

MARC: I think for me, it's like with music it's always constant improvement. You could never, ever get it all.

As bad as the baddest cat is, there's always somebody who can do something better than what they can do, and the breadth of it is just so wide, so I guess it's just that pursuit, and just knowing that I can put in hours, and hours, and months, and years, and there's still always so much further to go with it.

ADAM: The summer I turned 28 years old wasn't my finest. At the time I lived in Iowa and was going through a divorce. I was also back in school full time trying to get my college degree.

On top of it all, I was working full time in order to pay the rent of the room I hastily had to move into. It was a small room over the porch of an old Victorian style home and the floor was at an angle. In a dead sleep, I sometimes rolled right out of bed just from trying to turn over.

Needless to say, my life was in a bit of turmoil. My mindset was pretty dark and heavily anchored to pessimism. I needed a break.

So after quitting my job and telling my landlord I had to go to Maryland for the summer to take care of a sick relative, a lie I still feel some shame over, I packed up my Saturn and headed east. Outside of my landlord, no one knew where I was or where I was going.

For the next two months, I stayed with my close friend Jen and her husband Chris in Upper Marlboro, MD. I rented a room in their home, did odd jobs around their 14 acre property, and got a part-time job at a liquor store. I was pretty lost as to where I was going in life.

One night, they had a party and invited a houseful of friends over. While mingling in one room, I heard glass shatter in the next, followed by someone exclaiming, "Oh no, I made a mess." It actually encapsulated everything I felt about my life at the time.

But what followed will forever be etched into the walls of my memory bank. A second, much calmer voice chimed in and said, "It's not a mess. It's an opportunity to clean."

It's been over 15 years since that night. I still despise positive affirmations, and the saying "it is what it is" makes my teeth hurt. But I'll forever be grateful for that voice providing an alternative mindset, one I hadn't heard before, one that forces me to remember that the failures are merely a cleaning opportunity. It's a mindset I could actually live by. Doesn't mean I do live by it every day, but every day I still try to remember this mantra.

"It's not a mess. It's an opportunity to clean."

My cognitive behavioral therapist would be so proud.

My name is Adam Greenfield, and you're listening to The People In My Neighborhood.

MARC: Marc Rey, and I live in Eagle Rock in Los Angeles, California.

ADAM: And Marc's no stranger to the area, either.

MARC: I've been in this house for 15 years, but I moved out to L.A. to stay in '99.

ADAM: I didn't meet Marc while living in southern California, though. In fact, when I moved to San Diego in 2008, I had no idea he was barely two hours north of me.

The very first time we met was in Columbia, Maryland, 3000 miles to the east of our current position, and way back in middle school three decades ago.

MARC: Yes, we went to Wilde Lake together.

ADAM: And a quick fun fact... Wilde Lake's claim to fame, at least on the high school level? Edward Norton graduated from there in 1987, which happened to be the same year I moved to Columbia with my family.

Marc, though, like Edward Norton, is Maryland born and raised, and for better or worse.

MARC: I was born in Bethesda, Maryland, and grew up in Long Reach, Phelps Luck area of Columbia, and the summer right before high school my parents had the grand idea to move out to the country in western Howard County, so I wound up with a four year sentence at Glenelg High School.

ADAM: I don't envy that. But believe me when I say, the high school I went to, Howard High School, wasn't a walk in the park, either.

But even though we went to separate high schools, we still crossed paths after that, and typically in the music scene. Marc was in several local bands and one of them, The Hindered, I remember seeing live many times. I even had their cassette tape. Still do, in fact. Somewhere around here.

MARC: So that one, you're making me remember, it's a gorilla's face superimposed on that green cover.

ADAM: Yep, that's the one.

As for Marc's pull to music, that's always been there.

MARC: Yeah, I mean, as much as I can remember I always had a deep love and appreciation for music. I used to have a little Fisher Price turntable, and go grab my dad's records from downstairs and take them upstairs and probably ruined them.

ADAM: Been there. Sorry, Mom.

But as for Marc's formal music education, that started early.

MARC: ... then I got into playing music first at Phelps Luck Elementary. I played the flute in the whatever concert band I think they had at the time, and then at Wilde Lake Middle School I picked up the tenor sax, and then the tuba. So, I played concert band and wind ensemble at Wilde Lake Middle School. And then I want to say by eighth grade I had started messing around on guitar, and they provided a opportunity there to do the jazz band at Wilde Lake Middle School, so I played guitar in the jazz band, I think for just one year.

ADAM: When Marc got to high school, music sorta dropped off his radar until his senior year. After some time split between colleges on two different coasts, USC and Towson University, Marc immersed himself into the Baltimore music scene. Though really, most of the people were from his middle and high school band days.

MARC: Yeah, we started a band called Jay Jay, Mike Anderson also from Wilde Lake, and Wilde Lake Middle School, was in that, and that kind of became my focus throughout my last couple years of college.

ADAM: Over the years, Marc met many people in both the local and national scene. It also helped the internet was just starting to come around.

MARC: ... it was right at that time where I got in touch with through the internet a guy named Neftali Santiago, who's the drummer for the group named Mandrill, a group from the '70s from New York.

They were coming to Philly to do a show, and I had gotten in touch with the drummer, and had some dialog, and went to meet him at that show in Philly. Saw the show, Mandrill, was blown away, and we just kind of stayed in touch. This was probably '99, '98, and he knew that I was into music, and played guitar, and was a big lover of that band. He contacted me a few months later and said, "Hey, an opportunity might be coming up for you to play with us, would you be interested?" I was, "Hell yeah."

ADAM: And so it begins.

MARC: So, some time went by, and then next thing was like, "Okay, we're doing a tour. We're going to go do this European tour, it's maybe two or three weeks over there, and starting in Atlanta.", but they were taking their original guitar player, Omar Mesa, on the tour, so they

asked me if I would be willing to come out and rehearse with the band. So, I just went to the woodshed and learned everything super hard, and came out and had a chance to audition with them, and stayed.

ADAM: Eventually, Marc got his chance to play with the band.

MARC: We were going to Germany the next day and the guitar player was there with his wife, on vacation anyway. And they chose to stay an extra day in Amsterdam while the rest of the band went to Germany. We went to Germany and they picked up a show the same day in, I want to say, Hamburg, Germany. The leaders of the band, the Wilson brothers came to me and said, "Hey, you ready?" I was like, "What? Play tonight?", and they were like, "Yeah, Omar's back in Amsterdam, he wouldn't make the show in time, so are you ready?" I said, "Yeah." So, that was kind of my trial by fire, and at the end of that tour they said to me, I think Carlos Wilson was one of the leaders, four brothers who were in the band, blood brothers, and he said to me, "So, Marc, I wanted to tell you, you got the job until we find somebody better." So yeah, that was a great day and the catalyst for me to change my life and move out here.

ADAM: Marc has continued to play music since moving to LA, including with the band Year of the Dragon.

MARC: Year of the Dragon is Flying Jay Armant, Jr. on vocals and Walt "Dirty Walt" Kibby on vocals, Kerim Imes on drums, and T-Bone on the bass, and I play guitar.

ADAM: As for Marc's musical inspirations, well, it's pretty clear we grew up around the same time and in the same environment.

MARC: I was really into a lot of the stuff I was exposed to around that time, like the Bad Brains, Fugazi, Fishbone, a band from New York called 24-7 Spies was one of my favorite bands growing up. That was kind of the my generation music that I was getting into, and then my brother I have to give a shout to, because he was always into a lot of rock music, like classic rock stuff. He was into Cream, and Hendrix, and Zeppelin, Blue Oyster Cult, and all that kind of stuff.

So, when I first picked up the guitar, that's the guitar music that I was driven towards playing, so I was really into that. At the same time he also brought home the De La Soul, 3 Feet High and Rising cassette, which was huge for me to this day, I'm a huge De La Soul fan, and that just opened up a whole different world as well, and Run-DMC, we were into Run-DMC a lot in middle school. So, for me it was always a cross of different rap and hiphop, and this kind of punk and rock stuff that was current, and then my dad's influence of like Earth, Wind & Fire, and Stevie Wonder, and Osibisa was a big player in our house, and stuff like that. So yeah, that's kind of where it all came from.

ADAM: But music isn't the only passion in Marc's life. Sports plays an equally big role. And not just as a viewer.

MARC: I mean, I've always been passionate about sports, and music, and remain kind of equally passionate about those things to this day....

But I love any kind of athletic competition I can sit there and watch. Downhill skiing, I love it. But playing wise I was a soccer player forever, and I swam competitively in high school, so those couple things I keep doing in my old age.

I'm still swimming. I was there at 5:30 this morning in the water like a crazy person.

ADAM: Yeah, I'm not sure I'll ever understand that sort of early morning desire. Worms are gross, anyway.

As for soccer, Marc does more than just play.

MARC: I've coached my wife's women's soccer team now for, I guess, like 15 or 16 years in this Los Angeles rec league, which is fairly competitive. Mostly players coming out of college, and looking to keep their game going.

ADAM: And the team name?

MARC: The Lady Killers.

ADAM: Hell yeah.

MARC: Yeah, women on this team are from all over, spread out all over L.A., and yeah I mean, probably no doubt hundreds of women have been on and off the team since my wife and I been doing it. People moving, or changing, or retiring, or whatever.

ADAM: As for Marc's profession, he's mostly done with the life of a traveling musician and is a teacher at the Silverlake Conservatory of Music, where he met his wife.

MARC: These days I do a lot more teaching than I do touring. When my kids were younger ... I was on the road a lot more when my older kids were younger, and it just started to be such a grind. I was missing things, I was missing first steps, I was missing all kind of things, and that just really was a grind on me. I never really, as a kid, envisioned myself as a dad, but I guess going through it and my want is to be present, and involved more than anything. So, I think consciously, and subconsciously, I've made choices to where I don't want to be out all the time, especially if the conditions are rough and grueling, then I'd rather be here with the peeps I love the most.

ADAM: Over the years, Marc's seen a lot. He even relayed a story or two to me off mic that I can't quite put in this podcast. But is there something he'd do if he could, something he hasn't done yet for reasons out of his control or capabilities, even if said thing is not what we currently consider humanly possible? As it turns out, what he would want to do is humanly possible. It's just easier desired than done.

MARC: I guess the ability to really streamline if you want to enact change in community, even just a direct community like a school or our neighborhood, to be able to tap into those kind of resources. I feel like when I have strong opinions about things happening in the neighborhood and whatever, it's hard to go past the council, it's hard to go past the sit-down with the town hall with the bickering neighbors that seems to go nowhere. So, I guess I would just be able ... I would want to have a really good macro understanding of societal things that I see going on that I would want to enact change in, and have a really direct line to do something influential that could affect positively a lot of people.

I don't know. I guess I'm a pretty reality based here, fix what I can fix, control what I can control kind of person, and looking around at what I have I feel like I have most of what I want, and need, and I've done a lot of the things that I've wanted to do in life. Even musically, playing with some of the people I've gotten to play with, they're my heroes, and sometimes there's a what's next phenomenon, like that was all I could've asked for, what do you even ask for on top of that?

ADAM: Thanks for listening to The People In My Neighborhood, a podcast series reminding us that there's still a lot to learn about the people we know.

The opening and closing music in this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions. And thanks to Year of the Dragon for permission to play the song ".The Wreckoning" off their 2019 album release, Take Control.

Marc, it was so good to see you after all these years and I look forward to keeping in touch.

MARC: Awesome, for sure. Now we can go grab lunch off-mic or something.

ADAM: So until next time, I think I got your mail delivered to me on accident. And it seemed like it might be important so I thought I'd be sure to deliver it myself...