

An explosive tale inside the Department of Defense maze concerning one moral man's efforts to right wrongs. Lew Harris tries to free himself from his past doing what he thinks is right while often fleeing from those who see it differently.

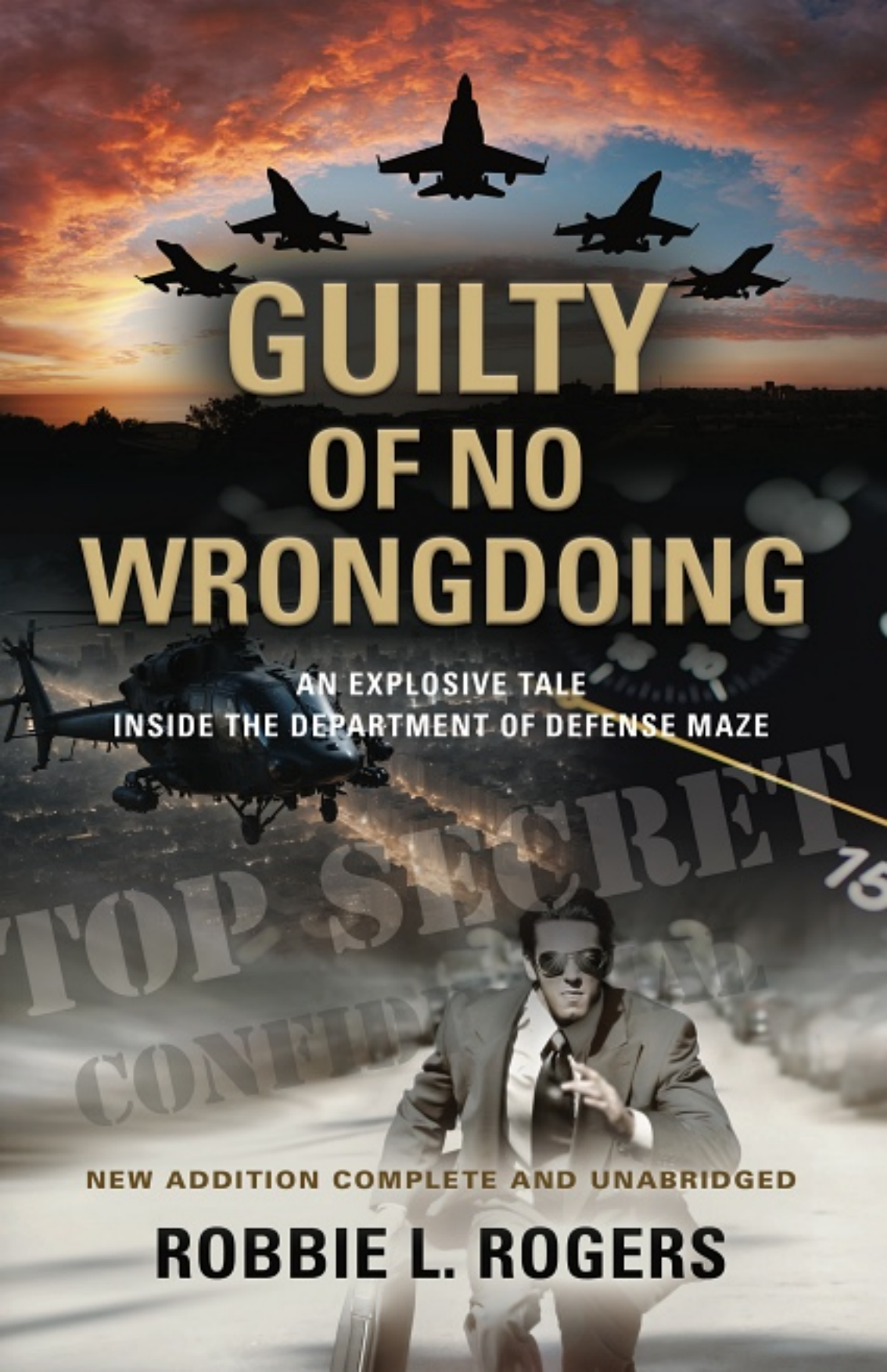
Guilty of No Wrongdoing

By Robbie L. Rogers

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GUILTY OF NO WRONGDOING

AN EXPLOSIVE TALE
INSIDE THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MAZE

TOP SECRET
CONFIDENTIAL

NEW ADDITION COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

ROBBIE L. ROGERS

Guilty of No Wrongdoing

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This book represents an ethical attempt to blend honest fiction and certain historical facts into a believable story-driven tale of secrecy and intrigue involving one man and the characters surrounding him. All characters and places, except historical, have no existence outside the imagination of the author and no relation whatsoever to any living or dead individual or corporation bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents except historical are pure invention or coincidental. While doing extensive research for this book many sources were utilized; hopefully my notes were never verbatim and thereby transcribed into the story you are about to read; however, if by some quirk an area or statement is placed in this body of work it is purely unintentional.

Most have but one chance in life. One decision, no matter how carefully thought out, often separates the mortal from immortality.

CHAPTER ONE

Life was hard in central Mississippi. You couldn't expect to have food on the table. It was as if God gave up on them, the poor inhabitants and even the land. Their crops supplying food and subsistence burned up in the fields. The slash-pine and turpentine jobs were long since gone. Only scarce pulp wood work remained. Prior to that they suffered the tung oil loss. Before that, nothing, and nothing from nothing leaves nothing, just like now. Likewise, never more than a burned-out crossroad on a worn-out map, the town of Buckatunna, was "good fer nothin'," you could count on it.

Curly, redheaded, Lewis Hardhead Harris knew to expect as much from life. Little family. No friends. No bicycle. Not even a scroungy dog. Nothing. Deep in thought, Lewis kicked loose gravel. The stern look on his face fully disclosed his personality. At twelve, and either too gangly or too young to fit in, he reflected the weight of his world. To make matters worse the town people left no doubt of his self-worth, considering him white-trash. He never knew his father; nor did he want to know the men in the endless procession to his mother's bed. His sister was the only one he could count on. She was always there; she loved him. Life is bearable if someone cares.

Becoming sullen walking past the pretentious general store, Lewis conjured stony-faced accusers watching, chastening his every movement, his every step, making him feel small and dirty, conscious of every inch he walked. Only those who called him names could afford items in the store and he hated them; he quickened his pace to save what little pride he had.

Like himself, most nearby folks lived like squatters and share croppers, hidden in folds of the wrinkled land, attempting to steal a living from reluctant surroundings. Across the way two rag-tagged county schools perched on a scorched hill. Further down Highway 45 an ill-conceived County High School sat out of place, a tuxedo in a junkyard full of has-beens that never were.

Making his way through the countryside, Lewis bounded up an embankment eagerly balancing himself on a shiny GM&O rail. Arms straight out he pretended to walk a tight rope. A lone freight car sitting on the desolate side-tracks at Carter's Ridge grabbed his attention. Slowly he approached. Assured no one was around he reached for the rusty ladder. "All yo jokers pay attention!" He yelled at the wind. "I'm the boss of this here train. When I say git, I mean git!"

"Ughhh!" He tugged at the rusty brake wheel as if to steer. Hardly noticeable... the car moved downhill. Lewis noticed it and scrambled to the top for a better view. It eased passed an unset side switch. At first it was exciting... going someplace else, then came his mama's "Point-Of-No-Return." Rapidly increasing speed, the car rocked back and forth.

Scurrying down the rear ladder he leaped without thinking. "Jesus!" He yelled in mid-air, not knowing why... it just came out. Instantly striking the ground, he fell upended, suspended in time, flailing over the chat-rock bed, gouging and grinding his body until he finally stopped. He remained motionless, afraid to move.

Maybe he was dead? No. Alive... just feeling dead.

"Ouwwww, oooo, ouch, ouch, ohhhh!" he moaned.

Limping to Trestle Creek, he awkwardly peeled off his clothes.

While swimming he flung his clothes to the bank, washing blood and embedded gravel away. He didn't cry, instead he smiled, proud of his strength for not crying from physical pain. At least it's Friday. *No school tomorrow*, he thought.

Meanwhile, the runaway freight car barreled toward White Horse Crossing, 60 miles away. A seedy brakeman bent over setting the tracks for a noisy diesel, head pounding from a hangover. He leaned out, almost throwing up, squinting, trying to focus blood shot eyes on the frantic engineer who foolishly waved in a strange manner. Instead he shrugged just before the runaway car decapitated him.



Much later, a rusty pickup sat, motor running, in front of the Lewis's family farmhouse. Nervously, his sister Carrie told her mother about Bobby Lee's head being chopped off. Serves the bastard right, Cora Leah thought. Glad I never give him the satisfaction of knowin' he was Lewis' father, `sides would'a done nobody no good no how.

Carrie's boyfriend gunned the beat-up truck's aging engine, repeatedly shaking his head. "Come on damn it," he yelled. Carrie stumbled wide legged, dragging a tattered suitcase between her legs, her mother nipping at her heels never offering to help.

"Jump off the Chickasawhay Bridge for all I care Carrie Leah Harris! If you want to run off; what you asking me for? Go! For Pete's sake go! To hell with `ya! Do anything but stay here; an' quit worry'n about Lewis; he never worried none about you; think about yourself! He ain't gonna mount to nothin' no how. Go! Go like I tell ya! I'll take care of him. `Sides, he can take care of himself. He's bigger'n you an' me together."

Cora Leah turned her back on her daughter and went back inside looking for something tangible to drink. Likewise, Carrie angrily slammed the dilapidated screen door for the last time in her life. Before she hardly got in the old truck lurched forward spewing gravel everywhere, speeding toward Highway 45 and another life.

Casually wiping bloody sweat from his brow, Lewis tugged wet clothes over his lanky body, not an easy task. Tying his shoes together, he threw one over his shoulder, the other dangled across his chest. Leaky wounds soaked into his shirt. As he hobbled toward home dust squirted between his toes seeking out the dampness it found.

"Wish it would rain like it used to," he grumbled. "Everything's so damn dry."

Stomp! Stomp! His feet purposely sounded on the road bed, billowing dust. It had not rained in months. The normally sticky Mississippi mud transmuted itself into a strange gray powder. Even when the wind did not blow the dust floated with a mind of its own.

I wonder if Mamma's home? Probably not.

"Your Mama's always drunk, or gone if she's sober," Aunt Alma said to him yesterday. Spitting dust out of his mouth in anger at Aunt Alma, he bit his lip against a new pain. She ought not say such things about Mamma, even though they're true. Mamma always says, "Buckatunna's worse than hell." *God I hope there's more to life than that. Probably all I'll ever get though.*

Lewis never hated his mamma, though he had reason to; she never took care of him; his sister Carrie did. Granny Harris apparently was different though, she died about the time he was born so he never really knew about her or any proper family. Carrie said Mamma's foul mouth and filthy life killed her Granny. She was likely right. They say Granny was a saint. He wondered, what it would be like to talk to a saint, someone who had better answers than he heard from anybody else so far. Still, if Granny was so God fearing how was it that his mother

turned out like she did? What in hell are the ingredients of success? Shit, what is success? Why is it some folks cut from the same cloth are good while the others seem bent on hell? Why does God favor some over others, and for what reason. Or, is there a God? Is it all made up to appease the ignorant? Granny believed or so they say. Why do I always think? Does anybody else? Carrie doesn't and I'm sure Mamma never did.

These and many more questions rattled around in Lewis' confused head. Glancing up He saw a dust cloud. A vehicle careened across the wash-board dusty red clay road. Not trying to escape dust as much as wanting to hide, he backed into dying willow trees. The commotion drew closer. A bleary-eyed sailor laughed maniacally behind the wheel. Lewis's mother on the passenger side took a big swig from a whiskey bottle.

Almost stepping out to wave, he thought better, knowing she would not acknowledge him. Instead he stood in emotional silence. Suddenly a defeated outburst reverberated throughout his angry young body.

"JERK OFFFFFFF!!!!" He screamed at the sailor, loud as though his heart would burst, not even hearing his own voice over the passing clamor.

The dry tidal wave entombed him, blowing its wake across the fields, flooding the woods, issuing death in its wake.

Trying not to breathe in dust, a strange plague ripped Lewis' soul. Angrily he sank to his knees, clamping his eyes tight trying to maintain the only thing he was proud of, his inner strength; still, years of frustration and hurt forced burning tears down his freckled cheeks and clenched jaw. Further attempting to sap his life, the searching dust settled on him. With a vengeance he spat out the grittiness.

"Well she's gone again."

Rubbing muddy tears on his shoulder he turned home. *Damned ole dust, whole world's gonna blow away, he thought, blinking the grit away.* Stomp! Stomp! His feet pounded anger against his mother.

"Jerk!" he screamed, driving away thoughts of the father he did not know.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! At Aunt Alma.

Stomp! At himself.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

"Who gives a damn anyway!" He shouted and trudged home.

No shade trees hid the dilapidated house from the relentless summer sun. The scorched field, plowed right up against the house, ate up every inch of ground except in the frontage along the roadway. Jealously, with tar-paper pride, the farm house they lived in clung to the blistering heat as if was the only treasure ever found.

Carrie was not home. Often she was not. This time Lewis wondered. Instead of allowing himself the comfort of worry he made rabbit stew. The rabbit he shot; the potatoes and beans he harvested from the meager garden he planted inside the once wet ditch, the one place where any semblance of moisture or topsoil remained. Darkness closed in. In despair he searched for a way to minimize the stifling heat.

"Ahhh," he sighed painfully setting on the hard gray porch.

If nothing else, he was normally a good sleeper, it was defensive. This time agony tossed him. This night was different. He was different. The world was different. It would never be the same.



Renewing itself in the morning a searing sun sought him. In self-defense, he got up. Usually he felt better in the morning. Not this time. Somehow he deserved better days; anything was better than his yesterdays. Sitting on the top step, leaning against the rough heart-pine

post, he suckled a Bahia stalk thinking about Carrie. Every now and then, tongue pressed on his teeth, he sprayed spit on the dry ground. The balls of mud where his spit landed intrigued him as he thought about his sister. He loved her; she gave him the only love he ever knew. *She'd have done the same thing for a ring-tail cat*, he thought, jumping off the stoop in anger.

Throwing the grass down he screamed, "I don't care if I ever see you again! I don't care what happens to you!"

Then his defiant shoulders slumped. Guess she met up with some guy and ran off like Mamma. Pulling another Bahia stalk, he stuck it between his teeth.

"I don't care. I don't need nobody no more," he mouthed, walking into the dry field.



For the rest of his life he would feel the weight of being alone, pressing down, destroying his last vestige of happiness. There was a short time when a runaway bitch dog limped up to the farm. It stayed until he nursed it back to health. However, it too ran off. In spite of himself one night he cried, not for being alone, but for something deeper, something he never had, something he never knew. He cried because he needed more than life gave, more than he would get. Yet he endured. It was not in him to give up or run away. Somehow down deep he knew if you were going to survive you had to fight. He believed that. He had to believe in something, that was all he had, believing. He must have inherited this capacity from Granny. Though he never knew Granny, her legacy lived on. The goodness of her deeds cast into the waters of life came somewhat back on him, maybe, maybe not so much, but it was at least more that he could have expected out of life or his family, and sooner or later he would learn; if you receive

you must give in like manner. Yes, somehow things would get better, they had to. Life could not be this way forever.



Right off Lewis knew he would catch too much ribbing in school if he used his real middle name, “Hardhead”; his mother named him that because she said his no-account father was hardheaded, and though he never knew who his father was he supposed it was true. Harry was the name he came up with, that's what he used. Just plain, Harry.

Too often deeds though done for the right reasons cause more harm than good. In like manner sometimes we must look beyond current situations to see the effects that come later before we can truly find that we have done good, many do not even try to do good and cause irreparable damage. Much like his life, schooling was hard for Lewis. He endured it knowing if he was ever going to get out of Buckatunna he would have to be smarter than his Momma or Uncle Riley, the only two adults he really knew. Teachers said he didn't care, he did and it hurt, consequently he hardened to their lame efforts.

Lewis was determined not to talk like a hick from the back woods; but, it was difficult, he got letters and numbers mixed up, frustrating teachers. Why couldn't they see what his problem was and help. Instead teachers made fun of him in front of the class as a form of discipline. No matter what, he knew knowledge was his only chance and figured somehow to stick it out. In spite of everything, school was his favorite place. He wanted it; it got him away from the depressing farm. A few teachers recognized his problem, some even tried to help, but most did not want to be involved with his kind. To make matters worse he was hardheaded according to his name, refusing occasional offers out of resistance to his often-inflicted ridicule.



Suddenly it rained as though God saw the misery that existed below for the first time, trying to wash it away. With a vengeance the parched earth turned its back on the dryness, allowing the torrential rains to ravage and gather its last traces of top soil. Forming wicked flowing streams, cursing and scarring the land, it plunged headlong toward the Chickasawhay River. A thick mucky mud clogged and flooded the country roads as it gouged new and deeper ravines taking his vegetable garden with it on its way to Hell.

Gradually the rain subsided, and Lewis's life along with the rest of the bewildered local inhabitants became more tolerable. Uncle Riley, his mother's brother lived nearby and began farming the old Harris place, giving Him hand-me-downs and a share of the crops. Uncle Riley wanted to do more, but with seven kids in a shotgun house there was no room to take Lewis in. Lewis knew Aunt Alma would have nothing to do with him anyway. Uncle Riley frequently drove his rickety wagon back and forth down the high banked gravel road and across Gully Creek. Lewis felt good riding on the back, looking where he had been. *I wonder what it would be like to cross the "Point-Of-No-Return" and leave Buckatunna... like goin' to Mobile on the bus.* "Your dirty hands and feet ain't goin' nowhere!" He sadly jumped down, turning his back on leaving.

I'll end up like Uncle Riley or worse, he thought. Finally Lewis knew the truth. He knew where he belonged; nowhere but Buckatunna. A tear ran down his cheek. Uncle Riley, with his mind transfixed on nothingness never gave Lewis a thought as he jumped down. No one ever heard Lewis.

Eventually he got a post card from his mamma in Alabama, telling him to send her some cigarette money. She was in the Alabama prison for driving a getaway car in a hold-up of a "State Greenfront." Her and her sailor friend were charged with robbery and crossing the state line carrying stolen goods.



Months later, on the way home from school, Lewis cut across the County Middle School yard. A worn-out basketball blew lazily across the red clay field. Casually picking it up as his losers-weepers possession, he felt a spark of happiness... somehow changed.

"Hey!" Coach Williams called out from nearby.

Lewis did not hear.

Coach watched Lewis bounce the worn-out ball and smiled. That boy's a lot like me when I was his age. *Let him have the ball, he thought, you were just going to throw it away. Maybe something good'll come of it. Nobody likes him. Damn if he don't make me hurt.* A week later Coach stood square in Lewis's path, a basketball propped on his hip.

"Hi Lew."

Eying him suspiciously Lewis stopped. How did he know his name, and nobody called him Lew, few even talked to him?

"Ya like basketball?" Coach offered, awkwardly shadow dodging on a run up jump-shot. "Want'a shoot a few with me. I could use a little practice with a tall kid like you."

Lewis said nothing, starting to walk off.

"You do talk don't ya?" Coach asked? "I saw you pick up that old basketball last week and watched you dribble it off into the woods. The way you handled it looked like with a little work you could be good. I could use some competition... don't have many friends around here. What d'ya say?"

Coach passed the ball hard to Lewis.

Not sure what to do, Lewis dropped his books and caught the ball... it stung. Nervously he bounced it a few times, finally tossing it back.

Lewis started picking up his books... "Think fast!" Coach yelled, passing harder. "Hey! What you trying to prove?" Lewis complained dropping his books again.

"Nothing kid. Just wanted ta see if I sized ya up right.

You know, you've got great hands, and you're quick. Like I say, if you've a mind to, you've got definite makings of a good ball player."

Coach limped toward Lewis.

Lewis backed away.

"Hey take it easy fella... if you don't wanna practice with me... I understand, nobody else does either. I just thought the two of us could help each other out..."

"Who told you I had a basketball, "Lewis interrupted?

"Like I said, I saw you pick it up, and besides I just guessed a tall kid like you could get a hold of a basketball one way or another."

Lewis tossed a ringer from where he stood.

"If you want your dad-blamed old basketball, just ask for it."

"Nope. Don't need it. Ta tell ya the truth I was gonna throw it away anyway. I'm glad you found it... that shot you just made proves what I wanted to know."

Lewis grinned in spite of himself, quickly scowling.

Coach made another awkward run up hook-shot at the board.

"Just remember if you can make the team, ya got a chance, just a chance mind ya of leaving this here one-horse-town!" With that and one more shot Coach let the ball fall from the net, limping off, leaving Lewis watching the ball roll toward the school.

Casually Lewis glanced to see if Coach was watching He was.

Not about to give him satisfaction Lewis turned home thinking about what Coach said, wondering if he was on the up and up.

Why did he limp like a gimp. What happened to him?

Coach was right about Lewis liking to shoot. He fastened a small barrel ring to a telephone pole near the road. At first, he spent most of his time running after the ball; that made him get better fast. Chasing rather than shooting was not what he wanted. Now he made ringers most of the time.

The next evening Lewis eagerly looked for Coach, but he was not there. Disappointed, Lewis walked away. *That guy probably just wanted to make a fool out of me anyway... like everybody else.*

He headed down Highway 45.

Sticking his head out a door of the County High School gym Coach yelled. "Hey Lew! Over here!" He trotted awkwardly toward Lewis.

Lewis walked toward him.

"Come over here Lew," Coach yelled. "I coach high school too... we're practicing inside. I'd like you ta see these guys."

Putting his big hand on Lewis's shoulder, Coach smiled. "You did come ta play didn't ya?"

Cautiously Lewis grinned. "Yeah, got nothin' to lose."

"Let's go then, those guys'll fall all over themselves without me tellin' em what ta do."

Lewis never had been inside a gym. It was big with hollow sounds and shiny floors. Guys dribbled balls everywhere, making funny noises with their shoes as they stopped or turned abruptly.

"See what I mean," Coach said to Lewis.

Coach blew his whistle, "All right you guys let's see some free-throws." He turned to Lewis, "Sit in the stands over there 'till I get through with these clowns. I'll be back in a minute." Coach blew the whistle and yelled orders as the team thundered over the court.

Grinning ear to ear, Lewis liked the squeaking sounds their shoes made best of all, expertly faking each other out. *They respect coach, he thought. I wonder why... maybe this guy's on the up and up? Okay... maybe I can get out'a Buckatunna. Yeah, but you don't have basketball shoes or a uniform like they do! All you got is a too-tall skinny body and two big hands and feet. You only know how to throw a ball through a stupid ring on a pole. Who you kiddin'?*

Coach yelled to Lewis. "What ya think?"

Hurting, Lewis shrugged. Instinctively Coach knew what was wrong. "Quit worrying and show up tomorrow!"

In gratitude for one's good fortune in life, one must render sacrifices, giving a boost in life to another, paying one's dues. Gradually Coach befriended Lewis. Teaching him how to play the game was easy, helping him through other areas was not. All his life people told Him he was "good for nothin'," and until now he more or less proved them right.

"Here take this." Coach said one evening handing him a plain black rock.

"What's this for?"

"I noticed ya got a problem knowin' y'ur right frum y'ur left, we can't have that on the basketball court or in life either for that matter."

Lewis looked away, trying to avoid Coach's accusing eyes.

None was there.

"It's okay... don't be ashamed, lots a people do. The trick's not let'n other folks know it.

"You gotta learn this right now my boy, if you got a problem... overcome it. If you're an over comer you'll be stronger frum y'ur problems; if not, you'll amount ta nothin'.

"This little black rock's y'ur ticket out'a Buckatunna. You need confidence by darn it; this'll give it to ya if ya'll let it. Then you can do anything ya set y'ur mind to. Keep it in y'ur right pocket. When someone says hold up y'ur right hand, think about where ya got it, and raise that hand.

"Why are you being nice to me? No one ever has before. What's in for you?"

"I don't blame you for being suspicions. When I was a kid like you I was too, but someone helped me. The trouble is I blew it. I could've been somebody like I know you could be, but I'm here instead, and darn lucky to have what I have. Someday I'll tell you about it... but

not now. Now you need to remember what I say about y'ur problem, or any handicap, and pat that darned rock when you're slipping. Okay...? Just pat it and remember who ya are and what you're gonna become, a darn good ball player with a future, an education and a way out'a here. When you're on the court, remember the side ya keep the rock on. I can't make a winner out of you if ya don't."

"But what about me mixin' up my numbers and stuff."

"Don't worry, it'll come, just do as I say, you'll be okay."

Soon Lewis's basketball scores soared, but his grades did not. "If you make County All-stars like I think you can, you'll get a chance at State, then I think I can get ya in Bama. But not if ya don't get through mathematics it won't happen. We'll work at it till ya get it right."

Consequently, Coach drilled him every night, using every opportunity to guide him. "Life's like this deck, son, you gotta play the cards life deals ya. Sometimes you're stuck with nothing, only the other guy may be worse off than you are. Or you might get the bid dropped on ya, like you did to me `while ago. It worked on me, you saw how I combined the kitty with what was a lousy hand, endin' up runnin' the table. Or, ya might get the lay of the deck frum drawing good cards. The main thing's play the best ya can, if you do, sooner or later you'll come out winner. A winner by choice not chance.

"And always be eager ta learn new things, don't hold back. Just go ahead and do it, force y'urself, that's what extroverts do," Coach said. "Ya see, most folks have all the right ingredients for success, they jest don't have the opportunity ta get it all together at the right time.

"You've gotta take chances, bein' prepared. Ya never know when y'ur chances are comin'. If you're not ready and ya jump at it anyway you'll make a fool out of y'urself trying, bein' a failure by choice not chance."



With Coach's constant prodding it wasn't long until Lewis became a fair student. His grades were never spectacular only good enough to make it; but Coach and soon Lewis was bound and determined that he would make it to college with an athletic scholarship. Coach really cared; it felt strange only Carried had cared and she was long gone; he never even heard from her again. At night when they relaxed Coach often talked about his childhood, explaining how Lewis too would someday owe his dues to society. He told him how he once had it made, all the way to the big time, but it went to his head; getting drunk and speeding became his downfall, then came the wreck. His legs would never be the same. He never got to play his first pro game with Cincinnati. Although the team paid for his medical expenses they dropped him like a hot horseshoe. It wasn't long before he was broken and penniless, ending up a never-has-been in Buckatunna. Just a broken-down coach.



We never know who we effect in our life. If we allow God to, He will guide us, and in doing so we can only be sure of one thing, some good will come out of our existence no matter the odds or indications, He will make it so. Finally Lewis completely moved in with Coach. Consequently Coach became the father Lewis never had, using every trick to bring out the good he saw in the boy. They only went to church occasionally; but, Coach always made sure Lewis knew about God, instilling things in him that forged a better person. He taught him especially to pray before a game and before any test. Lew decided it could not hurt, so why not. He didn't know if it worked, to pray, but for some reason it made him feel better. It settled him down to think that God, the creator of the universe actually might know he existed and take interest in how his scores turned out. He began thinking of

God as a sort of celestial coach who wanted to see his favorite teams win and kept up with the scores.

"Seeing's how you're a Bama fan, there's an old story about Auburn I want ta tell ya. It seems they were just gettin' their School of Engineering and Science goin' when they received a federal grant ta study the Hearin' Sensitivity of Bull Frogs. After buyin' all the prized jumpin' frogs from the Alabama State Fair, they picked out the best, 'Big George' was his name. He was trained so well he would jump on command. 'Jump Big George' they'd say and the frog jumped; then they'd measure out how far.

"Being's they didn't have much experience with scientific stuff they argued about how to go about doin' a Hearin' Sensitivity Study. As luck would have it there was a fella who knew it all. He stepped in an' took control. They figured he was right 'cause he was the loudest an' talked the most. Anyway, they cut off one of the legs of 'Big George' and told him ta jump. He didn't respond as well so; they yelled louder. With only three legs he jumped, but a little sideways. That's okay they were studin' scientifically, and scientists do strange things. But ya see, bein' a scientist excited and clouded their heads. They thought they were on ta somethin' and cut off another leg. Each time they hollered louder. Before long though the critter would'n jump very far.

"Undaunted, they severed the last leg. 'Jump Big George' they hollered, but Big George just lay there. Feeling successful on their first research project they hurried to write their scientific thesis. A month later they published their synopsis. The gist of it was that bull frogs become deaf when their legs were cut off." At that Coach laughed loudly then looked sternly into Lewis' eyes.

"Don't you forget that story, it'll keep ya frum drawing the wrong conclusions in life. Know what you're talking about before you open y'ur mouth Lewis; only a fool speaks without knowing what he's gonna say. An', also ya can't learn anything with y'ur mouth open; listen to

that worth listening to; but, forget any smart-ass loud-mouth idiot thinks he knows it all. An' do y'ur own thinkin', it won't lead ya astray, and if it does... learn somthin' frum y'ur mistake. But, if ya follow idiots who don't think you'll become cannon fodder for their causes, not yours."



Through the years, Lewis went through a metamorphosis, becoming "Lew" the guy kids quit mocking, and finally the one they cheered. With Coach at his side he made it to the State All-Stars, but only Coach's contacts got him the University of Alabama Athletic scholarship. No matter that his education made him smarter, Lew remained perplexed about many things, especially about God, often rebelling against the norm, believing but questioning at the same time. He wanted there to be a God. Somehow there has to be a reason for all this mess he thought.

It was now Friday. Lew looked out the rear window of the bus on his way to Mobile. The familiar cross roads of Buckatunna disappeared in the early morning Mississippi mist. "It's up to you boy!" Coach told you so; he's always right. But Lew wondered if he was going to make it as they drove across his imaginary "Point-Of-No-Return." He heard his mother's cursing warning echo in his head. "Don't threaten me with runnin' away ya dirty little good fer nothin' bastard. Just do it! See if I care. Only if ya do, I better never see ya again. Make up y'ur mind, I don't give a damn."

After that he vowed never to give her the satisfaction of running away, though he often felt like it. In her way, she gave him his most enduring quality, tenaciousness. Touching the black rock in his pocket renewed his inner peace. He knew he would be all right. "Lord, help me," he said a small prayer just in case.



During a three-hour layover in Mobile, Lew met Kathy, a waitress at the old LaClede Hotel. She treated him differently, smiling while smoking a cigarette, drinking a cup of coffee with him on break. I've never felt like this with a girl, he thought. She seems to enjoy me; but she probably thinks I'm an idiot, sitting here drinking eight cups of coffee and eating three pieces of pie. I better go before she starts to laugh at me. Reluctantly he left.

Continuing to wander, he missed the bus arriving back at the terminal just as the bussed pulled away. He ran up to the attendant. "Hey that Tuscaloosa bus left without me."

"Well hell boy, don't you know how to tell time? Time waits for no man and neither does Great Southern."

"Yeah, but I've got to get to Bama," Lew whined.

"Take it easy son... the next bus to Tuscaloosa leaves tomorrow at 7AM sharp. I don't know what you'll do 'til then, but y'ur stuck; sleep in the station like everybody else, I guess; or, see Traveler's Aid over there." Lew glanced at the direction he pointed, a sign on the booth read, CLOSED FOR THE DAY. "But what about my bags?"

"They'll be at the station when ya get to Tuscaloosa."

Dejected, Lew slumped. Damn, what am I gonna do now, he asked rubbing his rock. Suddenly he brightened. Excitedly he went back to the cafe and Kathy, telling her he wasn't sure about him being able to make it in college.

"You can't miss out on this opportunity. You said it's what you've always wanted. When does the next bus leave?" She fussed.

"Not till tomorrow morning at seven. It's okay with me though. I'll sleep in the bus station. "Say! There's a great 3-D movie called "House of Wax" playing down the street. Why don't you get off early; you and I could go, if you want to?"

Kathy was not used to people being nice, especially young men. Reluctantly she agreed to go. When her shift changed they left, talking

constantly, stopping at the drugstore for a cherry-coke float. "You remind me of my old boyfriend in Tennessee."

"S`at right?"

"Yeah, at one time we talked about getting married, but we didn't."

"Why didn't you?"

"I was stupid and ran off with somebody stupider."

Quiet streets echoed their footsteps their hands found each other.

Lew swaggered.

"Bobby."

"What?"

"Bobby John Crosby."

"That was the jerk I ran off with. I'm a divorced woman. D'ya ever date a divorced woman?"

"Heck no Kathy. I never even dated a real woman before, but you don't seem no older `an me. Shoot, you look just like the girls back home `cept you're a lot nicer"

Latching on to Lew's arm Kathy squeezed tight. A tear rolled down her cheek.

After the movie, against his protest, she drug him to her apartment to spend the night.

"But I don't want to put you out none," Lew pleaded.

"It's all right Lew. Really, it's no trouble, an' I've slept on that couch many a time. Make yourself comfortable, the bathroom`s in here. I'll be in the next room if you need me."

Kathy lay in her bed thinking about the young man she left back in Tennessee; her thoughts turned to Lew. Quietly she walked in the next room to watch him sleep. Impulsively she touched his face.

"Lew?"

Lew opened his eyes seeing her silhouette in the moonlit room. "Wh... whaat? Kathy.... What's wrong?" Startled, he awoke completely. "Is it time to get up?"

She knelt beside him. "No. No, Lew... I just got lonely."

Kathy placed her head on his chest.

Putting his arms around her, Lew stroked her silky clean hair, feeling her need to be comforted. He closed his eyes, thinking he must be dreaming, holding her close. Her fresh fragrance enveloped him, and he flushed. Scarcely breathing, Lew trembled, fearful she would notice and leave him alone. Hot feelings coursed his veins as she pressed her body against his. *Oh god*, he thought.

"Let's go to my bed, Lew," she implored, kissing him sweetly.

Obediently he followed in a daze. They made love the only way they knew how, clinging for different reasons; she trying to regain a past, he trying to find a future. Each gave life to the other. He needed experience; she needed innocence.

The next morning Kathy was all business.

"But Kathy I don't want to leave you. I love you."

"You've gotta to go, Lew. You say that, but I know I'll never see you again."

"You don't mean that. I'll be good for you. I'll love you forever. We can get married today. I'll find a job in Mobile. I'm strong. I can do anything. I won't desert you."

"No Lew. It wouldn't work, you'd soon hate me for taking away the one chance you have. No, get on that bus before ya make me mad and ruin what we had last night."

That next night Kathy cried herself to sleep, not over Lew, but what might have been if she had not run off with no-good Bobby John. Either way Lew was gone.



Lew was razzle-dazzled by the University of Alabama. Compared to Buckatunna, Bama's athletic dorm was luxurious, serving more food than he could eat, with steaks bigger than he dreamed possible.

However, reality hit him the next day, every bone in his body ached. Coach warned him, but he was not ready for the grueling workouts. Crawling into bed without eating he thought he had died and gone to hell. Halfheartedly he prayed, *Lord I know I'm not much and I know I could be better, but at least you can count on me for trying as hard as I can. I may not be the best, but I try most. Please don't let me fail. Help me find the strength to not only survive but persevere against the odds. I need your help. I can't do it alone and I don't want to go back to Buckatunna. I'll never go back, even if you break my legs like you did Coach, I'll never go back. So I'd appreciate it if you'd help me get through spring training. If you do I promise you I'll go to church some. Really I will....* then he fell asleep exhausted.

For the next two weeks he could barely turn over. Agony alone saved him; all he could do was sleep through the pain. He was too tired to even think about God much less pray. His promises were forgotten. If not for Coach explaining everything and the inner strength brought by his simply touching the black rock he would have lost his scholarship the first semester. True, he was a State All-Star, but to Bama he was a dime-a-dozen. Still, by hustling he made Red Shirt along with the apropos nickname "Ironhead."

Although never homesick, Lew was lonesome, talking to his rock for lack of friendship. At night he often dreamed of Kathy. After trying to call her several times he finally gave up. Instead he wrote her on a team photo postcard: *Hi Kathy, Remember me? I'm the skinny guy in the back. I tried to call, but got no answer. They won't let me use the phone much so I had to write. Will you write?*

"How's that sound?" he asked the rock, finishing the card. *God. If you're really up there, he prayed. Please let her answer this card. I'm so lonesome.*

The rock said nothing and neither did God.

"Love, Lew. Love, Lew? What do you mean, love. Am I an idiot or what. What made me write that?"

Again the rock didn't answer.

It was two weeks before he sent it. Two weeks later it was returned stamped, MOVED LEFT NO ADDRESS. He mailed her a letter this time hoping it might get through; it also returned. Several months later he received a card, postmarked Knoxville, Tennessee: I had to write and thank you for showing me someone cared. You gave me the courage to go back home. I am going to marry my old boyfriend, Larry. I wish the best for you. You are a sweet person. Love, Kathy.

Oh well, who cares. It's what you expected anyway, he concluded, women are like that; they hurt you. What's the point in praying. It's like taking vitamins you never see any results, an talking to God is like talking to my rock, except I can touch my rock.



Army ROTC sounded like a good idea. Unfortunately it apparently it was not for him, while at gunnery practice at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Lew's ear drums were ruptured during cannon firing. His Army career was ended; consequently he would never be able to enter the service. The ROTC commander was upset, but not Lew. There was too much discipline and who needs to hear perfect anyway. He just turned his head to hear better now. Bad hearing was a good reason to stay out of the Korean conflict anyway.

Never feeling the need to prove anything, Lew did not fit in the social order of things at Bama. He was too easy going with ambitions not aimed in the right directions, and the small athletic stipend he received suited him fine. Saving most of it, he bought an old black '41 Chevrolet coupe for \$50. It became his best friend; he took great comfort in sliding underneath to work on it even if it did not need working on, often he closed his eyes feeling confident about knowing

where everything was. He was like the old car, going nowhere, but now he was making it. The Chevy was not beautiful, but it suited him, especially when driving at night with the windows down, radio blaring and the cool clean air racing in, he was alive. Really alive. One morning he tossed his black rock into the bottom of his locker. He had his car and now a friend, a sophomore from Arkansas; he didn't need the rock anymore.

"All women ever do is run away from me, Sonny," Lew confided.

"I know what ya mean, Lew. A good woman's harder to catch than an ole catfish on a Sunday picnic, and even harder to hang on to. Ya best remember that."

"Well I've never been catfishing; if it's no better than losing a girl I don't guess I'll ever go."

"Hold on, I don't want'a mislead ya none on catfishing, but gals now, I know ya know 'bout them."

Lew laughed, "I sure do Sonny and if catching catfish is anywhere as good as getting a girl in the back seat of my old Chevy, yeah.. I guess I'll go with you anytime." But he did not know what it was really like, he was afraid, not of love, he was afraid of losing what he had, and he always lost.

Sonny was a loser too and lost his scholarship. Lew lost his friend. In turn, he studied harder, leaving little time for social life. Continual loneliness led him to take a job in the student cafeteria where he got fired for giving free food to financially strapped students. Fortunately, Ma Britt at a nearby boarding house liked him. He was country, that was important. So, she hired him in the kitchen. The kitchen-help were down-home people and looked up to him. For the first time he knew he had something to offer and he paid his dues, taking them places, loaning money, tutoring them in things they needed to know, like writing checks and reading the books Lew gave them to read.

Looking for ways to earn extra money Lew ran errands for wealthy students. It worked out better than he expected, though they treated him like a klutz, they gave him free booze and spending money for his trouble. Being a Klutz didn't bother him, he felt like one; still, at times he knew he was the only one who had any sense. Cleverly he took the free booze selling it, buying more, making more extra money, more than most rich students got from home.

Occasionally he picked up the old Bible Coach gave him. Coach said it was his mother's.

He casually wondered about religion, like he did about the universe and flying saucers. He read about David, Joseph and Samson, but most of the rest of the old testament was confusing. That along with all the thees and thous made him lose interest. *Who would talk like that*, he thought? That and being suspicious about what he couldn't hear, smell, or touch, he backed away from religion. Still, he had a belief in God; but the church, there was no way... there were too many false people there. Nevertheless, after remembering his promise to God when he was surviving spring training he went to church, but only when he felt like it. Still, it made him feel like he was a better person for having gone. Unfortunately, he felt the preacher was spewing hell fire and damnation right at him; it made him squirm. Finally something good came his way at church during his senior year at Bama, he met Barbara.

"We are all hypocrites, Lew, and what better place to be than in church, at least it helps us try to straighten out," Barbara said. "If you don't go to church, you're letting hypocrites keep you out, which could make you worse than they are. Nobody's perfect, so one way or another everybody's a hypocrite. The problem with guys like you... you think everybody ought to be perfect, but you're far from perfect."

"Yeah, well I can't accept all that stuff: you're not supposed to dance or wear lipstick, or cut your hair and on and on, while you do them

anyway. Why, your good ole Bible thumping brothers are nothing but friggin' fruit-jar-Baptists hiding under bridges, drinking shinny from fruit jars, stoking sister Sarah at the same time.

“Brother Andy spouts off about hell-fire and damnation, and me going to hell in a bucket of worms, then says pray to God and He'll help you get through your tribulations. Well hell's bells if that was true, the holiest place in the world would be the dentist chair. I never heard tell of being saved from the dentist drill. I don't mind living under a good set of values, but I'll be damned if I can respect guidelines set so's they strangle the life out ya. You can't tell me God said anything about lipstick, hair, or dancing, that's just dogma from some weirdo holier-than-thou. I know how to read, the world's worst atrocities were committed by Christians, sticking it to whomever they could, saying it was God's will. Well I don't want any part of anyone controlling my life anyway,” Lew said decisively to Barbara.



Lew always lost when it came to women. He lost Barbara before he found her. Consequently he found himself at the library pouring over books about some new found interests, human behavior, psychology, and philosophy. Determined to unlock puzzles in his head and those he saw around him, Lew's eyes leaped to the explanation of dyslexia, at once recognizing it as the problem which caused him to mix up words and letters.

Afflicted children have mild neurological disabilities which can be compensated through specific teaching.

God, old Coach was smarter than I gave him credit, he thought. If not for him, not only would I still be in Buckatunna, but I probably would be damn near illiterate. I owe that guy more than he'll ever realize. I ought to write him and tell him how I feel about him. He

might not be the smartest man alive, but he's got a PhD in common sense.

Immediately Lew went to the gymnasium. Digging through his locker he found it, the black rock. Rubbing it affectionately on his forehead and big nose to cause it to shine again he massaged it making power and comfort flow to him.

Yes, somehow you will make it, the rock told him.

Lew knew it was true. Coach never lied and neither did the rock and neither did Lew, especially to himself.



Lew's life did not allow for success nor hope, only gratitude for what he was, a normal man who only wanted to survive, and do some good along the way. He easily recognized he was never destined for greatness, just like he never was a hero in any game at Bama. It had nothing to do with his efforts, he chose to believe he was a has-been that never-was and that is what he became. It was not due to his intelligence it had to do with his belief or lack of belief in himself due to his family upbringing.

Lew eventually walked sternly across the graduation stage at the University of Alabama as Lewis Hardhead Harris a Mechanical Engineer destined to join the ranks of dedicated civil servants concerned with supporting the military in the cold war efforts. He was proud of accomplishing his goal of graduating but knew he was not greatness material no more than he did as the bench-warmer basketball player whose top scoring was a total of 100 points during the entirety of his four-year time as a second-stringer.

All systems were Go! Spend, spend, spend, build, build, build; no time to spare. If you don't spend all the appropriations, they cut your budget. It was asinine, but the highest military threat became get production rolling; fix it later! The greatest minds in the war machinery were picked, ushering in the most glorious era in the Department of Defense history. For those who knew how to tap the mother lode, the riches available far surpassed the old oil and gold rush days. *The "DoD rush" was on!*

CHAPTER THREE

The blazing sun struck a welder's arc at a lone figure, then continued cutting through the darkness, burning brightness across a tranquil morning sky.

Quietly a lone bird rose from the distant sea.... gliding across the fiery magnificence... Vurump!

Whump! Whump! Whuuuumptt! Sounds of war weapons suddenly replaced the tranquility. Yet Lew Harris, now a product of his chosen environment, remained transfixed, chewing his well-worn pipe, seeing little of the loveliness, or the hellfire.

Men with nondescript faces, designers of kill ratios, now entered the room. Ignoring Lew, silhouetted against the window. They filed

by like saviors, instead they personified a darker side of man. The grinding, clanking, exploding, mock battlefield of fast-moving tanks and automatic weapon fire tore Lew from his thoughts. He begrudgingly joined the others. *Damn meetings anyway, he thought, everybody talks, but nobody listens, disagreeing afterward. Look at 'em examining their thoughts before they have 'em. They never reveal anything. They just wait for the battle lines of the meeting, then pounce.*

As the Colonel arrived, Lew rose beginning his presentation regarding the effectiveness of JIDS.

"Good morning, I trust we all slept well," Lew offered dryly.

Last night he scarcely slept, lying awake, churning, wanting to tell the truth, knowing they would "kill the messenger." While not timid he remained reluctant, droning on instead about design deficiencies. Ultimately yielding to his true character he began blaming government specifications for the dilemma that plagued the project.

"If proper specs' were written no real problem would exist with JIDS. SYBEX is a creditable contractor; they should yell foul, not us. We force them to follow a megalomania of procurement cycles, projecting nothing but false schedules packed full of innuendo design deficiencies."

Kerplop! Lew dropped a large stack of military standards on the conference room table for effect.

"The Military Specification System wields itself like an illicit Ponzy pyramid, sneaking standards into contracts like a thief hiding dishonorable intentions from an unsuspecting mark. Heaven knows we don't understand them any more than they do! Given simple, direct descriptions, SYBEX would probably fulfill JIDS to the letter. As to the matter of the SYBEX analog chip...."

Colonel Karrington stood quickly slamming his chair against the wall. "I cannot accept that premise, damn it! Every contractor is out to

screw us for all they're worth! Furthermore, I refuse to listen to this garbage! Good day gentlemen!"

Colonel Karrington stormed out of the conference room leaving a legacy in his wake. Each man forcefully scribbled in their "save-your-ass" notebooks.

Damn it! Why wasn't I listening! I don't know what the hell's going on! Why on earth didn't I listen, Charlie Morris, Lew's boss thought, feeling piercing eyes from the civil servant and military attendees. Charlie's mind churned furiously. *That dumb jerk stuck it to my whole group again.*

JIDS, smids. What difference does it make? I can't do anything right, Lew thought trying to regain professional composure.

"Well?" He said, breaking the silence. "I guess we could go on, unless everyone feels the same?"

"There's not much point in continuing until I talk to the Colonel," Dr Willby said, finishing up his notes, closing his book. "I say we call it quits for now." Immediately camp followers shuffled their chairs and left. Lew shook his head disdainfully.

Charlie rose, placing a soggy previously smoked but now unlit cigar in his mouth. Looking at the sunrise he thought of yesterday, fishing with his wife and son, he sought peace, but found none. Chomping with determined passion he relit his junk-yard cigar. A repulsive brown ooze spread over his darkened teeth and he smilingly French inhaled the putrid odor. Turning around suddenly Charlie glared hatefully at Lew.

Not to be intimidated Lew returned the glare, retrieving something from his coat pocket.

Life's full of crap and then you die, Charlie thought. The doctor told him he was as much as a dead man with a suicidal life style looking for a place to die. Yet, somehow the cigar gave him inner peace.

"Buckatunna," Lew muttered puffing to light his pipe. "You know I'm right Charlie," he said, smoke bellowing.

"Right?... Right?!... Bull! Who told you, all you had to do was be right?! You made an ass out of yourself and the whole group while you were at it! You're a good engineer, but your sense of timing is lousy!" Charlie sank into a new-deal government chair. "Damn.. damn.. damn." He shook his head. "Our contract's coming up for evaluation. If heads roll my friend, your's'll be the first! You played basketball in school, you ought to know how to play games. These guys have all the marbles! Haven't you figured that out yet? President Teague spent over \$2.5 trillion on defense. Without that, this nation's economy would fall apart. Do you know what that means? The real economy would be useless without Department of Defense spending! You've got to bend a little my boy," Charlie smiled, obviously calming down. "Considering there are two sides to every question, I'm amazed as to how often you come up on the wrong side."

"Bull Charlie, these people are comfortable with their old problems rather than finding solutions," Lew added.

"Yeah, I know what you're saying. But, don't condemn their judgment because it's different from yours; you both may be wrong! Power struggles, career manipulations, bad organization, and inept personnel are unfortunate side-effects of the system, nevertheless, you've got to give it a chance! Most of these people mean well. They simply learned to work the system, something people like you refuse to do. "That's your problem! You think the entire system's screwed up, but you're the one who's screwed up. Haven't you figured it out yet? Unless you learn to use the system you can't change it! Let me put that another way; if you can't support the whole group, I suggest you make up your mind where you're gonna work! Understood?" Again Charlie glared.

Lew glared back. *Stick it in your ear*, he thought, smiling beautifully.

Charlie smiled back.

In spite of their differences they saw eye to eye, each respected the other's viewpoint and understood.

"I'd like to change the way things are too, but that's about all that stands between us and soup lines. Now pick up your damn papers and get back to your job while you still have one. We need you where you are," Charlie remarked, leaving.

I wonder what's wrong with him lately? He's sure changed, reminds me of Coach; I wonder where old Coach is? Not within 100 miles of this kind of crap that's fer sure. Such thoughts and problems made him search his right pants pocket.

"Damn it! You stupid idiot! You lost it!" Frantically he searched the floor and chair, drawing out antacids, popping four into his mouth in disgust. *God I hate these things*, he thought, chewing his antacid cud. The crunching echoed in his bad ear. Swallowing hard to rid himself of the taste, he angrily puffed smoke bombs. Smoke filled the room. Casually he raised one side of his rear-end to relieve himself from gas. Damn I got crap coming from both ends, he thought. This job's going to kill me or I'm going to kill myself with bad eating and drinking habits. Leaning back in the chair, tilting his head, stinging pipe ooze suddenly tormented his tongue. Defensively he stuck out his tongue, wiping the vile taste on the sleeve of his brown suit jacket.

"I know what you're saying Charlie, but it still sucks!" He said to the empty room. Trying to relax, he slowly glanced at the impressive photographs hanging on the walls. Each destruction device's label boasted proudly of its designated kill ratio, paying tribute to the inhabitants of Fort Yardley, Virginia. High priced buildings and personnel typified the sprawling Army Munitions Research Center. Located in the heart of the military complex, the newly built twin

twenty-three storied military facilities effectively pumped up both civil service and military personnel egos, making pussycats pretend to be tigers. The building's austerity amazed Lew, like the lasting impression of a beautiful bridesmaid in a doomed wedding procession.

Twenty-five years ago when Lew walked off the commencement stage at the University of Alabama, he wanted to change the world. Now he just wanted to get through the day, throwing two more tablets in his mouth. "Mint-green my ass! They taste like friggin' chalk!"

Feeling bitter gall foam against his esophagus and the one-pound potato lump in his chest, Lew left the room.

Looking up from his unending paperwork Colonel Karrington grinned at the sight of Lew passing. He purposely placed his desk so he could see who was wandering about.

Oh what I'd give to wipe the grin off that jerk's face, Lew reflected, scraping his tongue with his teeth trying to rid himself of the combination chalk mint and pipe bite. Dryly spitting out dead taste buds he entered the hallway.

Colonel Karrington mulled over the situation, enjoying the power he had; he liked making people like Lew squirm, hired because the system could not cope with the environment it created. His and the contractor's needs never coincided. His primary requirement was to spend money. If procurement was held up careers disappeared, it was damn sure not going to be his. It was ludicrous; but that's the way it was.

Those damn engineers think all there is to defense is whether a system works or not. Why does he think we need inflatable aircraft and tanks parked across the globe? It's not how well we design defense systems, but the quantity the enemy thinks we have. It's how soon we respond that's important. Fake aircraft deters the enemy better than some stupid electronic chip 6,000 miles away. We have backup systems to backup systems for that purpose. That dumb jerk, Lew,

doesn't live in the same world as me. Sure we make mistakes, who wouldn't after all the military spends \$2.4 million a minute. Let Congress worry about saving money not us and certainly not me.

Not one person, not even Colonel Karrington, could comprehend the trillions of dollars spent on defense. The lackadaisical approach by our politicians in appropriating funds was preposterous, but, how could they envision spending \$2.4 trillion in six years on defense? It was more than anyone could dream of, \$15 million per hour. Consequently the smell of money spent on war machinery permeated everything the DoD touched.

Feeling like a whipped dog on a short leash, Lew was oblivious to the Colonel's thoughts or anybody's for that matter. "Big damn deal," he muttered swaggering to regain composure. *See if I care; they can bend over and kiss their own ass. I ain't gonna ever do it anymore. I'm getting tired of this. Up, down, up, down, so's you don't know which way's up. If they would only slow down, things would get better; instead they want to speed up so nobody can do a decent job. To hell with defense preparedness, if it breaks they throw more money at.*

Stepping outside, Lew glanced around. *Down-loading cost. That's the name of the game. And, these buildings typify the gullibility of the taxpayer. They look like cheap monuments, rather than as expensive as they are. Maybe the architect tried to save a buck or two, but those egomaniacs probably fired him, or had him shipped somewhere. Still, a lot of costs were down-loaded he surmised, looking at the cracks in the facade, rust oozing out from the stuccoed walls.*

Though never seeing themselves at fault the Army was as guilty of down-loading as the Colonel's "damn contractors" were. From a distance the massive polished structures indicated they housed important people; instead they simply maintained a perpetual paper generating machine of vast emptiness. Like a Chameleon-Trojan horse their inept actions increased the need for additional planning and

administration, creating mind-warp excitement for the crisis-oriented managers, producing mice from foolish lions. Lew, however, worked for SENTECH, an off-base "hot-body shop." Four years ago it was on base. It's expanding role created space problems and the Army asked them to move off-base. In true Murphy's Law, Lew chose the wrong side of town to locate himself. The new office location caused him to spend an extra hour bumper to bumper on roads designed for half the traffic it now carried, in his car that was deadly. The MP's refused to allow him on the base anymore, claiming his car created air, ground, and noise pollution.

Lew often put off trips inside the "mouth of the beast." Yet, he never missed an opportunity to conduct business face to face. Scurrying from building to building, no matter where he went high paid people ducked their obligations, creating delays upon delays. Each stop made him wonder how the government managed to exist. Sure there were good honest people working all around him, but somehow he seemed to be destined to work with the opposite, the ones who were good old boy incompetent.

Awkwardly jiggling he ran toward the shuttle bus. *I'd better get to the office if I expect to get there before I'm late for quitting time*, he thought laughingly. Climbing on the bus Lew selected a window seat in the rear. Painted putrid olive-drab, the bus tried to disguise its true identity, a school bus. *Now that's an apropos name*, he thought, *olive drab; that's what this job's all about, drab crap!*

As the bus rambled on Lew saw Charlie Morris in a government taxi the next lane over. He could not see who was riding with him, no doubt more jerk water military retirees to stick in the stable. One rider wiped his hand with a white handkerchief.

Without thinking Lew succumbed to a frustrated urge. He spat out the window hoping to hit the taxi, which sped on oblivious to his actions. "Missed," he said, then tucked his head mortally ashamed.

Sheepishly he looked to see if anyone noticed. *What an idiot! Oh God... what an idiot I am sometimes. You big dummy, what if someone saw you? I can't believe you act so stupid sometimes. You wouldn't have done that if you'd had your rock. My God, what have I done with you, Lew thought searching through his pockets again. The rock wasn't there. It's my environment; I'm starting to crack up, that's what I am. The next thing will be the paddy wagon. Damn JIDS anyway, why do I always get the ones that are full of crap? Those jokers 'll cannibalize 20 systems to get one working. If they stick those systems in sensitive areas our nuclear security'll be as safe as a single tit on a momma pig with a thirty-pig litter. Damn the government and their high-speed response time. They jeopardize more lives than all the Ruskiies combined. They won't listen about SYBEX's temperature sensitive CPS-782. It's like they want it to fail. That analog chip will never function consistently with a temperature variance greater than five degrees. That means the system designed to protect our nuclear systems and warheads will be worthless. Any idiot with a blow torch can breach them without the alert force being the wiser. What's worse, they're putting the same chip in warheads, just what we need if war breaks out, sending duds at the enemy while they blow us to smithereens.*

The taxi carrying Morris stopped at SENTECH. The Army wanted an off-base location for SENTECH and that was what they got. The former x-rated book store housed 75 TEAM contractor personnel. New facade or not the place still looked like the ex-x-rated book store it was. Charlie got out, struggling with his and Congressman Gibson's briefcases. Grumbling to himself, he held the door to SENTECH open for congressman and retired Air Force Major, Ron Bunnt, working for CONTECH, sub-contractor on the AN/MXQ-T23A.

"After you gentlemen," Charlie said politely. "You can see we keep a low profile."

Compared to the bright sunshine outside the office was a dungeon. The dark interior was foreboding, as though housing a den of thieves who carved up recent acquisitions. The men inside made only a portion of the salaries the corporation headquarters could pay from profits that poured in through creative bookkeeping. SENTECH was paid for a certain level of work output not the number of people who work there, justified as long as they kept up the pace, penalized if not.

"Make yourselves at home gentlemen," Morris said, placing the briefcases on the floor, feeling his fingers ache from the heavy load. "I'll see if I can rustle up some coffee."

"Can I help you Charlie?" Ron said.

"No thank you I'm sure Ms. Murphy would be happy to get some. Betsy I would appreciate it if you would get these two distinguished gentlemen some coffee and make it black. That's right isn't it?" Morris said checking.

"Yes, thank you," Ron said eyeing Betsy. "But none for the good Congressman."

"Sure thing," she replied. "Charlie, do you want some too?"

"Yes, please," Charlie said noticing the dark brown circle spreading from the cigar he hastily put in his coat pocket. He grimaced pulling the soggy thing out, casually letting it fall in the trash can.

Ron Bunnt faced Betsy Murphy. "Hi! I'm Ron. I just wanted to meet the person who's responsible for all those laws I keep tripping over."

"Wrong Murphy I'm afraid," Morris interjected.

"Afraid so," Betsy replied. "But if that guy made a dime every time Murphy's law happens I wish I was."

"Are you sure you don't need any help Ms. Murphy," Ron said grinning at Betsy, seeing Charlie's antics with the cigar at the same time. He loved making people nervous, it made his day.

"No thank you," she said walking off with a smile, knowing he was hitting on her. A little tingle ran over her as she thought about it, but tonight she wanted to be alone.

Later, Dr Willby walked into Charlie's office, "Hi again, Congressman Gibson, Ron," he said robustly shaking hands. "I see you already met our illustrious Charlie Morris, and Ms. Murphy's famous coffee. Sorry I was held up; but you know how meetings go; Colonel Karrington came up with a hot project. Has Charlie filled you in on everything you need to know and didn't want to know at the same time?"

"Pretty much," the Congressman said. "There are just a few questions I want to ask before we go."

Lew Harris strolled in, stopping at Betsy's desk. "Hi Betsy! How's my gal this fine morning, I mean evening?"

Leaning over, he looked into the cleavage of her larger-than-life breasts, which peeped out the top of her blouse. He suspected Betsy went to great lengths to select such blouses, especially designed to snare eyeballs. Whatever the reason, they had a perfect kill ratio on her intended target. Lew lingered, inhaling the magnificent fragrance she wore. "Let's tie one on tonight, I promise I'll fix breakfast this time," he whispered.

"No Lew. You did not receive any messages while you were out," Betsy nodded her head backwards, indicating as she typed. Lew looked up to see Dr Willby in Morris' office cubicle, along with the two guys he had seen earlier in the base taxi. He could not see who they were, but heard Morris' voice.

"Okay Betsy, thank you very much. I'll just put my nose to the grindstone," Lew said, once more leaning down to mutter. "Bet they're conferring on ways to change the laws of gravity." She shook her head.

Knowing instinctively Dr Willby and Morris were somehow discussing their contract, Lew slinked back to his cubicle in the bull-

pen think-tank. "I need a fresh cup of goobers," he said passing his buddy.

"Yeah, I know what you mean, Lew. Hey, I heard about the visitors. Those guys were crunching jaw breakers pretty loud, if you know what I mean," Jack said peeping over the partition.

"Yup, well I can see a big drunk coming on," Lew added. "You want to come over tonight for a few brews?"

"I'd better bow out Lew," Jack regretted.

"I guess we'll have another `ass chewing' session Monday morning, complete with old war stories and cigar smoke."

Walking to his office Lew dropped the papers on his messy desk, glancing over the mess. "There it is." He picked up the black rock, stuck it in his right pants pocket and headed to the coffee pot.

Man I thought I'd lost you, Lew thought to the rock.

The rock didn't reply.

Lew needed his coffee, it bolstered him in a sick world that was not to his liking. "Damn wouldn't you know it, it's Friday and after all the bull I've been through today, there's no coffee! Well at least somebody put a new pot on."

Lew pulled the pot part of the way out from the dripping black syrup, tipping it slightly to pour a cup, ignoring the hissing coffee being spilled on the hot pad. "Someday I am going to learn to do that without spilling it," Lew remarked to Jack.

"The trick is to wait until the damn thing finishes," his buddy retorted looking over the partition wall.

"Thanks Jack, I'll try to remember that!"

Lew held up an unopened can of coffee.

"Hey, do you know there are only 13 ounces in these one-pound coffee cans?"

"Really? What the hell? At least they kept the same size can. That would screw up my workshop if they hadn't. Now how about letting me get some work done around here."

"Damn Jack! Life's getting to be like this damn can. We get short changed to hell and back and guys like you bend over and take more. What's the use? I send you to school, buy you books and look what it got ya. You work in a dump like this, and I gotta work with guys who save coffee cans for a living."

"I wouldn't gripe too loud; those guys up there got all the coffee. Your Ms. Twinkle Toes said one was a congressman."

"Whoops! I'm shaking already, I better get my butt back."

Sipping his coffee safely at his desk Lew leaned back in his chair thinking. Quickly picking up the phone he pressed Betsy's IC number.

"Betsy Murphy speaking," came the sparkling answer.

"Hi Sweetie, it's me again. Your ole Lonesome Lew. I just thought I'd hit on you again."

"Hi," she replied glancing at the reflection of Morris' office in the window before she spoke. Betsy conveniently located her desk so she could keep an eye on her boss's office, for her benefit, not his. "I figured that would be you. I don't know if I'm up to another all-nighter so soon. I swear I'm still sore from the last one."

"I'll kiss it and make it all better," Lew said grinning.

"Not this time Lew, I gotta go. Here comes the good doctor," Betsy hastily commented and the phone went dead.

That evening, looking for food in his bacteria laden refrigerator, deep growlings in Lew's overactive belly grew louder. *What you gonna do el-dumbo?* He thought.

You're trying to lose weight aren't you? He conjured from his rock.

Yeah, but missing lunch doesn't make good sense and to top it all I lost my only chance at sex.

You tried health spas and jogging once, try them again, the rock scolded.

Naw. That was too much like work; I like work, but working out is ridiculous. The main reason I went in the first place was to meet interesting women. But, after getting a good look at myself the mirror, sopping sweating wet, with my baggy work-outs and beer belly hanging out, the only thing I could get from a female is a laugh. That I don't need. "I guess I over eat and drink to compensate for wantin' to run away from life, like alcoholics and people who commit suicide do. Thank God, I don't take myself seriously. Those other idiots are misguided," Lew said to the rock.

No answer.

"I'll have ta be careful not to be so serious. It's better to get drunk than to kill yourself or someone else and tonight I want ta get drunk. I don't see how people drink and drive. It scares the hell out of me to think about killing somebody when I'm sober, much less drunk," Lew continued.

The rock agreed.

Celibacy, now that's not part of the bargain.

The rock didn't understand.

Retrieving a cold beer, he would forgo eating. "Buckatunna! Home and only a few brews away from oblivion." He took a big swig and placed his beer on the counter, then searched his pocket for change. "Those corner stores scalp you... but it still beats standing in line at the supermarket." Absentmindedly he threw a crumpled bill and the loose change in the kitchen junk drawer. For some reason he hated coins, paying only with paper money, wadding up the change, never looking or counting to see if it was correct. It was not that he trusted the clerks, he had no idea one way or another, it was just the way he was.

"Well son," he preached plopping in his broken-down chair, spilling beer. "It's like I keep telling you, you pays your money and

takes your chances, and then they fires you." Tilting the beer he toasted an invisible god.

After savoring the quietness a moment he picked up the remote control and switched on the 24-hour news channel, not wiping the beer from his pants and shirt. The insulting TV blared garbage to every nook and cranny of the tiny trailer. It was not a comfortable place and certainly not one most men his age would live in. Its shabbiness looked even worse by the condition he kept it in. Bare light bulbs protruded from stained ceilings casting a glaring light at the darker reaches of the hodgepodge. The once gleaming fixture covers lay stacked in various closets, no point in putting them on just to take them off again when the bulb burned out.

"Buckatunna!" He groaned feeling the spilled beer's wetness. Disgustedly picking up the newspaper he turned to the want-ads.

I might as well start looking, I can smell a can-job a mile off. Those S.O.B.s wouldn't act that way if somebody would sic the GAO on 'em. There's going to be a big blow off in this country someday. I just know it, and it's going to set things like that damn JIDS crap straight. There are too many takers and not enough givers and straightenouters. If something doesn't happen soon we'll all go down the toilet. Oh Lord God, you got to help me... I get so confused. What's the point of life anyway. Why does it seem that I'm the only one who cares? What's wrong with the rest of the world? Why can't they see what's happening.

He continually wondered about the complexity of it all.

I hope I am not becoming paranoid, he thought to the rock. Somebody has to direct this mess, there are too many coincidences for it to be just accidental. Someone has to have a design on it, right or wrong. Someone that only has our best interest at heart, I hope. Surely it can't be orchestrated by the legions of marauding idiots on the base. Why can't it all be simple?

The rock knew but would not say.

A simple Quixotic plan would be the Golden Rule, Lew continued thinking. Why does life have to be so difficult? More evil always takes over when we prosecute the others. Is there any hope?

The rock didn't know.

"To hell with'em all!"

The rock did not agree.

Angrily he threw the paper to the floor and picked up a well-worn book thumbing it. "I know I put a bookmark in someplace," he grumbled and began reading anyway. Too much beer and emotional stress made it hard to read and his mind wandered in and out of sleep. The book slid off his lap joining previous layers on the floor. Someday he would get it all together, but not now, he needed inspiration for that, now he was only inspired for getting drunk to forget.

The nightmare and reality of his youth continued to inflict him. Blocking any thoughts about it, he resorted long ago to using the town's name as a curse word. The only good thing he remembered there was the well water. It probably still tasted good; but he would never find out. It was easier to force his past and everything it stood for out of his life. Stubbornly he refused to remember, but times like these made his mind go where it wanted, when it wanted.

"Buckatunna," he muttered and his groggy mind produced persistent reflections of a skinny, impoverished, barefoot youngster. In complete despair and loneliness he wept in his sleep, plunging deeper into the grips of another alcoholic torture.

The rock didn't like to see his friend this way, but understood.

Haunted by voiceless sorrows, life often involves reoccurring situations we refuse to deal with, along with brief interrelationships serving the same in others. As such, one man's happiness is another man's hell; hence, happiness to some lies in remembering, to others in forgetting.

CHAPTER EIGHT

George Brannon, copywriter for WGNO TV at Silver Springs, Maryland, was a prisoner of his own time. Every day he put off leaving his favorite watering hole, the old "Hideaway Club," until the last minute. Sometimes he even stayed until the kids were in bed; his better days. Today against his better judgement he went home only to find himself immediately embroiled in another family blowup involving his oldest daughter Barbara. It devastated him.

"I don't care what you say Daddy! What's the big deal anyway? If they don't want me in that stupid riding club then I don't want to be in it. I've been telling you that for weeks, but you won't listen. I don't want to fight about it. And besides that, all you ever do is gripe about things. I never see you fighting back about anybody's so called civil rights. Why do you expect me to fight about something like this when you never do," Barbara said angrily!

"Watch how you speak to your Daddy young lady!" Emily said.

"That's alright baby, I guess I got it coming," George said sadly. "I haven't been much of fighter since you've been around, have I? A lot of things have changed in the last twenty years, including me. You don't know what happened before you were born and don't care about ancient history."

Pulling up his pants leg George said, "You've seen this scar. I told you it happened when I was a kid, it did, but I was nineteen. I thought myself and a bunch of others could help change things in this country. You don't know anything about the "Yippie" movement in the 60's, but I barely missed being charged along with the "Chicago Seven". I got this injury when I was with over a thousand others..."

"So what Daddy?" Barbara interrupted, "I don't see any statues to you, so why don't you let me grow up the way I want to! Just leave me alone and don't pull me down your well," she said angrily and stormed out the front door!

George stood in silence for a while.

"I don't know what's the matter with that kid lately. She always seems ready to bawl, or bless me out," Emily said starting back to the kitchen.

"It's a good thing both of the kids aren't that way. We should've named them day and night instead."

After dinner he picked up his violin, placing it gently under his chin and started to play, but stopped short, the weight of the music would be more than he could bear. He felt mortally wounded. Music was not in him. Too many thoughts blocked his mind. He headed to the garage. Dejected, he slowly went down the stairs to his to his old MG, spotless in the garage. He stared into nothingness, finally he opening his tool crib, sliding a box aside to retrieve his special bourbon. *Why won't she stand up for her rights. Most members of the Potomac Riding Club are white, they've got no right to kick her out, he thought. God what a woose I've become.*

"What the hell! You calls `um as you see's `um."

Taking a big swig, he shivered up and down his spine as the alcohol did its job. "Damn!" He shivered again.

Never was much of a drinker, but you'd think I could at least stop shivering, he thought.

Turning the glass up and throwing the rest down his throat he placed his hands on his burning stomach and pushed gently, hoping for some comfort. It was not the booze that hurt, it was a sense of loss. Not just the loss with Barbara, but his life. He spent a life time living in the past, it was not easy.

Maybe we should'a stayed in Iowa, he remorse. What good are dreams if based on fairy tale lies? I'm like the falling tree in a voiceless forest, a life with no meaning, soon becomes a sound with no hearing. Nobody knows who I am, or even that I exist. What's the point? Who cares?

"Yeah, what's the big damn deal?" He said leaning against his MG. "Who gives a damn?" *Yeah all I ever do is take up space.*

People with inner conflict cling to dreams. The moment they lose faith life seems hopeless. What do you do when your dreams die? In his mind's eye, his thoughts were both real and imagined and his dreams, well they crumbled at every turn.

Once optimistic, now his idealistic hopes were dashed.

Secure in bed, eyes closed, his indignation drove him to despair. He remained dead-awake, seeing his failures through closed eyes, dreading reality.

As it so often happens, things go from bad to worse. The next day Barbara disappeared on the way to her ballet class. They were devastated as no word came concerning her disappearance. Regulations did not allow for police to take action until she was missing 48 hours; too many kids and adults disappear overnight only to return or show up at a friend's house after spending the night out.

Days turned to weeks and still no word. Two months later the Maryland State Juvenile Police called advising them she was in the Holy Cross Hospital. Apparently a young man booted her out of his apartment because she was about to have a baby; consequently, Barbara rushed into the student union building at Saint Columbia College complaining of stomach pains. She asked for directions to the lady's room and gave birth unaided to a baby boy.

Several girls reported the incident after seeing her sitting in the stall with a faint grin holding the infant. The baby was blue when the paramedics got there. Barbara was doing fine. The infant died. George and Emily were crushed. Sure they made mistakes, but this was more than they could bear. Things like this only happened to those who don't care. How could they have missed that she was pregnant? She looked normal. No weight gain or anything. There were mood swings and not wanting to eat; but, pregnant? It never crossed their mind. Where did they go wrong? What would their friends think? The trauma pointed out how severely outside forces affected their life. In despair they turned to the counsel of Father Lewis at Good Shepherd Evangelical Church.

"Material wealth doesn't bring happiness, Daddy, and the stuff I use is less harmful than the whiskey you guzzle!" Barbara shouted.

"You sound like I did when I was your age. Well, let me tell you I was wrong then, and you're wrong now! You kids are determined to make the same mistakes we did. Don't they teach you anything in school? When you buy illegal substances you're dealing with the worst criminal possible. You think the joker who sells you dope is your friend. Well let me tell you sweetie; it ain't so! That bastard's as crooked and as slimy as the worst element on the streets. They'll all murder, steal, rape, and plunder society until they're killed by the sub-level they come from. You've got to get away from those types of people and not

accept their filthy life style. There's a lot of good out there if you'll take responsibility, get your education and stand up for your rights."

"Good grief Daddy. It's different now and an education is worthless. Nobody can get a decent job; and my teachers only know how to teach what's in the stupid books. If something worth teaching hit them in the face they wouldn't know what to do with it. The curriculum has no relevancy in the real world. Kids bring street violence into the schools because teachers don't understand our needs. I don't need to go back. I don't care what you say, I've got all the education I need and I'm not going back! You can't make me! If you do I'll run away again!"

"There! You see what we're up against, Father. Their generation is hell-bent on nothing. So street smart as to be smart assed instead; too dumb to realize they're unsuited for any society. Theirs is not a society. I give up! We can't talk to her anymore; she won't listen. She's so full of negativism and hate she can't function as an individual. Look at the way she dresses. Every kid looks the same. They've given up all traces of individualism allowing an ill-conceived and deranged society to dictate their life. That's not society; it's a hellish anarchy. I give up!"

At that Father Lewis asked Barbara to step outside while he continued the discussion with George and Emily. "You can't give up. The only way you can survive is to renew a genuine effort. Reject the street scene. You say you want to return to Iowa; but you don't have to move away. In fact that would be running away, just like she did, and sending Barbara to a boarding school won't take care of the problem either. That would only help her to run away again. I do agree with you in one sense; you need to put some space between you and the maniacal surroundings we are faced with! You've got to see the real tragedies; sure they aren't necessarily your problems but they affect you the same. They may seem great and to you and many others they truly are. But, much worse is to never have a chance by not knowing love, happiness, tenderness, or even the touch of someone who cares

when you are down. Your daughter needs you. Her so-called friends are like eagles raised in a chicken coup, never knowing what's up or down; instead of flying and raising to the heights of power it stays on the ground scratching for worms, never able to experience what God intended for it, it remains an ugly chicken instead of the magnificent bird it is.

"Derek Prince said, 'Those of us who belong to older generations can complain about Generation X or Generation Next or whatever we may call them. We can point out all their faults and failings. But the crisis did not begin with them. It is the older generations who are to blame. It is our generation. We failed to present them with the truth. We failed to teach them godly discipline. Now God is judging us through our children. I believe we are all going to reap the rewards of our misdeeds during our life-time and at judgement day, especially with respect to our children. God loves our Children.

"This may be hard to take George and Emily, but I sincerely believe no child runs away from security, and security is found in the affairs of the heart. Sure, there are extenuating circumstances, and maybe you think you fit that category. I don't. Nonetheless, Barbara felt you were too tied up in yourselves to listen to her problems. Yes, she loves and respects you. Consequently, she didn't want to disappoint you, so she ran away. No, she wasn't afraid of your punishment; it was your disappointment that she couldn't face. Can't you see that? She ran to keep from hurting you more than she already has. You've got to accept that burden. I believe our children are the first and foremost important aspect of our lifetime, our real legacy! If we screw that up, what good is success? You've got to make some serious changes in the way you look at your children and yourselves.

"Remember you are the adult and they are the kids. Sure they're rebellious, you were too; that's how God made us. When someone or something tries to force you into a mold, you flail or fight like a caged

animal against everyone who comes into your cubical. Teenagers are no different than you. Each struggling young life is a magnificent creation, don't let them waste it and don't stifle their potential.

"Sure they need discipline, but don't put so much emphasis on small things. Look at the big picture. If God harped on you like you harp on your kids, how far do you think he would get? Loosen up. Just being there makes a difference. Be there when they need you, and they will come to you. That's if you don't shut them out. It's easy to shut them out by letting circumstances rob you of the best things in life, but don't let it happen. They need you now more than ever.

"Give them you time and attention whenever they want it, not when you do. Don't watch TV or read a book when they talk to you. Listen to them; really listen and read them not the book. They need your undivided attention, and Washington needs your family in one piece, as a viable role model, not someone from the outside looking in. Heaven knows we've got enough of that. Granted you're mad and discouraged. Admit it. Go on from there. Every day is full of promise. You simply must do better. You say you don't have time, but no one has more time. It's what you choose to do with what you've got that determines where you'll be at the end of each day, not circumstances. What if God gave up like you are contemplating? Where would you be now. What if everyone gave up?" Father Lewis asked.

"If you worked at Disney World, would you be Mickey Mouse? Neither do you have to be affected by Washington D.C., any more than back in Iowa. You were not happy then, and you knew it.

"The problem is, most good role models moved to the suburbs. Consequently Washington lost its real resources, the family. The only authentic growth industry here now is drugs. You're too quick to criticize, blaming others for what's wrong, never seeing beyond your nose. What if you never knew what love was like? How would you learn it? Could you find it on the streets of D.C.?"

“You're right about one thing though, we're in danger of anarchy on the streets, right in the middle of freedom. As with any community, economic ties rule the society, and unfortunately right now that society is established by drugs, not the family, at least almost never the family. There are very few family ties left. No father, mother, sister, or cousins to fall back on. Often there are only single parents, and frequently they use the child, selling them to perverse sex to get money to buy drugs.

“With no bloodline except what they find in the street, blood is not thicker than the economics of the streets. Blacks make up less than 15 percent of our nation, while they make up 50 percent of prison inmates, and most of those say they're better off in prison than on the streets of Washington. That's not bigotry, that's stupidity. My friends, not just you, but all of us, simply go along to get along. That has to change. Washington is part of the problem. Scandalously racked with indecisive leadership, it is not even a well-rehearsed play. Rather, it is more like an improvisation studio with a large stage and players falling off the edges, dancing too far away from the music.

“The city is owned by politicians who are driven by two forces, the need to feel important, and the desire to feed the political system. Irrational behavior and meaningless intentions continuously occur, with symbiotic experimentation while everybody looks on for either good or bad results, according to whose pot it needs to boil in. Of mice and men, there seems to be an attempt to degrade mankind. Remember, what I said, give your kids the gift of time. It's what they need and it's your cheapest commodity. We have worthwhile inputs if we can only find someone to listen. And for heaven's sake give your kids the right to privacy, the same as you'd expect. No, don't allow them to stay excessively behind closed doors. For I'll tell you this, anything done in excess is wrong, for you, your children, and society. That means everything, overeating, *drinking*, music, TV, and religion, or anything else that takes you away from what you should do.

"You must help them set reasonable limits that'll help them make sensible decisions; yet always respect their viewpoint. Many times their decisions will be different from yours, or not as you'd like it to be but it will remain uniquely theirs. Let them have the same right to free thinking as you had. Sure you need to express your opinion to them, and mold their young minds into having proper attitudes and thoughts. But, the trick is to do it in the same manner you would to another adult.

"Let them make mistakes. That's the only way they can learn independence. Hopefully, they'll recognize the importance of your values, however you have to live up to them. False values create falseness, falseness that a teen can spot a mile away, and that my friends will breed monumental mistrust to which you must replace with trust. Trust from each other... for each other. Above all be generous, not just money and material things, but yourself, especially time and praise. Praise their trying, not just accomplishments. You've got to learn yourself give and take with each other, listening to what they really say.

"Try this formula. Luck spelled L.U.C.K.. "L" meaning love, "U" is understanding, and "C" is compassion and "K." is for knowledge of God. If you apply everything you do for you kids and yourself through the filters of LOVE, UNDERSTANDING, COMPASSION, and KNOWLEDGE of God, then there's hope. If not I'm afraid a move back to Iowa, or where ever you came from won't save you.

"You're a capable writer George. Why don't you try to affect a change? We could use better communication in the news media, the truth doesn't get out nowadays."

"Yeah," George muttered. "I hear what you're saying; but pray tell me, Father, what is the truth?"

"That my friend is what we need good writers for. To help us find what we need to know as truth," Father Lewis said.

"I suggest you start flat on your face."

George didn't know what the truth was anymore, for Christ or whatever, but he knew he could never be silent again, that was the past. Feeling like he let his family down, he worked feverishly beginning to submit writings to the Washington Post, of all things. To his surprise some were accepted as fillers on irregular pages, but it was a start. He began to pray and read the Bible. "Oh God, help me lead my family into a newness of life, and give me the gift of words like I used to have," he prayed. "I know I have been lost in my own indulgences and even in the very world that I vowed so long ago to change. Please Lord, help me to return to you and what you stand for. Forgive me and help me to regain the purposes you called me to. Most especially help me regain my family's trust. Teach me to become the father I should have been. Help me to look to you and not mankind. Use me, Lord. I offer myself, saying Here am I."

One night George worked on an article, he experienced a trembling sensation as if God were moving in him just as he prayed would happen. "Yowee!" He screamed as his mind raced. He pounded out his thoughts on his old typewriter in amazing fury. *I want to be part of a change, not the stupid change I thought that was right, but the right change for now. Maybe through my meager efforts other people will also become part of it. Maybe a new generation will speak openly again, changing the silent majority into a bold majority,* he thought. Exhausted he finally quit and drug himself to bed. Instead of sleep he lay awake only to get up full of electricity knowing he was on track.

**WASHINGTON D.C. CAPITAL OF
FREEDOM AND THE CAPITAL
OF AIDS.**

by George Brannon.

The incidence of AIDS per million population In Washington DC is 1,427,

four times as many as the entire state of California, where one would suspect to be far greater incidence.

Washington's totals for incidents per millions are greater than 35 of the 50 states combined, more than any state or city of the world, making it the AIDS capital of the world.

AIDS makes Washington a hotbed when it comes to gay-rights. Many formerly moderate people change their position due to the huge number of AIDS cases. The gay-rights people claim the high AIDS percentages are due to the large numbers of prostitutes and drug users, not....



Fresh from his acceptance at the Washington Post George feverishly attempted to find a niche. While involved as a volunteer with the school system George helped set up a sting against drug dealers within the school system, apprehending three school officials. The officials, a principal, assistant principal, and a physical education instructor were suspended instead of jailed, George wondered why? A periodic weekly docket check uncovered the same officials in separate schools. Apparently they tried to start a network to move drugs within the system. "We regret things like this, and we are going to do our best to see that situations like these are not part of the school system in the future," George said in a press interview as the new official spokesperson for the school board volunteer group. The three individuals were arrested buying cocaine and crack from an

undercover policeman. "We can't promise a drug-free school system, however, if more parents volunteer for the welfare of the children's environment, then we will eventually reach a better objective."

Two weeks later the ongoing efforts the sting uncovered the biggest seizure of drugs in Montgomery County, MD. Police arrested an Episcopal clergyman distributing methamphetamine. Local and federal law enforcement officers in several nearby counties were involved in the operation.

Sex Education is a Family Affair.

by George Brannon.

Communication is key to reducing teen pregnancies. Parents do not talk to their kids about sex and hate sex education in schools. Nearly one-quarter of this nation's children grow up in poverty, putting twenty-five percent of our future at stake.

Sex education should be a family affair and parents should be encouraged to establish their role as primary sex educators. Only thirty-three percent of students say their parents discuss sex with them at all. Even so, how many had gut-level conversations with their parents about it?

Adolescent pregnancies in blacks and Latin American ethnic groups are typically higher nationwide than other segments of the white population; but in Washington DC, larger percentages of

ethnic population exists so the problem is epidemic.

Many young minority teenage girls think they need to "make love" very often before you "catch a baby." Ignorance about the relationship between sex and pregnancy is a primary reason.

Birthing and complications cause one out of five teenage deaths. Furthermore 80% of pregnant teens are likely to be from a poor background. Eighty-five percent of all teen pregnancies result in female dropouts from school. How many male drop outs are related? Such youngsters cannot work to earn enough money to feed themselves and their children so they soon give up hope of getting ahead or turn to selling drugs.

Fifty-percent remain on welfare for eight or more years; twenty-five percent will be pregnant within the next year....



To Lew Harris' life never changed. While little separates winners and losers with Lew it was neither seconds or inches but that of keeping his mouth shut, something he could not do. He resigned at China Lake after losing his cool over ELECFAB being given another CWMSRAT contract. Wanting to take it easy and run away at the same time, Lew accepted a "job-shop" contract with CONTECH at Fort Walton Beach,

Florida, hiring himself to an off-base contractor for temporary expertise in military procurement. Immediately he was confronted with the AN/MXQ-T23A Phased Array Modular Jammer, PAMJ, it was a mistake too, they knew it just as well as he did.

Lew withdrew his job-shop contract with CONTECH.

That damn defunct system will never work, but when they asked me to sign blank time-sheets to turn into SEPAC according to their needs I had to draw the line, Lew thought. Somehow the unsolicited, non-competitive bid contract had to be pushed out in the open. The sole-source contract paved the way to give buddy-buddy friends a direct PAMJ sub-contract. The whole thing amounted to nothing more than an official money laundering for end-of-the-year fiscal restraints money within the government, totally avoiding the Competition in Contracting Act.

"Damn it all, just once I would like to have it all fall into place," Lew cursed throwing his office junk into his ratty '72 Corvette for what seem like the hundredth time. "Baby, it's just you and me all the way. We're just alike," Lew spoke to his car. "How I get in so much trouble trying to do the right thing is beyond me. It seems like only yesterday when I was hired at CONTECH, now I'm on my way out again. When will I learn to keep my big mouth shut. There's no way I could have keep quiet about AN/MXQ-T23A though. Hell PAMJ dropped that one in my lap."

"Ugghh." He grunted, ducking his head to plunge into the cramped Corvette quarters. Beach towels covered worn out bucket seats. Gently he adjusted himself to escape the menacing springs that jutted out. It was an act of skill to slide his six-foot nine-inch into the bucket seat; but he loved every part of his Corvette. Nevertheless, after the years of his punishment the car was a junk heap. A weak battery clicked the solenoid relay several times before the reluctant starter gradually turned the greasy engine over; blue smoke belched out.

"Atta baby," he said forcing a grin while fiddling with the air-conditioning, hoping to jiggle it "on." A nasty rubber smell ushered out. Grinning big time he begged, "Come on a/c; I need you now more than ever." The smell of burnt gym shoes emerged. Then sounding like a screwdriver dropped into it, the air conditioner stopped.

"Do you need a new air-conditioner installed in your old car?" The radio yelled at him.

"No I don't need a new air-conditioner, damn it, and I sure don't need to be hassled by some ass-hole on the radio in my own car," he bellowed turning it off, striking the dash board a resounding blow!

Oblivious to the disgust he created "Iron Head" drove on. Corvettes were supposed to be gleaming and speedy; his fit none of those preconceptions. Blue smog from oil blowing past the pistons and a plugged PCV valve made it even worse. The problem made him hotter. He rolled down the windows in self-defense. Exhaust rolled in.

Crashing across the railroad tracks made yellowed praying hands come down fall from the sun visor. He scarcely noticed it with all the commotion. Papers swirled in the back compartment making a "whack-whack-whack" sound before exiting out the window. Everything he owned was in turmoil. He was turmoil, but that was okay. So what? He had two weeks severance pay and didn't give a damn, at least right now.

Arriving at his trailer park, he found his next-door neighbor was moving out, blocking his parking slot.

"Dad-gum-it!"

Circling back through the bumpy shell driveway he stirred up billowing clouds of white chalky dust. The nasty stuff continually streaked his car making it look worse.

That poor lady is hanging out her clothes. Doesn't she know they're getting just as dirty in this filthy place?

After parking in a visitor parking spot, he turned the engine off; the tortured Corvette's engine dieseled haphazardly.

"Damn!" He cursed. "Why do they have to make everything so difficult?"

Embarrassed, the piss-yellow Corvette shook itself off. He slammed the door hoping the latch would catch, it did not.

"Who gives a rat's ass?"

He walked toward his mail box, jammed with fifty others at the end of a dusty turnaround. Stopping, Lew patted his rock, absentmindedly reading the address on mail box out loud, "1247 Shady Lane. That's a laugh, not a tree in sight!"

Reaching inside he retrieved junk mail.

The Post Office wouldn't have anything to do if it weren't for this trash, he thought to the rock.

Quickly leafing through the handful of mail, he discarded most of it in the garbage can, conveniently placed under the boxes. It kept tenants from throwing junk mail on the ground.

I bet the mailman sometimes threw other junk mail in too, he thought. *Saves the government money and cuts out the middle man.*

The late notice from the Water Company went into a pocket as he walked in the sweltering summer heat. Longingly, his thoughts turned to a good cold beer and air-conditioning in his trailer. "Damn!" Stopping in his tracks, he remembered there was no beer. "I knew there was something I was supposed to do on the way home."

Once inside he immediately searched his refrigerator. "Nothin'!" Drinking straight from his water jug tasted good anyway. He lay back in his "rear-back" chair, placing the water jug on the uneven stack of magazines scattered on the top of his IBM clone box, never opened. He bought the computer thinking he would use it after work. It remained in the original box along with the printer and paraphernalia, a tribute to his abject procrastination.

Toeing off his shoes. Thump. Thump. He liked the sound they made. It gave him comfort. If hell froze over, he wouldn't leave again today. It was Friday, nobody could boss him around anymore, not this week anyway, well maybe he would walk to the corner convenience store for beer, but not for a while. Lying motionless, at least it was quiet, except for his heavy breathing. Reaching over he lifted an ancient humidor from the top of the pile of magazines on the floor. Selecting one of his prized cigars he licked the long black Marshall Wheeling, feeling a strange pride from smoking the old-time cigar. He felt good as he bit off the twisted end of the cheap brand, made ever since the Civil War in Mississippi. Swelling with the sensation of a river boat gambler he slowly puffed on it in contentment, rolling it around with his tongue. The smell of an aromatic rat's tail burning filled the trailer.

I don't know what we're doing in this business anymore, Lew thought to the rock as he closed his eyes. We've done okay for ourself. How many people have a cool two million squirreled away? We could buy the whole town of Buckatunna if we had a mind to. I guess not being too smart in school paid off. I wouldn't have saved the money or even had it to invest if I'd been smarter. Bet old Coach worried himself sick trying to figure out how he was getting those dividend checks from the Coca Cola stocks.

The rock said nothing, knowing money was not Lew's answer.

Bamm! Bamm! Bamm! Lew jumped to his feet and opened the door in self-defense! It was his weird next-door neighbor. Lew was leery of anyone who continually asked questions every time he said anything.

"Hey Jack, I hope you don't mind? The hairy man said. "We had to use your space to move out, you know? I got this cold six-pack for you, to make up for the inconvenience, if you want it? Only please, don't tell the old battle axe about us moving out, you know? I don't think she knows yet; you know what I mean?"

The weird neighbor produced a cold off-brand beer, placing it into Lew's eager grasp. "Yeah, I know what you mean. Thanks Jack! You just saved my life. You can park there all night." Grinning, Lew tucked the beer under his arm as if to protect his prize.

"No sweat man, that's what friends are for, huh? We'll catch you like, later, you know? Some other place, some other space, know what I mean brother bean?"

With that, the sweaty barefoot man jumped off Lew's stoop.

"Yeah brother, you got that right," Lew said closing the door shaking his head. "Hot dog! My luck's gonna change starting now. Nothin' but lady luck from now on."

Immediately he popped a top on the precious beer, spewing foam everywhere. *The weirdo obviously dropped the beer*, Lew thought, but did not care as he toasted the room, spilling it all over the flimsy excuse of a carpet, and clicking on the TV. The 24-hour news blared while he puffed his cigar and drank the special beer, savoring it like a fine wine.

"Tomorrow, it's resume time but for now it's Lew's brew time, hallelujah! Here's to ya... you scroungy old hippy, and to the landlady, and to old AN/MXQ-T23A PAMJ. Screw you all," he exclaimed turning up his beer to take a long thirsty swig. He reached into his pocket for the smooth black rock, smiling in comfort.

The rock did too, but not for the same reason.

Lew picked up his tattered copy of George Orwell's "1984" and thumbed to where he had left off. As usual he forgot to use a book mark. *This is still a good book*, he thought to the rock.

This guy sure predicted a lot of stuff facing us today.

The rock said read the Bible Coach gave you.

Lew did not acknowledge the rock's comment.

"I hope he's not on target with his governmental take over in the hemisphere though."

The rock agreed.

"Big Brother" is only waiting for the chance to pounce, he thought. We are on the verge of tremendous social changes. It would be so easy for a terrorist to manufacture a fuel-air explosive carrying it in a backpack right up to the Capital. Hell if they blew up Congress it'd be the best thing that ever happened; but the whole bunch aren't worth the powder it'd take. Sort of funny though, if we could turn back the hands of time we would all be so busy trying to undo all of our mistakes we would not even notice the environment or anything like that. I guess it's best we stay like we are, trying to keep our mistakes from causing us to cash in on the wrong prizes. Sometimes I worry about my sanity, every lunatic believes he is the only one sane man in the world.

He picked up a newspaper from the floor and read.

Chicago 1968 Made Me What I Am Today.

By George Brannon

As a nineteen-year-old kid, I sincerely believed myself and a bunch of others could help change this country. I was injured along with a thousand others and spent weeks in a Chicago jail almost charged along with the "Chicago Seven" for demonstration, disruption and rioting. Chicago still gives the Democratic party officials nightmares, but not like it does to me and patriots of my generation. What happened to the powerful underground movement that was supposed to affect changes from inside the establishment? Where did we all go? Does the present

state of political apathy stem from our bosom?

Were we too young? Too idealistic? Or, only used as pawns? Twelve-thousand policeman and 5,600 National Guardsmen clashed against our "group of rebel rousers," resulting in 668 arrests from demonstrations lasting the entire week. That was the year of vaulting change we thought; instead we were crushed, finally scattering to the winds. Where are the fruits?

Nixon was elected in 1968 after a campaign against Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace. There were no choices. Nixon captured only 43.4 percent of the votes over Humphrey's 42.7 percent. This equated to 510,314 votes, or only .2 percent of the population of 240 million citizens; the equivalent of Kansas City dictating who rules the nation.

In retrospect I sense a feeling of lost years that I only hope someday will repay me. At the time we believed those in any uniform were part of the establishment, making them our enemy. Now we are the establishment, wishing we could repay society for the legacy we left to the youth of today. Suddenly, years bestowed wisdom on us and we

found this nation a better place. There truly is an abundance of good things if we look in the right direction, much more than the things we should tear down.

What are we going to say when our children ask, "Daddy what did you do during the war?" My friends, I do not know? I have no answers. The nightmare lives on in Vietnam, in Vietnam veterans, in Canadian-Americans who cannot come home, in the graves of Americans unidentified, and worse, those who may remain POWs. We left a legacy of scars on those who remember what happened in Chicago.

The establishment's attack in 1968 made us what we are today. Now, we are docile participants. We watched in awe the unforgettable conflict of good and peaceful assembly at Tiananmen Square in China, where authentic injustices were found. We cringed looking in reverence at the solitary figure standing in defiance of a brigade of tanks as though one against the entire world of power purveyors. We felt the pain with millions of others who witnessed the total oppression of a magnificent Chinese generation of

hope, born from decades of sorrowful repression and poverty.

We wept for the plight of freedom worldwide and wondered why we did not see the good of this nation for looking at the bad. Ours is the best, not that best could not be improved. We accepted our destiny, that of being apathetic voters of a rumbling decent. We challenge no one. Not anymore. Not even ourselves. The beer we consume causes us to remember, not forget, and we weep, where did our souls go?

Much of America may have forgotten the blood, the tear gas, and the angry anguish of the youth at Chicago.

The world watched as the battle of Balbo Square lasted only 30 minutes, but the traumatic brutality, the conflict and political ruination of it replays itself in my nightmares as I wake up and wonder, was it a dream or a nightmare of living reality?

For whom did the bell toll, whom did it serve, and when will the torment end? One fact remains, war will always be fabricated, but is it ever worth the sacrifice of lives? War must be made out of style, along with the LBJ's, Carter's, Nixon's, the types of leaders

who represent themselves and special interests instead of peace.

Who knows the answer? I confess I do not. But, apathy; never apathy; it serves as the maggot of greed, attempting to devour this nation? If we can do nothing else, we must get aggressively involved in the freedom process we profess to love. Join in selecting your leaders, attend political party meetings. Oppose special interest groups who freely establish cancerous destruction in the midst of our freedom; but above all, look for the good, and preserve it.



Searching for more possibilities George Brannon read a CRGS release concerning the appointment of the Honorable Congressman Harry W. Gibson to the Committee of the House on Ways and Means, a powerful 35-member committee.

It's crap like this that makes me want to jump in with both feet. That jerk isn't worth the powder to blow him back to Iowa. Maybe that's what I ought to do, jump on government waste and corruption. That would show Barbara I'm worth something.

After seeking out Congressman Gibson, George easily made an appointment since Gibson always sought more press coverage. Soon George felt he had walked into a third-rate movie script.

"Your Congressman Gibson and the small minority of responsible men like him seek to create an effective change. The others are simply charlatans. They attempt to cast those like us aside as unfit to serve in

their ungodly power structure. They play their games of warfare and welfare. Well, we are showing them; and, we have just begun to fight."

Bewildered, George listened as the congressman spoke in third party fashion, as though he were not the person he was talking about.

How can this old fart come up with things like this. They say his wife writes all of his speeches and press releases. She must give him a list to talk about like other wives hand out grocery lists.

"Nothing is permanent in DC, sonny boy. Everything is a temporary. Only a lust for power is constant. Forty years ago, when your Congressman was elected, he knew he couldn't be a typical Washington wise guy, fighting against a formidable enemy of wrongdoing politicians. He wasn't smart enough and it wouldn't do him any good anyway. He studied others and decided he could best survive as a pernicious porcupine politician. You know what a porcupine is don't you son?" Harry questioned George.

"Yeah, I think you mean you were hard to pin down and give a hell of a fight."

Ron Bunnt accidentally arrived for his appointment, Congressman Gibson introduced him. "This is my little friend from back home in Iowa. He's going to be a big-time reporter. Congressman Gibson always helps the little people from back home. If you can help him too, I'd appreciate it," Harry said.

Who is Gibson trying to fool? He does not give a damn for the little people back home, George thought. He slides through his reelection thinking his constituents believe in him. They only vote for him because they think whoever they send wouldn't be any different, so why bother. I wonder who Ron Bunnt is? I am suspicious of anybody connected with Gibson. George left with even more determination to make a difference concerning governmental corruption.

**AMERICA SHOULD RETURN TO
FAIR PLAY PRINCIPLES.**

by George Brannon

This nation left its first love behind, that of freedom and free enterprise. Real freedom does not exist in a partially free society. It must include everyone, never allowing one to have unfair advantage over another. In giving such advantage we take away the rights of one over the other.

Henry Thoreau was wrong, all must pay taxes; or else he was right, and no one should. This means an owner or renter, professional or laborer, salesman or office worker, businessman or consumer, retiree, low-income person, or any segment of the population, affluent or otherwise; all must pay equal taxation.

Unfair taxation, pure and simple is taking from one person to give to another. What is the difference between ghetto theft and robbery through unfair taxation? None; the deed remains the same.

Unwilling tax participants now look for shelters instead of investments, further eroding the GNP and the true character of this nation. Rather than automatically mimicking fast rising

industrial nations, a better climate for free enterprise should be sought founded on profit incentive rather than....



Although Congressman Gibson was much maligned by men, his popularity soared with women, and he was invited to speak before the National Organization for Women convention in Washington from the strength of his presentation before the World War Women Veterans concerning inequities in the armed forces with regards to women. Venissa had to begin writing Gibson's speeches after one disastrous speech where he proposed strapping rifles on animals as a joke before the NRA convention; it turned sour immediately. She usually was absent at his speeches, but this time she attended. The speech was close to a subject that plagued her. Harry loved Venissa, but his self-centered life style kept her in alcoholic dependency while he wandered around Washington and Pinkerton Knob involved in situations unfit for any Congressman.

"It is my pleasure to introduce a new champion to causes which are near and dear to us. That hard-hitting, powerhouse against corruption, mismanagement, misappropriation, and injustice toward all people, Congressman Harry Gibson." The MC said shaking hands with Harry, then sitting down.

Harry smiled at his wife, basking in his glory. The applause dwindled and he began to speak. "We live in a two-fold society where women are deliberately exploited. Men consider women, first, as sex objects, secondly, as subservient workers whose sole purpose is to supply their needs, and lastly, a friend, companion, or partner. Tonight I am going to talk about an unpleasant subject; I suppose to some seated here, these things should not be spoken of in public such as this.

“To those I apologize, but beg to differ. Prostitution is not the victimless crime, as some call it. Most prostitute's customers are white, married, middle-classed men, and most prostitutes are women and children. Day or night these women or children, victims of society, are forced into prostitution by economic situations; they work the streets, at roadside rest areas, truck stops, hotel bars, massage parlors, tanning salons, escort agencies, or any number of places where man's lust for illicit sex can be satisfied.

"Typically male dominance in the community at large perpetuates prosecution of such women by attorneys who fail to make the men involved equally culpable under the law. A man seldom receives a jail sentence for solicitation of a prostitute. Typically, although men are guilty of purchasing sexual pleasures, they receive no more than a five-day sentence at most, whereas, the female guilty of accepting the inference is given a two-month or more sentence.

"This moral crime has many victims; however the users of women create the predominant victim. Such women, are victims of disease, violence, and crime. Many women have few choices due to their circumstances and go into this abhorrent occupation for survival. Often honorable women are wrongly accosted by men looking for prostitutes. When an honorable woman accepts a seemingly honest gift to help her circumstances, she, suddenly realizes there's no difference between her and those she formerly condemned. Men are also victims, though of a lesser nature; society itself is a victim, suffering from a continuing decline of moral degradation."

"This situation will continue unless more organizations, such as yours, comes forward and form a political force equal to that of the domineering males. You must become a force to contend with. I, Congressman Gibson, and my cohorts can do nothing unless you are willing to step forward to accept your destiny. We the government of the people and by the people can do nothing unless you take your

place. That lady, means some of you must suffer somewhat to reach your goals. You cannot gain equality by arguing within the framework of the home. Just as your sisters in the past became a force in politics, so must you to gain your place in history.

"Looking for a better, more just future for all people, we must all strive for a true partnership with women-kind. If we do not establish a place in this nation for women, founded on freedom and partnership for all peoples, then we are to be pitied by all, and this nation will have been established on lies, not truths."

Congressman Gibson received a standing ovation as he basked before strobe lights from the gallery of news people assigned to cover the convention.

"Not a bad speech Harry, for a pervert that is," Congressman Resnick whispered as he grinned to Harry. "How many whores you got in your back pocket or at Pinkerton Knob?"

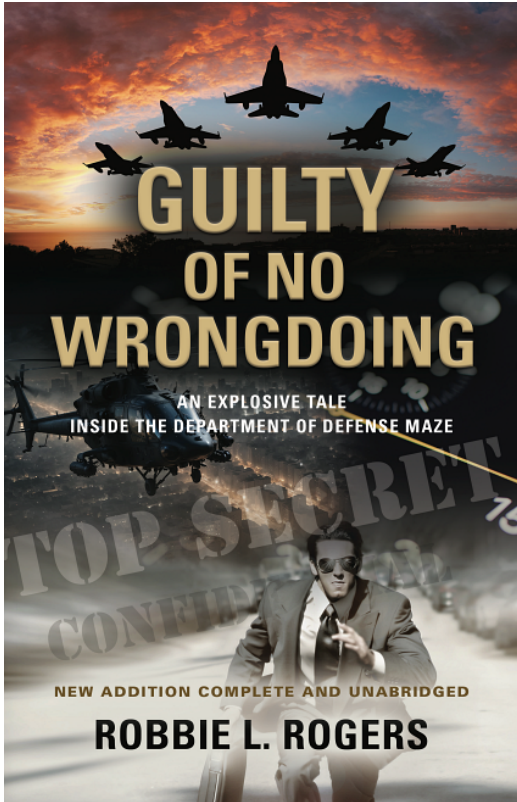
Not hearing Resnick's comments Venissa shuddered as her mind wandered to that awful night in New York City when she opened her apartment door after working late with her dancing instructor. At last she had been given a chance to play the lead part in Haus Koftsmere's newest production. Abruptly, six neighborhood hoodlums forced their way in the door while her mind was so full of excited happiness. She had not noticed them in the darkened corners of the stairwell on her floor. They fell on her as the world of negativism falls on those who dream dreams of happiness. Throwing her savagely on the floor they beat and raped her repeatedly for twelve long unending hours. Left defeated and unconscious, when she awoke, she wished death would come over her. she felt degraded and filthy; she had to be cleansed. Mercilessly she scrubbed herself into a bleeding crying frenzy with a scrub brush, only stopping her frantic efforts when she collapsed. After waking later, she left, abandoning everything in her apartment, her hopes and dreams. She returned to Mississippi and eventually came to

Washington, never talking to anyone about the terrible attack. Never would she disclose her fear, especially to Harry, whom she loved in spite his weaknesses. She was glad he never touched her anymore, knowing full well he and she both were the victims she wrote about in the speech which was so well received by NOW attendees.



Calvin Lovett, one of Harry's business associates was murdered at a retreat located near Gibson's own retreat. Police arrested a 17-year-old boy on first degree murder. Lovett was found beaten viscously and stabbed while he was naked, suffering some 30 wounds on his head and body. A 15-year-old girl was arrested as a principal witness and the attacker claimed she helped him. The two were captured in the woods near Harry's cabin.

It frightened Harry because he had been sexually involved with the pair earlier. *I'll call Judge Farcloth tomorrow morning and explain how it would be to his advantage to see that I am kept out of it,* Harry thought, *he owes me that much.*



An explosive tale inside the Department of Defense maze concerning one moral man's efforts to right wrongs. Lew Harris tries to free himself from his past doing what he thinks is right while often fleeing from those who see it differently.

Guilty of No Wrongdoing

By Robbie L. Rogers

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