked me if I still dream. I told him I did, and that he better stay the fuck away from my food storage cellar or I'll gut him like a pig.

But you may ask how, after everything I've seen, I can still dream.

Every day the sun rises is a new beginning. Forgetting the sorrows of the past, the morning sun presses forth, climbing wearily into the sky and lighting this fragile, imperfect world. So long as the sun lasts, so can we.

We are not doomed.

It's simply time to climb again.

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**Shawn Robinson** is a junior in English Education who's just happy to be here. He is writing a novel about college. You can see him perform more poetry at the M-Shop on Open Mic Nights.