A man's struggle to rebuild a life and make a moral choice.

Jogging with Giants

Buy The Complete Version of This Book at Booklocker.com:

http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4168.html?s=pdf

Jogging with Giants

H.C. Schau

© 2007, H.C. Schau First Edition

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

Published by Aventine Press 1023 4th Ave #204 San Diego CA, 92101 www.aventinepress.com

ISBN: 1-59330-496-X

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007935548 Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jogging with Giants

Printed in the United States of America

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Chapter 3

The trip back to the outskirts of Los Angeles was uneventful. The reporter followed him as far as Ontario Airport where she turned off, presumably to catch a flight east. He stopped at a brake shop that was open twenty-four hours and had the front brake pads replaced on the truck. He also had the oil changed and the truck given a general once-over. It was just after breakfast when he pulled into the driveway of Dr. Scotty McDonnald.

Entering the kitchen, he saw the eminent mathematician sitting, looking at a coffeepot.

"Plug it in, Scotty," he said, plugging the coffee pot into the wall, "or it won't work. Did you put coffee in it? You want some eggs or anything? I'm going to make some breakfast."

"A lot you know, smartass," the mathematician said. "I plugged it in and it didn't work, so there you have it."

"You have to plug it into the coffeepot and the wall at the same time, Scotty," Brice said, shaking his head, "but you know that."

"Oh yeah, I forgot, that's why it didn't work," the brilliant former Omega mathematician said. "I know it should work, it's worked for years."

"Nice try, Scotty," Brice said, "but I know you don't really believe that."

"Well, hey, how long you gonna stay? You want to catch a Lakers game?" the mathematician said enthusiastically.

"Can't, I've got to go to Florida and take care of a few things."

"You need help?" asked Scotty, pouring coffee from the pot into two cups. "You gonna find Little Willy? I can help, you know."

"Thanks, no, Scotty," said Brice Schroeder, "I've got to do this alone, but you can help in another way."

"What?" said the number theorist, brightening.

"You still keep in contact with my dad? Do you know where he is?"

"Sure, I email him about once a week and send him supplies if he needs them."

"Supplies? Where the hell is he?"

"He's in Central America, been conducting a field dig down there for years as part of some grant he got through the college."

"Can you give me his email address? I'd like to tell him I'm out."

"I already did, and the email address is on that laptop over there I got for you. It's got a Bluetooth Internet connection so you can get on the Internet from anywhere you can get cell phone coverage. And I got you another cell phone, this one has a few upgrades over the one I sent you in prison."

"How so?" asked Brice.

"Well, you know cell phones are basically radios that connect into the phone system via a computer-controlled switch, right?" Scotty asked. Not waiting for a reply, he added, "This one has an upgrade a friend of mine added that allows it to connect anywhere it can get a cell phone tower signal. It can jump radio frequency and protocol to adapt to whatever it finds locally, and I have a program that allows me to hack into the local phone company to give you a local number once I know where you are. I can even assign you the same number everywhere to make it really easy. The CIA guys do it all the time. This cell stuff is going to be huge. Do you know it's already the standard in Mexico and Central America where phone wiring is nonexistent? One day this sort of thing will be commercially available, I'll bet within a few years."

"You're a prince, Scott. I've got to get going, can you drive me to the airport?"

"Okay, but the odds of your plane getting off the ground are low. Say, after we get your feet on the ground, can I explain why I testified the way I did?"

"No need, Scott, you're still my best friend and there is no explanation needed. But what would you think about getting up a small group to do some commodities modeling? Nothing like Omega, just a small company we can have complete control of. We consult, that's all. No social issues, at least not that we tell anybody about. We keep our mouths shut and make some money. Interested?"

A slow smile came over Dr. Scotty McDonnald's face like the sun breaking through rain clouds. "Sounds like what we need, all right. You want me to start some preliminary research, maybe line up one or two good people?"

"Yes, but keep this quiet, I've got some things to do first, then we'll move," answered Brice.

"Well, at least you have money to do it with," Scotty said with a mischievous grin.

"What do you mean, Dr. Fruit Loops? I'm about broke."

"Oh, let me explain. You were not only the head of the Omega Institute, but remember that you and I were the only two stockholders in the corporation that was the holding company for Institute business. Well, we were always slow collecting from our customers on invoices we sent out for contracted work, so for the last year and a half I've been collecting some of the past due monies the Institute was owed. Since the Institute is no more, my legal advisor says the money must go to the corporation, so it's in the corporate bank account. Now, according to the bylaws we typed up in your living room many years ago, the corporation can pay us a salary and provide us with a variety of general perks. Besides that, money can be spent on whatever we decide is corporate business. Might be a good start for your small commodity modeling activity."

"I'm shocked," said Brice Schroeder.

"Why? You knew we were still owed money," protested the mathematician.

"Not that," laughed the former head of Omega, "I'm shocked that you would trust money in a bank. I know how you feel about them."

"Oh, that...well I didn't consider it my money, and the lawyers said it had to be kept in an escrow account that had an audit trail."

"Do you know how much is there?" Brice asked.

"Thirty-five million, two hundred fifty-two thousand, seven hundred forty-one dollars and seventeen cents, last time I checked," said Scotty.

"Good God," shouted Brice Schroeder involuntarily, "did you think you wanted to tell me the corporation had that much in the bank?"

"I just did," said Scott McDonnald, calmly finishing his eggs and picking up the breakfast dishes. "Besides, it's like your dad always says: it's only money. Come on, you need to get to the airport. Oh, the banking information is on the laptop, you are being paid a salary of five thousand dollars a week plus expenses. Here is a Visa card tied to the account, makes tracking your expenses easier for the accountant. Here is another Visa card that is untraceable if you don't want anyone to know where you are or what you're spending. I broke into the server that processes this card and have the totals reported but under false business and locations. No—I know your next question—I don't need a salary, I still get paid at that supposed think tank I work at, and we'll use the rest of the money to do some good by and by. Okay by you? Now throw your stuff in the truck."

The two men walked outside into the hazy sunlight, throwing a suitcase in the back of the truck.

"I miss Willy's fried egg and sardine sandwiches," said Scott. "I know she's gone and I know this sounds crazy, but sometimes I see her out of the corner of my eye, but when I really look, nobody's there."

"Happens to me about twice a day," said the former head of Omega, putting on his cowboy hat. "Maybe that's what death is; if you leave people behind, they just can't see you directly anymore, but they're still aware of you. I still feel her around me, and not just in memories, but *really* around me. I've stopped worrying about it and so should you. Give me your cell phone number; I'll call you from Florida. Now kick this thing in the ass, I've got a plane to catch."

The flight to Florida with the mandatory layover in Atlanta was uneventful. When he changed planes, Brice smiled at the old joke told around the South, "When you die, you gotta change planes in Atlanta on the way to heaven."

His plane landed in Jacksonville and the warm humid air greeted him like a wet kiss. He got his rental car and drove south towards his parents' home, a large compound overlooking the inland waterway. He didn't make the turn to the compound, though. He had a stop to make first in Mosquet, a small village just above the Mosquito Lagoon. He left US-1 and turned down a well-worn path through the low grass that ran toward the waterway. A mile across the waterway he knew was a narrow strip of beach that separated it from the Atlantic Ocean. He had played there many times as a kid.

His car came to a stop next to a small creek that ran down the slope to the waterway. In front of him were two houses, their yards separated by the creek, and further on down was a small boat dock with a twenty-two-foot wooden fishing boat tied up. He could see the crab traps stacked on the dock and he could smell fish and the sea. As he walked down the slope he saw a large man in overalls cleaning fish at an old wooden fish-

cleaning table near the dock. The man was old and sunburned and weighed at least 300 pounds. His forearms had the color of a fish underbelly from years of working the water. Brice knew him in an instant and waved as the old man saw him walking down the hill.

"Mr. Samuals, how's the fishing?" he shouted as he walked up to the bench.

"Brice, hey boy, good to see you," the old man brightened. "Aw, fishin' isn't what it used to be," the old man said, shaking his head and holding up the days catch. " Me and Sarge caught these early this morning, gonna have a fish fry tonight. Hey, stick around and we'll have you some fresh fish. You look good. You lookin' for Sarge?" to which Brice nodded. "His fat old ass is sittin' in the front room watching football unless I miss my guess," the large, old fisherman laughed.

Issaic Samuals was near eighty and had lived hereabouts all his life. He was the sergeant's neighbor and business partner for over fifty years. When William McKinley Brown had enlisted, he had continued to run their fledgling fishing business all alone. When William McKinley Brown had gone to Washington for ten years after the war, he had continued to run the business, often without help. When William McKinley Brown had finally come home, they continued as business partners just like he'd never been gone. The waterway along this area of Florida had once been a rich fish and shellfish harvesting ground. As the state had developed and restaurants had wanted more seafood, the markets demanded higher prices. As the local grounds had been depleted, the partners had looked to importing seafood from Central and South America. Now Samuals and Brown had large warehouses in the port of Jacksonville and the large seafood distribution business was run by the men's sons and grandsons. But neither man had really adapted to the new ways. Both in their hearts were simple watermen who went out onto the water to make a living. Witness the mess of fish Mr. Samuals was currently cleaning. Both men kept to other old traditions as well. Whereas their wives and children were constantly crossing over the small creek and in and out of each other's houses a dozen times a day, neither man had ever been in the other's house. It was simply the way it was in their time. When Issaic had been hospitalized years ago, Mary Ann Brown had cleaned and cooked in the Samuals house while Gloria Samuals had run the boats to keep money coming in. When William had been away, he'd sent every cent he could spare to Mary for the household, and Issaic to invest in new equipment. They were best friends and their trust had held the test of time and made both men wealthy. But neither had moved away and neither ever would; their lives were inexorably entwined here on the banks of the Atlantic waterway. Yet old traditions weren't gone, just modified for the wearer. A black man didn't go into a white man's house and vice versa. The small creek might have been the Grand Canyon for the two men. But for all that was right or all that was wrong, it had all worked.

Brice hopped the small creek and walked over the grass-covered sand that always reminded him of a putting green toward the Brown compound. He saw several cars, a motorcycle, and a trailer with wave runners parked randomly in front of the house. He stepped onto the porch and heard voices and television through the screen door. Knocking lightly on the wood, he heard a raspy voice yell, "Why do you always knock, young Schroeder? You're family, come on in!" The voice belonged to Sergeant William McKinley Brown, retired, or Sergeant Bill, as Brice's father called him.

The Browns and the Schroeders went way back to before the war. Brice's parents were young assistant professors at the University of Florida up in Gainesville, and

Sergeant Bill had gone up to take some classes during the slow fishing season. When the war had started, both Sergeant Bill and Paul Schroeder had volunteered, and since both were from the same draft board along the coast (the Schroeders had always lived close to the East Coast and commuted to Gainesville), they entered the Army together.

Actually, it was strange that the men had been processed together. At that time, most military units were largely segregated; inductees were separated by race upon entering the service and saw little of each other during basic training. The draft board from this part of the state at that time was simply too small to separate the races, so all volunteers were inducted together and shipped out to basic training. Paul Schroeder had attended officer training and Sergeant Bill had started as a lowly enlisted man. Both were sent to North Africa where the young university professor was made a platoon leader and quickly distinguished himself both in combat and as a general problem solver. The result was that less than a year after entering the war, Captain Schroeder was in command of over two hundred men and was allowed to pick an aide. Since he knew Bill Brown was there somewhere, he asked for and received William McKinley Brown as his driver and aide.

During the next three years, the two men fought in the thick of some of the most intense fighting in Europe, winning numerous honors and promotions. In the end, both returned home without a scratch. Rather than return to teaching, the young war hero (he had won the Silver Star for bravery) was urged to run for the Senate. He ran and won, serving two terms in the Senate. For ten of those years, Sergeant Bill (he had attained the rank of Sergeant before mustering out of the Army) had accompanied him to Washington as his aide and chief of staff. Since neither man's family would move permanently to Washington, both returned home often. The result of which was, after ten years, Sergeant Bill asked to be released to return to his home, family, and seafood business. He felt that his partner had run it for nearly fourteen years without him, and that was asking enough. In truth, he disliked Washington and missed the East Coast of Florida. The men had kept in touch, spoke and fished often, and had several business and non-business ventures together over the years.

Brice walked into the room and looked up to see a large black man seated in a recliner and watching a football game on television. The man seemed to be part of the chair rather than simply sitting in it. If a voice could be considered booming and raspy at the same time, that would describe the large man's voice. "Hey boy, where ya been?" He smiled so broadly one couldn't help but smile back.

"Well, you know, here and there," the former head of Omega answered.

"Yeah, I heard about the there, and I'm mighty glad you're back here where ya ought to be," the old man said seriously. "Well, what the hell, it's good to see you. We're gonna fry up a mess of fish, can you stay? I know all the kids will want to see you."

"Actually, I'd like that," Brice said. "I need to drop by my folks' house later and see my mother. There are a couple of things I need to talk to her about."

"Yeah, I know all about it. You take my advice, young man," the grey head was turning now to look directly at him, ignoring the field goal the University of Florida had just missed. "You remember, she is your mother and you be respectful."

"I never forget that, Sarge, but thanks for reminding me," said the younger man. "Actually, I stopped to see you first because I had a couple of questions I thought you could answer."

"Me?" the big man protested, "Hell, I don't know nothin' about nothin'."

"Cut the shuck and jive act, will you, Sarge," Brice cut in. "My dad says you're the sharpest guy he ever knew—oh, he also said it was you who won that Silver Star, not him, told me the whole story years ago." The system engineer smiled as he sat down on the couch. "Now, has it come to this sad state of affairs that a man has to get his own glass of tea in this house?"

The big black man smiled and tipped back his head, "Mary Ann, some riff-raff just wandered in off the street and wants a glass of iced tea.

Immediately a woman's voice called out from the kitchen, "I'm fryin' hush puppies for later, you tell him to walk in here and get it himself."

Brice did as he was bid and received a glass of iced tea and a warm hug from Mary Ann Brown. Returning to the living room he said, "Seriously, Sarge, do you know where my dad is?"

"Of course I do, just got an email from him yesterday. Yes, that's right, I got email, know how to use it, too," the Sergeant responded to an incredulous look from Brice.

"I didn't know that you kept much in touch with him anymore," he said.

"There may be a thing or two you and your computers don't know," the seafood executive replied. "He's on that dig in Central America, you know, he's been working on it for fifteen years. I was down there with him till last month, got too cold for me, my arthritis starts acting up. He'll be back in a month for the summer 'til he starts next fall."

"I didn't realize it was that large a project. I know he had been doing some research down there, but I hadn't realized he'd been doing it for so long in the same location," said the former head of Omega, suddenly realizing how much he had lost touch with people in his life. "Does my mother know where he is?" he added hesitantly.

"Where do you think you are, young feller?" the former congressional aide laughed, "Of course your mother knows where her husband is."

"Well," Brice started to add, "it's just that I didn't know."

"You don't seem to know a lot," the large man said, "but if you actually went to see your mama, you might have to find some things out. Oh, I know she can be a difficult woman, but so can we all. Underneath she's quite a gal."

"I didn't know you knew her. Actually, I guess I didn't know you actually liked her all that much," an astonished Brice said.

"She was down here for some blue crabs last month, brought one of her peanut butter pies; her and Mary Ann cackled on half the night about stuff. Oh yes, we see her from time to time. Now let's get down to the dock and give Issaic a hand, I'm gettin hungry and it don't look like Florida is gonna win this game." Brice rose to follow the big man out the door and was immediately assailed by Samuals and Brown kin, most of whom he knew well.

As he sat at the picnic table eating fish and corn, Brice listened to the noisy chatter of the assembled families and realized that perhaps he had been gone longer than he thought. Either that, or he had never understood much to start with, anyway. About eight,

he took his leave and announced his plans to drive over to his parents' compound several miles up the waterway. Sergeant Bill walked him to his rental car.

"I figured you were gonna stop here before you saw your mama," he said. "Scotty emailed me that you were headed this way." This hit the former inmate like a bolt of lightning, almost like seeing your dead wife sitting next to you in your car and asking you for a cigarette.

"Wait a minute, you know Scotty?" he said.

"Well, maybe you need to move into town where you can hear the news, Brice," Sarge laughed. "Scotty has helped your dad and me both from time to time. You introduced him when you brought him back with Willy that Christmas years ago. It was the only time I met your wife. God, I was sorry to hear about her. Me and Mary Ann go to church and pray for her from time to time."

It never occurred to Brice that friends or acquaintances of his would ever become friends themselves outside of his company. He realized how egocentric that was. As he said his goodbyes, he began to feel like someone who has awoken from a long nap. Had the world changed? Or had it always been like this and he was just now seeing it? Was his mother nothing like he thought of her, or did he really see things as they were, at least as related to him?

As he drove up US-1 to his mother's place, he began to wonder who this woman actually was, and what had she done with his mother? Baking peanut butter pies and gossiping in the kitchen? Didn't sound right; had she changed or had he? But regardless of who opened the door, someone was going to answer the question: "Where is my daughter?"

Chapter 4

Lillian Schroeder had been born in Michigan and had been married in college when both were about to get doctorates. Both wanted to be university professors, which meant, in those days, that both had taken more or less a vow of poverty. They had been delighted when the University of Florida offered them assistant professor positions; Lillian in the history department, Paul in the anthropology department. They had lived in Gainesville for about a year when they fell in love with the East Coast and found some property they wanted to purchase along the waterway. It had everything: a view of the waterway, ocean breeze (there was no air conditioning in those days), protection from hurricanes, and space to build a house without fear of neighbors. The 10 acres might as well have been 1,000, because they didn't have money to pay for it. But a strange thing can happen to people who want things; sometimes they find a way to get them.

During their early years in Florida, the Schroeders were interested in early Florida civilizations, particularly the Indians and early settlements. This required them to conduct many field digs around the state, which wasn't too difficult in those days since, outside of

Miami and Tampa, the state was sparsely populated. Because of this, within a few years, they had an intimate knowledge of the state. They found several orange groves that could be purchased for almost nothing and bought them. They hired a manager for a percentage of the profits and began running a citrus farm, slowly at first, using the profits to purchase other abandoned groves that could be made to produce. During this time they also began to notice phosphate deposits in the areas they were working. The property was in the middle of nowhere, so they were able to purchase the land and the mineral rights for almost nothing. Thus, within a few years they were running several profitable groves that were paying loans on a number of other properties containing phosphates. Then the war came and everything changed. The price of orange juice went up and the need for phosphates went through the roof. Lillian finally got together enough money to purchase her property and start construction on a house. She spent the next ten years finishing it, largely with her husband in absentia. By the late 'forties she had acquired enough property that she quit full-time teaching to manage their business; she has continued to do so ever since. They had acquired a considerable amount of land, which produced income for several decades. By the late 'sixties, the population boom had hit Florida and the land became more valuable for housing subdivisions. With several other developers, Brice's mother had slowly converted the orange and mining activities to residential and commercial projects. By the late 'nineties, a considerable amount of their assets had been turned over to a foundation which continued to make money, as well as engage in charitable works. She still managed a few of the properties and business activities, but in recent years had limited her involvement in both the foundation and the remaining business. It was estimated that Lillian and Paul Schroeder were among the wealthiest couples in the state. This had enabled Paul to serve in the Senate without fear of having to make a living when his service was finished.

The Schroeder's still lived at the property they had found fifty years before. They had bought some of the surrounding acreage to prevent development, and had enlarged the house and surrounding buildings many times. The compound now had a 5,500-square-foot two-story house, to which air conditioning had been added years ago, a barn, a large freestanding workroom, a gun range, a tennis court, a pool, and a sand volleyball court that hadn't been used in over ten years. The house was of the old Florida style, with a screened porch wrapped around three sides on both the first and second stories. The first floor was raised off the ground about a foot to allow air to circulate under the structure and keep it cool and dry. Before air conditioning, beds were moved out onto the second-story porch in the summer for sleeping. Now it was used only in cooler months.

Brice Schroeder sat in the living room as his mother brought two cups of coffee. They had embraced warmly, and for an instant he had thought of this homecoming as a happy one.

"I had Millie make up the bed in your room," his mother said. "How long can you stay?"

"Not long, my plans are to take care of a couple of things and then come back for a few days," Brice answered. He waited carefully to see if she would say anything, but the room remained silent. "I need to engage an attorney to start the process of getting Jenny back and getting on with my life," he continued.

"I already took care of that," his mother answered quickly. "I emailed our attorney and had him get on the judge's calendar to get all that taken care of. He said it should all be completed in about six months, given the backlog in the courts. You can't do anything until the judge grants you custody, you know," she added firmly.

"I assume you have guardianship now with primary physical responsibility given to the State of Florida," he said offhandedly.

"Yes, she's in a lovely place. I haven't had time to go there myself, but I'm told it's just lovely. We pay extra for her to be there, you know," his mother said, almost protesting.

"Yes, I'm sure," he answered. "Has Dad seen her?"

"No, your father has been out of the country half the time the last two years," she answered, shaking her head. "He didn't know about any of this until some time after it all happened, and I didn't want anyone to bother him with it," she said quickly.

"Probably for the best," Brice said, rising. "I'm going to bed. I have some things to do tomorrow, so I'll be gone early. I'll be back in a couple of days." He saw her questioning look and added, "Need to start looking for a job, you know, get things straightened out and all that."

"Well, you know I never approved of all that nonsense you were doing out west, living in a trailer, well, you know—," his mother began, but he cut her off by raising his hands palms out in front of him as he walked away toward the stairway. And for the first time in over a year and a half, he had sort of a plan.

The next morning he was up very early but found the housekeeper already in the kitchen when he went down to make coffee.

"Good morning, Dr. Schroeder," the housekeeper said politely. She was relatively new to the household and he did not know her well, but his parents liked her and she seemed pleasant enough.

"Does my mother call me that when I'm not around?" he asked, amused.

"Yes, sir, sometimes she does," the woman answered softly as she moved about the kitchen.

"Well, you'd better call me Brice. I was Brice around here long before I was Dr. anything," he smiled and then added, "Holy shit, she doesn't make you call her Dr. Schroeder as well, does she, or my dad?" He looked up to see the housekeeper laughing hard with her hand over her mouth, trying to regain composure.

"No, sir, I mean, no, Brice, I just call them by their first names," she answered when she had regained her dignity once more.

"Well, sounds like a good idea," he said, accepting the cup of coffee she offered. Answering her questioning look he added, "Just black, thank you."

"I'm leaving, I have some things to do, but please tell my mom I'll be back in a few days and I'll be able to spend some time."

"She's an early riser and I know she'd like to see you before you go. Why don't I just pop upstairs and let her know you're leaving?" the housekeeper said brightly.

"Thanks, but no, I'd better run. I have my things already in the car. I have several appointments and I don't want to be late. Hey, can you make a shrimp boil? I've been dreaming of a shrimp boil for years, don't get good shrimp out West," he asked, to which the woman nodded.

"Sure, I'll just call Sergeant Bill and have one of the kids bring up a few pounds. But if we're going to do that, why don't we tell them we're coming down to eat shrimp with them; any excuse for a get-together, is their motto."

"You know Sergeant Bill?" he started but let the words hang, not knowing why this should amaze him or even concern him.

"Well, both him and Issaic are kin to me," she said, turning on the stove and bringing things out of the refrigerator. "So yes, I guess you could say I know them."

"Well, dog my cats," Brice said. "Who are you making all that food for? Isn't it just my mother here?"

"Your mother is having several members of the Trust here for a breakfast meeting." The housekeeper glanced at the calendar on the wall with handwritten notes written on it. "Tomorrow, her sister and brother-in-law will be here for a few days, and after that she's going up to Crescent City to see an old friend who just got out of the hospital," the woman said, now indicating she was more than a cook.

"And would you know what she is going to talk about with the trustees?" he said, thinking he was being condescending.

"She is adding another member to the board—you actually," she said, "and there are some issues with the fees they are paying several investment services to manage some of the intangible assets. I typed up the meeting notes last night before you arrived, I'm sure she wouldn't object to you looking them over. They are in that green folder on the counter there." She indicated a green legal folder sitting on a counter under a wall phone. "Do you want me to get a travel cup so you can bring some coffee in the car with you?"

But the former head of the Omega Institute was already headed out the door. As he passed her, he simply smiled and said, "My head hurts."

A man's struggle to rebuild a life and make a moral choice.

Jogging with Giants

Buy The Complete Version of This Book at Booklocker.com:

http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/4168.html?s=pdf