"THE SECRETS OF AN UBER DRIVER"

"And So We Begin"

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US Copyright Registration PA 2-510-840
WGA-E Registration I374571

Adapted for Audio by James Lantos

FINAL DRAFT PODCAST FORMAT v1.0

Character List

MICHAEL "MIKE" SULLIVAN (47)
Former programmer turned internet entrepreneur struggling to make ends meet. Intelligent, introspective, and trying to find his place in the world while caring for his ill mother.

SUZANNE SMITH (52)
Retired College professor, Mike's longtime friend and (soon) former roommate. Sharp-witted, direct, with a dry sense of humor. Originally from New York.

DAVID ALVAREZ (65)
Retired high school Spanish teacher, Mike's friend and philosophical mentor. Cuban-American, well-read, with a particular fondness for Thoreau.

TOM SULLIVAN (47)
Mike's brother. More conventionally successful, hippy-ish, co-worker at high school with David Alvarez. Jointly responsible for mother's care but does little to help Mike with taking care of her. Always finding excuses not to help.

MARGARET SULLIVAN (72)
Mike and Tom's mother, suffering from advancing dementia. Former artist and art teacher.

CARLOS RODRIGUEZ (32)
Successful Uber driver who Mike realizes lives nearby after Mike becomes a driver. They develop a friendship. He becomes Mike's informal mentor in navigating the streets and the business. Street-smart and ambitious, from Guatemala.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS:

DANNY CHEN (19)
Harvard philosophy student, Mike's first passenger

CHARLOTTE FOSTER (35)
Blind passenger with a guide dog

BRIAN LEE (20)
Famous gaming personality ("RiceGum")

NURSE SARAH MURPHY (45)
Night shift worker

COLD OPEN

(SFX: SOFT WINTER WIND, DISTANT TRAFFIC)

(SFX: CAR HEATER RUNNING, LOW)

MIKE (V.O.)
(reflective, intimate)
Finally, one day I got up the nerve to go out and see how this thing worked.

(SFX: PHONE NOTIFICATION - UBER APP PING)

MIKE (V.O.)
I had bought one of those dashboard cell phone holders, and plunked down $100 on a dashboard GPS at Costco--which I later realized I didn't need--and ultimately gave away. Then I drove down to MicroCenter in Cambridge and parked in their parking lot. It was a snowy day, February 3, 2014. I figured this might be a good spot, near Harvard and MIT. There would probably be people wanting to hail an Uber around there.

(SFX: WIND GUST, THEN SETTLING)

MIKE (V.O.)
They say every journey begins with a single step. In Boston, that step usually involves admitting you have no idea where you're going.

(SFX: MULTIPLE UBER APP NOTIFICATIONS IN QUICK SUCCESSION)

(SFX: PLASTIC FUMBLING WITH PHONE MOUNT)

(SFX: MORE APP PINGS GETTING REJECTED)

CARLOS (O.S.)
(shouting over wind)
Hey! Need some help with that?

(SFX: SNOW CRUNCHING FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING)

MIKE
I've got it, I just--

(SFX: ANOTHER PING, REQUEST EXPIRED TONE)

MIKE
--meant to do that.

CARLOS
(reaching through window)

Here, before you lose all your rides for the night.

(SFX: PLASTIC CLICKING AS MOUNT IS ATTACHED)

(SFX: PHONE BEING SECURED INTO MOUNT)

MIKE
Thanks. I'm Mike.

CARLOS
Carlos. And you live in the building next door, right? I've seen you around.
(grin in his voice)
You know, you can do well with this gig if you do things right.

MIKE
(skeptical)
Yea? How long have you been doing this? How much do you make a week if I may ask?

CARLOS
I make two grand a week doing this. Been doing it about a year myself.
(grinning)

MIKE
Two thousand? A week? Holy Shit. Are you serious?

CARLOS
Strategy, my friend. But first, you need to survive night one.
(points at phone)
You might want to actually accept a ride after you are finished with your testing.

ACT ONE

(MFX: TRANSITION MUSIC - CONTEMPLATIVE PIANO WITH URBAN UNDERTONES)

SCENE: MIKE'S APARTMENT - EARLIER THAT MONTH

(SFX: KEYBOARD TYPING)

(SFX: COMPUTER MOUSE CLICKS)

(SFX: PHONE BUZZING ON DESK)

MIKE (V.O.)
A month earlier, I was still trying to figure it all out. My Internet business was barely breaking even, and the bills... they just kept coming.

(SFX: PAPER RUSTLING - BILLS BEING MOVED)

(SFX: PHONE NOTIFICATION - TEXT MESSAGE)

AUTOMATED VOICE (filtered)
"Complete your registration today!"

(SFX: PHONE RINGING WITH DISTINCTIVE TONE)

MIKE (V.O.)
Tom. My brother. Always calling, never helping.

(SFX: CALL GOING TO VOICEMAIL)

TOM (voicemail)
Mike, it's Tom. Again. Mom's facility called about the payment. Listen, I know you're handling things, but I've got Johnny's squash tournament this weekend in Connecticut, and--

(SFX: VOICEMAIL BEING CUT OFF)

(SFX: LAPTOP KEYS TYPING)

(SFX: MOUSE CLICK)

SCENE: SUZANNE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN

(SFX: COFFEE BREWING)

(SFX: KITCHEN SOUNDS - CUPS, SPOONS)

(SFX: MORNING BIRDS THROUGH WINDOW)

SUZANNE
Uber? You're going to drive for Uber?

MIKE
Just part-time. A few hours here and there.

(SFX: COFFEE BEING POURED)

SUZANNE
And your mother's appointments? And the business?

MIKE
I can manage it. The beauty of "setting your own schedule," right?
(beat)
Besides, I need to get out more. Working from home, managing remote programmers, taking care of Mom... I'm starting to have conversations with my historical prints.

SUZANNE
I actually think this is a good idea, Mike. You know I told you

that you need to be out of here by the end of the month. We've been friends for years. But I think this is for the best. And I think this will help you make the extra money you need.

MIKE
Nine years -- the longest I've ever lived with anyone.

SUZANNE
We're more than roommates. You helped me through with my career switch ... I helped with your mom... We've been through a lot. But we both know that we need more space.

MIKE
Which is exactly why I need to go. Before we go another round of Yankees vs. Red Sox when the new season starts.
(beat)
Besides, my credit's finally recovered. Time to stand on my own two feet.

(SFX: COFFEE CUP BEING SET DOWN)

SUZANNE
This isn't just about making rent, is it?

MIKE
The facility's threatening to kick Mom out. Tom's about as helpful as a GPS in the Big Dig. My Internet business is barely breaking even...
(sighs)
I need to be with people. I can't stand being at home all the time. This isn't what I thought being an entrepreneur was all about. I need something different. Something real.

SUZANNE
And you think you'll find that driving strangers around Boston?

MIKE
I think I'll find something. Even if it's just the answer to why anyone would build a city with this many one-way streets.

SCENE: ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY

(SFX: INSTITUTIONAL AMBIANCE)

(SFX: DISTANT TV SOUNDS)

(SFX: WHEELCHAIR MOVEMENT)

(SFX: BIRDS AT WINDOW FEEDER)

MIKE
It's just part-time, Mom. A few hours in the evenings.

MARGARET

(distant)
Seymour never liked driving in the city.
(sharper suddenly)
Tom called this morning. Something about a tournament?

MIKE
Yeah, Johnny's squash tournament. In Connecticut.

MARGARET
He's always going somewhere, that boy. Cuba, Vietnam, Connecticut. How about a visit to Brighton to see his mother?
(confused)
Have you seen my art supplies? I need to finish grading the students' work...

(SFX: WHEELCHAIR SQUEAKING AS MIKE KNEELS BESIDE IT)

MIKE
Mom, you retired from teaching five years ago.

MARGARET
Did I?
(looking at photos)
You boys were so little then. Always fighting. Are you still fighting?

MIKE
That was 40 years ago. We're still working on it, Mom.

MARGARET
(suddenly clear)
No, you're not. He leaves everything to you. You don't have to tell me.
(beat)
Promise me you'll write it all down, Michael. The stories, the moments... that's all we have in the end.

(SFX: BIRDS CHIRPING AT FEEDER)

SCENE: WALDEN POND - SUNSET

(SFX: WATER LAPPING AT SHORE)

(SFX: AUTUMN WIND IN TREES)

(SFX: GRAVEL CRUNCHING UNDER FEET)

(SFX: DISTANT NATURE SOUNDS)

DAVID
So you're finally leaving the house? Besides our walks, I mean.

(writing sounds)

MIKE
Uber driver. Can you believe it?

Pretty sure Thoreau didn't have to deal with surge pricing. Or the Massholes.

DAVID
(smiling)
No, but there were certainly Massholes back then. He may have been the first to speak about them, actually. But he also understood something you're about to learn. Every person carries a universe inside them. Even the ones going to Logan at rush hour.

(SFX: PEN WRITING IN NOTEBOOK)

MIKE
Still working on the poems?

DAVID
Always. Life gives us too much material to ignore.
(gestures around)
Like this moment - the light on the water, the conversation between old friends...

MIKE
You should see the conversations I have with my remote programmers. Though those are less "poetic" and more "why isn't this code working?"

DAVID
(chuckling)
Maybe that's why you need this change. To find new conversations.
(beat)
Your mother still writing in her journals?

MIKE
When she remembers. Some days she can't even remember what year it is.
(bitter)
Tom's real helpful with that too.

DAVID
And how is Mr. Important these days?

MIKE
Still important. Still busy with Johnny's tournaments. Meanwhile, I'm trying to figure out how to keep Mom in the facility...

DAVID
Perhaps driving will help. Give you perspective.

MIKE

Or an ulcer.

DAVID
(laughing)
Life is short, amigo. Even in Boston traffic.
(beat)
You know, Thoreau, despite the Wildman that he was...
(looks at Mike and pauses with a curious grin)
.....he still had his mother doing his laundry on the weekends.
(points up to the other side of the pond where they are seated on the shore, toward Concord)

(SFX: BOTH LAUGHING)

DAVID
It took him 2 years to find his voice out here. You will find yours.
(shows his notebook)
That's why we write things down.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(MFX: TRANSITION MUSIC)

SCENE: MIKE'S CAR - HARVARD SQUARE

(SFX: CITY TRAFFIC AMBIANCE)

(SFX: CAR INTERIOR SOUNDS)

(SFX: GPS VOICE)

MIKE (V.O.)
So that was the test run. After doing this for a bit, I felt good and I headed home. Then next step was to then go out and actually do a ride for real.

I needed two days to chill from this test run to feel the confidence to go out and give this a try. February 5, 2014 was the day. It was around 1pm and I decided to head down to Harvard Square to see if I could find some business.

(SFX: UBER APP PING)

(SFX: GPS STARTUP)

SIRI (V.O.)
In 500 feet, turn right onto Mass Ave.

MIKE

(to himself)
Mass Ave. Simple enough. Just like the instructions say. Though in Boston, "simple" usually means "deceptively complicated."

(SFX: TRAFFIC MERGING)

(SFX: BICYCLE BELL)

(SFX: CAR HORN IN DISTANCE)

MIKE (V.O.)
I can do this.

SCENE: HARVARD SQUARE - PINOCCHIO'S PIZZA

(SFX: STREET AMBIANCE)

(SFX: CAR PULLING UP)

(SFX: CAR DOOR OPENING)

DANNY
First day?

MIKE
Yes! Today is my first day! How'd you know?

DANNY
Most drivers don't white-knuckle Mass Ave quite so intensely. I'm headed to the Science Center.

MIKE
The app says to take--

DANNY
There's construction on that route. Been watching drivers get stuck there all week.
(beat)
You know, this reminds me of something we just covered in Philosophy. The Cave allegory - about how what we think we know isn't always reality.

MIKE
Philosophy major?

DANNY
Hoping to be. Right now I'm just trying to figure out why we think we know what we know.
(gestures to traffic)
Like, how do we know this is the best route? What makes any choice better than another?

MIKE
In Boston? Usually it's whichever route has the fewest potholes.

(SFX: BOTH LAUGHING)

(SFX: TRAFFIC NOISE)

DANNY
You're not from here originally, are you?

MIKE
That obvious too?

DANNY
You still believe in things like "logical traffic patterns" and "roads that make sense."
(smiles)
Don't worry. That'll change.

SCENE: CHARLOTTE'S PICKUP

(SFX: CAR DOOR OPENING)

(SFX: DOG PANTING)

(SFX: ASSISTANCE WITH ENTRY)

CHARLOTTE
Most drivers cancel when they see the walking stick with the red tip and my dog.

MIKE
Are you serious? That is ridiculous. Obviously, their loss. I'm sure he's a better navigator than my GPS.

CHARLOTTE
(smiling)
You sound new at this.

MIKE
You can tell.

CHARLOTTE
You still care. It's refreshing.
(beat)
This city... it can be overwhelming when you can't see it. But you learn to feel it instead. The rhythm of the streets, the flow of people...

MIKE
How do you do it? Navigate all this?

CHARLOTTE
Same way you're learning to - one turn at a time. And you remember the important parts. MBTA now pays for these rides for blind people to use Uber. Can you believe it?! Something good from the

MBTA.
(beat)
I'm a librarian at the Perkins school. Nice to meet you.

SCENE: NIGHT SHIFT NURSE

(SFX: CAR DOOR OPENING - LATE NIGHT)

(SFX: HOSPITAL AMBIANCE FADING)

(SFX: TIRED FOOTSTEPS)

SARAH
You're new.

MIKE
(no longer asking how she knows)
First night.

SARAH
Night shift at Mass General. You see everything there. Tonight, I had a guy who swallowed his car key to hide it from his ex.

MIKE
You're kidding.

SARAH
Welcome to Boston healthcare. Every night's a story.
(yawns)
Sorry. Been on my feet for twelve hours.

MIKE
Get some rest. I'll wake you when we're there.

SCENE: CHARLES RIVER - SUNRISE

(SFX: EARLY MORNING RIVER AMBIANCE)

(SFX: DISTANT EARLY TRAFFIC)

(SFX: PHONE NOTIFICATION)

(SFX: TYPING ON PHONE)

(SFX: TEXT MESSAGE ARRIVAL)

MIKE (V.O.)
A text from David: "How was the first day?"

(SFX: TRAFFIC BUILDING)

(SFX: UBER APP PING)

MIKE

(to himself)
Maybe that's what this city needs. So many messages. So much confusion. Someone to remember these stories.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

(MFX: TRANSITION MUSIC)

SCENE: NEWBURY STREET

(SFX: STREET AMBIANCE)

(SFX: PHONE VOICE MEMO BEEP)

MIKE
Maybe that's what this is becoming... a way to remember it all. The blind woman who sees the city better than anyone, the Harvard kid turning Mass Ave into a philosophy lesson...
(checks Uber app)
Seven hundred and eighty dollars my first week. Not two grand but not too shabby.

(SFX: CAR DOOR OPENING)

(SFX: PASSENGER ENTERING)

MIKE
So what brings you to Boston?

BRIAN
Gaming convention. I'm a content creator. A gamer.

MIKE
What's a gamer?

BRIAN
(chuckles)
For real, man?

MIKE
Yea.

MIKE (V.O.)
I later realized that not knowing what a gamer was immediately told anyone under 30 how old I actually was.

BRIAN
I play video games, create content. Got millions of followers.

MIKE

Millions? Holy shit.

BRIAN
(beat)
I have half as many followers as Ninja.

MIKE
(Not having a clue what that means)
I'm in the wrong line of work. Thanks for sharing.

BRIAN
Nah man. You just gotta find your angle. Like this - driving, collecting stories. That could be something.

MIKE
You think?

BRIAN
Put it online. "Secrets of an Uber Driver" or something. People eat that stuff up.

(SFX: MIKE'S THOUGHTFUL SILENCE)

(MFX: SUBTLE REALIZATION THEME)

SCENE: ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY

(SFX: INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND NOISES)

(SFX: DISTANT MEDICAL CART ROLLING)

(SFX: MUFFLED TV FROM NEARBY ROOM)

TOM
You're doing what?

MIKE
Driving. Part-time.

TOM
Like a taxi? Seriously?

MARGARET
(to Tom)
Your father drove a taxi.

MIKE
He did not drive a taxi, Mom. And it was your father, the doctor, who served in WW2.

MARGARET
(to Tom, sharply)
At least he's here. When was the last time you...
(confused)

Is it time for my art class?

(SFX: UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE)

TOM
(to Mike)
The facility called again. They're talking about moving her to a different wing.

MIKE
Maybe if you helped with the care instead of--

TOM
I've got the kids', my job, my life.....

MIKE
Right. Your life is always bigger.
(beat)
I'm handling it.

SCENE: WALDEN POND - NEXT DAY

(SFX: WATER LAPPING AT SHORE)

(SFX: WIND IN TREES)

(SFX: NOTEBOOK PAGES TURNING)

DAVID
How many stories so far?

MIKE
Too many to count. Too many to remember.

DAVID
(tapping his notebook)
That's why we write.

MIKE
I can't exactly take notes while driving.

DAVID
(pulls out phone)
Modern problems, modern solutions, amigo.

(SFX: PHONE DICTATION BEEP)

MIKE
You're seriously suggesting I dictate notes between rides?

DAVID
Why not? You're already talking to yourself half the time anyway.
(grins)
Besides, every writer needs a method. Even Cervantes had to start

somewhere.

SCENE: SUZANNE'S APARTMENT

(SFX: PHONE BEING HANDED OVER)

(SFX: SCROLLING THROUGH NOTES)

SUZANNE
(scrolling through)
This is good, Mike. Really good.

MIKE
It's just notes.

SUZANNE
It's more than that. It's...

MIKE
A way to remember?

SUZANNE
A way to understand.
(beat)
You're really thinking about doing this full-time, aren't you?

MIKE
The business isn't working. Mom's care isn't getting cheaper. And Tom...

SUZANNE
Is still Tom.

(SFX: UBER APP PING)

SUZANNE
Go. Keep recording.

SCENE: ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY

(SFX: GENTLE AFTERNOON AMBIANCE)

(SFX: BIRDS AT WINDOW FEEDER)

MARGARET
(smiling)
You are writing stories.

MIKE
Learning to.

MARGARET
Good. Someone needs to remember.
(beat)

Did your brother call?

MIKE
He's busy, Mom.

MARGARET
(sharp again)
He's always busy. But you... you stay. You listen. You write it down.
(softer)
Don't stop writing it down, Michael.

SCENE: CHARLES RIVER - SUNSET

(SFX: WATER SOUNDS)

(SFX: EVENING BOAT HORNS)

(SFX: LIGHT TRAFFIC ON MEMORIAL DRIVE)

DAVID
So what happens next?

MIKE
More rides. More notes. Try to keep the business going somehow.

DAVID
And the stories?

(SFX: PHONE BEING TAKEN OUT)

(SFX: SCROLLING THROUGH NOTES)

MIKE
Maybe they're not just notes anymore. Maybe they're becoming something else.

DAVID
Like what?

MIKE
A record. A map. I don't know yet.
(beat)
But I think I need to find out.

(SFX: UBER APP PING)

(MFX: THEME MUSIC BEGINS TO FADE IN)

MIKE (V.O.)
Another story waiting to be told.

(MFX: THEME MUSIC SWELLS)

END OF EPISODE

(MFX: CLOSING THEME AND CREDITS)

[END OF SCRIPT]