



This book is a journey into life. It travels through fears of hell fire and other life changing events into cool water of peace and love. It was my journey and I want to share it with you. Maybe you won't find the road as bumpy as I if you know where the potholes lie. In the wee hours of morning I had an experience that allowed me a glimpse of the afterlife...

Hell Fire Cool Water

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Hell Fire Cool Water

Ken Katin

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First Edition

Chapter 1

Hell Fire

I loved going to church when I was very young. It was a real joy. My mother would take me several times a week whenever she went. My Dad never went to church and I didn't ask why. He was a quiet man, hardly said anything to me, I didn't speak much to him either when I was a child.

My father had emigrated from Germany in 1912 to escape military service in the Kaiser's army. He hated war and violence of any kind. I was never able to determine if he had any teachings or feelings toward God. He never discussed those things with anyone. He could have been Jewish or a Jehovah Witness, I would never find out, he took his beliefs to the grave. I remember one time my mother talked him into going to church with her, it was the first and last time he ever went. A Sunday school teacher told him heaven was located on the North Star. I am sure he questioned that and a discussion ensued. He was very intelligent, questioned many things, and read a lot of books.

My mother was raised on a cotton farm in western Oklahoma. She was the opposite of my father in many ways. She was educated in a one room school to the seventh grade. All the grades were taught in the same room, and after you finished seventh grade, you were qualified to teach school. Mother had a hard time reading the local newspaper; she never followed the national news. Her days were filled with taking care of the family, and going to church.

When she lived on the farm she attended a "Holy Roller" church, a religion that expresses ecstatic fervor. Later whenever we visited Grandma I would go to that church with her. However mother would go to most any church or tent meeting that was available at the time, so long as the church was evangelical and fundamentally Christian. I always went with her.

My father worked for a railroad in Oklahoma as a machinist. He owned a model T Ford and when he went on vacation would drive all over the state. On one of his vacations he stopped in a small town to eat. A man approached him asking if he would like to pick cotton. My Dad had never picked cotton in his life, but jumped at the offer to try something different. It was in the cotton field that he met my mother; she was the daughter of the man who owned the field; the same man that had asked my Dad to pick cotton. Several years would pass before they got married, Dad would visit "Tony," my grandfather every year on vacation to help him pick cotton. Raised in Berlin, Germany my Dad must have loved the small town atmosphere.

After my Mother and Father married they moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma to be close to my Father's work on the railroad. My Mother soon found an acceptable church to attend. After I was born I went with her. My Brother was four years older than I so he went to different classes. I really don't remember being with my Brother in anything, he had his own group of friends and I had mine. It was Mother and me; while my Brother and Dad went places together most of the time.

The earliest memories of church were very pleasant and full of fun. Children met in the basement nursery while their parents when to Sunday school and church. Playing games and singing songs were the common things for the children. Sometimes we had a picnic with fruit drinks and treats. I really liked the songs we sang especially "Jesus Loves the Little Children." It went:

"Jesus loves the little children, All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, They are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

Singing this song made me feel loved by God more than anything else we did. I looked forward to going to church in order to sing and play games with the other children my age.

Hell Fire Cool Water

As we grew older, the children were separated into classes for boys and classes for girls. I no longer went to the basement nursery; I had my own class with a different teacher who would teach us straight from the Bible. We learned that Jesus was the Son of God who came down from Heaven to save us from our sins. This was necessary since Eve had sinned by eating an apple from the tree of life. Her sin became the sin of all mankind and in order to be saved from this sin we must believe in Jesus as our Savior. The teacher pointed out verses in the Bible that proved this was true. I had learned to love Jesus years earlier, so believing in Him was a slam-dunk for me.

The next year brought a new teacher and new teachings. We were told about a fallen Angel named Lucifer and how God had banished him to a place called Hell. Anyone who didn't do the will of God could find themselves in Hell. This place was eternal torment in a fiery furnace that burned forever. The screams of the wicked could be heard coming from Hell.

I had not expected that, it hit me hard like something totally unexpected would. I was devastated with the thought that Jesus (God) would do that to others for any reason. It raised a thousand questions in my young mind, yet I was afraid to ask them.

"What happened to Jesus loves the little children of the world?"

As time went by and more teachings were given, some of my questions were answered, but never the question of "Why?" It was taught that anyone who didn't believe as we did could not go to Heaven even if he was a good person and helped a lot of people. It was necessary to only believe in Jesus as your savior and no one else.

As time went by I grew bolder and began to ask questions. "Who is the Holy Ghost?" This question was answered by explaining the trilogy of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Nothing seemed real to

[&]quot;What do you have to do to go to hell?"

[&]quot;Will God forgive you if you ask?"

me, none of the answers were sufficient to quell my fear of hell. I began to hate going to church, never really knowing whether I was safe and saved or not. I had gone down the aisle and committed myself to Jesus and was properly baptized, but felt no different than before. As this fear of God grew in me I would have crying spells triggered by visions of a burning hell fire with me in the middle of it. I pleaded with my Mother to not make me go to church. She finally relented and allowed me to go downtown to a movie on Sundays.

In High School I forgot all about God, and Spiritual things. I joined the chess club to play chess, and the "scalpers," which were a group of kids that cheered for the football team. My Dad and Brother were in the "Boy Scouts," so I joined the Scouts and went camping with them. I began to enjoy living again as the thoughts of hell faded away.

It was at a Boy Scout Christmas party that I met this girl. The moment I saw her I knew she would be my wife. I was introduced to her at the party but wouldn't see her again for over a year. It was during my junior year at High School that I saw her coming down the stairs between classes. We would meet in the hall and talk. That started a long four year courtship before we were finally married in October of 1957.

Chapter 2

Hurricane Audrey

During High School I took vocational printing. It was a three year course and prepared students for working in the printing field. I specialized in running a Linotype machine. It was a very large and complicated machine that cast slugs of lead with type on them to use in printing most anything. I not only learned how to run it, but also how to maintain and keep it running. Linotype operation was a highly skilled job and paid more money than most printing jobs. At the time I expected to run a Linotype the rest of my life. But as with most things in life it didn't work out that way.

One day in January all the seniors were called to the school auditorium for a meeting. We didn't know what it was about until we arrived. Military recruiters were there to talk to us about enlisting in the Army. There was a draft in place and 18-year-olds had to register for the draft. However not all were called, only the number necessary to replenish the ranks of those leaving the service. We were told that if we joined the reserves now we could pick the service we wanted. So I joined the Navy along with most of my friends.

I chose the Navy for several reasons; I was a strong swimmer and loved the water. I liked the fact that you carried your food and bed with you onboard the ship wherever you went. I also believed the ad "Join the Navy see the World." Several of my classmates and I signed up for eight years in the Naval Reserve. We went to reserve meetings on Monday of every week for three hours, and then during the summer we went "active" for two to four weeks for training purposes. It would keep me out of the draft and out of the Army. I was paid \$75 every three months. It seemed the best way to fulfill my military obligation.

The first summer was Boot Camp at the Great Lakes Naval Base in Chicago, Illinois. We spent two hours marching every day before we went to classes on ship nomenclature and operation. We learned how to fight fires onboard the ship; to load and fire 5" guns; and to speak the language of the Navy. It was intense mental and physical work. But I learned a lot about myself as well as the Navy.

During the weekly drills we took tests to prepare ourselves for our jobs aboard ship. There was a list of many jobs from which we could choose. Jobs such as gunnery, boiler room, damage control, cook, quartermaster, sonar, cryptography, radar, and others were on the list. I chose to become a radarman, and the next summer I went to radar school in Norfolk, Virginia. It was a four week school and full of reading books and attending lectures. My brother had previously joined the Coast Guard and was stationed at Groton, Connecticut. He would drive down and pick me up for the weekends, and we did some serious sightseeing in Pennsylvania.

The summer of 1957 I would actually go on a training cruise in the Gulf of Mexico. I was excited about that, but didn't have a clue that this summer would be so memorable that it would remain with me for the rest of my life. I was also to be married in 1957 in October. This year was special in many ways.

When I wasn't going to Navy reserve drills I was working at a printing plant running a Linotype machine. I wanted to get into the printing union to make more money but it wasn't to happen at least for a few years. So I did the best I could to learn and grow into my chosen trade.

The summer of 1957 finally arrived and I was sent to the naval station at New Orleans, Louisiana. I would ship out on the USS Kenneth M. Willett, a destroyer escort for a two week training cruise. We would be visiting some places in the Gulf as well as running exercises in submarine and surface warfare. Around the last week of June would be our departure date. I would be manning the radar.

The following is an account of that cruise that would start me thinking about God again. Since I quit going to church I had become agnostic. I could not reconcile the loving Father of my childhood with the authoritarian God I was taught about later. There was just too much difference to logically believe anything. The love I had known and felt as a child was nowhere to be found when I became an adult.

Description of the training ship:

USS Kenneth M. Willett (DE-354): She was built in 1944, 300 feet long, 37 feet wide, and mounted 2 x 5-inch/38 dual purpose guns, as well as 2 x twin 40mm guns, and 10 x single 20mm guns. Her main duty was escort for fleets of merchant or naval war vessels. Guarding them from submarine attacks with her 2 x depth charge racks, 8 x depth charge projectors, and 1 x Hedgehog (24 bombs). To me she was a training ship on a training cruise in the Caribbean Sea.

It was a hot June morning when the Willett made her way down the Mississippi river from the New Orleans Naval Station to the Gulf. We were scheduled for two weeks of training with a short stop at one of the ports in Central America. We also visited Dry Tortugas for a couple of hours on the way.

The ship was on a war time training schedule. There were drills going on every day and some nights. General quarters or "Battle Stations" were sounded at least once a day. Along with gunnery practice, chasing submarines provided for our training, and plotting zigzag courses.

I and another reservist, unknown to me, were the only ones in radar training. There were two seasoned radarmen to train us. The watch schedule was 4 hours on, and 4 hours off. We were trained separately except for the "dog" watch which was 12:00 midnight to 4:00 am, when we were put together by ourselves. I can understand why the regulars didn't want to do that watch.

Besides radar we learned to plot courses, run the DRT, fire control radar, fathometer, and read charts. The days were full of things to learn and not

much time for sleeping and eating. But I loved the schedule, I felt important learning all these things.

The days passed quickly and we soon reached our Central America port to do some sight-seeing and stretching our legs for the day. It was fun, but not long enough. Again on the ship we started back to New Orleans, to do more training along the way.

Two days out, during the dog watch, I was manning the radar while the other reservist was reading a manual. It was a boring night, with no "blips" on the screen to chart, just empty ocean all around us. I started to play with the controls on the radar and switched the search range out to two hundred miles. In the left upper quadrant was the largest blip I had ever seen. I showed it to my partner, and we started to wonder out-loud what it could be when the OD (Officer of the Deck) walked over and asked us what was going on. Not being able to tell him, he ordered us to go wake the Chief Radarman to come take a look at the large blip slowly becoming larger.

When the Chief arrived, he peered over my shoulder at the screen; his face became an ashen white when he remarked: "Oh my God." He asked me the ETA of the blip, to which I said "about 40 minutes." He quickly turned to the OD and said "that is a Hurricane bearing down on us, I recommend going the General Quarters, Sir." The OD asked him to wake the Captain, and then stepped to the ship's loud speaker.

"General Quarters, General Quarters, man your battle stations, man your battle stations, this is not a drill, this is not a drill." All hell broke loose.

The next few minutes were controlled chaos. All water-tight doors and hatches were shut then locked down. All boilers were put on line. The after steerage was activated. Damage control teams were alerted. All guns were loaded and locked, the crews looking for a target. The captain announced the approaching hurricane, told the gun crews to empty their weapons into the ocean and, if they were not in a protected mount, to get

below deck. In less than 15 minutes the ship was ready to do battle with the storm.

Radar is no good in a storm where the ship is rolling and plunging up and down. Myself and the other radarman where ordered to report to the bridge for lookout duty. We were given full-length rain gear, rain hats, and then tied with rope to the railing on the bridge. I was the port lookout and he the starboard lookout. The bridge was covered except for the far ends which were partially open to the sea. It was sometimes called the flying bridge. I could see the full length of the ship on the port (left) side. My job was to locate and report any ships that were within eyesight. I was tied in place for safety. As they tied me to the railing (stanchion), I was given a large knife. This was to be used to cut myself free in case the ship capsized. A frightening thought.

There were five of us on the bridge. The captain manned the ship's radio. A helmsman, with special skills guided the ship. Two officers to check our position, roll meter and other instruments, and us two neophyte lookouts. From my position I could hear the radio communications, and the orders being sent and received on the bridge. This was somewhat of a mixed blessing, I knew what was going on, and some of the things I heard were not pleasant to my ears.

With all boilers on line and full speed ahead the ship was turned into the direction of the hurricane. The fastest way out of a storm is straight through it. There was no course to take, only to keep the bow of the ship headed straight into the waves coming at us. To get broadsided by a big wave would mean going over, then under.

The wind was becoming stronger and the waves higher as I watch intently for other ships. Soon the wind was howling, and the waves growing larger by the minute. Ten, twenty, thirty, even forty-foot waves were washing over and crashing down on the Willett. This was just the beginning of the storm. The worst was yet to come.

As the waves grew larger, I saw the other lookout on the starboard side untie his ropes and run below deck. I don't know if he was ever disciplined for deserting his post or not. The first main concern was flooding. The waves now fifty-feet high were sending huge amounts of water into the ship. The air vents, stacks, and uncovered stairwells were being flooded with water making its way into the bilges of the ship. I heard the bilge pumps start earlier, but they were not pumping enough water, there was more water coming in than being pumped out. I was listening to the communications from damage control. The helmsman yelled "use the fire hose pumps." The pumps used to fight fires onboard the ship were put into action pumping water overboard through the fire hoses. This scarcely stabilized the amount of water in the bilges, for now.

The Captain was radioing our position to the Coastguard every five minutes, so if we capsized they would know where to look. I heard the Coastguard radio come back to ask if we could help another ship floundering about 15 miles from our position. Our Captain yelled into the microphone: "hell no, I can't help myself." Then he turned his eyes upward and said: "Lord help us through this," something he would say over and over through the duration of the storm. At this time in my life I was agnostic, but praying like a preacher, it was the common thing to do that night for all.

Being a lookout in that storm was inconceivable. I was staring into the oncoming wave one moment, the total blackness of the sky the next moment. If there were anything in between I couldn't recognize it. The ship would plunge into a wave, roll and wallow down into the trough and then slowly rise up again to plunge into the next wave. The maximum roll number was 33 degrees, if the ship rolled as much as 30 degrees it could capsize. I watched the roll meter closely. I could see we were taking 25 degree rolls regularly with an occasional 28 degree roll. The time between when the ship rolled, to the time it righted seemed forever. It was a breathless time, a time for intense faith.

The waves, now sixty-feet high, were causing havoc below deck in the crew quarters. The heavy rolling of the ship was throwing sailors off their

racks (bunks) into the bulkheads and onto the steel deck. The injuries were mounting. Those that could were using sheets, rope, anything they could find to tie themselves into their racks, or onto pipes running through the quarters. Most of the sailors were seasick by now, and the deck of the crew's quarters was awash in vomit.

I heard a loud crack, like an explosion. I turned just in time to see a wave of water crush our motor whale boat. The wave cut through the motor whale boat like an axe through butter. The front part of the boat went into the ocean and quickly sank. While the rear of the motor whale boat slipped down the davit ropes. Then it started to bang against the side of the ship with every wave. The Captain ordered it to be cut loose to prevent any further damage to the Willett. A group of sailors in black and yellow foul-weather gear began to come out onto the deck. They were all tied together with rope, the first man bearing a fire axe to cut the lines holding the remnants of the motor whale boat to the davit. They made their way slowly, carefully out onto the deck, looking like a giant centipede. As they approached the davit the first man started swinging the axe at the rope. It wasn't long before the rope parted and the remains of the motor whale boat slid into the ocean waves, but not before catching and crushing the hand of the axe holder. He was hurried below for treatment.

Upon the 01 deck things were not so good either. This is the deck above the main deck. Life rafts, shark nets, flags, and rigging are stored there among other things. I liked to go to the 01 deck when not on watch, to lie on the ropes, and watch the stars. In the middle of the ocean, at night, the stars are brilliant, so beautiful and calm. But tonight we were in the middle of a raging hurricane, with no peace or calm in sight. The now sixty to seventy-foot waves were washing overboard everything on the 01 deck that was not made from steel, and welded down. All the life rafts, shark nets, rigging, flags, and flag holders were gone. Everything vanished into an ocean of waves gone mad. When the Captain heard about the 01 deck he remarked: "how am I going to explain the loss of a million dollars' worth of gear."

Throughout the whole ship, anything not bolted down, was flying through the air, rolling across the deck, or being washed overboard. It was not safe to go below deck, or anywhere else on the ship. I was scared as much as anyone on board, but I was tied in place, for which I was very grateful.

About an hour later, I started to notice the waves receding in height, thinking we may have reached the eye of the storm. Hoping we had reached the eye of the storm. Still the waves continued getting smaller, becoming less violent, and the wind was subsiding. Could it be we were through the hurricane. In a few minutes I had my answer; we had passed though the hurricane and were sailing into calm waters again. Time seemed to be at a standstill during the storm, everything moving in slow motion, so I had no idea of how long we were in the hurricane's path. My best estimate was three to four hours. However some were saying as high as six hours. It was still dark, but only about an hour to daylight.

I untied myself from the railing and slid down to the deck, I would sit there until first light. The Captain went back to his quarters and became violently ill. The helmsman was relieved and went below; the bridge was manned by a new team, including lookouts. I struggled to my feet and went to CIC (combat information center) where the radar equipment is located. The radar was out of commission due to the storm taking the radar antenna with it as it passed. I went over to the DRT (dead reckoning tracer) to find out where we were in the Gulf. Our location was over 150 miles from where we should have been when the storm began. I also noticed a course had been set to return to base, and we were going there at half speed ahead.

I started to go below deck to my rack, but the stench of vomit stopped me cold. So instead I climbed up to the 01 deck and sat against the mast, one of the few things left intact. As the sun came up it revealed the devastation to the equipment of the Willett. I could also see the hurricane had turned the Willett into a ghost ship. The salt deposited by the waves as they crashed over the decks had turned the ship a ghastly white; sparkling in places where the sun hit the salt crystals. I was reminded of movies with ghost ships. The Willett looked just like one.

The clean-up began. The sailors that weathered the storm in the 5-inch gun mounts fared the best. They led the efforts to make the ship livable again. All those who were able pitched in. I returned to CIC to do clean-up work there. Picking up books, logs, and other objects thrown onto the deck by the raging storm; I helped square away the combat information center.

The clean-up continued into the afternoon. The galley (kitchen) announced it was ready to serve sandwiches to those that wanted them. This was around 3:00pm. The navy sandwich, at that time, was two pieces of white bread with a slice of bologna stuck between them. I declined. Most others did also. But I did go for coffee with a little sugar. No longer having a job, I attempted to go to my rack again. This time the smell of disinfectant was strong, but the lack of sleep for almost 24 hours compelled me to hit the rack. I knew we wouldn't reach port until noon the next day.

I awoke early, declined the offer of sandwiches from the galley, and made my way to CIC. The regular radarmen were there going over the supplies and equipment. I worked with them learning a lot more about the total operations of the combat information center than I would have otherwise. Before long we heard the communications officer announce the mouth of the Mississippi river. We were not far from our base. It is customary when entering port for sailors to put on their dress whites and stand at attention along the railing. This time it was not mandatory, those who wanted to could. There were about 25 sailors who did. I went up to the 01 deck to observe the entry into the mighty Mississippi.

As we entered the river and started up the winding path to the Naval Base, it became obvious the ghastly white of the Willett was attracting attention. People were gathering on the river banks, and pointing their fingers in our direction, so all could see the Navy ghost ship entering port.

Finally the Naval Base came into view. As we neared the dock, ambulances, and medical personnel lined up to board the ship. When the gangway touched the dock, medical personnel rushed aboard the ship to

help the injured. Four stretchers were used to carry those off that couldn't walk. The ones that could walk were helped off the ship and into an ambulance. This included the Captain who was helped off the ship by two medics. The extent of the injuries was unknown, but none were lifethreatening. There were many x-rays to be taken, and wounds to be dressed. Some, like the Captain, were just so sick they needed time to recover from the experience.

After the injured were taken off, buses came to get the rest of us. We were taken to a barracks where we would spend the night. The regular sailors would stay in the barracks, while the reservists were sent home to our loved ones the next day. That evening I ate my first meal after the storm in a base cafeteria. I was ready to return home.

In summary, we were all glad to still be alive. There were many times I thought it was over for me. The ship's crew was to be commended for their quick, expert actions that saved the ship from loss of life. I was told later that at least three ships had gone down around us in the hurricane. I learned we had encountered hurricane Audrey, a category four hurricane. When Audrey made landfall in Texas and Louisiana she killed hundreds of people and left thousands homeless. How we made it through just had to be a miracle.

While I was looking for a picture of the USS Willett, I learned during WWII she had weathered a typhoon off the coast of the Philippines at the time of the battle of Leyte Island. She was a tough ship.

I had experienced the best and the worst of being on the ocean in a small ship. I still had more training cruises to go before my enlistment was up. So with some apprehension I would sail again, but only after some rest; I went to school the next summer.

My wife and I were married on schedule in October of 1957. I was still working as a Linotype operator and wanted, even more, to get into the printers union now that I had family obligations. I approached the union to sign up and was told the waiting list was over 100 applicants.

Discouraged I settled down to work at the job I had. It was three months later when I got a call from a union shop owner asking me to come try out as a Linotype operator for him.

I went to work at Typography, Inc. the next Monday. It was the largest and best shop in the City. They had three Linotypes and only one operator so it was necessary to "hit the floor running." I worked hard and fast for two weeks before Russell, the owner said anything to me. He told me that I had a permanent job. My paychecks were full union pay for which I was very grateful. I had entered the union through the back door which made me somewhat of an outcast to union leadership

We bought a house and started to raise a family, but always in the back of my mind was the question of God. During that time I felt the need to go back to school. I had a High School Diploma, but wanted more. I knew I could not make it in college without a lot of work so I started to read books, hard books, and full of big words I didn't know. I held a dictionary in my lap and started to read; when I found a word I didn't know I looked it up. Drawn to books on psychology, theology, and philosophy I searched the used book stores to find them. I found a book written by Sigmund Freud and began.

This was most difficult reading for me, but I kept on trying to understand what Freud was talking about. After a few months and reading more of his books, I began to understand his concepts and why he used them. I also read books by Karl Jung, Alfred Adler, and other famous psychologists/psychoanalysts, but I liked Freud the best. He seemed more human and caring to me. Freud was heavily criticized for his use of sexual concepts in his work. When I bought his book "Totem and Taboo," at a used book store there was an old yellowed newspaper clipping in it. The clipping was of an interview between a reporter for the paper and Freud. The reporter asked Freud why he used sex as the basis of his work and Freud replied: "these concepts that I use are merely the tools of my trade, it is love that heals." I then knew why I liked Freud's work; the love came through between the lines of his words. Freud really helped me to look

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beyond the literal part of life into the transcendence. I could see the whole picture as greater than the sum of its parts.

My reading in theology was not as fruitful. I read some of C. S. Lewis' books as well as other books by contemporaries of his time. But the answers I sought were not in the pages of those books. I looked for a deeper meaning than they presented. In philosophy I learned different ways of looking at a problem or concept. Nietzsche, Kant, Locke, Descartes, and a few others, I read, but did not really enjoy. What I did get was a much larger vocabulary and greater confidence in my ability to tackle college.



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