Cultural Daily

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Anthony Bourdain, a Reflective Appreciation

Eric · Wednesday, June 13th, 2018

Anthony Bourdain made his first splash as a New York bad boy author-chef, but his career skyrocketed and crossed over, making him an international celebrity in the food, travel, literary, and TV worlds, by his living so large and following his own drummer. His shocking and unexpected suicide has left a gaping hole in all those worlds; he was so loved and respected.

I cannot say I was unaware of him, even though he was probably still in a New York kitchen when I was posting my first travel blogs from little internet shops in Southeast Asia in 2000. It was actually my wife who first led me to his TV show, *No Reservations*, on the Travel Network. She was enamored of him, and I was more than a little jealous of his success. But I also appreciated him, and the way he combined travel, history, food, media, culture, personality, and chutzpah into a delicious mix that fed and educated the masses.

He didn't tell his readers or TV audience where to go or how to get there. No hotels or budget flights for Bourdain. He simply reported on where he went, and he offered entertaining insight on the food, on the people, and on the places he visited. His show was personal and that's why people loved it, and him. He was smart, street-wise, and funny. He could also be abrasive, so "New Yawk"… but he always called it like he saw it and experienced it—from the greasy, "sweating, bleeding, cursing crews of cooks and dishwashers" (a shout out to Jonathan Gold), to the disenfranchised, poor people of the 3rd world whose food he so loved to eat and celebrate. In this way, he was an artist, and one "of the people."

Along with Robin Williams, Kate Spade, and too many others, Bourdain's death by suicide brings the ugly and closeted truth of depression to glaring light yet again. In our conflicted and often-hopeless modern world, Bourdain said that just eating a bad pizza somewhere in the wide world would set him off into a spiral of depression for days. I can relate. Because although these seemingly "have everything celebrities" still surprise and shock us with their final acts of despair, perhaps it's more a mix of brain chemistry, genetics, and personality type that make for such an agonizingly unbalanced trip off our emotionally-fraught tight ropes. Sometimes some… just choose to… fall off.

He said in a recent interview that having his 11 year old daughter, Ariane, gave him something to at least try to live for. I understand. I have an 11 year old son—and a wife—who I love, and who I live for. They count on me. My friend, Harry, reminded me of that just today, after our trip to Altadena this past week when I rolled, and ran, too many stop signs. He suggested that I change the way I drive, that I "slow down," if not for myself, then for my family. I told him thanks, and that

although it’s hard to teach this old dog new tricks, that I would take his message to heart, especially in light of Bourdain’s suicide.

“Travel isn’t always pretty. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that’s ok. The journey changes you, it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully you leave something good behind.” – Anthony Bourdain

R.I.P.

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