

Josh Cutler's Diary: Some Context and Themes  
October 9, 2024

1996 • What was going on in that year?

- The Internet's World Wide Web was only 3 years old. There were no social media in use by adults or adolescents. There were about 400,000 individual domains on the WWW (compared to 359,000,000 active sites in 2024 & 1.98 billion total domain names registered).
- President Bill Clinton was re-elected to a 2<sup>nd</sup> term. The events of 9/11 were still 5 years ahead.
- Tupac Shakur was assassinated.
- Both Tom Holland and Zendaya were born.
- The top films of 1996 were *Independence Day* followed by *Twister* and *Mission: Impossible*.
- In 1996 the nine-most important companies in the US were General Motors Corporation, Ford Motor Company, Exxon Corporation, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., AT&T Corp., International Business Machines Corporation, General Electric Company & Mobil Corporation.
- In 2022, the nine most important companies worldwide were Apple, Microsoft, Saudi Aramco, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway, Tesla, UnitedHealth Group, Johnson & Johnson. Note that no 1996 corporation was as important in 2022 and that the earlier list includes mostly industrial and oil companies.

Cultural/Socio-economic Situation of Family

- Only child of two upper middle-class professionals (mother-professor; father-lawyer)
- Attends exclusive private school (St. Ann's) in Brooklyn
  - 2023-2024 Tuition for High School: \$57,650 + mandatory activity fee of \$475
  - School enrollment: ca. 1,025 to 1,075 students from preschool through Grade 12
  - Strong emphasis upon the creative arts
- National Public Radio (NPR): Who listens? Recent research summarizes its listeners in this way

Today's (2020s) public radio listeners come from all age groups. The largest portion of listeners skews 35+, reaching an audience of established listeners and viewers who are leaders in their personal and professional networks. About half are between 25 and 54 years old....Historically, most public radio listeners at NPR News stations were white. But today's NPR includes Latinx and Black listeners....Public radio listeners typically fall into higher household income (HHI) categories and have for years. This is primarily related to the fact that households that listen to public media tend to have more formal education than non-public media households. The median HHI of an NPR News listener is approximately \$103,000 per year. [<https://blog.marketengenuity.com/by-the-numbers-who-is-actually-listening-to-public-radio>]

## Themes

1. Normality
  - a. Am I normal?
  - b. Difference between how I look and how I act.
  - c. Believes others seen him as a “wacko...a loony bird” which with TS makes him a “double loony bird and I go over the edge”
2. Where do I fit in with peers?
  - a. TS has put off some of his peers who find him annoying.
  - b. Unsure of how he would be received with tape recorder.
  - c. Difficulty in relations with girls in peer group whom he pushes away
3. Internal pressures of tics which he can't control
  - a. Likens tics to “big balloon inside my stomach” that gets bigger and can't be controlled. Suggestion that his tic may be like an exploding balloon.
  - b. Tries to control tics in school (only partially successful) vs. allowing them to erupt at home
  - c. Can't control what comes out of his mouth (vs. control of bowels)
4. Home
  - a. Needing to push parents (mother) away; need to be independent
  - b. Feeling he is under constant maternal scrutiny (are you spying on me? Being asked about his disability all the time)
  - c. His lack of normality is also shared with his parents
5. Obesity and ugliness of others (including a Tourette teen)
6. Pranks
  - a. Call to a school for help with an “emotionally disturbed child”
  - b. Call to a health club for help with weight reduction of 800 lb. male

## Possible Interpretation

At age 10, Josh Cutler, a student at a prestigious school in Brooklyn and child of a well-to-do professional couple in Manhattan, was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome (TS). The symptoms of TS involve tics, that is, noises and other disruptive actions which other students tend to find annoying even though they have some positive regard for Josh. As he grew up through his late childhood and into adolescence, he came to experience himself at least in part through the eyes of others as externally a reasonably handsome male, but internally as someone who is crazy, strange, and unsure of himself among his peers. He has the recurring experience of losing control of expressing tics which may then be reflected in his regular references to obese people (who presumably have little control over their food consumption). He doesn't seem to have any relationship with a teenage girl. As an only child, Josh has been the constant concern of his mother (and, perhaps, his father who is absent from this recorded diary). At a time of life when teens seek to gain a measure of independence from their parents, Josh experiences his mother, at least, as both intrusive and overly focused on his TS disability. His agreement to engage in a recorded diary project for NPR may reflect his understanding that there is a measure of stature among more upper-class adults and, possibly, other teens to be associated with NPR.