



THE STORY OF JOEYSUKI

# UNHAPPY

***WITH A DREAM LIFE***

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE  
TO NAVIGATING UNHAPPINESS  
FOR ARTISTS

## **Unhappy With A Dream Life**

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The Story Of JoeySuki

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Paraphrased by Luc Espinosa

## The Dreamlife

Hi there!

The book you're about to read is my personal story. There's nothing I would do to change it, and that's a good thing because I don't want to change it. The past is a part of me and took me to where I am right now. It was a bumpy ride with a lot of highs and lows, but was totally worth it.

People tend to ask me, "Would you do it all over again?" My answer is simply, yes.

While traveling the world, I've met people of different cultures, dined at the best restaurants, slept in the best hotels, and lived in the most luxurious ways.

All these trips brought me to places where I would have never been by myself, and the best part? I didn't pay for any of it. It's actually the contrary - people paid me to do it!

Doesn't that sound like a dream life to you?

Well, it doesn't to me...

## 2004

### **Birthday Parties and My Grandpa's Speakers**

I was fifteen when I somehow got the idea to start DJing. It's kinda weird looking back at it now since my family had no musical history. Sure, there was always music playing in the background, but neither of my parents played any instruments or had any artistic career. Somehow, I still felt the urge to become a DJ.

Like any young aspiring DJ, my first problem was that I didn't have any money. I wanted gear to start playing, but since there was no money, I decided to hustle my way into gathering as much gear as I could from family and friends. People had stuff they wanted to get rid of anyway... so why not give it to me? I still remember receiving HIFI speakers and an amplifier from my grandpa. He wanted me to have it and set up my own drive in DJ show.

My first show was a birthday party for an eight-year-old kid. Picture me playing in front of twenty young kids with all that high-end hardware. The main problem I encountered was that my relatives' CD players didn't have any pitch options because, well... they were normal CD players. The players were slow as hell and only had a play and pause button to work with. I knew that if I really wanted to become a DJ, I needed to figure out a way to make this work. I later tried timing the tracks perfectly so that the audience wouldn't notice that the previous track was done. The issue with this process was that I needed to hit the play button approximately two seconds before the previous track ended, otherwise the next one wouldn't be ready to start. That's how long the delay was on those players...

After doing some gigs and making decent money for my age, I saved enough money to buy my first 'professional' CD player. It was a dual CD player with two pitch wheels on it, but it most definitely wasn't a Pioneer player - that stuff was too expensive for me. This pitch bend wheel was a big upgrade because I could finally start mixing properly. The problem was that the pitch bend wheel had a small delay; it wasn't as bad as my previous players, but I still needed to

calculate the delay in my mixing time. To this day, I'm still very thankful for that player since it taught me how to DJ with shitty equipment. If you can play on shitty gear, you can play on anything!

## **D-Dale**

By this time, I had some experience DJing at home parties. My best friend at the time told me that he had aspirations to become a DJ as well, so we decided to start a DJ duo named D-Dale and build our own drive-in show. The DJ booth was a custom build for the trunk of his dad's car since his father was the one driving us to all of our gigs. We invested some money and got ourselves two vinyl players and a decent mixer. In combination with my previously bought CD player, this was a decent set to begin with.

Our first gigs were weddings, graduation parties, and birthdays; we were doing pretty well. Our fee was 75 Euros for a whole night, meaning building the DJ booth, playing and clean up the room afterward. Still, 37,50 a person wasn't bad at all for that age. We had friends making less money doing their paper route. We were just playing some music and loving it.

As our name started going around town, we got an email from a local bar. They were looking for a DJ to play on Friday nights and heard some great stuff about our sets. That's why they asked us to send a mixtape, the only problem was, they were looking for just one DJ, not a duo. After delivering both our mixtapes we were invited to meet the manager in a local McDonalds where we got the unfortunate news that there could only be one person who could get the gig, and I was that one. That was a tough decision for me because I didn't want to disappoint my friend, but, at the same time, I wanted to get that residency as well. Luckily, my friend was okay with the situation and wished me all the best.

## 2007

I was around the age of seventeen, which in the Netherlands, was too young to actually go out. But, since I was almost turning eighteen, my parents allowed me to take the job at the bar. They were pretty strict about not going out before my eighteenth birthday, but this was different. I was working and not drinking with friends (at least they didn't think I was).

Aside from my DJ ambitions, I also didn't know what to do with my study. I graduated high school and now needed to find a follow-up school but didn't know what to pick. A friend of mine decided to go to Breda. The school was focussed on tourism, and we'd heard some great stories about the parties and pretty girls so it became an easy decision for us. Because he went to Breda, I decided to follow him (and also drop out after three months).

The fact that I got to play in the city center every week opened up a whole new world for me.

### **Becoming a Local DJ**

I had to play every Friday from 22:00 to 04:00 in the morning. I was still playing all kinds of music genres at that moment because that's what the audience wanted - and my boss too. My fee went up, and I got 75 Euros a night. To me, that was crazy at the time. Like I said before, my friends were making less with shittier jobs while I was playing music, drinking and partying and made even more.

A typical night in that bar could be described like this:

I came in around ten o'clock where I found approximately five people inside. Four of them were regular guests, and the other person was the bar girl. I started playing some music on the background with the volume just low enough so that people could still have conversations but also loud enough to hear. From eleven o'clock, I was allowed to turn up the volume. Still, not too loud, but at least at a more of a 'club' level. I was already playing for two hours

and had some drinks from the bar girl. Since the DJ booth was located behind the bar, it was easy for me to drink with them and the quieter the night, the more we drank. After midnight, the volume was allowed to go on 'club mode' and I was getting into my zone. This was the best part of the night! People started coming in requesting songs, and I was playing them on my professional DJ set behind a bar. At the end of the evening, I helped clean up the mess (I felt obligated to do it and didn't think it was weird at all). After having some food together around 5 AM, someone from the staff had to bring me home because I didn't have my drivers license yet and there was no public transport active that early.

I played like this for a couple of months until I found out that the hippest bar in town organized a DJ contest: they were looking for a new DJ to fill a spot in their schedule. I had always dreamed of playing there since the DJ's that playing there were people that I looked up to. After some encouragement from friends, I decided to enter the contest.

When I arrived at the contest on a Thursday evening, I was amazed at how busy it was (Thursday evenings were new to me). The music was loud, the lights were shining, and I immediately got that club feeling that I loved. Every DJ got a time slot, around 30 mins, to show what they had. The first thing I noticed was that every other contestant was way older than I was. There was an eight-year gap between us. Somehow that scared me and made me even more nervous than I already was.

Okay, it's my time to shine! Thirty minutes to show what I've got right in front of the DJ's that I was looking up to (Saying it like this, it reminds me of that TV show 'The Voice'). I started playing in a DJ booth far more professional than I was used too at my residency. There were four Pioneer CDJ1000 to use, a Pioneer DJM mixer and two monitor speakers on each side. I was in DJ heaven. I actually don't remember what I played there, but I still remember the manager (and the Saturday night resident DJ) coming up to me during my set. I got afraid because I thought he was going to ask me to stop playing. I was wrong. He approached me and asked me what I was doing next Saturday because he wanted me to do a test night together with him. The smile on my

face was so big that the place got blinded by it and at the same time, anxiety kicked in. Was I good enough? Was I going to fail in front of a lot of people? What was I going to play? A thousand questions ran through my mind and tried to talk me out of it, but they were unsuccessful. Next Saturday I was going to play in the hippest bar in town.

When I arrived at the bar, there was a chill vibe going on. People were having drinks and talking to each other - you could feel the energy (You know, the energy you feel when you're confident the night is going to be great). I started playing together with the resident DJ. My hands were sweaty, my back as well, and anxiety was all over my body, but as soon as I hit 'play' on that CD player, all those feelings were forgotten. I was ready for this.

After a successful night, the manager offered me a resident spot on Fridays. A night for my own!

Another milestone.

Playing records in this bar was great, and I learned a lot from playing there. The crowd was tough, and you had to entertain them every minute of the evening. If you picked the wrong song, they would let you know. This bar was my school. It was where I learned how to DJ, how to read a room, and how to read a crowd.

Now that I had an ample amount of time at night to develop my DJ skills in a perfect environment, and all the time of the world during the day because I didn't have any school or side job, I started to feel like I needed something more after a while. I was playing a lot of mashups at that moment, but I didn't create those myself. Those mashups were from other local DJ's, and they were known for it. I wanted that as well.



## **Making My Own Music**

My grandnephew was already making music at this time, and he was also DJing at a club across the street. Since he knew his way around music production, I asked him to help me out with my gear. I wanted to create my own mashups and bootlegs to spice up my DJ sets in the weekend.

We went to a store, and he advised me on what to buy because I had no clue about what I was going into. I ordered a new computer, bought monitor speakers, a MIDI keyboard and a mixer to adjust the volume. In total, it was around 500 euros. We drove home, and he helped me install it and gave me some of his software as well.

I ended up with Cubase, simply because that's what he was using. I didn't even know there were other DAW's available. I completely followed his advice.

## **Too Cool For School**

During this period, I found out that there was a music school in my hometown called 'Rockacademy.' I noticed that guys like Hardwell, Firebeatz, and Franky Rizado went there, so it seemed like a decent option to me. I still wasn't sure about which school I wanted to pick, and this sounded great: combining my hobby with school.

Halfway through the year, I decided to apply. I knew that only a few of the people that signed up would finally make the cut. My chances were small, but since I had no clue what else to do, I thought "why not give it a try?"

The admissions test was simple: you had to play a few of your own produced tracks in front of a jury of three music professionals and make sure you'd mix them perfectly. After that, there was a hearing test. One of the three jury members would sit behind a piano and started to hit notes without you seeing the notes. I had to define which notes he hit, and since I had never played the piano OR knew how to read notes, I had no clue what I was doing.

After a few weeks, the news came in. I failed the admission test and wasn't allowed to enter the program that year. This didn't come as a surprise to me. I just got into making music, my tracks sounded shitty, and I had no clue of what I was doing. It was clearly too early for me, but I set a new goal for myself.

Next year, I would enter the Rockacademy.

## 2008

### **Building My Artist Career**

Since I still had all the time in the world because I was denied access to the rockacademy last year and still had no side job because I was making enough money with DJing every weekend, I ended up making music day in day out. There wasn't a day going by without me sitting in that studio. To be real honest, it wasn't a professional studio. The desk was actually two steps away from my bed. It was a real bedroom studio.

A typical day for me that year looked like this:

I was living at my parents' place. Every day I woke up around 9:30 AM, went downstairs to have breakfast in my bathrobe. Sometimes I even took breakfast with me upstairs and started making music until my parents came back from work around 5 PM. Since my studio was located in my parents' house, and we were living in a terraced house, I couldn't make too much noise when everyone was at home. My neighbors never complained because everyone was at work during the day when I was making music, and as soon as they came back, I stopped. My mom hated hearing one loop for the whole day. To me that was normal. I actually caught my mom humbling a melody of mine simply because she was hearing the track on repeat all day long.

Now, looking back at it, I spent crazy amounts of time in the studio, trying to develop my skills.

A lot of big DJ's are from my area of town. Guys like Bassjacks, Fedde Le Grand, and Funkerman were playing in town every week, and they were just like me: just getting started with their career. One of the guys that was also living in my hometown visited the bar a lot where I played. He approached me on an evening to tell me that he was making music as well and offered to collaborate. His name was Apster.

We ended up making tons of music together; we just had a great click in the studio. I was more of a technical producer while he came in with the creativity and melodies. It was a perfect match, and since we were both still learning, we could learn a lot from each other. That year we spent enormous amounts of time in the studio together. Most of the time we met up at least three times a week. All the time and effort we spent didn't go unnoticed. After a few months, we got our first release on a small label called Big Boss Records. The track was named "Chekk."

I still remember how stoked we were when we received the contract for our first release together. We couldn't believe it, finally a release! There was only one problem: there were so many words in the contract that we didn't understand. We decided to contact the label manager and ask if it was possible for us to come to see him and if he could explain the deal to us word by word. We were afraid to sign a bad contract.

### **My First Record Deal**

There we go. We got into the train towards Amsterdam. Two young music producers, who didn't have a clue of what was going on, were going to a label managers house to get educated on a deal that they were going to sign. When we arrived at his home, he started explaining all the terms and conditions that the agreement stated. A lot of it made sense, but most of it was still one big question mark to me. Even though we still didn't know what we were getting into, we decided to sign. Having an official release was a big goal for us, and we didn't want to let this agreement stop us.

Luckily, nothing wrong happened with that deal. I still appreciate that manager taking the time to explain everything to us, but now looking back at it we were too young and too inexperienced. The track didn't do that much damage in music land (like most first releases of an artist), but it gave us a tremendous motivational boost to continue building our music career. Having this release tasted good, and we wanted more.

## **Getting Recognized**

We kept making music together until we got an email from one of the biggest labels in the Netherlands at that moment. It was a daughter label of Spinnin' Records named Sneakerz Muzik. The Sneakerz brand was a big name in the industry that year. They were throwing a lot of parties all around the Netherlands, and all the upcoming DJ's were signed to them. We wanted to become a part of that label as well so you could imagine our excitement when we got an email from them, asking for us to remix on one of their releases. The remix ended up pretty shitty. Somehow we weren't capable of creating something we were happy with, but the label thought the remix was good enough, so it got released.

The fact that they approached us to do a remix meant that we now had our foot in the door. We had established a new connection that led to us sending them our latest original songs. After sending a few, two of the tracks got signed, named Bombazi en Papuado. Mainly the first one did some real damage in the DJ industry at that time. A lot of Dutch DJ's played it, and it garnered us some decent attention from the industry.

## **Back To School**

Around this time, I was still trying to get into the Rockacademy again. I did the admissions test again, this time my music was on a higher level but my music skills remained terrible. I still didn't know how to read or hear notes. All the music that I previously released or made was created by listening to it. The only benchmark I had was: "Do I think it sounds good?".

Luckily, good news came in a few weeks later. This time I did get into the Rockacademy, and I was all excited to get started. My music was doing well, I had enough gigs in my hometown, and I was going to work on music even more at school. Life was great. That September, I started my education at the Rockacademy. Like I said before, guys like Hardwell, Firebeatz and Franky Rizado had studied at this school as well, so my expectations were high.

In my year, only six people got into the music production department of the Rockacademy. You might know one of them because he ended up as part of the DJ duo Mightyfools, his name was Jelle. We started the year freshly. I had to change DAW's because the school was only working in Logic on a Macbook and I was using Cubase on a PC. That change hit me harder than expected. Getting used to a new DAW took me a long time. Somehow I couldn't manage to get the same sound out of Logic as I had created before in Cubase, but after a few months, I finally nailed it.

I learned a lot at that school. As I said, I didn't know how to read notes or how to define any keys in general so music theory and piano lessons were precious. I completely isolated myself for over a year to master this skill. The problem was that a lot of the time that I spent at school was going into other topics like music history etc. Those topics didn't interest me, but it cost me a lot of time to get into my head. That had me thinking...

My career was starting to grow at a slow pace. Remix requests were coming in, and more tracks were getting signed by the month. At the same time, I was at school, spending my time on music history. Somehow, that felt a bit off to me. Wasn't this school built to make artists make a living from their music? I was at the point where I needed to cancel remix requests because I needed to spend time on things like music history. That felt off to me. My career was growing, but classes were stopping me instead of supporting me.

After the first year of the Rockacademy I managed to get all my grades for every topic instead of music history. I ended up having two choices:

- 1) Re-do the first year and loose more time.
- 2) Leave school and get to spent more time on my own career.

The choice seems pretty easy now, but at that moment it was pretty tough for me. Just like every other kid, my parents and everyone around me were telling me that, without a degree, I would fail in life. Deciding to quit school meant that I didn't have a degree and that made me anxious.

All of my teachers were people from the industry — people who were successful in their music career and were now focussing on educating the next generation. As you can imagine, whatever they said, I took their word for it. Talking with one of my teachers cleared my mind a lot. He told me that a school, created for artists, is actually pretty weird.

Can you name a single successful DJ who has a degree in music?

That sentence made something click in my mind. He was right. Why was I so focussed on getting into this school while my career was already doing well without it?

After a talk with my parents, I decided to quit and go all in on my own career. I still remember my dad saying: “Have you ever earned 3000 Euros in a week? Well if you finish your last exam next week, you don’t have to pay for your college so think about it twice before you make the decision”. Now, looking back, his was a crucial moment where my parents could have stepped in and could have stopped me from making the decision. The fact that my parents were so open minded and believed in me lead to me deciding to go all in on my music. If they had made me finish school first, my life would have been completely different. One of the sentences my mom told me in that conversation was, “If you think you can do it, we will support you, but the minute I see you slacking and watching TV all day long, you will go back to school.” And she meant it.

## 2009

Okay, so that's it! I've decided to quit school and go all in on my music career. I felt excited and anxious at the same time. What if this path didn't work out? What would I do next? Did I need a degree after all?

Again, all those questions didn't stop me. It fueled me to work even harder. For the first time in my life, I felt like I needed to prove myself.

### **The Next Level**

2009 was another year full of highlights that helped build my career. I began releasing more and more tracks, and gigs were coming in more easily.

I started the year with a new release, a collaboration with two friends who also lived nearby, or at least one of them. My first collaboration with Firebeatz dropped on Beatport. We always had the best time in the studio together. Tim had his studio at his parents' house in a town called Goirle, and that's where I went every time to make music with them. Sometimes we also went to Jurre's studio in Hilversum, but since both Tim and I were located here, this seemed like the better place to work.

There's a funny story behind how I got to know Tim. Although I didn't know him yet, similar to myself, Tim was also working his way up in the local bars and clubs as a DJ at that time, and now he needed my help

My phone went off: "Hi this is Tim, I need your help with one of the connections in the DJ booth at the location" I replied: "Sorry who am I talking with?" He again said, "Tim, I'm the DJ tonight, and I don't know how everything works in this booth. They said I should call you because you knew how things worked over here." I kindly replied: "Well Tim, I'm not sure who you've talked to, but I've only played there once and also don't know how those things work over there. I'm afraid you're gonna have to call someone else for this."



At that moment, I honestly had no idea who he was, and he probably didn't know me but somehow our paths crossed again, and we ended up in the studio together with his partner in crime. The first EP we released was called the 'Electric Zoo EP.' It featured two tracks called 'Echobird' and 'Filterfish.' Feel free to look them up on Spotify or any other online service.

Just like me, Firebeatz was also making a start with their career. Funny how things go right?

One of my most significant decisions in 2009 was quitting my residency. After releasing on labels like Sneakerz Muzik, my name began to gain some traction, and I started receiving booking requests for other cities and other parties. While I was previously being booked for my DJ skills, promoters were now booking me for my sound.

I decided to leave my current residency behind as it wasn't the place where I could represent the JoeySuki sound. I still had to play hip hop and R&B there which didn't fit the house music that I was releasing. I needed to have a clear goal and vision with my artist brand.

### **Leaving The Residency**

Quitting my residency seemed like an easy thing to do. The only problem was that my residency was responsible for two gigs a week. I earned 500 Euros a week there which (for all the quick mathematics out there) ends up being 2000 Euros a month. That's not bad at all for a young guy working two nights a week. That money gave me a stable income and stress-free life which I never considered when I decided to quit.

From that moment on, I was relying on external gigs from event promoters; my income plunged. My fee for a gig was somewhere between 50 and 250 Euros at that time, and having one to two gigs a month wasn't going to do it for me. Luckily I was still living at my parents' place and didn't have any financial obligations.

The biggest problem for me at that moment wasn't the financial part, but the fact that I wasn't playing that much anymore. I loved the adrenaline rush from Djing, and going from two gigs a week to two gigs a month was too much of a change. I needed to adapt to my new reality. The decision to quit still felt like the right decision because it was time for me to move on. My music was doing well, and other opportunities arose. It was the perfect moment for me to step in.

### **An Unforgettable Sunday Morning**

During 2009, I also created a remix for a guy named Milton Channels. I'm not sure how I ended up getting that remix, but that doesn't matter. What matters is the story that I am going to tell you right now. It's the story of what that remix did for me.

It was Sunday morning. Breakfast was sacred in our house, but on Sunday's we had an extra long brunch with the family. Just before we sat down, I opened up my email quickly on my computer to check if I got any new messages. I opened up my email inbox and stumbled across an email from Mark Knight. Mark Knight was one of the artists that I look up to. Imagine getting an email from your biggest idol.

Here's what Mark wrote:

*Hey Joey,*

*Just wanted to drop you a line to say really like your mix of "Trip"*

*Been playing it every where and it goes off!!!!*

*Please keep me posted with all the new bits.*

*Hope you are well*

*Regards*

*Mark Knight*

My mind was blown. One of my biggest role models just emailed me to say that he liked my music and that he played it a lot!!! You can imagine that morning was special to me.

In every career, moments like these are special. You should treasure them and remember them at all times. Especially at times when you feel down or unsuccessful.

I kindly replied to Mark:

*Hey Mark*

*First of all, thank you for your email! I really appreciate it and it's a big honor that you support my track!!*

*I will keep you posted about my new bits for sure!!*

*By the way, I was looking for this years upcoming Amsterdam Dance Event and I couldn't help noticing that there isn't a Toolroom Knights evening this year? Too bad.. Last year I visited your party and I wanted to go back this year... that's why! It rocked big time last year! :) Are you coming to ADE for some conventions or something else?*

*Well... thanks a lot for your mail and I hope i'll see you at ADE this year. Keep an eye on your mailbox for the new stuff :)*

*Regards Joey*

The email after that he replied the following:

*I was going to ask you something. I have a track i have signed by D-Formation which i am looking for a mix on. Unfortunately there is no money in but it would be a god way of getting more involved with us here at Toolroom.*

That's it; I was shocked. Did Mark Knight just asked me to do a remix for Toolroom Records??

To me, it was unbelievable that a remix I created in the past could lead to this.

I ended up taking his offer. The fact that there was no money involved didn't matter to me. I just wanted to get a release on the almighty Toolroom Records, and at the same time, I gained a significant new audience from there as well.

The remix didn't end up being what I was going for. It was 'ok' to me, and luckily, the Toolroom team decided to release it. My release on Toolroom was now official.

After releasing the remix, I also got the opportunity to play at a Toolroom Knights event in Amsterdam.

Another milestone.

## 2010

2010 was a big year for me and my career. As you read in the previous chapter, my releases were gaining more attention everywhere and labels were began interested in my work with me. Toolroom was the first of many to come.

### **Milestone After Milestone**

During this year, I managed to do remixes for the likes of Like Mike, Bassjackers, and Shermanology. That helped me gain more attention.

I also released another collaboration with Firebeatz called 'Hidden Sound.' That track opened up doors for me because iconic DJ's ranging from Swedish House Mafia to Tiesto were playing it. Steve Angello even featured it on his 'Size Matters' album!

Another milestone.

### **My First Tour**

During all those successes with my releases, another big thing happened.

Another email came in.

*Bro*

*You have got some wicked tracks coming out*

*Who have you signed Good Vibration too? Also "Down to Earth"?*

*Your remix of Release Me is really good! Nice job bro*

*Bassjackers, NICE!!!!*

My music seemed to reach other continents as well, and this man happened to be the managing director of a big dance music label in South Africa. He heard my previous releases and had kept an eye on my social pages to find out that I had unsigned music as well.

I ended up signing my track 'Down To Earth' on this label.

This release got me a new opportunity. It got me my first international tour in South Africa.

I still remember getting the email a few months after the first time we got in contact. Again, I went mental. I was already packing my bags and was ready to go! That's when my parents stepped in again.

My parents are good people. As mentioned before, they let me choose my own future in the whole school decision thing, but now, they wanted to know what I was getting into again. At that moment, I didn't understand it. Like I said, I was already busy packing my bags while they were left with so many questions.

Who is this guy? Why is he paying for your flights, hotel, and to play? You know, the typical parent stuff. Me: "I don't know, who cares? Let's go!"

Luckily, I had a guy who was guiding me through my career from the moment I started playing in my hometown. Remember that DJ contest? He was working at that same bar and noticed me. He offered to help me with the more serious stuff of my career. In hindsight, he was a combination of a manager and a coach. He was a bit older than I was, and was more experienced in this industry because he had some previous experiences with other artists. My parents knew him as well. They'd met him a few times, and every time a contract needed to be signed, he was there to go through it and save me from signing something dangerous. The moment I got the request to come and play in South Africa, he was there to take away all my parents' worries (well not all of them, but most of them).

We ended up making a deal that I was allowed to go if he'd join me. We arranged two tickets which made things a bit harder for us because that meant it was more expensive for the South African Booker.

When the day of departure came in sight, a terrible thing happened. Remember that volcano that took down all the flights in Europe in 2010? Yup, that was the week I was leaving for South Africa. I was checking the news every hour to see what the status was. Every airport was closed; no airplane was allowed to go into the air. After several phone calls and emails, we finally found a way to de-tour our flight. Instead of leaving from Amsterdam, we had to go to Frankfurt by train and get on the plane to South Africa there. There was just one flight leaving from there; it was our only shot.

When we arrived at Frankfurt Airport, I was shocked. It looked like the movies. Frankfurt Airport is a pretty big airport, and at that time, NOBODY was there. All I could see were big empty gates and halls, full of emergency beds for people to stay on because no one was able to go home. This was the first time I was flying across oceans so I was already a bit stressed out, and this certainly didn't help.

When we finally boarded the plane, it was nearly empty. Everyone on board had their own row of seats, and since the airplane was stacked with food and beverages, we had nothing to complain.

The tour was a fantastic experience. We had seen quite a lot from South Africa.

The fact that I was able to travel, experience the world, taste different food, and meet new people was life changing to me. During my gigs, people were going crazy - some even recognized me! This was all new.

I could get used to this lifestyle, or at least I thought I could...

Aside from my first tour, another big achievement happened that year.

## **The Booker**

2010 was the year that I signed my first release on Revealed Recordings called 'Dig.It.All'.

I had been in contact with Hardwell for a while now since he was already playing a few of my tracks. After sending him my track Dig.it.all, he was determined to sign it on his recently launched label, Revealed Recordings.

This felt like a big step for me. Hardwell was already a big name in the industry, and the exposure through Revealed would help me reach a new audience again. Today, I still really appreciate him for giving me the opportunity.

That release didn't do much though. It was a nice release, did some damage in the scene but wasn't a big hit (again).

What the release did help me with was getting signed to a booker. After years and years of finding and finalizing my gigs myself, I finally piqued the interest of a big booker named Anna Agency. That's right, the booker where Hardwell was signed. I guess it wasn't a coincidence that they had recognized my music and started following me. Everything leads to something and in this case, my release on Revealed lead to Anna keeping her eye on me.

Having a booker like Anna Agency on board was a big deal to me. It was approval of something that I already knew myself; I was just looking for a professional to acknowledge it for me. I was doing alright with my music, and it seemed like I had a good chance to 'make it' as an artist.



## 2011

2011 was a fresh start. Again, things were going well as more international gigs came in thanks to Anna Agency. Because I signed with them, I could make use of their network as well. They started selling me to their network as ‘a new kid on the block’ who just started releasing music on Hardwell’s label.

### **It’s Bootleg Time**

2011 was also the year of bootlegs. I found out bootlegs were a great way to build an audience. The crowd loved them and DJ’s as well because it was an easy way to spice up your DJ set. Every crowd, no matter where you’d play in the world loves to hear a song they know (unless you’re playing real underground gigs) and DJ’s preferred to play different versions of the track, preferably a version that fits their own sound as well.

I started creating bootleg after bootleg, sharing them with my network of DJ’s. I gave it all away for free! As a result, a lot of DJ’s were also playing my bootlegs. From local acts, to the likes of Hardwell, DJ’s across the globe were using my tracks in their sets, and it felt amazing. It also really helped me to build an audience.

When a more prominent DJ plays your music, they actually become ambassadors of your sound. They introduce your music to their crowd which eventually gives you more significant reach and opportunities to get new fans

At the end of 2011, the biggest milestone of my career was about to kick in.

### **And A Munster Was Born**

A quick recap of the last few months: I had already been in contact with Robbert (Hardwell) since we had been sending music back and forth for a while. He was playing some of my stuff, and I (obviously) was playing some of his stuff. He signed a track of mine on his label, and I got signed at the same booker as he was signed to.

It was a typical weekday in the studio and I kept running into a problem. I had this drop that I, but somehow I wasn't capable of creating the right break for it. Everything I tried seemed to sound off. Breaks weren't my strong suite. I was better at designing drops.

For some reason, I contacted Robbert that day (or he contacted me) about something completely different. We talked on the phone for a while, caught up and finally came to the topic of me not being capable of finishing this song that I was working on. He kindly offered to give me feedback. Maybe he had some great tips that could help me? Turned out to be even better.

When I showed Robbert the track on the phone, he immediately bombarded me with a lot of ideas. "You should do this in the break and then go over to that..." I could hear him saying it, but still, I had no clue. I was stuck in a track and was about to give up until the best idea of that year got into my head. Why not ask him to create the break and make collaboration from it? And so I did.

I was lucky. Robbert already was a fully booked DJ at that time, but luckily I spoke to him when he was at home in his studio for a few days. I guess I was at the right time at the right moment. I offered him the deal. "Would you like to work on the break because I don't know what to do with it and since you have all these ideas...?", I waited for his reply. "Yeah sure, send it over! I'll let you know once I have something," he replied. The big Hardwell was going to work on a break of my track, could this be happening for real? A few minutes after we hung up, I sent the project to him. I was expecting him to take a few days before he could come up with something because I knew he was busy, but that's not what happened. A few hours later, I was sitting on the couch, and I got a message from him including a voice clip. He had already finalized the whole break! I was blown away. It fit the track perfectly, and it had that Hardwell sound to it. He also sent a message after that voice clip: "Let's finish this song together tomorrow; come over to my place." Wait what?! Was he actually inviting me to his studio to finish a song together?? YES!

The day after, I was excited to go over to his studio. When I arrived, he welcomed me into his house, and I got to meet his parents. We went upstairs to his studio where we would spend the rest of the day working on Munster. During the studio session, his parents came in to check now and then to see if we were thirsty or hungry because we lost track of time. If they hadn't checked up on us, I guess we wouldn't have eaten or drunk anything at all.

At the end of the day, the track was done. We had connected the dots between his break and my drop and finalized the whole track. We sent it to the label manager of Revealed, and a new release was born.

When I came home, it started to become clear to me. I was going to have a collaboration with Hardwell; this was HUGE! When I told my friends and family, they were so happy and excited for me!

### **Market what?**

One of my friends approached me a few days later and asked me: "Have you thought about how you're going to get the most out of this release?" and I replied: "yes, by releasing it?". He shook his head and said: "well, these kind of opportunities are unique, you'd better use them and get the most out of it. Have you ever thought about a marketing strategy?" I started to feel awkward. "No?" I replied. "Well let me help you with that," he said.

The friend that I'm talking about was a guy that I recently met. He actually approached me during a night out to tell me that he was a fan of what I was doing and that he'd love to join me on a gig once. He offered to drive me to one of my gigs in the Netherlands so that I could focus on my set and not worry about the traffic. I was amazed by the offer. Until now, I was driving myself which caused me a lot of stress, so an offer like this was pretty well timed.

He ended up driving me to a gig in the middle of the Netherlands. He took his dad's car because it was bigger and more luxurious, and he did as he promised me. He drove me to the gig. During that hour-long ride, we got to speak a lot get to know each other (fun fact: he became my tour manager from that moment on).

He was involved in my career, knew about everything that was happening, and helped me market and brand my artist career. That's where I started to see the value of a strong brand and marketing strategy.

You know, we think that the music industry is about music, but it isn't. The best artists alive are unknown because they've failed to let the world know about their existence.

To me, this marketing and branding thing felt a bit unnatural in the beginning. I didn't like 'selling' myself that much on social media, and I didn't see the value of it. After a while, we managed to make things more interesting for me. I'm a competitive guy and so was that friend of mine, so we decided to create goals for every year (growth of socials, etc.) and connect awards to it.

Every time we came up with a post, we made a bet about how much likes it would get, and that encouraged me to come up with more and better content every single time.

Now, looking in hindsight, I wonder what would have happened to my career if I didn't do all those things. Would my music have been enough to get me through the cut? I don't think so.

I've always known that I wasn't the best music producer or DJ out there. Sure, I knew my way around the studio, and I definitely knew how to DJ, but I could name at least ten other producers who were better than me, but somehow they never managed to launch their music career, and I did. Coincidence?

## 2012

I was enjoying of the result of my collaboration with Hardwell. After releasing that track, the world now knew who JoeySuki was. Since all eyes in the industry were on Hardwell at that time, this collaboration couldn't have come at a better time. Every blog wrote about it, every Hardwell fan now started to follow me, and the track got major support from big DJ's.

### **Getting Exposure**

All of this lead to my agenda becoming fuller and fuller. With the help of Anna Agency's vast network, I started getting gigs all over the world. The collaboration with Hardwell was the perfect unique selling point for them to sell me to bookers. You just had to drop the word 'Hardwell' and 'collaboration' with 'new talent' and people would be interested in booking you.

2012 was the year that my gigs started to take off.

### **A Trip To Indonesia**

One of the gigs that I still remember is the first time I had to play in Indonesia. I was going to do a mini tour there with two gigs: one in Jakarta and one in Surabaya. What seems crazy now is that I was flying over to Indonesia for just one weekend. Fifteen hours of flying, roughly twenty four hours of traveling from door to door times - and doing that twice all in one weekend. I lived for that shit.

The moment I got out of the airplane, the moist and hot air hit me in my face. I was already feeling pretty dirty after the long flight, and the indonesian climate certainly didn't help.

Like any international trip, I proceeded to walk to the border control where officers would check my passport. But, as they checked my passport, I knew something was wrong. After taking a look at my passport, two officers started to talk in Indonesian to each other. My visa wasn't arranged.

We started communicating in English but that didn't really work because they didn't speak English so we resorted to hand movements and broken phrases. After awhile, they took me to a backroom where it was even more hot. An officer sat down in front of me and started to check my passport again, and I started to feel stressed. Officers kept on coming in the room, talking to each other in Indonesian and leaving again. "This isn't good" I was thinking.

After three long hours of waiting in that room after a fifteen hour flight, someone else finally showed up who spoke English to me. He was the promoter, and he told me that he needed to arrange a few things before they could let me enter the country. I still didn't understand what was going on, but I trusted this man who claimed to be my promoter. A few minutes later, he came back with some cash, gave it to the officer and told me that my passport was going to be delivered to my hotel with the right visa stamp tomorrow. I still don't know what I was thinking at that moment, but somehow I agreed on it and left the airport together with my promoter.

When I arrived at the hotel, I started to get anxious about my passport. There's one rule that my parents taught me about, and that is that you should keep your passport with you at all times. Well, I fucked up. Anxiety started to build, and I kept thinking about me losing my passport in a country like Indonesia, far far away from home with people who didn't understand me. I started to come up with the most horrible endings of this story: I was going to be locked up, my parents were never going to find me, someone would steal my identity, you name it. The day after my arrival in Indonesia I woke up and the first thing I did was going to the reception to see if my passport had arrived. That night wasn't comfortable for me. Aside from having problems sleeping because of the time difference, those anxious thoughts didn't help as well. When I was at the counter and checked if my passport was there, the office girl told me that it indeed was delivered. Weight fell off my shoulder. She gave me my passport including the VISA stamp that I needed and the anxiety started to go away.

Stories like this seem pretty weird or unlikely, but the fact is that these kind of moments were pretty common in my DJ career.

## 2013

The year 2013 started off pretty quiet as always. For most DJ's, January is the holiday month. It's the summer holiday for artists. February is quiet as well. Things start to get back on track again in March.

### **Miami Here We Come (And Go)**

One of the main events scheduled every March was Ultra Music Festival in Miami. This was one of those festivals that I'd always dreamed about playing or at least visiting once. Today, Ultra is still unique because most artists who play there, consider this festival to be the start of a new season. This is the place where a lot of DJ's premier their latest tracks, show their new light show, or announce upcoming tours.

This year, I booked myself a ticket to Ultra Music Festival. I wasn't booked to play there; I just wanted to go to the festival and meet with people from all over the world. Ultra wasn't the only reason for me to visit Miami because, at that same week, the Miami Winter Music Conference started. This was the best place for me to network with people from the music industry from all over the world.

On the day of departure, I was a bit nervous. I had heard of a lot of great stories about Miami and Ultra, and I was excited to see what this week was going to bring.

I was traveling together with Firebeatz and one of their friends that day. We decided to rent an Airbnb together during that week, and since we were all from the Netherlands, we also traveled together. When we met at the airport in Amsterdam, I got even more excited. The flight was filled with Dutch DJs that were going to Miami. The big names were there, but also talented youngsters like ourselves were onboard. We were all ready to rock Miami for a week!

We were having conversations in the airplane about what we should do at the border because we had heard a lot of stories of artists who got sent back because they didn't have a working permit and we didn't have one as well. The difference with those stories was that we weren't making any money on the gigs that we had in Miami. It was all promotional, and our previous experiences with other countries told us that we didn't need a working permit if it was a promotional gig. We knew there was a risk involved to travel to the US without a working permit, but we believed that we didn't need one.

When we arrived at the airport in New York, the tension started to build inside my body. I began to feel stressed and nervous as well. What if I got picked out of the line? What if I got sent back? What if they locked me up? The line at the border control seemed to take ages. We were standing in different lines, and the first person to go to an officer was Jurre. He laid down his passport and started talking from a short distance; everything seemed to be going well. That gave us a positive, motivating feeling. Next up were Tim and his friend. After a few seconds, which felt like hours, they were granted access to the US, and it was now my turn. "What's the reason for your visit?" asked the border security officer, "ehhm I'm going to Miami to visit a festival there," I said. His eyes looked up towards me, and he asked me a follow-up question, "ahh, Miami you say... Well that sounds like fun, enjoy your time over there!" he said and \*bam\* he set a stamp of approval in my passport.

"Welcome the US!" I got so excited that I immediately ran to the rest of the pack to join them. We needed to get on to a connecting flight to Miami, so we were in a bit of hurry. When I found them behind the border control, I felt excited and ready to go until I noticed the looks on the faces of Tim and his friend. Jurre still wasn't there, and he was the first one who got out of the line... "Where is he?" I asked. "Well he's still not here, and I don't see him at the desk where he was before so that must mean that they took him for an interview," he said. In a matter of seconds, my nervous feelings were back. I went from total excitement to a kind of panic mode in milliseconds. "But... What should we do now?" I asked because we had to get on to the connecting flight to get to Miami in time. "Well, let's just walk, and they'll probably let him walk because he's doing nothing wrong so we'll meet him in the plane," he



said. We started walking to the next gate until we heard a voice out of the intercom on the airport "Passengers traveling with Jurre, please report yourself at the immigration desk." Fuck. Tim and his friend were called back because something seemed to be wrong with Jurre. One of the first things they check is if you are traveling alone or not and since they booked their flights together, they were called out first to come back and report in. My anxiety started to kick in, and somehow I felt the urge to continue traveling on my own. I wanted to go to Miami; waiting for someone the airport wasn't going to help. I wasn't going to be able to change that situation, so I decided to go solo from there. I started walking towards the next baggage check before I could enter the next gate to Miami. I put my suitcase down on the band, and the officer asked me "What's in here sir?" "Well, nothing weird actually, maybe some merchandise, a few USB sticks and clothing, why?" I replied. "What's your profession sir?" he asked. "I'm a DJ; why?" I said anxiously if I already knew what was going to happen next. "Please come with us," he replied. We started walking, they were carrying my suitcase, and I was guided into a backstage room where I found Tim, Jurre and their friend, and numerous of other people that looked like they were either desperate or criminals. After a few moments of catching up with them and going through what happened an officer approached us and told us to turn off our cell phones. We weren't allowed to communicate with each other or with someone else. They put us into different interrogation rooms which is when my anxiety reached the highest level. My worst nightmare was about to happen and I didn't even know what I did wrong. I already thought it had something to do with the working permit, but why would they mistreat us for that? We weren't criminals; we just didn't have the right piece of paper. After a few hours of interrogation, which felt like I was in a bad movie, the officer told me that he was going to leave the room for a while to discuss the situation with a colleague and that he would come back to me with more news afterward. When he entered the room again, my heart started pounding again. I'd told him everything, and it felt like I needed to confess something that I didn't do so I just told him the truth about everything and was curious to hear what his verdict was going to be. "You're going back home my friend," he said. Somehow the officer became more empathetic now, and it looked like he felt bad saying it to me, "I've compared your story with your friends' story, discussed it with colleagues, and came to the conclusion that we have to send

you guys back since you don't have the right documents." My world started to fall apart underneath me. "What? How? Who?" my brain just collapsed, and I didn't know what to do in a situation like this. The first thing that I wanted to do was call my marketing friend to cancel all automated marketing plans on social media and call my brother to ask if he wanted to pick me up from the airport in Amsterdam the day after, but since our phones had to be turned off we weren't allowed to do phone calls. After registering our fingerprints, taking mugshots, and agreeing on our declare, we were guided to an airplane to Amsterdam. Our tickets were already booked by the officer, and we didn't have a choice.

The first plane leaving for Amsterdam had four seats available, ours to be. Luckily, our flight carrier didn't charge extra costs for rebooking the return flight, so we didn't have to pay for that, but usually, that would have been the case. Approximately six officers walked around us in a circle to escort us into the back of the empty airplane. No one was boarded yet, and we had to get in from the back entrance. The officers escorted us to our seats, locked our belts, and handed over our passports to the flight attendants. We were only allowed to get our passports back when we landed in Amsterdam. The officers had left the airplane when one of the flight attendants came to us and asked, "What the hell did you do? We've never seen anything like this before". "Well we didn't have a working permit," I said. "Wow, it looked like you were some kind of serial killers escorted by the police haha," he replied. As soon as the airplane left the gate, I pulled out my phone, turned it on, and sent my brother a quick message: "Please come pick me up tomorrow at Schiphol, I'm coming back home will tell you the details later." Imagine getting a message like that, being entirely left in the dark without any answers. Not my best text ever, but it got the job done. When we arrived in Amsterdam, my brother and friend were there to pick me up, and that's when I explained what happened. The days after that were one big blur. I was supposed to be in Miami now, visiting Ultra and networking with new people but somehow, I was in my studio in my hometown again. What the hell happened?!

This story still haunts me to this very moment. The fact that I got sent back from the States got me a notification in my passport which means that I'm not able to travel to the US anymore without a working permit. In the years after 2013, I did manage to get a working permit after a lot of hassle and spending money, and eventually managed to get in the US and tour around. Every time I come across the border, they still pick me out of the line and interview me to ask what I'm doing in the US.

### **Dubbed Records**

In 2013, something else happened as well. I started to notice that I wasn't comfortable anymore with the music that I was making and playing. Somehow I felt disconnected with Electronic Dance Music.

I noticed it in the studio too because making music wasn't as easy anymore. I was struggling to create new tracks and to finish them, and when I would finish one, it was tough to find a label that liked it enough for a release. After a few "no's" from record labels because my music didn't fit their sound, I decided to create my own record label. I always had this idea in mind and now was the perfect moment to do this. My management connected me with some companies from the music industry that could help me with this, and within a few weeks, it was done. Dubbed Records was born. A platform where I could release my music whenever I wanted to keep a continuous release schedule throughout the whole year and not to let any music wasted because of A&R managers with a different taste.

Dubbed Records started pretty decently. Since my artist name was in the picture at that moment, it was pretty easy to launch a new platform. I also had quite a big following consisting of music producers and DJ's which were my target clients for Dubbed. I started releasing my music on Dubbed, but I also started to sign other talented producers which I got to know through my weekly demo sessions on Facebook. The releases were doing well, but it cost me a lot of time to keep everything going.

## Life Is Calling

Because I was releasing music on Revealed Recordings, I was connected with a friend of Hardwell named Kill The Buzz. We'd met a few times during one of our nights out in Breda and other parties, and it seemed like we would be a great fit in the studio. He was great with melodies because he knew how to play the piano while I still was the more technically focused producer. After meeting each other a few times, our publisher offered for us to get into the studio together. He also thought it would be a great combination between the two of us.

Aditya a.k.a. Kill The Buzz visited my studio in 2013. Aside from having a great musical connection we also noticed that there was a great personal connecting. We were having a lot of fun in the studio, and from experience, I knew that was important for collaboration. In between all the jokes and worthless comments we also managed to create a track. A track which we were thrilled with and sounded really well. The melody came from an old demo from Aditya, and we had created a whole new track around it. The only thing missing was a vocal, so we sent it to our publisher who was dedicated to finding a vocal for us.

A few weeks later, the vocal was ready and in our inbox. Once we listened to the demo version, we instantly knew the vocal was too strong for the track. Because we already had a powerful melody, the even stronger vocal on top of it would conflict, and it didn't take us long to agree on the fact that we needed to create a new instrumental for it. That's where the current version of 'Life Is Calling' was born. We started to create chords and progressions that were adding value to the vocal instead of declining it. The vocal fit so well with the chords, and the power of the drop was exactly what we were looking for (especially because my productions weren't the best lately). Once we had sent it to Hardwell and the Revealed Recordings team, they were instantly in love with the track. They wanted to sign it and premiere it at Amsterdam Dance Event. We even got on stage with Hardwell during the premiere! Big plans were made for this release, and I didn't know if I was happy or anxious.

## 2014

I'll start with describing this year as the best year of my career. This was the year where everything came together business-wise, and success was lived every moment.

### **The Ultimate High**

'Life Is Calling' was released at the end of 2013 and since it was doing so well in the charts and was being supported by a lot of by other DJ's, the track got more and more awareness from the audience. This was my biggest release so far.

The effect of a successful release was mostly measurable in the number of gigs that were coming in a few months later. During the spring and summer, my schedule filled up pretty quickly. At that same time, I started to feel disconnected from the music industry and myself more and more. I noticed that my feelings towards the traveling part of the job began changing. I wasn't excited when I got booked in a different country, the contrary... It started to feel like a negative thing.

Here's a small list of highlights that were scheduled for me that summer:

- Tour in India
- Tour in USA
- Tour in Asia
- Official Remix for Jennifer Lopez
- Playing at Tomorrowland
- Playing at Creamfields
- Playing at Ushuaia Ibiza
- Playing in several other countries

My career was at an ultimate high that year. My manager got me a lot of remix opportunities and one of those opportunities was to remix Jennifer Lopez. I still remember when that request came in. They were looking for a Dutch House

remix, and I was asked to deliver one for them, but the deadline was a few days. That freaked me out but I just got started working on it, and in a few hours I managed to create a decent track that sounded well but still was still a bit minimalistic. I wanted to know if this was the kind of remix that JLO was looking for, so I sent a snippet of the track to her management to check. When the response came in I was astonished: they liked the remix so much that they immediately approved it! The only thing I had to do was putting the final touches on it, and I was done. I must say, the track was very effective and I'm still happy with how it sounds today. Sometimes that happens - creating a new song in just a few hours.

With all of these successful moments going on in my career, my personal life wasn't doing so bad either. I found a new apartment with my girlfriend which was located in a great part of town. It was completely new and bigger than what we had hoped for. Things just couldn't get better from here...

### **A Trip To India**

In May 2013, I was booked to play three shows in India - something I would call a mini-tour at the moment. I had to travel for five days including three different cities to play in. That would mean one or two flights, and a different hotel and club every day. Now, this might sound special to you, but to me, this was normal life at that time.

Something you should know before we continue on my mini-tour in India is that the week before I left, I had been working around the clock to finish my new apartment and move all the stuff to there. It was both a physically and mentally tough week, but I never thought it would hit me that hard. Let's continue the story.

I had just moved into my new apartment, and the place was still a mess. There were boxes everywhere, and I couldn't find anything that I needed because I didn't know which box it was. Nonetheless, there was no time to worry about that because I needed to go to India two days after moving in. As mentioned before, I felt like I was exhausted both physically and mentally, but I didn't feel

like I had a choice. It was time to get back to work and to start this tour. As soon as I left the house and said goodbye to my girlfriend, I already felt like I wanted to stay. I didn't feel like going to India. I wanted to enjoy my new apartment and make it a new home. Right now it was one big mess, and I was leaving my girlfriend in it. I got into the car where my tour manager and friend were waiting for me. They were going to take me to the airport as usual. When we arrived at Schiphol Airport, I got out of the car, said goodbye, thanked my tour manager for driving me, and walked into the airport (You might think it's weird that he didn't join me on that tour, but the reality is that even on a higher level, it's still pretty expensive to take someone with you every time. You have to pay for everything and the fees for the shows aren't always high enough to make it lucrative to bring a tour manager.)

When I was entering the airport, I immediately went through customs and went to the tax-free zone because I wanted to be on time for my flight. When I was strolling around those shops, a bad feeling started to take over. I decided to call my girlfriend because I felt like there was no way back from this. I felt like I didn't want to go at all, but I had no choice. I felt like a prisoner of my own success. When I called my girlfriend, I started crying in the middle of the crowd. No one really approached me because well, it was an airport. People cry there. My girlfriend calmed me down with some kind words, and that gave me the courage to continue and head to the gate. My flight was leaving in an hour. Decision time was over; it was time to stop being a baby and do this. What could happen in those five days right?! When I arrived at the gate, I was still feeling pretty stressed. It felt like I was all alone on this planet and no one around me could see me. It's boarding time now. I took out my boarding pass, showed it to the flight attendant who was kind and welcomed me on the flight towards Mumbai. I took my seat and still felt stressed. Somehow my heart kept beating, and it didn't want to slow down, what was happening?

As soon as the plane took off, panic attacks started to kick in. At that moment, I had no clue what was going on. I didn't know I was having a panic attack and the fact that I didn't know that, didn't help at all. My feelings were unexplainable and only fueled my anxiety. "What if the plane crashes? What if I have a heart attack on this plane? What if there is a terrorist on this plane?"

Those were thoughts that were going through my mind constantly, and I couldn't explain why. I had flown a lot at that time and had never experienced something like this. I knew that flying was a safe way to travel, but I still kept picturing those crazy scenarios in my mind. My mind was going crazy, my hands were sweaty, and I didn't feel like eating or drinking. I just tried to close my eyes and focus on the movie that I was watching. I tried to repeat every sentence so that my mind would wander off from those horrible thoughts. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. I was literally fighting myself. From the outside, I was trying to keep my cool. I don't think the person sitting next to me knew what was going on inside my mind at that time.

Day One. The moment I landed in India I started counting down the days, hours and minutes until I could go back home again. That didn't help because it made the trip feel even longer. Do you know the sentence: 'Time flies when you're having fun?' Well the opposite is true too. At the airport, in Mumbai, I was picked up by my driver. He was a nice man that brought me to my hotel , but somehow I still got panic attacks. I was aware of everything that was happening around me. I got the feeling that people were watching me and wanted to attack me. The temperature in India was also really different from the Netherlands. It was scorching and moist, and the air was polluted. At the same time, I noticed that the hygiene wasn't really great, which reminded me about a tip that I got from my brother: "Watch what you eat in India because you will get sick." That sentence led to me not eating at all. I was already feeling shit, so I didn't want to become sick in India. I decided to go on a safe food program which meant: dry cookies, bottled water and maybe some bread. That safety food thing starved me out and didn't help me feel better. It made me feel worse and weaker than before. What's interesting is that things start to get blurry to me from this point. I only have a few image frames left of what I've experienced during those five days in India:



- I remember a police raid twice in one night at the club where I had to play
- I remember feeling anxious when I left my hotel room
- I remember playing at an after party with way too much liquor
- I remember waking up with my promoter next to me because he drank too much as well
- I remember thinking that the driver wanted to abduct me
- I remember being pulled over by the police because they said we drove through a red light when we really didn't

Well, there's a few more, but I forgot most of it. Somehow that just wasn't saved in my brain. Of the things that I also remember is that every moment when I was alone in my hotel room, which was most of the time, I tried facetimeing my girlfriend or mom. I was feeling so lonely that I wanted to have someone near me that I trusted. We didn't even have to speak to each other, the fact that facetime was on and that they could see and hear me was enough. I was feeling unsafe, and this helped me feel safer.

Somehow, I managed to play all of the gigs. I wanted to go back home every minute of the tour which made that tour feel like a month while it was just five days. To top things off, I got sick on the last day. When I arrived in the last hotel for the tour, I noticed that it was a really luxurious hotel.

Everything looked clean, the food looked amazing, and I was starved as hell so what do you think I did? I attacked the buffet. I was feeling starved, so I dove into it and ate as much as I could at that moment. That night, after my gig, my stomach started to rumble, and that's when I knew I made the wrong decision. I had to go to the toilet every 30 minutes since I had to throw up a lot and had severe diarrhea. Luckily, this happened on the last night, but I still had 24 hours left in India. Those 24 hours were loooooong. Again, I was facetimeing with my girlfriend or mom and asked them to come to pick me up at the airport in Amsterdam the next day. I didn't want to be alone when I came back, that's how bad I felt. I laid in bed the whole last day, watching Netflix and facetimeing before it was time for me to leave. Just one small problem, I was still sick. I had

to go to the toilet every half hour, and that kept on going for the rest of the night as well. At the airport and the airplane, I kept becoming sicker and sicker.

When I landed back in Amsterdam and saw my mom waiting for me at the gate, I burst into tears. I felt like a little kid that was abducted from his family for a year. The only thing I wanted to do was cry and feel like shit about myself. It was hard for me to describe my feelings and story to my mother in the car back because I somehow blocked everything. The only thing I knew was that this was really bad and I needed to get back on my feet soon because it was only May and my summer was fully booked so there was a lot more from where that came from.

### **Cancelling The Tour**

The rest of the summer I kept feeling like shit every time I had to play. As soon as I sat down in the car next to my tour manager, anxiety kicked in. We talked a lot about it during our rides together, but that didn't help. I couldn't find out what the problem was. I decided to visit a psychologist to see if she could tell me what was wrong. After a few visits, I knew what panic attacks were and how to deal with them. That helped me a bit in the flights whenever a panic attack occurred again, but it didn't fix my problem.

At the end of the summer, I played in Ibiza before my last tour: two weeks of touring through Asia. That was not what I was looking forward to. I felt like I had been stretching myself physically and mentally to the maximum for the past few months. I had already managed to continue DJing and traveling for a few months while feeling pretty bad, and I wasn't sure if I was able to handle this Asia tour on top of it. I kept having hope and trying to find the motivation, but I wasn't able to do it eventually. In September 2014 I collapsed mentally and physically.

I woke up on the morning that I had to leave for my two week Asia tour. My energy level was already drained because of the months and weeks before that had been heavy for me. I thought I could find the motivation and energy to do this tour as well, but when I woke up, I knew enough. I just didn't want to get out of bed because I didn't want to go into that airplane and do the tour. I kept crying and crying and decided to call my mom for help. "What am I supposed to do now?" I asked here. She answered the only sentence a good parent would give in a situation like that: "stay home and get some rest." And so I did. I called my manager and booker and told them that I wasn't able to go on tour. Everything needed to be canceled last minute which meant that most costs that were already made (flight tickets etc) were for me. "Are you sure you want to cancel the tour? There will be some consequences because it's so last minute, you have to understand that" my booker said. "Yes," I replied crying. "I don't care what needs to happen, but I'm not getting on that flight." At that moment, I didn't care anymore. To me, there was only one option, and that was staying at home. I still remember the second when I hung up the phone and officially canceled the tour, an enormous amount of weight fell off my shoulder. I also knew that this wasn't the end of the story. It was time to dig deeper into the core of what caused this feeling inside of me.

I must say that the business problems at that moment weren't that big of a pain in the ass. Aside from the money that I had to pay back (which killed my savings) I didn't really experienced anything else.

Just recently in 2019, I ran into one of the promoters that booked me on that tour. I haven't spoken to him ever since that moment so it was nice catch up for a while. He told me that I had put him in a bad situation because my problem became his when I decided to cancel the tour. That gave me a bad feeling. It was never my intention to hurt someone else with my decisions, but this was a decision that I had to make for myself.

## 2015

The year started badly for me. I was still feeling like shit, and after a few visits at the shrink, I still didn't feel like I was making progress. The panic attacks kept on kicking in, especially when I was feeling bad after a heavy night of partying or drinking. I remember this one day after Carnaval, a traditional Dutch party, I woke up and was feeling 'okay' for a change. I layed down on the couch with my breakfast to watch some TV, and suddenly the feeling of anxiety took over. I started sweating and panicking and wanted to leave the house, so I decided to take my stuff and go out for a walk. That was the most extended panic attack I had experienced in my life. Even the day after, I was still feeling the after-effects of it. Feeling like shit - and not knowing why - drains your energy. I was tired all day without doing anything. I wasn't tired because I worked out too much or because I didn't sleep enough. No, my brains were on steroids in this period. I also wasn't the best partner for my girlfriend because when I was at home, I was grumpy and negative. Now looking back, it must have been a hard time for her to live with me and not being able to help me because I completely blocked her out.

### **Sabotaging My Own Career**

Because I wasn't the best version of myself during this period, it all reflected on my career as well. As an artist, you are your business. So if you aren't doing well, your business isn't going to do well either. After canceling the tour in September 2014, I started restructuring my DJ life. I thought something went wrong in the traveling process first. Since I felt homesick in India and during the whole summer in 2014, I decided that I didn't want to travel too far anymore. That meant that I was cutting my gigs in Asia and the US. Personally, that felt like a great decision because it led to me not being away from home for long periods anymore, but for the business, this was the stupidest thing I could have done. Asian and American markets were exploding, and those were the continents where you could make real money at that moment as an artist. So deciding not to tour there cut a big chunk of my income but I never thought about that result of my decision at that moment.

I kept struggling with creating music in the studio as well. My first problem was that I didn't even feel like working or going to the studio. I first needed to find some motivation to actually get there. When I finally arrived to my studio, I needed to find creativity to produce new music. Most of the time this didn't work out, and I just kept on staring at my screen for the rest of the day, only to go back home at 17:00 and chill again. No progress was made at all.

Do you know that feeling of refreshing Facebook over and over again until you realize what you're doing? That was me.

My manager and booker were also left in the dark. I only communicated the necessary with them and instructed them to follow my orders if I wanted to change something like canceling out Asia or the US. They didn't know what was going on aside from the fact that they knew that I was feeling horrible. That was a bad decision. If they knew how I felt and what my emotions and thoughts were at that moment, it would have made the collaboration between us a lot better. A manager and booker work on percentage base, which means that the more you earn, the more they receive. So the minute I started to cut out markets like Asia and the US and wasn't productive in the studio anymore, they began to earn less on me as well. That led to me not being priority number one for them anymore, and I couldn't blame them for it. They have to make money too; as soon as their artist isn't making money anymore, they have to get it somewhere else. That doesn't mean that they don't contact you anymore and let you die without doing anything, but I got it from a business perspective. The personal perspective told me that those people should still contact you to see how you're doing and what they can do to help.

Because my income was getting less and less, I started to make weird business decisions. It's a classic mistake. I felt like a cornered animal that only had one option left: fight for his life. I started to accept all remix requests, even if it was for low fees and I didn't feel the original track. I began to release on labels that didn't fit my artist profile, but since they were the only one that wanted to release my music, I'd go with it. I started to take on gigs that weren't satisfying me etc.. Bad decision after bad decision was made which caused me to feel even more disconnected from my own artist brand.

## **New Challenges**

Since my music career wasn't doing too well, I started to look for another project to focus on. I needed something new, something fresh that could take my mind off all the shit that was going on in my life.

At that time, my label, Dubbed Records, was still active and still releasing music although the label also suffered under the circumstances. I decided that Dubbed was going to be my new project to build on and expand. Together with a friend who had a lot of great ideas for the brand, we decided to go onto this journey together. We spent hours and hours on building a new brand from Dubbed. We created our own clothing line, organized multiple parties and tried to sell self-created artworks. This project gave me a great motivational feeling because for the first time in a long period I felt like I had a purpose again. I had a reason to wake up and get out of bed.

Still, my music career was bleeding, and I didn't care. I started to feel that I was done with my music career. I couldn't find the passion anymore that got me into this whole thing. It felt like the fire inside me had died entirely. I didn't want to play anymore. I didn't want to travel anymore. I didn't want to release new music anymore. I was done.

After a few visits to a shrink, a friend of mine told me that maybe going to a career coach might help me. I had never heard of such a thing before, but I was so clueless at that moment that I was ready to try everything. I was also doing yoga to see if that would calm me down but so far, no success there.

## **Eureka!**

I was ready to go to my first meeting with the career coach, and I didn't have a clue what to expect. "What was this man going to tell me that could help me with my problems? It's not even career related!" I thought. I parked my car, walked to the building where the coach was located and entered an old house. I was told to wait in the waiting room, and while I was waiting there, I noticed numerous books around me about career decisions and self-help. This was new to me. I felt like I landed in some kind of spiritual house and if there's one thing that I'm definitely not, it's being spiritual. The thought of me feeling better because this man started to decline.

A door opened, and I was invited to come upstairs. Two stairs up and we arrived at the attic where there were two sofas, some boxes, and a whiteboard. He offered me to take a seat and so I did. I started to feel a bit nervous because I didn't want to explode in tears in front of this man. In the last few weeks, I felt like I could cry all day long, but I kept those emotions in and pushed them back. We started to talk about why I was there and what he could help me with. I kept my cool. After approximately 45 minutes, he asked me to stand up and to hold a pillow. "Think of this pillow to be all your negative emotions and feelings and hold it close to your chest," he said. In my mind I had to laugh. "What was he thinking?!" I thought. I stood up, took the pillow and pushed it against my chest, thinking about all the shitty things that were going on in my life and all the negative feelings that I had every day. I had to breathe heavily for a couple of seconds, and then he told me to throw away the pillow whenever I was ready. Again, I thought that he was crazy. What could a pillow do? I didn't believe in this shit. A few seconds later I was ready to throw away the pillow, and I burst out into tears. I still can't explain how it felt, but it all came it. After crying for a few minutes, I sat back down and took a sip of my water. "How does that feel?" he asked. "It feels like I just lost a hundred pounds," I answered. It really did.

A few sessions later, I was asked to take a personality and career test by my coach. I had to answer multiple questions, you know those questions that are all the same, but they rephrase them each time? This was one of those tests. The goal of this test was to find out if my personality would fit my current job.

For example, as a person, I love to work with people, but in my career, I was on my own for most of the time. I started filling in the form, and after a few minutes I was done. The results came in directly and my coach printed out both forms. When he showed me the graphs, I didn't know what to look for until he explained to me what I was looking at. The graph had two circles in it, and those circles had some peaks. Those peaks represented the things that were important, for example, money or being a manager. In the best result, you would see those two circles lining up with each other perfectly which meant that the things you prefer as a person also reflected in your job. With me, it was vice versa. All the things that I appreciated or I found to be important in life disconnected with what I was doing in my job. That's when I got my big 'eureka moment.' I was being confronted with all the things that I already knew but never really thought about. I knew it because I was feeling the results of it, but I couldn't put my finger on the problem until I saw this graph. Because of this graph, I could explain all the decisions that I had made in my career and why it lead me to where I was at that moment — being unhappy in a perfect life.

I left his office after this test to let things sink in. This was big news to me, and I still couldn't believe all the things I just found out. It explained so much to me that I started to rethink my whole life.

Every little piece of the puzzle fell into the right place, and I could finally see the whole picture.

Knowing what I knew at that moment it was time for me to make a decision. I knew I wasn't happy in my music career and that the last year-and-a-half was terrible. I tried to make it more comfortable for myself to maintain what I had, but it all ended to the same thing, me feeling unhappy as hell. I was lost in a maze where I would try every possible way to escape, but each path seemed to be a dead end. That feeling exhausted me. I didn't want to fight anymore. I was done trying, and, with the results of that test in the back of mind, I knew that this career wasn't a long term plan for me anyway.



## **That's It, I Quit!**

This was the moment when I started to get into my mourning period. I had to say goodbye to something that I loved, and that was hard to digest. I was used to waking up in the morning, grabbing breakfast, working on music, playing in the weekends, and make a living from it. I quit my school to pursue my dreams and what did I have left now? Nothing.

After a few weeks of thinking, my thoughts kept coming back to the same answer. I had to quit. I decided to have a meeting with my manager and booker to tell them the story and my conclusion. There wasn't another option left for me. This was what I had to do. I had to deal with everything that was still happening in my life, and finding a way to end it all nicely was part of it. Luckily, my team took it really well. They completely understood me and respected my decision which made things a lot easier for me. I was scared to end up in a really bad story about a deal that you had to pay off. At that moment, my savings were running low because I hadn't really made any money in the past year and I had spent money on the canceled tour. My bank account was taking a lot of hits lately, and I couldn't take much more.

Now that the business side was finished there was only one thing left to do. Tell the fans. The thought of me quitting gave me a great feeling. It gave me a feeling of freedom. Somehow I felt trapped in my own life for a few years, and I finally got a way out. I decided to create a video with all the highlights of my career. I spent a full day diving into the files to find the best pictures and videos of my career; it was beautiful to relive those moments again. It felt great to see how much I had accomplished in those years, but it also felt weird to be so happy with something that made my life so shitty. After a couple of hours of editing, I finally had the result. A video of all my highlights, supported by an acoustic version of my track "Life is calling." That title was pretty ironic because I really felt like life was calling. It was time for me to move on.

It was 18:45 and I just had dinner with my girlfriend back home where I was planning to post the video at 19:00 because that's when I had the most reach on Facebook. The whole day I managed to control my emotions. Normally, I cry with every emotional moment in a movie, but somehow this video didn't do anything to me. It was 18:55 and I decide to go and sit on the couch to prepare my post. I had also created a small little text to explain what was going to happen; still no emotions. My girlfriend was in the kitchen at 19:00 and I was sitting on the couch ready to push 'publish.' "Are you still 100% sure that you want to do this?" She asked. "Yes, 200% sure," I replied, and I clicked publish. The moment I hit the button, I burst out in tears, and that freaked out my girlfriend pretty much. "What's going on? You're still sure you want this right? Why are you crying??" She said. "Yes I'm really sure about it, but somehow it feels like..." I said. "It feels like what?" She asked. "It feels like I am burying myself," I replied. That moment and feeling is still etched in my brain. The moment I pushed the publish button, it literally felt like I was burying myself and was witnessing my own death. It felt tragic and relieving at the same time. A few moments later I calmed down, and I still was happy with my decision. The door was finally closed behind me, and now it was time to go.

Time for a new chapter in my life.

## 2016

After I decided to quit my artist career, my panic attacks started to disappear. Sometimes they still popped up, but they declined a lot in frequency.

Funny enough, I always thought that the industry would turn itself against me as soon as I would put out the video. Somehow this topic of burning out as an artist still felt taboo. That's why I was blown away by all the kind messages that I received from not only fans but also people from the industry. I had never expected them to care about me that much. It meant so much to me to see that they actually cared about how I was doing. They also started to ask what happened because no one really knew what was going on deep inside me.

### **Something's off...**

Now that my career was gone and my panic attacks reduced, I thought I was doing well, but, somehow, I still felt like something was off in my life. I was sure that my decision to quit DJing was the right decision, but I felt like there was something else that I needed to spend some time on. As I mentioned before, I hadn't been the best boyfriend during this period. I was cynical, grumpy, and not capable of thinking about other people's feelings or opinions. I totally neglected my girlfriend in this period, and our relationship suffered from it. The more I started to think about it, the more I began to notice it. We had changed in those years. The first time I met her, I was a different kid. I was full of energy and ready to take over the world with my music. I wasn't scared of anything in the world and did whatever I thought I had to do. You could see the passion for music and my career in my eyes. All of this was gone. Now, I was a guy that didn't have a purpose in his life. Woke up without a reason to live, had no money and no future goals. I wasn't the boy who she fell in love with five years ago. After a few months of making each other's life miserable, we decided to end our relationship. It just didn't work out. I wasn't making her happier, and I first needed to get myself back on track again to be capable of making someone else happy.

## **Rock Bottom**

I moved back in with my parents. I still remember entering my old bedroom on the day that we moved all my stuff from my apartment to my parents' place. I laid down on my old bed, stared at the ceiling and said to myself: "this is it, rock bottom." I had nothing left in my life except for my family and friends. My career was done, my relationship just ended, and I had no place to live. I started crying in bed, not knowing what to do. Ending the relationship with my girlfriend felt like the right decision, but at the same time, it also didn't. I just lost the last thing that I had in my life, and here I was, laying in my old bed staring at the ceiling without any plan or idea how to get further.

After a few weeks of living with my parents and not having a job, my mom told me to go and find a regular job. I had been DJing since I was a little kid and was used to making my own money with it; thus I never had a 'real' job. I didn't know how it was to work for a boss or to have a fixed income. The most normal things in life felt surreal to me and since I was looking for a 'normal' life, looking for a job was the right decision at the right time. After having that conversation with my mom, I opened up my Facebook page, and I noticed a message there stating that they were looking for employees in a clothing factory. It would be a temporary job for three months, and it would be four days a week. Finding a job wasn't the hardest part for me. The hardest part was that I had to take the hit to my ego that I went from being this 'big time DJ' to 'being an employer in a factory.' That thought scared me because I always thought that even though I had success in my life, I still remained to be the same simple guy from the Netherlands that knew that the life I was living, wasn't normal. Working for a fixed income in a factory was a dent to my ego. I felt like I was taking a step back and the thought of me thinking that scared me. What did I become? Did my career change me, even though I thought it didn't? Yes, it did, and I felt bad about it, really bad.

## **A Fight With Myself**

Although I didn't really feel like going to work in a factory, I still decided to go. One of the thoughts that helped me make this decision was that I had nothing to lose. I already had nothing! I woke up early to get ready to get to my first day of work in the factory. I prepared my lunch and stepped in my car. I knew that one of the two people working there was a woman that I knew. It was the mother of a boy who was in my old soccer team when I was a little kid. Her husband was my football coach for a while and knew who I was too. The fact that I knew someone who worked there freaked me out even more. What would she think of me? Would she think I'm a loser? Would she laugh about my situation? Once I arrived at the factory, I rang the doorbell, and a man let me in. This was the other person working there, and later on, that man was the person I would be working with for the upcoming three months. I entered the lunchroom where the woman I knew was already waiting for me. She obviously remembered me and started talking, "Hey Joey, it has been a long time! How are you doing? Funny to see you here, my boys already asked me if it really was you coming to work here, they didn't believe me because a big-time DJ like you shouldn't work in a place like this". Ouch. That hurt. Everything I was scared of happened in the first minute I came in. My ego was taking hit after hit and I didn't know how to handle it. I just kept smiling and being nice, but deep inside, I was dying. I just wanted to leave and never return.

A typical day in the distribution center looked like this: We came in around 08:00, had coffee together, worked until 10:00, had coffee again, worked, lunch at 13:00, worked, coffee at 15:00 and at 17:00 we were done and ready to go home again. The only job I had to do there was put pricing stickers on the clothing that came in. On a typical workday, thousands of pieces of clothing came in, and I had to price them, divide them under the affiliates and sometimes I had to bring them as well. During the whole day, I was standing next to the man who was running that distribution center for over 25 years, so you ended up talking a lot. This man was in his forties and had been working for the same company for over 25 years. This to me was special because I could never imagine myself doing that. I would go crazy! After a few days, I started to connect well with the kind man. We had great conversations about everything

and nothing, sang along to songs on the radio, and talked shit on everything we didn't like in life. During these conversations, we also talked a lot about my life. One of the things I remember him asking me was, "How does a guy like you, end up in a place like this?" Well, that was a great question and food for thought. I started explaining to him about my life, and he was obviously intrigued to hear all the stories I had to tell. The world I was living in was so different from the one that he was living. I told him about the successes in my career and the people that I worked. That impressed him, but still, he had this burning question: "How did you end up here?". When I told that part of my story, it all became clear to him. I also told him that I was lost in life and didn't know what to do next since I never graduated or had any other experiences in different work fields. I told him that this was a temporary thing for me because I wanted to feel how it's like to live a different life. He respected me, and I respected him after hearing his story as well.

After a few weeks, I really started to get along with him. We had a great time working together, as well with the mom of my old friend that was still working there. We had a lot of fun during the day, worked hard but also had deep conversations about life. These people helped me get back on track again. The clear and open vision they had in life helped me see things differently. It gave me a different perspective on my own life and how I approached it. In combination with the work I was doing all day long, this job was perfect for me at that moment. I had nothing to worry about, had a fixed income, worked from 8 till 5 four days a week, and when I was done, my phone didn't ring, no email came in, or no one texted me. I calmed down and found back the quietness in my life. I finally felt like I had balance in my life again.

Because I had all the time in the world to think about my life during this job, I also had time to think about my next step. I really liked this job, but I also knew this wasn't my dream job so what should I do next? Do I still want to work in the music industry? Can I do something else without a piece of paper?

## **Getting Back Into The Music Industry**

After working in the distribution center for three months, they asked me to stay a bit longer because they needed the help and I liked working there. I didn't have anything else to do so I decided to stay. A few months later, a friend of mine from the music industry approached me. He was working at a record label and informed me about the fact that they were looking for a project manager. I immediately replied, and since I already knew the owner because I had released a couple of songs there in the past, I was invited for a job interview. The interview went great. We had a great connection, and since I was so experienced in the music industry and was excited to learn something new, they hired me. After six months of working in the distribution center, I went back to working in the music industry, this time in the background.

## **Artist Coaching**

During this period, I also started thinking about my own career. The entrepreneurial vibes still hadn't left my body, so I wanted to create something on the side for myself. Something that would bring me happiness and gave me some extra income. In my own career, there were a lot of moments where I could have needed help from someone that was experienced and who knew the music industry- some kind of mentor. I could have also used someone that might have prevented me from making the wrong decisions, especially at the end of my career. I could have also used someone neutral in this industry. Since everyone was working on percentage-based fees, no one could really be neutral when it came down to making decisions- at least that's how I always felt about it. I decided to combine all these things with a few more and become a coach. The idea of a coach came to me because the career coach really helped me and that got me thinking why there wasn't a person like this for artists specifically. I started googling and found out that it just didn't exist, at least not in the form that I wanted it to be, and that's when I decided to start a new company called Artist Coaching.

I started to rebrand my social media pages to my new Artist Coaching brand. I also began to create content around topics that artists were struggling with in their career, and after a few days, the first clients came in. In the beginning, it all felt a bit weird. I didn't really know what to expect, and the first clients didn't really seem to be interested in coaching but more in meeting me. I still remember one of the first clients. I opened up Skype because our meeting was scheduled at that time and I called my client. The moment the video went on, he started screaming and yelling from excitement, not believing it was really me who he was talking to. It wasn't someone who was interested in my coaching services, but he wanted to have a chat with his favorite artist. I needed to find out a way to make this change, and I knew it was going to take some time for people to understand that things have changed for me now. I kept doing what I was doing. Created a shitload of content and interacted with everyone online. At one point, I remember doing coaching calls on my way back in the car from my current job at the record label. Things were getting a bit too busy because my evenings and weekends were now dedicated to coaching and that's not what I wanted. I wanted a life where I could be off in the weekends and spent time with my beloved ones. That's the whole reason why I decided to quit my artist career, and now I was doing it again. It was time to make another decision.



## 2017

### Decisions

In September of 2017, I made another difficult decision in my life. I was working as a freelancer at a record label which I really liked. I worked with the staff and in the background of the music industry, but something was still off. I was missing the feeling of having something of my own and having the freedom to be in charge of my own time. I wanted to be an entrepreneur again, and the fact that my coaching was doing so well allowed me to make a decision. After working at the record label for precisely one year, I decided to go all in to my coaching business. I was making just enough money to pay my bills, but there still was a risk to it. I needed more time because I wanted to create more content and get more clients in, but my current job was blocking that opportunity. The moment I resigned from my job, I felt free again. Not because the record label treated me bad or anything but because now I was back in my old habitat. A world where I could decide what to do, when and where to do it. I had a lot of time again so I started to create even more content and that's where things took off even more. More clients came in, and my business exploded!

At that same time, I also decided to move in together with my new girlfriend who I met a few months before. Both my private life and career were back on track, and I started to feel like myself again. I started reading a lot more about mental health and overall happiness. I still wasn't done with exploring what happened to me. I had answers to a lot of my questions, but not all of them, and my body and brain kept surprising me with actions that I didn't expect. I wanted to find answers for everything that was happening and for the first time I actually managed to get them myself. This was a weird experience for me because I never liked school and I never liked studying, but now I actually did. I was intrigued by all the stuff that I found out about the human body and brain.

I decided to create a life for myself, created by my own decisions and on my own terms.

## 2018

Life changed a lot for me in the past few years. My career had changed, my relationship had changed, and I changed as a person. I had learned so much stuff about myself, my brain, and body that helped me to get through this and build an even happier and better life.

This year I was becoming a dad of a little girl. Crazy how life can go right?

If you had told me three years ago that I would be an Artist Coach with a different girlfriend and a daughter, I would have laughed but somehow it all happened, and I'm happy it did.

My business is doing well, and I keep on developing my skills. I decided to study again and get better as a coach. I continue to read and listening to audio books. I even get to travel again for work, but now I don't have to play. I get to talk and spread my experiences and knowledge about the artist life. I've picked up my workouts again and have started to work more and more on my health. Not only physical health but also the mental part. I'm feeling stronger and happier than ever, and I'm ready for what's next to come.

**My life didn't go as planned, and that's ok.**

## What went wrong

When I started Djing as a little kid, I never thought about how this could end. I was an enthusiastic young guy who liked music. I never thought about touring the world, making money with music, or releasing my own music. I had no goals; I just wanted to learn how to DJ and play at parties.

Because of all the minor successes that I had in my career (playing in my hometown - getting signed on a big label - Playing in different countries etc.) I started to become a successful artist in a real slow tempo. I never really realized what happened until a few years ago when I already quit DJing. I still remember the feeling that I got when I decided to quit. It felt like I had stepped out of a moving train - a train that I had entered ten years ago, started driving, and now ten years later, felt like I was lost.

The moment I decided to quit school and go all in on my music, I decided to convert my hobby into my work. But, that's not how I had experienced it at that moment. I thought it was a great way to make money with something that I loved to do. The minute music became my work, something changed.

To me, the most significant change was the financial pressure. Now I really had to make money and earn a decent income out of it because there were bills to pay and a future to build. That financial stress killed me. I am a guy who refreshes his bank account ten times a day to be sure to know what's going on. Having a buffer and a stable income was essential to me, but I found out about this too late. An artist life is everything but stable. I never had a moment in my career where my income was stable enough, and that freaked me out. I was stressing each month about the financial part, and that reflected on my creative input.

Here's the biggest thing that went wrong:

As an artist, you create a second personality inside yourself. You name it and start performing with it. In my case, that other personality was JoeySuki. The problem was that my fans only saw me as JoeySuki and completely ignored Joey Lelieveld. I can't blame them because that was how the world works. I don't see Daft Punk as Thomas & Guy-Manuel either, but to me, it didn't feel right. Being a DJ and performing under a different name isn't enough to get you off your game. People started calling me JoeySuki in my time off, each private party that I attended the conversations were about JoeySuki.

"How was your weekend?", "Where did you play?", "What's next to come for you" just a few questions that were asked to me regularly. Again, I get why people would ask these things because they were genuinely interested in my life. The problem was, it wasn't MY life; it was JoeySuki's life. Each conversation that I had in my private and business life were built around JoeySuki. It felt like Joey Lelieveld didn't even exist anymore.

JoeySuki took over during the years. Joey Lelieveld ceased to exist, and everything in my life was built around my artist brand. I completely got disconnected with who I was as a person. I was living like I was a brand neglecting my own personality.

Because I was DJing under the name JoeySuki for such a long period (over ten years), my subconsciousness started to give me signs that something went wrong, hence the panic attacks. I ignored the first signs but after a while, they become too heavy, I was forced to listen to them.

Something went wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on the problem.

When I started to dig deeper into myself after getting the ultimate sign from my subconsciousness (the burnout - crying in bed and not being able to go on tour), I found out so much about myself that I started to feel like I had to get to know myself again. I completely forgot what made me happy, what my hobbies were or what I liked to do in my spare time. If you'd asked me what

JoeySuki wanted, I would have hit you with my goal list, but when it came down to Joey Lelieveld, I blacked out.

Somehow during those years, I created an internal conflict between those two personalities. It literally felt like I was schizophrenic.

After deciding to quit, I entered a period of 'finding myself.' This sounds really vague, but I can't seem to find better words for it because that's what it was. I needed to find Joey Lelieveld again and find out what he liked, what made him happy in life, and that was a tougher job then I'd expected.

Knowing what I know now, I would have done so many things differently in my career. I would have started with the thing that I've ended with: getting to know myself better.

I was making decisions in my career that were based on other people's opinions just because I didn't know who I was. The minute you start doing that, it's done. You won't notice the result of such a bad decision in the short term, but in the long run it will come back and hit you in the face. With a chair. Made of steel.

As an artist, knowing who you are is one of the most important things to have. If you know who you are and what you represent, you will be able to build the strongest artist brand and become the biggest artist in the world.

Releasing your music, posting on social media or performing at gigs will suddenly not be a problem anymore because you don't care what other people think about you. You know who you are, and that's all you need to know.

You do you.

## Life Lessons Learned

Looking back at my artist career I can say that I've learned some valuable lessons from what I've experienced. I would like to share the most valuable ones with you.

**1) You are priority number one in your own life**

No matter what happens, take care of yourself first. Think about what happens with casualties in an airplane when the air masks drop down. You first have to save yourself before you are capable to help someone else.

**2) You are the only one that has to live with the consequences of your decisions**

Every decision you make in your life will have consequences, positive or negative. Always be aware of the fact that you are the only person who needs to live with those consequences. There's no one else to blame.

**3) Everything is stupid until it's not**

Everytime you are going to start something new, people will tell you that it's stupid. Remember the first time you told your friends you were going to be a DJ? Right... Don't let other people's opinions stop you from doing what you want to do. Once you've achieved your goal, people will see it's actually not stupid at all.

**4) Surround yourself with people that add a positive value to your life**

You will be infected by the people you hang with. Successful people will motivate you to do more, and losers will try to drag you into their shitty life. Be wise with deciding who your friends are.

**5) A good partner is the best lifehack you will ever find**

It's called a cliché for a reason because everyone experiences the same thing. Having a partner that supports you in what you love to do the most is one of the most valuable things in life.

**6) Life is a marathon, not a sprint**

Be patient and realise you're still young. Success isn't built in two days; some things take time.

**7) No one knows what they are doing**

This quote helped me to understand that I wasn't the only one who didn't know what I was doing. No one can look into the future or knows what's coming next. The only thing we can do is make decisions based on our current knowledge and adjust along the way.

**8) Energy flows where focus goes**

If you want something, focus yourself on that goal and it will become reality. If it isn't happening, you're not putting in enough effort.

**9) Learn how to say no**

This is something I should have learned in the beginning of my career. Saying no would have made my life so much easier. Saying no also means that you're making a decision for you, not for someone else.

**10) Trust your gut feeling**

You're gut never lies.

**11) Don't believe everything you think**

That little voice inside the back of your head isn't you. It's there but it isn't you. So don't believe everything it has to say.

**12) The harder you work, the luckier you get**

I don't believe in luck. Luck is something that is being created by decisions that you've made in the past. In that way you've created your own luck.

**13) Be a product of your choices not of your circumstances**

Don't let other people decide what's going to happen in your life. Take control of your own life and start making decisions for yourself.

**14) You are your own worst enemy**

The hardest part of life is mastering your own mind. As soon as you know how your body and mind work and how you can control it, you're on top of the world.

**15) Life is about making mistakes**

Mistakes make sure that you keep evolving as a person. If there were no mistakes to be made, there would be no reason for progress in your life.

**16) You never know who you're affecting**

I found out about this after my music career. You never know who you're affecting with what you're doing. It could be your music, it could be that thing you said to them. Sometimes something hits at the right moment at the right time so don't wait for the right moment to do something.

**17) You're either getting better or you're getting worse**

There is no ultimate middle, there's always room for progress.

**18) Clear communication is key in life**

What we communicate through our mouths decides on how the world sees us. Take a second before you actually say something and think it through. Timing matters.

**19) Be a nice person**

Being nice will always help you in life. No one wants to live or work with an asshole.

**20) Don't fool yourself**

It's easy to get lost in your own lies. Don't fool yourself; be honest with yourself. Are you really tired or do you just feel like Netflixing? Are you really hungry or do you just feel like eating?



Thanks to everyone who supported me during the good and bad times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive letter 'J' with a horizontal stroke extending to the right.