

The words had barely escaped my lips when the rebuke came swiftly and with the effect of indelible ink.

I REMEMBER SUCH A SIMPLE, PREDICTABLE, and familiar life, one rich with friendships.

Something slowly crept in my life, saturating the very core of my person, like a hot, sticky ooze running into the pores of my skin, then seeping through the flesh, permeating the bones. Impossible to remove, it's now me.

How did I get here?

It's impossible to tell how all of this will play out. Scarred up, never to completely clean again. One bad habit repeated over and over again, the same fatal attraction. Following what has become the desires of my heart.

I remember the day John asked me and a few common friends to help him steal the decorative rock in front of the yard down the street; the ones who were always out working during the day, leaving their mark one handful of dirt at a time. Hard workers, worthy of everyone's praise. *Just a prank*, he said, *won't hurt anybody*.

Problem is, it didn't stop there. Thirty days is ample time for a habit to become set, whether good or bad. A pattern that's embedded for years is hard to crack. Just like driving towards a daily routine, so mind numbing and habitual. How many times have I driven the same dark, common turns and corners, slicing at full speed around the corner that pools water after a rain, slowing for the pothole that has already sent me teetering onto the center line, then not remembering the details later. *Did I drive through there at all? I don't remember a thing.*

We become creatures of habit, following those well-established patterns that provide a sense of comfort, and in some cases, safety and survival. Not so bad if the habits are good and lead us down a good road.

It's been said that we can't tread water forever, we're moving in one direction or the other. This goes for individuals as well as larger groups, when under a common, strong-willed leader. It can also go for nations. When the tide starts flowing toward a dead end, the more momentum it picks up, the less likely it will change directions until it hits a dead end and splinters into fragments. Only then will the mentality change from following the crowd to one of individual reason, for some of the fragments. Until then, the minority dissenters will have to put up with the labels and mockery. They also get to watch an erosion of principles. It's no surprise that our media outlets can control our watercooler conversations by what is on the daily tabloid headlines of our favorite web site. Our predictable patterns.... Such easily read creatures of habit, most looking for something to follow, somewhere to fit in, often times at the expense of many.



CRAIG ELLIOTT is the owner of *EE Productions*. He is a portrait and media photographer with corporate background in telecommunications. His passion is photography. Craig is currently working on his first book.

CONTACT: craig@eephoto.com

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