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How I Built My House With No Doors

An Autobiographical Novel by Dave M. Monroe

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Published by David Monroe – <http://davemonroe.net>

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This book is an autobiographical novel. This book is based on the life of the author. Some names and locations have been changed. Some events may be exaggerated or altered for artistic or thematic purposes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I want to thank my wife Susan. I really love her and I can't even begin to explain how thankful I am because without her by my side right now, and in the future I would just crumble.

I would like to thank my loving family. My mother, my late step-father John, Beth, Jane and Jenn, who helped me edit this book, and whose literary guidance I much needed.

I would also like to thank Dave Thompson. Although I have never met him in person he helped me edit this book too, and has kept me entertained on Internet Relay Chat for over a decade.

I also owe a great amount of thanks to all my teachers in school and to all my friends, past and present that have put up with me and all my craziness.

Oh, and my cat. I can't forget my cat.

DISCLAIMER and NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Call this whatever you want. I call it my autobiographical novel. First person or third, fact or fiction, or a bit of both, it doesn't matter... it's a novel. This book is based on many true events, however, parts have been fictionalized. Some names are real and some have been changed either by request of the person or in an effort to protect their identities as seen fit by the author.

Someone asked me once why I'm doing this, and they came straight out and said "Why would anyone ever want to read anything you wrote!?" Well this isn't for 'anyone'. It isn't for no one either. It's for me and whoever wants to read it.

I am ADHD and probably about 100 other acronyms that I don't even know or remember. The fact that the older I'm getting the less I seem to remember about my life is why I'm writing anything at all.

I have been given many great opportunities in life and have managed to screw most of them up. Maybe that is why now, later in life, I am desperately trying to make good with what little I have. Sometimes, it seems like it's an impossible task, and it probably is... but I just have to make sure that when I do take a dirt-nap, and I tell myself I was a good man and I did good things, that I'm not lying to myself.

PROLOGUE

Dave wants to go back. Back before he has seen the things he's seen, heard the things he's heard, felt the feelings he's felt, and dreamt the dreams he's dreamt. Back to a time where everyone and everything, was okay in his heart, and in his imagination. Back before his heart was broken, before deception was merely an everyday occurrence in his own mind. Before emotions, before secrets, before love, hate, trust, mistrust, speculations and even before memories. Back to a time when his heart was pure, and he slept in a peace that once surrounded him.

A box of riddles.

Now spending his days trying to undo the damage that surrounds him, he still somehow, in his own mind, maintains a small glimmer of optimism and hope for the future even though his past is surrounding him like a vulture circling a dead animal. He feels love for his wife, his family, his cat and everyone around him.

Love can't stick to a heart that is running away.

Waiting for the perfect time to tell everyone what he knows, what he did and didn't do. A time to explain the face he wears. The face he hides, and the face that reveals the truth about who he is, what he wants to be and what he is.

A face that doesn't exist.

Forever reaching for the past and never seeing what's happening now or in the future.

This is the story of how Dave built his house with no doors. A solid structure around him constructed from the inside out.

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Chapter 1 - Understanding

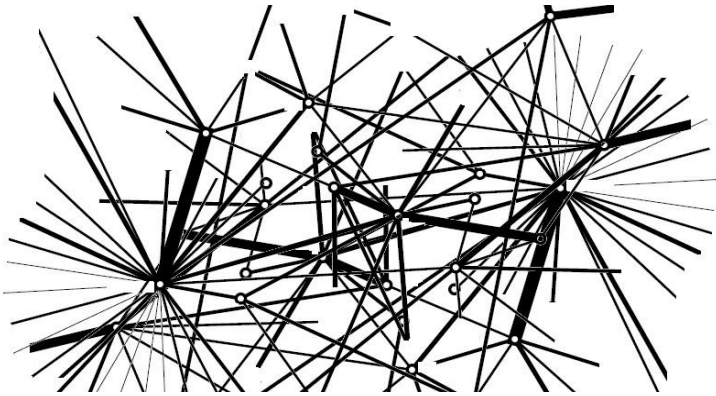
Doomed from the start, I spent most of my childhood in mental hospitals, group homes, therapy and Special Ed classes when I was in an actual school. I was unaware of most things happening around me. I have memories only of parents fighting, therapy sessions, and an occasional weekend visit to my father's home in Virginia.

Somehow, I made it through the therapy, group homes and Special Ed classes. Yet my whole life, I have carried with me the same troubles and conditions. Diagnosed early in life with Hyper Activity, now known as ADHD and popularized by the media, I was never able to escape it. I continued to make the same stupid types of decisions I've made time and time again. Somehow, most started off in my mind as good intentions or seemingly great ideas, but few ever turned out well.

I don't think like other people. I doubt I ever did. However, as I get older, I get more and more confused. It's very hard to explain what happens in my mind. However, every thought is a line. An actual line I can see. I am looking for a logical path to a conclusion. I am not happy until the line connects to some kind of outcome I accept as logical. All of the lines are black on a white background. They are all straight. There is no grey area

in my grey matter. Every path must either be right or wrong, positive or negative, one or zero. When I cannot make a logical decision, like electricity, I often default to the shortest path with the least resistance, which, also like electricity, often ends in shock or electrocution. I have learned, just like a rat in a lab (although much slower) that I do not like being shocked or electrocuted. I hold on to every thought as long as possible until I find that logical conclusion I'm looking for, even if it does not exist.

This is my brain; these are my thoughts:



As confusing as this picture may be to others, it is even more confusing to me. Someone once asked me to explain it, but I can't. They wanted an explanation of what happens to me mentally and physically. Simply put, it's exhausting, depressing and confusing, both mentally and physically. It's very sad to me

to have all the pieces to a puzzle and not make them fit. Somewhere, something is not making a connection and for each 'something' another line abruptly ends, and another begins. I don't really expect anyone to understand the pain, exhaustion, helplessness, and sense of solitude and disassociation this kind of thinking causes me, but they just need to accept it.

The worst thing anyone can do is try to help me when I say, "I don't understand," or to offer me assistance when I am in the middle of doing things. Any distraction, any variable tossed in that I have not already calculated into the final product will stop the line.

I don't remember much of my childhood. As I get older, I remember less and less each day. I do remember that by age 10, or so I was in Johns Hopkins, as an in-patient, undergoing group therapy and one on one therapy and was a guinea pig used to test the latest and greatest drugs for hyperactive children. I remember when I wasn't in some kind of hospital or group home, I liked to set fires. It didn't matter what I set on fire, a dumpster, a small patch of forest, or even the three story townhouse my family was living in, although to this day, I still swear that was an accident.

When the townhouse went up in flames, it certainly was a memorable moment in my life, and I remember standing at the

window, in my parent's bedroom with a lit candle. The drapes were some god awful orange, see through material. The sun was shining in the window, and I was showing off the lit candle to my friend Mitchell, who was standing in my back yard. I blew out the candle and then went out, riding my bicycle with Mitchell. We rode down to this area close to my home that was a field the local motocross bikers turned into a course. We weren't there very long when we heard sirens. Just as any kid would do, we followed the sounds of the sirens. They led us right to my house. My older sister, Beth, was at home with a broken leg she had gotten from clowning around or something at school. A neighbor was nice enough to help her out of the house and another neighbor saved our family's cat. After the fire was over, the first two stories of the house were black. The top floor had no walls left in two of the bedrooms. My father was pissed and while the rest of the family stayed in the basement, he made me sleep in one of the burnt rooms.

This was about the same time as my parents were fighting all the time. One time, before the big fire, my father called all the kids, me, Beth and my younger sister, Jennifer, to the kitchen and we all came at his call. Once we were all there, he stood on one side of the hallway, and my mother was on the other side. He screamed, "Pick the one you want to live with! Stand next to the one you love most!" Beth and I stood next to my mother and

Jennifer stood next to my father. My father moved out alone, without my sister Jennifer and without much of anything else, soon after that.

After my father moved out, my mother started dating a guy she worked with; his name was John. I don't think he liked me much from the very beginning and the feelings were mutual, but much, much later in my life, I did become very close to him. I remember he used to bring me crap whenever he came over to visit. Crap like a baseball glove and a softball. I wasn't too impressed and I doubt I even played with the stuff because I was too busy setting fires and playing with Mitchell.

When I was about ten, there was this one girl in the neighborhood I had a crush on. Her name was Andrea and she lived in the house on the corner of our street. She was just a girl who had curly brown hair. She used to play with Mitchell and me every once in a while especially when we were out riding our Big Wheels. She didn't come out and play very often, but when she did, Mitchell and I were happy. I mean, the only other kids we played with were Mitchell's little sister and some fat kid which lived across the court and seldom came out to play. There was nothing wrong with the fat kid, but since we rarely saw him, he was just some kid. One morning my mother was reading the paper, and she saw a story that said some family died in a

horrible car accident on their way to church. She said she thought it might be the family that lives on the corner. Again, I was only about ten years old at the time and certainly not very good at figuring things out very quickly, but I was starting to connect the dots. Their car was hit head on by another car that crossed the median on Interstate 270. They were either on their way to church or coming from church. Everyone in their car died. Andrea's grandmother lived in the house with her and her parents, but Mitchell and I never went and asked her what happened. What Mitchell and I did, after we hadn't seen Andrea for a long time, is we went to her bedroom window, where we would sometimes knock and ask if she could come out and play. We looked for any signs of life, a light on, curtains moved or, maybe if we were lucky, Andrea herself. Nothing. I suppose this was my first heartbreak too, because I thought she was cool, and I missed her. I did go back to her house a few years later, when I was about 13. I was just going to see Mitchell but thought I would knock on Andrea's door. Amazingly enough her grandmother was still living there, and she invited me in and confirmed the story of Andrea's death; it was pretty much as I described. Her grandmother gave me a portrait picture of Andrea that I still have somewhere, and she wrote Andrea's date of death on the back.

Eventually, my mother and John's relationship got more serious, and we moved out of the neighborhood where Mitchell lived and I rarely ever saw him again. We didn't move very far, as I look at it today, but back when I was 11 years old, it was quite a distance. Sure, it was sad leaving Mitchell and the neighborhood. However, back then, although I had a best friend, I was oblivious to the change, because except for moving across town nothing seemed to change in my mind. I knew, if I wanted to, I could always go back and see Mitchell. In my mind, even at this young age, I thought no matter what happened you could always go back.

CHAPTER 2 – Growing Up

We moved into a condominium with John. It was an okay place. I quickly made friends with the kid downstairs, Robby. Robby had a mean mother. She was a blonde Puerto Rican woman, who, according to Robby, used to bring men home for sex. I didn't really know what sex was yet. I only knew girls were different than boys. Robby also had a brother. I don't remember his name because he was never there. He was away at military school.

Robby and I were best friends, and we did all the normal stuff kids do. We built tree forts with stuff we stole from nearby construction sites, wandered all over town, took pennies down to the railroad tracks and waited for a train to come by and smash them, and crap like that. Besides throwing snowballs at cars and grabbing onto the back of UPS trucks to pull us around on our skateboards, we didn't really do anything too crazy. I wasn't setting fires anymore. I had risen past that stage. It was more fun to walk to the 7-Eleven with Robby and spend the little bit of change we had on candy and then go crush some more pennies on the railroad tracks or hop over the fence to get into the County Fair, when it was in town.

This was also the time in my life when my sister, Jennifer, and I would go visit my father at his house in Virginia on weekends, or at least on the weekends he decided he wanted to come and pick us up. He never picked up my other sister Beth, because Beth was not his daughter. Beth is actually my half-sister because her father was some guy my mother was married to before she married my father. However, I have always called Beth my real sister because she was always there from the moment I was born.

My father lived in a house with his new girlfriend, Sybil, and her daughter, Tina. Together, he and Sybil had their own advertising / marketing business. I guess they were doing well because they had a house, as well as a few cars and motorcycles, but my father never paid my mother the child support money he was supposed to. One time my mother and John had to come and pick Jennifer and me up from my dad's house. I'm not sure what led up to the decision that they had to come pick us up but when they got there my mother and my father started arguing about money. The argument escalated to my father running up to John's car and pulling out the money he had in his pockets and throwing it at the car, while screaming stuff like, "You want all my money!?! Here take all my fucking money!!!" Mom, John, Jennifer and I were already in the car and John just drove away because my father was getting violent and acting like a total

jackass. Nevertheless, it wasn't over yet, no. As we drove away, my father got in his Triumph TR-6 and was chasing us down the road and ramming the back of John's car with his. We pulled over into a church parking lot further down the road and John and my mother got out and somehow calmed my dad down. Eventually, we drove away and my father went back to his house. I'm sure there is much more to that story, but being as disturbing as it was and the fact I was really young, I don't think I understood or even remember the whole event.

Sybil was kind of mean though, maybe not mean but strict... No, she was mean, a flat out bitch. She once locked Jennifer in her room one day, all day, just because Jennifer didn't make her bed. Jennifer was only 6 years old at the time, and I'm pretty sure Sybil did other mean things to her too. I really don't think Sybil liked either Jennifer or me. Sybil even made her own daughter Tina stay in her room and wouldn't let her talk to anyone, as punishment. Now, Tina was just your typical teenage girl. She had long blonde hair and was into stuff like ice skating and cheerleading, nothing special, but at the time I did think she was cute.

I remember Tina once said she was going to go smoke some pot. I didn't know what that meant. The only thing I could picture in my head was someone with a saucepan hanging out of

their mouth. I soon learned what pot was because we smoked it together once. This was also the time in my life when I discovered alcohol. In the basement of Sybil's house, they had a bar and behind that bar were gallons of Ernest & Julio Gallo wine, red and white. I would drink it whenever I was in the basement. No one drank it with me, just me, myself and I. I would even get out of bed in the middle of the night, go down to the basement, and drink so much I threw up.

The other cool thing I discovered in the basement at Sybil's house was porn; this was when I discovered there was a reason boys and girls were different. There were three movies my father had downstairs in a hutch next to the VCR, Debbie Does Dallas, The Devil in Mrs. Jones, and Inside Desere` Cousteau. So, I did what any teenage boy would probably do, I got drunk and watched them. I wasn't too quick because it took me a few viewings before I noticed I didn't feel quite the same as usual. The rest of that realization is best left to the imagination. The fact that I saw these movies is probably what led to Tina and me fooling around. Not naked, but just kissing and heavy petting. Tina and I were both about 12 or 13 years old at the time. I doubt either of us knew much about sex with an actual other person. I know the only thing I knew was what I saw on the videos, but I had never thought of trying it.

Besides sex videos, pot and lots of cheap wine, I also remember I would spend hours in the basement at Sybil's home. What a basement it was too, not in a good way either. It was okay, as long as you avoided the dried up turds her little Yorkshire terrier laid in the three inch pile, bright red carpet. This basement was more like a dungeon than a living area. It was dimly lit even though there was a sliding glass door which leads out to the back yard. I would play Atari games like Tank, Asteroids and Night Driver and watch two non-porn videos with Jennifer over and over, Billy Jack and Champions, a made for television movie about ice skating. My sister and I probably watched Billy Jack at least two hundred times, and Champions about one hundred times during all the weekends we spent there. There really wasn't much else to do.

I used to ride my bicycle next to my father, when he went out on his morning ten mile run. He told me it was ten miles, but I doubt it was, maybe like five, if that. However, like I said, there wasn't much else to do. This was probably the time in my life when I really started to like riding bicycles. I'm not sure what exactly drew me to cycling. It was probably a combination of the fact that it was cool to ride around and enjoy the scenery and the whole mechanical part of it, like cleaning and repairing the bikes I rode. My father would sometimes take us to events he was involved in through his advertising agency. One time, we

went to an event on the Potomac River which was sponsored by one of the local radio stations, WPGC. Everyone at the event made rafts out of whatever they thought would float. The goal was to complete some kind of course on the river without sinking. Another event was at a local car dealership, some kind of Grand Opening or something. They had free hot dogs and hot air balloon rides.

I had an old desk in the basement of Sybil's house, too. It was back in the laundry / utility room, and I had all kinds of tools and junk I would mess around with. My father used to buy me those kits from Radio Shack that had all kinds of electronic components on it along with a bunch of springs and wires to connect the components and make stuff, like a crystal AM radio or some kind of random beeping noise. My last real memory at my father's was one Christmas season, he told Jennifer and I we could have anything we wanted for Christmas as long as we wrote down what we wanted on a yellow legal pad in red ink. Nothing else was acceptable and if we didn't do it exactly the way he told us, we wouldn't get anything. I completed my list, but my sister didn't. Then come Christmas day, I got gifts, and she got nothing.

See, my father, although I thought he was cool, was a real asshole, and it wasn't until way later in life, I found this out. Not

only did I find out he was an asshole, but he was also a compulsive liar, drunk, drug addict, and even later in life, I learned of things that were much worse than any or all of those things put together.

CHAPTER 3 – The Teenage Years

At this time of my life, I was becoming too much for my mother to handle at home. I was sixteen years old, always hyper and getting in trouble. It was getting hard to find a school for me to attend, since I was failing even the Special Ed classes I was taking. So, my mother and step-father decided that maybe I should go live with my father in Rochester, NY. He was having his own problems at the time, like a failed relationship with Sybil and the fall of their advertising company, which was his idea for them to start together. He was kicked out from Sybil's house, and he was going back to Rochester to live in his mother's home.

I remember my trip to Rochester with my father pretty well because there wasn't much to remember. My mother packed me up a few suitcases and my father came to pick me up in his 1976 brown Ford Pinto. During the drive up to NY, we didn't talk too much. At one point in the journey, my father reached down behind the car stereo in the center console and pulled out a bag of weed and a bowl. He packed the bowl, lit it, smoked some, and passed it to me. I toked the bowl and thought, "Wow. This is gonna be a great time in New York!"

We made it to Rochester safely and when we got to my grandmother's house, I was set up in my own room. It was

always my favorite room in her house. It used to be the “Stereo Room”. It was paneled in rich wood and had wooden shelving built into the wall that connected it to the living room. There were two small wooden doors in the wall that opened into the living room. I suppose this is where the stereo equipment would have been, if it was indeed being used as its name implies. It had a window which looked out to the backyard. A very large backyard, loaded with tall trees that must have been hundreds of years old. The door to my room opened into the “Library Room”. It was a large hallway that connected the kitchen, living room, and a short hallway that went to two larger bedrooms. One of the bedrooms, the largest, was connected to an addition my grandfather built onto the house himself. It was a very large studio apartment with a fireplace, kitchen, bathroom, and large living area. My grandmother stayed in the smaller of the two bedrooms, and my father occupied the larger one and the studio.

So, there I was, a 16 year old boy from the big city, and I had just moved into country living. I felt like I was an outcast already, and I hadn't even met anyone yet. I had to start a new school, midyear. My school was probably a good fifteen miles away from the house. It was fifteen miles through fields, barns, and a bunch of absolutely nothing. This was not going to be fun.

Wheatland-Chili Central School. It was called a “Central School” because it was so god damn small. In one building, it had grades 6 through 12 and still had room for a full sized gym and Olympic sized swimming pool. The school only had about six school busses, and they were parked out behind the school, next to a small steel building, when they were not in use.

The first day of school I dressed up as usual for the area of the country I was used to. I donned some slacks, a button down shirt and a sweater. Just to add some flair, I wore the sweater around my neck, preppie style. The bus pulled up and I got on. Life stopped for me at that moment. This was the first look I got of the other kids in my school. All eyes were on me, and I was overdressed. It didn't help that I already look like a dork, no matter how I'm dressed either.

The bus was filled with students, who appeared to be, unintentionally I'm sure, sorted by age. At least until you got to the back of the bus. Up front and moving toward the center of the bus were the 6th, 7th and 8th graders. Grades 9 and up were closer to the back of the bus. Everyone was dressed casually, meaning jeans and stuff. Nothing like how I was dressed. At the back of the bus were the “Heads”, meaning “potheads”. They were dressed in jeans, boots, heavy metal band t-shirts, and leather jackets. Two or three of them had boom boxes; one box

was blasting Ozzy Osbourne – Bark at the Moon. When I say “blasting,” I mean loud! The whole bus was forced to listen to it, and the bus driver didn’t care. This was the norm and I was way out of my league already.

I made it through my first day of school and through the first couple of months; I slowly gravitated towards and began to click with the Heads. It was a rough transition though, a lot of teasing and shit at first, but I made it. Several of the other Heads lived close to where I did, so I integrated myself into the group by buying pot from them, smoking it with them, going to parties, et cetera.

One of the Heads was Cenzi. He lived two houses down from my house. At first, I was probably a nuisance to him because I needed to belong to a group. Belonging to the Heads was my goal, and Cenzi was one of the coolest of the group, and eventually we became friends. Then, there was Kramer; he lived across the street. He always had the best weed for sale. Then, there was Scott; he was a good friend too, but he lived across the river and about three miles down East River Road. Then later, came Chris; he became my best friend, next to Cenzi. I mean... he was cool. Although I don’t think the stinky bastard ever took a shower, he was older looking, had a 5 o’clock shadow and

could buy beer and alcohol at the stores down the street in front of Rochester Institute of Technology. So hell yeah, he was cool.

When I wasn’t in school, I was either at home vegging in front of the TV, watching MTV, out with friends, getting drunk and stoned or I was out with Cenzi in his Chevy Blazer driving to Batavia, NY to do some snow plowing in a trailer park his parents owned. The cool thing about plowing with Cenzi was he always had beer, and we would stop at a small motel along the way that was owned by a New York State Trooper. A State Trooper who sold drugs! I guess Troopers get good drugs from the kids that they pull over and say to them, “give me your stash, and I won’t take you to jail.”

The school year finally ended. I was only at this school for about six months, and I moved from being a preppy dork to being a pothead dork. Even though I was smoking pot in school and out, crushing up caffeine pills in my school books and snorting them with everyone else at the back of the school bus, and Judas Priest has now become my favorite band along with Ozzy, Dio, Motley Crüe and Iron Maiden, I still had a desire to learn. A desire to learn anything either science or math related. Which is why, when I wasn’t in the school bathroom smoking pot and cigarettes with everyone else in a cloud of smoke so thick you could use a shovel to move it, I was in the library

working on the brand new Apple Computers the school had just gotten, or I was in the trigonometry classroom working on the TRS-80 or the CompuColor computers they had. When I say “working on” them, I mean I was already learning the inner workings of computers and the languages they use. I was already breaking down programs to their base code and learning how to defeat the code and remove copyright protections. I was becoming a hacker before the term “hacker” even meant anything. It was fun and I had no way of knowing then that it was this very thing that would be my demise way later in life. Some might argue with that last statement and say my real downfall in life was drugs and alcohol, but I would have hacked, even if I never did drugs or spent a majority of my life in a constant drunken state. It was never a crime that excited me. No, not the stealing of bikes which I did from time to time and, not the doing of the drugs, and not the result of hacking a system or a program, but it was the thrill of figuring out how to get around the obstacles in my way to get to the end result. I didn’t steal a bike for the thrill of having someone else’s bike; I did it because I figured out a way to get around the method people used to lock them up. I didn’t get any excitement from owning a hacked version of a copyrighted program or using other people’s work from the network servers at school to get good grades. It was the actual breaking of the program code or the penetration of

a supposedly secure network that gave me a sense of accomplishment. I suppose I could say it is similar to a diver, diving only because he loves to dive and not because he likes to achieve the monetary rewards of finding a sunken treasure. Sure, finding the treasure is cool, and it is exciting, but not because you have it in your hand, but because you know that you did it. You surpassed all the hurdles in your way and you accomplished something few other people could even think of doing.

It is now my second year at Wheatland-Chili Central School and yep, I was still a Head; I still partied far too much. Life at home was okay, because every Friday night my father would bring home a pizza and a six-pack of beer for me and whatever friend or friends I’d have over. However, I was the only Head without a girlfriend. I was so busy worrying about fitting in and fussing with computers that I had forgotten about girls. That was about to change. That year was going to be different.

I had my eyes on Barbie. She was cute... really cute. Brown, curly hair, nicely developed, a slender build, and well... she had a nice ass. I don’t even remember how I met her because she was one or two grades below me. That alone was bad for many reasons. I wouldn’t be able to take her to the prom, and I’d probably get teased by other students my age for

going out with a girl in 8th grade when I was in 10th. Still, something about her drew me in. In the end though, I never got to date Barbie. I ended up dating her older sister, Patti. Patti was one grade above me; she wasn't nearly as good looking as her sister, but I liked her. I liked her a lot, and not just because Barbie was her sister either. As a matter of fact, once Patti and I started hanging out, her sister was a non-issue. The main problem with dating Patti was that she lived probably twenty miles from me. It was twenty miles of fields, farms, and absolutely nothing.

My father would drive us places occasionally, but Patti and I would like to meet at night sometimes in a trailer that was in her yard. It was a nice sized trailer, and we used it for what any two teenaged lovers would use it for... sex. So, I had to find my own transportation to her house. I did what any teenager would do, I stole a bicycle. Isn't that what any teenager would do? Probably not. I needed a good bike, not some used Huffy with a banana seat and tassels hanging from the handlebars, but a real bike, a nice 12 speed road bike, a racing bike. So, one night, at about 3:00 AM, I got nice and drunk, smoked a few bowls and walked over to the R.I.T. Campus down the street. I headed for the on-campus dorm buildings and the bike racks in front of them. The next thing I did was walk around a bit and scope out the situation. This was the 80's and there were no surveillance

cameras like there are today. As long as no one saw me taking a bike, there was no way to get caught. So, I went to one bike that had a lock going through the frame and rear wheel, and I took its front wheel off. This was done very quickly because all expensive bikes had the "quick release" wheels. With a front wheel in hand, I rapidly found a bike that some dumb ass, probably in a hurry, locked up just through the front wheel. I disconnected the bike from the front wheel, leaving only the front wheel on the bike rack, popped the front wheel I just took from the other bike onto the one I just got, and I hopped on and rode off. Total work time, including walking over to the campus and the quick bike ride home: about 30 minutes. I then had myself a nice \$2000 bicycle.

I rode this bike to Patti's home many times. Ride time to her home was about an hour and a half. It was a hard ride, but the pain was always eased by releasing some hormones once I got to my destination. I would usually sleep there until about 5 AM and then ride home to be there in time to change and go to school.

This was the year Patti was going to graduate. I still had another year left. Long story short, Patti and I broke up. To be honest and fair to her, she broke up with me. Her high school years were about to end. It was time for her to move on. Yes, I

cried like a bitch. I mean, I had just lost the first girlfriend I had at this school. Honestly though, I had a great time with Patti, even when we weren't having sex. We used to take long walks, talk about whatever teenagers talked about, and I even used to go to marching events she did with the school because she played the clarinet in the school band.

My school schedule changed and I went to a vocational school called something like WIMOCO (no clue what that stood for) for half of my school day every day. It was a large school that had students from all the regional schools attending and learning vocations like Auto Mechanics, Carpentry, and Electrical Engineering. At WIMOCO, I was taking Data Processing. I worked on big, old computers. Maybe they would not have been considered too old back then. With today's technology, you could take one of those computers that took up about 40 square feet, weighed about 2000 pounds and fit it on a memory card for your cell phone. I learned RPG, RPG2, COBOL, FORTRAN and other computer languages. I also learned how to use those computer languages along with some creative thinking of my own to defeat the systems they were running on. Yup, I hacked the whole system, and hijacked other students work and assignments, changed a few things and then submitted them as my own.

WIMOCO was where I met Cindy. She was taking the Dental Technician classes. At the end of the day at WIMOCO the entire school had to walk through the Dental Tech section of the building to get outside, where the busses were that took us back to our regular schools. This is how I met Cindy and, after flirting with her for a few weeks, we made plans to get together.

Cindy was a great person and great looking, too. Short, blonde, wavy hair, and just very adorable. There was just one small problem; she lived in Hilton, which was very far away from where I lived, even further than the distance to Patti's house. There was no way I could cycle that far. So, we spent most of our relationship on the phone and at school events that either my father or her parents would drive us to. Occasionally, we would meet at a roller skating rink in Greece, NY. It was far away too, but I had it all figured out. First, my friend Chris and I would get stoned, and then we would call a cab. The cab would drive us a good twenty-five miles to the rink, and we would tell it to pull over at some townhouses across from the rink. Chris would get out first, and I would act like I was reaching for my wallet. Then, I would pop the door open and Chris and I would run like hell! We would then go across the street to the rink, and I would meet up with Cindy. When the evening was over, Chris and I would call a different cab company, and we would do the

same thing again in reverse. We did this for months and never got caught.

CHAPTER 4 – The Navy

Chris dropped out of school and became a member of the Army Reserves. So, I didn't get to hang out with Chris as much as I used to. He moved out of the neighborhood and into the city of Rochester. My grades in school were horrible, probably because I had pretty much stopped going to school altogether. So, I decided to join the military too. I didn't care which branch. I met with some recruiters through my school and decided on joining the Navy.

I thought joining the military would be good for me. I wanted a little discipline in my life; I needed it. So, I joined. I left my comfort zone in Rochester and hopped on a flight to San Diego, California to start my new life in the Navy.

Of course, before I was sent to San Diego, I had to do all the normal stuff one does before joining the military. This included taking the ASFAB Test (it's kind of like the SAT tests you take before you go to college, only on the ASFAB test, you don't have to be able to spell "SAT" to pass). Then there was the psychical exam, to sum it up in as few words as possible... "Bend over. Cough. Heartbeat, that's good. Now, if you can walk out the door and leave, we know your eyesight is good. Okay, leave."

Also before the tests, I had to meet with the recruiter and answer some basic questions like:

Have you ever smoked marijuana?

Yes, sir.

When was the last time you tried it?

About an hour ago.

*Okay, we'll leave that out. *sound of pen scratching out text**

Have you ever tried cocaine or other stimulants?

Yes, sir.

When was the last time you tried cocaine?

About three days ago, at a party.

*Okay, we'll leave that out. *sound of pen scratching out text**

Have you ever tried hallucinogens, like LSD or PCP?

Yes, sir.

When was the last time?

About a week ago... wait... do 'shrooms count as a hallucinogen?

*Okay, we'll leave that out. *sound of pen scratching out text**
So, out of all the available jobs on this sheet, which one would you like to choose as your Naval career?

This one, the Navy Military Police Officer.

Okay. You just have to take the ASFAB test and a physical, and then you will get a letter telling you where you will be going to boot camp.

I'm serious, that was pretty much the dialog. It was like 1984 or 85, and I don't think the military gave a crap who they enlisted. Then after my letter telling me when and where I was going for boot camp came, I was off to San Diego.

I had to go to Buffalo and catch a non-stop flight to San Diego, along with about 20 other idiots like me. I don't remember the flight itself, because I was pretty drunk and stoned. I even brought a bag of weed with me. When the flight landed in San Diego, and before I had time to spark up a joint after the flight, we were herded onto a bus.

This bus took us to The Navy Recruit Training Center, and when we arrived, we were taken off the bus and brought into a big room, with blue squares on the white tiled floor. The blue squares were four tiles squared. That's 2 feet by 2 feet. We were told to sit in the blue squares.

I said sit IN the square Recruit!!! Why is your foot outside the blue square Recruit?!! You think this is funny, Recruit!?? Give me twenty!!!

Okay, funny or not, this is what I wanted. Yeah, this was what I needed. Discipline! YAY! Only it didn't take me long to figure out this wasn't the military I'd seen on television. There were no Company Officers (CO's) swearing; they weren't allowed to because it might hurt someone's feelings. There was no kicking and banging around of trash cans because, first of all this was the 80's and the trash cans that you could buy at a hardware store for \$10 probably cost the US Military \$5,000 each, and besides, loud noises might scare the recruits. So yeah, the first forty-eight hours they kept us awake as long as possible, chopped our hair off, and then issued us uniforms and all that other crap.

Then something happened, just within the first 48 hours that made me think I'd made a big mistake, two things actually. The first thing was when they made the announcement: "Anyone who is having second thoughts and wants to go home, right now, with a General Discharge, step forward!!" and about 10 guys walked up. They were taken to a separate room to be discharged, and we never saw them again.

Then the other thing that made me realize the military under Ronald Reagan was a farce was when they sent us to a room full of people at desks and when it was my turn, I went to a desk and sat down. It was explained to me that, although I signed up to be a Navy Military Police Officer, that the job was no longer available. I had a choice; to either choose another job from the sheet in front of me or leave, with a General Discharge. This was my time to make a break for it. A General Discharge is just as it sounds. It's not great like an Honorable Discharge, but it's not bad like a Dishonorable Discharge either.

At this point, I'm probably an idiot for not taking the easy way out. Although I knew I needed the type of structure the military offers, I was beginning to see too many loopholes in the system. I saw these loopholes because that is what I do best. It's just like stealing bicycles, hacking the code of computer programs, or exploiting vulnerabilities in a network. Don't think I didn't think about taking the easy way out though, I did. In fact, I had another choice in my head too, the choice of staying in the Navy, eating well and getting paid or going back to Rochester, with my tail between my legs and ask my father if I could live in the house again, while I find a job.

I know earlier I said that living in the house with my father and grandmother was kind of cool but, there were some not so

cool times too. Like when Cindy and I were alone in my room one day. My grandmother must have thought we were making out or having sex, which at that moment we weren't, but she started calling Cindy a whore and a slut. Yeah, it was a little creepy because I never saw my grandma go off like that. I felt horrible for Cindy. So, we called her mom to come and get her but Cindy lived in Hilton, and it took her mom a while to get there. I was shocked at the entire situation. I just tried to calm the two of them down, and then I got stoned. Speaking of getting stoned, here's another little story about growing up with my father. I think it's worth mentioning again that he smokes pot. He smokes a lot of pot. He also drinks a lot of vodka. One time he told me he was on a new diet. The diet consisted of four things, hard boiled eggs, baked potatoes with cottage cheese on them, and well, vodka.

However, that's not the story. The story is, one day, he came to me while I was vegging on the couch, and he was excited. He told me, "This is it; I have quit smoking pot! I am never going to smoke pot again. This is it. I quit!" Of course I didn't give a shit, so I was just like, "Great, Dad." I was a teenager, right? Right, so, what did I do? I raided his stash, of course, slowly, over a period of about two weeks. I kept taking a little bit of his stash, until finally it was all gone. If that weren't enough, I also scraped all the resin from his pipes. I cleaned him out totally.

Then one day, the 4th of July to be exact, about 6:00 PM, I was crashed out on the couch in the living room, and I was awakened by my father. He kicked the couch as hard as he could to wake me up and screamed at me:

You smoked all my pot!

You said you quit, Dad!

I did quit, but this is the 4th of July and I figured that I deserved just a little toke!

Well, then you didn't quit, dumbass. What do you want me to do about it now?

You know what Dave, fuck you. And as long as you are in my house, you better get a fucking job and start paying me some rent, since you're not even going to school anymore! And from this moment on, I am only buying for you what you need to live... bread, peanut butter and MILK! That's it!

Well, he lived up to his promise. He bought me a huge tub of peanut butter, some bread and milk. Even so, he forgot two very important things. Number one: it was not "his house," it was his mother's. Number two: his mother wasn't going to let her grandson live on bread, peanut butter and milk. As a matter of fact, the rest of the time I spent in the house, before joining the

Navy, I ate better than I ever did before. I know you're not with us anymore, Grandma, but thanks. I doubt I said, "thank you" back then, so thank you.

Anyway, there I was, in the Navy, and I had a serious choice to make. I chose not to go out on a General Discharge. Instead, I chose another job; I chose to be a Sonar Technician. However, it would be eight weeks before I go to the A-School. A-School is where they train you on the job you chose in the Navy.

By this time, all of us recruits who had come in on a bus to the training center just a few days ago were divided up into Companies. I was in Company 071. We were all marched out to our barracks. It wasn't much different than you have seen on television or in the movies; it's pretty much a room full of bunks. Once I learned how to play the system, I didn't have to do shit. A good chunk of the time I was in boot camp, I was able to go to the CO's office, tell him I needed a chit to go to Medical because I wasn't feeling good. A chit is the equivalent of a hall pass in high school, and anytime someone requested one from the CO, he would write it. I would walk in the direction of Medical, go behind a building, and take off my leggings. Leggings were the only thing that differentiated a recruit from any non-recruit Navy personnel. The Medical Center was over a little bridge at the center of the base. The bridge separated the Recruit Training

Center from the other side of the base which was, in fact, a 'real' Navy Base. No ships or anything, it was just a base with lots of medical buildings, schools, and oh yeah, there was an Enlisted Mans Club there too. It opened at 11:00 AM, so after I ditched my leggings, I would go to a Navy Store, buy a pack of cigarettes, and then go to the club and get drunk. By 5 or 6 PM, I would go back to the barracks and crash out.

This was never even noticed by the CO because he just didn't give a shit. As a matter of fact, by 9:00 PM, he would drive his sporty new red Trans Am right up to the barracks; he would get out of the car with about two cases of beer and three women. The company Yeoman, also a recruit, would join the CO in his office with the beer and the women. My whole company was totally screwed up. It was so screwed up that the CO got removed. We got a new CO, and our company was "Yellow Flagged", which meant that when we marched, we had to carry a yellow flag to show the good companies what happens to companies that suck. What happens is this: we don't get any stars on our company flag to signify areas at which as a company we excelled, and we get to stay in boot camp for four extra weeks. So, my eight week boot camp experience turned into twelve weeks.

I eventually got out of boot camp. It was time for me to go to A-School and learn how to be a Sonar Technician. It sounded really simple on the paper they showed me at boot camp, but I was about to find out otherwise. First, I needed a Top Secret security clearance, you know because I was about to learn what exact sound a PING makes when it bounces off a Krivak Class Frigate or a Kilo Class Submarine. I was beginning to hate all this crap immediately. I mean, shit, I was failing Special Ed in high school. Hell, on the days I was in school, I was stoned and having sexual daydreams in class about my teacher Ms. Kennedy. I didn't mention her earlier, but she was hot. So, there is no "frigate" way (navy joke) I was going to be able to handle these classes and graduate A-School. The only reason I graduated from the computer class I took at WIMOCO in high school was because the teacher knew I was smart. On the last day of class, when the grades were handed out, I thought I was going to fail, and she took me aside and gave me my grade. She said, "The reason I gave you a B+ was not because you did the work. As a matter of fact, I know you stole everyone else's work, but somehow you were smart enough to hack into everyone's account on the mainframe. That tells me that you are smart, very smart. I just hope that in the future you put your knowledge and skills to good use". Sorry, Mrs. Smith, I didn't.

Yet here was my chance, was I going to make it through A-School or was I going to fail? I know the general principle of sonar technology; I watched whales on Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom, but this A-School is tough, really tough. The equipment the Navy was using at the time was archaic. At the time, the Navy was just starting to climb aboard the technology bandwagon. The equipment alone wasn't all that made it difficult. The other thing was that being a sonar technician required advanced math skills, like calculus and trigonometry, two classes I didn't take in high school.

Oh crap, why am I lying? The real reason I didn't make it was because on the A-School base, there were beer machines everywhere, and \$.50 got you a Heineken. Add to that the fact I was in Southern California, only a short drive or long walk to Mission Beach, there was no way I was even going to go to class. Instead, I was going to get drunk on base, then take a cab to Mission Beach. When I got to the beach I was going to hang out on the concrete boardwalk, sit on the wall and wait for some guy to skateboard by and softly say "Sid" as he passes. 'Sid' is the code name for Acid or LSD. Then I was going to whistle or make some kind of other gestures, telling him to come back and I was going to buy myself about six hits of acid from him for the weekend. Then I was going to go back to base, drink lots of beer and trip out like a son of a bitch.

That is why I didn't finish A-School. Then once I was failing A-School, or failed actually, they took me out of class. I just waited for my papers to tell me what the navy was going to do with me next. I was probably going to get put on a ship as a Bosons Mate. In case you don't know, a Bosons Mate is about the lowest life form on a ship. They are the ones that swab the deck, paint the entire ship and do every shit job there is. To be fair though, they play major roles in keeping the ship in a battle worthy condition.

While I was waiting for my orders, they moved me to a different room to live in on base, and I got this roommate named Smith. I didn't know much about this guy, except his name was Smith, he was mean, and he was crazy as hell. He was even crazier than me. He would talk about how he was from New Orleans and was in a gang that killed people all the time. I didn't believe half of the stuff he told me, not because it wasn't believable, to some extent, but I simply had no inner city experiences to relate to. I'd never been in a gang, unless you count wearing a leather jacket in high school, drinking beer and smoking pot being in a gang. I don't. I was a dork in high school, leather jacket or not, and I was still a dork in the Navy. I even got a chit to go to Medical from my CO in boot camp the day the Company was to go get trained on how to fire a pistol. So, I had never even fired a gun. I just liked drugs and drinking.

Oh yeah, and stealing stuff. Smith and I even stole countless cars off the base of the A-School. It was his idea at first, but I improved on his idea. His idea was more like "let's go beat the shit out of someone, steal their money and their car and if they are lucky, we won't kill them." I didn't like that idea at all. Count me out of that. I'm not beating the crap out of anyone, stealing their money and car, and then running them over with it or whatever. Nope. Not doing it.

Hey Smith, let's do this instead... Let's wait until about 7:00 PM, when all the macho dudes go to the gym on base, and you go hang out at the door to the changing room. I will go in and pop combination locks; it's really easy. I figured out how to pop a Master Combo Lock in like 20 seconds when I was stealing bicycles. Then you just let me know if anyone is coming and if everything goes well, some guy's wallet and car keys will be in the locker, and we are out of there in less than a minute and no one gets hurt. We will then go to the parking lot, find out which car the keys go to, then we take the car and go to the beach and get fucked up on whatever drug is being pedaled at the time.

I was shocked. He actually went for my plan. He probably didn't like the fact there was no violence involved, but we did it, many times. At this point in my life, I had drunk alcohol, I've done drugs, hacked computers and "borrowed" cars and bicycles,

but that was it, man. I'd never in my life ever done something to deliberately cause physical harm to someone. I had never fired a gun, and I'd have never even been in a fist fight. I was at the receiving end of a fist once in high school, but I dropped like a brick and did not fight back. I like people; perhaps I like people too much. I did a lot of bad and illegal things, but I didn't do it to hurt anyone. I did it because I wanted to fit in, to be the clown, or just to get attention. I did my crimes for the excitement, the thrill of a plan, any plan that I made actually working. That in itself was a thrill for me. However, at the same time, I trust everyone has a good side to them and the little stuff I did in my life up to this point was all pretty petty. Smith was about to change all that for me.

Smith and I were both restricted to base for a week at the time. I don't recall why he was on restriction, but I was on restriction for missing duty. Actually, I didn't miss duty but while performing my duty of building security patrol one night, I forgot to check in and report "All Clear" when I was supposed to. It was probably because most of the times I was on duty, I would be tripping on acid, and I would have my ass parked in one of the bathrooms, and I would be staring at the tiles on the floor because they were a nice visual hallucination when stared at long enough.

Being on restriction never kept me or Smith on the base. We would just walk down to where the bay and the fence met and go through an opening in the fence and then hit the town. We would go out drinking, eating, and taking the bus down to Mission Beach to score some drugs. Then one evening something happened that changed my life. We went out for some reason. I'm not even sure what the reason was. We were high on acid. Along the way, we were greeted by a hooker. She did all the talking with Smith, and I was just kind of in the background. Smith said, "Come on, man, I gave her \$20, and she's going to give us blow jobs." I was like, "Sure, why not." I wasn't unfamiliar with hookers. I had been to Tijuana many times, especially right after Boot Camp, to release my hormones between the thighs of a woman and to get a feeling I was willing to pay for at the moment.

So, we went to a motel room, where the woman was staying, and she invited us in. The room was dark and she lit some candles. There was a baby in the room. At that point, I was not interested at all; I just wanted the moment to be over. I was high on acid, and I was in a dark room with a black woman, her crying baby, and Smith, who I already know is crazy. I didn't trust this situation at all. I certainly wasn't going to be enjoying a sexual experience in this atmosphere and with all these distractions. This was nuts.

She quieted the baby and then came over to the bed where she worked on me and Smith for about thirty minutes. Neither one of us was very aroused at all, so we zipped it up and headed for the door. I started walking away, not being satisfied and thinking, "Well, that was stupid but no harm, no foul." As I was walking away, Smith was still at the door with her. She was in the room; he was outside. He was trying to negotiate his \$20 back, since she didn't accomplish what she was hired to do. Apparently, she didn't want to give the money back, and I saw Smith punch her in the chest; she fell backwards and the door closed.

Smith started running, telling me to run too. I started to run and tripped over a concrete thing in the parking lot. He told me to get up and run. I said, "Why are we running!? I can't run. My ankle is fucked up! It hurts! Why are we running?" He opened his hand and in his hand was a knife. It was a small 3 inch blade Buck knife. It was bloody. He told me he stabbed her in the chest. I got up and limped, as fast as I could, back to base.

My life had just changed. Life was fun, exciting and a big party up until this point. It really did change my life. I just went from drinking, drugging, hacking, and an occasional petty theft to being a witness to and an accessory to murder. It was life

changing and it is probably the moment that made me begin to understand that life does end, abruptly and sometimes for no good reason. Sure, I lost my childhood friend Andrea many years earlier, but I didn't see it happen. I didn't see the life escaping from her, and I was younger and oblivious to what life meant. Suddenly, everything was serious to me. I couldn't believe this. I wanted to know what happened to that woman! I couldn't be part of this! NO!!! Life as I knew it was just snatched from me, and I had a funny feeling life for that woman had ended, and in the room with that woman was a baby, a baby who is now lying next to its dying mother. A mother, who for whatever reason was turning tricks just to feed it. A woman who, like I stated about people earlier, had a good side. I know she had a good side, or at least a much better side than Smith, the man who just stabbed her had. I saw the look in her eyes before this moment. I read people pretty well. I saw a woman, a woman who loved her child enough not to leave it on a doorstep or in a dumpster. Probably, a woman who just wanted to bring up her child in a world where it had a chance not to make the mistakes she was making. I will carry with me forever the pain of what I witnessed there. A woman, a human being with hands that reached, a heart that beat, a face that smiled and tears that fell was most likely murdered. Now a baby, an innocent child,

reaching out with its hands, is denied. A child ripped from its mother's bosom without explanation or cause.

Now, I'm sorry, and I know up to this point in my life, I'm already a damn criminal, but no, not like this. There was no way I was going down for this crap, so I did what any dork like myself would do, I went to the Military Police the next morning, and I ratted the mother fucker out. I told the MP's everything I knew. They did some checking with local police and two days later my orders came in, and I was assigned to a ship. The MP's thanked me and told me if my testimony was needed, they would let me know. They assured me that Smith was going to be Court Marshaled and would probably be in the Brigg for a very long time. They never did tell me more than that, so I am assuming the woman died.

CHAPTER 5 – Getting Out

USS Merrill - DDG 976

32nd Street Naval Base – San Diego, CA

It was a big ship. I guess not really, but it was big to me. It was an old Navy Destroyer that was about to be decommissioned, until they decided to fit it with the latest and greatest weapon of the time, the Tomahawk Missile. Oh yeah, and it was gray. I would come to be very familiar with its grayness, since I would soon be painting it.

I checked in and got my bunk. This was my new home. It was not too bad. The bunk was tiny. The ship was loud. The others onboard were all wacko. It was like I was sent to a ship full of psychos. So, I guess I fit right in.

Being a Bosons Mate wasn't that bad. It was pretty easy, actually. My duties consisted of a little painting, standing lookout, holding a fire hose when fire drills were called, and working in the flight tower. I worked in the tower when a flight quarters was called and a helicopter was landing. That may sound like a lot, but it wasn't. Since the ship rarely went out, it left me plenty of time to continue what I do best, drink and do drugs. I was stoned the whole time I was on that ship.

I had a ball one night, when I was doing duty as helmsman on the bridge of the ship.

Permission to roll the ship, sir!

Permission granted, Helmsman.

Then with one quick movement, with as much force as I could muster, I spun the helms' wheel to the right; I let it spin for about 30 seconds and then abruptly stopped it. I did the same thing again, only this time to the left, and then I leveled the ship. I did this all as the ship was near its full speed at 20 Knots.

Sir!?

24 degree roll, Helmsman. Good job.

Thank you, Sir!

Now, this may not sound very exciting to you, but it was fun. It was fun for me and everyone on the bridge that knew it was going to happen. It was not so fun for the people below deck, in the galley, where they were eating and cooking or in the racks, where they were sleeping and just got tossed to the floor. A 24 degree roll is pretty much the maximum roll the ship can take before the mast disconnects, as it is designed to in order to keep the ship from rolling over completely. Like I said though, it was fun.

I also remember one night, I was standing Aft Lookout, and we were out at sea. It was dark. You don't know how "dark" dark actually is until you are out in the middle of the ocean at 2:00 AM and the ship is "Lights Out", which means all passageways are closed, and you can't even smoke a cigarette out on the deck because the tip of the cigarette or the flash of the match used to light it could give the ship's location away to enemy ships as far away as 100 miles. That sounded like bullshit to me because I would think that the sound of the massive sized gas turbine engines of the ship itself, running at 30 knots could be picked up by enemy sonar over 1000 miles away and would give the location away more than the light of a cigarette. But what the fuck do I know; I'm just a Bosons Mate standing aft lookout. Right now I'm on my headset in communication with the forward look out and with CC or OPS (Central Command – located in the center belly of the ship where everything is controlled from and operated). Late at night the normal thing to do on a lookout is to tell jokes over the headsets to the other people. I guess it was to help everyone stay awake because without some jokes and some conversation, I'm sure we would all fall asleep on duty because it was pretty damn boring.

This was the night I came pretty damn close to death too because, although I have done it before on other nights and with

other listeners, I was telling “mom” or “mother” jokes. Like, “your mom’s so fat she sweats mayonnaise and has to use a whole roll of paper towels for a tampon.” Although the jokes I told were not directed to any one person in particular, one person decided to take it as a personal attack against his mother. After he got mad at me and said he was going to come to the aft of the ship and kill me in one hour. I explained to him, I wasn’t cutting on his mother; it was just a joke in general. However, he did show up at the aft of the ship in one hour, as he stated. He and two other guys, big guys, started to push me around, and the whole time I was like, “Dude! I wasn’t cutting on your mother!! I was just making jokes!!” He wasn’t persuaded. They had me backed up, up and over the rear of the ship.

So, there I was, about to pay the ultimate price for being nothing worse than a clown. The ship was traveling at about twenty-five knots, and it was 3:00 AM. The ship is in “Lights Out”. I had just reported in “All Clear” about five or ten minutes before, and it would be another twenty to twenty-five minutes before I was supposed to report again. If I were to be thrown from the ship now, I would be twenty-five minutes away from a ship traveling at 25 knots in total darkness, with no life preserver or anything else on me. Add to that another ten or fifteen minutes before I was reported missing and finally, another ten or fifteen before the ship comes to All Stop and a ‘Man Overboard’

is called. Yeah, I’m a dead man. I was upside down, and they had me by my legs. I was staring at the white water churning around the screws of the ship and thinking, “If I’m lucky the screws will quickly suck me in, chew me up and spit me out as chum for the sharks.” Then, just as I realized I really didn’t have a life to pass before my eyes, and that someone needed to slather me with butter because damn it, I was toast, sirens and alerts sounded. Instantly, the entire ship lit up like a candle. No, it lit up like lots of candles. Then I heard a voice; it was not the voice of God or some other higher power telling me “I just saved your ass again Dave,” but instead it was a voice that called out with the deafening tone of a thousand trumpets and it said, “FLIGHT QUARTERS!! FLIGHT QUARTERS!! ALL HANDS REPORT TO YOUR FLIGHT STATIONS!! FLIGHT QUARTERS!! FLIGHT QUARTERS!!” I just about pissed myself and then, I heard another voice as I was being pulled up and back onto the deck by the guys who had put me over. It was an angry voice, and it said, “You’re one lucky motherfucker, asshole.”

I never saw that guy again, and I didn’t stop telling “mother” jokes either. I continued on with my life as normal. Normally drunk and stoned, normally a thief and clown, and normally too stupid to figure it all out. To figure out why I am all the things that should have killed me, not just that time, but many times.

After about two weeks of being out at sea, my ship was back in port and not scheduled to go back out for a few months. So, except for some of my scheduled duties which included a little painting, and some lookout duties or logging people on the ship as they board, I had plenty of free time to get drunk and stoned, and I took this time to do just that. As I mentioned earlier, I love Southern California. I love the weather, the beaches, the mountains, the laid back attitude of the people who live there and the fact that no matter how freaky you are; you're accepted. I loved Southern California so much I decided to go on a nice long bicycle ride to enjoy it, without any boundaries. I hopped on another bike I stole from a bike rack at the end of a pier where all the ships were out to sea. I went to Mission Beach, bought a shitload of acid and tripped my way on to a journey filled with sea breezes, palm trees, tall ships docked in the port of San Diego, then into the hills, with the tall trees, cool winds, and furry little tarantulas walking across the roads. They were there. I swear it.

I was so wrapped up in the beauty of it all, I lost track of time. I did plan on being out cycling around for three days, but it turned into a week and a half. I had missed a crapload of duty on the ship, so I figured I was in a lot of trouble. I figured I might as well stay out and about for another three days and just call it a two week vacation. The Navy would call it either a two week

UA (Unauthorized Absence) or simply Desertion, which if we were at war could be punishable with death by a firing squad. But what the hell did I care? This was just another stupid decision of mine for the record books. What really pissed me off was when I did return to the ship, after being gone for two weeks, no one had noticed! I looked at the schedules, and I was still being scheduled for duty. It was nuts. I wanted to be disciplined! I wanted justice! Yeah, I'm an idiot. I had already been caught with marijuana in my blood during one of the random drug tests the Navy was doing. I even had to go to Captain's Mast once because of it. Captain's Mast is basically the same as going to court, only this was the Captain's ship, and it was his court. When I was at Captain's Mast the Captain asked me, very clearly, "Son, are you trying to get out of the Navy?" and I replied, "Yes, Sir! I am!" When it was time for him to return his verdict, he said "Thirty days restriction to the ship, thirty days of extra duty and forfeiture of half your pay for one month." This pissed me off because this isn't the Navy I wanted to be in. I needed someone or something to control me. I may have been drunk and stoned my whole young adult life, but I wasn't stupid. I knew it would all one day, catch up to me and damn it, this was my last hope for some kind of structure and discipline in my life and to save my dumb ass from self-destruction.

It just didn't happen. No one cared. I was missing all my duty. They even stopped making me go take the Navy ordered drug tests when my number came up. So, I went to the Command Master Chief of the ship, and I turned myself in for being UA for two weeks. The CMC was like, "You were missing? Let me look at the logs. Mmmmm, wonder how I missed that. You sure have been missing. I'm afraid I'm going to have to send you to Capitan's Mast."

So again, I am at Capitan's Mast, and the Captain asked me again, "Son, are you trying to get out of the Navy?" and again I replied, "Yes Sir! I am!" I was hoping this time he would let me out. However, instead he said, "Sixty days restriction, sixty days extra duty and forfeiture of half your pay for two months."

There I was, supposedly stuck on the ship for sixty days. Although it didn't stop me from walking off. I just walked off. My name never made it to the restricted list, so no one stopped me, and I went out on another two week UA. I came back and turned myself in to the CMC again. Again, I go back to Captain's Mast, and he asked me again, "Son, do you want to get out of the Navy?" and I replied the same as before, "Yes Sir! I do." This time he said, "Okay. Wait for your orders." I was excited until I found out that getting discharged can take up to eight months.

Within two days, I got my orders, and I was to check into my new quarters on a section of the 32nd St. Naval Base, a section I never knew existed. My quarters were great. I had a huge room all to myself. They assigned me to work off base, in a naval lawyer's office. I wasn't sure what I would be doing there, so I showed up the first day and asked the Commander, who was also a Navy lawyer, what my job was, and he told me "Nothing." I said, "What? I just sit here and do nothing all day?" He told me that was pretty much it, and that they may occasionally ask me to look up old cases in the legal reference books and do research. Wow, there I was; a total screw up on his way out of the Navy on a Dishonorable Discharge, and right before I leave, they give me a job as a paralegal. This was similar to the job I wanted when I joined in the first place. I mean, it involved law, and I liked it.

I really did like the job. I especially liked the fact that I could take off for lunch and then not even come back until the next day. While I was working at my new dream job in the Navy, I started buying stuff with money I didn't have. It seems that when you are in the service you get credit at all the local stores that sell expensive stuff like cars, furniture, electronics and big appliances. I bought a few high tech stereos. One was a big 500 watt Kenwood stereo, and I bought a bunch of smaller stuff like an Aiwa boom box and an Aiwa walkman-style device that even

had a remote control. It was all pretty cool stuff and expensive, too. It was a good thing I never planned on paying for it.

CHAPTER 6 – After the Navy

My discharge day finally arrived and when I left, I was only allowed to keep my Sea Bag and whatever civilian clothes and stuff that I had. I was stripped of everything that had anything to do with the Navy, like my uniforms and military I.D. They gave me a check that was two-thirds the value of what a bus ticket would cost to go back to the city I came from, Rochester.

I had a really nice bicycle at the time and my first plan was to cycle across the country. Unfortunately, I had no idea about the value of money, how far it would get me, how far it actually was from California to NY or how much time and energy it would take to make that trek. I started the journey and didn't make it too far before I gave up, called my mother, and asked her to wire me some money. She did and I hopped on a bus back to Rochester.

I had nowhere to stay when I got there because my grandmother had sold her house and moved to Mesa, Arizona and my father, being the worthless leech that he is, followed her. My friend Chris was in the Army full time now too so that was another dead end. So, I had no job, only a few friends, and not much of anything to go back to. I even called my father and asked him what he did with all my stuff, the stuff I left behind

when I joined the Navy, and he told me he threw it all away. All my clothes, my high school yearbooks, and any possessions I ever had were gone. I suppose it was his way of paying me back for smoking all his pot, but regardless, it was a pretty fucked up thing to do. He could have held on to it for me or sent it to my mother in Maryland, but I guess it was just easier to toss it in the trash.

I figured when I got back to Rochester, I would look up Cenzi and crash at his place for as long as he'd let me. I also figured I would get a job somewhere, but I had no idea where. When I arrived, I made my way to Cenzi's house. He let me crash out in his truck, but not in his house. Probably, because it was his parents' house, not his, and they didn't like the idea too much, if he even asked. I found a job as a maintenance person at a fairly large strip mall called Southtown Plaza. My duties were to fix stuff that was broken, pick up trash, mow the lawns, and crap like that. I thought the job was cool, only for the fact that I got to ride around on an ATV.

My job there didn't last long because one day I was fixing something in the back of a shoe store when it dawned on me that I needed a new pair of shoes. The shoes that I was wearing were worn through and the soles were lined with cardboard. So, I took a new pair from a box in the store, put my old ones in, and

walked right out. Yeah, somehow I thought they wouldn't notice I was walking out with a bright, new pair of shoes, when I had walked in with a tattered and dirty pair, just moments before. It wasn't long, maybe a half hour, before the police were at the maintenance shop, looking for me. They took the shoes back, gave me mine and my boss fired me on the spot. I was also given a ticket, and a court date to answer for my crime. Nothing happened at my trial because the shoe store didn't press charges, so I just got a slap on the wrist.

I finally found a place to live; I rented a room in some old lady's house that I saw advertised in the local newspaper. I had found a new job working at TJ's Big Boy, where I had worked once for a short time during high school. It wasn't long before I cleaned out the old lady's house. By cleaned out, I mean I sold all her silverwares and took all her prescription drugs. I was getting into heavier drugs at the time. My drug dealer was a deaf guy who went to R.I.T. He lived off campus in some apartments on E. River Road. He only went by the name E.T., but I didn't care; he had the best weed I ever had before. One time I went to his apartment to buy some weed, and he was having a party. When he finally came out to see me, he laid out a line of cocaine on the breakfast bar between the kitchen and living room. When I say he laid out a line I mean, he laid out a line! It was about a quarter inch thick and three feet long! I had

never seen that much cocaine! He snorted about three inches of the line, handed me a rolled up twenty dollar bill, and motioned to me to snort some; not some, but the rest. The rest was mine! Wow. I felt like I died and went to Cheech and Chong Heaven!

There was this fat woman named Kim where I worked, and she was hitting on me all the time. She was married to a guy named Chris, and they lived in the city of Rochester itself on Love Street. Like I said, she was fat, and I don't mean a little overweight; she was like 400 pounds. She told me her and her husband were looking for someone to rent a room in their house, to help them pay their bills. I knew this was going to be a disaster, but I took the room, simply because it wasn't going to be long before the old lady I was renting from discovered her silver was missing.

Living at Kim's was one party after another. Just about every weekend we would collectively buy a keg of beer and have a party at her house. When I say collectively I mean, Kim, me and other people from work. Her husband, Chris, didn't like it too much. Chris, also, used to like to show off his guns. He had a lot of guns: handguns, rifles and shotguns. He kept them locked up in a cabinet.

I finally quit my job at Big Boy, because I couldn't take Kim hitting on me all the time. So, I found a job at Coco's Carousel,

an Italian restaurant in West Henrietta, about eight miles out from where I was still living at Kim's. I met a lot of new people there, mostly college students from R.I.T., and we partied like crazy. One of them was a girl I thought I fell in love with, but the love was short lived. I don't remember her name, but I remember she was short, had red hair and a gorgeous body. I remember we often used to go to one guy's house to party. Our relationship started like any good relationship does. It started after we were all out playing touch football in the snow and the mud, and we went back to the guy's house. We all got stoned, took some blotter acid and watched Pink Floyd – The Wall on VHS. Isn't that how love starts? One thing led to another and next thing you know, me and the girl were all over each other. Nothing serious happened that day, but in the days and weeks to follow, we became quite the couple. People at work told us to get married, but I wasn't that much in love and the sex wasn't even that great. I mean, for me the sex was great but probably not for her. It was probably the biggest sexual blunder of her life. The first time we had sex, and she was naked in front of me, I scanned her body and uttered those words that make any woman melt in a man's hands... "Wow! You really are a redhead aren't you!?" Needless to say, that didn't go over too well, but hey, it was the first time I ever saw red pubic hair.

Also, I was still 18 years old, and I was firing faster than a machine gun probably, but in my defense, I was quick to reload.

Love life aside, it was time for me to get out of Rochester. Sure it was fun. I partied like I've never partied before, but I was tired of living in Kim's house with her gun happy husband and tired of walking 8 miles to and from work every day. I needed some ideas, but I didn't have any. So, I called my mother and her idea was that I move to Ocean City, MD.

When I moved to Ocean City, MD, I was outgoing, happy, and didn't care what people thought about me. I was even once known as "The Big Kahuna" among my friends when I lived in Ocean City. It's amazing how things change as you get older.

The first thing I did in Ocean City was to get a room at The Englander. The Englander was a rooming house. An old home sectioned off into about twenty rooms with dimly lit hallways, slotted doors, and community bathrooms. It wasn't much, but it was a place to lay my head at night.

It was spring in 1986 when I moved to Ocean City, and I had to go out and find a job. It didn't take long to find one, since everyone was hiring. The summer season was quickly approaching, and Ocean City is a seasonal town, a major

vacation spot for people and families from Maryland, D.C., Virginia, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

I probably put in about four job applications at various businesses before I made my way to a café located in the basement of a hotel. I was greeted by Mike and Mary Anne, the managers of the café, and they hired me on the spot, as a line cook.

My duties included: cooking breakfast and lunch, waiting on tables, and being a cashier at the counter. Mike and Mary Anne were pretty cool people to work for. They never demanded too much, just that you worked hard and brought a happy face to work with you. Even after the workday was over, they were always there for you, well, they were for me.

Mike and Mary Anne kind of adopted me, as the son they never had, and I could always come to them with my troubles. They would never turn their backs to me. I guess you could say they were the parents I never had. I mean, sure; I had a mother, a father and step-father but Mike and Mary Anne were different. Mike always had stories to fit any occasion. He would tell stories about growing up as a surfer and although Mary Anne didn't have as many stories to tell, her animated expressions would tell stories of their own. After Mike offered advice to any problem I would come to him with, and told me a story to go

along with it, the story and the advice always seemed to relieve and distract me from whatever it was that was troubling me to begin with. Of course, after you got to know Mike a little more, you realized that about 90% of his stories were full of crap, but it didn't matter because the way he told the stories, was not only entertaining and distracting, but therapeutic to an extent. I was happy to have met Mike and Mary Anne. Along with their daughter, Courtney and Mary Anne's father, they were my family in Ocean City, and I honestly believe I am a better person today for having known them.

Anyway, back at the café; one morning while I was working as a cashier at the counter, one of the hotel maids came to get a cup of coffee. She came down and got coffee every morning that she worked. There was something about her that was drawing me to her. Maybe it was her purple hair, maybe it was her eyes. I'm not certain but whatever it was; I was definitely attracted to this girl.

It took me a while to get her name, which was Laura, and even longer to get up the nerve to ask her out on a date, but eventually I did. Although, it didn't go quite as I had it planned out in my mind; one morning as she was getting her coffee at the café, I asked her out to dinner, and she originally turned me down gently. That didn't stop me because I continued to ask her

out until she finally said, "Yes." See, I have never been known as a person who easily gives up, so I wasn't going to start giving up with Laura. It's a good thing I wasn't a quitter too, because Laura stood me up about five times before she finally showed up for our first date.

Our first date wasn't anything special; I mean it wasn't fine dining and dining or anything. It was just a walk on the boardwalk, some cheap food and a trip to the amusement park on the pier. We didn't do much but get acquainted with each other outside of work, and take a ride on the Ferris wheel.

Many people warned me about Laura, even Mike and Mary Anne didn't like her, but I was in love, and I didn't listen to anyone. Even so, thinking back on it now I should have listened to everyone, especially Mike and Mary Anne.

Laura was living with her father in an apartment outside Ocean City, in a small town called Showell. It was a tiny community, one that consisted of nothing more than probably 200 people and a chicken farm / processing plant. Laura's father's name was Ed, and he was a recovering alcoholic. He was something like the Grand Pooh Bah of Alcoholics Anonymous or something like that. I also learned that Laura was a recovering alcoholic. Laura was older than me and Laura had

something other girls I dated didn't have, a past. It was a tainted one that spiked my curiosity.

Laura and I had now been in a relationship for about three or four months. She had some cool stuff, like a bag full of gold. That's right, a bag full of gold. She had a purse and in her purse was another smaller purse with gold chains, gold rings, and gold bracelets. It was expensive stuff too. She had Tri-Gold, White Gold, 14, 18 and 24 carats. She didn't mind parting with it because she had plenty of it and could always get more. So in my eyes, not only had I found my true love, she also came with a pot of gold.

There was this guy and I don't remember the guy's name because I never met him, but Laura knew him, and she would meet with him occasionally in hotels in Ocean City. I think she also met with some people who made adult films, but I never knew if that was true or not. Anyway, this guy (we'll call him Bubba) was apparently responsible for about twenty jewelry store robberies in the Baltimore area. I think Laura told me this, and I also think I was told by the Ocean City Police department that Laura was in some deep shit, and that I would go down with her, if I didn't do something.

To make matters worse Laura was pregnant, about a month. I assumed the baby was mine, but I'll never know. It wasn't

important anyway. I was 18 or 19 years old; Laura was 23, and I was in a world of shit. I should have listened to everyone who had warned me about her, but I didn't.

I'm skipping over a whole bunch of good stuff that was happening in my life at the same time. Mike and Mary Anne were still my family away from home. I had become the number one cook at the café. My duties expanded to running the outside grill, occasionally being a bar back, playing a major role in getting banquets set up, and running in one of the three buildings the hotel had. So, not all of my life was turmoil, just any part of it that had to do with Laura.

I didn't have a car; I didn't need one. I just stole bicycles and used them to get around or the bus system in Ocean City was sufficient for getting around. Yet I liked riding bicycles. My favorite bike that I stole was a Peugeot Nice. It was a road bike, similar to the bikes used in the Tour de France. I loved riding it. I spent a lot of money fixing it up with the best components, and I took a lot of pride in that bike and the fact that I was a damn good and fit cyclist. I would probably ride about twenty to thirty miles a day from Ocean City to Berlin, MD or Assateague Island and back. So, except for Laura, I was leading a pretty normal life.

When Laura found out she was pregnant, she said she wanted an abortion, and she knew where she had to go to get it; it was on Route 13 in Dover Delaware. It's pretty scary, thinking back now, how she knew where to go and have an abortion. At the time I was young and dumb. I didn't really absorb what was happening around me when it had anything to do with Laura. I was convinced that Dover wasn't that far away and that the Route 113, I saw in Berlin, MD was the same as the route where the abortion place was, and that it would take us there. So, one day I convinced Laura I was right, and we could hitchhike to the place. After we made our way to Berlin, I soon discovered I was wrong and we went back to our apartment in Ocean City.

Since it was winter, the café I worked at was closed for the season, so I was working as a cook at The Mermaid Saloon, down at the inlet in Ocean City. That was a really cool job. I mean... it was owned by a drunken guy named Bruce, who bought it with money he won in the Maryland Lottery. The place was always dead, so all the employees, including myself, just hung out, ate the food and drank the beer for free, and smoked pot and hash outside the back door.

While working at The Mermaid, I made a few friends. Another cook who was a short person named James, a bartender named Jeanie, who used to give me free drinks and back

massages at the bar all the time, and a kooky waitress named Anne. Anne was a lesbian and a vegetarian and was always talking about some kind of food she made with natural ingredients and stuff. She seemed pretty weird to me at the time but Anne knew about Laura being pregnant and offered to take her to Dover to get the abortion.

The abortion was done and it wasn't until after it was done that I felt a bit angry. I mean... that could have been my baby, and it probably was. However, I still had other things to worry about, like the fact that the Ocean City Police wanted Laura to be a confidential informant and work at the bars on the boardwalk, to help them catch drug dealers. This pissed me off because she was still pregnant when they demanded that she do this, that is, if she didn't want to get arrested with Bubba the jewelry thief.

I went to the police and offered that I be the CI in place of Laura. Since I was not 21 yet, I couldn't work at the bars. I don't know how I did it, maybe it was my pleading with them to leave her alone because she was pregnant, but somehow I got Laura out of her deal with the cops to be a CI, and I got them to disassociate her with Bubba.

This is not where the troubles with Laura stopped; this was just the beginning. We, or at least I, was still in love, and now I was on a mission to "fix" Laura, put her past behind her and

move forward in life, without the need of friends like Bubba, not having more abortions and to live the dream; My dream of Laura and I living together forever. Thinking back, I realize I was an idiot. Laura didn't know any other kind of life and although my intentions were good and my dreams were grand; I was 18, and I had no way of providing or even preparing for the dream of a perfect life.

Laura and I started arguing a lot, well maybe not a lot, but more than I would have liked. On the flip side, it wasn't too bad, because arguments always ended with sex, lots of sex. It was the sex we had one night that opened a whole new world of problems with me and Laura. I suppose "problems" isn't the right word because it wasn't really a problem as much as it was just freaky. One night, and I think it was my idea; we decided to take the bus from our apartment all the way up to 145th street, the MD-DE line, and take a romantic walk on the beach in Delaware.

So, we got off the bus and walked along the dark beach at about 2AM. We walked hand in hand. We were happy, content, and loving each other. It was nice to be beneath the stars and moon with nothing but the sound of the waves crashing against the shore. We kissed and stroked each other, until we were naked in the sand, making love on the beach. Oh, it was great.

It was about the most romantic scene you could think of; it was like being in a movie.

More like a horror movie. Sure, making love on a beach looks great on film, but sand is really quite an irritant, but not nearly as irritating or shocking as what happened next. After we had sex on the beach and were back in our soggy clothes, Laura goes into a panic and says, "Run! We have to run! They're here! They're following me!!" She grabbed my hand, and we were running back towards the street. The whole time she is telling me to run and that some kind of sprits were chasing us.

This was the weirdest thing I ever heard. Was Laura a psycho? I had to admit I had questioned her sanity on occasion, but I was really questioning it now. We made our way back the street, got on a bus, and went back to our apartment. The whole way, she was looking behind us, in what appeared to be a genuine panic. I was laughing and not taking it seriously at all. This was the time she decided to tell me she was a witch.

OK... a witch!?! The only witch I was thinking about was "which" exit I should take off this bus and get away from her! This was nuts! She was nuts! Or was she?

Later in our relationship, she did a few things that made me wonder if she was, in fact, a witch. The following winter, we

were living in a hotel at the end of the Rt. 90 Bridge on Costal Hwy and, by this time, we were arguing more than usual, mostly about how we were going to pay the rent. We had a cat; it was a stray we took in because it was cute, and because it was a cold winter. One night, I came home from one of my daily bicycle rides. Yes, I rode my bike in all seasons and all weather conditions. My return to our room that evening was much different than any other. When I walked into the room, Laura told me, didn't ask me, but told me "Change the kitty litter." I replied, "I will, just give me a moment to clean up; I just got done riding thirty miles." She said, "No. Clean it out now!" I said, "Give me a minute, jeezzz!" She then picked up the cat and walked out on to our balcony. We lived on the third floor, and she held the cat by the scruff of its neck over the railing of the balcony and said, "Clean the litter now!" I was thinking she was just fucking around and again, I said, "Give me a minute, damn it," and then she did not drop the cat; no, she threw it down with all the force she could and without even a thought about the cat, its life, and / or my feelings.

I was shocked and I immediately ran down to find the cat. Luckily, the cat was fine. I suppose three stories isn't that much when you are a six pound cat, but the cat was scared and had crawled under an air conditioning unit of one of the rooms on the first floor. Needless to say, I took the cat back to the room and

cleaned out the kitty litter. This obviously led to an argument and, boy, it was a good one too. We had a bunch of potted plants in our room and by the time the argument was over, every single one of them was tossed around the room. Oh, but not just the plants, no, it started off as of all things, a food fight. I'm not sure which one of us started it; I think it was her that started it by beaming me in the leg with an egg from the fridge. Keep in mind, this was a small room. It was basically a studio, with a kitchenette area, a king sized bed, a table for 4 and a bathroom with a toilet and a tub. When we were done, it was trashed with food, dirt, water, soda, and just about everything else. There was so much dirt, water, and other food stuff involved that when it was over, we were both covered from head to toe with mud, eggs, and soda. So, what do we do now? The fight is over and we are tired, dirty and sticky. What a perfect time to have sex. Yes, we rolled around on the bed, on the floor, and finally, into the shower, having sex the whole time.

Why didn't I leave? Sure, she was nuts, but damn it; the sex was good, and I was still sure I could fix her. Plus, a lot of it was actually fun. I mean, when we argued, it was usually about money because money was tight, especially in the winter months, when there were no jobs and our arguments never lasted long and were followed by a mutual agreement to have sex. Again, it's the winter months right now and sex is about as hard

to come by as a job, especially if you don't have a partner. I was lucky enough to have one.

In the summertime in OC, sex and love, if even in a drunken state, is everywhere. Something about the beach, the ocean air, the skimpy bathing suits and the hormones floating around in the air of the resort bars, the rented beach homes, and anyplace you can find alcohol seems to somehow evolve into love. It's crazy and maybe that is part of what drew me to Laura, minus the alcohol because I didn't drink at the time. I guess what I'm trying to say, even though I didn't even come close to saying it is, yes, Laura was nuts, and I was nuts for loving her, and we were both nuts together and even more nuts for staying together. Yet life with Laura was not always bad, and it wasn't always nuts. We enjoyed each other's company, even when we weren't having sex. We both enjoyed just being with each other, eating the same foods, going to gem shows at the OC Convention Center, and even going to AA meetings together. Although I was not an alcoholic (or at least not admittedly because I wasn't drinking at the time) I would still go with her and her father occasionally.

Until one summer; it was in July of 1989; Laura and I were living in an apartment on the bay. The night before Laura and I had had an argument, not a big one, just a disagreement, but

Laura said I would be sorry. I thought, "Sorry for what? What are you going to do?" and the following day I found out.

I was at work, cooking breakfast at the café, and this day was beginning to be a bit different than any day I had ever had. It all started off with a headache, and I never have headaches, never. The headache was getting worse and worse as the day went on. I took aspirin and anything else Mike and Mary Anne had at the café that might help me, but nothing worked. The headache kept getting worse and worse.

My workday was over and I still had a splitting headache. I made my way back to the apartment, and Laura was in the kitchen cooking something. I told her, wait, first I need to clarify something... this is a true story. It is still as scary to me now as it was on that day. I came home, Laura was in the kitchen, and I told her, "Man, I have a killer headache." She simply smiled and said, "I know." I said, "You know?" and she replied, "Yes. I know. Go look in the bedroom." Well, headache or not this was piquing my curiosity, so I went into the bedroom and looked.

I was scared, shocked, and in such a state of disbelief at what I saw, as I walked into the room. The room was dark, with the exception of about 50 candles that were lit. Some on the dresser, some on the nightstands, and a very nice, seemingly strategically

placed assortment of candles on her vanity. The mirror of the vanity was removed and on the wall in front of the vanity where the mirror was now missing was a picture of me. It was held in place on the wall with a steak knife directly through my head. If this wasn't enough, the knife was puncturing the picture directly where the center of my headache was.

Now, I had no way of knowing what she was doing at the apartment that day, while I was at work. She had never done anything like this before and as far as I was concerned, everything between us was fine, except for a brief argument the night before that was simply left off at her saying I would be sorry.

OK, so as I had learned by the incident with the cat, I should have known anything could tip Laura into whatever it is that makes her do crazy stuff. Seeing this steak knife through my head, I started to question my doubts about her declaration of being a witch. Only this time I was not thinking about which exit to take to get me off the bus; I was thinking about which exit to take to get me out of this relationship!

I knew this day was coming, not the part about the witchcraft, but the part about breaking it off with Laura. Obviously, by her actions, the feeling was mutual. I had been spending some of my free time working on other relationships. Not just potential

romance, but all the other relationships I had with my friends and my relationship with Mike and Mary Anne. By this time Mary Anne was pregnant and Mike and Mary Anne were both very excited and busy getting things together for the birth of their new child. So, my responsibilities at work grew and so did my responsibilities to Mike and Mary Anne. I worked harder at work and helped out Mike and Mary Anne whenever called upon at their home and at work.

My personal life in general was picking up. I was becoming known as The Big Kahuna, The Big Kahuna of what? I'm still not sure of to this day. I had lots of friends, lots of places I had to be, to be with all my friends, and lots of things to do to keep up The Big Kahuna image. There was one girl at my work, well, two, who I really liked. The first was Lauren. She was a beautiful girl with a great heart. She had a certain seriousness about her, and she was seldom a comedian, like I was. At the same time, her personality just radiated something that could only be described as outgoing and friendly. She was quite an attractive person too, blonde hair, slender, and tanned. I think I liked her because she was a person who was easy to talk to. Whenever I was around her, I didn't have any problem taking off my Big Kahuna mask and just being myself. I would hang out with her and others at the pool of the hotel where we worked and just engage in idle chat about whatever and enjoy the life at the

beach. Lauren played a very significant role later in my life. Not too much later but her role is maybe one of the reasons I am still alive today.

The other girl I need to mention is Regan. Regan was not as good looking but not ugly by any means. She was fun to be around, but I never felt comfortable being my true self around her. For her, I always seemed to be playing a role just to entertain her. I mention her now, because there was more about her than I knew, and I wish I would have been able to get to know her better. She was often withdrawn and troubled about something, anything, whether it was her home life or her friends; she had issues with something all the time. Perhaps that is why I was always playing a role to cheer her up, but every once in a while she would let me into her life just enough to keep me interested. She played a small role later in my life, too.

Who are these people? How did they play a role in my life and exactly when is “later”?

CHAPTER 7 – Ocean City

“Later” is August 1988. I was on my way to a Murder Mystery being held in the bar at the hotel, where I worked. A Murder Mystery is an event held in the bar, where actors come in and act like regular customers, and then someone pretends to die, and it is the job of the people in the bar to solve the mystery. I had never been to one before because it was always held in the bar, and I didn’t drink at the time. It just sounded like something that would be enjoyed more by people who are drinking. But for some reason (I still don’t know why) that was the first night I ever considered going to one.

It was about 4:00 PM, and I was riding my bicycle from home to the hotel, to attend my first Murder Mystery. Laura and I had split up, and I was living in the Englander again, so I am only riding my bicycle a few blocks to where the hotel is. This is not a long ride at all. I don’t remember any of it and very little of what happened the following days. It would seem that on my way to the event, I was riding my bike in the bike lane of Coastal Highway. Traffic was heavy because it was August, the height of the tourist season. As I am passing Phillip’s Seafood restaurant and a miniature golf place on the right, I hit the back end of a minivan with my bicycle. It may seem like that is no big deal, but remember I like to cycle. I put in at least twenty

miles a day, and I am traveling at about the same speed as the traffic on the highway. The last speed the computer on my bike recorded was 33.1 MPH. It seemed the guy driving the minivan was in such a hurry to take his family out for a game of mini golf that he was not paying attention to the traffic, especially not to me. Perhaps he did not judge my speed correctly. He was traveling in the opposite direction on the highway, he turned left to go into the mini golf place, and pulled right in front of me. Witnesses say I then clipped the rear of his minivan and was launched about fifteen feet into the air and landed on my head in the center lane of Costal Highway. The only thing that kept me from being run over repeatedly by the cars behind me was that I had just passed through an intersection and the light behind me had turned red. Had the light not been red, I would have certainly died because the traffic would not have been able to stop fast enough to keep from running me over.

An ambulance was called to the scene, and I signed a paper saying I did not want medical treatment. I remember none of this: not the accident, not the ambulance, none of it. Apparently, I did take my bicycle and go back to my room at the Englander, because what I do remember is waking up the next morning. I looked at my bike and saw it was damaged, although I didn't know why. I walked to the bus stop to take the bus to work. As I was riding the bus, it passed my work. About five blocks later,

I realized I missed my stop and rang the buzzer on the bus to signal the driver to stop. I got off the bus and then walked five blocks back to my work. It was about 6:00 AM, and I wasn't supposed to be to work until 3:00 PM, but I had no clue. I walked into work and Mike and Mary Anne immediately knew something was wrong, and they told me to go lay down in one of the booths in the bar area, which was closed that early in the morning. They say I was covered in blood from my head; my clothes had blood on them, and I was not responding to their instructions. I put up a fight, telling them I couldn't go lay down; I had work to do and I had to get the kitchen ready for breakfast; I was running late. But they finally got me to settle down and go to the bar and lay in a booth while they figured out what to do.

I owe a lot to Mike and Mary Anne; they have seen me grow up from some eighteen year old kid to now a twenty year old man, struggling just to stay alive. They trusted me with their business, their children, their home and most of all they just trusted me. Now my life was in their hands.

They called the 66th Street Medical center and took me there, and I'm not sure, but I think Lauren was with them. I got to the medical center; I was quickly examined and then taken to a real hospital in Salisbury, MD about forty miles away. I was in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit. I do not remember most of this.

Mike and Mary Anne called my mother and my step-father, who lived in Montgomery Village, MD, about a three hour drive away. My mother called the hospital and they told my mom that I was dead.

I was dead! Not really, but damn close. The hospital later corrected itself and let my mother know I was not dead, but if I had not been in as good of shape as I was, I would have been. It still troubles me that the night before, the ambulance let me sign a paper refusing medical attention, especially when it was obvious I had suffered a severe head trauma. But there I laid in ICU, my mother on her way. Mike and Mary Anne, I am sure, came to see me and then someone I never thought would be there showed up, Lauren.

That is the way I remember things. It's a good thing my mother was taking notes. She started taking notes of everything as soon as Mike called her. These are her actual words, exactly as she had written them:

9:30 - Mike Called said it's about David did not want me to become unusually alarmed. Said David had been in an accident. He didn't know what happened but David had taken a fall off his bike the night before, somehow gotten home and

somehow gotten to work Fri. morning. And that he was at the 66th Street Medical Center and would be transferred to Peninsula General Hospital and it would take about 45 min. Said he had a very large skull fracture. Told me that David came to work very disorientated. Told me he fell off his bike but didn't know how he fell. He went into the office and was trying to put band aids on his cuts. Mike asked David what happened.

I waited 45 min (10:00) and called the emergency room and was able to talk to David. He said "Mom, I fell off my bike and my head hurts. It hurts mommy, it hurts". I told him I would be there. The nurse said he would have a CAT Scan right away and the doctor would have the results right away.

David's voice was very slurred and slow. It sounded as if he dozed off as he talked to me.

I wanted to wait until I heard from the doctor before we left in case they sent him to Johns Hopkins or another hospital. I didn't know how big PJA was.

I called again (10:30 ?) – was told David was in process of having CAT Scan, Dr. would read it, would take about an hour. I asked if David was in pain. Nurse said 'No' because he was asleep most of the time.

I took care of everything at home – Jenn, Jane, dog, cats, packed to leave. Called again. CAT Scan had been done and the doctors were waiting for another Dr to read it to get another opinion and that they would call me. I finally got a call about 2:30 from Dr. Spencer who said that Dave had a massive skull fracture, blood clots and a few cuts and abrasions. He said he hoped they would not have to do surgery because the risk was high and David would pay a dear price if they had to cut into the brain. He said David was scheduled in the ICU Unit. He said he put Dave on Ritalin to make

sure he would not go into convulsions. The seizures were a major concern and that he would be on this medication for 6 months.

John came home and we left about 3:00. It was about 6:30 when we saw Dave. He was just laying there with his eyes half open, asleep. He woke up and said "Hi mom". He kept saying how much his head hurt. We only stayed a few min because David was so sleepy.

We came back at the 8:00 visiting hours. David was the same – mostly asleep, but he knew who I was. Talked to Dr. Spencer who said he did not think surgery would be indicated. That hoped the blood clots would be absorbed. He said for the next few weeks I would have to be David's babysitter – he would probably do strange things. Said porch lights on – nobody's home. Nurse said Dave's uncooperative.

Sat – 6:30 AM

Saw David told him the time – He knows me. I kissed his forehead. He said "OK Than You!" He did not cooperate during the night. Wanted to go home. Nurses had to wake him up every half hour around the clock to shine flashlight in his eyes to make sure he is still conscious.

Friday Aug 19

Jennifer and I went to see David. He was very whiny and agitated. His first words to us were "OK. I was going to take a shower!" in a very whiny voice. Then he said he had to go to the bathroom. He was very agitated that someone was already in the bathroom. He was almost in tears. I showed him where another bathroom was. We walked outside the hospital, he had a cigarette. We sat in the lobby for about 2 min. Told him how accident occurred – still cannot remember. He said his back hurt and he needed to get back to his room. He said he still had ringing in his ears. I asked about his eyes he said it tires him out to look at anything. We went back

to his room and he was exhausted. I asked him if he could eat anything, he said no. The nurse came to give him his medicine and she said he had not taken his medicine this morning. I told David he needed to cooperate and take his medicine. He started yelling that he would not take his medicine at 5:30 in the morning. I told him the medicine was to prevent convulsions. He just kept yelling over and over "I don't care! I don't care!" I could not calm down. We got ready to leave and David said, "I can't sleep with him yelling! He Screamed!" He indicated the man next to him. I said "I don't hear anything". David Said "I know I'm not hallucinating. He screamed!". I told David goodbye and left. I talked to Dr. O'Halloria and told him David heard screaming. He said David may stay for 2 or 3 more days instead of coming home tomorrow.

Sat 20

I called and D. is not coming home today. I will find out results of his CAT Scan when I see David today. I'm going to take D. a milkshake today. Maybe he will eat that.

The milkshake did not taste good to him. He didn't even know what it was. He was in a good mood though. We took a walk outside. He still hasn't eaten.

Sun 21

I looked at David's chart today. I had to go back and look again — it said "Very Cooperative"! His behavior is finally settling down. He really wants to come home. Maybe tomorrow.

Mon 22

David couldn't come home today either. Tomorrow. I'm ready for him to come home. I'm sure he will be manageable. And he hates being in the hospital. No one tells me anything about the CAT Scan. I guess everything is OK.

Tues 23

I finally rounded up a doctor and they think he can come home today but they don't know what time. David was upset — he has been ready to go for 3 days. I came home and waited for David's call to come and get him. It came at 10:00 PM. It was pouring down rain. I told him to go to bed that I would be there in the morning.

Wed 23rd.

We had David packed up and out of that hospital so fast! — 15 min and we were on our way.

Sept 10 Sat

David called this afternoon. Said he has calmed down a lot. He cut out all caffeine and knowing anxiety is causing the sleeplessness and pounding heart has helped him. Now he knows he is not going to die. But one thing he said has me so concerned. He woke up the other morning and couldn't

remember his name. He knew to go to work but everything was very vague. He got to work and while there he mentally scolded himself for something and said to himself "Oh David, you dummy!" and then he remembered his name.

He said he's not the same person he used to be. He said people treat him differently because he is different. Nothing is funny to him anymore. He used to be quite the jokester — not anymore.

He said Mary Anne is very upset with him because he is slower and not as alert as he used to be. She even threatened to dock a few hours from his pay. They have not been getting along very well.

He went for the first long ride on his bike. He gets very frightened. He painted his bike red so everyone would see him and rode on back roads.

My sister Jennifer told me a story about how she was notified of my accident and until just recently, when she sent me the story, I had never heard it, and Jennifer wrote:

I was in summer school. I didn't need to go, but all my friends did, so I went, too. And I got the note to go to the office and Mom was on the phone. She said you were hurt really bad and she had to go the hospital and I should stay at Tammy's. And I was like, "Okay." And she asked if I wanted to come home. I said, "No." I didn't see how that was gonna change anything. And I wandered back to class. I was in class for about 10 minutes and I was just in a daze. And I got up (without realizing I was doing it) and left my classroom (which you're not allowed to do in high school) and walked to Tammy's class. I don't know what my face must have looked like, but as soon as the teacher saw me, his eyes got really wide and he ran to me, asking what was wrong. And I just very calmly said, "Tammy and I have to go now." And he looked at Tammy and said, "You have to go now."

Then I was so freaked out while I was staying with her, she didn't know what to do, so she took me to church. She didn't know what else to do. John called while we were gone and he never believed that I was church. He was so mad at me for going out and partying, while you were in the hospital. I really was at church. And then I visited you in the hospital and I gave you Ted (my teddy bear), to keep you safe. It was very scary.

It was scary for me too, and until later in life, I had no idea the accident affected so many people. I also didn't realize until later in life just how it really affected me either, and I will be demonstrating that here soon.

Although I do not remember it, Lauren came to see me in the ICU. I don't know what she said to me, and I don't even know why she came. I mean, we were just friends, and I had plenty of friends who didn't come and see me, or if they did, they were not allowed to actually come see me at my bedside in the ICU, simply because they were not immediate family. Somehow Lauren pushed through that gauntlet and was by my side. I think that was one of the big reasons I am still here. Because, like I

said earlier, she just had a certain radiance about her, and it was that radiance and our friendship that played an important role in my survival.

With that said, I don't want to take away the fact that it was a combination of everyone in my life at the time that played roles in my survival, including my mother, step-father, Mike and Mary Anne, my sisters, and anyone else I don't recall at the moment. Of course, my health had a big role, too. After Laura and I first met, it was only for the first few months that I was smoking pot and then that ended, or at least was a rare occurrence, and I didn't drink at all, or at least rarely, while I lived in Ocean City. I was in great shape, and I loved cycling so much, as I have mentioned before. I was really on my way to becoming a professional cyclist. Well at least I was... until my accident.

When I moved to Ocean City, I became a different person. I felt free, as I was cycling every day; I found friends like I will probably never find again in Mike, Mary Anne, and others. I was trusted by people, looked up to by some and respected by many. People came to me for advice, and I was always happy to offer it. I was enjoying my early walks on the beach and watching the dolphins jump about 100 yards from shore. I really wanted to take SCUBA lessons, so I could go swim with them. I had pushed all my past behind me, and I was really enjoying the

fresh new life I started there. I had found myself a home. That home was Ocean City, both a home for my heart, as well as a place to lay my head. I was thankful to be alive, as I have cheated death one more time. After my accident, I wanted things to just be the way they were. I got scared and I got angry at myself because I couldn't do the things I used to do.

After my accident I tried, I really tried hard to get back into cycling, but I couldn't do it. My bike was totaled. Of course, I stole another one and salvaged as many of the really expensive components I actually purchased and had on the old bike and migrated them to the new bike. I took rides daily at first, but every time I rode, even if I was on a country road by myself, I had fears that, to me were unexplainable. Maybe it wasn't even fear at all, but whatever it was, there was something that was holding me back, and I couldn't nail it down.

One of the local lawyers took my case against the driver of the minivan, and the driver's insurance company was making offers. First, it was \$10,000, then \$25,000 and then higher and higher as the months went by. I was advised by the lawyer and my family, including Mike and Mary Anne, to hold out for more. So I did.

During the months, which eventually turned into about a year, before I did settle, I was going downhill and quickly. The first

thing I did was start screwing up at work. I just wasn't able to do the things I used to do only a few months earlier. I wasn't able to remember things, simple things, things any normal person could remember, like my own name. Another result of my accident was that I lost my senses of smell and taste. This made it hard for me to perform my duties as a cook. I was failing all across the board.

Maybe that's why I started drinking again, maybe that is why I was cycling less. Regardless though, I felt horrible inside and out. Looking back as I am writing this, it is at this moment in my life when I start trying to go backwards in time and become the person I once was just a few months earlier. Something left me on the day of my accident. I don't know what it was, but I also left myself that day and I just wanted to go back. Although Mike and Mary Anne were still my bosses and still my friends, I just wasn't living up to their expectations at work. Maybe I still was as a friend, but I doubt it. I tried to connect with Lauren after the accident, but I believe she was backing off too, because of my new behavior. Hell, I remember one night; I took her out to dinner to one of the nicer restaurants in Ocean City, but during our dinner, I not only once but probably more than twice, called her, "Laura". This was horrible because she knew I dated Laura and she knew, just like everyone else, that Laura was a total fuck up. The fact that I would even make the mistake of calling

Lauren, “Laura” I think was the time and place where I lost any chance of ever having a serious relationship with Lauren.

So, I drank more and smoked more pot too. Mike and Mary Anne hired a guy named Byron to work at the café. He was an early 20-something, black guy who lived out in Berlin, MD, but what I remember mostly about him was that he sold drugs... not just any drugs, but crack, crack cocaine. Sure, why not? I’ll try it.

I did try it and I liked it. It was cheap and the high was okay. It released me from my troubles for a moment at a time. Before I knew it, I was smoking crack daily. I quit my job at the café, got a new job at Nick Idoni’s House of Ribs as a line cook and a bartender. I also got a part-time job at a small motel called Harrington’s on 18th street, where I worked at the front desk at night. I loved my job at Nick Idoni’s because I was working with another crackhead, and even the owner, Nick, was heavy into cocaine. I liked my job at Harrington’s because all I did was sit alone in the office at night and do nothing. Sometimes Regan would come and keep me company. No. There was no sex, no love, or anything like that; we were both just happy to be in each other’s company. She was at least three years my junior. Although she was kind of pretty and was semi-easy to talk to, that’s all it was, talk.

We would chat about her problems. It would mostly be the usual stuff like family, friends, school, etc. I would like to think she walked away with something beneficial from our conversations, as it seemed my role was simply to offer advice and an occasional shoulder to cry on. Talking to her always made me feel better because I worked with her at the café and now I was sorry I ever quit. She seemed to have so many problems, most trivial and whatever advice I offered was not only easy for me, but it also made me think, “Damn... maybe my life doesn’t suck as much as I think it does.”

Back to the crack. Allen was the name of the guy at Nick Idoni’s who was the crackhead. I remember he was a big guy, kind of fat, tall, and he was Jewish. His sister, Eileen, was also a crackhead. She was about his age, which was mid 20’s. All three of us would often drive from Ocean City to Baltimore to go pick up an 8-ball of coke from either one of his friends in the inner city or from one guy I knew who was in a metal band and often played at Hammerjacks, a big club right outside Baltimore. We would then drive back to Ocean City. Allen would drive and Eileen and I would be in the back of his station wagon, cooking up the coke into crack in a 4oz. Ecco gravy ladle. We would make the crack and then the three of us would smoke it as it was ready.

Smoking crack was great for a while, but I was starting not to like it. The high only lasted as long as there was crack in the pipe, and it was starting to get expensive. So, I made my decision to stop smoking crack one night. This night was like no other. Eileen met some guy at a bar who said he knew where to score some crack, and somehow I ended up in the car with the two of them to go to this place, which turned out to be a trailer in Delaware. It was late, about 1:00 AM, when we got there and the guy said I had to wait outside, at the entrance to the trailer park because the guy in the trailer would only deal to Eileen.

Well, I'm not stupid. Neither Eileen nor I had much money, and she was going to have to have sex with or give him a blow job or two for the crack, but I didn't care. I just wanted some drugs, so I stood out by the road for 15 minutes... an hour... two hours. It got to be about 3:00AM and I was still sober. I looked around at where I was. I looked to the left, and I see the highway I am on, cold, dark, no cars. I look to the right, and I see the highway I'm standing on, where does it go? Nowhere, that's where I was physically and mentally, on a road to nowhere. So, I start walking with my thumb out and, eventually, I get a lift back to Ocean City.

I never saw Allen or Eileen again. I quit working at Nick Idoni's the following night. I was scheduled as a bartender that

night, and I simply gave away all the booze. If someone asked for a shot of vodka, I gave them the entire bottle and told them it was on the house, as long as they went somewhere else and drank it. If they asked for a mixed drink, I gave them a bottle of each ingredient and told them to go home and mix a few on me. The next day, I got a call from Nick Sr., Nick's father, and he asked me if I knew why there were empty liquor bottles scattered all over the parking lot, and I told him, "Because I quit; that's why." I think I gave away over \$3000 of booze that night.

I went back to work at the café with Mike and Mary Anne. I was still a drunk. Finally, another offer comes in from the insurance company of the guy who hit me on my bike... \$110,000. I took it, against the advice of my attorney, and after he took out his 33%, I was left with about \$60,000 or \$70,000. I don't remember the exact figure, but damn it, I was rich! I was richer than I ever had been before. So, what did I do? I tell Mike and Mary Anne to take their job and shove it, because I'm rich now! I don't need that job! This was just another bad choice on my part.

Even though I technically didn't need a job at this point because I had more money in my bank account now than I would normally make in like two years, I still needed a job because deep inside myself, I knew it wasn't a lot of money. So, I took a

job at Giovanni's Restaurant on 29th street as a service bartender. It was the perfect job, because I was in a little tiny room in the kitchen that was filled with booze! YAY! I was in heaven. The waiters and waitresses would come back and order drinks for their tables, and I would make one for the waiter or waitress and one for me. I was loaded by the end of every night.

While I worked there, I made friends with one of the cooks named Mike. He lived out by the Ocean City Airport, in a nice trailer park, in a trailer his grandparents left him when they died. He was a generally laid back guy. He fits into this story later.

With my new found fortune the first thing I did, because I was a big hotshot rich guy now, is I called a Jeep dealership in Delaware and told them to bring me a Jeep Cherokee Laredo. I didn't care what color, but told them to make sure it had all the options, and to get it to me here at Giovanni's by tomorrow afternoon, and I will pay them with a cashier's check upon delivery. \$19,909 was the cost and it was delivered, and I paid. Yup, I was cool.

CHAPTER 8 – Money Changes Nothing

It turned out that one of the waitresses at Giovanni's was the sister of a guy Laura recently married. That's right; she went and got married to some guy she knew in AA named Duane. Here we go, back to the Laura story, and it's even worse than before.

So, I get some information from her sister-in-law, and I go find Laura. She's working at a t-shirt store up at the 94th street mall. I stake the place out a bit before I walk in. She sees me, as I walk in, and acts like she's delighted to see me. I'm sure by this time word has gotten around Ocean City that Dave, "The Big Kahuna" got a nice little chunk of change and likes to spend, spend a lot.

Laura and I met a few times before we started to date again. Yes, she was still married, but she told me she was not happy. So we dated a bit. We went to New York City for the 4th of July in 1991. I went and rented us a house in Salisbury, MD. It was a big house with four bedrooms. So, there I was living with a married woman... but it comes with a catch... okay it comes with another catch, besides the fact she's married. The other catch is that she leaves me every other week to go to Baltimore and be with her husband for a week.

Back and forth she goes. Do I care? No. I actually take her to Baltimore and drop her off, wait for her call a week later to come, and pick her up! I'm a complete idiot. However, it's Laura and I still thought I could fix her. Looking back, it was me who needed to be fixed.

By this point, I totaled my brand new Jeep by taking a wide left turn around a blind corner on a country road in Berlin, MD. I saw an oncoming car that was also taking his turn kind of wide, so I turned hard right and landed it in a ditch. I sold the Jeep and I bought a 1979 Camaro from the guy who fixed up the Jeep. I was happy because he fixed the Jeep good enough that when I sold it, I got \$12,000 for it. Not bad, only an \$8000 loss on the Jeep. I got the Camaro for \$6000. It wasn't street legal; it had a bored out small block 350 with a 480 lift and a 268 duration, running headers and straight pipes, a 12 bolt rear end and a Saginaw M22 4 Speed transmission. I know that doesn't mean anything to people who don't know about cars. To put it bluntly, the car was fast, very fast. It had a fire red paint job with about 12 coats of clear on top. I was able to do 11.5 second quarter miles in that thing. Top speed about 135 MPH, and it was a fast 135. The car was set up for, and basically had, only one role and that was as a drag racer. I loved that car. I drove it drunk every day, just like I drove my Jeep. So, it was destined to be destroyed quickly.

One day I was driving it from Salisbury to Ocean City to do something. I forget what. I know it wasn't work related because Giovanni's fired me for being drunk all the time. However, as I was driving down Rt. 50 into Ocean City and as I was passing the Maryland State Troopers Station right outside Berlin, I was traveling at 110 MPH. There was a speed trap there that day, just as there usually is. A Trooper car parked in the median between the eastbound and westbound lanes. Did I slow down? Hell no. I simply didn't care. Was I drunk? Of course I was.

I wasn't in Ocean City very long. On my way back to Salisbury, I passed the officer again; this time traveling at 120 MPH. I watched him in his car, as I drove by. His head was down and he had a pen in his hand. As I passed him, his head tilted up and both his head and his eyes followed the direction I was going and as I continued to speed by, his head slowly returned downward. It was obvious to me that he was writing something very quickly. That was it though, he didn't pull out and chase me; he did nothing. Not yet anyway.

I was about five or ten miles further down Rt. 50, when I looked in my rearview mirror and saw a barrage of flashing lights. There must have been fifteen police cars, gaining slowly but gaining on me nonetheless. I knew who they were coming after: me. So what do I do, being the kind citizen I am? I pull

over and wait. I figured I should do that and spare them the need to call out the helicopters on me; since there was no way they could outrun me, if I decided to run.

So, I pulled over and waited. Suddenly, I was surrounded by police cars. Amazingly, I was calm. All the officers stayed in their cars except for the one who was taking notes at the speed trap. He walks up to the car and says, "I don't like people transporting things on the highway they aren't supposed to be transporting. May I search your vehicle?" I said, "Sure," and I turned the car off, took the keys, and put them in my pocket, as I stepped away from the car and stood beside it, just as the officer directed me to. He searched the car but found nothing. He spent about thirty minutes looking through everything. By this time, all the other cops had left. They were probably laughing their asses off at him because they were certainly prepared to make some big bust or something, but it materialized into nothing. After the Trooper was done searching the front and back seats and removed himself from my car, I pulled the keys out of my pocket, dangled them from my index finger and asked the fine officer, "Would you like to check the trunk now?" with a sarcastic tone. The officer said, "No. Please come and sit in my vehicle." I accommodated his request and sat in the passenger side front seat of his police car. He said, "I'm writing you a warning for going over one hundred and ten miles per hour..."

and then he sniffed the air in his car twice. *sniff* *sniff* "Have you been drinking today?" I replied, "Yes, sir." He asked me how much and I explained I had just finished off a fifth of vodka. All he did was ask me if I was going home, and I said, "Yes." He gave me my warning ticket and said, "Go straight home."

I was fearless. I had money. I had vodka. I had a part-time woman, who I thought loved me. I was on top of the world. Although things got stranger when Laura told me she was pregnant again. This time I was excited. I had money! I could be a dad! Sure! Let's do it! That was my plan anyway. Hers was different. Hers was the same plan as the first time. Abortion. Only this time, I was crushed. I mean, the first time I understood. Neither one of us had a good job. We were living in the cheapest places we could find, going to the church on 4th street for boxes of food each week, and working for a friend of hers, an old lady who lived in Ocean Pines, and doing housework for a minimal amount of money. There was no way either of us was prepared to be a parent. This time I was rich damn it! This could work.

It didn't and I was angry. I didn't take her to Dover for the abortion; she either went on her own or had her husband take her. Oh, wait... that's right; she's married. Maybe it was his kid. Hell, including me, she was already sleeping with two guys

at the same time. Maybe there were three or four guys in total. Who knows? I was angry and suspicious because by this time I wasn't as rich as I thought and Laura and I took in my friend, Mike, as a roommate. Perhaps it was his baby. Even so, I didn't care because, no matter how many guys she was screwing, I was the only one that was willing to step up and take responsibility.

After the pregnancy thing, we fought more often. I drank a lot more too. I bought a \$2400 bicycle and never rode it, except when I would drive her to her job in Ocean City. I would drop her and the car off, take my bike out of the back and then ride it to my new job as a chef at Tom & Terry's out on Rt. 32, in Delaware. One morning, after we had an argument, I woke up hung over, and my car was gone! The Camaro was missing! I freaked! Laura was missing, too. So, I called the cops and told them she stole my car. About six hours later, they called me and told me they saw my car parked in front of the Department of Motor Vehicles on Rt. 50, right at the edge of Salisbury. They told me they were not going to charge Laura with anything because I didn't see her take it and neither did they. Then they told me the keys to the car were sitting on the front seat, and the car was unlocked. They also told me I should just come get the car, take it home and forget about the whole thing. So I did.

Months went by before I saw or heard from Laura again and, during this time, there are two more car stories to tell. First, one day, when I was traveling West on Rt. 50 into Salisbury and I was somewhere near Pittsville, a black Mercedes pulled up to me, as I was going about 75 MPH in the right lane. The window of the Mercedes rolled down and there was an old man in the driver's seat, he looked at me and my Camaro and pointed forward, then gave me a thumbs up. I didn't know who this nut was, but sure. He wanted to race, OK. So, I returned the thumbs up, and I dropped the car down into third gear and I buried the pedal to the floor. I left him behind me, and then I quickly shifted the Camaro into fourth gear and punched the pedal to the floor again. He was behind me by about 300 feet, and I was maxed out now at about 130 MPH. Then, faster than crap, the Mercedes passes me. It didn't pass me slowly either; it left me behind like I wasn't even moving to begin with. I had to look down at my speedometer just to see if I was losing speed, because no one had ever passed me in a race before, let alone faster than GW Bush could fuck up a sentence. I figure the Mercedes had to be doing at least 170 MPH, perhaps 190, and as it passed me, I saw it was a 660 SEL, which stock has a highest possible speed of about 150MPH. His definitely had modifications, it was not stock.

It wasn't until I was approaching the first stoplight on Rt. 50 as I was about to enter Salisbury that I saw the Mercedes sitting there at a green light, waiting for me. By the time I got there, the light was red again, and I pulled up next to the Mercedes. The window rolled down again, and the old man said as he laughed, "So... how's it handle after 120?" It was at this moment I realized who I just raced, Frank Perdue. The tough man who makes a tender chicken just cooked me faster than a chicken breast.

Second, the death of a Camaro. A few weeks later, it happened. I was driving down Rt. 50 and going into Ocean City. I was probably going about 70MPH, and I was in the right lane as a 1986 Pontiac Firebird pulled up to me and beeps his little horn twice. It sounded like the cartoon Roadrunner with its high tone horn that just about all cars in the 80's had, and I thought to myself, "This is one race that me... the Coyote is gonna win" and I dropped the Camaro down into 3rd gear and punched the gas. I left that little Roadrunner wannabe so far behind me. There was no way that Pontiac piece of shit was ever gonna catch me. Just as I was thinking this, I realized... "Now might be a good time to shift up to 4th gear," and no sooner than that thought crossed my mind... *BAM!!!* The loudest bang I heard since I was in the Navy and watched the launch of a Tomahawk Missile happened and at the exact same time the temperature

gauge went all the way over past "Hot", the Check Engine light came on and there was a cloud of black smoke behind me. This may be the black cloud that haunts me in the future I don't know. Right then my car just exploded. I coasted off to the side of the road, as the Pontiac Firebird passed me without slowing down and tooted me a final farewell with his little Roadrunner horn and I heard its little *beep* *beep* as my car, no longer a Camaro but just a car, coasted into a conveniently located used car lot. When the car came to a final rest, I popped the hood and looked in the coolant tank. I saw oil floating in the coolant, which meant I blew a head gasket. No big deal; I could replace that myself. I wondered what the liquid was that was running on the ground from under the car? I looked and there was a hole in the oil pan, about as round as a softball. I had thrown a rod and this, I could not fix myself. If the rod was thrown, then the transmission is probably toasted. So, I sold the car to the used car guy for \$600 and then paid him \$4800 for a 1988 Oldsmobile Toronado that was on the lot, and I drove off with a new car.

Laura and I were back together again, but I knew it was not gonna last long. I was broke. I had moved out of the big house in Salisbury, MD and into an apartment. I couldn't afford to pay my electric bill, so I fixed up the electric meter outside so I could use all the electricity I wanted and the meter wouldn't spin. I sold the Oldsmobile and bought a cheap, stripped down Ford

Escort. Laura stuck around for a while, and then we broke up. It was the final breakup, because I never saw her again.

I was broke and broken. I took my last \$2000 out of the bank one night and got together with two of my neighbors, and I threw a party, a crack party. One neighbor was a pretty cool guy who lived across the hall. I don't remember his name, but he was overweight, and I think he may have been gay, but I'm not sure. I only make that assumption because he talked, "gay" and used to have a male roommate, until they split up. The other neighbor was a woman who lived downstairs, and she was about 5'6" slender but fit, with curly blond hair and had an average build. She also had some disease where at times she would periodically revert into the mental state of child or a complete idiot. I don't remember the name of the disease, but 99% of the time one would never know she had any disease or problems at all. I used to help her do stuff occasionally like paying her bills and go grocery shopping, just little odds and ends, when she needed help. I liked helping people and it made me feel good when I helped her.

This night, I decided to blow the little bit of money I had left. There we were, in her apartment, me, her and the neighbor upstairs. Our building is so close to downtown Salisbury, I only had to walk a few blocks to go get some beer and then another

few blocks in the other direction to go to the crack house. I know I said earlier that I quit smoking crack, and I did, but tonight was special. I made about three trips to the crack house and then back to the apartment, where we would smoke the crack and then drink some beers. Finally, since I was spending so much money at the crack house, I told the crack dealers to just bring me some crack to the apartment. Guess what? They did, and the party lasted until I finally ran out of money.

I didn't care about money; I grew up poor and I'll probably die poor. When I do have money, I like to make other people happy, and seldom think of myself. I guess I was always too blind to see that once I got my insurance settlement, I seemed to have more friends than before. Yet, again, it didn't matter. I knew this was my last party with my small fortune. I look back now and I wish I had invested it or bought a house.

A few weeks after I threw this great party, I had to find a new place to live because I had no money to pay rent. I went and stayed with my friend in Ocean City, Greg. Greg worked at The Castle in the Sand Hotel as the maintenance man. In the winter months, I would work with him there. I would work and get paid under the table, so I could still collect un-employment. During the winter months in Ocean City, most of us locals didn't have jobs because everything was closed down, and we would

just collect unemployment until our jobs started again in the spring.

I thought Greg was a really cool guy; he lived in one of the top apartments of a quad his father owned. His father was alive when I first met Greg but later died of old age. Greg was an alcoholic, who had been sober for like 10 years when I met him. He never drank or did drugs or anything like that. He was actually my inspiration, when I lived in OC. He would tell me funny stories of when he used to drink and his stories were what kept me sober most of the time I was in OC. He was also married to a woman named Lana, who later died of cancer. I would often hang out at their apartment and just chat or watch football on Greg's giant TV.

Greg let me stay in one of the empty apartments in the quad, since it was winter and there were no renters living there. He didn't want me to stay too long, because as long as I was there he had to pay the electric. So, I only stayed a few weeks before I started off on a journey that would change my life forever.

CHAPTER 9 - Charlotte

It was November and, for some reason, I decided I wanted to go to Atlanta, GA. I have no idea why; I had never been there before, and I knew nothing about the place. So, one day I started off walking, and I made it as far as the Greyhound Bus Station and I called my mother and begged for money. She wired me some money, and I bought a one-way ticket to Atlanta.

The bus trip was nothing exciting and when I got to Atlanta, it was like 3:00 AM and there was no sleeping allowed at the bus station. The security people at the bus station would walk around and throw out people who were there just to sleep in a warm building. So, I just stayed awake with my expired bus ticket in my hand, and it worked because I wasn't thrown out of the station. One of the many times I stepped outside to smoke a cigarette, there was a police officer by the door. There was a homeless man sitting on the ground with his back up to the brick wall of the Greyhound building and a car rolled up. It was something like an early 80's Buick of some sort, and it was grey. The car pulled up quickly and screeched to stop. A kid, I guess about 17 or 18, got out of the back seat and walked up to the homeless guy sitting on the ground, and started to stab him with a knife and kick him, repeatedly. The cop standing there did nothing! The kid jumped back in the car, and it took off! The

cop went over to the wounded homeless guy and was talking to him, as if he was about to administer some kind of first aid, but he didn't. He did get on his walkie-talkie and call for an ambulance. While the ambulance was coming, I asked the cop, "Why didn't you do anything!? Why aren't you doing anything!!?" and he simply said, "He wouldn't tell me who did it."

Now I start thinking maybe being homeless in Atlanta wasn't such a great idea. I was going to go out and try to find a shelter the next day and then look for a job, but I quickly changed my plans. My new plan was to get the fuck out of Atlanta, ASAP! So, I stayed at the bus station until morning and, lucky for me, there was a liquor store right across from the bus station and it opened at 9:00 AM. It was about 7:00 AM at the time and I went for a small walk. I went to see the Underground and the trains. I also took a walk around the downtown area and admired the old churches and architecture of the buildings. I then made it back to the liquor store and bought some cigarettes and a 1.75 liter of peppermint schnapps. I put the items in my bags and stopped off at a drugstore and bought some canned beans. Then, I started walking towards the CNN Building, and the railroad tracks behind it. I was planning to hop a freight train, and I didn't care where it took me.

I got to the tracks, and I met an old bum. He said his name was Willie. He must have been a bum for a while, because his hair was all knotted and his clothes were tattered. Willie seemed to be living a life of solitude and detachment similar to the direction my own life was heading at the time. We quickly became friends as we sat there talking about things like politics, religion and just the general schemes of life. He used to be married, had children, and appeared to once have a very happy life. Just as my life was turning in circles and upside down at the time, so did his. He found himself unemployed, his family and friends all started to disappear, and he became an alcoholic. I shared some of my peppermint schnapps with him, and he shared some of his Mad Dog 20/20 with me. We continued to chat for a few more hours until he finally cut me short and asked me where I was going. I explained to him that I really didn't care, but I think I wanted to go north, back towards Maryland. I figured that heading back was my best bet because so far my plan wasn't working like I wanted it to, so I needed to get back to where I started. He said, "That one. It goes as far as Charlotte, NC. It will leave in eight minutes; hurry."

So, I took him at his word, and I jumped into an open top container car. It only had steel I-beams in it. Sure enough, exactly 8 minutes later, the train started to roll. Wow, I was on my way. So, I sat in the train car and got shit faced on

peppermint schnapps and ate cans of beans. It wasn't a very fast train, but didn't make many stops either, so I was happy. When I needed to take a leak or a crap, I would walk all the way over to the other side of the car and take care of business.

As the boring day rolled on, it got dark and difficult as it was, I eventually fell asleep. When I woke up, it was just breaking dawn, and I wanted to know where I was, I mean, what state. So I poked my head out of the top of the car and was trying to look at license plates of cars that were at the railroad crossings. I'm not sure if I ever mentioned it, but sometimes I'm not that bright and while I had my head sticking out of the top of the train car and as the train was passing a railroad crossing, I saw a little white pickup truck. On the side of the truck, it had big blue letters "CSX". I had absolutely no clue what CSX was. It didn't occur to me that it was the railroad company that owned the train I was on. As the train car I was in passed the railroad crossing, I noticed the guy in the pickup saw me. He followed me with his head, and I waved at him, and he waved back.

About ten minutes later, the train came to a stop. I didn't think anything of it. The train stopped every once in a while anyway, and it wasn't until I heard some guys talking and then one climbed up the rail car and looked right at me that I started to worry. Even though I was scared and about to shit a brick, the

guy was nice and all he said was, "This is your stop," and I got out and started walking.

I walked for a few hours along the tracks, until I came to a small town. The town was Monroe, NC, and I went to look for a church, so I could ask the pastor for help in getting back to Maryland. I eventually found a church, which isn't hard to do in North Carolina, but it was closed and wouldn't be open until Sunday. There was a highway bridge near the church, so I thought I would camp out there for a few nights, and maybe someone will come to the church before Sunday. So, I was now living under a bridge in North Carolina. God Damn! I just wanted to go home, but I had no home to go to really. I had everything only months ago, and I just wanted to go back. I just wanted to go back to having friends. I wanted to go back to being in love, and although Laura was a nut, she was a warm body to share the bed with and someone I did love at one time. I wanted to go back to cycling. I wanted all the money back I had just blown. I wanted to work for Mike and Mary Anne. I wanted to go back to all the happy things I once had. However, I couldn't think about all that right now; I just needed to focus on getting back to Maryland first.

About two days passed and then one night two police officers came under the bridge I was calling my home, and they asked

me who I was and what I was doing there. I told them my whole story, starting with my bicycle accident, my rise to riches, and my quick decent to where I found myself now; living under a bridge in North Carolina. I knew there was nothing waiting for me at the beach. It was off-season, so there were no jobs. I had no place to stay, Laura and I were finished, and I explained to them that I just wanted to go back home, back to Ocean City, MD. They took me back to the police station and bought me a Double Whopper Meal from Burger King; I guess they could tell I hadn't been eating. I was thankful just for the food, and I thought at this point they would just toss me back out on the street and say, "good luck." But my story must have been at least a little compelling because out of their own pockets, they bought me a bus ticket to Charlotte and told me to go to Travelers Aid when I got there and tell them my story. They let me sleep at the police station overnight and took me to the bus station in the morning. When we arrived, I thanked them for the food and the ticket and for a moment, just a moment, I convinced myself that everything was working out and that good things were going to happen.

I got to Charlotte and I went to Travelers Aid where they quickly told me they couldn't help, and they gave me the address of a shelter I could stay at. I was kind of bummed out so, I decided to take a long walk around the city. I needed to find

food and the shelter they told me about. So, I started walking around, and I found a soup kitchen that was feeding the needy and I sure was needy at the time, so I stood in the line with all the other homeless and needy people. When I finally got to the food, they served me a roll, some cornbread, and some kind of soup on top of rice. The soup was horrible. I still, to this day, think it contained rat meat or something because mixed in with the broth and vegetables were bones. Chewable bones but bones none the less. They were unidentifiable bones to me; at first I thought maybe they put canned salmon in the soup, and they were fish bones, but then I thought about it a minute longer and while looking at the bones, I remembered that fish don't have legs.

After eating at the soup line, I walked around town for a while, and I was impressed by both the architecture of the homes and how clean the city was. It had a very nice library downtown, where I spent a lot of time to stay sheltered during the day and where I took some time to read. I eventually made it to the shelter Travelers Aid told me about, and it was certainly different than anything else I had experienced in my life. It opened at 6 PM, and I checked in. They had a room where you could store your belongings and a big room full of bunk beds. Lights went out at 9 PM and came back on at 5 AM. No meals were served or anything and by 6 AM, you had to be out of the

building. You were allowed to keep your bags and stuff in the storage room, if you were planning to return the next night.

So, it's 6 AM and I'm standing out in front of the shelter, with about sixty other guys. Smoking cigarettes and waiting for a van to pull up, looking for cheap laborers. I got picked up most every morning by someone to do some kind of work. The usual types of jobs were moving furniture, yard work, or working at the local tire manufacturing plant, cleaning up all the waste rubber. Every day I worked I would make about \$40 to \$60, which was just enough money to keep me drunk on Mad Dog 20/20 and 40's of King Cobra beer. The only problem was that if you were drunk, you were not allowed to sleep in the shelter. This was no problem for me because, in my walks around town, I found old, abandoned buildings, next to the railroad tracks and in one of them; I had actually constructed my own little apartment, in what used to be an office. I had found an old mattress, and that was just about everything I needed that I didn't already have. I used the clothes I had in my Sea Bag as a blanket and the office was fairly clean considering it was in an abandoned warehouse, so I was happy.

I was spending most of my time doing odd jobs and then spending hours of drunken solitude, convincing myself things would get better, plus I was a good man, who did good things. I

was oblivious to everything happening around me. I mean, I was just reliving the memories in my mind of everything I once had, everyone I once knew and wondering where it all went wrong. I had no answers, so I just had to drive myself to continue and search for the answers and live one more day.

I eventually found a real job in Charlotte. It was on Tryon Street; I was hired as a cook for a catering company and old folks home. It was right across from the shelter and the library. So, when I wasn't working, I had places to go and seek refuge. I was actually making good money, too. I was started off at \$10 an hour, which for the time was pretty good. I worked for a chef named Mac Epps. Our boss was a well dressed black guy who drove a Jaguar. He had a habit of spending the profits of the business on cocaine, at least that was the rumor I heard anyway. Sometimes our paychecks would be a day or two late. I didn't really care, because I was getting paid. I eventually moved out of the shelter and my improvised apartment in the warehouse by the railroad tracks and into an old motel, right there on Tryon St. close to work and close to downtown.

The motel was disgusting. Nevertheless, I was happy to be sharing my bed again. It was too bad that instead of sharing it with a woman, I was sharing it with cockroaches. The room was small, but it had a queen sized bed, a microwave and a bathroom

with a tub and shower. It wasn't much, but it was better than the shelter. Things were looking up.

I really wasn't happy though. My paychecks were getting further and further apart because my boss was too busy shoving the money up his nose. I needed to come up with a plan. So, I figured out where my father was living in Phoenix, Arizona and I called him and asked if I could crash at his place for a while, if I ever made it to Phoenix, and he said, "Sure." So, that was my new plan, I just didn't know when I was going to do it because even though my paychecks were being snorted up my boss' nose, I was still getting them occasionally, until one day...

It was Friday and it was payday. I was happy, because my paychecks were usually about \$700, and I was going to go pay my weekly rent at the motel which was about \$300 and open a bank account, finally, and start saving up to move to Phoenix. Then something happened that made me change my plans. Not my overall plan of moving to Phoenix, but my plans of when and how I would get there. My boss made an announcement, "Okay. No one is getting paychecks today; you have to wait until next Friday. I'm sorry, but there is just no money to cover the checks." I went up to him, and I explained my situation. I said "I have to pay my weekly rent at the motel, or I'm gonna be homeless; I have to pay them \$350". I told him \$350 because, if

he was going to give me the money to pay my rent, I would also need a little extra money for food and beer.

He told me I could have my check, but only me and no one else. He told me I couldn't tell the other employees I got paid, and there was a catch. He said, "You have to make a small investment in the company..." He broke out a pen and paper; he subtracted the \$350 I told him I needed for rent and then with the number that was leftover he said he needed money for the register. He then handed me my check and told me to go to the bank to cash it and get him so many ones, so many fives, so many quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies. I guess he wanted me to loan him all that money from my check. I agreed, just so I could get the check in my hands, and once I had it in my possession, I told him I was going to the bank just like he asked me to, and I was going to get his change. Then I told him that I would be right back, knowing the whole time that I was lying my ass off.

I took the money and ran. I think he was suspicious or worried I may not return, so I left my jacket at the restaurant to make it look like I was coming back, but I knew I wasn't and I knew where I was going, I wouldn't need the jacket anyway. I went to my motel room, shook all the cockroaches out of the clothes I had on the floor, took the last few swallows of MD

20/20 I had left in a bottle from the night before, packed up all my belongings into my Sea Bag, and I started walking right down Tryon Street, right past the restaurant, hoping my boss wouldn't see me, and luckily he didn't. I went into the bank that was on my way to the Greyhound station downtown. I cashed my check and then at the bus station I bought a one way ticket to Phoenix. By 6:00 PM, I was on a bus and out of town. I would miss Charlotte, because it was a really neat city, and if I had just found the right job, I probably would have called it home.

CHAPTER 10 - PHOENIX

I arrived in Phoenix about three days later. The bus trip was nothing exciting, and I don't even think I bought any booze for the trip because I was watching my money. Even after the bus ticket and food during the trip, I still had about \$600 left. The Greyhound station was near downtown Phoenix, and I arrived at about 7PM. I took a quick walk around, and I thought I had died and gone to heaven when I found out that just about every convenience store sold hard liquor. I bought myself a bottle of vodka and a scratch-off lottery ticket, and then I checked myself into a motel. Although I was going to go stay with my father for a while, I wanted a little mini-vacation to relax from my time spent in Charlotte and my long trip to Phoenix. The motel I checked into was a real motel, meaning it was a national chain, and not some roach infested hole in the wall, like the motel I lived in when I was in Charlotte.

I spent a few days relaxing and the scratch-off lottery ticket I bought was a \$200 winner, so things were off to a good start. This definitely seemed like a step in the right direction. I really had plans to turn my life around, but even then all my ghosts from the past were starting to haunt me. What I mean is I still wanted to go back. I still wanted to go back before I had my accident and started spiraling down the drain. Yet at the same

time I was wishing I could go back, I was also patting myself on the back for making it as far as I had at this point. No, not my status in life, I still felt like the lowest life form on the planet at this point, but just the fact I was alive was amazing. Even so, as far as I had come, I had no idea I was about to fall to the bottom of the barrel called, "Life." But right then, I was happy.

Phoenix was like a new world to me. Similar to San Diego, the streets were lined with palm trees, but in Phoenix, they were also lined with ornamental orange trees and olive trees. I thought they were real orange trees at first, until I peeled one of the oranges and took a big bite out of it. There was no sweetness to the fruit at all; it was bitter, even beyond the bitterness of a lime. I thought the oranges were symbolic of my life at the time, which was starting to look a little brighter than it did just a few months earlier. They looked great! They felt great, and probably even smelled as sweet as they looked, but once you peeled back the layers and took a bite; the real heart of the fruit was revealed to be bitter.

Phoenix was also different in that everyone had guns. When I walked into a bar once, I saw a sign which said, "Please Check Your Weapons with the Bartender." Wow, this was like the Wild West. There were also a lot of Mexican gangs in Phoenix and from the little I had seen so far I knew I wouldn't want to

mess with these guys because they were mucho loco! Although later during my stay in Phoenix, I became friends with quite a few Mexicans who were in gangs.

The architecture of the homes was much different than I had seen before, too. It was my first look at Stucco and clay brick buildings. One thing I noticed right away about Phoenix was the cockroaches. My lord, these things flew! Yeah, they are about two or three inches long, and they flew. When you are walking down a sidewalk at night and see one walking toward you in the opposite direction, you get out of its way. Don't bother stepping on it because that won't kill it, and besides, you're outnumbered. Other than the roaches, the guns, and the gangs, I liked Phoenix so far.

I called my father from the motel one day and arranged a time for him to come and pick me up and take me to his place. At this time, I still liked my father, and I still looked up to him. I had not learned yet about why he was kicked out of Sybil's place; I didn't know much about him other than he was always starting advertising and marketing companies with women and the companies always failed.

My father's place was a simple one bedroom apartment on the ground floor of some complex on the 300 block of E. Monte Vista. When I got there, he had a homemade futon in his living

room, he told me that was going to be where I would sleep. He didn't have an advertising/marketing company anymore; he was working at U-Haul in "Hitch Central." I think that is where they just schedule appointments for people to have a U-Haul trailer hitch installed on their vehicle. He wasn't making a lot of money, and I don't remember what kind of car he was driving, but it wasn't anything fancy or expensive. My father is also an alcoholic, like I am, so I wasn't too concerned about how much money he had; I just wanted to know where the booze was.

My father was the same as ever though. He told me his landlord was a hottie, and she always wore knee-high black boots and a turtleneck sweater. So I think, "great, he's a stalker, too?" I'm not very impressed. The first week or so I was staying with him, he took me around Phoenix to show me all the cool stuff, you know, like where to get a good hooker, the cheapest booze, and crack cocaine. I'm sorry, but none of this shocked me or even interested me, for that matter. I was more focused on finding a job at this point.

I found a job as a line cook at the Hooters Restaurant located in the Arizona Center, downtown near Van Buren St. The Arizona center was a pretty cool place, loaded with tons of shopping and restaurants. It was only about a twenty minute walk from my dad's place, so it was perfect. I loved my job at

Hooters because there were plenty of women for me to hit on and plenty of free beer and wings that came with the job. This is where I met a guy named Scott. He was a drunk and a stoner, just like me, so we often got drunk and stoned after work. I'm going to leave Scott out of this story for now but don't worry; he comes back in a bit. My job at Hooters didn't last very long. I was always drunk and/or stoned on the job and one night they just told me I was fired.

It didn't really bother me because I was already scoping out other jobs at the AZ Center, and I found one at a really nice restaurant called Sam's Café. Sam's wasn't a café at all, by definition; it was a full blown restaurant with a South Western style of cooking, and I started off working at the Cold Station. The cold station was where I was responsible for making salads, quesadillas, and desserts. Which doesn't sound bad, but it was hard work because of the volume of business Sam's did. I would easily make over 800 salads a night. I came up with ways to make them faster than any employee had ever made them before. I was a bit messier than they would have liked, but I was the King of the Cold Station. Sam's was paying me good money, too. So, I enjoyed my job. I enjoyed it because I loved cooking, and because I made lots of friends there. One cool thing I should point out is they didn't care that I was a drunk, at least not at first. I got the damn job done and that's what they paid me to

do. They didn't care that during the whole night I was working, I was also filling up my drink cup with Sherry from the big Bag-in-Box, located back in the baker's area. They didn't care that after the restaurant closed, and it was time to clean up the kitchen that I walked across the street and bought myself a fifth of vodka. They didn't seem to care that I brought it back, opened it, set it on the counter of the workstation I was cleaning, and took swigs off it while cleaning. They didn't care that after I was done cleaning, I would take the bottle out to the bar area of the restaurant and finish it off, while I waited for others to finish working. Then we would all get together and go play poker at my new apartment.

Yup, I moved out of my father's place and got my own apartment. I had a kick ass job, and I was moving up. I started off working at the cold station, and then I was doing prep during the day, then I was a grill cook, and, finally, I was the sauté cook, the hardest position on the line. I was doing great. Even though I was drunk the whole time, no one really seemed to care. I was The Big Kahuna again! I had money, booze, and friends! What else could anyone ask for? I was even working part time across the AZ Center at The Great American Sports Bar as a line cook and the only reason I was working over there was because they asked for me! Yeah I know! Someone wanted me! It was amazing. I soon found out that things can change quickly.

Remember Scott? Well, he was just another friend; One that after I left Hooters, I didn't really see very often. Until one day, he asked me if I wanted to go to a party with him at his friends' place. Of course, I said, "Hell, yeah! Let's party!" Which is exactly what we did. We went to his friends' apartment. His friends were what appeared to be a yuppie couple. They were in their mid 20's. The woman, Becky, was hot. I mean, sexy as hell. Thin, with nice breasts and a nice ass to boot. I think her husband's name was Mark; I forget but I didn't care either.

Anyway, the party started off as any party I was going to at the time would have started: beer and a few joints. Becky was making some pesto with linguini for us, and she went over to the freezer to get something. I thought she was getting something for the pesto she was making, but I was shocked when she broke out some sugar cubes from a plastic bag in the freezer. She handed each of us a cube and said there was about three hits on each. I knew what that meant, and it meant there were three hits of acid on each, and at first, I was reluctant. I was thinking I didn't really want to trip; I was already buzzed enough from the beer and weed. Of course, like the fool I am, I gave in and took the acid. We took the party out to the pool at the apartment complex. Before we went out to the pool, Becky had another surprise. She started laying out lines of a white powder. I thought it was coke, but I was wrong. It was crystal meth. I

never had meth before, and I was really hesitant to try it now. Shit! I was in way over my head. Beer and weed were fine. Three hits of acid on top of that... OK... but shit!! METH!? I am being out-partied by a hot, yuppie chick!

That to me was a challenge. I know I can out drink anyone, and I can probably out smoke them too, if we're smoking weed, but now the ante had been raised and although I was very worried I might die, I did it anyway. No one else was dying and if I didn't do it, I'd just be the same dork I had always been. So, I did a few lines of meth on top of everything else. Then we all ate some pesto and then grabbed our beers and out to the pool we went.

I thought, "I'm feeling good... no, wait. I'm not; yes, I am; no. I'm not. Definitely not. OK, I'm scared now. I'm tripping. Oh, crap, this is a bad trip. I've never had a bad..."

I threw up at the pool. Becky, Scott and Mark told me it was OK; they tried to calm me down, but damn it, I had to go. I HAD TO GO! I needed to leave. This was bad. I was gonna fucking die!!! I was a god damn dead man!!! I had to go. So, I grabbed my jeans. I didn't put them on; I was still wearing swim trunks of Mark's that Becky let me borrow. I grabbed my jeans only because my wallet was in them. I walked to the bus stop even though Scott and his friends were telling me not to go, but

my decision was made. I had to go. I needed to go soak in a tub of ice or something. I just needed to go.

I got on the bus. Tripping, sweating, shaking and scared. What the fuck was everyone looking at?!? Me? I was thinking to myself, "Fuck you; stop looking at me!!" They probably weren't, but in my eyes, they were. I made it to my apartment. I went inside and closed all the curtains. I did not like the light from outside. I just needed to relax, and I would live through this. I finally took a shower, cold shower, and then I went and lied down naked in bed. I was still hot. I was still sweating and my air conditioning was set very low; it was probably 65 degrees in my apartment. I just kept telling myself I needed to relax. I needed to calm down. My heart would slow down soon. God, I hoped my heart would slow down! Soon! I was worrying too much. I needed to take my mind off all this. Even after a lot of conversations with myself and well... never mind, I was still hot, still anxious. I needed to do something; no... something else. So, I started walking around my apartment, thinking of what I should do. My Carpet!! That's it! I needed to vacuum my carpet!! It's dirty! Wait, I don't own a vacuum. I thought I would just pick up the big stuff I could see on the carpet with my fingers. So, I started in the corner of the living room; I got on my hands and knees, and I started picking dirt from my carpet. I was thirsty, so I thought, "I'll drink a beer." But first I had to

finish cleaning my carpet. I was still picking at the carpet in the living room. I spent nine hours on my hands and knees cleaning my living room carpet. It didn't feel like nine hours, but the clock doesn't lie. Man, I wished I had some paint, so I could paint the place. I wished I owned a car, so I could take it apart bolt by bolt and clean it.

What was this drug? I hated it. No! I fucking loved it!!! This was the shit! I loved meth! I could do anything!! I could paint the world, twice! I had just found my favorite high. I got to know Becky and Mark very well. It turned out, they were meth dealers, not the yuppie pinheads I first assumed they were. They were not your average drug dealers, like the ones you may have had in your high school that only dealt in small quantities. They would fly to Los Angeles once a week to pick up major quantities. I became just a great customer. I was high on meth all the time. Even at work. I was still drinking like a fish, too. My friends at work were getting worried about me. They could see the changes. I couldn't though, and to me, there were no changes, except for the fact I was working harder. I was partying harder, too. I was starting to make stupid decisions; I mean, I've always made stupid decisions, but they are getting even more stupid. Like one day, I was at the library, and I was looking up a book. I don't remember what book or why, but next to the computers, where you look up books, I found a set of

keys. I kept them. I took them home and on the key ring was a Honda motorcycle key. I told myself I would go back there at night in three days and if there was a Honda motorcycle there, I would take it. Then, three nights later, there was, and I did.

The motorcycle was a piece of shit. It barely ran. The owners were probably hoping some dumb ass would steal it. That's where I came in. I took it home and I even spent money on it, replacing the broken turn signal on the back. I planned on riding it and had no intention of letting it go. One day, I was with Scott, and we were on our way to Becky's to get some drugs; I was drunk. Scott was on the back of the bike, and I was driving. We were at a red light. The light turned green. I gave the motorcycle a little too much gas, and I flipped the bike. Scott and I landed on our asses; and what's my luck? Who is directly behind us? A cop! He let Scott push the bike to the side of the street and then let him go, but I was arrested for DUI.

They took me to the station and booked me. I didn't even have a valid license. While they were in the process of booking me for DUI, they weren't buying my story that the bike belongs to a friend. After some searching, they find that it was stolen. They dropped the DUI charge and booked me for theft. They released me the next morning, with a ticket with and a court date. When I went to court, the owners never showed up for the bike,

so I think my charges were dropped or reduced. I don't remember; I was drunk.

CHAPTER 11 – Meth – Jail

By this time, I was really suffering at work, and my friends were really worried about me. I had been doing so much meth I would be awake for like three or four days straight; then I would sleep for two days solid. I would miss work a lot. Amazingly, they still let me work there. Until one day, I finally quit. I was up and awake one time for fourteen days straight. Fourteen Days! I finally crashed and slept for five days straight. I was doing so much meth I started getting paranoid. I thought people were in the crawl space over my apartment, and that they could see me and they were laughing at me. When I picked up the phone, I thought I heard other people on the phone talking to me before I even dialed. I was a mess.

One thing I did during my fourteen day meth session was I started working with Becky and Mark. I took a trip or two with them to L.A. to pick up the meth. We were buying it in major quantities, one time a quarter pound and one time a half pound. That is a boatload of meth, if you don't know or can't imagine. We would take Southwest Airlines from Phoenix to LAX, rent a car, and then drive into the center of Orange County, where we would meet a guy. Not just any guy but a big guy, probably a member of some white supremacy group, a Skinhead or something. We would have to answer his questions and shit

before we were allowed to go to this one club, actually a dive bar, and meet with another Skinhead, and then finally, into the back room to meet the Skinhead who sold us the stuff. I can't even explain how scary this was. These weren't bikers like The Fonz on Happy Days; these were guys who would sooner cut your head off and shit in your neck than they would take any crap from you. One wrong answer to their questions and they would probably blow your head off, with the guns they were not even trying to hide. The questions weren't difficult to understand: "Where did you come from?" "How did you get here?" "Is that your car?" "Were you followed?" and the most important question, "Where's the money?" They made it very easy to understand you were shit and they owned your ass.

After we got the meth, we would just pack it up in our carry-on luggage and then hop on a flight back to Phoenix. It still amazes me to this day that we didn't get busted. Thankfully, we didn't. Once we got back to Phoenix with the meth, Becky and Mark would rent us a limousine for a week and a large suite at The Biltmore in Scottsdale. The suite was alone about \$600 a night and the limo was extremely expensive too. At this point, being a drug dealer was fun. We would go to the after-hours clubs between Phoenix and Tempe. We would arrive in our limo at about 1AM because that was when the clubs closed down for a

while, stopped serving alcohol, and then reopened as Rave Clubs.

All different ages were in the clubs, but most were between seventeen and twenty-five. This was our target clientele. We would all walk into the club, and do a little sexy dancing on the dance floor. Becky would do some freaky dancing with the girls, too. I'm not sure her husband enjoyed watching that very much, but I sure did. Our main mission though was to feel out the crowd and get the word out that we were there, with drugs. Becky and Mark had connections at the bar, so this wasn't too hard to do. I'm not much of a dancer; I look like an idiot, so I didn't hang out on the dance floor very long. My role was all business. So after I was in the club long enough to look around and grab a Coke at the bar, I would go back out to the limo and wait. I waited for the clients Becky and Mark screened to come and visit me in the limo, and I would make the sale. Becky knew me well, so she always found me a "friend" for the night, too. I trusted her, and to be honest, some of the girls she would hook me up with, I would never have had the nerve to approach; they were that hot.

After a night of perusing the clubs and selling meth to all the sweaty rave goers that wanted it, we would go back to The Biltmore, grab some drinks from the mini bar, hop in the hot tub

that was on the deck outside our suite, and celebrate another day survived as a couple of drug peddling yuppies and a geek. It was a great life, or at least I thought so. I could go out and live the life of a Columbian drug lord on Miami Vice for a little while, but then the time came to go get more drugs, and that's the scary, life threatening part I didn't like.

The whole time I was selling drugs to the kids at the rave clubs, I was also selling drugs, including heroin and meth, to my father. My father got fired from U-Haul and then got a job as a driver for a transportation company. However, I didn't give a shit about him. He was going downhill fast, but for some reason, it didn't bother me at all. Just like me, he picked the life he had. Besides, I'm moving up, and he's my dad, so he'll be fine; or so I thought. Last time I had seen him, he was on meth and was screwing every cheap hooker he could find. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had AIDS.

Okay, that's not completely true. That wasn't the last time I saw him. I saw him very briefly one night. It was the night I got busted for burglary. I know, I had everything, why did I go and screw it up buy getting arrested for burglary? I think I did it because I really, deep down, wasn't happy as a drug dealer or happy with any other part of my life at the time. I was a dealer who was killing the young people at the clubs and even the old

people, like my own father. Sure, I had money, limos, and rooms at the best resorts available. I met Charles Barkley, Natalie Merchant, Stevie Nicks and a host of other famous people, both when I was working at Sam's and when I was staying at The Biltmore. I had friends, both real friends at Sam's, who worried about me and generally cared about me and friends who only liked me because I was gonna buy them something, or because I was their meth dealer. I had a roof over my head and food in my belly. I was happy. Especially when I consider the fact I was living under a bridge in Monroe, NC only about a year before. Only I was not happy.

One night, I was taking my trash to the Dumpster at my apartment complex, and I saw a cardboard box in there; it was small, a little larger than a shoe box. It was opened at the top, and it looked like it had some tools in it and a plastic container for nuts and bolts or something. So, I'm a guy; I like tools. I like to build stuff and fix stuff. So, I grabbed the box, and I took it up to my apartment. I looked inside the box, and it was filled with disassembled dead bolt locks and a bunch of keys. Inside the plastic container, I originally thought was for nuts and bolts, were pins for the locks. This was pretty much a kit a locksmith may have and accidentally thrown away. I inspected it further and I saw some of the keys had building numbers and apartment numbers stamped on them. None are for my building or my

apartment, but I wondered if they would work. I was curious. So, I picked a key out at random, and I waited until about 2AM to go check it out. I went to the building and apartment that was stamped on the key, and I saw there are no lights on in the apartment, so I assumed they were either not home, they were asleep, or no one even lived there. Did I mention I was drunk? I was drunk. Anyway, I didn't want to go in the apartment; I just wanted to know if the key worked. If it did, I may have wanted to go in the apartment later. I may have struck a goldmine, in the eyes of a thief. I may even have been able to find a real thief who would pay me for the keys, and then they can go rob the people. I don't know; I just wanted to know if the key worked. So, I slowly stuck it in the lock, very slowly, because if someone was home, I didn't want to wake them up. Ok, the key was in now, and I turned it. I didn't turn it all the way, there was no need too. I just needed to see it turn a little to know if it worked. It worked! I quickly removed the key, and I went back to my apartment. I started to think I would go to the apartment tomorrow, in the daylight, during normal working hours, and hopefully no one would be home. I had never done a burglary before. However, I thought sure, why not?

So, the next day I do just that. I walked right up to the apartment, and I knocked on the door. If they had answered, I would have just said, "Whoops, sorry, wrong apartment." I

knocked again and no one answered. I looked around quickly. I put the key in the lock, turned it and walked right in and closed the door behind me. The first thing I did was go to the refrigerator; I deserved a beer. No beer, but there were three wine coolers, so I opened one up and went to sit myself down at the person's dining room table. There was no actual dining room, the apartment was tiny. It was just a studio apartment. I had stayed in motel rooms bigger than this. I looked around for something to take, but there wasn't much there. The place obviously belonged to a woman because, first of all, a man would have some god damned beer, not some lame Bartels and James fruity wine coolers, and second, because this person was a pig. There were clothes and crap tossed all over the place; it looked like it had already been robbed. I thought, "Wouldn't it be funny if I cleaned it up? Ha-ha!" I didn't, but the thought of how funny it would be did cross my mind. I saw a small travel bag, and it looked like it had some jewelry in it, so I grabbed that and a boom box that was obviously her home stereo system. The boom box was pretty nice; it was huge and had a five CD changer. I finished my wine cooler, left it on the dining table and calmly walked out with the travel bag and stereo. I walked back to my apartment plugged in the stereo, called Domino's, and ordered a pizza. While I waited for the pizza, I checked out

the jewelry in the travel bag, and it was all fake, not even gold plated. At least I got a cool stereo.

I had just gotten away with a burglary. I was so full of myself that I thought I could do anything. A few days later, in my own building, on my own floor, I heard someone's alarm clock going off. It was right next to an open window. I wasn't thinking anything criminal at first, but the damn thing had been going off for like two hours. My father had just walked up to my apartment and was asking me if I wanted to go with him on a trip to Las Vegas. I told him, "Wait here; I'll be right back." It was broad daylight, probably about 3PM, and finally I just said, "Fuck it," and I walked over to the apartment, pushed my hand right through the screen, and unlocked the door. I walked in and I turned off the alarm. I wasn't there to steal anything; I was just pissed. I was drunk, so anything pissed me off. I wasn't even being sneaky or anything about it; I left the door to my apartment wide open when I walked over there.

As luck would have it though, I wasn't in the apartment for more than thirty seconds and the guy whose apartment it was came in right behind me. He was a big body builder looking kind of guy and he said, "Sit!" So, I did. I told him I was there because I was pissed and next time he decides to leave his alarm clock blasting by an open window for hours, he might want to

think that someone might just say, "Fuck it" and come in and turn it off themselves. By this time, the cops were already called and on their way. My father was in my apartment, watching all of this and was probably thinking, "What the fuck!?"

I probably would have gotten away with this, if it wasn't for one thing. When the police were talking to my father in my apartment, to figure out how he fit into this story, there was the stereo I had just stolen from an apartment a few days earlier and there was that box of keys and locks. They let my father leave, and then they arrested me. Not for what I just did, but for burglary of the other apartment.

I was taken to the court building in downtown Phoenix to the booking station, also known as The Horseshoe. It is shaped like one inside. You enter in one door. You are moved through the process of being booked, then you wait to see a Magistrate or Judge, who sets your bond and if you are released on your own recognizance, you go through the process of being released, and you exit through another door at the other end of the horseshoe. Unfortunately, I had my prior run in with the law involving the motorcycle. It really sucks that a residential burglary is considered a violent crime, even if there were no weapons involved and no one was home at the time. I still don't understand the violent crime classification and I even made sure

before I entered the apartment that no one was home and that there would be no confrontation with whoever lived there. All of that aside, my bond was set, and I had no way of paying it, so I was not lucky enough to make it out at the other end of the horseshoe and be released. I was however, unlucky enough to make it out the other end of the horseshoe handcuffed and tossed into a white van. I was on my way to the Maricopa County Jail, located outside the city and close to South Mountain.

I was sent to a “pod” in one of the buildings and assigned a cell I had to share with another guest at the jail. A “pod” is a section of jail cells with one common area where prisoners can eat, watch television and play games like cards and chess. The pod is within view of the indoor guard tower. I didn’t say much to anyone while I was there. The whole time I was in jail, I minded my own god damn business. I occasionally played chess with other inmates in the main area of the pod or participated in a game of Spades. I didn’t start any trouble. I just kept hoping that when I went to trial, in three months, I would be released.

Three months later, I did go to trial. I don’t even remember much about the trial. I was represented by a Public Defender, because I couldn’t afford a lawyer, and I think I got screwed. I’m sure today, if I pleaded that I did the crime, but I was struggling with addictions to methamphetamine and alcohol, I

probably would have been put on probation and assigned some kind of treatment, but I didn’t and I wasn’t. Instead, I was sentenced to one year in County and the three months I served already waiting for trial was subtracted from the one year, so I only had nine more months.

Like I said before, I just minded my own business in jail, so the time went by quickly and without any confrontations. When I had about two months left to serve, I was allowed to go out on Work Release. This meant I could go out and find a job and work outside the jail, but I was only allowed out for a few hours a day until I found a job and then when I did find a job, I had to return to the jail when I wasn’t working. I did find a job as a breakfast cook. I worked about five days a week and the job was pretty far away from the jail. It was not on the public transportation bus route, so every morning I worked, I had to walk about five miles to work and then about five miles back, at the end of my shift. It was a nice walk, though. In the mornings, it was cool outside and in the evenings or afternoons it was hot, but not too hot. There was one small problem with this job though, and it would certainly be my downfall... the job was in a restaurant / bar. In the mornings, they didn’t serve alcohol, but the kitchen was right next to the bar and, of course, I helped myself to some booze. Not too much at first, just a little, then a little more, and finally, a lot. One of the catches of being on

work release was that you were subject to urine tests and breathalyzer tests either at random or when the guards suspected you had used drugs or alcohol. Needless to say, one day when I returned to the jail from my job, I was shitfaced; I could barely stand up. I thought I would get more time added to my sentence, but all they did was take me off the work release program.

A few more months passed, and it was time for me to be released. This is a time that is really vague to me, just as much of my time in jail is, probably because except for when I was out on work release, I was sober. When I was released, I had nowhere to go, so I called up my dad again, and he let me stay with him. His life hadn't changed too much; he was still drunk, hanging out with hookers and was still using whatever drug he could abuse, whenever he could find it.

I really had no intention to use meth again, but I did go and lookup Becky and Mark. I actually was relieved when I found out they moved to Federal Way, Washington. I also found out that Becky had a baby, and they moved away to try and get out of the drug game and live a little more responsibly. I thought that was cool, and I hoped they would make it. I know that Federal Way is a pretty expensive place to live, so I assumed that they were, at least, doing well financially.

I went back to Sam's Café, with my tail between my legs, and asked if I could have my job back. They were actually happy to see me, and they re-hired me on the spot. They knew about everything that happened to me. How? I don't know because I had pretty much stopped seeing any of my friends at Sam's months before I got in trouble. Somehow they knew and it was refreshing to know that even after I was a total jackass at work and in my personal life, someone still cared about me and still liked me. I really wanted to do something constructive with my life. Sure, I still drank a lot, but I was off the meth pipe. I only stayed with my father for a few weeks, and then I moved into the Encanto Park Apartments up on Thomas St. On my way to and from work, I passed Phoenix Community College, and I started to think I should take some classes. So, one day, I went to the school and signed up for classes, student loans and all that stuff. I was amazed that during the registration, when they asked me what high school I graduated from, and I told them I didn't graduate, and they didn't even care. They told me you don't need a high school diploma to attend a community college. So, I was certainly happy about that.

I got my student loan money, bought books and a computer. Yeah, I spent some of my student loan money on booze, too. I mean, that's part of being a college student, right? Drinking? It was a good excuse to drink, in my mind anyway. I signed up for

four classes; Math and English were mandatory, and I took a writing class and a psychology class. I was setting myself up for failure, because I couldn't even handle high school. How the hell was I gonna handle college? It didn't take me long to figure that I made a big mistake by going to college. The classes were huge, so there was no one on one with the instructor, and it was pretty obvious most of the students in a community college were not there to take it seriously. They were probably in a community college for the same reason I joined the military, because their parents told them to get a fucking job, go to school, or get the fuck out of their house.

Math class sucked, so I stopped going, and I got an 'Incomplete' for the semester. The same with the English class I was taking. My writing class was a joke; all we did was watch a movie: Mel Gibson in A Man Without a Face. Then we were supposed to write an essay at the end of the semester about what the movie meant to us. What a joke. My psychology class was even worse; all we did was watch videos that went along with our textbook. Every Friday, we were given a twenty-five question multiple choice test and our final exam was going to be a fifty question multiple choice test. Top that off with the fact that we only saw our real instructor about four times. He had a practice and couldn't be bothered, so he sent his wife in to start the videotape at the beginning of class, and then she left. There

was no attendance taken or anything. He even told us all the answers to the final exam were in the text book, and we could essentially never come to class and still pass the final, if we read the book. He just didn't give a shit, the students in all my classes didn't give a shit, and the whole experience was a big fucking joke.

At work, I made friends with one of the bakers. He was a Mexican. He was cool and funny, oh yeah, and a drug dealer. So, about halfway through my first year of college, I was back on meth. I was, also, dealing to my father again. I was setting myself up for failure again and fail is what I did. However, there was a light at the end of that tunnel. That was when I met my wife, Susan.

CHAPTER 12 – Marriage

Susan worked at the Circle-K, right next to my apartments. I used to go in there all the time. I lived off their soda and two hot dogs for a dollar special. One night, I went in there still wearing my work clothes from Sam's and I bought a bottle of wine, a frozen pizza and a box of condoms. She carded me for the wine. I think she was just joking around, because I had been in there many times and bought beer or wine, and she never carded me before. I showed her my I.D. and then went back to my apartment. The next day, after I got off work and went home, there was something at my door. I wasn't expecting any deliveries or anything, so the closer I got the more puzzled I became. When I finally arrived at my door, I saw that someone had left a bottle of wine for me. Who could it be? I really had no idea at this point. I never gave Susan much thought. I mean, she was just a cashier at a convenience store I went to a lot. She was short, a little overweight, but she had a cute face and a funny and outgoing attitude. I had no clue it was her who had left me the wine. A few days later, though, there was another bottle of wine and by then it was driving me nuts! I wondered, "Who's stalking me?" It took me a while to put it together. Maybe it was the fact that the wine was in a Circle-K bag, but I finally remembered I was carded once at Circle-K. So, I went to the

Circle-K and saw Susan. I asked if she was the one who left me the wine, and she told me she was. I was surprised and flattered at the same time.

I'd never thought of having a relationship with Susan, not at that time anyway, but we did start hanging out, talking, having pizza and playing cards at my apartment. She was a card shark, too. Our first time playing poker, I asked her if she had ever played before, and she was like, "No. Not really." Well, she cleaned me out. She won all my cash and all my saved up change. By the time she was done with me, I was digging in the couch to find change to play another hand with. I just couldn't believe she won all my money! I liked this girl. I liked her a lot! She just had this thing about her that... damn it... I realized I loved this girl and not because she just took all my money, but because she did it very well and had a radiance about her that just made me like her more and more every time we were together.

Eventually, I asked her to move in with me, and she did. She was living in her parents' home at the time. I thought that must suck, because her parents' home was nasty. It should have been condemned. I was happy to have Susan living with me. I thought, "This might be the girl who turns my life around." I needed someone to straighten me out. Susan had never been in

trouble with the law or anything else. She didn't drink or do drugs. I'm sure at that time in my life, I would have much rather have had a woman who drank and did drugs, and I'm sure if I wanted to I could have had plenty, but it was refreshing to be with someone who didn't do those things.

We lived together for about a year, and then we decided to get married. By this time, I had stopped doing meth, but I was still drinking like a fish. We scheduled our wedding in Las Vegas at the Little Chapel of Flowers. We stayed at The Aladdin Casino and Hotel for three days. The wedding was tiny, just the two of us. The night before our wedding, we stayed up all night playing nickel slots and when it came time for our limo to pick us up and take us to the chapel, we were dead assed tired. It was cute, too. When the pastor of the chapel was going through the vows, and he asked Susan, "Do you take this man, David Monroe, to be your lawfully wedded husband to love and to hold...?" she replied with, "I think I will." I guess, "I think I will" is as good as, "I do" in Vegas because we were married. After the wedding, we went and toured the strip and visited all the cool casinos and the next day we went back to Phoenix, as husband and wife.

One day while living in Phoenix, I made the decision that my wife and I were going to be moving to Maryland. It wasn't a

decision I made because my wife and I were struggling financially, not totally anyway. It was a decision I made because the day I made it the temperature was 127 degrees. I know, I know, "But it's a dry heat." Well, bullshit. I don't care if it's a dry heat or a wet heat; it is one hundred and twenty-seven god damn degrees! The batteries in cars were boiling over, mass-transit busses were breaking down and littering the shoulders of the roads along with the broken down cars, and the only thing moving was the mercury and it was moving up.

The next day, my wife and I were packed up and on a Greyhound bus; we were on our way to Maryland. Of course, I was drunk for the whole trip, and it wasn't very exciting anyway. We did get to stop in many small and interesting towns. I found them interesting only for the fact that they were old. I do like the architecture of old buildings and the look of old, dusty towns. I am sure there were interesting stories about each town, but I wouldn't remember; I was drunk.

Three days after our journey to Maryland started; we arrived in Washington, D.C., hopped on a Metro train and took it to the Shady Grove station at the end of the Red Line. That is where my mother was waiting for us and when we got in her car, she gave us an apple and a hamburger from Roy Rogers. She drove

us to her home, and life was starting in Maryland for my wife and me.

CHAPTER 13 – Moving Back

I was drunk, but I was thankful to be in Maryland and thankful my wife had stuck by me this far. I mean, we had only gotten married five months earlier, but we had been with each other for about two years before that, and I think if it wasn't for love any normal person would have left me two years and four months ago. The change of scenery was nice. There were green things like grass and trees, there was water, and most of all there was weather, changing weather, not just hot and hotter. There are seasons in Maryland.

The first few weeks we were in Maryland, we spent a bit of time sightseeing and looking for work. We hit the usual tourist attractions, like the Capitol building, the National Zoo and other places around the area. Eventually, Susan found a job at a veterinary clinic, and I started working at a buffalo wing franchise called Wings That Go that was owned by my step-father's son, Michael.

Working at my step-brother's restaurant was okay, as a temporary job, but I was still looking for a better job, which I finally found through a temporary agency. So, I quit Wings That Go and worked as a temp answering phones and scheduling appointments for technicians who worked for TSS. TSS stood

for Technology Service Solutions, but it was really IBM that the technicians worked for. Basically, it was my job to answer a phone and talk to a client. The clients would be either a home computer user or a large company, and I had to figure out their technological repair needs and then schedule a date and time for a technician to go repair their problem.

It was just me, and a woman named Roxanne in the office answering the calls and scheduling the appointments. Roxanne was a very attractive older woman, possibly 40 or so, and she was fun to work with. When we weren't answering calls, we would always be chatting up a storm about whatever topic either of us came up with. It was always fun working there.

But IBM noticed that once I started working at the call center, the technicians had less and less work to do. At first they thought I just wasn't scheduling calls, or that I wasn't entering them in the system correctly. What I was actually doing was I was solving the issues for the callers over the phone, using simple diagnostic skills I had because of all my years working with computers.

The people at IBM thought this was great. It was great in the fact that I had the skills to diagnose and repair without ever having to actually go on-site. So, needless to say, my days as a scheduler ended quickly. IBM wanted me, so they hired me

from the temp agency, as a full time IBM employee. They gave me my own van to go on calls with, tools, books, and a Diners Club credit card with no spending limit and even sent me to classes at IBM in Atlanta, Georgia to be trained on some of the bigger computer systems they serviced.

I was loving life at this point, but I was still a drunk. I was probably drunk every day I worked, but I worked hard and accomplished most of the jobs I was assigned with ease. What I hated about that job was the driving. I mean, I love driving, that's well known to everyone that knows me. I don't even let anyone but myself drive whenever I am in a car with other people. However, damn it, I hate traffic! It stresses me out and this job of mine had me stuck in traffic most of the working day. By the end of my employment with IBM, I became too good at what I did. Good to the point that I was covering Maryland, D.C., and Northern Virginia.

I still enjoyed my job when I was on-site and fixing things, but I just didn't like getting there. There were some jobs that I did that stick in my mind. Of course, I loved it whenever I worked on equipment at The Pentagon, The Capitol, and the Navy buildings in Southeast D.C. How I ever got clearance to work in some of the places I worked, I will never know. One

service call I went on will stick in my mind forever; it was a dream. I mean, it seemed like a dream...

Crystal City, Virginia was the place. I was on a service call to go fix some lady's Gateway computer. I don't even remember what was wrong with it; it was probably a video card that went bad or something. I arrived on-site and the woman lived in a high rise condo. It was very upscale and had doormen, valet parking, etc. The kind of stuff you would find at a luxury resort hotel, only it wasn't a hotel. I finally made my way up to the apartment after admiring the décor of the lobby and making my way through the maze of atriums and hallways. The woman who opened the door was stunning. I wished all my calls were like this. She was tall, thin, short blonde hair, very attractive and answered the door wearing only a silk camisole and a silk robe to match, all very see-through. I'm sorry. I'm a married man but damn it... I can look, can't I? Besides it's not like she gave me any choice; this is how she answered the door. The decorations and furniture in her condo were of a contemporary style. It was uncluttered, clean, lots of glass and steel, but yet not too cold or too futuristic. It was very well designed.

I was having trouble focusing on my work and in my attempts to make some kind of coherent small talk, to learn more about this stunning woman, I asked what she did for a living, and she

simply said, "Wow." The word, "wow" meant nothing to me, and it didn't matter anyway; I was just making small talk. Plus, my job was over. I had diagnosed the problem, called Gateway, and ordered the part. Gateway would then ship the part directly to the end user and schedule a time for another visit by a technician to install the hardware. What were the odds of my getting scheduled again to come out here? It was time for me to just pack up my tools and go on about my other calls.

I told the other guys at IBM about this stunning woman, and I guess I wasn't the only technician who had been there. A few of my co-workers had also had the pleasure of meeting her. I asked them what she meant when she said she worked for "wow." Then one of my co-workers told me it was "W.O.W." and it was the Worldwide Organization for Women, and that I should release the wild fantasies in my mind about this woman because, simply put, "She is a man hater."

Man hater or not, she was still a stunningly beautiful woman and as luck would have it, I was the technician who was scheduled to return and install the part Gateway sent to her, but when I returned, I was not greeted by the same sexy woman who was barely dressed, instead I was greeted by what I will assume was her girlfriend. Don't get me wrong, her girlfriend, if that's what she was, was also very attractive. Shorter, brown wavy

hair, and equally as attractive as the first woman, but she was lacking a few things that made her as exciting to look at. First was she was dressed, not barely dressed in see-through next to nothings, and second she lacked the charisma the other woman had. Maybe I am not being fair in my assessment, and maybe I was just disappointed I wasn't greeted by the same scantily dressed woman as before. Anyway, this story certainly was no tale or memory that defines my life, but it is a memory I thought was worth sharing.

I wasn't going to write about this next subject for a few reasons: the main one being that I'm sure it is something my wife Susan wants to read. There are other reasons, like the fact I don't want to relive this moment in my life as much as I am sure my wife does not want to relive it in hers. However, I have to write about it because it kind of defines me in the future.

My wife Susan and I had gotten our own apartment and one night, my wife discloses something to me that has scared her for life. I don't even recall how it came up. I think she just had a phone conversation with her parents, but whatever the circumstances were, she told me she was sexually abused by her parents. My wife was adopted. Her father was in the Air Force or something and while overseas, her parents adopted her. She told me tales of how the abuse happened, and that it started when

she was about four. She told me horrid tales of how her mother would hold her down, while her father had his way with her.

I couldn't understand this. Remember in the beginning of this book when I explained to you the way my mind works, and I showed the diagram of how my thoughts look to me? There were many fewer lines in that diagram before I learned this. My brain was being over-clocked. I tried not to think of what she told me, but since I couldn't make any sense out of it, I couldn't stop thinking about it. No logical conclusions were made in my mind about this. There were too many questions like: how could anyone? Why would anyone? How could she live with this? How am I going to live with the knowledge that this happened to my wife, the woman I love, and the woman that I promised to love no matter what? How am I going to fix this? I can't fix it; it's done, at least I made that logical conclusion. I just didn't know. I was crushed. I was confused, and god damn it, I was fucking pissed!

I had met her parents many times before we got married, and I never even thought, why would I, why would anyone think... It just made no sense to me. I had to do something. I didn't know what to do. I was going to Phoenix; I was killing these mother fuckers! That's the only logical conclusion. Kill!

My wife explained to me that she has just learned to live with it and that her father was kicked out of the military because of it, and he found God and he worked at his church. This pissed me off now even more. Now get this... you know what he does for a living? He's a fucking teacher at a grade school! How the fuck did that happen!? HOW!? GOD DAMN IT! HOW!!!!???

We got on a flight to Phoenix. When we got to Phoenix, I was still pissed. I called her parents and told them I fucking hated them. I probably told them, if I ever saw them again, I would kill the worthless cock suckers!! My wife told me that would not change anything. Somehow, Susan was able to calm me down. We went to see her parents. I don't remember going in the house; I may have stayed in the car, but if I did go in the house, it was only to scope the place out and figure out where I'm going to stuff the dead bodies.

We were only at her parent's house briefly, any longer and I am sure I would have killed them. I have even been asked by a few people why I didn't kill them. I don't have the answer. Maybe I was too drunk at this point. Maybe I had a moment of sanity and realized that it wouldn't change the past. Who knows? The point is I didn't do it and if I had, I would probably be writing this book from prison. However, my wife and I were actually able to have a little fun the rest of the time we were in

Phoenix. I took my wife to the finest restaurants, and we stayed at a nice hotel, because she deserved it. I did this all on the Diners Club card IBM was nice enough to give me, so even though IBM wasn't picking up the tab because the card was actually in my name, and even though I never had any intention of paying for it, money was not an issue.

I made a decision after learning my wife had been sexually abused. Actually, I made many. The one that has affected my life the most is the decision I made of never having sex with another human being again. If I can't please Mr. Happy myself, then I won't have sex with me, either. The logic behind this is, if you get hurt you don't go back and get hurt again, and I don't want my wife to ever get hurt again, and I was hurt too. The semi-logical reason is I can't get the hurt out of my mind, not my hurt, but hers. Everything, every thought or idea I have in my head, that I cannot logically resolve in my mind, stays there forever, until either it is resolved or until I forget about it. My other decision is if I can't get back at her parents, I'm gonna get back at someone.

Is this fair to my wife? Should she be denied the physical love our marriage should have, a love that is as deep as the love I feel for her in my heart? Probably not, but I just can't do it. Not with her, not with anyone. I cannot bring myself to ever look at

another person in the midst of having sex and not think of this. Maybe she's over it, maybe she learned to deal with it, but no one should ever have to, and I am now going to inflict upon myself the pain I feel she should be feeling or the pain she does feel but has had to suppress her whole life. You can call my actions some self-righteous, martyr-wannabe condition, and maybe it is, but until I have the answers, until someone explains to me how this shit can happen, then my mind is made up. I have drawn the line in my mind, and it will not be erased. I will never forget and I don't forgive.

What makes this even worse is, when I first moved to Maryland with my wife, and we were living at my mother's house, we all were excited and jumped on the Internet bandwagon. We got a computer and signed up for every online service there was, AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy, and Juno. You name it, we had it. I don't know why or how, maybe it was just the fun of looking up people you used to know online, but I found someone I used to know. Sybil, the woman who kicked my father out of her home. Now is when I find out why she kicked him out... yeah, he molested Tina, not once, not twice but throughout the years. At first, I was thinking, "No way, Sybil's making this shit up!", but then after what my wife told me her father did to her, I had to go back in my mind and redraw a line.

Oh, and don't think I didn't tell Sybil where my father was because I did. What I didn't mention yet about my trip to Phoenix with my wife was we went to visit my grandmother. She lived in a nice trailer park in Mesa. She had a really nice double-wide and the park she lived in was for seniors, so there were a lot of activities and support for the people who lived there. Except for the time my grandmother called my girlfriend Cindy a slut, I really loved her. She was a great grandmother and not just because she always mailed us cash for Christmas, although that was nice, but because she was a pioneer in her days. She was an awarded school teacher who, back in the day, protested the stupid shit our schools were doing to students like tying the left hand of a left-handed student to their desk, all because writing with your left hand wasn't considered normal. She was also a very active woman and just had a great attitude about life. She was great and to have a son like my father, a total jackass, and not go crazy is an admirable feat in itself.

When we got to her trailer, guess who was living there? Yup, my father. He wasn't there when we got there, but she told us he got kicked out of his place and was just staying there a while. He had his computer set up in her living room and was obviously sleeping on her couch. Susan and I had a great visit and sadly, that was the last time I saw my grandmother. She died a few years later. It was also the last time I saw my father, too but

unfortunately to the best of my knowledge, he is still alive. As we were leaving, my father was driving up. He got out of his car, and I said, "Hi, dad!" and he walked up to me and said, "You know, you are the stupidest mother fucker in the world." That was it. He then walked in the trailer, and I was just shocked; my jaw dropped and I looked at my wife and shrugged my shoulders. I said, "What?!" and I started to walk to the trailer to confront the bastard, but it was agreed between my wife and myself that this was not the time or place to have this confrontation, but I was certain, and very happy, that the online conversation I had with Sybil seemed to work.

It's Time to go back to other life events for now. After a year or so working at IBM, I was getting bored, and I wanted to extend and expand on my knowledge. I wanted to move up to networking, but IBM thought I was doing too good of a job as a simple technician and didn't want to let me get too far away from that position. Let's face it, I was the only crazy fool, drunk on the job or not, who could or even would, cover MD, D.C. and Northern Virginia; I was the only one with the technical skills, the clearance to go to the places I did, and the driving skills to get there that they had. Needless to say, I started to look for another job.

I finally found one, working for a much smaller company called RCI and starting off doing similar work to what I was doing at IBM, but the pay was better, and I would hopefully be able to move up into networking quicker than I would have been able to at IBM. As it turned out, I was kind of right by making the move to RCI. Although I started off just fixing laser printers on Capitol Hill in the offices of every Senator and Congressman there was, I was taking tests and getting certifications for other stuff at the same time. Starting off, I was just getting certified on specific hardware and computer systems, like Compaq servers, but soon I was working with another group at RCI working on networks, and adding to my already growing stack of certifications. I was also working along with the selected few technicians at RCI, who were working on getting certified in what was new then, CISCO systems, CCNA and CCNP. Although I wasn't on the list of technicians who RCI was willing to spend the big bucks on the get Cisco Certified, I still stuck by and learned all I could from the guys who were.

At RCI, I was also sent out with other network engineers to do jobs that were definitely out of the realm of the normal service technician jobs I had been doing at IBM and also within RCI. I was learning more and more about server technologies and operating systems I never knew existed or had only heard

about, like Netware and other Novell systems and software. Soon I was traveling across the country installing networks.

I was still drinking. I was drinking about a 1.75 liter of vodka a day... every day. I had been doing this for years. I didn't know how to work sober, drive sober, or anything else. I was drunk 24/7. Even though I was making more money now than I was at IBM, I was squandering it all somewhere. I'm not quite sure where exactly it was all going (vodka is cheap), but it was all going somewhere.

I had one last big job at RCI before they eventually fired me for being a drunk. I was excited when I was chosen to do the job, but when it was over, I decided I hated networking. Networking sucks mainly because most of it is time spent in a tiny room full of servers, routers, hubs, telephone and networking devices. All the time you are in these small rooms sweating your ass off plugging in cables and setting up the network, you are really bored shitless. There is no excitement, unless you get excited by dripping in your own sweat while assigning IP addresses across the network, and taking the occasional walk outside the server room to a workstation to do some minor repair on a cable exciting. I don't, and I also didn't like it that on this last big job I was doing, installing servers and networks for Sunburst Hotel Systems, I was in a pretty cool

place geographically; I was in Anaheim, California. I was sleeping in and working in a hotel that was about 400 feet from the entrance to Disneyland. Even though I was there for nearly two weeks, I didn't get to go out during the daylight hours and enjoy any of it. I just worked all damn day and deep into the night. In the two or so weeks I was there, I seldom saw daylight. I may have said that already but redundancy is something that is programmed into us network people, and it's something I like to do repeatedly.

One night while I was there, I did go out. It wasn't my ideal night out, but it was fun. The last time I was in this area of the country I was in the Navy and on my time off duty I had a great time dropping a few hits of acid and driving or cycling to some of the beaches, mountains, and other beautiful places southern California had along its highways and byways. I liked to take in the serenity of the land and enjoy the peace of watching all the highly diverse groups of people in the cities. They were just people living among each other, and accepting each other without prejudice. I think that is one of the great qualities of California and the people who call it their home. That night, I could only find solace and comfort in those memories. That night I was looking for trouble. Maybe not trouble, but damn it, I had just been stuck in a server room the size of a small walk-in

closet for nearly two weeks, and I just wanted to go have fun. I didn't care what kind of fun, but just some damn fun.

What kind of fun can you find in Anaheim, California at 1:00AM? What kind of entertainment can be found on the outskirts of Los Angeles and only blocks from the entrances to the world's most family oriented park? A park that is the epitome of clean, solid, down to earth fun; the centralized genesis of all fantasies that have been built on the artistic creations of cartoon characters? Well silly, the answer is adult nightclubs with strippers and alcohol, of course. Yes, as sad as it is, you can find this type of entertainment right outside the entrances to Disneyland. So, nonetheless, I decide I'm going to go to a club, continue my drunkenness, make a complete ass of myself and most importantly have fun. I hadn't had a moment of fun in two weeks, so it didn't matter what I did. I just wanted to be doing something, so why not go to a strip club?

I did go. I did have fun. I'm still married. I know this, but I think I fell in love with a stripper. Of course, I'm drunk. I got a few lap dances and boa feathers dragged across my face over and over, but there was one stripper I actually had a dialog with. Not a dialog about what most men there would consider useful to their needs at the time, but just good old fashioned talk. Talk about the topics of the day, the weather, me, and then eventually

her. I'm sorry that I don't remember her name, it probably wasn't her real name anyway, but the dialog I had with her turned out to be more like a therapy session for her than anything else. I didn't mind. Even though I'm a drunk, I guess people like to talk to me. I don't know why, but it has seemed that my whole life, especially noticeable when I lived in Ocean City, people just like to tell me their problems. I offer advice, but I don't know if anyone has really applied my advice to their life. I certainly hope not because I see how far my advice to myself has gotten me, but I offer it anyway, and it seems to help others, just not me. That's not really a fair statement because it does help me. It helps me to think that I have helped someone else.

My whole life I have been reaching out for help, but no matter how much attention I try to draw to my needs, no matter how many different ways I try to explain what's in my mind, no one ever seems to get it. They don't get the message I'm trying to convey about myself. However, I seem to have found my niche in the ability to help others express what they feel, to get the messages they want to convey to the world out there and hopefully to help them. It may be why I have always worked in the service realm of jobs. Restaurant work, fixing computers and, even later in my life now, designing websites, all of it is helping others. I don't know where that stripper is today, but I hope she found a better way in life and became what she truly

aspired to be, and I hope whatever advice I gave her, or if just the fact I was willing to listen to her helped her.

I finally finished that job in California and went back to Maryland again. It was a few months later that RCI canned my ass. Life really sucked. Financially, I was in ruins and my marriage was falling apart, not because I was ever unfaithful or anything, because I never was and never would be. Even so, what I was and the only thing I really knew how to do very well, even better than fixing computers, setting up networks or cooking food for people, was being drunk. I did it very well. Well enough that it scared people. Important people like my wife, my family, and whatever friends I had left at this point. I don't know why people, especially my wife, ever stuck by me. Maybe they know me better than I know myself. Maybe they see the true me. Maybe I can't fix my own problems because I'm too busy trying to fix everyone else's. Maybe I fixed too many meals for others, sat and listened to too many people's problems, and put too much thought and effort into fixing them. But I can't stop. Fixing other people's problems is my salvation; it is the only peace I find in life. Maybe there is a balance between fixing others and other things like computers and fixing myself. There is a line somewhere; logic tells me so. There are only so many options. There are a finite number of possibilities, so there is an answer. I can't find it. I drink.

CHAPTER 14 – Back in Business

My wife and I moved into the PinDel Motel in Laurel, MD. Finances are short; we are paying weekly rent. We have a nice little apartment. It was not a motel room; it was an apartment in a separate building they had behind the actual motel. It was kind of okay, I thought. What did I know; I was drunk. My wife and I were arguing all the time. My life was crumbling and I was taking everyone down with me. I am the Titanic of self-realization. I can't see the iceberg in front of me because of the deep alcoholic fog I am drifting through. I am the pilot of this flight to a personal Armageddon.

One night, in a typical drunken state, I decided to drive to 7-Eleven and get myself something. I didn't know what. I just needed an excuse to get out and drive. I got to the 7-Eleven and bought myself a quart of chocolate milk. I got back in my car, and I started going back to the motel. As I was just entering the town of Laurel and I am approaching the part of town where the traffic lanes split, I saw a police car behind me. It followed me for a bit. I was almost back at the motel. I thought, "Maybe I'll make it. I'm not speeding or anything and I drive drunk all the time, so I doubt I'm swerving or anything, maybe I'll make it. The motel is getting closer. I think I'm gonna make it! Yes! I'm gonna make it!! The only thing that could fuck this up now

is if he turns on his... OH FUCK!!!! He just lit me up!! What a fucking asshole cop! Doesn't he have anything better to do than screw with innocent drunks like me!? Isn't someone selling crack by the racetrack or something? Why me? Why now? Oh, screw it!" I started drinking the chocolate milk, thinking that is going to make me smell less like alcohol. I was close enough to the motel now that I don't care if he has his lights on and is screaming through his PA telling me to pull over. I'm close enough. I'm pulling into the Motel and parking in front of my place.

There's a gun drawn and pointed at me.

Sir! Turn off the vehicle and step out!!

What's the matter officer? I just went to 7-Eleven to get this chocolate milk. I was thirsty.

Step out of the vehicle.

OK.

Have you been drinking tonight, sir?

No, just this chocolate milk. Why? Have I done something wrong?

I pulled you over because your passenger side headlight is out. But when you didn't stop this became a felony.

A felony?! Come on! You're kidding me. I was practically here already.

The more I spoke, the deeper I was digging myself in. Soon came the field sobriety tests. I failed. Into the squad car I went. I was taken to the police station and given a breathalyzer test. I don't remember what the results were besides, "*Holy Shit! Hey, James come and look at this shit will ya!*" I think that meant there was so much alcohol in my system that there should have been a sign posted next to me that said, "No Smoking – High Explosives Area." Whatever the results were, they charged me with DUI and then instead of locking me up in a cell until I was sober, like Otis on The Andy Griffith Show, they just called me a cab, and then told me to go home and sleep it off.

I did nothing like they suggested, instead I went back to the Motel and continued to get drunk. The next morning, I woke up and continued drinking. Life seemed like it was over and now, to top everything off, I just got a DUI. Neither my wife nor I had a job at this point, and we had nowhere to go. Then I found out that, by the grace of God, my step-father insisted I move back into his home, and he would help me buy my own Wings That Go franchise from his son, my step-brother. There was a

condition though, I can't be drinking. Of course, I agree. In my heart, I knew I should stop drinking, and I really did have every intention of giving it my best shot, but an alcoholic's best shot is pretty much equal to, "Yeah, whatever. I'll do and say anything to get what I want" and followed by a good ol' "God, I swear I will never drink again."

I moved back in with my mother and my step-father. I went to court and, since it was my first DUI, they went kind of easy on me. Well, it was easy at first. All I had to do was attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings three times a week and check in with a probation officer once a month for six months and get tested to see if I had been drinking. My license was also restricted to only being able to legally drive to and from work. Sounds easy, right? It wasn't. Not in the least.

I had just purchased my own Wings That Go franchise. It was a franchise location that was once run by my step-brother, Mike. Mike had his own problems, like the fact that he was on heroin and just about any other hardcore drug you can think of. He once showed up at a picnic at my mother's house naked! He tried to start fights with random people and then ran off down the street, screaming at the top of his lungs. I wish I had been there to see that, it would have been hilarious, a bit scary too, but funnier than shit. He also had a big gambling problem and owed

lots of people tons of money. So, the franchise I bought from him was crap. It was filthy. None of the equipment worked. It had no customer base and the only people who did come in there were there to find Mike, break his legs, and collect their money. These were big, scary guys, too.

So, I had this hole in the wall franchise. Not even worth the \$108,000 I paid for it. In all honesty though, I didn't pay for it, my step-father, John paid for it. I think this franchise was important to him for two reasons. The first being that he had a lot of money invested in Wings That Go Corporation and second, because he wanted the best for his family and that even included me. To top off the franchise purchase price, I also needed to fix the dump up, replace equipment, put some food in it, and advertise aggressively to repair and replace the diminished customer base. I needed more money, so I borrowed some from my step-father. I was working my ass off at that point, and I was actually not drinking. Things were looking up. I was working about twenty hours a day, to the point where sometimes I just sleep at the store. When I was not working in the store, I was running errands for the store, like trips to Sam's Club to buy food and supplies. I was really running myself down, and so was my wife. I don't want to not give credit where credit is deserved. We were both putting in more hours than we expected, but it had to be done, if we were going to make it.

I started missing AA Meetings; I started missing appointments with my probation officer. I was in violation of my probation. Eventually, in the mail, I got a notice which said I had to go back to court. Surely, they would understand my situation; they would see I was just an average small business owner and although I was trying to do everything right, the situation was spinning out of control. I was having trouble keeping up. They'd have compassion for me, right? Oh, who the fuck was I kidding? This was a court of law, if I wanted compassion I'd better go to church. I had violated my probation; I had broken the law; the written law, the instructions given to me by a judge. I was screwed. I had lost control. I had failed. Hey! I've got an idea! I'm already screwed, right? I don't have to see my probation officer anymore. I don't have to go to AA meetings, and I don't even have to go back to court and explain myself for like two or three months. I thought, "I'll have a drink." I did, and then I had another and another.

Back to square one. Only this time I had a really good reason to drink. No, not the fact I have to go back to court, but my step-father had gone into the hospital. It was pancreatic cancer. He was in the hospital for a while, then he came back home. He tried to work again, but then found himself in bed at home with visits from the hospice people. He was dying.

My step-father, John, and I were not always best of friends, but through the years I have begun to feel a strong connection with him. I started learning more about him and how he went about his life. Sure, he had some crazy moments and sometimes he did some randomly crazy things, like when he thought my sister was out partying while I was in the hospital after my bicycle accident in Ocean City years back. All in all, he was a smart, hard working father of eight kids. I admired him for his hard work and his progress in life. From the time I first met him, when I was a child, he was just a regular everyday stockbroker for Dean Witter, but by the end of his career, he was the Senior Vice President of Investments for Morgan Stanley / Dean Witter. He was making mega bucks, too. I've never been one to put much value on a person's wealth, but when I see that the wealth was a direct result of their hard work and dedication to everything, I put a value on it. In this case, the value was that I wanted to work more with John. I wanted to learn how he did it. I wanted to absorb as much as I could from him, and I was just starting to.

There would be no Wings That Go, if it wasn't for John. The corporation itself is a farce. It was a tiny company barely qualifying as a business let alone a serious corporation. It only had about fifteen locations and was owned by the son of the hard working couple that built the company up from nothing. By

“nothing” I mean they had nothing more than a single deep fry cooker, a few sauces, some wings, and a desire to serve chicken wings out of a small standalone “shack,” for lack of a better term. Through the years, neither the owner nor his employees really gave a crap about the company; they were just happy to sell a franchise once in a blue moon and reap the benefits of that sale and the franchise fees current franchisees were paying.

There were two employees, Mark and Don, who did seem to care and actually did show up to work every day and were seemingly doing their best to at least try and make something out of the company. Unfortunately, the shape the corporation was in at the time was dragging them and the company under very quickly. Back taxes being the most critical issue, but that combined with trying to cover up the company’s past mistakes and current disasters was making it next to impossible to rebuild this company. They were taking one step forward and two steps back, to coin a phrase. Hey, I want to give credit where and when credit is due, so I will say that in my mind, they were both company heroes at the time, and even in my eyes today, they, together, did help grab the company by the bootstraps and bring it to its crescendo a few years later. However, before that, my step-father stepped in. He had money, family in the business, and he bailed out Wings That Go, not once, not twice, but repeatedly. He collected mostly common stock in the company,

as repayment for his investment. He was also placed on the Board of Directors, since he ended up owning a very significant percentage of the company. He tried to steer the company in the right direction financially. His business ideas for Wings That Go were pretty much hit and miss, mainly because his knowledge and principals of how businesses and money work were propagated from a sterile stock trading world and just didn’t apply in the restaurant business or simply didn’t work as well as planned.

Regardless, my step-father fronted Wings That Go lots of money and had a recognizable interest in Wings That Go. As a franchisee, I had an interest in seeing this company grow too. However, he would never see this dream of his, of mine, and of every other deserving, hard working franchisee, come true, because he was moved from home, to the hospital, and then finally to a Hospice, to die peacefully, surrounded by family.

One day about a week after my step-father was moved to the hospice, I was at my store and it started off as a normal day, nothing unusual going on. It was just another day in the life of a small business owner. I was sweeping the floor out front and then something hit me. I started shaking and I started crying. I started crying for apparently no reason. Something inside me told me to call my mother and tell her about my weird

experience, and I did. I called and she told me she was just about to call me and tell me to come to the hospice; John only had maybe a few hours left.

Look, except for the crazy shit Laura did back in Ocean City with a steak knife through my head, I'm not a spiritual person. I'm too logical a thinker for that. I'll believe it when I see it, when I read a datasheet on it, or when Microsoft or some other big corporation makes some kind of certificate for it. However, that day was different for me. There was a connection between John and myself, and even before I called my mother, he was telling me to come see him. I have never had an experience like this before, and hopefully I don't have one again for a long time. This was some kind of Time/Life Book story or something that couldn't possibly be dismissed as coincidence, or could it?

My wife and I shut down the store, and we went to the hospice to see John. We all got to spend some time alone with John and speak to him. I know he could hear and understand, but he was powerless to respond with more than an occasional grunt or other slight movements that, at least in my mind and I'm sure the minds of the others that were there, were movements confirming acknowledgement that he understood.

I don't remember what I said to him; it was probably something about how I admired him, and even though he was

parting, I would do my best to make sure his wife and his latest daughter, my sister, Jane, were OK, and I would do my best to make sure I took everything I learned from him, although not much, and apply it to make sure his last big business dream, Wings That Go, would continue to prosper. I knew I hadn't said everything I wanted to say, but other people still needed to talk to him, so I left his bedside, crying, tight faced and determined not to let it get the best of me. I would move forward no matter what, in memory of a man who is now very dear to my heart.

I'm Drunk, again, still. I couldn't cope with this shit they call, "life." What was the fucking point? I think, "Everything I love is going to die someday anyway. I'm gonna die someday. What the fuck is the point? Money? I'm not interested. The more money I have the worse I become. Love? Crap. I don't know. I'm drunk." I was drinking again. I had just lost one of the most important people in my life. His daughter, Annie, had watched him take his last breath when she was beside him. The strange thing is, after John passed, we had a party. I played along. Shit, there was beer and pizza that his friend, Harold, bought. I never understood the whole "wake" or "party in remembrance of..." bullshit. Someone just died for Christ's sake. I'm confused. I don't understand. Nothing computes, yet everything is obviously finite.

I was buzzed at the funeral. Actually, I don't know that for a fact; I'm just logically assuming. I had been lucky, I guess, because I was 33 and John was the only person I had ever been close to, and personally looked up to that died. The funeral was boring. I must be drunk because I don't remember it. I remember carrying his casket into the church. I remember the night before at the funeral home. I remember being at the burial, but I don't remember how I got there.

A week after all this, I went to court for my DUI case. I tried to explain to the court that I didn't mean to miss the AA meetings, I didn't mean to miss my appointments with the probation officer, but I was just trying to be a good citizen and run a small business, and I was just consumed by everything happening at once. Then I threw in the good old, "Oh, yeah, and my step-father was dying." I probably could have had a better attorney because all he said to the judge was, "Your Honor, I believe he had us all stymied." "Stymied?" What the fuck does that mean? I hope it's good.

"Mr. Monroe, you are sentenced to 10 days in the county jail. Bailiff, take Mr. Monroe into custody."

Hmmm, I guess "stymied" isn't a good thing. I can't say I've ever used the word before, but I'm sure to remember it from this day forward.

I was taken into custody and transported to the County Jail. Not much to talk about here. I requested to be in solitary confinement because at the time about two-thirds of my body was covered with psoriasis, and I know it's only going to take one dumbass in general population to think my skin condition is going to kill him, and then he'll say something stupid and I'll have to kick his ass, and then my ten days could turn into ten years, if I kill the bastard. The jail obliged my request, and I got my own cell, in my own section of the jail even. It was all good with me; I like the peace and quiet. I also got out in five days because they have this "good behavior" policy, where every day you go without causing any problems, you get a day cut off your sentence. I guess it's like the jail's version of a half-off sale. So I guess my request to be alone paid off in the long run.

CHAPTER 15 - Rochester

My wife and I decided to close the restaurant. There is too much pain in the memory of my step-father passing away and his son, Michael, who we bought it from, was being a real ass and making it impossible to run the place. He would come in and do crazy things like threatening to drive his car through the restaurant. He was just nuts.

One thing I did, while I was there was I started my own business that I ran from the back of the restaurant and from the basement of my mother's house. It was called X-Pirate. I'm not sure where I came up with that name because I haven't started attacking pirates and porn peddlers on the internet yet; that comes later. However, that was the name I came up with, and I started the company using all the skills I acquired at IBM and RCI. I was able to take the skills I acquired from my past employers and apply them to a basically un-tapped market in the Washington, D.C. area, one that offered smaller businesses the same services for their computer equipment that the bigger companies in the area were getting.

I began to focus on my new goal of providing high tech services at low tech prices for the masses. I was able to provide service contracts to larger companies, such as Polysonics Corp,

COM21 and Randstad North America, to name just a few. At the same time, I continued to focus on smaller businesses and home users, offering them the same services at the same low prices.

Not only was this a big hit with the larger companies because they were getting better attention and lower prices from me than they were from the bigger companies such as IBM. It was also a big hit with the small business and home users because now they could get the same service that only larger companies could afford and also have that service delivered quickly, on-site, and on their schedule.

I also started working for Wings That Go, INC., as a manager for a few of their corporate stores. I did this for about a year, and then I quit. I wanted to go back to Rochester, NY again, and I did. My wife and I went up there in the middle of July 2001 and looked for a place. We found a really small apartment on University Ave. and signed a lease to move in at the beginning of August. Our landlord was Carl, a 30-something entrepreneur who was into real estate. Mostly, he flipped houses in downtown Rochester. His parents were always at the house where our apartment was, and they were very nice people.

We moved in right around the very beginning of September. Susan and I were both looking for jobs, but in the interim, I was

working day labor at Labor Ready, just to have a few extra bucks. We weren't hurting for money or anything at the time, but every little bit helps. Skip ahead to September 11th and a note in my journal:

September 11th, 2001.

I remember this day very well. My wife, Susan, and I had just recently moved to Rochester, NY. We had been there only about a week or so and were living in a very small one bedroom apartment on University Avenue. The studio was so small that Sue got the bedroom with a twin bed in it, and I slept on the couch in the living/dining room. I always slept with the TV on, still do. At the time, I was addicted to watching CNN 24 hours a day. No particular reason, I just like news.

I don't know what made me wake up as early as I did that morning; I just remember something was telling me to wake up. As I was coming back to life after what I'm sure was another drunken night and sitting up while rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I remember looking at the television, and it took a moment or two for my head to register what I was watching.

I was awake and alert right after the first plane hit a tower at the World Trade Center in New York City. I quickly went to

wake Susan up. She was grumpy as always when I wake her up, but I told her she MUST come see this.

Susan joined me in the living room, and we sat together looking at the television. At first, we were writing this off as some kind of freak airline accident. Perhaps a plane had malfunctioned, or maybe it was just a case of pilot error, maybe the error was the pilot had a few too many before takeoff. Whatever it was... It certainly must be an accident.

No sooner than we were trying to justify or find a reason in the tragedy, we were witnessing on television the second plane hit the second tower at the World Trade Center.

There was no justification now. Susan and I were both awestruck. Our mouths were wide open, our hearts beating fast, and so many thoughts spinning through our minds. Accident, pilot error, equipment error, all excuses we could possibly think of were as quickly thrown out the window as a plane can slice through a concrete and steel tower.

The people in the towers.

The families of the people in the towers.

The businesses they worked for.

The emergency responders.

Their families.

Pets, pollution, toxic chaos...

Oh, my lord! I just saw someone jump! Another! A third!

With the senseless loss of life, anger becomes me now. I want to help! I must go! I can't. I mean, I can, but would I be helping or hindering? It's a six hour drive. I wait.

BREAKING NEWS

Reports of another plane hitting The Pentagon.

We are at war.

My family! My family lives outside Washington, D.C.!! Do I go protect my family or to NYC to either help or hinder? My sister, Beth, My Mother! MY FAMILY!!!

I Cry.

Fear.

Anger.

Urgency.

I call my mother. I tell her I want to come down now. She tells me to wait, but I don't want to. We are at war!! Even being

the drunken fuck-up that I am, I will stand! I will fight! You will not take my country, my family; YOU WILL NOT TAKE ME ALIVE!! I WILL STAND!

My mother and my wife calm me down. I am to wait. However, the thoughts are already scrambling through my mind. How do I get to D.C.? I know how to get there, but what if we are at war? Food. I need food. I need to protect myself. Anarchy will set in. I am ready to protect.

Eventually, I calm down. All the time I am planning for the worst case scenario, the news is providing more and more information. Not all of it totally correct at the time, as we now know today. It was beginning to look more and more like the work of a small group and not a total blown out war.

No bombs were falling. The only things that were falling were buildings, lives, dreams, families, hopes, plans and futures.

We will never fully recover from September 11, 2001, as a nation, as a people and I will never fully recover or understand that day. There are families that will forever be without a father, a mother, or a child. There are vacations that were never taken, weddings that never happened and dreams that never came true after that day.

But the reality that happened after 9-11 was a reality that made us all stronger and closer; as a nation, as a people and as individuals.

We can't change the past, and we can't get back what we lost. What we can do is unite as one, help each other heal and move forward knowing that what we lost that day will only make us stronger in the future.

After a while, September 11th was behind us, and I finally found a job. I got a job at a call center. I was working and doing phone support for Comcast Internet. It was a pretty simple job; I just had to answer the phone, pretend to listen to the person on the other end and then tell them to reboot their cable modem. If that didn't work then I told them to reinstall Windows and call us back if it still didn't work. I did enjoy the job, and I worked there for nearly a year when all my drinking finally caught up with me.

I was at work and I had just eaten a sub from the sandwich shop at the grocery store next to my work. My stomach started hurting before I went home, and by the time I got home, I was in serious pain and went to the emergency room at Highland Hospital. They told me it was just gas, and told me to go home and take some laxatives. I never had any gas pains like this before. This felt serious, but I hesitantly took their advice and

went home and took every kind of laxative I could find at the drug store. It was no help, so this time I called an ambulance to take me to the hospital and this time the hospital drugged me up pretty good and did some tests. They came to the conclusion I had appendicitis, and before I knew it, they were administering anesthesia and I was out like a light bulb.

When I woke up though, I looked down, and I saw a huge scar down the center of my chest, and a scar where my appendix was, or used to be. I also saw a tube coming out of my side, and they had a tube up my nose and down into my stomach or my lungs. It didn't take me long before I yanked out the tube in my nose and the one in my side. I'm sorry, but I hate doctors and hospitals, and I certainly don't like any tubes sticking out of me. They quickly sedated me with Valium, and I also had a Morphine drip I could control with a push button. They told me to press the button, whenever I was in a lot of pain. I quickly learned the button worked, but not every time I pressed it. It only administered a dose of Morphine no less than seventeen minutes after the last dose. Leave it to me to figure that out, but I did, and I hit that button as often as possible, pain or no pain.

I think I was in the hospital for a week, and I really hate hospitals now because they told me two things: number one, they told me my appendix was fine, that it wasn't the problem, but

they took it out anyway because I didn't need it. Now, I'm not a real doctor, I just play one in my own mind, but that made no sense to me. Number two, they said that I didn't have appendicitis, and that I had pancreatitis, and that they operated on my pancreas. They never did tell me exactly what they did to my pancreas, just that they carved me open like a Thanksgiving turkey to operate on it. I personally, don't think they did anything to it besides look at it and say, "Yep. That's a pancreas. Nurse, close him up; I'm late for a golf game."

They also told me that I have diabetes. It was probably from all my drinking and if I didn't stop drinking, I could die. Did I stop drinking? Yes I did. For maybe a month or so, but then a job offer came in for me, a job where I couldn't resist drinking. Don, the V.P. of Marketing for Wings That Go called me up and wanted me to help them rewrite the operations manual for the corporation and when I was done with that, I would become a Wings That Go Corporate Trainer. The coolest part of this was I could stay in Rochester and work from there. I really liked this job offer, so I quit my job at the call center and worked from home for Wings That Go. I also continued my own business, X-Pirate in Rochester, and I occasionally got a job or two fixing stuff. So, things were looking good. Then I got a good idea to close down X-Pirate, at least close it down as a computer / printer repair company. I was going to start doing websites for

small businesses. I started off doing sites for my landlord, Carl, and then I started doing websites for all the Wings That Go franchises that wanted them, and I did them cheap too, so I got lots of clients.

After finishing the operations manual for corporate, they started sending me to new Wings That Go locations that were getting ready to open. My job was to show new store owners how to operate their stores as outlined in the operations manual, that I had just helped corporate complete. So, I knew the OPS manual page for page, and I also knew about running a store because I used to own my own and I was a manager at the corporate stores. There was no way I could ever fail at this job, no way. Not me. Mark at the corporate office even said that as long as he was in command I would always have a job.

The other cool thing I liked about the job was that I got to travel. WTG Corporation would buy my plane tickets and pay for the hotels and rental cars. This was really cool, at first, because I got to go to all sorts of places I had never been before, like Mobile, Alabama (the hometown of one of my favorite singers, Jimmy Buffett), Shreveport, Louisiana, and so many towns in Texas that they all started to look the same.

So, everything was going great, except for a few things. The hotels or motels WTG Corporate was putting me up in were

dives. Only rarely would I be lucky enough to get a hotel room that didn't have cockroaches on the walls or bullet holes in the windows. It was horrible. Then there is the fact that many times I went out to a new location, I would be working with this fat guy who owned his own franchise in Rhode Island or something named James. This guy was an ass; he never did anything according to the OPS manual, and he was constantly putting down my boss, Mark. He would utter words like, "Fuck the OPS manual. And Fuck Mark too. Mark can suck my fucking dick. He's a fucking total dumb ass and so is Don. They can stay in the office and butt fuck each other and leave me the fuck alone. Mark can stick to buying hookers on Craigslist with the money he makes every time a franchise is sold. I run this shit; they don't do a god damn thing for this company. Fuck Mark!" Wow, and that is no exaggeration either. So, I was really starting to hate this job. I had my own damn problems to deal with, like trying to get all the new stores to follow the OPS Manual, and it was becoming very difficult with this kind of work environment. I even called Mark on more than one occasion and told him I didn't appreciate this crap and it seemed to just go in one ear and out the other. Mark didn't even flinch when I told him the things James said and I know Mark never confronted James with my concerns because it never stopped; it just escalated.

After about a year of being a Corporate Trainer, they decided to have me re-open a store that previously failed in Tyler, Texas. The really bad thing about this plan for me was that I had to move to Tyler, Texas.

Wings That Go in Tyler was doomed from the beginning. Corporate only gave me \$30,000 to build it. Sure, it was in a building where another Wings That Go had just closed but, except for a walk-in cooler and the hood fans, it was gutted. Nothing was to code, like plumbing, fire, or anything else. Not only did I have to build it up from nothing, I had to rebuild what was still there and do it all with only \$30,000.

I traveled to Dallas to buy equipment for the store and another Wings That Go Corporate employee went to another store that had closed and got some tables, chairs and fryers. I'm pretty sure this is when I got my hernia that I still have today. I literally put that store together myself; I wasn't even allowed to put anyone on the payroll until a week before we opened. I also installed the point of sale system and computer network which linked the two registers to the two computers back in the office.

CHAPTER 16 – Big Mistake

Remember earlier when I mentioned how I was hurt when I found out what happened to my wife as a child and how I said I wasn't done with that issue? I wasn't lying. I had been thinking for years on how I could do something, anything. I think I may have just found it, or it had just found me.

I have always been drawn to technology since I can remember, first the electronics on my desk in the basement of my father's house in Virginia, to the computers in my high school, to my time at IBM and other technical companies, including my own. Now IRC had become a big part of my life starting back in 1996 or 1997. IRC is a pure text chat client for your computer. It is sort of like older BBS's (Bulletin Board Systems). It doesn't have any animated characters, emotions or anything else. mIRC is a specific brand of an IRC Chat Client, which can be modified with scripts or code so that you can customize it to your liking. You can also download other people's scripts to use if you like them. However, as the saying goes "The Best Script Is One You Write Yourself" because when you download other people's scripts you could also be downloading Trojans, backdoors, viruses, or worse.

I enjoyed IRC for its simplicity. I don't like other chat clients like AOL AIM, MSN Messenger and Yahoo Chat. On IRC, I met people from all over the globe. Some people I liked and some I didn't. I met people that lived normal lives and people who murdered their best friends and went to prison and never came back.

One person that I met on IRC was a girl from Australia, who went by the nickname ^mermaid. She suffered from Cerebral Palsy or some other serious illness, and she had a mother who was a drunk and often abused her. ^mermaid was 19 and dreamed of going to college, but she spent her life going from her home with her mother to her grandmother's home when her mother (mum) got too drunk. Fortunately, for ^mermaid her mother eventually died and ^mermaid was able to pull her life together and go to college. I wish I had kept in contact with her because I would love to know how she is doing today. I am very moved by and inspired by people who seem to have everything going against them in life, and still manage to rise to the occasion and succeed triumphantly.

One thing ^mermaid did was get me to go to an IRC channel called #movies. In #movies the channel theme was to talk about movies and whatever else. One of the people in the channel was Just-Dave, a fat man in Kansas, who was a network savvy

amateur hacker. I felt quite at home among the pool of people from every corner of the globe and every corner of the mental spectrum in #movies. Pretty much anything was acceptable in the channel except for one thing, piracy. On IRC, there are many ways to transfer files from one user to another user, and just the name of the channel itself was an open invitation for people to come in and advertise their servers with pirated movies, music, or porn. These visitors were kicked and banned as soon as possible. It was like a full time job keeping people like that out of the channel. So I used to make scripts for my mIRC client that would automatically kick and ban people who advertised such wares.

It wasn't long before my scripts became popular. Not only in #movies but in other channels that had their own set of problems. I found myself writing scripts for people in #movies and other channels and as the needs of my script grew so did my knowledge of scripting and also where and who to target my scripts against.

Although my claim to fame on IRC was making scripts that were anti-piracy and doing my little part in stopping piracy, it just wasn't enough. Not for me, I had to think outside of the box. I wanted to know how it all worked, not just how to stop it. I mean, how could I effectively stop it if I didn't know how it

worked? Right? I even named my own computer repair company X-Pirate.

As the pirate's technology grew so did my knowledge base. So I had a lot to learn, and although I am an ex-IBM'er, my knowledge was more in hardware and setting up networks than it was in destroying networks. Considering that I suffer from ADHD among other things I did my best to study up on it even though it was difficult for me to retain most of what I was learning.

I never clicked with the hackers, but I did some self education on different ways of hacking people. I never put together a BotNet, but I did have fun port scanning large ranges of IP addresses and wrecking havoc on random PCs around the world. In what I would have considered to be pranks, I would connect to random computers, replace people's family photo albums with pictures of other people's families, change subtle lines in people's resumes or other documents and send 3000 page print jobs to remote printers. I also learned how to compromise network routers and switches and use them to connect to other networks anonymously, which allowed me to wreak even more havoc.

'More havoc' is exactly what was about to happen on so many levels it's almost inconceivable. Right at this moment my task seems certainly obvious... at least to me. I needed to

combine what I learned about IRC scripting and hacking and bring them together. Although I was very good at taking other people's IRC Code and editing it to suit my needs, there was no code out there that accomplished the tasks I wanted to.

There was one person on IRC that had a brain I needed to pick, Just-Dave. See, he used to reboot my computer at his will back in 1996-97. He did it by giving me code for my anti-piracy scripts that he said would help, and on the surface it appeared to, but below the surface he had complete control of my PC.

I finally got Just-Dave to reveal to me the code that gave him access to my computer, and it was so simple! One line! One action! One result but with many possibilities! It was just what I needed to make my new plan work! Then after I added this code to one of my more popular scripts, I realized that the code wasn't enough. It was good, and played a vital role in my scripts, but I needed to take it further! I needed to take it to the next level... and I did.

After I had deployed 100's of thousands of scripts with the code in them, and 10's of thousands were still in use on multiple IRC networks, I had control. I had control of the world! I could make people's computers do anything I wanted! Anything! Or at least that's what I thought. It actually turned out that I only had limited control. I was pretty much trapped in to only being

able to execute commands that were built into mIRC and a few commands for the Windows XP Command Prompt. I had to think of more stuff! I needed help! So back to Just-Dave I went revealing only part of what I wanted to do and not giving him too much information. I'm pretty sure he saw through my schemes though, and he helped me anyway. He helped me figure out ways to see what channels people using my scripts were on, what their operating system was, what was on their clipboard, and what websites they were looking at. Along with all that, I could script out code that echoed everything they typed anywhere on IRC directly to me and anything someone typed to them was also echoed directly to me. I was also able to add to my scripts an open hidden FTP connection. FTP is just a text only file transfer protocol. What that means is there are no thumbnails or anything, and you don't know what you got until you get it. It can also be used to retrieve and send important system files to and from their computer.

So, here I am with one of the most downloaded scripts ever, which has so many hidden backdoors and malicious code it is unbelievable. I'm still not happy. I need to figure out how to get more control, and I pull my hair out for months thinking of what the next level will be. I consider that 99.9% of the users of my script are using Windows XP, so the answer to my goal must be in XP. I asked myself; "what does every version of XP have that

is the same no matter what language it's in and what updates and service packs have been installed?" The registry!! It's the registry! Everything is controlled through the registry! EVERYTHING!!!

I know what I need to do now, but how do I do it? How do I open a remote desktop on someone's computer without them knowing? How do I open a truly transparent FTP or Telnet connection using mIRC as the Trojan horse? The answer is simple; I need to learn everything possible about the Windows XP registry, and every Command Line tool available. This is an area where no mIRC script maker has gone. They may have touched on it, but most would give up because it's too much. Most would stop at the first hurdle they came across. But no! Not me! I'm on a mission!!!

So I study and study some more. I set up computers in my home for the sole purpose of testing out certain code and how I can destroy computers over the internet using my scripts and some old fashioned straight forward hacking and attacks. Some of my experiments are successful and some are not, but thanks to trial and error and many months of real-time testing at home and years of testing on people using my previous scripts, I finally have what I need.

I took out a big chunk of this part of the story simply because I'm not going to write an idiots guide to hacking. Besides, there were many downfalls to this including the part where my landlord and my boss at Wings That Go may have been looking in from the outside. They had no idea why I was doing what I was doing and neither had the balls to just come out and ask me. If you've ever seen those cartoons 'Spy vs. Spy', well this is sort of what it's become at this point, only they were spying on me spying on my targets.

Back to Just-Dave I go again. This time I ask him directly how I can change the code on my scripts that are already out there, and he gives me some ideas and examples. I try them, and with some modifications they work. I put them in a separate file which executes some writing, re-writing and deletion of code in my scripts that are currently out there. As I mentioned before, I am alerted whenever anyone is using my scripts, and I have now set my own personal script to re-write their scripts, whenever I am notified. The re-write is done through the same method that Just-Dave used to shut down my PC back in 1996-97.

So I have got everything ready to go, my old scripts have been converted to include new code, my new scripts are being downloaded and there are plenty of people to spread my script around.

Wow. That was a whole lot of work, but damn it, people are trying to pedal the crap I want to eliminate on the networks I use to IRC on and worse of all, in the channels I visit!! I am being motivated by anger. The anger I feel because I found out the very disturbing things happened to my wife and the anger towards my own father.

I know what you're thinking; "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Maybe there is some truth to that but not in this case. Something happens to you when horrible things happen to someone you know and love. I won't even deny that I've been a jerk my whole life. I have said things to people I never should have said, saw things, I never should have seen, been places I never should have been, etc. So, this is the time. This is the time in my own mind and for my own reconciliation, to redeem myself for every bad thing I have ever done. This is the point in my life where it is time to start doing good things, even if the path to accomplishing the good things meant doing the wrong thing. It didn't even matter if it made sense to anyone else, nothing I do ever did. It made sense to me and I jumped in with both feet.

I start to think I need to separate myself from this plan now. Sure making the code was fun, challenging and rewarding, to a

certain extent, once it actually worked, but I'm too chicken to actually deploy it on the world.

I handed the whole project over to Just-Dave, madcow, and MikeT. Madcow was a person Just-Dave and I met online when we first tried to start our own IRC network. He was a guy, who was going to Cornell University and had a very large BotNet established. MikeT was a friend of madcow and, after chatting online with him, seemed to have many of the same goals as I did. So there was no more testing. I made the script and I want it deployed quickly. MikeT sets up his own FTP server. Nothing illegal on it that I know of except maybe the script I made. He then joined one of their channels and advertises that he has porn! On his FTP, he makes sure there is a directory called -=FREE FILES=-. Everyone likes free stuff, even perverts. So in this folder he put like five free pictures and a Self Extracting Zip File of the script I made. I made my script a self extracting installer file for MikeT so he could hide other goodies in it like transparent remote desktop applications.

MikeT can now see everything people type to others, everything that is typed to them, and he can control their mIRC, and their PC through remote registry edits and a remote desktop to their PC. He has total access to everything they do. From this point MikeT would collect a boatload of information about them,

their email address, their job, their friends and family. MikeT can gather information from them through a Windows registry hack that enables Windows Remote Desktop. Then, if the target is stupid, I mean really stupid and registered a username on the IRC network and logs into it, MikeT would then have their username and password.

Believe it or not, some people use the same password for everything, so when MikeT gets their IRC network login and password, he can go to the homepage of the network and login to their account via the web. This tells MikeT even more about them. Specifically, the email address they used to register. So MikeT can try to login to their email address that is through their Internet Service Provider using the same password they use to login to the IRC Network. Sometimes, rarely, but sometimes, BINGO! MikeT now has access to their account and email with their Internet Service Provider.

Here MikeT could raid their address book, and through their ISP email account MikeT could email all their family, friends, co workers, local police, Americas Most Wanted, and even Oprah a confession. It was a full confession at that. MikeT could attach logs of their conversations on the IRC network with other users. He could even get their physical address from their ISP account

and provide that to all the confession emails that he sends out along with their phone number.

Sadly, even after all the hard work I have done for this project, I was told that only one pervert was stupid enough to fall into every trap that was set.

This project that I handed over to Just-Dave, madcow, and MikeT was becoming too much like work. I'm not getting paid for it, and I FUCKING HATE MYSELF! This project has started to consume my life. Sure, making a script that helps good people hack the computers of perverts was fun, but it's actually hard work. So, after months and months of research, development, and deployment, I back off even more. I mean, hell, I have just helped a small group hack the world, and for what I believe was and is a good cause. Although, I will never be recognized for the hard work I did, or will I? And remember, I didn't really write all these scripts, Just-Dave wrote them, I edited and published them. Have I been scripted by Just-Dave? Have I followed a scripted path, thinking that I was actually doing something good when in fact I wasn't?

CHAPTER 17 – Enough

Now, I have many more problems in my life I need to take care of, like the fact that I just lost what I thought was the best job I ever had because of my drinking problem. I was at the very first Wings That Go convention, and everyone from corporate was there and just about every Wings That Go franchise owner from all over the country was there too. I was drunk. I know I say that a lot in this book, but this was going to be a state of drunkenness that tops all others. I had bones to pick with many people and this was my chance to confront them all at one time. One man I mentioned earlier, James. I confronted him about everything I hated about him, the way he down talked about my boss, Mark, and even the way he showed no respect to the company in general and the operations manual. My verbal abuse got to the point where at the dinner for the corporate people I called James out. I called him out into the hallway, and I was prepared to kick his ass. Kenny, another corporate employee, franchise owner and even a past food distributor for the company and his wife, Nancy, cornered me in the hall and tried to calm me down. At this point, I could barely stand up, and it was time

for me to go to sleep because tomorrow was going to be a big day, the day we greet all the franchisees and the real convention starts. So, I went back up to my hotel room with my wife, who was embarrassed as hell by now and was thankful that the night was over. However, it wasn't. I got up to the room, and the room was too hot. The air conditioning didn't work well enough for me, and I started throwing stuff around. I called the front desk many times, and they got sick of me calling so they sent up security. Security decided it was time for me to leave the hotel, so they called the cops, and I was taken to downtown Atlanta, to the police station. I was only there for about four hours before I was released. I suppose it was just to give me time to sober up because no charges were filed. When I was released, it was raining, and I walked back to the hotel which was about fifteen blocks away. When I arrived, I was able to get to the room they moved my wife to, and where my belongings were. I got dressed into new clothes, but I still looked like shit. I thought that I would be able start the day, as if nothing happened the night before. I was wrong. When I made it downstairs, I was met by Mark and James. Mark fired me on the spot.

I got in my car with my wife Susan and started driving back to Texas. So many things were going through my head, but one thing was sure... I could never drink again, and I didn't. In fact, I even went out seeking help for my drinking problem, but it was

too late. I lost my job because of it or at least that is what they should have told me but instead the CEO of Wings That Go, Mark, put it in writing that it was for 'other serious issues' but failed to address any of those issues. I suppose if it was just the drinking then he would have had to follow the legal route and offer me a chance to continue and complete the treatment that I was getting.

David,

This letter is in response to your emails concerning the WTG convention and the WTG Tyler store. First I would like to address the business issues relating to the Tyler store in order of importance. I would like you to close the checking account and send me the document stating it is closed and the balance left in the account. Please send me along with the gas card, the cell phone and any other company property you may have. Also please return at this time, all corporate paperwork and files to my office as soon as possible.

Shannon from the Texas Workforce Commission has been contacted and we here at the corporate office are taking care of that.

Your work on the web site has always been admired and appreciated by all of us here at Wings That Go. Your expertise in the area of technology is a viable tool in this day and age. Your work on the web site may continue since it is work we agreed on under a separate agreement at a different time. However the website must continue to be operated in a timely and professional manner.

Secondly I will address the issues surrounding the Wings That Go convention which led to the termination of your employment with us. This was our first convention that required many months of planning and hard work to achieve the desired success. My hope as president of this company was that my corporate employees conducted themselves with dignity and professionalism representing Wings That Go. Our corporate employees were the hosts and needed to be attentive and proficient in all matters concerning our franchisees. The first night you arrived in a foul mood and instigated an argument with another corporate employee. You came to the hotel angry and excessive drinking aggravated the situation to a level you could not control.

Alcoholism is a disease that we could understand and work with. Unfortunately you have demonstrated here and in the past that you have other serious issues which continue to fester. Myself and others tried to calm you down and asked you to relax and enjoy. I do feel you have knowledge and enthusiasm to share with our franchisees. You refused to let things go and allowed them to escalate involving others. The issue that angered you about Providence Rhode island was not your business or concern it was a time for us to convene as a team to discuss the itinerary for our first convention and to share the enthusiasm together for the long days ahead this was very disheartening for me and the others it was not the start we anticipated or needed at this time

Which brings me to the last issue your employment at Wings That Go it is with regret that I must adhere to my original decision to terminate your employment with our company I feel it is the only course of action I have left since we have been down

this road before I accept your apologies and understand that the behaviors were not intentionally to cause havoc I am pleased you have realized your problem and are seeking help however as president of this company I must take the course of action that is best for the company has a whole good luck with your future endeavors.

This was just great but I have a feeling that my boss also feared the fact that my family still owns a huge chunk of stock in the company. I'm sure he would say the chunk wasn't that big, and it meant nothing, but maybe, if challenged, it would become worth more. I really don't know. I know the company has many skeletons in the closet, and the stock may not even be worth the paper it's printed on. I know this much, they must have wanted me out of the picture for reasons other than my drinking. So, along with just getting fired, I had a million puzzles in my mind at the time that I needed to put together.

One of those problems was a crazy neighbor of mine. This man did everything possible to annoy the hell out of me as it seems to happen everywhere I go, and one day I finally called the police on him to complain about some of his activities and general harassment he caused to me and my wife. He was acting like the cop in that 2008 movie, Lakeview Terrace with Samuel L. Jackson. Besides being a total ass he also used to bring teenage boys home with him. This concerned me for a few reasons but the main reason would be that this man showed no

sign of being a responsible adult, or even a human for that matter. Apparently judging from what he came right out and told the police, harassment is something he was not only good at, but it was something he was planning to continue for an indefinite period of time. The conversation I had with the police went something like this:

I open the door and 2 officers walk in:

OFFICER 1: He umm... I'm recording by the way

ME: Okay.

OFFICER 1: When we were there he came up to us and he wanted to know your name, so umm, he kinda hinted that uh, you know, he didn't say in any words, he kinda hinted that you know that maybe he might use his connections or whatever, so we're gonna get you to fill out a little form here...

OFFICER 2: Do you have your driver's license on you?

ME: What do you mean 'his connections'?

OFFICER 1: He's a probation officer; there is really nothing that I think he could do.

ME: Isn't that just like a glorified social worker?

OFFICER 2: It's a little more complicated than that. If you're not a convict, it's nothing you need to really worry about.

OFFICER 1: Yeah. But if he does this... uses his position to do this, he could get fired.

ME: What is his deal?

OFFICER 1: He's an idiot.

WIFE: Use his connections?

ME: Did he appear stoned to you? Every time I talk to him he always seems wasted.

OFFICER 1: No, not tonight. He probably doesn't have any connections, he may think that he does, and I'm going to note in my report that if anything like this does happen or if you get contact from him saying he was going to do whatever it is a probation officer can do, to my knowledge isn't anything, um he can get fired. Pretty much if he comes to you at all or if you get any kind of overt threats or anything like that, you know he didn't make any kind of specific statements, but it led us to believe that he was going to at least look into doing something, you know, whether he can do anything it would be something completely... I couldn't think of anything he could do.

ME: Yeah I just don't get it.

OFFICER 1: Anyways...

ME: Did you give him my name?

OFFICER 1: Uh yeah, I had to.

ME: What's his name?

OFFICER 1: Dennis Dearion

OFFICER 1: He's smart enough not to be 'stupid', like 'stupid' stupid.

ME: Yeah.

OFFICER 1: But he might do something stupid enough to get himself fired.

ME: Well this is crazy. I've been living with this now for over a year.

ME: Did he let you in?

OFFICER 1: No he wouldn't let us in.

OFFICER 2: We sincerely hope that you all are able to reach some kind of happy medium or whatever.

OFFICER 1: OK well, we certainly hope you all can settle this peaceably.

I like to get to know my enemies, and I seemed to have found one while living at the Oaks by the River Apartments in Tyler, Texas. An enemy, whom even with a position as a Smith County Probation Officer, was for all practical purposes a law enforcement officer. A law enforcement officer that for whatever reason decides it is a good idea to threaten and disturb rather than serve and protect.

Did Mr. Dearion follow up on his threat to continue his actions by 'using his connections'? He may have. I know this much, when I returned to the police department to follow up or get a copy of some of the reports, they seem to have disappeared. Is this the corruption of one man or of many? I'll probably never know, but it is a story that needed to be told because if these are the kind of threats, he makes to one citizen, then I can only imagine how many stories about this man there are that have not been told by others.

It also makes me wonder if I have any room to talk. I mean in my own life, I have taken the unlawful road many times and in one case I was even motivated by my emotions and I resorted to my own type of vigilantism. Sure, it was fun writing mIRC Scripts that helped others hack the world, and destroy the lives of perverts, but I did it; it's over and it's time for me to move on.

I later found myself second guessing the script I created with Just-Dave and the methods I used to test it. I also was second guessing Just-Dave's motives from the beginning. Right now I was thinking that even though I was using what appeared to be Free Wi-Fi spots, how secure was it? How secret was it or, even more importantly, how transparent was it? I remember the days there was some guy outside my home sitting on the park bench with a laptop. Who was he connected to? I mean, what network was he connected to? Was it the same network I was on, maybe? I was a sitting duck when using free Wi-Fi like I was. My supposed cloud of anonymity was, in fact, an enormous abyss of transparency. Could I have been so wrapped up in the creation of the script that I forgot to think of every way it could backfire?

I had to force out of my mind all these negative thoughts and questions and try to continue along with my life. However, weird things started to happen after that moment. Everyone I lived around turned into a zombie. People started looking at me with blank eyes. Darkness surrounded everything around me. Steven King couldn't have written a creepier scene, and it was getting creepier by the day. Was this just the guilt I felt because of the things I had seen in my life, the things I had done, or just what I was seeing when I look in the mirror at myself? What affect was all this going to have on me, my family, and my friends? Did I still have any friends?

I moved away, trying to escape. I moved back to a place where I once had friends and family alike years ago. I went there partly in search of the “me” that used to be and partly to pick up the pieces and reconstruct what I have destroyed.

When I reach my new destination, Rochester, NY, I find that nothing is the same. The friends I once had are gone; they’ve moved on. The family I once had, moved too. Life cannot be like it was many years ago. All the time I have spent drinking, alienating people, destroying career after career, and hacking the world, everyone and everything else known as “the world” has moved along without me. I am now decades behind the world and the friendly, kind person I used to be and the person everyone used to love has become cold and lost in the shuffle of life. I continue to try to pick up the pieces and put back together what I once had and who I once was, but it is an uphill climb.

I haven’t had a drink for nearly five years and that’s good. I continue to be self-employed and have a growing client base. That is good too. I even still play a small role in helping to rid the world of perverts, only now I do it through and in cooperation with agencies whose job it is to handle such cases. Things are looking brighter, but I can’t put those shades back on too soon. There is a black cloud following me and trying to tear me down. No matter where I go, it finds me. Maybe Laura did

see something that night on the beach in Delaware, maybe demons were chasing her, and perhaps they were the demons from her past. I find it amusing sometimes the things I see other people do or the things that happened to them, the things I was often so quick to dismiss, occasionally happen to me too.

Is this the guilt I feel for doing all the crappy things I’ve done in life? Is this Karma? What is this?

I always told other people that, “Five will get you fifty,” and that the things you do in life will come back ten-fold. Perhaps that is what is happening. Where do I go from here and how do I redeem myself? Well, I’m stuck. I’ve dug myself in really deep. I have an entire life of bad decisions to repair.

However, I don’t want to run away from it. I will confront anyone who is willing to confront me; I will tell my side of every story as I just have and will tell it again when asked, even if it gets me in more trouble. I will continue to be polite to people and continue to do good things for others when I have the opportunity and maybe eventually people will be able to see the real me.

Will people ever trust me again? Probably not after reading the stories I just told. Not anytime soon, that’s for sure. I can’t spend my time waiting for the sky to fall because I have a lot of

work to do now to repair what I have done and if I spend my time waiting for the end, it will come sooner than I expect.

People have asked me how someone like myself, who spent a large chunk of their life on the wrong side of the law, suddenly has a change of heart and direction. I don't think I can explain it but I'll try. I think that everyone wants to do good things. Some people are born with that desire, and some people take a little longer to join the bandwagon. I happen to be one of the people who took a little longer. It took me a long time to realize that the satisfaction I get from doing something good for someone feels better than the satisfaction I get for doing things for myself and always trying to be the center of attention. Even after I figured that out I was still a little slow. For example, with my mIRC scripts and escapades, I bit off more than I could chew. I wanted to fix the whole world. Another example would be that I used to drive around, look for drunk drivers and call the police on my cell phone to report them. It took me a long time to realize that it is not nobler to help the whole world than it is to just help one person.

Today I spend my days writing, making web sites, helping out my mother and supporting my wife while she is dealing with some health issues. I am doing all of this while I myself am battling diabetes combined with peripheral neuropathy and

delusional depression. However, I am quite content in helping the people around me, and always putting the needs of others first.

CHAPTER 18 – A Final Note

Is there a moral to all these stories? Sure, there are plenty, take your pick.

I have been able to pick up and at least attempt to move on. My days of thieving, drugs, alcohol, and hacking the world, have ended many years ago. It is unfortunate that I am still trying to go back to who I was and to right all my wrongs. I know. I know it's an impossible task, but I can't stop. I have not found all the logical paths I am looking for. I have many more dots to connect in the lines that I see in my head. But until then:

I need to know. I need to know that something good has come from the things I have done.

I need to know that something I did, or something I'm doing now has helped or is helping someone.

I need to erase some of these lines in my mind.

Every morning I wake up, and it becomes more and more difficult for me to even make sense of or remember the simple things that most people instinctively know.

I tried really hard to think of a way to explain that in a way that people can understand or visualize, and I came up with two examples.

1. That picture at the beginning of this book; all those lines. The more lines that are drawn the darker the picture gets, and it's becoming harder and harder to define the lines. Everything I forget, every new question presented to me, starts a whole new line.
2. Let's say you have a computer, and you've had it for years, and you have never done any maintenance to it like defragging the hard drive or removing programs you no longer use. Every day that goes by the computer takes longer and longer to boot up because it has to sift through more and more crap every day. That is my life.

One day, the lines in my mind will become a solid black shape, and that will be the day my 'computer' no longer boots up. In the meantime, I will continue to be fascinated by, and equally disoriented by the parables of life. I will continue to tell myself I was a good man who did useful things. Maybe, just maybe, when my 'computer' no longer boots and I see a solid black image in my mind, there will be one last line, a white line that takes me to one final logical conclusion. I'm done.

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