

Thrown Away



Kenneth R. Szulczyk

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Chapter 1 – The Drudgery of Life

I awakened in a small tent and peeled the two layers of dirty sleeping bags away from my body. I rose, unzipped the tent, and crawled towards a new, dreary day. Then I closed the tent and zipped it up to keep the insects and critters out.

I stood up and looked at the sky as the clouds hid the morning sun. I began shivering from the cold air. The mornings were becoming colder as winter snuck closer by the day.

I walked through the homeless camp and meandered around the scattered tents throughout the woods. I was one of Tent City's founders and pitched my tent near the center where we set our fires. As the years dragged on, others joined our camp while others left. It took a lot of work to tell how many people lived here in the tent city. A 100 or a thousand. We didn't count heads, and the government census takers were not likely to know of our existence.

Someone began a prolonged coughing spell, clearing the phlegm and tobacco residues from his throat.

I walked along a winding path through a patch of woods near the city. For the next mile, the trail followed the river until I reached the bridge. Then I climbed up the embankment, hopped over the guarding rail, and walked along the sidewalk to downtown.

Every couple of blocks, I stopped walking and coughed for a minute from the pollution and smog from the morning traffic. Drivers rushed to work during the heavy traffic to clock in before 9 o'clock as they weaved in and out of lanes, trying to beat the other drivers.

I reached the Homeless Center by 9 o'clock, just in time for a late breakfast. Entering the Homeless Center, I crossed the spacious, empty lobby and joined the late crowd—the who's who of the lowest of the low. The homeless with jobs and interviews ate at seven, along with the other workers worldwide. In contrast, the few homeless mothers rushed their children to school.

I stood at the end of the line with the other chronically homeless. Of course, none of us wanted to be homeless. We were ashamed of our positions, always looking down and walking around in a trance. Unfortunately, society looked down upon us as outcasts, losers, and

failures except the few who took pity on us and helped us, like the volunteers in this shelter – God bless them. Unfortunately, most people sat comfortably in their homes with their families as they filled their lives with meaningless activities.

I reached for the stack of yellow trays and grabbed the top one. I flipped it over, placed it on the track that followed the counter, and added a fork and spoon. The center did not give us any butter knives because we could easily steal them and sharpen them into weapons. Everyone stood quietly, lost in a trance. I slid the tray along the track as the line moved forward.

One helper slopped a serving of grits onto a plate and added a slice of margarine. Another helper formed a hill of scrambled eggs next to the grits with an ice cream scoop. Then another added a burnt sausage patty and passed the plate over the counter.

“Thank you,” I said as I grabbed the plate.

“You’re welcome,” the helper replied in a chirpy voice.

I studied the new helper. The helpers and volunteers lasted about a month, always being replaced by the endless pit of students who attended the university nearby. Perhaps they took pity on us and helped us, or they earned credits as they furthered their studies in psychology and sociology by studying the rats in their natural habitat. Perhaps it made them feel better about themselves after seeing the homeless who were in worse shape than they were.

I continued pushing the tray along the track. Then I added a glass of orange juice, two slices of soggy toast, and a cup of coffee with extra sugar and cream.

At the end of the food line, Fred, a large, jovial man with a neatly clipped, full black beard, smiled and said, “Hi Jason.” Then he handed me a small bag filled with the ends of the loaves of bread.

“Thanks, Fred,” I replied as I nodded and slipped the bread into my coat pocket.

I always sat at the same place and ate breakfast, taking my time. Of course, I had plenty of time, the only precious commodity a homeless person could own. I sipped my artificial orange juice to help wash down every bite of food. After finishing the meal, I sipped my bitter coffee.

We rarely talked or smiled while eating, but who could blame us. How could a homeless person who moved from one place to

another be happy? We didn't know where our next meal would come from or what dangers lurked on the streets after midnight when the decent folks drifted off to sleep in the safety of their homes.

After eating breakfast, I placed my tray onto the cart. I placed the silverware into the container filled with dish soap while I stacked my plate, adding the next level to the tower of dirty plates. Then I put the coffee cup and glass on the middle shelf. I noticed the cart had a small trashcan mounted to the end, where the homeless scraped the remains from their plates, but we almost always ate our breakfast and rarely threw food away.

After breakfast, we must leave the shelter unless the weather becomes frigid outside. On cold winter days, the admin would allow us to hang out in the lobby for warmth and comfort. Today was a tad chilly, but not enough for them to let us stay inside.

The center encouraged the homeless to check in to see if it had any free beds. They gave residents a clean bed, soap, and hot showers. Then if we were not working, we had to attend classes in life skills, job searches, resume writing, and Bible studies. But the shelter was overflowing with the homeless, while we who ate the late breakfast represented the chronics of the chronic homeless.

As I passed the door to the men's dormitory, Doug opened the door and kicked down the doorstep. "Does anyone need a shower?" He yelled.

I paused. Then I lifted my right sleeve and sniffed my armpit as a strong odor struck my nose because I had not showered in days. I reeked like a shit-covered toilet.

I headed into the male dormitory and passed row after row of bunk beds. Every bed was neatly made up, with the bedsheets pulled tight. Ultimately, I took off my coat, hung it up, and slipped off my boots. The staff always laid the supplies in a row of small bins. I grabbed a small bar of soap, a tube of toothpaste from the first tub, and a towel from the next tub. Entering the large bathroom, I undressed near the bathroom sinks. I held onto the sink to slide off my pants because the dirt and grime hardened them into stiff plastic. I removed several coins and a small toothbrush from my jeans pocket and placed it on the sink with the toothpaste.

I tossed the old, dirty clothes into a large hamper near the bathroom door and entered a shower stall. The warm water felt good,

flowing over my body as it washed the dirt and grime away. Then I moved away from the water spray and applied a thick lather of soap over my hair and body. I closed my eyes and washed my face last. Then I plunged myself into the shower to rinse off.

I stood in the shower for fifteen minutes and allowed the hot water to massage my body. Then I turned off the shower, grabbed a towel, and began wiping my body. As I wiped my legs, I spotted a red rash spreading across my right thigh. I winced in pain a little when the towel rubbed against it, so I patted the rash gently with the towel. Then I wrapped the towel around me, grabbed my coins and toothbrush, and approached the sink.

I looked at myself in the mirror – a stranger with a hollow face and sunken eyes stared back at me. I didn't recognize myself anymore as street life had quickly aged me; although I was 25, I looked like a fifty-year-old man. I was not sure when this stranger stole my body and what he did to me, but this stranger refused to leave, and my health was deteriorating quickly.

I grabbed a tube of toothpaste from the counter and squeezed a healthy squirt onto my brush. I began brushing my teeth. Then I rinsed and spat out the paste into the sink.

I waited near the door as three homeless men entered the bathroom. Then I exited and headed to the bins of donated clothes. The first bin held socks, while the next one had underwear. The next bin contained stacks of neatly folded shirts; the last had neatly folded jeans.

I grabbed a change of clothes that would fit me and put them on while standing near the row of beds, out of the way of the other men. I slipped the toothbrush and coins into my pocket and felt the itchy fabric of the dress shirt. "Too thin," I whispered to myself.

I headed to the clothes bin filled with old, tattered rags and began digging for my flannel shirt. I found it near the bottom. Then I slipped on the flannel shirt, put on my coat and boots, and headed outside.

I walked the three blocks to the library. After entering the building, I headed to the magazine section and always grabbed the latest local town newspaper and a magazine or two. Then I hid in a corner away from the patrons.

I read newspapers and magazines daily to occupy my free time. I always skipped the classified section. With no home or residence, employers just discarded my application. Once I became unemployed for a year, employers never interviewed me. Sometimes, the managers quickly sent a rejection letter.

Managers were such suspicious people. If someone had a year gap in their employment history, the managers assumed the applicant hid vital information. The applicant must have spent time in prison or in a looney house, or the applicant went on a crime spree robbing gas stations and convenience stores. Then the applicant decided to become a law-abiding citizen again before the police caught them in the act.

I was unemployed for years. The government considered me relatively healthy with no medical conditions or disabilities, so the government gave me no help. Their motto – all abled-bodied males must work.

I turned the page and spotted a story – ABC Fabrication has laid off 500 workers. Wow! I applied at that factory after I was laid off from Taylor Manufacturing. I used to make automotive parts when I was working at Taylor. I made three times the minimum wage with health benefits and pension when I operated an industrial shear at a steel fabrication plant. I would move large sheets of steel or aluminum onto the table. I measured and drew the cutting lines - remembering the rule – always measure twice and cut once. Then I adjusted the shear and aligned the cutting lines with the shear blade. Then I pressed the button that rammed the shear downward with thousands of pounds of force, cutting the metal sheet along the marked line.

I heard Taylor Manufacturing was experiencing financial trouble and had defaulted on its bank loan. The day I lost my job, the bank sent a company to repossess the machines.

At that time, I didn't worry. I collected unemployment benefits and had a pension. I also possessed job skills, but I was wrong. I attended a dozen interviews initially, but they always found something wrong with my qualifications. They wanted someone who could operate computerized equipment. What the fuck? We were craftsmen. We could outdo any dork with a computerized operated machine. When my unemployment benefits had run out, I

found out the company robbed our pension fund, leaving us with nothing.

Of course, I still didn't worry after I spent my savings and lost my unemployment benefits. If I had known what would happen, I would have bought a better quality tent and top-notch camping equipment.

I turned to the next page of the newspaper.

One of the librarians patrolled the premises, doing her hourly rounds. She spotted me but passed by today without saying a word. The staff usually left me alone if a few patrons visited the library. If school students showed up or more patrons visited the library, then they may ask me to go. After that shower, I imagined my stink cloud had shrunk, so she probably didn't smell me today until she had walked past me.

After several hours in the library, I walked the five blocks to sit on a park bench near the river, but I must be careful. I always avoided the teenagers who rarely come to this park – those cruel bastards. They always said the most insulting and disgusting things, such as “Get a job, you lazy bastard,” or insults that included me performing various sex acts with my mouth and tongue on multiple parts of their bodies for the coins in their pockets. Then I read the stories when several teenage bastards doused a homeless guy with lighter fluid and set him on fire, or they hurled a large rock on a homeless person's head. At the same time, he slept on a park bench.

I pulled a bread slice out of the bag, tore it into several pieces, and tossed them to the pigeons. I always enjoyed feeding the pigeons because they never judged me or looked down upon me. They eagerly gobbled those crumbs from a homeless man.

I broke the bread into five or six pieces and tossed each crumb to a bird. The bread was quickly eaten as the birds fought over the crumbs. Then the birds scattered after they had eaten everything.

I just stared at the river and dreamt of a different life – a life with a job. Perhaps that life would include a wife or girlfriend waiting at home or a couple of kids running to the door screaming, happy to see their dad enter the house after a day of work, but I had no one.

I had no mother; I had no father; I had no grandparents, no sons, and no daughters. My parents and grandparents died long ago, leaving me alone in this cold, cruel world. I had a brother and sister,

but I stopped talking to them after my mother had died. They fought over my mother's things while my mom's body was cooling in the mortuary. I shook my head in disgust. I had an excellent job with a spacious apartment and a well-used car then.

It was so long ago. I couldn't remember the last time I visited a relative's house, received a phone call, or hugged a loved one. No one called during holidays and birthdays. I always dreaded my birthday because I had walked one step closer to my final resting place. Of course, my imminent death did raise a good question – what would the state do with my body after they had found me dead on a sidewalk or decomposing in the woods? Did I even deserve a proper burial?

Time hurled the ultimate cruelty upon the homeless because time only informed me when I would get my meals at the charities and homeless centers and how much time I had remaining in the day. I didn't have to clock in for a job, attend a business lunch at a restaurant, or be on time for a meeting at the office. Time only possessed meaning for people with jobs and somewhere to go with something to do. I had nothing as the cruel hands of time ticked ever so slightly. I stopped wearing a watch years ago because I would always glance down at my watch every minute or two, and the watch's hands would never move.

After a while, I rose from the park bench and headed to the art museum. Only entering the vestibule, I glanced at the oversized clock on the wall - noon approached, and it was almost time for lunch.

I returned outside. Pedestrians filled the sidewalks as they scrambled to their favorite lunch place.

I walked along the sidewalk while everyone passed around me. They never looked in my direction as they passed. Although people surrounded me, I was utterly invisible.

A well-dressed man in a navy business suit approached me as I walked. He glanced in my direction and quickly looked away. Everyone walked by and didn't notice me, as if I didn't exist.

I imagined if I dropped to the sidewalk dead, everyone would walk over me – never thinking twice to see whether I needed medical attention. Once my body began to smell and bother the pedestrians, the city would come along and scoop me up.

I walked to the Rescue Mission, where they handed out sack lunches to the homeless. I stood in line with the others as the line moved quickly. I approached a thin guy wearing a white dress shirt, blue tie, and dress pants. “God be with you, my brother,” he said while handing me a lunch sack.

“Amen,” I replied as I grabbed the bag and walked away.

I didn’t bother to peek inside the bag to see its contents. It wasn’t that I was a stingy bastard, but I already knew what was inside—two bologna cheese sandwiches, carrot sticks, a packet of six peanut butter crackers, and a can of generic soda. God bless them for caring even though the city discouraged the churches and good folks from feeding the homeless. The city probably felt the good folks were feeding the homeless like stray cats, which would cause the homeless population to explode over time.

I returned to the camp.

As I approached the camp, several men huddled around the campfire while sitting in lawn chairs. A large pot of stew simmered on the edge of the fire as it rested on two bricks while flames licked the bottom of the pot.

Chapter 2 – An Unfortunate Death

As I approached the camp, a young man jumped up from the seat, leaving a place for me to sit next to Bob, one of the tent city's first residents. Bob must be in his 50s and almost entirely bald. Of course, unlike the rest of us, he seemed to enjoy his homeless predicament.

"Jason, did ya hear?" Bob asked as I sat down next to him.

"Hear what?" I asked.

"The sheriff plans to clear us out on Friday."

"Clear us out? Why?"

"We're violating the law." Then Bob handed me the official eviction notice and added, "We're squatting on city property, and these tents don't meet city code. A code enforcement officer and two police officers carrying rifles came today and said we have until Friday. If we're still here, they'll remove us... By force if necessary."

I glanced at the notice and returned it to Bob. "Shit," I muttered. Then I leaned my head back and closed my eyes.

"What are your plans?" Bob asked.

I opened my eyes and stared at Bob. "What do you mean?"

"What do you want to do about this?"

"What can I do? I can go to the pawnshop and get my rifle back. Then I can shoot at the officers as they approach us."

Bob burst out laughing along with the other members sitting around the circle. Once the laughter settled, Bob added, "Just make sure you don't hit one of us."

"Don't worry," I replied. "I'm a terrific shot. Of course, I lost that rifle years ago. The pawnshop gives you two months to reclaim your items. After that, they sell it to anyone who wants it."

"I hear ya, man."

"Oh Jesus," Tony called out. "Oh, Jesus. What'll we do? Please, Lord, give us a sign."

"Don't worry, Tony. We'll just have to pack and get. We'll find another spot to camp," I said.

"But it ain't right," Tony said while clutching a Bible while tears formed in the corner of his eyes. "We're not hurting anyone. We just

want to live here in peace.” Then Tony quoted a Bible passage, Joshua 1:9: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD, your God, will be with you wherever you go.”

“Amen, brother. God knew what he was talking about,” I said. “Like I said, it doesn’t matter. It has nothing to do with right or wrong. The police view us as weak, and they’re strong. They want us gone, and they know they can kick us around. What can we do? Go hire an attorney and sue those bastards. No one cares about us. They know they can do anything to us, and we’ve got no choice in the matter. We’ll just have to get when they come.”

“Do you want some soup?” Bob asked.

“No, man. I’ve got my lunch right here,” I said as I opened the lunch sack, pulled out the first sandwich, and bit into it. Don’t get me wrong – the soup smells fantastic, but I didn’t want to abuse Bob’s hospitality. We considered Bob, the wise elder in our camp.

I took another bite of the sandwich. Then I felt my throat tighten as the food became lodged there. I pulled the can of soda out of the bag, popped the top, and swallowed a gulp, clearing the roadway to my stomach.

“Do you have any ideas where we can move?” Bob asked.

“We can follow this river and see where it goes. I think it leads to some old factory buildings. The residential neighborhoods after that,” I said.

“Fuck the po-po. We’re staying here,” Nathan threatened as he leaned against a tree, smoking a cigarette.

“They’ll throw your ass in jail. We’ve got no defense against them,” I replied.

Nathan chuckled, took another puff from his cigarette, and added, “Shit. You think I’m afraid of jail.” Then Nathan started punching the air before him, pummeling an invisible enemy. Nathan was athletic and strong but no match for a group of police officers who have no trouble shooting harmless victims at the slightest provocation.

“Okay. We’ll see.” I said as I pulled the second sandwich out of the bag and continued eating.

“I think you’re right. There’s a bunch of abandoned factories about a half-mile away. We probably can squat in one of the buildings during winter,” Bob said.

“Yeah, I think that’ll work. We’ll set up a new camp. Besides, I don’t think the police are following us around, or I hope they’re not.”

“What ya talking about? If I sat on a street corner asking for donations, the police would be there within 10 minutes to arrest me.”

“Maybe they do follow us around a little. But we should try to squat in the factory for winter and return here in spring. It took the police some time to find us. We’ve been here at least two years.”

“Yeah, that’s right. It took those dumb motherfuckers two years to find us out here,” Nathan added.

On Friday, I awakened early as darkness covered the landscape in a blanket of blackness. “Today’s the day,” I mumbled as I rubbed my eyes.

I lay on my back and closed my eyes, thinking about high school – wishing I could return there and start over. Everything could’ve been different. I wouldn’t have hung out with that group of losers – drinking and smoking at every chance we could get, even coming to class high half the time. I could’ve studied harder and hit the books. I could’ve asked Cheryl out – a lovely girl who occasionally glanced in my direction during algebra.

Don’t get me wrong. I’d been with several women in high school – if you can call the sluts hanging out at the pool hall women. With the pool hall girls, I just needed a couple of wine coolers and the backseat of a car. But things had changed! I was sure the pool hall girls would never look at me now unless they fantasized about doing it with some homeless guy – some type of homeless guy fetish. I thought I would wait a long time for that to happen.

“It doesn’t matter,” I mumbled as I opened my eyes. “That was a long time ago; Now, I’m different. I’m on the bottom of society’s ladder and still struggling to hold on.”

I peeled the sleeping bags from my body. Several joints in my legs popped as I rolled over and got on my hands and legs. I

unzipped the tent and pulled out the sleeping bags. Then I pulled out my hiking backpack, which served as my sleeping partner. I rolled each sleeping bag tightly and fastened it to the bottom of the backpack. Then I pulled out my clothes and stuffed them in the backpack, one by one.

I spotted a half-bottle of Wild Turkey. Probably got too drunk one night, and the bottle slipped deep under my sleeping bag. I grabbed the bottle, held it to eye level, and studied the amber liquid for chunks. The contents looked pristine and clear. So, at least I didn't regurgitate into the bottle.

"Are you saving that, Jason?" Bob called out.

"I sure am. We'll celebrate tonight at our new place. "

"That sounds like a plan. I can get another bottle."

"Cool. We'll celebrate at our new place tonight," I said as I shoved the bottle into a side pocket on the backpack. Then I pulled the stakes up, pulled the rods out, and neatly folded the tent. Then I stuffed the tent carefully into the bag. I fastened the tent poles to the side of the backpack and slipped the tent stakes into a side pouch.

I shook my head back and forth and felt depressed because I packed all my belongings into a backpack. Then I hoisted the bag onto my back, slipping the straps over my shoulders.

"Do you think you can help me?" Bob asked. I turned to Bob while he was packing, stuffing everything into a large chest. I unslung the backpack and started helping Bob pack. After 20 minutes, we had packed everything tightly into the chest.

"Where're we carrying this to?" I asked.

"If you can help me get this down to the utility road. Then I'll get my car."

I re-shouldered my backpack, grabbed a lawn chair and tucked it between my arm and body, and grabbed one chest handle. Bob grabbed the other lawn chair and used the other hand to hold the other chest handle.

We heaved up the chest and began making our way to the utility road. As one of us hit a bump in the forest, the chest tried to wiggle free, but we finally made it to the utility road without dropping it.

"Could you wait here while I'll go get the car?"

“No problem, man.” Of course, I missed this morning’s breakfast at the center. Still, unlike the other unsavory homeless in our camp, I respected and trusted Bob.

Bob hiked down the road to the city while I unslung the backpack, sat on the chest, and waited. After an hour, I spotted a red Honda Civic along the bumpy road. The suspension moaned and squeaked every time Bob hit a bump or pothole.

Bob shut the car off and hopped out. “Sorry for the delay. I hit some bad traffic on the road.

“No problem. I didn’t have much to do.”

“I tell you what – breakfast is on me. Nothing fancy, of course.”

My pride demanded that I refuse, but I knew breakfast would be spectacular. Besides, I already missed breakfast at the homeless center.

We packed everything into the trunk, including my backpack. Bob drove farther along the road to a small clearing. Then he turned the car around and headed to the city, to his favorite diner.

After fifteen minutes, he slowed down in front of this small diner and turned into the parking lot filled with cars. The diner looked like a trailer converted into a restaurant with a sign – Shortcakes, the best breakfast in the city. He parked the car behind the restaurant, and we headed inside.

As we sat in a booth near the entrance, a waitress headed over and passed out the menus. “What’ll you have?”

At first, I looked at the waitress, then I looked around and liked this place, a working-class diner where all the patrons wore faded, dirty jeans and old torn shirts and coats. The waitress treated us like humans, like all the other working folks in this place.

Bob handed the menu back and said, “Please, I’ll have a Western omelet, hash browns, and coffee.”

“I’ll have the same, please,” I replied and returned the menu.

“It’ll be 20 minutes for the omelets and hash browns, guys.” Then the waitress walked to the kitchen window and clipped the order on a small turning wheel. Then she grabbed a pot of coffee and rushed to our table, where she flipped the coffee cups and filled them to the brim. Then she walked around the diner, filling everyone’s coffee cup, or at least those drinking regular coffee.

“Today’s the big day,” Bob said as he poured cream into his coffee and stirred it.

“I know. I plan to go back and watch it.”

“Why? They are a bunch of dirty, corrupt bastards. They’ll arrest you and throw you into a jail cell.”

“So! They can’t take anything from me. They can’t squeeze money out of me because I have nothing. If they want to cram me into a cell, then at least they’ll have to feed me, but it’ll cost them.”

“I see your point.”

I dumped a lot of cream into my coffee and added four sugar packets.

“Well, buddy, you’ll have diabetes in no time,” Bob joked.

“Diabetes is the least of my worries,” I replied and chuckled. “It’s not that I like sweet coffee, but I try to pack on the calories whenever possible. I never know where I’ll get my next meal.”

After a few minutes of silence, while we sipped our coffees, Bob blurted, “So, what’s your story?”

“My story? Why?”

“We’ve got time to kill, and everyone has a story.”

“Well, my story is pretty simple. I worked for a company that went under. I thought I could find another job, and look where I am today. Everyone talks about how well the economy is doing. Maybe for them, but not for me. What about you?”

Bob chuckled and replied, “That is a long story.”

“We have nothing but time, so what’s your story?”

“My story’s different. I was helping my friend paint the outside of his house. I knew I should have known better, but I climbed a ladder on unsteady ground. After I reached the top, the ladder fell over with me on it, and I landed square on my back.”

“But I thought you were hurt at work? That’s why you collect disability.”

“My friend gave me a bottle of painkillers. I plopped two or three while heading to work the next morning. The pain was excruciating, but I made it in without anyone noticing. Then I slipped and fell on my back in the break room near the water dispenser with a dozen people watching. This time, I didn’t get up. My boss had to call an ambulance.”

“Where did ya work?”

“I worked in an office for the city government. I processed claims for the city.”

“So you had a good job?”

“It was a great job, but that wasn’t the problem.”

“It sounds like you could’ve returned to work?”

“Yeah, but it was my woman. During the first week at home, I lay on the couch in front of the TV. My wife served my meals and drinks whenever I asked, but she always gave me these cold stares as if I were no longer a man. Then after a week, she packed her suitcases and returned to her mother’s in California.”

“What? I thought the wedding vow was until death does the couple apart.”

“Apparently, she forgot that part of the vow. Well, at least I didn’t kill the bitch, even after she sicced her attorney on me. I never talked to her again. She always had her attorney talk for her.”

“What happened in the divorce court?”

“I never went. She realized the divorce would be messy, so we settled out of court. I gave her everything she wanted if she would leave the disability check alone. She sold the house and took the bank accounts, or at least the ones she knew about, and I signed the divorce papers.”

“Damn, she cleaned you out.”

“That’s okay. We’re done now. She’s someone else’s problem now.”

The waitress hurried over, carrying a tray with our breakfast on it. I pick up a fork and begin cutting and eating the omelet – a taste of heaven compared to the meals at the homeless center. Then I tore a corner off the hash browns and plopped it into my mouth using the fork. I closed my eyes and slowly chewed the food, savoring every little bite.

“The breakfast is delicious here,” Bob said.

I swallowed, sighed, and added, “Damn good.” After a minute, I asked, “What happened to your wife or ex-wife?”

“She found some sucker to marry her. Well, at least we didn’t have kids.”

“Well, at least being homeless has an upside - no women.”

“Says you, but I did learn my lesson. If that urge strikes me, I rent the woman by the hour. It’s definitely a lot cheaper than

marrying one. A one-day rental is always better than complete ownership.”

“Didn’t you ever want to return to work?”

“Why? After I had lost the house, I thought, why go back? I just wanted to enjoy the rest of my life. So I went camping, permanently. That way, I could stretch that disability check.”

“Camping, is that what you call it?”

“Hell yeah! I fish when I want to. I read books, play video games, and watch TV. I don’t ever have to work again. I can enjoy the rest of my life. I’m done with work.”

I took another sip of my coffee and studied Bob while he ate his food. He was happy and actually content with life—definitely an odd bird among the homeless. We homeless just huddled around, making chitchat with each other, complaining about the evil world, passing a bottle of spirits around, and waiting for the Lord to take us home.

”Maybe you should have bought an RV or a bigger car to sleep in than the woods.”

“I could’ve, but the damn city passed an ordinance. If a cop catches you sleeping in a vehicle, he’ll impound the vehicle. Then you must pay the city a fortune to return the vehicle.”

“It’s like the city has criminalized homelessness.”

Then he looked up at me, smiled, and added, “They sure have. Isn’t it great to be outlaws?”

“It’s really fantastic. Why didn’t I choose this life sooner?”

I left my stuff at the new camp at the abandoned factory. I walked to the homeless camp, where half the residents left the camp as they carried and dragged their stuff to the abandoned factory.

I sat leaning against a pine tree near where I pitched my tent. Now, that spot was a square of dead grass and weeds.

Nathan leaned against a tree, smoking a cigarette.

“Here they come,” someone shouted.

Nathan stomped the cigarette against the tree to put it out and flicked the butt into the bushes.

Cops surrounded everybody.

“What do you want?” Nathan growled. Two large officers approached Nathan, and an officer screamed, “Get your hands up.”

Nathan made a test sound with his tongue and raised his hands slowly while he grinned.

“Do you have any weapons or drugs on you?”

“Nope!” Nathan said as he continued grinning.

“Raise your hands up high,” an officer demanded.

Nathan raised his hands higher as his grin widened.

“Do you have any needles or sharp objects in your pocket?”

“Nope!” Nathan replied. Then an officer thrust his left hand into Nathan’s coat pocket.

“Officer, you’re violating my rights. I have the right...”

The officer screamed, “You have no rights.” Then he pulled his hand out of Nathan’s pocket and punched Nathan hard in the stomach. Nathan fell to the ground, holding his stomach, while another officer jumped on top of Nathan’s back, screaming, “Stop Resisting! Stop Resisting! Stop Resisting! ...”

The officer planted his knee on the back of Nathan’s neck while the other officer grabbed Nathan’s hands one by one and handcuffed his hands behind his back.

“I want my attorney!” Nathan yelled. “You violated my rights! You bastards violated my rights!”

Both officers pulled Nathan up. Then one officer led Nathan to the paddy wagon while Nathan jerked back and forth, trying to free himself.

The officer who tried to search Nathan’s pockets approached Tony. At the same time, Tony held the Bible in his right hand, closed his eyes, and recited, “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

“What did you say,” the officer screamed.

“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and song; he also shall become my salvation.”

“Oh, a wise ass!”

Two other officers joined the mean officer and surrounded Tony.

“Get your hands up, now,” the officer screamed. Tony raised his hands while still clutching the Bible in his right hand.

The mean officer grabbed Tony's hands, knocking the Bible to the ground and cuffing Tony's hands behind his back.

"Officer, my Bible."

The mean officer stomped on the Bible with this foot while he shouted, "Here's what I think of your god." An officer led Tony to the paddy wagon while the mean officer approached me.

"Get up slowly with your hands up," he commanded. I obeyed and raised my hands slowly up in the air.

"Do you have any needles or anything sharp in your pockets?"

"No," I replied.

The officer began searching my pockets, but I didn't have anything. Another large officer approached and said, "The vans are full. We can't take anymore."

The officer who had checked my pockets said, "This is your lucky day." Then he punched me in the stomach, and I dropped to the ground and curled into a fetal position.

After ten minutes, I felt better. I crawled to a tree and propped myself into a sitting position with my back against the tree.

I saw two police vans filled with members of our homeless community. Nathan sat in the last row while he screamed profanities at the officers, twisting and contorting his body, trying to break the chains.

I saw a team of city workers dragging tents, sleeping bags, and our supplies and tossing them into the bed of a large pickup truck. The officers and city workers returned to their vehicles, climbed in, and drove away. And, the woods became quiet.

An old homeless man saw me and approached. I think his name was Richard, but I wasn't sure. "I see they left you behind, too. Oh Lord, please forgive them," he said.

The old man helped me to stand up. "Do you think they'd do this to Jesus?" He asked.

"I don't want to disrespect Jesus, but I'm not sure they would give Jesus a break. Wasn't Jesus homeless?"

"No, not Jesus."

"Well, he never lived in a house and walked from town to town saving people, didn't he?"

"Huh, um. Yes, he did."

"Doesn't it sound like he was homeless?"

“Yeah, but it was Jesus.”

“I know, and some things never change, but at least we are more civilized. We wouldn’t nail Jesus to a cross today. Still, they probably would throw Jesus into a looney bin and pump his veins with anti-psychotic medications.”

“Yeah, right. The state can no longer afford to pay to send people to psychiatric hospitals. They’d just throw him into a cold jail cell and let him rot there for years.”

I noticed Nathan’s pack of cigarettes and lighter lying on the ground. I wasn’t sure why I did it, but I bent down to pick them up and stuffed them into my winter coat pocket. And I didn’t even smoke.

I walked over to Tony’s Bible and picked it up. I opened it and read the first passage I saw, “Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” Then I closed the book and slipped it into my winter coat with the cigarettes and lighter.

We were living in the factory for a week. After returning from the city to get my daily meals, I entered the break room in the old factory. Bob sat upright on his cot, lowered the newspaper, and said, “Did ya hear about Nathan?”

“No,” I said while I nodded back and forth.

Bob handed me the paper where he had circled a small story on the last page. “He died in jail. The police said he committed suicide by strangling himself with his shoelaces wrapped around the neck.”

“That doesn’t make sense. The police always took my shoelaces during my visits there.”

“Bingo,” Bob shouted.

“Those sons of bitches,” I screamed. Then I sat on the lawn chair next to Bob as my heart raced and my face reddened. “Those sons of bitches,” I yelled.

I knew Nathan was young, immature, and a little misguided, but he didn’t deserve to die. The police must use some people as examples. They would show the public who was in charge and what

they could do to us. That way, they kept everyone in line. They kept everyone afraid.

We could only do one thing to a bully, and it was not talking about touchy, feel-ly stuff. Someone must stand up to a bully, give him his own treatment, and make him swallow his own medicine.

I began thinking. Being homeless was the worst feeling a person could experience. I wouldn't wish homelessness on my enemies because I felt horrible, useless, and defective, and society would just not let me be. Society interfered with me any chance it got, reminding me how worthless I was.

Bob passed a bottle of Jim Beam. "Here, man. Here's to Nathan."

I made a toast to the heavens. "Here's to Nathan," I muttered, gulping down a large swallow. Then I began thinking about how I could avenge Nathan's death. Those sons of bitches must pay.

Chapter 3 – A Little Revenge Feels Good

I searched through the old factory, going through the rubbish and trash that lay scattered in every room. I carefully lifted the rubbish on each pile because I didn't want to anger the rats, raccoons, and other critters by disturbing their homes.

I saw an old door in the back of a large, dark room. This door had rusted shut. It took half an hour to pry the door open using a long iron bar. After the door had squeaked open, I let my eyes adjust to the darkness before entering. I saw old, rusty shelves filled with bottles and containers of chemicals.

I looked at the various containers and used my hand to brush the cobwebs and the thick layer of dust off them to read the labels. Then I tilted the label towards the light coming from the doorway, so I could read them.

After going through half the chemicals on the shelves, I found success. I smiled as I dusted off small glass bottles of paint thinner with the caption at the bottom of the label – Extremely Flammable. Keep away from fire. I slipped one of the bottles of paint thinner into my pocket.

The next morning, I walked along the old trail along the river that snaked through the old homeless camp. I passed our old camp and kept walking. Then I searched for a scrawny, five-foot, oak tree.

After walking for 10 minutes, I spotted the tree about 10 feet from the path.

While approaching the tree, I couldn't see the flat stone because a layer of dead leaves covered the forest floor. I brushed the leaves away from the tree and uncovered a flat rock. I looked around to ensure other people were not lurking around. Then I crouched on my knees and moved the rock to the side. I tried to dig into the dirt with my hands, but the ground was frozen.

I spotted a small tree branch nearby, grabbed it, and plunged it into the earth to loosen the soil. Finally, I began digging and uncovered a freezer zip-lock bag with a small metal lock box inside.

I hid my ID, important papers, and a stack of 20-dollar bills inside the box. I slipped a twenty-dollar bill from the stack and

stuffed it into my pocket. Then I picked up the photo of my mother and studied it.

I returned the photo to the lockbox, closed the lid, and tucked the box into its zip-lock bag and reburied my booty. Although most the homeless at the camp were honest people, we had several thieves who stole everything and anything.

I replaced the stone marker on top of the soil and used my hands to cover the area with leaves again. Then I headed to the city for breakfast at the Homeless Center.

After taking a sack lunch from the Rescue Mission, I walked around the downtown for a while. I didn't know what possessed me, but I was walking around while a light snow began falling to the ground on this cold, dark November day.

While walking past the closed down cinema, I saw the bubble gum machine of a police car parked in front of a large grocery store – Perry's Supermarket. The lights were switched off, while the car sat quietly near the front entrance.

I noticed the cop car had an opened window on the driver's side, just opened a crack.

I stopped and pulled out a winter hat with the missing top fuzzy ball out of my jacket pocket. I jerked the hat down onto my head until it almost covered my eyes. I tugged on each glove on my hand, tightening the gloves. Then I changed direction and headed towards the police car.

While approaching, I pulled out Nathan's old pack of cigarettes and lighter, and lit a cigarette and inhaled the first drag.

As I drew near the car, I read the propaganda on the side – To Protect and Serve. "So that's what the state calls it," I mumbled.

I looked around and saw no one in the parking lot. It was around 3 o'clock, and most people were either working in warm offices or sitting on a warm couch at home watching TV. People rarely trekked outside when temperatures dipped below freezing.

I reached the front of the car and turned to look at the front doors. I didn't see anybody because a thick frost covered most of the store's glass windows. The cop must be in the office towards the back –

probably arresting a shoplifter like one of my homeless buddies – searching for a little liquid antifreeze to keep the body warm.

I pulled out the bottle of paint thinner and twisted the cap off, holding it upright. I slipped the bottle through the open window and slipped the cap into my pocket.

The bottle landed on the driver's seat as the fluid gushed out.

I grabbed the cigarette from my mouth and mumbled, "Here's for Nathan, you sons of bitches." I uttered and snapped the butt off the cigarette and slipped the butt into my pocket while I tossed the lit cigarette into the window.

VOOOOOSH!

I walked past the police car to the three-foot wall forming the edge of the parking lot, where the wall separated the parking lot from a busy thoroughfare. I grabbed the top of the wall and hurled myself over.

After landing on the other side, I peeked over the wall to see what I had done. The fire burned a bright orange that lit the dark parking lot while heavy black smoke poured out of the open window. I smelled the pungent smell of burning plastic filling the air.

Bystanders gathered outside the store's entrance while a police officer ran toward his car. He opened his eyes wide and screamed into his walkie-talkie as he watched his car burn.

I ducked and began walking along the sidewalk on the other side of the wall, where the officer and bystanders couldn't see me.

I continued walking to the intersection and crossed it and turned right. I walked one block, and then I turned left. I heard the sirens of the fire truck approaching. Then the fire truck passed by with its flashing lights and sirens blaring.

I continued walking in a zigzag direction towards the homeless camp. One block I made a right, the next I made a left. Then I saw my old liquor store. I walked to the entrance and tossed the cigarette butt into the overflowing ashtray on top of a trashcan. I ducked inside for a couple of minutes to shake off the coldness. I figured if I must go away for a while, I'd want to spend a little time with my old friend – Jack, so I bought a pint of Jack Daniels and slipped it into my winter coat.

I walked by the Homeless Center and saw the open Thrift Store next door. I entered the Thrift Store, and the young clerk set his book on the counter and looked up at me, "Hello Jason. It's been a while."

"Yes, it has. I've meant to come in. I got a new voucher for some clothes, something a little warmer."

"By all means, help yourself. We have some new winter clothes. I've just put them on the shelves this week."

"Great," I said, then I headed to the racks and chose a new winter coat, making sure it was different from the winter coat I was currently wearing. Then I grabbed a new knitted winter hat with its fuzzy ball on the top and a thick sweater.

I approached the counter and pulled out the coupon and handed it to the clerk. "What'd do you want me to do with my old coat?" I asked.

The clerk studied my tattered clothes. "Unfortunately, we can't reuse your coat."

"I understand."

The clerk returned to reading his book while I slipped off my old coat. I put the sweater on, the new coat, and the new hat. Then I put Nathan's cigarettes, lighter, and a pint of Jack into my new coat.

I headed outside with the old coat folded under my hands. Then I tossed the old coat into the dumpster behind the store and headed home.

I entered the abandoned factory around five and saw Bob sitting on the lawn chair while he stared at his portable TV. He looked up at me, "Did ya hear?"

"Hear what?" I replied.

"Someone set a police car on fire in downtown about two hours ago."

"No shit! Who would do something crazy like that? That must explain why I saw a fire truck speeding past me when I was coming home."

Bob turned the screen so I can see the news on his portable TV. A fireman recoiled his hose while the reporter panned to the police car. The outside of the car looked fine, but the fire completely ruined and blackened the interior.

A news reporter said, “The police are following leads and searching for a suspect or suspects. If anyone knows who had done this, please contact the police at 5-5-5 and 5-5-5-5.”

“Damn,” I muttered and added, “That’s crazy!”

“Jason, just be careful. This world is filled with some real crazies.”

“Boy, ain’t that no lie.”

Bob pulled out a bottle of Jim Beam and showed it to me. “I thought we could share this.”

“Thanks man, but I thought I would spend a little time with my old friend - Jack.” Then I pulled out the pint and showed it to him.

“Ole Jack. He’s an old friend I haven’t seen in quite a while.”

“Let me have my lunch, and then we can visit our old friend.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

I knew I jammed a stick into a beehive, and the angry bees were swarming, wanting to sting anyone nearby. The police started harassing the homeless regularly, searching for the suspect who torched the police car.

Bob ran into the break room in a frenzy, and he was royally pissed off. “The police pulled me over,” he yelled. “They said I swerved too much and crossed the yellow line. Then those bastards made me take everything out of my car and place them on the side of the road. And those bastards laughed the whole time as I did this.”

“Damn, that’s messed up. Let me take a whizz, and we can start drinking.”

I jogged to the storage room and started pouring all the flammable liquids from the small bottles into a 5-gallon gas can – an old red, metal can made decades ago, when Americans actually used metal to make things. After twenty minutes, I filled the gas can at least three-quarters full. Then I placed the small empty bottles near the door in four rows across and five deep.

I returned to the break room, and Bob sat in his chair, completely quiet while his face remained a bright red.

I pulled out a pint of Jim Beam I had been saving, and let Bob do the honors.

Bob twisted the lid and took the first swig.

I pulled out a cigarette from Nathan's pack.

When Bob saw me light up a cigarette, he asked, "I didn't know you smoked?"

"I don't, but this is a special occasion."

"Those are Nathan's, aren't they?"

"Yeah, I thought I would smoke them in his honor."

"Could you give me one too?"

I tossed him the pack, and he took one and lit it up.

After he exhaled the first drag, he lifted the bottle of Jim Bean in a toast, "To Nathan," and took a large gulp. "I wish someone would teach those bastards a lesson," he mumbled. Then he passed the bottle to me, and I repeated the toast, "To Nathan."

The next morning, I went to the storage room and grabbed two bottles and slipped each one into my winter jacket pocket. Then I hid Nathan's cigarettes and lighter on the top shelf in the back where no one could see them.

I walked through the woods to get my breakfast, and once I made it halfway into the woods, I hurled one bottle far into trees. The bottle hit a tree and shattered into a thousand shards of glass. I threw the other bottle, and it hit a tree with a ting and landed on top of the snow.

I knew it would take me two weeks to dispose of all the small glass bottles. Of course, I didn't want to litter, but I couldn't carry the bottles into the city and throw them away in the various trashcans and dumpsters scattered throughout the city. Although the police weren't the brightest fruits in the salad, they only got to catch me with one bottle, and they would know I was the one who torched the police car.

Today's coldness bit and burned my exposed skin as if hot metal were singeing my skin. Large areas on my legs were chapped from the lack of moisture, and my legs burned every time the pant leg brushed against them.

I made it to breakfast with no problems and then retrieved my sack lunch around noon. As I was walking home on the sidewalk, a

squad car screeched to a halt near me. Two police officers jumped out of the car and surrounded me.

“Get your hands up,” an officer demanded.

I noticed each police officer had their right hand resting on top of the gun holster.

I raised my hands.

“Do you have anything sharp in your pocket?” The officer yelled.

“No sir,” but before I could finish my sentence, the officer already stuck his hands into my coat pockets, searching for contraband.

His smile deepened as he pulled out my sack lunch. “What da we got here?” He ripped the bag open while his smile inverted upside down. “What the...”

My sandwich, crackers, and soda fell to the ground. Then the officer began stomping on my food.

The cop continued searching my pockets and yanked out my Bible. Then he threw the Bible onto the ground.

The officer yelled, “I should take you in for littering, and... and... vagrancy, loitering, and, and, and disturbing the peace” while he clenched and unclenched his fists as if he were preparing to punch me.

“Hold on Frank. Let’s not lose our cool.”

Frank slipped his hands into his thick coat.

“We just want to ask you some questions.”

“Okay. Can I lower my hands?”

“Sure, but keep them where we can see them.” He pulled out a small writing pad from his coat pocket while keeping his eyes on me. Then he began. “What’s your name?”

“Jason. Jason Mathews.”

The officer scribbled this information in a little book.

“Do you have your ID?”

“Sorry sir, but I haven’t had an ID in a while.”

“When were you born?”

I paused for a second and started thinking.

“When’s your birthday, dirt bag?” The mean officer yelled.

“It’s been a while. It’s February ninth, nineteen ninety.”

Both officers stepped back a foot and studied me as if I had leprosy.

“Sir, are you sure?”

“I’m sure. I know the street life has been rough on me.”

The officer scribbled this in his notes and quickly asked, “Do you smoke?”

“What? No sir, not in a while.”

“Which brand do you smoke?”

“Sir, I don’t smoke.”

“Do you know who set the police car on fire last November?”

I wanted to look to the ground, but I knew that would be unwise. I looked straight into his eyes and replied, “No sir.”

“Where do you currently reside?”

I knew I couldn’t tell them about the factory. I knew when they have a slow day, they would be there rounding us up and kicking us out.

“The tunnels.”

“Oh, the tunnels.”

Sean, the mean cop, said, “Let’s take him in, Frank.”

“Do you want to do the paperwork on him? You remember what the captain said. Write citations for people who can pay. Besides, this guy is so poor; we couldn’t rub his two ass cheeks together to squeeze out a nickel.”

Then they chuckled.

“Let’s go,” Frank said.

Sean opened the driver’s side of the door and hopped in while Frank stomped one last time on my sandwich, twisting his foot back and forth over the sandwich several times.

Frank looked at me while pointing his finger at me. “I better not catch you breaking any laws.” Then he walked to the passenger side and hopped in, and the police car sped away.

I bent over and picked up my lunch, feeling completely and utterly humiliated and violated, but I must eat. I slipped the flatten sandwiches and pulverized crackers into my pocket. Then I picked up the Bible and can of soda, and slipped them into my other pocket and headed home.

At least I didn’t crack. The police thought I lived in the tunnels with the tunnel people. The tunnel people hobbled inside the sewers

and drainage tunnels under the city, trying to survive as society's wastes and filth tried to drown them and erased their existence.

The sad thing about being homeless, the people named us after our abode. If we lived in the sewer tunnels, then the people called us tunnel people. If we stayed in tents, then we became the tent folks. If we lived in RVs and campers, then they called us tent people on wheels while sleeping in cardboard boxes relegated us to the box people.

Each abode had their peculiar type of homelessness. The drunks and drug addicts lived in the boxes and slept on park benches. The people staying in tent cities and RVs were folks down on their luck, holding onto the thin strands of civilization. Then the absolute crazies lived in the sewers and tunnels under the city, and those people were the dangerous ones.

After two months since I had torched the police car, the police kept harassing everyone.

Whenever I walked around downtown, I often saw a squad car. My heart always raced while my mouth became dry. My winter hat became damp around the forehead while a cold sweat covered my face that the cold winter wind tried to freeze.

On February 1, I walked from the library to the Rescue Mission for my sack lunch

A police car screeched to a halt five feet in front of me. Then two police officers just stared at me as I walked by. I just lowered my head and pretended I didn't see them.

A week later, the skies darkened early around 4 o'clock while the snow pounded the ground. I walked along a sidewalk on my way to the factory and almost shit my pants as a spotlight blinded me.

I raised my right arm to my face to block the light.

While squinting, I saw the silhouette of a police car farther up the street with two laughing shadows inside. I looked down and continued walking along the sidewalk towards the police car while the spotlight remained on my face.

Once I passed the car, one officer asked, "Should we bust him?"
"Nah," the other replied. "It's a waste of paperwork."

Afterward, I headed home, and the police didn't follow me.

Chapter 4 – A Lot of Revenge Feels Better

In mid-February, the police shot an unarmed black teenager, and the community erupted into violence.

I wasn't aware of this as I sat in the library, skimming several books. Around seven o'clock at night, I heard a large crowd screaming in unison as I walked outside.

My curiosity led me to the downtown near the city hall. Turning the block, I saw hundreds of people standing outside City Hall, screaming, "Justice for Marcus." As they chanted, they pumped their signs up and down in the air. I read several signs - Murder is Illegal – Arrest the Officer, Hands ~Up – Don't Shoot, and Justice for Marcus. Small children huddled close to their parents and held signs such as My Generation is Next.

I watched the other side and saw a solid line of police officers wearing riot gear. They were standing shoulder to shoulder with a baton in one hand and a shield in the other. They marched in formation like soldiers. In front of the officers, an armor-plated vehicle advanced towards the crowds.

I turned and returned the way I had come. After making it one block, I turned around and saw the armored vehicle and police marched towards the screaming crowds.

The police fired tear gas canisters that filled the streets with white, thick smoke. Then a commotion broke out. People started screaming. Windows were shattering. Protesters hurled firebombs and Molotov cocktails in the air. The bottles exploded as they hit the ground. Other bottles struck the building facades, igniting rings of fire that tried to climb the walls.

Two officers grabbed a protester and threw him on the ground near the corner where I had stood. They stood over the protester, beating him with batons while kicking him on his sides.

Flashing lights and sirens from police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances filled the evening air.

I shook my head back and forth, denying what I had just seen. The police had declared war on the people. The police had forgotten that respect is traffic along a two-way street. If they treated people with respect, they would respect the police more. Still, instead, they

treated everyone like stray dogs that they could kick around and brutalize. Then the police militarized themselves and accumulated armored vehicles and weapons to intimidate the people, utilizing force to keep everyone terrified, quiet, and in line.

Instead of heading home, I walked to the police headquarters four blocks over. I figured a few police would be at the station since the police were busy beating up the protesters.

Walking past the new jail building, I observed this six-story monstrosity. The building was a standing tower filled with tiny, narrow windows along its side like missing scales around a serpent's body. A chain-linked fence surrounded the property with barbwire curled in loops along the top.

I walked to the police station – a two-story building with large tinted windows. A chain-link fence surrounded the back and sides, but the front of the building was outside the wall.

I noticed a small grass walkway between the fences between the police station and the new jail. I walked between the fences and smiled when I saw the back area filled with bushes and small trees. Then farther, a row of abandoned factory buildings formed a solid line behind the jail and police station – a bygone era when this city was an industrial powerhouse.

I smiled after seeing where the police parked their squad cars safely inside the fence but near the trees and bushes.

I headed home and approached the old factory around nine and saw Bob sitting outside, waiting next to the door.

As soon as Bob saw me, he jumped out of his chair and yelled, “Dude, I thought you got caught in the protests.”

“No, man, but it was bad. It’s a war zone down there,” I said.

“I saw the news. The reporter says the protesters looted the downtown businesses and set everything on fire.” Bob patted me on the back. “I’m glad you made it back in one piece,” he said.

“Me too.”

Bob picked up his miniature TV, and we sat and watched the screen. The reporters showed the protesters smashing windows and grabbing merchandise from the stores and businesses. The TV camera panned left and captured a protester throwing a firebomb at the armored vehicle.

I noticed the reporter never played the footage where the two officers were beating a protester near the street corner. The news only showed the protesters' wrongs while the police served their duty to protect the city.

I didn't believe in killing people, but I had to strike back at the bastards who killed Nathan. I decided to step up the game and send those corrupt police a message, especially after the police squashed the protests. I constantly thought – how can I strike back? I scavenged for parts here and there throughout the factory. I saw discarded car relays lying near a loading bay. I discovered an old dusty box filled with skinny black rubber hoses in another part of the factory.

One day, after getting my lunch, I returned to the library. Walking near the auto parts store, I saw a small box lying on the ground. I picked up the box, opened it, and removed an electric fuel pump. I slipped the fuel pump into my pocket and tossed the box into the trashcan in front of the store. Some people were such litterbugs.

I walked to the library and pulled several books off the shelf. I read books on basic electronics and physics, and I constantly wondered which type of device I could build.

I returned to the factory with the fuel pump. Then I remembered seeing an old car battery outside. I carried the battery to the storage room, where I took a coil of wire and cut off a foot strand. I removed the insulation from both ends and tied one end to the battery post. Then I took another wire and did the same, attaching it to the other battery post.

I touched the wires to the contacts on the fuel pump, which whirred to life. Then I checked the relays. When I connected the cables to the first relay, I heard nothing. For the second and third relays, the relays made intense clicking sounds.

Every day I walked into the city, I thought about what kind of device I could build. I carried several parts in each pocket.

I studied in the library until dusk and walked to the police station to hide the parts in the grass path between the two fences where three

thick bushes grew near a row of small trees. After two weeks, I had hidden two coils of wire, an old grill electronic igniter, two relays, a fuel pump, and a large coil of black rubber tubing, along with tools and miscellaneous parts.

On Saturday, I walked to the hardware store near downtown. As I entered the store, the clerk behind the register squinted his eyes and frowned when he saw me, but he remained silent.

I noticed two outdoor patio lights lying on a shelf. They were shaped like a rock, battery-operated, and on sale for two for \$9.99. These lights automatically turned on when it became dark outside. Then I bought two different flashlights with two other brands of batteries for my new stuff.

After leaving the store, I headed to the back of the building, where I removed the packaging of my new stuff and deliberately scratched up the plastic on everything to make it look old. I did the same for the batteries.

I spotted an old oily rag near the dumpster that someone used to wipe oil and grime off a car engine. I used the oily rag to soil the new parts.

I tossed the packaging into the dumpster. Then I wiped the batteries with a rag to remove my fingerprints and inserted them into the patio lights and flashlights. Then I placed my new parts into the bag one by one.

I returned to the library and waited for the evening. Then I hid my new parts behind the police station. I smiled because now I was ready. The bastards would pay.

I made my move on Sunday night when everyone quieted down after partying on Friday and Saturday. I knew the police did a few patrols on Sunday night. Working men had to be sober to start the work week the next day while recovering from a weekend of heavy drinking.

Even though it was mid-March, I put on my thick winter coat, and I headed to the storage room for the red gas can filled with a flammable liquid. I held the gas can in my right hand inside my coat and walked downtown. About every fifteen minutes, I sat down and

took a break. After reaching the city, I took my last break behind a building and rested between two large green dumpsters. The police station was around the corner.

When I reached the police station, I became ecstatic because everything was quiet. Most police cars were parked behind the station in a neat row along the fence.

I walked behind the police station and hid the gas can behind a tree. Then I got my parts individually and started putting my device together.

I cut the rubber hoses into 10-foot strands, plugged the ends with twigs from the trees, and used a pin to pierce small holes at the ends so they would spray the flammable liquid everywhere.

I took a grill igniter apart. I taped the piezoelectric igniter to the end of the hose and connected wires to it. Then every six inches, I wrapped tape around the wires and rubber hose.

I didn't have another igniter for the other two hoses, but I plugged the ends and jabbed small holes at the end.

I coiled each rubber hose in a ring and attached each hose to a plastic splitter. Then I inserted the splitter into the fuel pump. I cut a 5-foot rubber strand connected one side to the fuel pump and slid the other end into the gas can that I had hidden under a bush.

A pair of headlights sliced through the darkness. I ducked down and scooted near the bushes as a police car pulled into the parking lot and parked at the end of the row of cars. Two officers exited the vehicle and headed inside the police station.

I waited five minutes and then continued building my device. I took the first patio light and broke the bulb. Then I attached wires to the light bulb's filaments and connected them to the fuel pump. I got the other patio light and did the same. I broke the light and attached wires from the filaments to the igniter.

I grabbed a flashlight, turned it on, and placed it in my pocket.

I used a long tree branch to slide the rubber hose with the igniter through the fence and under the middle police car. With my other hand, I held a rag around the hose to wipe any fingerprints as the hose passed through the rag.

I slid the next two black hoses under the police cars on the ends of the row. Then I used the rag to wipe the fingerprints off the flashlights and patio lights.

I stood still for several minutes as I watched the police station. I scanned to the left to observe the jail, and then I looked behind me and saw and heard nothing.

I took the flashlight out of my pocket, cupped my hand around the bright light, wiped it clean of fingerprints, and placed it against the light sensor for the patio light that would trigger the fuel pump. I covered the flashlight with a thick old towel I found that would block the light. Then I placed the other flashlight against the other patio light that activated the igniter. I clicked this one on and put another heavy towel over it. This flashlight should shine longer than the other.

I looked at my device in the darkness and smiled. I bent down, clicked on the patio lights, and used a rag to wipe my device. Then I wiped the gas can and tools, ensuring I would leave no fingerprints behind. I no longer needed the tools, so I tossed them into the bushes.

I felt so alive as I walked between the fences between the jail and the police station. I stopped as I approached the road, scanning for traffic and police entering and leaving the parking lot. I saw nothing. Everything was quiet on a Sunday night, or at least so far.

I walked along the sidewalk towards downtown, heading towards the old fire station. I turned and looked around. Although several dogs barked in the distance, no one was walking along the street.

I slipped on my gloves and pulled out six tire spikes I had made from old beach sandals three days ago. I had taken beach sandals, removed the strips, cut them in half, and pounded long, thick nails through them at different angles.

I tossed the tire spikes along the dip in the driveway where the fire station's driveway met the road.

I walked home. I knew I had returned late. As I approached the factory, everyone was sleeping while several people were snoring out of sync, like horny frogs croaking for female companionship around a small pond.

I awakened late, around noon. I slipped out of the sleeping bags and left the tent. As I rose, Bob said, "Have you heard? Someone bombed a fleet of police cars last night."

"Wow! That's incredible!" I said as I looked into Bob's eyes.

"You know, I went looking for you last night and couldn't find you." Then he twitched his head up and down like a parent who knew the child had done something wrong and questioned whether the boy would fess up and tell the truth. "You wouldn't know who had done this by chance, would ya?"

"No, man. That's asking for trouble."

"The police are calling it an act of terrorism."

"Terrorism huh. Like what the police did to the protesters last month?"

"If they catch you, they may do to you like what they did to Nathan."

"Perhaps that shouldn't be so bad. Could death be worse than being homeless?"

"Very well then. Perhaps those bullies needed a lesson or two," Bob added as he smiled,

"Well, someone gotta to be the teacher. How else can someone learn?" I replied as I returned his smile. "A bully needs to swallow his own medicine to learn not to be a bully."

The End.

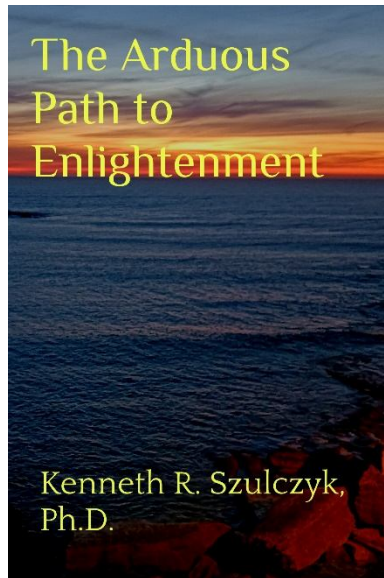
About the Author

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 am doing alright. I am living life to the fullest.

Other books from the author:

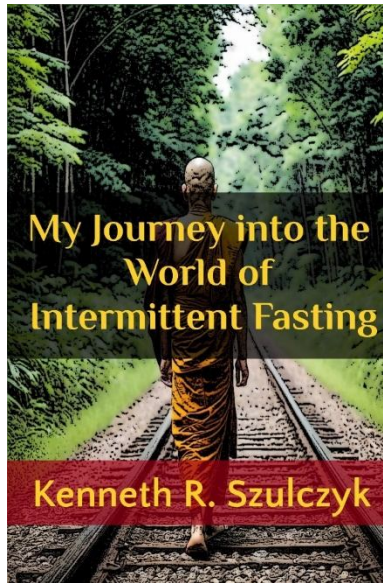
The Arduous Path to Enlightenment

As human beings, we often ponder upon our existence on this earth and ask ourselves why we are 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.



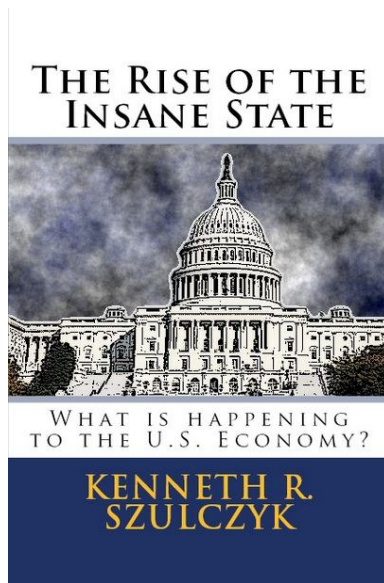
My Journey into the World of Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent fasting is 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 is 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 is a tool that can help you discover the power of intermittent fasting and unlock the doors to a healthy, long life.



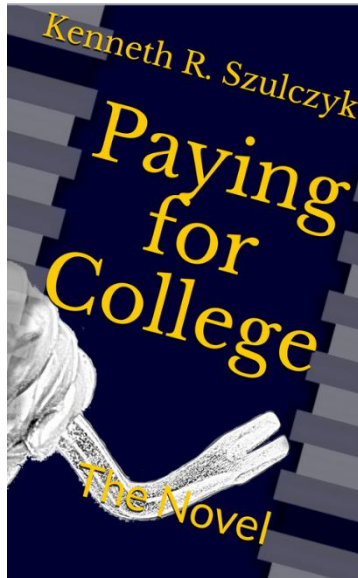
The Rise of the Insane State – What is Happening...

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.



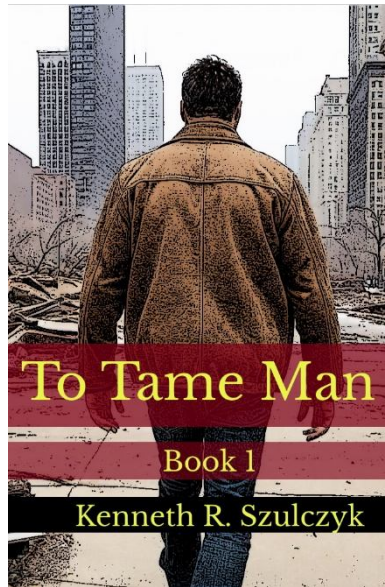
Paying for College – The Novel

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.



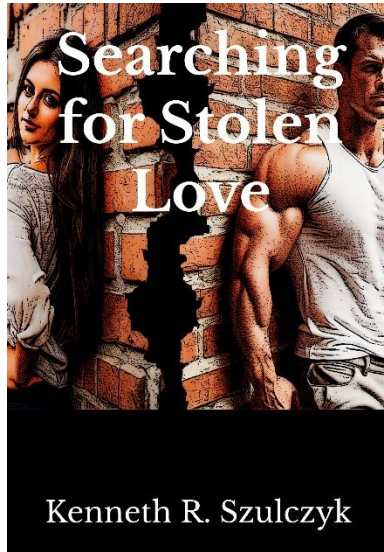
To Tame Man

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 is an American finance professor. He is thrilled to teach at the Bosnian University of Management, a place, where he hopes to make a difference. His future is bright, and he fell in love with a Serbian woman. Having just completed his first semester, he is looking forward to a peaceful winter. But one night, his girlfriend disappeared without a trace, and he is 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 are 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 is 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