

Mind Splinters:The Awakening
A.J. Donnelly

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CHAPTER 1

Max Daely hummed as he walked into the boy's locker room at Ridgeland Junior High School. After all, it had been a particularly good day. First he received an A- on his History exam, second his Math teacher was out sick so the class watched a movie and last but definitely not least Katy smiled at him in the hallway. But all that was about to change when he spotted Garrett Lokee and his friends huddled near his gym locker.

"Hey guys, the knitting class is downstairs," Max said with a dimple-inducing grin.

Garrett smiled an ugly crooked-teeth kind of smile as his two goons, Warren and Sil, encircled him.

"That's real funny smart guy," Garrett said. He then proceeded to crack his knuckles.

"I try," Max replied but beneath the sarcastic exterior his insides were churning.

Warren, a beefy boy with slicked-back blonde hair, threw Max hard against the row of lockers. He then grabbed Max's right arm and shoulder and pinned him against the lockers. Sil, a massive boy with more muscles than brains, only needed one hand to pin Max's left side to the lockers.

"Not laughing now are ya," Garrett said, relishing the moment.

Max opened his mouth to cry out for help but he was silenced when Garrett's fist drove into his stomach.

"I've been waiting a long time for this," Garrett said through gritted teeth. "This is for that day in gym." Another punch, this time to the kidneys.

Max gasped for air, his lungs on fire.

"And this is for getting me suspended for three days." Both fists, one after the other, slammed into Max's abdomen. He doubled over in pain as Garrett walked over to the locker room door and peered into the hallway. With a satisfied grin he rolled up his sleeves and returned to his helpless victim. "And this is just for fun."

Blow after blow rained down as Max tried to steel his body from the avalanche of hits, but Warren and Sil held his arms tight to his side making it virtually impossible to protect himself. The only thought in his head was to stop the pain but the only way to stop the pain was to stop Garrett.

Garrett shook his hands loose as he bounced up and down on the balls of his feet. The flush in his face matched his short-cropped curly red hair. "Hold 'em down," he said with a gesture to his two buddies. Warren and Sil

tightened their grip on Max's arms and forcefully bent him over at the waist.

Out of breath, Max tilted his head up to peer at Garrett. Staring into those blue eyes Max could see the pleasure the bully was getting out of the beating and that's when he knew that this would not be the last time this would happen. Garrett enjoyed terrorizing him too much to let bygones be bygones.

Max watched in slow motion as Garrett swung his right leg backwards. He realized his face was second's away from being shattered and there was nothing he could do to prevent it. He peered into Garrett's blue eyes and saw nothing but pleasure glaring back at him. Angered boiled from deep within and he let out a roar from the depths of his body.

For a split second Max felt something catch inside his head, like when a fish nibbles on a fishing rod, and then there was a sensation of being pulled into Garrett's mind. In the next moment Garrett's body went limp and lifeless. His momentum twisted his stout body around and caused him to crash onto his right side. Just then his body began to convulse; his arms and legs shaking as if a bolt of lightning had struck him, his eyelids aflutter, his pupils rolled to the back of his head.

"What's going on?" asked a wide-eyed Warren.

"I don't know," responded Sil in a panic, his acne even more pronounced by the flush in his cheeks. He and Warren released their hold on Max who looked as stunned as them.

Sil knelt down and grabbed Garrett by the shoulders and shook him. "Garrett. Garrett!" he screamed but there was no response. "Let's get out of here." He raced towards the exit without looking back, his massive frame quicker than Max would have thought. After taking one last look at his fallen buddy, Warren quickly followed suit.

Max stood rooted to the spot, staring at Garrett's spastic body. For a moment he shut down, completely unable to process what had happened. One second he was preparing to have his face smashed in and the next Garrett is on the ground having a seizure.

Just then the gym teacher, Mr. Tully, entered the locker room wearing his customary t-shirt and sweat pants. The moment he spotted Garrett, he rushed over to his side and grabbed him by the shoulders. "Garrett! Can you hear me?" Still no response. "What happened here?"

Max could only shake his head in response.

CHAPTER 2

At the dinner table that night, Max devoured one of his favorite meals; meatloaf with mashed potatoes and corn. Seated across from him was his little sister Freyja, who at the moment was texting on her cell phone. She had flaxen colored hair and a button nose. She was quite the opposite of Max because her mouth was always running at full speed and she loved telling stories about anything and everything that was happening in her oh-so-eventful life. Just one day in her life sounded more eventful than a year in Max's.

"How was school today kiddo?" Max's father asked as he loosened his tie and took his seat at the head of the table. He had light brown hair parted to the side and bags under his eyes from a long week of work. He unbuttoned the top-most button of his light blue shirt and commenced rolling up his sleeves.

"OK," Max replied, unwilling to tell his parents about what had happened in gym. Garrett had recovered from his episode and so he felt there was no reason to tell them about it. "Barry Sellner got detention for telling the math teacher to stuff it."

"Back in my day, you didn't get detention," Mr. Daely said as he placed a napkin on his lap. "The teacher would

smack you around for saying something like that. No-siree-bob. You can believe me when I say that after a teacher hits you in front of your class, you'll think twice before mouthing off again."

"Teacher's didn't hit the children Jack," interjected Mrs. Daely, a slender woman with shoulder length auburn hair and sharp facial features. She grabbed a spoonful of corn and placed it on her dinner plate. "You always exaggerate. Remember, I went to the same school as you and I remember you getting a few detentions in your day."

Mr. Daely turned to his wife and gave her a meaningful look. It was the kind of look only couples that have been together for over seventeen years would understand.

"And what about you, sweetie," Mrs. Daely turned to her daughter. "How was your day?"

Max knew what was coming next. Anytime Freyja was asked such a broad question she would talk endlessly until someone interrupted her. This was usually the time that he went off into his own head and thought about hockey or video games to keep from losing his mind from all the babble streaming from Freyja's mouth.

"It was OK," she replied without looking away from her phone. "Mrs. Pluto let us have free time to do whatever we

wanted after lunch so me and Suzie and Harriet we played this game where you..."

Max found it hard to tune her out. Lately his concentration waned and he found himself listening to his chatty sister ramble on about things that went nowhere and back. Finding it extremely frustrating, he doubled his efforts in an attempt to drift off into his own thoughts and away from the incessant babble.

"...and Suzie and I think Harriet cheated because you're not supposed to look. And then, oh yeah, Josh Harrison came up to us and told Suzie he thought her shirt was cool. He is so cute!" Freyja went on like this for the next several minutes while the rest of the family continued to eat their dinner. When she finally paused for more than half a second Mr. Daely interjected with a question for Max, affording everyone a respite from her nonstop chatter.

"So Max, what are you up to tonight? Want to help me clean up the garage?"

"Actually, I was planning on going over to Sean's if that's OK." He speared the last piece of meatloaf with his fork and stuck it in his mouth.

"Can I go?" burst out Freyja. "I wanna go."

"No," protested Max with a little more force than was necessary. "He's my friend and I don't want you hanging around."

"Max. Be nice to your sister," his mother warned while dabbing at the corner of her mouth with a napkin. "She likes to play with you and your friends. She doesn't have any friends her own age in the neighborhood."

"So?" Max retorted with a shrug, not understanding why his sister not having any friends became his problem.

"So," repeated his father pointing his fork at Max, "Freyja will be going with you tonight."

Max's shoulders slumped. "But why?"

Mr. Daely's eyebrows shot up. He wasn't a tall man, or even a very well built man, but he was in good shape from running almost every day and when he wanted to look imposing, he could.

"Why?" he asked in a no-nonsense tone of voice as he removed his glasses and placed them on the table. "Well, for one thing, because I said so. And for another, if you've been paying attention to the news lately you would know that in the past half year six children have gone missing from the surrounding towns."

"I must have missed the text telling me what some missing kids have to do with me?" Max said as he tossed his fork onto his plate.

"It has to do with you because we don't want anything to happen to you or Freyja. We love you two very much and no one knows if these children ran away or were kidnapped. And until we get some closure on these events we're going to be doing things a little differently around here. So tonight I want you to take your sister with you and keep an eye on her," Mr. Daely concluded as he wiped his mouth with a balled up napkin and threw it on the table. "And if I find out that you and Sean took off on your bikes and left your sister behind, you're going to be in deep trouble."

Max rolled his eyes and looked away from his father. He couldn't believe what he was hearing; never before had his parents forced him to take his sister with him. They would occasionally ask him if she could go along with him, and sometimes he would let her, but the times he said no they always respected his answer.

"And another thing," Mr. Daely said. "I want you two home by nine o'clock."

Max's eyes bulged out of his head. "What? But it's Friday night! We were going to —"

"What you are going to do is be home by nine. I've already explained to you that things are going to be different around here for a little while. And for starters, I don't want the two of you out much past dark anymore."

"But Dad I-I..." Max stuttered as he tried to find words for the cruel injustice being thrust upon him. Not only did he have to take his sister with him to his friend's house, but to top it all off they had to be home by nine o'clock. On a Friday night!

Mr. Daely held up his hand and continued, "I know you're smart kiddo, and you're growing up to be a man, but it's not you that I don't trust. There may be people out there that are kidnapping children and I don't want to lose either of you."

"Whatever," Max conceded in an annoyed tone. He shook his head in frustration and looked away from his parents because he couldn't bear to look at them anymore. Freyja on the other hand just sat in her chair watching the discussion unfold with a grin on her elfin face. She watched the whole conversation happen between her Dad and Max as if it were a tennis match.

"Max, please, we're not doing this because we're mad at you or trying to punish you," Mrs. Daely interjected,

playing the part of the peacekeeper. "We're doing this for your own good. You understand don't you?"

"Yeah, fine," Max muttered in a huff while still refusing to look at his parents. He seethed inside and knew if he voiced his frustrations he wouldn't be able to go out at all, so he bit his tongue and focused on the beige carpet beneath the dining room table.

"Yay!" Freyja burst out. "I get to hang out with Max and Sean! I get to hang out with Max and Sean!" She continued her singsong chant as her parents began to clean up the table.

Max looked over at his sister and felt a twinge of annoyance at how much she got away with because she was the baby, and it had been that way ever since she was born. *Max let Freyja play with your toys. Max, take your sister biking with you.* It was always something with her, and she knew from an early age that she could get their parents to do just about anything for her.

"Stop it," Max told his sister. With their parents out of the room he intended on putting an end to her annoying little chant. But she just pretended not to hear him and kept right on doing it.

"I said stop it." He shot up from his chair and Freyja stopped mid sentence, unsure of his next move.

Sensing no real danger she resumed the chant and focused on her phone.

Her complete disregard fueled his fury.

"Shut up," he hissed through clenched teeth as he slammed his fist onto the table. Freyja burst backwards into her chair causing it to topple to the ground. An ear-piercing wail soon followed.

Mrs. Daely rushed back into the room and ran over to where Freyja lay prone on the floor. Mr. Daely entered and glanced at his daughter who was holding the back of her head. He then proceeded to march around the table to Max.

"What happened," he insisted as he folded his arms across his chest.

"I-I don't know," Max fumbled with his words as he tried to explain what had happened. "I-she...she just fell over. I was -"

Before he could finish pleading his case his mother broke in, "And what happened to your face?" She peered over the table as she wiped the tears from Freyja's cheeks with a napkin.

"What are you talking about?" Max asked perplexed. He felt something tickle his upper lip and he licked at it. It tasted like copper. He wiped his mouth with his right hand and felt a line of blood trailing between his nose and

his mouth. He examined the blood smear on his finger and had no recollection of why he would be bleeding. This was the second time in as many weeks he had a nose bleed out of the blue.

"Why are you bleeding?" Mr. Daely grasped Max's head to determine the cause of the blood flow.

"I don't know," Max stated matter-of-factly as he wiped the blood on his jeans. "But it had nothing to do with Freyja falling over." The explanation didn't seem to satisfy his parents as they looked at each other and then back at him with the same sour expression on their face.

"So you're saying she just fell over?" questioned his father. "I highly doubt that...not that hard. We heard her hit the ground from the kitchen. So would you like to tell us what really happened here?" He released Max's head and placed his hands on his hips. His nostrils flared as he waited for a reasonable explanation to what had just happened.

"I told you, I don't know. I was standing here the whole time. I got up and told her to be quiet because she wouldn't stop singing. Then all of a sudden she just fell over. I don't know what happened. Maybe she tripped over the dog." He knew she didn't tripped over Rusty, the family German shepherd, but he didn't have a better

explanation to give. And at least the dog theory sounded plausible.

Mrs. Daely helped Freyja to her feet and guided her back into the chair. With tears still glistening in her eyes Freyja retrieved her fallen phone and glared over at her big brother.

"Max, you better start telling the truth or you're going to be grounded for a long time. Now what happened?" His father's raised voice meant that Max had reached the end of the line. The time to tell the truth had arrived. The problem was he didn't know the truth or at least the truth that his parents were looking for.

"You know, I'm the one bleeding here. How many times do I have to tell you that I didn't do anything," he demanded in an angry voice.

"Go to your room young man," insisted Mrs. Daely. "And don't come out until you're ready to tell us the truth about what happened here."

CHAPTER 3

Max opened his hazel eyes and peered outside his bedroom window to find that the sun was shining on a beautiful autumn day. He removed his bed covers and leapt out of bed. As he pulled on a sweater that was lying on the floor he remembered what had happened the night before and wondered if it was wise to leave his room yet. After all, he had gotten sent to his room. He mulled over his options before heading downstairs.

When he arrived downstairs he saw his sister sitting on the white couch watching a Disney program for tweens. When she heard him come into the room she turned around and gave him a sour look. He returned her look with one of his own and stuck his tongue out at her for good measure.

"Max? Is that you?" His mom's voice called from the kitchen.

"Yeah mom," he sighed.

"Will you come in here please?"

He heaved another sigh and looked over at his sister. She stared back at him with a smug grin on her face. He grimaced and walked out of the living room and into the kitchen where his mom was busy making breakfast. His stomach growled as a wave of delicious smoked bacon washed

over him. His mother, wearing her hair in a bun and wearing an old off-white sweater with the sleeves bunched up, placed a piece of bacon on a paper towel and switched off the stovetop burner.

"Do you have anything to say for yourself," she said as she grabbed a hand towel off the counter and cleaned the grease off her hands.

"I'm sorry mom," he said in what he hoped sounded like a guilty voice. "I guess I pushed Freyja a little too hard last night and that's why she fell over. I didn't mean too, she was just annoying me. I'm sorry." He tried to sound as apologetic as possible because if she didn't buy his apology he didn't know what he was going to do.

His mother just stood there with her hands on her hips. It seemed as if she were trying to make up her mind about the sincerity of his statement when she responded, "OK, Max. Thank you for apologizing. But I'm not the one that you should be apologizing too. I want you to say you're sorry to your sister for knocking her down. Then you can eat your breakfast."

She shooed him out of the kitchen door and he shuffled over to stand in front of Freyja. He glanced one last time at his mother who was watching from the kitchen doorway. Seeing no way out of an apology he took a deep breath and

said, "Freyja, I'm sorry for pushing you down last night. I was a jerk. I'm sorry."

Freyja didn't even look at him as he made his apology; instead she just kept watching TV. Her only acknowledgement that he had even spoken was one word: "Whatever." He had to clench his teeth not to say anything to his sister at that moment, he just wanted to eat his breakfast and watch some TV. He looked up at his mother with a shrug and she nodded her approval. He followed her back into the kitchen as his stomach once again voiced its discontent with not being fed anything yet.

"Max. When you're done with breakfast I'd like you to come with me grocery shopping."

"Aww come on," he griped as he grabbed his plate of bacon and eggs off the kitchen counter and rummaged around the utensil drawer for a fork. Apparently he was going to be punished after all.

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"What kind of fruit do you want in your lunch bag this week?" Max and his mother walked into the local grocery store as Mrs. Daely pulled out the grocery list from her purse. Max grabbed a shopping cart from the row of carts stacked outside.

"Apples are fine," he answered.

Apples. Would it be anything else but apples? Why can't he pick bananas for a change?

"Because I don't like bananas, I like apples," Max pointed out as he wheeled the shopping cart into the first aisle.

"Who said anything about bananas honey?" She glanced at her son with a perplexed look on her face. She then looked over the grocery list and grabbed a few cans of soup from the nearby shelf. "Max, sweetie, I'm going to pick some things up on the other side of the store. Can you do me a favor and pick up some milk, cheese and..." She checked the grocery list again before continuing, "...whatever dessert you would like in your lunch this week."

"Sure mom," he acknowledged, nodding his head. He knew the faster they got the grocery shopping finished the faster he could get home, so he raced out of the current aisle and headed towards the other side of the store where the dairy products were stored.

Do not be alarmed.

Max stopped short. He spun around and saw an old gentleman standing next to him reading the label of a box of candy mere inches away from his face.

"Excuse me sir, but what did you just say?" inquired Max.

The old man looked over at him and blinked to adjust his focus. "I didn't say anything son. Are you OK?"

Max thought it over and decided that this was not the man he had just heard. "Yeah, sure...I'm fine. My mistake." He waved an apology to the man and moved down the aisle.

You have a special talent Max.

"Who said that?" he called out.

My name is Gray Towers. I know what you are going through and I can help you.

"Help me with what? My grocery shopping?" Max asked as he peered around the corner of the aisle.

The first thing that you need to understand is that you can speak to people without using your voice. That is your gift. You have the ability to listen and speak to people using telepathy.

The voice was definitely male but he didn't see any men. There was only one woman who had a baby sitting in the top of the shopping cart cooing and drooling all over itself.

"What's telepathy?" asked Max, to no one in particular.

I've already told you, it's the ability to speak to people without using your voice but what I want you to do now is try to answer me with your inner voice instead of your outer voice. Can you do that?

"How?" Max asked, unable to understand the request.

It's easy. Just pretend that you're talking to yourself inside your head. The same way you may talk to yourself when taking a test in school or when you're having trouble trying to sleep.

Max couldn't believe that he was actually going through with this nonsense but decided to play along for the moment.

Like this?

Perfect, the male voice said. Try it again.

He was a little shocked because he didn't expect it to work. He looked around and still didn't see any men in the area. He grabbed the cart and shoved it down towards the end of the aisle.

If this guy is so special then why won't he show himself, he thought.

I'm not hiding from you to scare you Max. I'm not showing myself because I want to make a point about the special talent that you possess. You don't need to see

someone to actually speak to them. You have the power to speak to people just by thinking about it.

Max wondered if maybe he was dreaming this whole encounter. Maybe he was still in his bed sleeping and not at the grocery store talking to imaginary people in his head. His mother did warn him that reading comic books before going to sleep would give him weird dreams.

I must be going mad! No one can talk to other people in their head.

"You're not going mad."

Max jumped at the sound of the man's baritone voice. He spun around to face a burly man who appeared to be the same age as his parents. He was easily over six feet tall, had salt-and-pepper hair, more pepper than salt, a broad nose and wore jeans and a sweatshirt that partially concealed the muscles beneath.

"Sorry to have startled you Max but you're not crazy. Quite the contrary; you have a gift. Not many people are blessed to have the ability that you have."

Max just stared at the middle-aged man with his mouth hanging open. He had no idea what to say. If he wasn't crazy than what was going on? None of it made any sense.

"Max," said Towers, waving his hand in front of Max's face. "Your mother's looking for you." And then he

pointed to the end of the aisle as Max's mother came around the corner with a basket full of groceries. She made a beeline to her son and placed the grocery cart between Towers and Max.

"Hi Mrs. Daely, my name is Gray Towers," the burly man announced in a calm voice. "I was just talking to your son here about some very important things that I think we all should talk about."

She glanced down at her son that back up at Towers. "OK, well, my name is Suzie Daely. I see that you've already met my son Max. Would you mind telling me what this is all about Mr....Towers did you say?" She put her arm around Max's shoulders.

"Call me Gray," he insisted. Mrs. Daely nodded her head in acknowledgement but a frosty look remained on her face as she held her son close to her body. "Well Mrs. Daely," Towers began. "What I'm about to say is going to be hard for you to understand at first. Heck, even I find it hard to believe when I hear myself saying it, but none-the-less everything I'm about to say to you is the truth." He paused before moving on. "Max has Extra Sensory Perception." He paused another moment to let them digest what he had just said. "You may or may not know what that means exactly, but allow me to explain further. There are

several Extra Sensory Perceptions, or as they are more commonly known as ESP's, but the one that your son has exhibited is known as telepathy; which is the ability to read peoples' minds."

As he explained the situation a hint of a smile crossed Mrs. Daely's face. "Listen, I don't know what..."But she didn't get the chance to finish what she was about to say because an elderly woman had just stopped next to them with a shopping cart full of goodies.

"Hello Suzie. Hi Gray, how are you?" Mrs. Morgan said. She was eighty eight years old with short cropped white hair and a slight bend in her back. She had lived in Ridgeland her entire life and if there was something going on in town, you could bet that she knew all about it.

"Hi Mrs. Morgan, how have you been?" Mrs. Daely asked with sympathy in her voice. Mrs. Morgan's husband had recently passed away from lung cancer.

"I have my good days and my bad days dear," she offered with a shake of her head. "But the good Lord has blessed me with an abundance of caring friends and family to help me through this tough time, so I'm coping as well as can be expected." She gave Mrs. Daely a look of thanks for asking and then noticed her son. "Oh my! Is that Max?"

"Hi Mrs. Morgan," Max said with a short wave of the hand. He always liked her because she was different than many of the elderly that he knew because she never treated him or his sister like a baby. She respected what they had to say and treated them like adults, even when they were acting like children. The fact that she always had a bowl full of candy at her house didn't hurt either.

"You're getting bigger by the day Max. And more handsome I might add." Max blushed and looked the other way. He wasn't good with compliments.

"It's good to see you again Mrs. Morgan," Towers said with a big smile on his face.

"Same to you my boy," she said as she gave him a hug. "Same to you. I wanted to thank you again for all the help you've provided these past few months. I don't know what I would have done without you."

Towers waved the gratitude away and responded, "It was my pleasure. You've been a friend of the family since before I was even born. Besides, I was happy to help out, it's the least I could do for all the times you and Mr. Morgan had to listen to me sulk about my life."

"Oh, George and I didn't mind a bit. We wish things would have turned out better for you."

"So do I," Towers agreed.

"You're a good man Gray, and things will work out for you. I see a happy future in store for you." She reached out and patted his arm in a loving manner. He placed his hand over hers and squeezed it reassuringly. "Well, I better get going before all my frozen goods become liquid goods."

She waved goodbye and continued slowly down the aisle. Mrs. Daely watched her go and then turned back to Towers. She cocked her head to the side and seemed to study him for a moment. "I don't know who you are, but my opinion of you has...shifted. I'm still a little lost on what you think my son is -"

"It's not something that he is," interrupted Towers. "It's something that he has. And I know that sounds bad, like he has some sort of a disease or something, but it's nothing like that. What he has is a gift...as long as he learns how to use it."

"That's true; my son is gifted...and very smart," she looked down at her son with a frown. "And he should have known better than to talk to strangers."

"I completely agree and apologize for my intrusion, but what I'm telling you is very important. You must understand -"

"No, what you must understand is that we are leaving," she countered.

With a defeated smile Towers reached into his pants pocket and retrieved a card. "When things change, please don't hesitate to call me." Max eyed the card with hope but his mother made no move to grab it. After a long uncomfortable silence she reluctantly reached out and snatched the card from his hand. She scanned the proffered card and saw that it only had his name and number on it. Nothing else: no company name, no title, no logo.

"Thank you Mr. Towers, but I'm sure we won't need any of your assistance." She handed the card back to Towers and ushered Max down the aisle in the opposite direction.

Max couldn't believe what had just happened. He had a conversation with a stranger in his head, or at least he thought he did, and now his mother was forcing him to leave. He needed to do something, and do it fast.

"I'll be right back Mom, I forgot the milk." Before she could even respond he bolted back down the dairy aisle. He came to a halt before Towers and stood rooted to the spot, unable to speak. Without a word Towers held out his hand and offered him the card. Max shot a nervous glance behind him, then quickly seized it and shoved it in his pants pocket.

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For more information about the Mind Splinters series please visit the website at www.mindsplinters.com. For more information about the author please visit his blog at www.ajdonnelly.com

About the author

A.J. Donnelly was born and raised in Connecticut. He attended college in Boston and eventually found his way out to Southern California to pursue a career in the entertainment industry.

As luck would have it that career did not last long and he soon found himself working as a web programmer. The seed for the Mind Splinters series was planted when he was designing and programming web games for kids. His love of video games, comic books and fantasy novels all culminated in a story about a young boy named Max Daely.

When he is not busy with his day job he spends his time with his family and the remaining tiny bit of time reading books, playing video games and watching movies.