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Digital Death: Archives, Memories, Bodies and Decay  
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November 29, 2015

### Tell Me Something Good

There is a common habit I think we all share of holding onto things that have no practical purpose: crystal glassware, fine china, bronzed baby shoes, objects that capture a moment in a time, a loved one's spirit, a shared history. Sentimental items imbued with nostalgia that we keep safe in dusty attics and cold basements to admire and preserve with no intention of ever using them again. Their original function overshadowed by the compulsion to hold on to memories, however fleeting.

I have a CD. Hot pink. FUNK printed in bold psychedelic letters. All caps. Loud and unconventional. A snapshot of me and my best friend, Micaela, when teenage wasteland bled into young adulthood. We were young, careless, and intent on abusing the limited freedoms that being of age and still living under our parents' roofs afforded us. We would get high in the middle of the day and insist that we could really *feel* the music coming out of the speakers in her little grey Saturn. There were countless loud nights where the darkness suddenly blurred into hazy sunlight and we would ponder if we were up really, really late or really, really early.

In truth, it is not the CD itself or its contents that haunt me. It's the crude, hand-drawn cover, the poorly spaced track listing on the back, and the farewell inscription inside that has paralyzed me, and kept me from listening to it in its entirety at any point in the past 5 years. It's special to me, and I need to keep it safe. It was given to me by a very, very good friend I haven't seen in years.

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*Track 1 - Brick House*

Micaela turned 21 half a year before me in the spring. We spent that summer going out nearly every weekend to all the places that didn't check IDs at the door. At the Martini Room, we would let guys buy us drinks, and then quickly disappear into the crowd before they expected something in return. Sometimes, we would go out with only ten bucks between us, knowing that some unfortunate person would surely pick up the bill. Most nights, we could be found on the outdoor patio at the bar on Douglas Street. At the time, Micaela was dating some 30 year old (possibly homeless) graffiti artist whose friends spent a lot of time there. Micaela is an artist too, but that was about all they had in common. I have to admit that I was glad when they broke up later that summer. Still, if it wasn't for him and his drunk, old friends I don't think I would have ever met my friend Hunter.

*Track 2 - Play That Funky Music*

Hunter was underage too, but he worked at Douglas Street as a barback. He was tall, and lanky with long, dirty blonde hair and a thin face. I can't remember exactly when we met, but I think Micaela knew him first. The three of us and Hunter's girlfriend all grew up with strict military parents. While mine and Micaela's parents had left the service when we were relatively young, Hunter's parents were career military officers, and so he had spent most of his life in exotic places like Guam, Myanmar, and Idaho. We were all quickly developing a wine habit, and Hunter insisted that Idaho wine was the best in the world - better than Italy or California. I had to believe him. Idaho was where his mom lived, and where he wanted to be. His parents had

lived in paradise all over the world and had inexplicably decided to settle in Boise, Idaho of all places. To Hunter, it was next to Eden.

#### *Track 4 – Funky Town*

Hunter was smart and silly and kind. I felt like I had known him since we were kids, like we had inside jokes that we had yet to discover. Micaela agreed. We'd sit in the parking lot of Douglas Street bar in between his shifts, and pass a bowl between the three of us with Led Zeppelin or Kanye West or a Micaela's random mix CD of blues and rock & roll on repeat.

#### *Track 7 - Love Rollercoaster*

Hunter tried to take me on a date once. We were pretty young, and I think somewhere between the hard liquor and all the time we spent together, he had trouble telling the difference between romantic love and the intimacy of friendship. Most of our "date" was spent in his car, lost, trying to find some restaurant. I searched through his CDs: Damien Rice, the Flaming Lips, a bunch of other indie artists I had never heard of, and a nondescript hot pink FUNK CD. I popped it in the CD player and started skipping through the tracks.

"Did you know that you can hear the scream of a woman being murdered outside the studio in Love Rollercoaster?" I asked.

We played the song over and over, but never found the scream.

#### *Track 8 - Fantastic Voyage*

In the fall, I impulsively decided to move to Albuquerque, New Mexico. For my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, Hunter gave me the FUNK CD as a going away present. He drew the case himself. On the inside,

he explains that the original case was “dropped from a ski lift and lost in the snow”. On the front is some kind of James Brown caricature with sunglasses and a microphone that always looked more like the raisinets mascot to me. On the back is a handwritten track list, adorned with a burning joint and *Mota!* -that’s spanish for marijuana- in big letters.

Of course I had to hide the case from my ex-military, catholic mom. “Be safe”, she told me before I left for New Mexico, “I know you and your friends do drugs”, and I vehemently denied the accusation.

#### *Track 10 - Let’s Groove*

Shortly after I left, I came back home for Christmas and New Years to find Micaela and Hunter just the same as I left them. They picked me up in Hunter’s car: a little red, two-door sports car built for speeding. We raced out to his dad’s house in Rockford with Micaela in the passenger seat and me in the back playing Super Mario 64. In between rounds of super smash bros., we caught up. Hopeless romantic that he was, Hunter had started seeing a new girl. She was bubbly, and lived about an hour away. Micaela told me he would drive out to see her 2 or 3 times a week. It was quickly becoming very serious. Hunter always seemed to moved fast and reckless, whether he was behind the wheel or in the throes of a new relationship.

#### *Track 12- Superfly*

It was a strange winter in Albuquerque. It snowed 2 inches, and the entire city shut down. In February, I got a call from Micaela. Hunter was speeding on his way to see his girlfriend. He ran a red light. He was hit by a semi-truck on the driver’s side. He spent the summer on life support. At some point, his family flew him to Idaho to be closer to his mom. I had a dream that he was

getting better. It was so vivid and wonderful that for a little while, I believed it was real. When I told Micaela, she became angry with me for believing in something so foolish.

In the fall, Hunter's family made the decision to disconnect the life support machines.

### *Track 16 - Express Yourself*

I'm certain something must have changed when my friend was taken from me in such a sudden, violent, unfair way. I became a little more cynical, a little more careful, and a lot more in-tune to who and what really matters to me. As a result, I'm quicker to drop friends who don't respect me. I try to be more patient with my family, though it's not my greatest virtue. I apologize more. Maybe some of these changes can be attributed to age and maturity, but I can almost pinpoint the exact moment when I started taking myself more seriously. It isn't just me that has changed either. Douglas street is a pizza place now, and darker than I remember. Micaela has a daughter, and I have to drive over an hour to see her maybe once a month. She's still my best friend. One thing that has essentially frozen in time is Hunter's Facebook profile picture. In it, he's smiling and in desperate need of a haircut. I can't remove his profile from my friends list for the same reason I can't listen to that dumb CD. It represents a piece of someone I'll never get to see again. To play the already-worn CD would be to potentially destroy part of his memory, and I'm not willing to take that risk. Micaela and I don't talk about Hunter much. She lost another friend before him in much the same way, and it's just too difficult to face sometimes. Every now and then, she and I will relive the good times and drive around aimlessly all night until we end up in some restaurant parking lot. In those moments I can almost sense Hunter in the backseat of her car, talking, singing, and laughing with us, and I find peace.