You're never going to live in California

Paul M Nicholson

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For my sister and mother
I think they gave out some of the best advice in the olden
days - things like “Don't forget to put on clean underwear
before you go out!” That was probably in case you met
someone special, then at least you’d have clean underwear
on.

And when someone would say “Don't forget to wash behind
your ears” I suspect that was code for ‘you should wash
everywhere,’ in case you should happen to get busy.

All that great advice still applies today, but this handy guide
explores the complexities of the 21st century. Chock full of
gritty but realistic assessments, You’re never going to live in
California fearlessly engages common mental snares with
candor and wit. We are all just over-aged adolescents in
search of answers, and this guide is certain to put at ease a
few common pressing concerns.
#timesup

Really, your time is up. The testing window has closed, and the examination has concluded.

Again, make sure everything is filled out using a #2 pencil, and be sure to sign the bottom of your answer sheet in pen.

A proctor will be around to collect your packets shortly; you may leave them face down on the desk.

For those of you with a fake disability, you will have three more hours to finish the examination.

For the personal proctors assisting clients with their tests, you will be allowed just a few minutes to intercept and correct answers before signing and submitting your client’s answer sheet.

If your parents have recently donated a large sum of money to the university of your choice, you may relax, your scores won’t matter anyway.
Who do you think you are?

Well first off, you’re a different person to each and every one who knows you.

When you get a good grade, you’re a scholar. On a road trip, you’re an adventurer. At the party, you’re the life of the party! When you sit alone in a dark room donning your tin foil hat, the government can’t read your thoughts.

Truth is, you probably don’t even know who you are, and you probably won’t for a long time. You’ll try on piles of different hats before settling on being someone who is 70% of the person you want to be.

No matter who you think you are on the inside, whatever job you have is how people will think of you. Unless you think vaccines cause autism, in which case, that’s what people will remember you for.
What exactly are you going to do with your life?

To answer this, you'll need to lift your face from that cracked screen. Nobody's going to text you what to do next.

If you don't join the military and aren't good with your hands, you should get more school. When you get there, don't risk following your heart. You can't pay back a hundred and fifty thousand dollars with a degree in psychology. Where to go? Well, get yourself over to the local State College and follow your passion for healthcare or possibly forensic accounting.

They say opportunity is at your fingertips, so get your hands on a couple of those unpaid internships. The lower you set your expectations, the more likely you'll find your dream entry-level position.
I hate my life
You're never going to live in California.

It's too expensive, and too far away. It's not what you know, not near your job, and you have no family there. You won't go to school there, which means no foothold to make friends or get an apartment, and it's just not going to happen.

If you manage to save a little money, and get time enough off work, you'll probably be able to take a trip, but moving to California just isn't in the picture.

Maybe you should stick around here — visiting is good enough anyway.
YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO LIVE IN CALIFORNIA
It's totally okay that you're still single.

Pretty much everyone is. None of your friends are getting married, but even if they are, they can't afford a house, let alone children.

Didn't you have that casual thing for a while? Maybe that'll become something some day. Either way, you take a great selfie, and Tinder sort of works, so relax with an e-cig and pop a Xanax and an Adderall. Unless you're rich, pretty much everything in life is just a numbers racket if you think about it.
Quit being so dramatic about everything.

You always act like “everything is just all too much.” Stress and depression are part of the game. They’re the reality for everyone, so deal with it because it doesn’t get any easier.

If it’s all still too hard, it might be best if you continue living at your parents’ place. You’re not saving any money anyway. But look on the bright side: you have time, and your mom’s Netflix login, so there’s that.
What's the point of any of this?

The world is full of infinite possibilities.

...but not the possibility for a comfortable retirement. Wages aren't keeping pace with inflation, and you'll be taking care of your parents for those critical 20 years when you had your last shot at doing something. Company pensions don't exist anymore and Social Security isn't going to be around by the time you're old enough to retire. Your 401k is only worth 4k, so you better hope you like your job, because you'll be doing it pretty much forever.

The atmosphere is filling with CO2, sea levels are rising, and climate change can't be stopped. I'm sorry to say it, you're probably never going to see a glacier, a polar bear, or even a minor celebrity.
There is no justice in this world and the police are not here to help. Nothing is fair, from the college admissions process, to getting a job, to carnival games. Homicide is down, but suicide is up in every age group and demographic.

There are precious few things in this world you can count on, save the generosity of your fellow humans. Be it a best friend, your parents, or a complete stranger, people are always happy to tell you when you've made a mistake. If we could bottle the powerful urge to give unsolicited advice, I believe we could solve our energy crisis.
Paul M. Nicholson

Interspersed between periods of unemployment, Paul worked as a furniture mover, a candy delivery driver, and a newspaper distributor as a child and as an adult. He has taught in underperforming public schools, and wrote professionally on the currency markets in the lead up to the 2008 financial crisis. Before that, he worked for the Federal Government on the Hurricane Katrina Disaster recovery efforts. More recently he has spent nearly a decade as an academic advisor at the Parsons School of Design. Currently, he is the Director of Martin Art Gallery at Muhlenberg College in Allentown PA.

1. The “Allentown” from the eponymous Billy Joel song

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“I wish someone had told me about all the things I couldn’t do when I was younger”
- everyone