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The Mystique of Jack Jacobs

Comparing Christoval, Texas to San Francisco is a robust exercise of contrasts. A tiny unincorporated village in West Texas, Christoval is a community of about 400 people in which everyone knows each other. The lack of a local government and no tax revenue base to draw from gives the town a level of independence more akin to early American settler life.

In such a small rural town, one must truly partake in the joys of outdoor living in order to compensate for the lack of urban experience and dearth of social offerings. The outstanding feature of the town is Pugh Park, a 54 acre stretch of pristine land along the South Concho River. Jack Jacobs spent many days swimming, paddling, and fishing in its pristine waters. These memories are forever etched in his mind and will always be a part of his identity.

Yet, even the great outdoors can get boring, especially when there are few new faces to share it with. Jack quickly learned that the intermittent boredom of a sleepy backwoods village is best arrested with a creative spirit, a characteristic element which he possesses in abundance. It is this spirit which gives Jack a very unique persona, a persona which is as comfortable in Christoval as it is in San Francisco.

But comfort does not necessarily mean fulfillment to Jack. His persona is also laden with a healthy desire for new experiences along with a penchant for adventure. Life is to be lived and new greener pastures, perhaps of an urban variety, must be explored. He looked forward to leaving Christoval for Southwestern University, and yet knew it was only a temporary puddle jump. Designs of visiting a big city with all its excitement and culture were waiting for him in the near future. This is the reason why, that in the midst of his college career, Jack made a spontaneous decision to temporarily leave the friendly confines of Southwestern University in favor of the unknown city lights of San Francisco.

Jack found himself on an airplane much earlier than even he otherwise expected as he headed to a San Francisco community college. He knew he would be back in Texas after a while, but that did not seem to matter much as he stared out of the airplane window looking at the expanse of space and fresh air over the earth. The air in the so called "bubble" of Southwestern University was getting a bit stale, and Jack needed this move in order to refresh his soul and satisfy an inner yearning for new experiences.

Interestingly, Jack's family moved from Brooklyn, New York to Christoval before he was born. The city life is perhaps in his blood through the gene pool, one might say. Yet his lone biological brother and his two step brothers do not share his penchant for urban stimulation. His father and mother moved to Christoval because they were seeking a quieter life, and they never looked back. They were seeking an escape from the city but the city never quite escaped from them.

It is clear that some of the New Yorker in his parents found its way into Jack. Upon meeting him, one would surmise that Jack is, in fact, a New Yorker. He talks and acts very much like a native New Yorker and not at all like he was reared in a small town. I can personally relate to this phenomena as my father grew up in Queens, New York and eventually moved the family to a small town in Connecticut a few months after my birth. I have picked up

much of my father's mannerisms during my formative years and can easily pass off as a Queens kid myself. I, though, have enjoyed the benefits of having close proximity to New York and by making hundreds of visits to see relatives who still reside there. Jack, on the other hand, absent this depth of New York City experience, can still easily pass as one of the city's native sons.

Jack is a product of these two worlds, a unique individual who is hard to label, and justifiably so, since Jack is not one who likes to be restricted by labels, or geographic boundaries for that matter. For this reason, Jack is initially very hard to size up. Upon meeting him for the first time, he comes across as a bit reserved, yet not irrelevant by any means, and he is certainly not boring. One gets the impression that Jack is a person of substance but cannot quite define what values this substance rests upon. He seems to have a self-assuredness which can be hard to gauge initially, whether it is cockiness or just his being comfortable in his own skin is hard to distinguish at first blush. But above all, one will notice that Jack is a unique individual whose behavior remains natural in any environment, whether he is working out in the gym, hanging out in a coffee shop, or just talking over the phone. Simply put, Jack is his own person and never puts on any airs. He is both New York and Christoval at the same time, and more recently he has added San Francisco to the Jack identity and mystique. He will unapologetically, and quite honestly, tell you he enjoys urban living every bit as much as shooting his favorite gun in the backwoods.

Jack cuts a lean and proportioned figure with good stature. His features are symmetrical and are accented by large framed glasses. They seem to fit him well though. The glasses are particularly interesting as they give a glimpse into Jack's boldness and sense of freedom. His style is interesting and cannot be labeled into a particular category. For example, he will wear a crisp white button down shirt and match it with a screaming blue and purple hat with the words "Casual Cruelty" boldly proclaimed on the front bill. The contradiction in styles, which is quite hard to pull off without drawing too much attention, is very fitting to Jack and pleasingly presented. It is obvious he is comfortable in his attire, and this aspect of Jack reveals a healthy interior confidence and a declaration of independence from categorization.

Jack is not consciously trying to be unique either - he is just being who he is. He may come off as quirky to some, and might even be judged as such, but only by those people who, having been conditioned to forge their own identities in accord with the prevailing fashions, would otherwise fail to grasp Jack's openness to realizing his own identity without the chains of categories. It is quite refreshing to find out that Jack does not dress or act in any particular way for the purposes of attracting attention or for desires to fit into a particular group for acceptance. Speaking with Jack confirms that his independence is indeed genuine. In fact, he is brutally honest, but refreshingly so.

That is especially true when it comes to telling stories about himself. Jack spares no details and will give you both the good and the bad. He will tell you how he was often mischievous and found himself in trouble. One time he carried a shotgun to school and was sniffed out by a dog whose barking alerted the security guard. He was faced with two options - stay or run away. He ran right into his car and drove off. No town police meant no investigation and that meant no legal problem! Christoval has its advantages for such exploits.

During one of our conversations, Jack mentioned he was on the tennis team in high school. I asked him if he is good at tennis, assuming he must have been. But considering his graduating class consisted of only 24 people, one never knows. Without hesitation, Jack responded, "I wasn't very fucking good!" This exchange captures the essence of Jack - no

pretenses and no fear of speaking the truth. No measured or canned answer. Just the raw truth, in language to match.

Shooting was Jack's thing in high school. He started a shooting team which was quite good. The gun his father handed down to him, a Remington 870 Wingmasters, is a most prized possession, that, along with his 2012 SRT Charger. These treasured possessions indicate Jack is not about to discard Christoval altogether; they represent many fond memories of his village life. This point helps us to better understand Jack's trip to San Francisco, which was not about getting away from his past or finding something new to replace the old, but was rather about adding to the treasure of experience already built up.

San Francisco was new and "really crazy" according to Jack. He fit right in, though, and feels he benefited much from the experience. In fact, he realized all he expected from San Francisco. It would seem then that Jack's satisfaction with the Golden City would beckon a longer stay than just one semester. But Jack never intended to stay there for any meaningful length of time to begin with. Before jumping to conclusions that Jack is an aspiring vagabond, one needs to understand Jack on a deeper level.

I have come to find out that Jack is, in fact, a very rational person. There exists in him an interior balance which governs his decisions and actions. His desires are measured in terms of their practicality and benefits. He performs a sort of "cost-benefit" analysis by taking into account experiential desires, actionable possibilities, and expected practical results. Jack found himself on the airplane in late August of 2015 fully aware of what he was doing. This was not a permanent move and he harbored no expectations of finishing his college career in San Francisco. It was simply time to re-charge and fulfill a hunger for new experiences and encounters - more specifically the type of experiences which he found lacking at Southwestern University and are more easily realized in a diverse urban city environment.

Jack drank in all that San Francisco had to offer but did not allow himself to get carried away into a new world by discarding the old. In fact, during his stay in San Francisco, Jack realized more than ever the value of Christoval, Texas and a Southwestern University education. Many people, including myself, often feel that the "grass is greener on the other side", and this mentality always provides plenty of interior angst, leading people to wonder if they can be truly happy in a present situation or place. Jack has no such qualms as he seamlessly adapts to the environment he is in - no matter where it is. He interacts with place and people, and absorbs experiences like a sponge. San Francisco was needed to keep the sponge wet with new water. After having soaked it all in, it was time to head back home.

In early January 2016 Jack found himself on an airplane again, this time heading back to Christoval for a short stay with the family and then back to Southwestern University. Jack talks about how there is a dearth of good colleges in San Francisco - at least not any that are on the academic level of a Southwestern University. Jack came back to finish his studies at Southwestern and plans to obtain a much coveted degree. Jack's rational mind knows all too well that, in order to live his life as he desires, he must first finish college and choose a vocation that will be truly fulfilling. Southwestern University provided Jack a great academic platform and degree program that fit in much better than any school in San Francisco.

Jack is presently having a great time at Southwestern and now appreciates it even more as he is able to draw even sharper distinctions between it and San Francisco. At the same time, these emphasized distinctions offer much more richness and value to his experiences in both places. Jack is truly not an "either/or" man, but is rather a "both/and" pioneer. Jack integrates his creative side and need for new experiences with a rational buffer. He enhances experiences

by absorbing their value instead of viewing them with predetermined lenses. All his experiences build more value on top of previous ones. Old places become more appreciated by way of experiencing new ones.

Jack took a break from Southwestern and loved his stay in San Francisco. Now he is more happy than ever to be back at Southwestern University. He knew he would be back at Southwestern just like he knows he will visit San Francisco again in the future. I have come to learn that Jack's perspective of place and experience is not a contradiction at all, but rather a paradox. Jack is a mystery onto himself, and he holds no reservations about this fact. He embraces life as a mystery to be lived, all the time and at any place. He finds comfort and fulfillment by actually embracing all the mystery life has to offer. Perhaps this is exactly what sets Jack apart - he is comfortable in his own skin because he is open to seeing the mystery of his identity evolve through shared experiences with multiple people and in many places.

Author's Note

I have had the pleasure of getting to know Jack over the past month. At first, I was expecting to meet a very reserved and unassuming person - one that I might not be able to relate to. But in only five minutes it became clear how easily it is for Jack to open up and engage in conversation. His mannerisms and ability to relate to my own experiences growing up in the Northeast made me realize how much we have in common. Much like me, Jack values all aspects of health - the mind, the body, and the soul. Although I've known Jack for only a couple of weeks now, I already consider him to be a good friend. This article on Jack best represents the work I did in class because of the extensiveness of interaction between the two of us. The fact that Jack was also tasked with writing an article on me helped us both to engage on a deeper level. Although I had a similar experience with Ralph at my gym and got to know him rather well, he remains somewhat as an anonymous figure and is a harder person for me to relate to. I do believe my impressions of Jack are on point and I have been made aware that his friends who have read the article are in agreement with its substance.