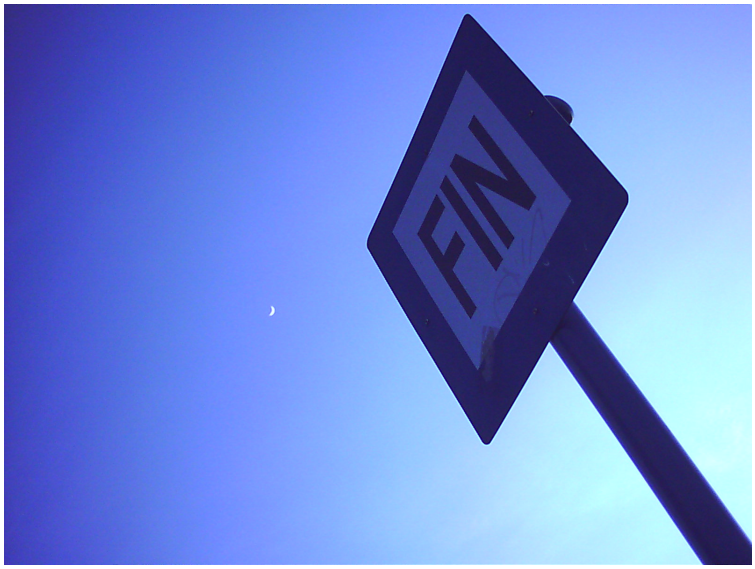

I am 40 today.

Thank you, thank you, I appreciate your condolences. I received many nice presents. The Browns got me the usual: A big pile of shit.

Watching the game, I sunk into a kind of numb hopelessness usually reserved for funerals. Week in and week out, viewing the games is like chewing on a rock that I can never swallow, like doing a tax return that is infinity pages long. It is the opposite of fun.

As the game came to a close, my pregnant wife - who's due in about 2 weeks - started experiencing pains and a spike in blood pressure. She called her doctor - her doctor said go to the ER. So off we went.

The hospital visit was a false alarm that devolved into urine and blood tests. So I got to watch the Steelers win while sitting in that hospital room, waiting. And I speculated on how it must be nice to watch your team without cringing like a beaten dog expecting a whipping.

Stuck in some tepid depression, my thoughts turned to the methods I usually employ to escape it. In other words, I wanted a drink. On NFL Sundays, generally a nice dose of alcohol is useful to help wipe the slate clean, and I really could've gone for 7 or 8.

Except I'm not allowed to drink anymore. Setting aside the fact that my wife might pop any day and I need to maintain sobriety just in case, my doctor has sworn me off of alcohol since I went on my cholesterol meds. Apparently using both the meds and booze at the same time can cause liver damage, which I hear is less than optimal.

Along with cholesterol meds, I'm also on meds for high blood pressure, a condition I likely earned from years of smoking (which I have also quit).

Not to mention that I have had to sacrifice red meat and cheese and, well, anything with taste because my doctor refers to my heart as a ticking time bomb.

I've lived a good life, a fun life. I've been to many places and done many things and met a lot of good people. I partied a lot too, and it's taken its toll on my body. When you're 20 or 25, you disregard the price you will have to pay "someday" in the distant future, but "someday" has finally arrived.

So there I was, sitting in a hospital, watching shitty football and aging ungracefully and unable to console myself with any of the things that made my first 40 years so pleasurable because I have to stay alive for my 12 year old, my 10 year old, and my baby daughters.

I'm not even allowed to go peaceably to an early grave with a smile on my face.

Now, I'm not one to dwell on life's little difficulties, especially when most people's difficulties are so damn petty. And mine are certainly no different.

It's not like I really have a choice anyway, so I have to reinvent myself. I have to become one of those ultra-healthy robots that I've always loathed (and envied).

I have to change. I'm now making the turn and starting the back nine of life, and I'm going to have to approach the course differently if I expect to finish. On the front, no matter how the hole was set up, I always pulled out my driver and swung as hard as I could - often with my eyes closed. Part of me probably hoped to die playing that way. But my life doesn't belong to me now. I have to change.

If the birth of a new baby isn't a good time to go ahead and get that done, I don't know when is.

And I think that one of the new changes I'm going to employ is to stop investing emotional capital in sporting franchises. Franchises like the mother f***ing Cleveland Browns.

Why do I enjoy Tribe games? I can sit there and relax and just appreciate the game unfolding in front of me... because I won't really be bothered if the Indians lose. Same goes for the Cavs. Even Buckeyes losses don't stick with me very long. I watch plenty of football games and the only time it's like work - the only time that it causes me pain - is when I watch the Browns. It's like a terrible marriage that I don't want to end because I've put in so much time and maaaaaybe she'll magically "change" when she wakes up tomorrow and hot damn I'd hate to miss that miracle.

Tomorrow never comes. Some weeks it's in new and extravagant ways, some weeks it's in the old tried and true fashion, but regardless how they go about doing it, they lose. And even when they don't, it's just a shallow reprieve before the next wave hits.

I'm not bitter or angry at them. I'm just burned out. As with my drinking and smoking and cheeseburgers, I just need to be done. I need to cut off this bad habit and move on. I have to change.

I mean... it's a game. Being played by guys I don't particularly care about. Coached by guys I don't particularly care about. Run by guys I don't particularly care about. Owned by guys I don't particularly care about. And there's nothing I can do to control the outcome, no matter how much I spend on tickets and beer and brats or how loud I yell or how much NFL merchandise I buy.

It's really a poor way to spend so much of my time and energy. I plan my weekends around the game. I've avoided family events for football. I've told old friends that were in town that I couldn't meet up with them because it conflicted with the Browns. I've told my daughters repeatedly that I couldn't do things with them because Daddy had to watch the game. Then there's the articles I read, the articles I write, the message boards I spend ridiculous amounts of time on, the sports talk shows that I listen to constantly... so many wasted hours.

And then when the games finally arrive I can hardly stand to watch them. I DVR them because I get so disgusted so quickly that I always switch to something else. Then back. Then away. Then back. All while telling anyone who will listen "*Here's where they blow it.*"

I'm an addict to a habit that brings me no joy. It used to. Now it's just a habit.

And it isn't just the losing - if I have trouble watching these games now, I can't even imagine how I'd be if they were in the playoffs. If I'm obsessed now, I can't even imagine how I'd be if they were Super Bowl contenders. That time bomb in my chest would hit zero.

I've been writing these articles for 6 years now. When I typed that, I stopped in shock. Holy shit. I can't believe that I've been doing it that long, that I've spent 6 years worth of Sundays and Mondays and sometimes Tuesdays writing about the same pathetic results. I can't even begin to calculate the hours.

This is not a knee-jerk reaction, because it's been a long time coming, nor is it my cheesy "*I'm done*
", because I'm not. Like I said, I'm just burned out and the nature of this toxic relationship needs to change. I will always love the Browns and I will always root for them, but we just can't live together any more. I will watch their games on TV if I have time and I will watch their games at CBS if I have tickets, but we need to start seeing other people.

Browns - it's not you, it's me.

I have a lot of things in life that I need to be working on and working out. I have to change. So

it is with some regret but certain clarity that I use the Bye week to say... Bye.