

Paying for College



Kenneth R. Szulczyk

All characters, places, and situations that appear in this work were purely fictitious, created in the writer's mind. Although the places in the novel do exist, any resemblance to real people – living or dead – were entirely coincidental.

Paying for College
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The Short Story

Here I was, sitting in the bushes.

It was mid-March, and it was still cold. The rain was pit patting lightly on the leaves. My clothes were damp from the rain penetrating my jacket.

I shivered; my teeth clicked together, making me sound like an old mechanical typewriter. I glanced down at my watch. It was around 10 o'clock. I gazed across the street, looking at Mike's Garage and observing all signs of life.

The lights were still on, and the mechanics were still working inside. They must have many cars to work on, as they worked late that night.

Here I sat, wondering what the heck I was doing here. Was I really this crazy? This desperate? No harm was done. I can get up now and go home. I would suffer no consequences, but I remained glued to the spot. With tears almost flooding my eyes, I remembered the financial aid letter that had arrived in the mailbox yesterday.

The university gave me two weeks to pay the remaining balance on my account. The university would automatically withdraw me from class if I didn't pay. Of course, I would not finish my coursework and lose my scholarship for next year. I owed the university a meager sum of \$660, but it was a king's fortune to a student on financial aid.

Those dirty bastards who worked in the financial aid office. They were bureaucrats with horned-rimmed glasses and wore cheap polyester suits. They needed to gain people skills as they dissected every student with their neat little formulas and determined how much the university could extract from each student. One financial aid officer prided herself on being known infamously as the Dragon Lady. They were more interested in eliminating students rather than helping them pay for school.

CLANNK! One of the mechanics dropped a wrench, bringing me out of my somber.

I was nervous. This was the first time I had done something like this. I sat in these bushes, shivering in the rain. A faint mist rose from my body as my warmth evaporated some of the dampness.

Although I crouched low against a building, a light breeze pushed the rain toward me.

I looked around for a new spot, but this one gave the best view of Mike's Garage and the surrounding area. I could see any approaching traffic, which surprised me; there was very little on Saturday night.

Mike's Garage was located one block south of Lincoln Way West, the busy thoroughfare in town. However, I felt I was in the countryside with no souls on this street.

I sat here glued to this spot. My intentions were clear, and I was pushing the cold and wetness from my mind.

A good friend, Brian, told me Saturday was Mike's Garage's best day. My friend should know; he spent two years suffering in that garage. Many people brought their cars in on Saturday, on their day off, to service their vehicles. The garage manager hid the day's proceeds in his old, metal desk in the far back corner of the garage in his dingy little office. The money was locked in a metal box in the bottom drawer on the left-hand side of the desk. If my friend only knew what I planned to do with this information. Of course, he hated that job, so he probably would want a piece of the action.

Even though Mike's Garage was surrounded by towering, massive oak trees that cast heavy shadows over the property, Mike's Garage had a clearing in the back, surrounded by a 7-foot tall chain-linked fence.

As I glanced around my surroundings, one of the cars in the garage suddenly fired up to life. A red 1996 Toyota pulled out of the garage and drove through a gate behind it.

Then the night fell silent as the car's engine was turned off. A tall, bearded man appeared and then closed the gate. Although dark, the man was covered from head to toe in filth and grease.

The padlock snapped close with a loud click that echoed 100 feet across the street to my spot in the bushes.

The bearded man walked to the front of the garage and waved goodbye to the other guy inside, "See ya later, Chad." Then he climbed into a rusty old Buick.

The Buick's engine roared to life. The car had severe rust-leprosy, and the exhaust rattled severely as if it was ready to fall apart. Then the car pulled onto the street and drove away.

I was still sitting in the bushes, waiting. I couldn't see the other occupant, but this was good news. Chad was the son of Mike, who runs the Garage. Mike went permanently on vacation and rarely stepped foot in his own business.

A few minutes later, the garage lights switched off. Then Chad appeared and pulled the two heavy garage doors shut. As Chad slammed them shut, the closing doors sounded like the rumble of a thunderclap, and the sound reverberated off the surrounding buildings. Chad was a tall, muscular man with rugged good looks. He got into a new Ford F-150 and drove away.

I still sat in the bushes. No other cars were in Mike's Garage's front parking lot. The traffic was dead, and I hadn't seen another car drive on this street in at least half an hour. I sat here for another 15 minutes in case Chad or the mechanic had forgotten something and returned to the garage.

Looking at my watch, I saw it was already 10:26. In the background, I heard two drunks arguing. They must be on their way to the bar, already drunk.

I rose slowly from the bushes, shaking the sleepiness from my legs. Although my legs were weak, I crept across the road. I walked briskly to the fence gate at Mike's Garage, acting like I belonged there.

Then I walked around the side against the fence, scanning the area and ensuring no traffic or pedestrians were coming. If anyone could see me, the tall trees and my dark clothes would hide me in the shadows.

Satisfied, I pulled the gloves out of my jacket pocket, put them on, and quickly climbed the fence. The rain and cold made the wall feel like ice, even through the gloves.

Once on the other side, I ducked behind a car, again scanning the area for strangers.

Crouching low, I slowly hobbled to the corner of Mike's Garage.

Unfortunately, the garage building had no windows in the back. Creeping low, I approached the window on the side.

The window was old and divided into two sections, each with nine panes. I pushed up on the window, hoping it would open, but it wouldn't budge. My next strategy was to push in on the panes.

At first, the panes didn't bulge, then CRASHHHHH! The window imploded inward as shards of glass crashed onto the garage floor.

I quickly ran to the back and hid behind a car. My heart was racing as adrenaline coursed through my veins. I sat there in the back, crouching low, looking for any signs of trouble. I didn't hear a peep.

After 10 minutes, I jogged to the window and climbed through.

My eyes adjusted to the dim light as I glanced around the garage. I didn't see any blinking lights or other indications of a burglar alarm. I meandered to the back of the garage to Chad's Office.

I opened the door with no problem.

Walking around the desk, I opened the bottom drawer and removed the metal lock box. The box was old and cheap, with a heavy layer of dirt and grease.

I carried the box from the office into the garage, searching for a crowbar. With luck, I saw one lying on the bench.

Holding the box firmly with one hand against my body, I used the hand to work the crowbar into its crevice. As I applied a little force on the crowbar, the box screeched and moaned. Then it popped open.

The gods must be looking favorable on me tonight. The box was full of money. I removed the bills and spread them on the workbench. There must be over \$1,000 here. In the dim light, I saw several checks.

I sorted these out and placed them to the side. I left the checks behind because I wouldn't try to cash them.

I folded the bills and slipped them into the front pocket of my jeans. The gloves made the task difficult, but I felt the money sliding down the pocket.

The box also contained about \$5 in change, so I tilted it, emptying its contents into my eager glove. Then I slid the change into my other jeans pocket.

Thinking to myself, I must be smart. I returned to Chad's Office and opened all the other drawers on his desk, spilling the contents onto the floor. I also meandered around the garage, opening other drawers on the workbenches and toolboxes.

I wanted to ensure this job looked random. If only one drawer was disturbed, the police would know this was an inside job.

A smile swept across my face as I looked at the mayhem and mess I had caused. I felt like a two-year-old left unattended in the kitchen for an hour.

I returned to the broken window and slowly peered onto the street, looking for any signs of life.

It was still dead. The rain stopped, and a foggy mist hugged the landscape.

I quickly jumped through the window, making my way to the fence. I hastily climbed up and over the fence and jogged to the street.

I continued walking down the street. As the distance from Mike's Garage widened, the vigorous thrusts of my legs softened into joyous skips.

After two blocks, I removed the gloves and slid them back into my jacket pocket.

I was flabbergasted and confused. This was way too easy.

I didn't have a car, so I walked directly to Lincoln Way West, a busy street. Then I turned left and walked to the closet bar six blocks down the street.

I didn't walk directly home because the police had a K9 unit. If the dog picked up my scent, it would immediately lead them to my dorm room. Maybe the dog would have trouble discerning my scent from all the drunks at the bar.

I approached Mad Murphy's. It was a rustic bar with country music thumping out of the jukebox. The building was old and appeared to be an oversized shack surrounded on all sides by a dirt parking lot full of rusty, broken-down Ford and Chevy trucks.

As I walked through the door, I didn't believe my luck. One bar stool was empty. The gods were looking favorably at me today. I placed myself onto the stool and ordered a Corona, using the change in my pocket.

Behind the bar, a 3-foot-high mirror followed along the wall. In front of the mirror were several wooden shelves brimming with various liquors. Then I saw the reflection of the dirty, bearded mechanic standing in the corner of the bar, holding a cue stick in one hand and a Budweiser in the other. A tinge of guilt swept over me as the mechanic placed his beer on the table to take his shot.

My conscience began to cry. Maybe I should have not done this. I had no right to steal another person's money. Then another thought, probably from my id, penetrated my mind. My grandmother took her car to Mike's Garage two years ago, and they screwed her. The mechanics changed her oil and spark plugs and charged her \$550. Anyone with mechanical knowledge can go to Wal-Mart and buy those parts for \$30. Thus, they stole from my grandmother, and all I did was steal her money back, plus interest and penalties. This idea, aided by alcohol, helped assuage my guilt.

Occasionally, I glanced at the mirror and observed the dirty mechanic with cold intent. I would mumble "thief" under my breath.

The dirty mechanic with the beard never recognized me. He never turned to look at me or even approached me. We were complete strangers, although our worlds collided indirectly for one instance.

Waking up in my dorm room the following day, last night's activity was surreal. It seemed like a dream. Jesus, how much did I drink last night? Did I really break into a garage and steal money?

Sliding out of bed, I picked up my pants. I saw a bulge in the front left pocket.

After dumping the contents onto the bed, I counted \$1,225 in bills and \$1.25 in change. I really did break into Mike's Garage.

Then I glanced at the clock; it was 8:30. "Oh crap," I hollered. Political science started at 9.

I quickly dressed in new clothes and pulled a ten-dollar bill out of the stack of money, sliding it into my jeans pocket. Then I hid the remaining cash at the bottom of my clothes hamper. Even if I had a roommate, another man wouldn't go through another man's dirty laundry. Men have phobias about touching other men's used, smelly undergarments.

I put the clothes I had used the previous night, including my old sneakers, into a plastic bag from the store. On my way to class, I stopped near the cafeteria's dumpster and tossed the bag of clothes into it.

I slyly looked around and saw that other students didn't show one ounce of interest. It was common for people to throw garbage away, even though the dormitory had ample trash facilities.

I scanned the local newspaper daily, looking for evidence of my crime.

I noticed a short story on Monday tucked on the last page of the newspaper. The police were investigating the vandalism at Mike's Garage. They believed some rowdy high schoolers had broken into the place, creating a giant mess. The article didn't mention anything about stolen money. That was it!

I still haven't paid my student account, but I felt a significant weight lifted from my chest. I felt at ease in class and could concentrate and study. Sometimes, I felt guilty, but then I thought about my grandmother getting taken by those thieves.

A week had passed, and I had two more days to pay my student account.

I retrieved the money from the hamper and organized the cash stacked by denomination. Then I headed to the administration building.

The administration building was a seven-story steel and glass edifice. The steel was painted dark brown, and the windows appeared blackish in the sunlight. The building glared over the university campus like an ominous black tower, ensuring anyone in the vicinity knew who was in command.

I approached the looming tower and entered the first floor to the cashier's office.

Only two students were in line. It was late March, and most students had already paid their accounts.

The line moved quickly, and it was my turn.

I slowly approached the counter and said, "Hi, how are you doing? Here's my student ID. I'm here to pay my account."

The cashier was an old, middle-aged lady with thick, horn-rimmed glasses. Her face seemed frozen in a frown. The joy of life left her centuries ago.

She took my ID, keyed in my student number, and mechanically replied, "You owe \$690."

"What do you mean? I thought I owed \$660?"

"Well, sir, the university assessed a \$30 interest fee on your account."

Instead of arguing with her, I pulled the wad of cash out of my pocket. Then using the largest denominations, I counted out \$690 and handed it to her.

The woman grabbed the bundle of money and recounted it.

I felt a little nervous. Touching the money would make the woman know it was stolen, so I scrutinized her, searching for hidden expressions or acknowledgment of my misdeeds.

The woman placed the money in the drawer and handed me a receipt.

“Thank you,” I said, sticking the receipt into my pocket. I turned and quickly left.

It was May, and I completed my last final exam. Returning to my dorm room, I was speechless. I couldn't believe it. I made it through my third year of college. I earned a B- in English Composition, but As in everything else. This was a terrific year!

As I walked along the sidewalk, a campus squad car quickly stopped beside me.

My heart started to race as the police car squealed to a stop.

Ah, Jesus, as I thought to myself. Have I been caught?

The campus officer climbed out of his car with a clipboard. The cop glanced at me. He turned and began checking the parking permits for vehicles parked along the road.

Beads of perspiration formed on my forehead as I sighed.

As I walked into the dormitory foyer along a wall of mailboxes, I noticed a letter in my mailbox.

I quickly retrieved the letter and noticed it was from Financial Aid. I mumbled, “Great, those bastards again!”

I hastily tore the letter open and scanned the contents.

The Financial Aid Office was pleased with my progress and decided to continue my scholarship. Next year's tuition, room, and board were estimated at \$16,600, while the scholarship covered only 10 grand.

I uttered, “Great, I must find another \$7 thousand for next year.”

A smirk crept across my face as I crumbled the letter and thrust it into my front pocket. I remembered a Mexican restaurant downtown. I heard that the restaurant owners hired illegal, undocumented workers. The restaurant owners paid these workers less than minimum wage and mistreated them badly.

My smirk broadened into a wide smile. Stealing was not stealing if it was from thieves and criminals. Right? Especially if the money went to a good cause?

The End.

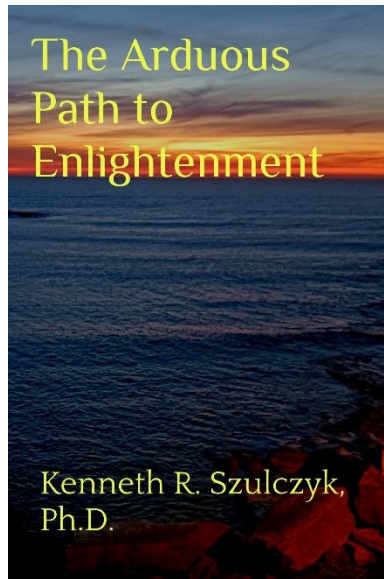
About the Author

I was born in a small town in Michigan, filled with the noises of factories. While growing up, I witnessed factory closures, which brought high unemployment and few economic prospects. I left the town to pursue my dreams and enrolled in a university. My education opened the door to the world, where I graduated with a Ph.D. in environmental and natural resource economics from Texas A&M University. With my degree, I traveled and lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kazakhstan, Morocco, Malaysia, and the United States. Currently, I teach economics and finance at a small university in Morocco. Despite my humble beginnings as a poor boy from Michigan, I was doing alright. I was living life to the fullest.

Other books from the author:

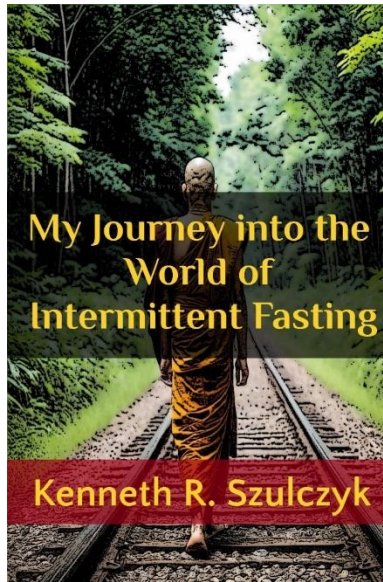
The Arduous Path to Enlightenment

As human beings, we often ponder upon our existence on this earth and ask ourselves why we were here. We search for answers through various religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. They share a common theme where God wants us to use all our talents and become closer to Him. We examine methods like fasting, meditation, lucid dreaming, sensory deprivation, and mind-altering drugs such as psychedelics and marijuana to explore our minds and awaken our spirituality. We delve into the deep depths of our minds and psyches to gain greater awareness and uncover hidden aspects of ourselves. Through this journey, we discover our true selves and purpose in life while traversing the path to enlightenment.



My Journey into the World of Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent fasting was a journey with many twists and turns. We may not be exploring ancient stone ruins in the jungles of Cambodia or savoring the exotic flavors of spicy Thai cuisine from the food carts on the streets of Bangkok. However, fasting was a journey to a healthier body. In this book, I take you on this journey, sharing practical insights and tips on all aspects of fasting. I've distilled my knowledge and extensive research into an easy-to-follow guide, including 50 practical tips on fasting, exercise, and nutrition. My book was a tool that can help you discover the power of intermittent fasting and unlock the doors to a healthy, long life.



The Rise of the Insane State – What was Happening...

This book offers a comprehensive view of the U.S. legal system, explaining the relationships between the people, businesses, and their government. It's not filled with complicated statistics or high-level economic jargon. It's written for any intelligent person who wants to understand why a government takes over its economy. The book uses numerous examples and cases from the United States, but these ideas can apply to any country. It's a book that makes complex concepts accessible and understandable.

THE RISE OF THE INSANE STATE

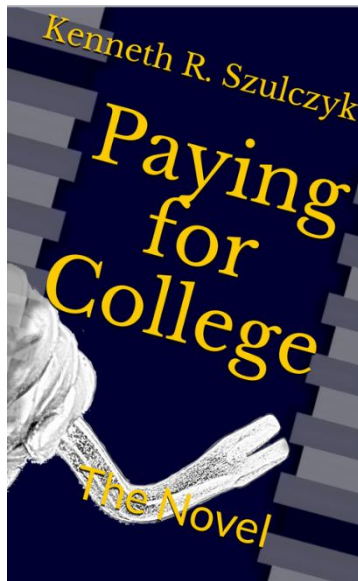


WHAT IS HAPPENING
TO THE U.S. ECONOMY?

**KENNETH R.
SZULCZYK**

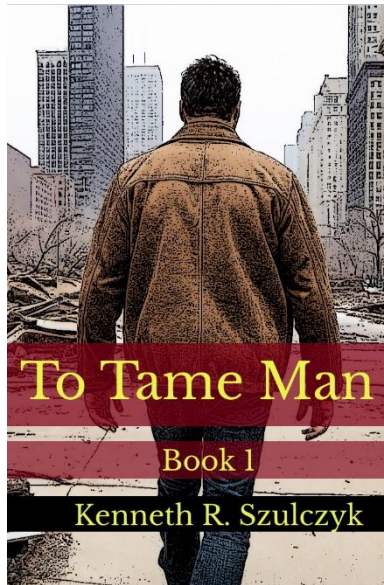
Paying for College – The Novel

Brothers, I only wanted to attend a university and escape a small town with no job prospects or future. But every time I opened my mailbox at the dorm, I pulled out another tuition bill with a looming due date. So, I had to do the unthinkable—break a few rules and do some insane things. Then everything just became crazy.



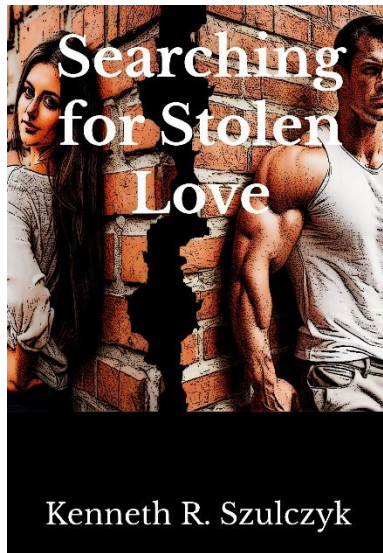
To Tame Man

The United Federation of Cities has been at peace since the Great War, and one of its great cities, Chicago, has experienced no violence, no crime, and no murders in 68 years. Then Susan, the director of the Male Processing Unit, ran out of Growth Inhibitor 37, and several males, including Brown 447, didn't get their treatment. Unfortunately, Brown 447 shows an uncanny intelligence and rises up and challenges the society of Chicago. Mayor Lilith and the Mayor's Guards must restore the social order and return law and order to Chicago.



Searching for Stolen Love

Fox was an American finance professor. He was thrilled to teach at the Bosnian University of Management, a place, where he hopes to make a difference. His future was bright, and he fell in love with a Serbian woman. Having just completed his first semester, he was looking forward to a peaceful winter. But one night, his girlfriend disappeared without a trace, and he was left with a growing sense of unease. Determined to find her, Fox embarks on a search that would lead him to uncover a mystery in the land of blood and honey.



The Second American Revolution – The Building of an Empire

As a child, Jerrick Ray Davis dreamed of delivering powerful speeches to the people. He also dreams of building an Empire across the North and South Americas. These were not simple daydreams but ideas that map out Jerrick’s destiny. Jerrick rises out of the wreckage and devastation of the Michigan economy and turns his dreams into reality. Jerrick Davis and his political party, the National Workers’ Party, took over the United States government and the rest of the Americas. Jerrick Ray Davis becomes the most powerful man in the 21st century, and the world trembles at his sight. Jerrick Ray Davis also makes a promise to the people. After the 2008 Financial Crisis, he will put all Americans back to work. Good-paying jobs will be plentiful again. Of course, Jerrick Davis puts everyone back to work, building his Empire. This story was about Jerrick Ray Davis’ life from early childhood to rising in power. Please read this story with caution; we may be all toiling hard on Jerrick Ray Davis’ Empire. As Jerrick Ray Davis says, “All Americans will be united under one flag.”



Kenneth R. Szulczyk

The Second American Revolution

The Building of an Empire