

**Times  
When I  
Cried in  
Public**

a narrative meditation.

# **Times When I Cried in Public**

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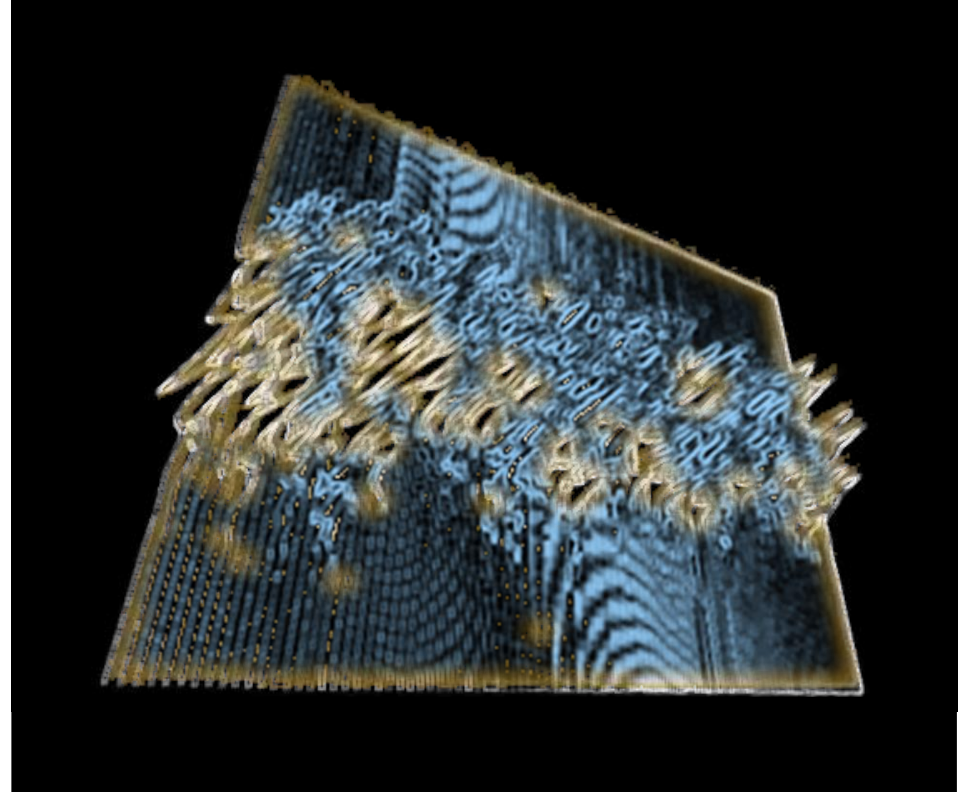
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digital pdf edition, 2026

a narrative meditation.

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### **Grand Central Terminal, 1988**

I see a homeless, palsied man in a wheelchair. The guy running a kiosk puts a hot dog in his hand. Two city cops walk by, and one says, “Hey ya’, Mike, ya’ got a hot dog there?” Mike seems well known and liked here.

He has little accurate motor control as he tries to get the hot dog to his mouth so he can take a bite. He can’t quite get his aim right. The end of the hot dog veers off to the side and hits his cheek. He turns his head so that his mouth is closer to the dog, smearing a bit of bright yellow mustard on his dark brown skin. He tries again. The hot dog stops an inch in front of his mouth. He reaches out with his teeth to grab it, biting only air.

He finally makes it.

I try to appear nonchalant and avoid directly staring, but I am overwhelmed. My eyes tear up and I don’t move. My partner asks me what’s wrong. I tell her in a broken, halted voice. She is obviously confused and embarrassed as she pulls me toward the stairs to our train.

### **Dachau, 1989**

In the crematorium there is a neat row of large furnaces. Each rust-tinted iron retort sits with its door gaping wide. I am paralyzed with horror when I notice that in front of each open oven door is a bier, contoured and curved precisely to accommodate a human body.

A man near me has a large video recorder on his shoulder. Other people are taking pictures of the relics of genocide. I am simultaneously flooded with disgust and overwhelmed with grief. My eyes water. Speechless, I turn away and start stumbling toward the exit.

My partner turns to me and starts to ask me something but then stops and just follows me out. She looks how she always looks when she’s embarrassed for me and averts her eyes when I look at her.



## French Quarter, 1991

I am in the city after many years, looking around for anyone I know. I see Robbie, a local artist and father of two of my most special friends, in front of his regular spot on the corner of Jackson Square. His paintings hang on the park fence. I approach him and am surprised when he remembers me.

I ask him how his family is. A question about Wendy forms at the edge of my tongue and stalls as Robbie's expression becomes serious.

I am wholly unprepared when he tells me Wendy died in an accident. My breath stutters and my knees nearly buckle.

He kindly says, "I know, I know. We've been through it all ourselves already."

I compose myself and tell him how sorry I am.

I'm in town with my mother and look for her along Decatur Street. When I find her, I hug her and start shedding tears. I tell her, in a sobbing voice, what I just found out.

She is tense, and I can tell she is uncomfortable.



## Lower East Side, 1993

I am in the Bleecker Street Bar. Rob Jones has died, and some of us are holding a wake for him.

I'm with him the night before he ODs. He calls me to come over. When I get there, a few bags with black stars stamped on them in smudged ink are arrayed on the kitchen table. It is his first time shooting up. Rob's wife does the works for him (she is Sid's partner in '79 when he ODs, as well). I chicken out and just snort it. I black out periodically through an eventful night. I don't remember going home.

The next day I hear the news. He is gone. Overdosed. Maybe intentionally.

Nobody else at the bar knows this.

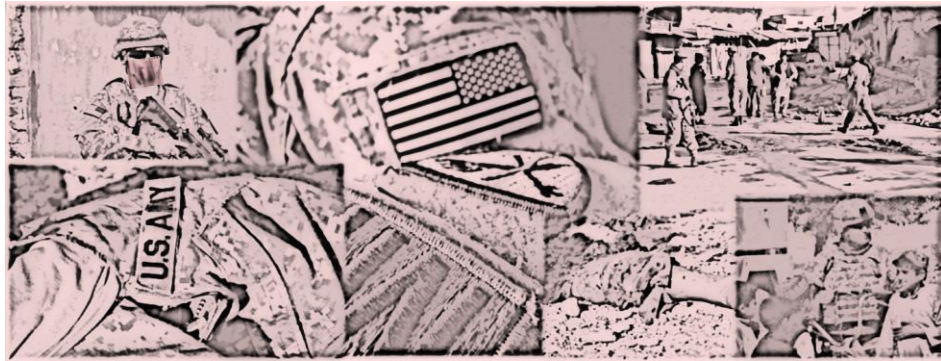
I get plastered. Johnny, even more wasted than I am, leans forward and his head hits the bar. His sort-of girlfriend comes over to tend to him, and I grab him toward me, yelling, "don't touch him, leave him alone," for absolutely no reason whatsoever.

I don't realize my eyes are watering until I start talking and hear that my slurred speech is blubbery and wet. She looks at me with incredulous contempt. Johnny mumbles incoherently. I black out.

I never cry in public again; and in private only when drunk.

0630, 9 October 2025

Until...



I wake up early and don't feel like going back to sleep.

I start to write about crying in public.

I write everything here up to this point.

I start getting ready for the day shortly after 0800.

## Writing Workshop, 2025

I am reading aloud something I wrote moments earlier, while sitting in class. It is about a moment in combat that occurred in 2011 in Kandahar. When I reach the part where some soldiers get blown up, I choke up and feel my eyes moisten.

I recover enough to finish the poem and then apologize. The professor thanks me with compassion in his voice, but nobody else speaks and the air is thick with discomfort.

Then...

**Home, 0850, 9 October 2025**

I hear police sirens outside as I towel off and dress. A minute later I go down to my truck and see police cars blocking my driveway, which is next door to my parents' house.

I assume they are here for one of our elderly neighbors, but I hear a family member's name over one of their radios. I go to the other side of my parents' house and see Tommy, my brother-in-law, agitated and talking to an officer. My stepmother is bent over at the waist with her hands on her knees, looking as if she's about to collapse.

I run to her and grab her. She wraps her arms tightly around my shoulders, and says, "She shot herself. I can't believe it. My sweet baby."

I silently hold her in a tight embrace, my eyes welling up as I rock her gently. She starts to sink, and my father comes up and replaces me as her anchor.

I turn my attention to Tommy. He's leaning forward and looks like he might pitch over. An officer reflexively moves to catch him, but I'm there before they reach him. I grip him in a bear hug as he starts sobbing and shaking. I hold him tighter, saying, "I know, I know. Let it out, don't hold back," as I erupt into tears myself.

The officers don't know what to do—or rather, they know to do nothing. His wife, my sister, is gone.



**ex vita aliqua**

**witness to the making of a life.**  
spelling and grammar may be intentional.

# Times When I Cried in Public

988 Lifeline: dial 988 for crisis counseling 24/7/365.

Text: HOME To 741741.

Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988, press 1 for veterans' crisis assistance.

Text: 838255.

Trevor Lifeline: 1-866-488-7386. LGBTQ+ crisis intervention 24/7/365.

Text: START to 678678.



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