

L.A. NUTS

Meet the Author: Takes One to Know One

By Joe Dungan

Jul 2, 2007

I know where Paris Hilton lives.

Knowing things like this against our will is one of the side effects of living here. As much as I present myself as a detached outside observer, I'm infected with Angelitis. Angelitis is a condition that afflicts residents of Los Angeles, and its symptoms include misplaced priorities, self-importance, ethical vacuity, uncontrollable materialism, and falsity in relationships. Then again, I don't obsess over my car or my appearance, I'd like to think I'm not a self-important phony, and when people ask me what's new, my answer never involves a screenplay or an agent. And, in fact, people sometimes mistake me for an east coaster. So maybe I'm merely a carrier of the disease.

The reality is that I'm not only a native, but I've lived here my whole life, which means I don't have a frame of reference for what a normal city should be like. All I can do is look at the people and realities of my city with my own sense of irony and bullshit detection. And as cities go, L.A. has a mind-boggling amount of irony and bullshit.

Any sane person would move out, right?

I know where Paris Hilton lives.

I can't help not forgetting things like that. I try to forget them, but I can't. Try not thinking about pink elephants. See what I mean?

I think about a lot of things. I think about all the failed food experiments before people figured out sublime combinations like chocolate and red wine. I wonder how fish wash themselves. I wonder who's in charge of naming the streets. I think about how if gold is just another element, why scientists can't somehow slightly fuck with a neighboring element, like lead, and turn it into gold. When you consider that the only thing separating one element from another is its number of electrons, neutrons, and protons, and that lead has more of each than gold does, gold is kind of already in lead. All you have to do is take away a few electrons, neutrons, and protons from a lead atom, and then you have a gold atom. Who says this can't be done?

I'm fascinated with parking enforcement laws, commercial airplanes, and small towns in Nevada. I couldn't begin to tell you why.

I used to get angry more often. A lot of it was just walking-around bluster, the kind that only alienated people -- which only made me angrier. But sometimes I got creative about it. Like when I was working at this dotcom in 2001. There were some people in my department whom I wouldn't trust to water my plants and they were making more than I was for doing far less work. The injustice was so infuriating that I exacted a little revenge when I left the company. As an early employee, I qualified to buy as many as 2,500 shares in the company at a strike price of 15 cents per share. This was a great deal except for the fact that the company wasn't yet listed on the stock exchange and was in the process of going down the shitter. Still, this seemed like a good chance to take a piss on the doormat on my way out. So, at my exit interview, I slid a dime and a nickel across the desk of the human resources manager and requested to purchase one share, please. I eventually got my stock certificate in the mail, no doubt at great legal and administrative expense to the company.

If I heard correctly, a rule later got passed that prohibited anyone from trafficking in fewer than 100 shares at a time so as to keep anyone from pulling such an annoying stunt again.

I went to California State University, Northridge, for my bachelor's degree at a time when I was so dumb to life that it would be years before I even knew my head was up my ass. I was a business major because the college was close to my house -- or I went to that college because I wanted to be a business major. I don't even remember anymore. I changed my major to TV/Film because television and film were more interesting.

I know where Paris Hilton lives because someone told me. Sometimes people mention stuff to me and it sticks. Someone told me that grapefruit has fewer calories than it takes to digest it. Someone told me that three percent of the population bites their toenails. Someone told me that pubic hair toupees were invented during the black plague because the plague made one's pubic hair fall out and pubic hair had aesthetic value back then. I've remembered all those things too. Does that make me crazy? I just remember a lot of stuff. Sue me.

When you think about it, knowing Paris Hilton's address is really not such a strange thing to know or admit. It was just something I heard. I'm not obsessed with celebrities, really. I see them once in a while and then forget about them -- until I think of them again. Did someone say, "Pink elephants"? Damn!

Okay, there was the time I saw Quentin Tarantino in a movie theater and asked him for a job. What was I supposed to ask for? His autograph? I was unemployed. Fat lot of good that would have done me. And besides, he was there to see one of his own movies. Paid money and sat in the third row. And you think *I'm* weird?

I also remember my first day of fourth grade at a new school right after our family had moved. A girl named Cathy Saunders asked me to lead the class in the morning flag salute. I didn't know how to lead the class in the flag salute, and I thought it was ridiculous of her to ask the one person in the room who hadn't seen it done before. So I whispered to the first kid nearby, Donald, what to say. He whispered back, "Put your right hand over your heart, begin." I repeated it and led the class in the flag salute, then sat back down in my seat that, a week earlier, had been occupied by a girl named Donna who, I was told, had been killed in a car accident.

I don't remember Donald's last name, but I remember he had a little round bandage on his cheek to cover his ringworm.

I might be crazy. I don't think I am. Then again, whenever someone fears they might be crazy, that's good sign that they're sane. I'm pretty sure I'm sane. My shrink tells me so. But I keep seeing her once a month anyway. That's not exactly a sign of a Zen Buddhist.

I'm positive I used to be crazy. Let me take that back. Not because I'm a liar, but because I'm too impulsive about my word choice. I used to call myself crazy all the time. But I wasn't crazy. I was aware enough to start seeing a shrink voluntarily, wasn't I?

I'm positive I used to be depressed. That's when I started seeing my shrink. Twice a week. I really wasn't doing well back then.

I know where Paris Hilton lives. I live in Los Angeles in spite of that fact.

I live here because I was born here and despite the city's flaws, I've gotten used to them. Maybe it's made me discontent on a level that I'm not even aware of, but until I become aware of it, I'm staying.

Most of my friends and family are here, despite how crazy they may be. My brother once visited all 58 counties in California within a span of four months -- while keeping a full-time job here in L.A. I have another friend who, at one time, only wanted two books: one about the actress who played Ethel Mertz, and another about the whole "two Darrins" thing on *Bewitched*. I'm friends with two people who are the only two people I know who have volunteered stories to me about times they've crapped their pants as adults. As coincidence would have it, they're a couple. I'm friends with a woman who's a pack rat. She married a man who's a neat freak. I point to them as proof that God has a sense of humor.

I have one friend who cries at Paul Giamatti movies, draws R.I.P. pictures of celebrities when they die, and not only knows exactly how many times he's seen *Jackass: The Movie* (it's gotta be over 40 by now), but he laughs his ass off every time he sees it. He also occasionally sends scary and/or embarrassing fan emails to an actress friend of his, signs fake names to them, and attaches random Internet photos of males who are either physically deformed or incredibly ugly.

I'm friends with people who were afraid they'd be mentioned in my column because they think they're weird. They're among the more normal people I know.

And that's just the stuff off the top of my head.

Then there are the people I don't know. I get tailgated by them. I had my car broken into by one of them. They make noise when I'm trying to sleep. They put junk mail on my doorstep. At least one of them leaves his dog's shit in front of my apartment building all the time. So many work in the entertainment industry. Tens of thousands of crazy, crazy people. I shouldn't say that. There are actually some sane people in show business. His name is Dennis Franz.

I'm here in spite of the fact that nearly every quality of life in Los Angeles continues to worsen. Traffic is murderously bad, the air is brown, the houses are impossibly expensive, and we're running out of water and what little we have is full of chlorine. We don't have enough police. Our public school system sucks. We don't have enough hospitals *and* some of them suck. Our local news media are largely worthless. In recent years, my city has been nurturing two seemingly contradictory qualities at once: The cost of living is approaching extortion levels while the city is turning to shit. And people keep moving here. And there's no end in sight.

I started criticizing the hell out of Los Angeles because it's easy to make fun of stuff. Then I thought that maybe all my observations might encourage us to do better. Then I decided that was crap. I hope my city can do better, and I wish to hell it would. But I doubt it will. The reason I wrote this column is because Los Angeles was easy to make fun of.

As it turns out, I did *not* know where Paris Hilton lives. I was a little less shallow than I thought I was all this time. I was told it was at the north end of Fairfax Avenue. But I just discovered that that is not true. I know this because I just did a little research and found out the exact address.

Now I know where Paris Hilton lives.

Copyright © 1998-2006 [TheSimon.com](http://www.thesimon.com)

View this story online and more at:

http://www.thesimon.com/magazine/articles/la_nuts/01412_meet_author_takes_one_know_one.html