

Matthew Mailman

This is a collection of drawings I made to depict some of the most memorable moments from my time homeless in New York City, between January and July 2021 as a spoiled nineteen year old punk.

I tend to gravitate towards the positive memories, of adventure and rebellion, as a way to avoid the persistent night terrors and the ever constant feeling of needing to move on soon. In this project, I have to be careful to honor both the good and the bad of that life without slipping into romanticized delusion.

I want to find a way to navigate the trauma along with the achievements of those six months, using experiences as landmarks, and drawing as a medium to do so.



My Gazebo:

About two weeks into this whole thing, I was crashing with my uncle and his partner. I stayed for two or three days before my dad caught wind of his brother's slight, and I was on the street again, this time at midnight, in February.

With no possible way to find a place to stay, I headed for the gazebo that overlooks the Central Park Children's Zoo to watch the snow fall. I didn't really sleep at all.

I tried to call my dad to see if he would show me any sympathy. He didn't pick up. I later found out he was on a spearfishing trip in the Bahamas.



Mart:

Mart is most of Manhattan's 74 year old weed guy/uncle combo, and I'm pretty sure he sold weed to my dad at some point. He started dealing back in the early 60s when he was around 13 or 14, dealing weed for local gangs via bicycle. By the 70s he had his own operation, hiring runners to move for him. He graduated from weed to shrooms, acid, DMT, nitrous, mescaline, etc... By the 80s he owned and operated three large scale grow-ops throughout Brooklyn and Queens. In the late 80s/early 90s he sold the warehouses to a few influential friends who were rumored to have connections to the current East Coast rap game of the time, possibly including Notorious B.I.G. Those connections continue to supply him with free high quality weed to this day.

Nowadays he just hangs in his Upper West Side apartment and takes week long vacations to his condo in Tampa to see his several stripper 'girlfriends'.



Covid Test and Trace:

After cycling through several shitty jobs I actually had to work at, I finally found the perfect job for me: Covid Canvassing. The job consisted of casing housing projects, knocking on doors, getting yelled at for apparently being police, then smoking weed on project rooftops and forging vaccine signups to meet our quotas. It was a morally questionable \$20/hr to get incredibly high with a nice view.

Breaching the rooftop access and gazing upon the other rooftops below would grant you the beautiful and reassuring sight of the rest of your coworkers doing the exact same thing.



The First Time Nelson Saved My Life:

Throughout my time on my own, Nelson saved my life twice. The first time, a middle aged cab driver was beating my ass after my card declined with all of my possessions in the back. When I asked if I could buzz Nelson from his brownstone to bring some cash, the driver grabbed my bags and threatened to drive off. Nelson, hearing me struggle to get my shit from his second story apartment window, came down and delivered the second most efficient ass beating I have ever witnessed.

After the driver fucked off, Nelson and I smoked cigarettes on the stoop to his apartment and laughed about it through bloody smiles.



Running in Slides:

Nelson and I would often go to a park near his house in Little Domenico to smoke at night, whenever his ex-DEA dad was home. One night, around 2 or 3 AM whilst there, we were approached by two sketchy dudes, who just came up and introduced themselves, stood there for a second, then one said, “my bad, thought you was someone else...”, nodded and they walked off.

Twenty minutes later, they’ve left, along with their friends who were gathered two picnic tables down from us, and we’re on our way out. We notice a blacked out van with red LEDs under the doors multiple times throughout the beginning of the walk, until eventually, it was unabashedly following us.

Every time it would get close to us, we would hide behind the cars parked along the side of the street, move up until the van would need to turn around to follow us and repeat, inch worming our way back towards Nelson’s apartment. Eventually we were close enough that Nelson was confident he could make the sprint back. He takes off before I even realize we’re doing this, I look down and make the horrifying realization that I am wearing slides. As I start flip flopping at max speed up the street, I hear the van door slide open and the guy from before yell “Hold up pretty boy!”



Anna:

Anna is my ex. We were in an open 'relationship' if you can even call it that, throughout my first few months homeless. Our meetings would consist of her getting irrationally angry at nothing, which would turn into irrational passion and back into anger, usually ending in physical abuse. The last time I ever saw her, I gave her the wrong address to where I was crashing by two blocks which resulted in the cigarette burn scar on my left hand and her number leaving my phone.

While I was at rehab, she reached out over instagram to tell me she was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and is seeking her own treatment. That makes sense.



Rylo:

I met Rylo when I was 15 at a summer camp both our parents sent us to in a desperate attempt to improve our character. A year after I met him, he was convicted for racketeering to be tried as an adult, getting a treatment plea which resulted in him spending two and a half years at one of the most abusive wilderness programs in the United States. He came back so fucked up and he started pouring his trauma into a fashion brand that he has been able to support himself off of for the last couple years.

I crashed with him in White Plains for a couple days, watching him inhale two packs of reds a day... inside his apartment. When I finally decided to get the fuck out of there, he drove me to the train station. He went 120mph in the pitch black, on slick roads, in his shitbox, while blowing out his speakers to Yung Lean.

I left my acoustic at his apartment. I don't know if it's worth the risk to get it back.



Oh Fuck:

One night Rylo and I decided to drop acid at night and hill bomb in the pitch darkness. It ended about as expected and after I bailed I noticed that my arm might be entirely severed from my body. Panicked, I sprinted to the nearest public restroom to assess the damage in the light, only to be met with a little road rash. Oh acid.



Taya:

I met Taya on the fire escape of an NYU party, and we quickly bonded over the fact that neither of us knew anyone from NYU. We spent 4/20 together at Washington Square Park, and we would see each other whenever we got the chance.

Shorty after meeting Taya, I went to a kickback at Nelson's place, where I was to meet Blanco. I told Nelson about Taya to which Blanco interrupted, " Taya Holly?", her (fake) full name. I replied "yeah?" To which he said "Don't fuck with that bitch, man."

I later asked Taya about him. Apparently he sold her weed when she was 13 or 14, and he was 18 or 19, and ever since, he'd been trying to groom her.



The Second Time Nelson Saved My Life (Blanco):

A while later, I was crashing downtown, but I needed to move on, and Nelson offered his couch, all the way on 184th in Washington Heights. He also landed me a ride with someone he vaguely knew which meant I could avoid taking several trips to move all my stuff on the subway.

On the ride over, we got into a minor fender bender, but we kept moving. As we got close, I texted Nelson to be safe. The driver kept acting all shifty and I was getting really sketched out until we parked a block from Nelson's place and I knew something was going down.

The driver turned around and said "That's 250." "How? What?" "For gas" "For a 15 minute car ride?" "That's not gonna be cool man."

At this point I notice two guys standing on the curb right outside the car. Oh fuck. I hear the door unlock and I'm already dragged onto the ground outside the car, getting hit everywhere.

I hear a bunch of shouting and I'm not being hit anymore.

I look up to see one of the guys out on the ground with the driver rushing over to him. Then I see Nelson staring the other dude down, and the other dude turns out to be Blanco, who set this whole thing up because he was upset about Taya.

I got most of my shit out of the car except some guitar pedals some clothes and some sketchbooks. I came out of it with two cracked ribs, a concussion, a broken nose and a cut right above my left eye. My whole flank was various shades of green and purple for three or four weeks, and walking around for work was not at all pleasant.



Blowup:

Slowly as time went on, Nelson and I started getting into more and more fights. He was becoming secretive and manipulative, using intimate knowledge of my struggles to find was to bend the truth to make me doubt my judgements. Essentially gaslighting me into never being confident enough to call him out on his bullshit. Eventually, old friends started reaching out to me about money he stole or owed to them, and I got worried about our joined money that was going towards an 'apartment fund', where we outlined all expenses, including a guarantor so that we could move away from his equally manipulative father. He would maneuver around my trust issues and guilt trip me into not questioning him when he would refuse to show me our money due to some excuse or another. One night, I found Percocet stashed in his backpack while looking for leftover weed, and I realized where our money had gone.

The next night I confronted him, knowing I would never see any of the money I had earned over the last six months and so after a shouting match, I just left.



I'm so tired:

After a few nights of crashing around with Tinder dates, at bandos, through parties, I eventually ran out of the little cash I had that wasn't stolen, along with all my clothes and all my art supplies.

On July 18th I called my parents for the first time in the six months since they kicked me out. It wasn't relief, or happiness, or sadness or anything. It was just an unspoken permission to feel how tired I had become. I could finally stop moving. After some deliberation, terms were set in place and I came home on the 19th.