

January 5, 2009

## **Morbid Calculation**

About three years ago, I sat down at my desk with a calendar and did a quick calculation that led me to a very specific date... January 5, 2009. It seemed so far away at the time. Now all of a sudden, it's here. This is the date in which I would be the exact same age of my mother - to the day - when she passed away in 1983... a total of 164 days after her 38th birthday.

I know that calculating such things is a bit morbid, but it helps put my life in perspective. What if I had died today, too? Did I live a good life? What have I accomplished? What more could I have done? Could I have been a better person? Could I have lived a better life?

## **Measures of Success**

At my age, my mother was happily married to a doctor, owned a large house in a gated community, and practiced religion devoutly. She was kind, smart, beautiful, and fashionable. She had four children. (That alone was a huge accomplishment!) And she had a wicked sense of humor (which was probably necessary if one was to manage four kids).

Me? I've never been married. I rent a dirty apartment in the city. I am currently not practicing any religion. Am I kind? I try. Smart? Above average. Beautiful? Hardly. Fashionable? Um... no. I definitely don't have any children. But I did inherit my mother's wicked sense of humor!

Based on these attributes, could I say whether or not I've been successful to this point in my life? Are there other attributes that are important? Work, money, friends, fame, awards? What are the measures of success?

## **Path To Discovery**

Very early in life, I had to abandon my dreams of becoming a beautiful, sexy, down-to-earth underwear model.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWER-W8l9mI>

Apparently, there was no market for guys who wear cheap, baggy boxer shorts. Too bad.

Steering clear of modeling (and generally avoiding cameras until I hit my 30s), I followed both my heart and my head in forging my life's path. Luck often intervened. I majored in geography and moved to California. I got my masters degree in urban geography mainly as a way to survive an economic recession (a lucky and brilliant move). I eventually landed a job revitalizing the North Park neighborhood in San Diego, where I worked for nine years.

It was a truly amazing experience to be an integral part of the transformation of North Park from a shabby, filthy neighborhood into a vibrant, exciting community. Before, it was hard to find one

reason to visit North Park. Today, one could spend an entire weekend exploring the shops, dining in the restaurants, and visiting the art galleries.

Tens of thousands of people benefited from my work in North Park. But I still don't feel as if I succeeded in life.

## Tools For Improvement

Although I helped revitalize a neighborhood, I don't think I left behind enough tools for people to make urban improvements on a grand scale. Specifically, I feel the need to address the relentless construction of ugly buildings, like this new condominium complex in San Francisco's upscale Pacific Heights neighborhood.



While there are some amazingly beautiful modern buildings, most are downright plain and boring. What happened to architectural ornamentation? Decorative cornices? Elaborate friezes? Buildings that make you stop and stare and say, "Wow!"?

If there is an earthquake and the decorative buildings in San Francisco are destroyed, will plain, crappy buildings be built in their place? Would the city be the same if it contained nothing but buildings constructed in 2009?

My goal in life is to address this issue, and solve the persistent problem of ugly architecture. I might not bring beauty to the world as an underwear model, but I can bring beauty to the world through smart planning that enables and encourages beautiful structures.

THAT, for me, would be success in life.