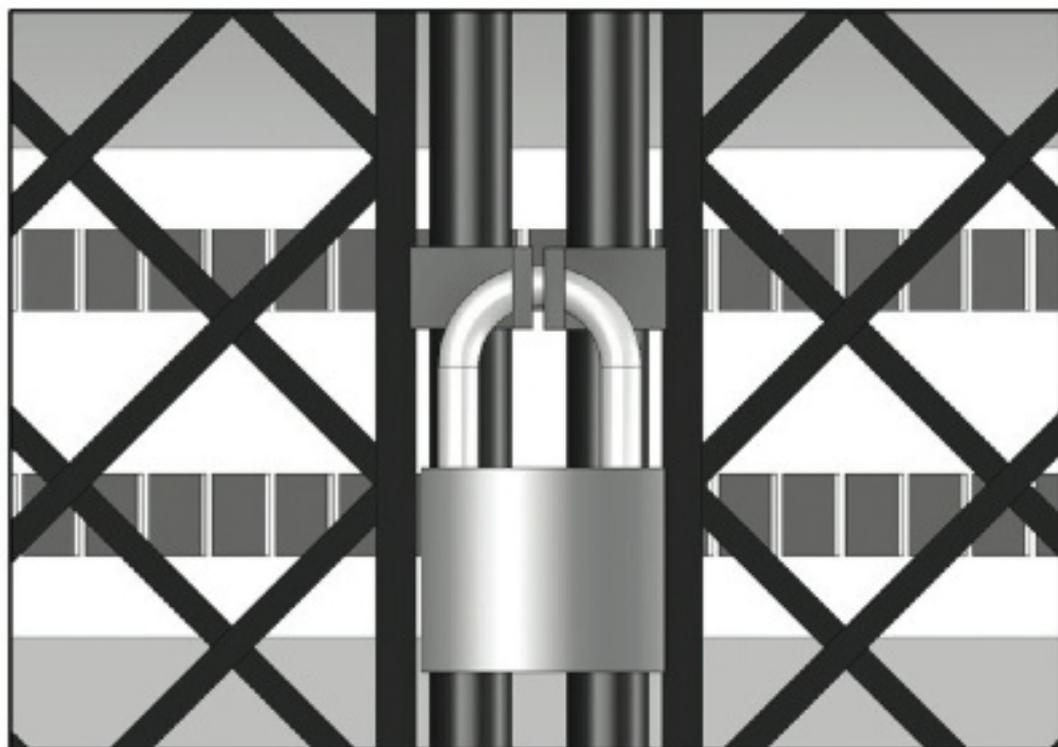
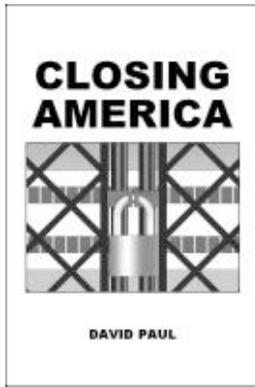


CLOSING AMERICA



DAVID PAUL



THE VANISHING AMERICAN DREAM. This story takes the reader on an exciting journey around the world and into the interactions of people. While those in power come and go, the main character stays to witness the quest for power and money. If you like to go behind closed doors, you'll enjoy this story.

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Goodbye

A human resources assistant is one of the last Heiler people left. Soon she'll be gone, too. I asked her to clean out a tall five-drawer file cabinet in the basement of the main building so I could move it across the street to our building. What's in the file cabinet is obsolete and unimportant, but the file cabinet is locked, and our human resources assistant has the key, and she refuses to open it.

I'm going to move it loaded. Sheila will help me. We get it on a two-wheel cart, tip it back, and roll it onto the elevator. It's heavy. Now comes the tricky part. It needs to go down some steps to get to the sidewalk outside. It flies down the steps taking me with it, like the coyote in the cartoon. We get it across the street and into our office. It's Friday evening. That's enough madness for one week.

Our application engineering manager will be toast. He and I didn't connect well. It was the ex-military man against the free spirit. After we merged with Truben, he was moved from position to position until he finally ended up as application engineering manager. At one point he was given a windowless office by Lester's engineering vice president and told he may not need it long. Somehow he survived. He outlasted those who were going to fire him. This time he won't survive. His last day will be the end of the year. He's had nothing to do for quite a while. He's been reading a dictionary.

Our retrofit man reports to Truben's head of retrofits. Our retrofit man's brother has a machinery installation company. Our retrofit man's brother gives our retrofit man leads, and our retrofit man gives his brother leads. Our retrofit man has been visiting customers without telling our salesman, and our salesman is upset about it. Our salesman complained to the big boys that our retrofit man is getting business for his brother instead of for us.

Our retrofit man learned from a friend at Truben that Roger was coming to our offices to fire him. After that, our retrofit man had his latest customer confirm to the big boys that his brother had turned their inquiry over to our company. Then he sent an e-mail to the big boys asking to keep his job. Ralph and Truben's head of retrofits are our retrofit man's drinking buddies, but they remain silent. They're not going to bat for their drinking buddy.

Roger arrives at our office and fires our retrofit man. After our terminated retrofit man and Roger are gone, I go into our retrofit man's office. Standing against the wall of his office is a long iron pry bar from our factory. That's all that's left of our retrofit man. Our spare parts man will take his place. He'll handle both spare parts and retrofit machines. Our spare parts man had been given his lay-off notice. This saved him.

Sheila doesn't like Truben, and she doesn't like making documentation for China. She hates what her job has become. She's been off work a lot lately. Roger is upset that he can't get through to us on the phone when Sheila is not here. That's the same Roger who needed a written description of Sheila's duties to justify keeping her. Now Roger feels that maybe Lester's former assistant, Grace, is better suited for Sheila's job.

Sheila is absent more and more and makes more and more mistakes. Maybe she's seen too much of this mess. Maybe being paid so little for what she does is getting to her.

Grace is helping our people get new jobs, but that will end soon, and then she'll be gone, too. Grace is willing to stay, but her salary is a lot higher than Sheila's salary, and Grace doesn't want to take a cut in pay.

Finally the decision comes. Grace can keep her salary if she takes Sheila's job. How things change. A few months ago I had to fight to keep Sheila's job. Now Grace is going to be paid a big salary to take Sheila's job.

Sheila's first question, after we tell her she's being let go, is whether she still qualifies for state-funded plant shut-down training and extended layoff benefits. She just made it under the deadline. Now I

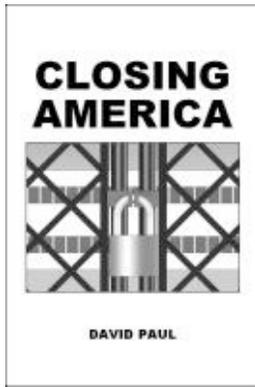
understand why Sheila has been so difficult to work with. She wanted out.

Sheila packs up her personal things, and then stands in my office doorway while I take a customer call. When the call ends, Sheila puts her arms out and hugs me. I walk with her to the door, and then she's gone. It took a half-hour for a person I worked with for four years to be gone forever. Tears come to my eyes. I stay late to finish some work and then turn out the lights. Sheila's suit coat still hangs on a hook on the wall. That's all that's left of her.

Our application engineering manager's last day finally arrives. He quotes a passage from the Bible and is gone. The dictionary he's been reading still lies on his desk.

Our head of accounting is the last Heiler employee. She came here right out of high school, worked her butt off, lost most of her pension, and sees Truben people collecting pension benefits from our closed-down pension fund. She hates Truben for what they've done to her and for what they've done to the company she loved. The day I helped her move across the street from the main office building into our office building she had only one request for the short time she had remaining, an office with a window. She had worked her whole life in a windowless office.

At the end of her last day, we go downtown for a beer. Heiler people have all done well in their life-after-Heiler. They were well trained at Heiler College. When I told Lester we were a college, not a company, he said he would change that.



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