



The lazy summer of 2008.

A summer during which most Americans witnessed their life savings go up in smoke with the housing market...

...and the country fell into the deepest recession since the 1940s.

It was also the summer that I slammed a U-Haul into the bumper of a parked car...

...and started my future at the university.

San Jose was a place for me to try to get my life back on the road...

...after a traumatic young marriage...

...and a most beautiful divorce...

...with a college education being the pillar of stability I so desperately needed at that moment.

Education it seemed...

...was that golden ticket that would allow me through any door, that the gates to prosperity were virtually non-existent for someone holding a Bachelor's degree.

And for a military dropout like myself, it sure as hell beat working some low-end job in retail for the rest of my life. Even when Uncle Sam kept his purse tight and refused to cough up the Montgomery G.I. Bill like he promised, I didn't hesitate taking out the private loans necessary to fund my future...

...without fully realizing the costs.

# The Barriers to Higher Education

by Erik Thurman

My first move was into a very modest apartment with a couple of very unmodest people...

I had deep dark fantasies about the woman when she sang opera at 2am...

...a dream where I'd sneak down to her bedroom...

...and punch her in the throat to get her to shut up.

While the other roommate, for reasons I'll never understand...

...was secretly hoping to fail out of school...

...even though his parents were willing to fund his entire education.

Just to spite his own father.

So it was a no-brainer where I spent most of my time.

The delicately trimmed landscaping of the university was adequate enough to put my mind at ease.

I encountered what I thought were intelligent people who "liked to draw."

While most of them were trust fund kids right out of the nest...

...I enjoyed the company.

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CONSTRUCTION AREA  
STUDENTS / STAFF  
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— THIS AREA —

**WARNING**  
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IS A FELONY  
ANYONE TRESPASSING ON THIS PROPERTY  
WILL BE PROSECUTED  
TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW

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I felt...welcomed.

So when tuition rose a bit, I didn't think much of it.

I just put in a few more hours at the bowling alley as the greaseball pinchaser in the back...

...usually sneaking in perspective homework after blowing down the machines...

...and sending lewd text messages to my Filipina sweetheart half a world away.

Coffee, my bitter, black lifeline...

...ensured that I didn't crash on the job.

And when I wasn't covered in oil from cleaning out ball gutters...

...or coughing up charcoal dust from my illustration classes...

...I would converse late into the night alongside my student-comrades about the only thing that mattered...

"The Industry"

The promised land where we would all strike a deal with one of the bigger studios.

And quickly pay off our loans.

I dug myself deeper into debt by taking out an unsubsidized loan and not looking back.

That hole in my pocket inspired my late night modeling career.

When I wasn't spending my days on the second floor of the art building pushing out drawings for a white-haired old man...

...who told me that this "comic thing" I was doing was a dead end...

...I was on the model's stand, being displayed in front of a group of strangers.



All I needed was a stopwatch, a robe, a pole...

...and a smile.

Great tips, though.

And then tuition hiked 33% in one summer.

So I picked up a few other odd jobs here and there...

...from some questionable clients.

Then tuition jumped another 10%.

And I found it harder to get into the classes that I needed.

Then another 15% hike.

All the while trying to obtain that coveted "industry" job.

I was oblivious to where all of the extra fees on my semester statements were going.


...I wondered why all these new buildings were popping up.

And when teachers were getting pink slips...





Stop the Cuts!

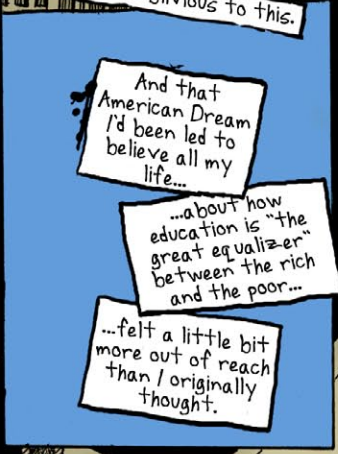


...until they were already gone.

I was so caught up in this fantasy that I didn't even notice a lot of my classmates slowly disappearing from the university...

I wondered if I was the only one who was oblivious to this.

...and 10,000 incoming students weren't even allowed at the front gate.



And that American Dream I'd been led to believe all my life...

...about how education is "the great equalizer" between the rich and the poor...

...felt a little bit more out of reach than I originally thought.

Then "super seniors" were told to pack their bags and leave..



In the still summer of 2011, while the nation struggled to raise the debt ceiling...

...a quiet California university raised a roof of its own.

Built along the shaky foundation of a young generation left with empty promises and no future.

It's said that about 85% of recent graduates will return to their parents' home while they look for jobs that don't exist in this economy.

They are the lucky ones.

What about the 15% who don't have a home to go back to?

I hope and dream that if I ever make it back from working overseas...

...the barriers to higher education in this country might not be as high as they are now.

