

THE Z



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ALSO BY

WH CLARK

***RETROFITTING FOR ENERGY
CONSERVATION***

***ELECTRICAL DESIGN GUIDE FOR
COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS***

1001 ENERGY TIPS

Forward

I just finished publishing a rustic version of this book. Even though I only gave away a few promotional copies, I did learn one thing. Once you tell your friends and family you've published memoirs – Doh! – they're ever so cautious with everything they tell you.

OMG. That moron's going to put it in his goddamn book.

I was hoping people would start being nice to me. But, like all my other plans in life, the exact opposite happens. They clam up. Become suddenly formal.

“The Z” has multiple layers of significance, but the most important one is that I'm schizophrenic. I've never been on psychoactive meds. The Veteran's Administration says I'm “highly functional.”

I've always had difficulty with folks believing my claims about things I've done in life. Once they find out you're schizophrenic, everything you say becomes a

grand delusion. The U.S. Naval Academy? Professional Engineer? Exploration drilling engineer with Exxon? Master's Degree in Aerospace Engineering?

People always seem to be so afraid of schizophrenics. Well, I'm telling you now, the feeling is mutual. The disease itself is manageable, most of the time. It's a boundless fountain of creativity - if you can control the output. The biggest problem is the people you meet. It's infuriating. Nobody EVER listens to you. Nobody ever believes a word you say.

Try living like that, and tell me that's not a misery.

I told the VA's nondenominational preacher once that I didn't want to go to Heaven. He was somewhat shocked. Blasphemy! I said almost all the horrible things done to me in life were by upstanding members of high society, the sciences, the arts – the church! – and I'll be damned if I end up in Heaven getting beat up on by all the same evil people all over again.

When that first version of this book came out, you guessed it – nobody believed a damn thing I said. Not even my own devout Christian big sister, Regan Lamia, who witnessed firsthand a lot of it. It's a terrible feeling, staring into the jaws of disbelief – but, hey – I'm used to it, or at least no longer shocked down to my threadbare socks when it happens.

Subsequently, I set up a giant website with all the supporting documents about everything I talk about. here. Didn't make any difference. If people are THAT

prejudiced, shoving documents at them only makes them angry not sympathetic. So, I guess we save the documents for the civil suits for slander and defamation that are sure to come.

Otherwise, lucky for you, schizophrenics lead a very lonely existence. Even highly functional ones like yours truly. Which means my story is almost brutally terse. I won't bore you with charming sketches of the beautiful people who have populated my days on this green Earth. Doh! Because there aren't any. You'll meet lots of villains, though. They are legion.

People have only so much empathy to spare. I have no right to ask for your attention span. I can only ask for you to think about how you spend your limited currency of empathy.

We live in an EXTREMELY narcissistic world. EVERYBODY demands your undivided attention.

I will try to earn your attention. I want to make your time reading my words worthwhile. I seek to enrich your life. I want you to understand schizophrenics. To LISTEN to them. Because ours (mine) is a unique perspective on the world.

To say I was a victim of "systemic racism" makes me laugh. LAUGH, I'm telling you! Other unnamed groups have it made in the shade, compared to the miserable life of a schizophrenic. They have a huge, gigantic social support network. Entire political parties. Whole TV channels. Churches!

Schizophrenics are each an Army of One. Just the One.

We. Have. Nobody.

The Romans (citizens of Rome back then, which was a metropolis of over one million souls) had a law that you couldn't deprive your neighbor of his or her just due of sunshine. We need a new ethic where every person, in an office or workplace for example, gets their just due of sunshine – attention, respect, or care.

Schizophrenics are not assertive. We DESPISE attention, or at least I do, and I'm the "sickest of the sick," (to quote my first shrink) which implies I speak with authority on the subject of schizophrenia (correct me if I'm wrong).

We need your sunshine, too.

I'm not saying this because I'm angry, a bully, or a savant (smart person). I write screenplays as a hobby. I've tried making lead characters who are schizophrenic. It's impossible! Folks just plain can't evoke an ounce of empathy for people like me. Not in real life. Not on the silver screen.

The most evil, terrible villains in Hollywood are schizophrenics. It's always been that way, since the beginning of storytelling. We're the Fallen. The Shadows. The Dark Ones. The Borg. The Sith.

You'll meet a lot of evil characters in this drama who are NOT schizophrenic. They're doctors. Professors. Ministers. Esteemed engineers. Presidents of Universities. Disability advocates. How come Hollywood doesn't paint them in the role of villain? Not to worry, I can do that.

I WILL do that.

One

I was born on 30 October 1956, a stroke before midnight at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Mom was watching the clock; she would tell me years later. She didn't want a child born on Halloween. (Sorry 'Ma, this kid was born on Eastern Standard Time.)

I was six weeks premature. My first six months were in an incubator. I was a sickly little rat. Spinal meningitis. Rheumatic fever. Jaundice. At one point a Catholic Priest gave me last rites. God didn't want me. Still doesn't. Maybe He never will.

It's a good thing I was born in a Catholic hospital because otherwise, nobody would have even tried to save me. Hell, these days I never would have made it out of the womb. "He's technically just a partial-birth kid. We can get rid of him." YES! (My folks would have done it, too – what with three LOUD babies already at home ages 1, 2, and 3 - I wouldn't blame them one bit.)

They say the first few months are when you bond. With the mother. Father. Siblings. With the world. My first bond was with a clunky, stuffy incubator in the Neonatal ICU.

“You think that’s bad, wait for the hospital nursery, Bud.” Constant SCREAMS from other kiddos. Night and day.

Except there was no night because the harsh fluorescent lights overhead never went out. So there I was, SCREAMING in my little plastic coffin. My echo chamber. Desperate for attention that never came.

I learned my lesson. Spartan babies don’t cry. We watch. Wait. Listen. Prepare.

Many years later a therapist told me I lacked a connection to the world. This sounded to me like, “Give up your independence, and become one with the Borg.” I did, however, take her advice to heart - in my own way. The bonding with Mom, at least. I penned a whole series of sci fi stories about that bonding thing.

Great stories, but, sorry. No bonding. With the world. With my Mom. With the therapist, whom I saw only the once. Spartans are strong. Independent. We don’t cater to the psychology of the unwashed masses.

Actually, I think I’ve been as connected with the zeitgeist as anybody else. The problem isn’t with me. It’s with the world. I haven’t changed. The world has, and who wants to become one with a world that’s antithetical to everything you believe in and hold dear?

Did the Spartans drop their arms at Thermopylae and let the Persian hordes through? No. I am one with

the three hundred. (Plus the seven thousand Greeks with them that Hollywood never tells you about. Shame on them. Greeks fight like the dickens.)

I think I did pretty well, all things considered, looking over my life. I'm smart. VERY smart. I know what happens in my brain and, over time, learned to adapt. Even to take advantage. The problem wasn't me. The problem was the people who hated me. Bullied me. Talk about infuriating! Who can live like that? It's a wonder I didn't turn into a sociopath.

I can picture the house where I grew up, at 2424 Cottonwood Avenue in Baton Rouge. The neighborhood. City Lake a block away. I can see the topography of the neighborhood, too. The hills. The driveways where I used to steal rubber bands off their Sunday papers, tooling around on my clunky red Schwinn bicycle. Ducks in the lake. Turtles sunning along the rocky shore.

Playing a round on the 8-hole public golf course a few blocks away. The lay of the greens. The tees. Water holes. Sand traps. Where Mom knocked a squirrel out of an oak tree one time. The pro shop next to the public City Pool that had long since been closed on account of integration.

Excuse me, but how is a big, beautiful public swimming pool closed down after it's integrated? If all the white folks stayed away – awesome, we have the whole pool to ourselves! What, whites wouldn't swim there IF there were Blacks in the pool. And the Black folks wouldn't swim there UNLESS there were whites.

No wonder the parish shut down the pool. Just let everybody go to fat.

(If you haven't figured it out yet, the only reason I'm writing this miserable tome is because it affords a venue for social, political, scientific, and spiritual commentary. I am one with Nietzsche, who said, "If you criticize one group, you're a bigot. If you criticize them all, you're a natural philosopher." That's me, an equal opportunity kind of guy.)

Ours was a single-story red brick house on a corner. Lots of concrete curbs I had to trim as one of my chores. My maternal grandmother, Gramm, lived across the street on Dogwood Avenue. The Lorios next to her. They had a son my age Rhett who I never did much with (he was later in the Army ROTC at my high school) - and Melinda, the dentist's cute daughter I never had a chance to go out with.

We had a basketball goal in our driveway (fronting the Lorio's house), on top of the carport, hanging over a concrete slab. I'd shoot hoops hour after hour, any damn time of the day. Sometimes playing horse with my sisters. Hopscotch drawn with chalk on among the long cracks in the driveway. Learning my math multiplication tables as I shot hoops.

BOUNCE. Infuriating the neighbors. BOUNCE. Ticking off Melinda, the object of my affection. BOUNCE.

There was a swimming pool in our backyard. A "tree house" on stilts in the side yard. Parallel bars. Tall

ligustrum shrubs I trimmed every spring. A mimosa tree in another neighbor's yard, hanging over the pool. Its hairy red flowers littered the pool often. This made Pop very angry, to the point of wanting to poison the damn tree. He was a chemical engineer, and could well have done just that.

(It occurs to me that I likely thought about doing the poisoned deed myself, just to please the old man.)

The kitchen windows looked out into the backyard and the swimming pool. Pop mixing corn meal, coating fish, to deep fry. Hamburgers were his meal, too. Eggs. Oatmeal. Mom cooked fried chicken, roasts, and vegetables.

I remember Mom in the kitchen in her red one-piece swimsuit eating fresh boiled crabs. I don't know which smelled worse, Mom or the crabs. She practically lived by the pool, soaking up the rays (sweating buckshot). She paid the price later on, dying of skin cancer.

Mom was very modest with her perfect figure and ample bust. Never a sexual thought passed my mind (until that therapist suggested the idea untold decades later). I pity the young boys these days, how their mothers test their sexy outfits on them. Strut around the house (beach, shopping mall, schoolyard) half naked, showing off their stuff.

I can only hope the young boys DON'T have that mother-son bond. Otherwise, they'll be sexually arrested for life. But, hey, if people want to stay in low gear for life, more power to them. The world has six billion too many people as it is.

There was a large playroom at one end of the L-shaped house. It was originally a garage, then closed in. One whole wall was floor-to-ceiling cabinets, opening out in a V-shape. One section was mine. Lincoln logs. Legos. An erector set. Cardboard brick-shaped blocks. Pop's wonderful hand tools. He ended up locking his tools up in a hallway closet.

My three sisters Leigh Erin, Kelle, and Regan (older by 1, 2, and 3 years) had sections of closets in the playroom as well. I can recall them fooling around with Barbie and Ken dolls, cutting clothes out of patterns. The whole family played whiffle baseball in the side yard once in a while. My oldest sister Regan and I, when I got older, would play tennis against Mom and Pop (who played for Georgia Tech) in doubles on clay tennis courts at Bocage on Saturday mornings.

I can remember playing golf with Pop once or twice, walking around the 8-hole City Park course, our golf bags on a rolling cart. I once SMACKED my 3-wood into the ground, bending it. After which time it hit the sweetest shots.

My bedroom was in a short hallway next to the playroom. It was a small room. Wood paneling. Built-in bunk beds to the left. A chest of drawers to the right. A built-in bookcase behind the door as you open it. Tom Swift. The Hardy Boys. Later Boy's Life magazines. Practically the only books in the whole house, other than a few in the living room.

There was a second door in my small bedroom, leading to a central hallway. So, my room was a shortcut

and didn't exactly afford much privacy night or day. This never bothered me.

I got accustomed to the lack of privacy. To everybody ignoring me. I became an observer. Watching. Analyzing.

I'd bring a whole stack of books home when we visited the public library downtown. Science fiction mostly. Heinlein. Isaac Asimov. Hubbard. Later, the book that made the biggest impression on me was *One Man Against Rome*, the story of Hannibal's Carthage versus Rome.

I read the Sunday paper color funny pages. I was only allowed to watch a couple of TV shows. Bugs Bunny. Luny Tunes on weekend mornings. The original Batman. Pop enjoyed Hogan's Heroes. (Naturally, so did I.) The whole family watched Mission Impossible on the console TV in the living room.

The first movie in a theater I watched was *The Guns of Navarone*, in Exxon's residential compound theater at Sierrro Colorado, Aruba. Pop was there. Maybe Mom, I don't know. I was in college, second year at the U.S. Naval Academy.

The next movie I saw in a theater was *Star Wars*, a couple years later in Austin, Texas with Pop and my younger brother John. I did see George C. Scott in the movie *Patton* at the Naval Academy, but it was a required function. That doesn't count.

As an aside, I've spent my whole life adoring that movie and General Patton in particular. What an

American hero. Talk about a HOOT and HOLLER at the Academy! I'm not such a big fan anymore, not after I learned that the Russians lost 26 million people stopping the Nazis on the Western Front.

By the time Patton attacked from the shores of Normandy, the Nazi soldiers who remained were tired old men and boys conscripted out of desperation. Those Nazi irregulars were malnourished, poorly equipped, and a total shambles of a military force. Boy, have we ever been brainwashed. Give credit to the Russians, for God's sake. They're the ones who stopped Hitler's war machine. All Patton did was wipe up the wretched remains.

The only other TV I recall was Bonanza when we were living in Spain, circa my junior high years. I remember the first time I saw Bonanza in English. I thought, "That's not how they talk."

Most young people would, at this point, say, "OMG. What did you DO all the time?" I played. Read books. Rode my bicycle. I don't recall ever being bored. Not once.

In the vernacular, I matured. Va-voom, zipped right on through Freud's psychosexual stages, in perfect sync with the world. The takeaway is that kids who spend 8 hours a day on social media – of course they'll – never mind.

Back in Baton Rouge, when I was younger. I can picture the whole floor plan of the house. Pop's tool closet in a central hallway that opened off into my folk's room. My

oldest sister's room. A common bath (for all us kids), and another bedroom for my other two sisters that was right across from the bath. Around the corners was the kitchen, and at the end of the hall next to my folk's bedroom was a foyer leading into the living room.

Mom had an upright piano in the dining room off the living room proper. We all had to take lessons. They only stuck for my older sister Kelle. She was quite good and plays to this day. Later they enclosed a porch off the dining room into a dedicated piano room. Mom had a baby grand there. She loved the piano. Played all her life.

The front yard stretched around the corner. There were a couple of oak trees. Raking leaves in the fall. Stepping on stinky caterpillars. Burning wasp nests out from under the eaves.

At one time there was a sandbox in the front yard, when I was a snot-nosed kiddo. Giant yellow construction trucks and tractors for little Bill, alias Bud. (My father's name was Bill, too.) Mom said I used to call them, "Fucks and fractors." LOL.

We always had a German Shepherd in the backyard. (Meadow) Muffin went with us to Spain. Never came back, though. I had my own dog once, a puppy we found at the pound, half dead of pneumonia. A Catahoula Kir, which is a hunting dog (spotty skin, one brown eye, one blue). Tiger by name. I nursed him back to health. We had to give him away to a friend of my sister Kelle a few months later.

When we were settled in Benicasim, Spain, a neighbor wrote that Tiger had returned to the house

from halfway across town. This made me sad. I missed him.

One of my sisters had a black Siamese cat(s). Oddly, I don't remember those cats, not one bit.

I had a big metal tub on the porch in the backyard where I kept turtles I netted in the lake. Once I dumped all the turtles in the pool when my sisters were swimming. Scared the hell out of them. (The chlorine probably killed the turtles. Sorry, guys – meaning the turtles, not my damn sisters.)

One time I brought a white duck home from City Lake. Robert. I fed him oatmeal. Pop made me bring him back to the lake. I caught flies to feed the turtles.

Mom would raise a litter of puppies in the summer. I remember spraying them with a mist of water to cool off. Their little tongues stopped panting right away, and they'd go right to sleep.

My clothes came out of the Sears and Roebuck catalog. Charlie Brown shirts, with wide colored stripes on a white background. A yellow raincoat for all the rain we got in south Louisiana.

That's it, folks. No designer clothes advertised on Sesame Street that I just HAD to have. Nothing to distinguish me other than my boundless energy and zest.

“Look, the kid has no clothes.”

Summer vacations we motored around in a little blue Buick station wagon. Somehow we always drove west. Don't ever remember a single vacation on the East

Coast. Just packed up and hit Eisenhower's new Interstate system. Modeled after Hitler's Autobahns (built by hand by young Germans, mostly – OMG physical labor, perish the thought) which were so damn good, in fact, that they helped the Allies to defeat the Nazis.

That's progress. At first, it's wonderful. And then. It always comes back to knock you flat on your butt.

On our family vacations out west, I was always in the back of the Buick wagon, building castles with everybody's luggage. Counting cars at the "Holiday Inn," which is what we called auto salvage yards.

I beat the crap out of the red Corvair Pop drove to work one time. Ball peen hammer. In retrospect, I like to think I heard about Ralph Nader's crusade against the rear-engine Corvairs being so unsafe. Gotta wonder about this young engineer, don't ya?

I used this anecdote to entice Mr. Nader into a debate with Patrick Buchanan in the presidential contest of 2000 when I was in grad school at Texas. The PC police (actually, my editor on the campus newspaper) made me cancel it. I had reserved an auditorium, arranged for the Navy ROTC to be ushers, the whole shebang. More on that later.

I never went to kindergarten. Just first grade because I was a year younger than all the other kids (on account of my late October birthday.) Riding the yellow school bus. Mom picking me up from Walnut Hills Elementary School, with an apple cut up, a carrot, celery, and a jar of

Hawaiian Punch. (I doubt this was out of love. More like the constipation that's plagued me all my life.)

Pop showing me the valves on the swimming pool pump/filter. Cleaning the pool with the vacuum filter. Putting the black plastic cover on over winter.

Motoring around the pool on the brick/concrete sidewalk with a little yellow push-pull car – steer with your feet and pump a lever between your legs to go forward. Zoom zoom! Round and round.

I had a couple of buddies in the neighborhood. Stewart. Ray Overall. Skipper Hoover (who died shortly after we arrived in Spain. A farming accident. His father ran over him with a tractor.) They both lived a block away in houses fronting on railroad tracks. We played army in the bamboo thicket along the tracks. Chuck had a house by the golf course.

There was a row of Black houses a block away. Pop forbade me from playing with Black kids. So I never did. This didn't teach me to be prejudiced. I just, well, did what I was told. Period.

We had a Black maid Lina Mae who would roll up Pop's shirts in a wet ball and iron them. She did other chores I suppose, helping out Mom – who was coping with four small children in the house.

A yellow canary in a cage with a bone to sharpen its beak. Stealing potato chips out of the freezer in the utility room.

“Don't stand in the refrigerator door,” I can hear Pop screaming, as I was standing there trying to decide what

snack to devour. He was a real energy conservation nerd.

Turn the lights out when you leave the room. Drive the speed limit. Who turned the thermostat up? What do you think long johns were made for? Bastard made me into an energy conservation fanatic.

Snow cones at the Bet R Store down the street. Blue topping. Going with Mom to the A & P Grocery Store: two giant carts full to the rim. The checker ringing everything up. Saving S&H Green Stamps.

Grandpa Howard would drive all the way from Los Angeles every year. There was a kitchenette in the playroom for him. Special bowl for his cereal and sliced bananas. Big black Cadillac. Peppermint candies in the glove box.

We visited Grandpa Howard in LA once. Big house. Steps up to a gazebo. He was rich one year and dirt poor the next. Mom didn't much like him. Pop never talked about him. But peppermints are the master key to any kid's heart. I loved Grandpa Howard.

I don't remember doing much with my sisters. Quiet hour every day after lunch when we were home in the summers. Mom sunning out at the pool. My sisters doing their thing. I read or played with my toys in the playroom.

Only one memory of my other grandfather. We called him Dadee. He brought me to the construction site when they were building Eisenhower's Interstate a block away, and a concrete bridge over Town Lake. We

looked down in a deep hole. The glasses fell off his face! The workers couldn't fish them out of the muddy hole.

Dadee had been a forester on Indian reservations out west. I remember an Apache tribe's plaque in his garage to the "Great White Father."

Gramm, my grandmother, was a social creature. She civilized Dadee. He quit the Forest Service and founded the School of Forestry at LSU across town, then was the Dean of Forestry. There's a bronze plaque to him at the building.

Borden's would deliver milk at the back door a couple of times a week. Glass jars in a metal crate. With four small kids, I'm sure we went through a LOT of milk. The delivery guy used to call all us kids collectively, "girls."

I remember Kool-Aid in the house, but never any carbonated beverages. Damn stuff does more than rot your teeth. It leeches calcium out of your bones. Kids these days have such weak bones they regularly wash out of the Army's Basic Training.

Mom said I used to demand to go see Mike the Tiger in his cage outside the LSU football stadium every weekend. She was well along with bone cancer at that point, so who knows? I don't remember it, but I do remember Mike's cage. The smell. Darkness. Being sad.

We went to see an LSU basketball game once. Pete Maravich, one of the best college shooters of all time, was playing for LSU then. He had socks with no elastic.

I didn't much like going to Church at the First Presbyterian downtown. Pop would give me Dentyne and lemon drops to keep me quiet. Great taste combination, by the way. Never went to Sunday School.

Gramm (who was a big wheel at that church), smelling of powder and all dressed up, usually had dinner with us after church. She didn't like Pop, not one bit. Dark looks and pursed lips. Gramm clearing her throat. The mother-in-law from hell. Literally. (Small wonder why Pop took so many overseas assignments as soon as he got some seniority at the refinery.) Gramm lived right next door – well, directly across Dogwood Avenue.

My sisters propped me up on a ladder one year to put a star on top of the Christmas tree (I fell down, CRASHING the tree).

Playing ping pong in the playroom one year, the ball went past me . . . right on through a swinging glass door, I chased after the ball and went - CRASHING into the glass. I gnashed my arm, requiring a dozen stitches the clinic for Esso employees across town. Two horseshoe-shaped scars.

Mom and my three sisters gave me a Mohawk buzz cut in the back yard once. Another time they put a bowl on my head for another custom haircut. I thought this was great fun. If this is what it takes to get some TLC, have at it.

Kicked another glass outside door in one time. Not sure why. Damn near split one of my toes in half. Pop, the old Ozark hillbilly, wanted to just tie the toe up with a stretch of twine. Mom brought me to the clinic for six stitches.

Pop grew up on an apple farm at Cedar Gap near Springfield, Missouri. Dirt poor. Had to shoot squirrels for meat on the table. It was just him, his Mom, and her mother – who spoke only German. His father, Grandpa Howard, lived down the road a ways, in a mansion, in Memphis. He was a mover and shaker there.

Never figured out why his mom spoke only German. Who was she? Where did she come from? Maybe she was Hitler's ex. That was my theory. I have Hitler's same pale blue eyes. A small boy's imagination was CRASHED down to reality when I inherited the Family Bible 20 years later and discovered she was Swiss, and emigrated directly.

Or – did she?

That's pretty much it until we left for Spain in the 2nd grade. No memories of anything special with my sisters. Or Mom. Or Pop. Yawn. A boring, conventional childhood. I even played an unenthusiastic left field in the Beau Bois League – Pop was a huge baseball fan, and this was a great disappointment for him.

Pop and my sister Kelle would watch the Saint Louis Cardinals baseball on TV for hour after hour (he used to peel the skin off grapes while they watched). Baseball didn't interest me one bit. Never liked watching sports. Much rather play them.

I did my chores – mowing the grass, raking leaves, trimming the lawn and shrubs. Never complained. Never got into trouble (yet). Never got punished. Never needed any help – or got any – with my schoolwork.

I was pretty much on autopilot from the get-go. Seven and a half months in the slammer, then – boom – a lifetime on parole. Can't make any mistakes or it's hard time without a work release permit.

Pop worked real hard as a chemical engineer, often working late to start up a new system, at the Humble (then Esso, then Exxon) chemical refinery across town. Mom had her hands full with my three older sisters, who were real hell-raisers. (With two brilliant parents, all us kids were VERY smart, and quite a lot of trouble for poor Mom who needed every bit of her psychology training.)

My sisters caused all the headaches (so far). I just, well - did my own thing. Wandered off to play 8 holes of golf by myself a couple times a week. Tooled around the lake on my red Schwinn. Shot hoops. Read my books. Built things with my erector set and toys.

I wasn't anti-social. Quite the contrary. At the Beau Bois summer camp one year, I got a small plaque for, "The Most Courteous Camper." I was a happy, very intelligent kid who was just left to his own ends.

(It occurs to me now, I wonder if my folks thought I was gay. I mean, kids just are NOT courteous. That's an old Southern virtue that the Yankees fought a whole Civil War to expunge. We're Ugly Americans now, and proud of it.)

No activities whatsoever with my sisters, that I recall. They evidently thought I had "cooties." Nothing with Mom other than chores. Same with Pop.

I didn't ask for more, and they didn't give it. Problem solved. Everybody's happy.

Hey, I was weaned in an incubator. Doesn't take much at all to make this kid happy. Fresh air. Peace and quiet. Dark nights. A room to myself – even if it was treated like an Interstate shortcut to the playroom. No problemo.

Gonna take a whole lot more than that to get me upset.

Later on, my Grandpa Howard died and left some money to Pop, which he used to build a small camp on Lake Rosemound, about 2 hours' drive north of Baton Rouge. I shot cans off a shelf we built into a tree with a BB gun. Fished off our dock. We had a ski boat, and went out on the lake now and then. My sisters absolutely HATED going up there. Hated.

Me? I – again – disappeared, fished, wandered around with my BB gun taking potshots at birds (very rarely hit anything), mowed the grass, and did my chores. LOL. I was burning branches and leaves once, caught the back acre on fire – and half the neighborhood, too. Otherwise, nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing memorable.

I don't remember any school friends, not in first grade. Fresh buns at the school lunch. Kick ball. My teacher calling out "WILLIAM!!" when she was angry with me. Studying the giant Army Ants in the packed dirt schoolyard. Cops came by to show us their German Shepherd drug-sniffing attack dog once. Mom picking me up in her blue Buick station wagon.

That's it, folks, the sum total download of my memory banks.

Hey. I'm not trying to abbreviate anything. I. Just. Plain. Don't. Remember. Anything. Else. Which is very odd because I have excellent recall. Was it me? Or my family? Was this kid BORN schizophrenic (I think so, in retrospect)?!

All I can say is that years later after my Mom passed away, I was cut off utterly and totally by my siblings (and their sundry children). It's been 20+ years since I've heard one peep from any of them. One. Peep. This is how you treat an individual who's just been rated 100% disabled Permanent and Total by the U.S. Veterans Administration? Okay. This is me – leaving.

Don't get me wrong. I got no complaints. I was a happy, healthy kid. Just no family life to speak of. And then, right when my sisters were older and behaving better, and things were looking better on the family front. . . Boom!

My little brother John Wesley was born.

Doh! Time to check out an armful of books from the library because that cute, healthy little boy was the new center of attention, and would remain so until – you guessed it, I left home for good to attend the U.S. Naval Academy.

Again. I'm not complaining.

Being an incubator child, I doubt if I wanted any extra attention anyway. Live and let live. My only requirement is stimulation – the intellectual kind. Things to observe. To do. Freedom to be active, always active, always doing things.

No shortage of that – any of it! - at Annapolis, that's for sure.

Two

Mom grew up as the daughter of a university professor, a very attractive debutante indeed (think Bettie Page), and with a posse of admirers. Then World War II broke out. She lost several beaux to combat.

Mom, Donna Yvonne Hayes by name, was almost done with college at the time, a double major in psychology and chemistry. She was a competitive swimmer and for the rest of her life swam a mile a day in warm weather. She kept her trim figure to the bitter end.

Every house we ever lived in had a pool. (I can imagine the discussions she and Pop had. . . Two stubborn, headstrong people – but always in private. “The little boy has ears.”) Mom had ambitions (and the intelligence) to become a medical doctor. I suspect the war changed all that. She got a job as a chemist at the Enjay refinery in Baton Rouge to help in the war effort.

Mom’s favorite story was how she got dashed with acid in a laboratory incident. They rushed her to a

chemical shower which, as designed, washed every last bit of clothing off her. And there she was. Stark naked in front of a laboratory full of young men.

Having zero idea of anatomy at the time, I laughed with everybody else, not quite knowing why. This is me, the most courteous camper. (It's okay, everybody else ignored me. Gramm was nice, though. I brought dinner on a tray to her every evening. She lived a short walk across Dogwood Avenue. Stuffy house. Gramm all dressed up. Always kind. Bilbo. That's what she called me.)

Pop got a tennis scholarship to Georgia Tech. He was a very handsome dude, decked out in his tennis whites (think Humphry Bogart). He belonged to a fraternity and, in fact, lived at the frat house for a while after he got a job at the Humble refinery in Baton Rouge.

Pop was drafted into the U.S. Navy as an Ensign, but got a deferment because his chemical engineering expertise – creating derivatives of hydrocarbons - was more important than his service. It's my understanding he was the industry expert on resins, the really thick gooey stuff left over after all the lighter oils were fracked away.

Mom was a sorority girl. I suppose they met at a social function on the LSU campus across town. (I wonder if Pop took all the overseas assignments because all the other men his age in America were combat veterans and made him feel bad. I'm sure this sentiment was prevalent, just not sure how much it affected the old man.)

Mom told the story about how her father was a very gruff man. Whenever she brought a date home, Dadee never talked. Just wrote his question down on paper and handed it over. Apparently, Pop passed muster. He probably wrote his answers down and handed them back.

I found several documents online about the late Professor Ralph Hayes. He was extremely well-liked by his students. He trained an entire generation of foresters and trained them well, go the accolades.

After the war, Pop got a Master's Degree at LSU (the most useless piece of paper he ever owned, he used to say). About this time they got married. Mom would bring him lunch at the refinery every day. Until their firstborn, that is. Then two more in quick succession. Adios goes that medical career, Ma'. (Honestly, she never complained and in fact was very happy with her life, which was quite the adventure as you will soon see.)

After Mom died circa 2002, I inherited The Family Bible, a giant gold-edge 1860 King James Edition. Inside is a genealogy of Pop's side of the family. William Brown Jr. married Ida Erb just before the Civil War broke out. He was the commanding officer of the 15th Mississippi Cavalry for the Confederacy. Col. Brown survived the war, settling down near Vicksburg. (Which isn't that far from Baton Rouge, and is quite close to our old camp on Lake Rosemound, just over the Louisiana border.)

A year after Mom passed away, I moved to Port Gibson, a small town just south of Vicksburg. A year

later, wandering around town waiting for them to close on the sale of my house at 206 China Street (I was moving to Vicksburg), I chanced upon Wintergreen Cemetery a few blocks away. And, lo and behold – there was the last resting place of William Brown Junior, my ancestor.

Yeah. Surprised the dickens out of me, too.

I later wrote a novella about Col. Brown's Civil War exploits, which eventually morphed into a screenplay called SHILOH. "The ghost of an avenging Confederate general terrorizes a small southern town."

William Brown's father-in-law was William Erb, a famous Swiss psychophysiologist, after whom that reflex when you hit your knee just right was named. Dr. Erb had four sons who emigrated to America, starting the Mennonite community in Pennsylvania. When the Civil War broke out, two brothers joined the Confederacy and two brothers fought for the Union.

Gramm used to say that Dadee was a direct descendant of U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes. President Hayes was evidently a very gruff and ornery individual, so maybe she was right. (Great-Grandpa Rutherford was the only president not directly elected by the people, by the way. Something about everybody haggling after the Civil War; he was the compromise president.)

Another ancestor Gramm claims for us is Cotton Mather, the preacher involved in the Salem Witch Trials back then. Again, knowing her and my family history, this fits very much with our family character. (And is

excellent fodder for a horror drama set in the Deep South in the middle of a Civil War battle zone.)

In any event, our roots in America go back to the Revolutionary War and beyond.

My father's father, Joseph Howard O'Cleary, emigrated directly from Cork County Ireland. They Americanized his last name at Ellis Island to Clark. The Clan O'Cleary was one of the four ruling classes of the Druids, the antiquarians or keepers-of-history. The storytellers. So perhaps I have this curse of the written word in my blood. If only I could be rid of it, once and for blessed all.

Grandpa Howard was a railroad engineer. My pride and joy as a boy was a fancy Lionel railroad train (which I still have) he gave me for Christmas one year. It's a beauty. Still works to perfection. Made in America par excellence.

I found a letter in Pop's papers from President John F. Kennedy, thanking Grandpa Howard for some unnamed but important "service to the country." It was mailed a week before JFK was shot. Grandpa Howard was deceased at the time. My father received it almost on the very day of the assassination!

What a shock THAT must have been.

Grandpa Howard was never in the military. He never did anything noteworthy that I know of other than get rich on the stock market, only to go bankrupt in quick order. I understand this financial fracas happened several times. I did find newspaper clippings, saying he

was a big wheel in Memphis. Moved out to Hollywood later on.

My speculations on this “important service” to America (Grandpa Howard was an Irish Catholic, just like JFK) are laid out in another screenplay, CRASHDOWN. “An elderly recluse in the Appalachians helps a young human-looking female extraterrestrial find a new host.” The old codger’s story is mine. The young lady is, well – the girl I never had.

The drama is set in my house in the Appalachians of western North Carolina, where the schizophrenic dude regales the young lady with a rambling tale of his family’s dark past involving the Roswell UFO crash in 1945.

(Dadee was a forester in New Mexico at the time and Grandpa Howard, the railroad engineer – White Sands Proving Ground where the UFO landed is where all the Nazi rocket scientists were brought after WWII – whole trainloads, the train and all – in Operation Paperclip.)

Basically, a dark conspiracy theme (Mr. Bill versus the Deep State) runs throughout this tale, in all its gory glory. An alternate title was “The Secret State,” tying JFK’s assassination to the military-space-industrial complex at the time. (Remember President Kennedy’s dream of landing on the moon?)

To prelude a little bit more, by the time I swore an oath and was commissioned on my first day at the U.S. Naval Academy in 1974, my family had lived in a total of eighteen different places overseas. I was, to whit, an

“Exxon Brat.” Consequently, the timeline gets a little crazy from now on.

2424 Cottonwood was always our home base. We moved back there between overseas postings, although basically we were gone for good after 1st grade, only returning to my last year in high school.

All the moves would be difficult to follow and a very confused jumble of places, schools, vacations, and dates, except for one fortuitous document that I prepared when I was hospitalized against my will on a psychiatric ward (straightjacket, padded pink room, and all) at Brooke Army Medical Center.

This is, the original, rambling, HAUNTED 1940s BAMC on Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. They diagnosed me with “severe chronic paranoid schizophrenia.” In the words of my doctor, I was “the sickest of the sick.” So testified at my tribunal my boss at the time, Chief of Chaplains Colonel Robert Sanders, United States Army.

Then, well - being stuck on a psych ward for weeks on end for “observation” - baby blue pajamas - surrounded by crazies (who seemed quite all right to me), what else was I to do but try and understand their diagnosis?

Picture this: an E4 writing a formal research paper on psychology. On an army psych ward. No underwear. Just baby blue PJs. No sharp surfaces. Butterscotch pudding. Saturday afternoon Children of the Corn movies (no kidding).

Like – grandiose delusion. DIAGNOSIS
CONFIRMED.

So. I created a document pinpointing exactly the cause of my schizophrenia: extreme nuclear radiation exposure when I was a Midshipman at Annapolis while on a summer tour of a nuclear-powered submarine. My proof was in my past, which I showed repeated a VERY specific (nuclear particles have a specific half-life) pattern over my major life events heretofore. That document listed every place I lived and the dates. I wrote a small research paper explaining the diagram. Gave it to my doctor. He, in turn, presented it to the hospital staff.

Wow! I'm famous!

Except, in a really bad sort of way.

Later on, in my Army medical tribunal, the two doctors on the panel voted against me – the line officer said I should remain in the service – presumably because the two doctors had prior knowledge of my case, presented to them by the Chief of Psychiatry, Gabriel Durand-Hollis – a Mexican national who spoke broken English at best. Justice served.

The inciting incident for this misfortune (getting locked up on a psych ward) was a horrific situation I had only just got out of at the U.S. Army White Sands Missile Range in southern New Mexico, where I worked as an E-4 Specialist 93E Weather Tech.

(Remember? White Sands is exactly where the Roswell UFO crash landed back then.)

An entire fracas at WSMR - a motorcycle wreck, my car blowing up, fistfights, threats from generals and Congressmen – began right after I presented a tech paper to the commanding general and a couple of scientists at the “High Energy Laser Project” on post, HELSTAF for short, what President Reagan called the trillion-dollar “Star Wars Laser” project.

Well, my paper, it was a very dry subject, and – being creative to a fault – my final poster was an application of my proposed theory, a faster-than-light spacecraft.

FYI. The beauty of a letter that got me that opportunity to chat with the Big Brains at HELSTAF was a certain letter from NASA dated a few years earlier on a little manuscript I wrote. NASA said, in part, “Your concepts about the Unified Field Theory appear to be so profound as to be years ahead of the scientific thinking in which you delved.”

Nice words, but say hey – you can’t give me a JOB?!

But, wait. Rewind.

Say what? You jabbered on about a fu*cking UFO to goddamn senior brass at White Sands Missile effing Range??? (I swear, hand on Bible, at that time I was the only person in America who didn’t know squat about UFOs.)

Well, you can fill in between the dotted lines. The splats of blood. The headaches. The heartaches.

Mom always told me, “You’re never happy unless you’re in trouble.” Well, going by that, I should have been absolutely ecstatic. So not. I was on an effing psych

ward. Fighting for my life. For my sanity. For my science.

Perspective: Psychology expert Mom? Any other mom would move heaven and earth to extricate me from this and all the other troubles I got into. Not my Mom. She wanted me to be happy. Ergo, let him enjoy his trouble.

Another way to put it, and this in retrospect seems to be my life's motto: If you're going to get into trouble, you might as well. Go. All. The. Way. That's me. The real-life Saturday Night Live Mr. Bill.

"Oh, no. It's Mr. Bill." SPLAT.

Sorry to tell you all things ahead of the official timeline. Like, maybe now you want to stick around for another chapter or three? Please? If for no other reason than to figure out why God has given little old me this wonderful opportunity to thumb my nose at the entirety of modern science.

If this doesn't turn out to be the Greatest Show on Earth, well – ask for your \$\$ back.

Three

Okay, back to Billbo's formative years. . .

We're in the Deep South now and in a segregated metropolis. LSU was on one side of town and Southern University was on the other. Nice middle-class homes on one side of Town Lake. Poverty and shacks to the other. Both connected via Eisenhower's wonderful new Interstate system. (We drove through East Baton Rouge on the way to our camp on Lake Rosemound. Always frightened me a little bit, the "dark" side of town.)

Both sides of Baton Rouge served a miles-long string of world-class refineries, docks, and rail yards along the mighty Mississippi River, processing Gulf Coast oil from inland and offshore wells throughout the southwest. Baton Rouge was (and remains) a veritable wealth machine.

And there's STILL not enough for everybody to live a good life?

This was the late 50's rolling into the early 60's. The Civil Rights movement was in full swing. Gaining momentum. Fixing to shake the very foundations of society.

I was a white kid in a working-class neighborhood. My old man was an engineer at a refinery adjacent to the Black side of town. A good many of his workers were Black, I'm sure. The only thing ever said in my household all the while as I was growing up was Pop saying I shouldn't play with the Black kids on the edge of our neighborhood.

By all rights, I should have been a bigoted, racist, redneck little jerk. What happened? I'd like to say I don't have a racist bone in my body. Or that racism is learned. Or taught, directly or by example. The mundane truth is that, at that tender young age, when most good Southern White Boys learn they're better than Blacks – well, Pop whisked the family away on an assignment in Caracas, Venezuela.

I was maybe 3 years old at the time, so I don't have any direct memories. I was apparently impressed by airplanes, though. My folks said I used to call them, "Two-tuos." Which must have impressed my engineer father to no end. Until they learned it was just another creative-ism, thanks to my later getting hold of one of Mom's red lipsticks and screaming all over our little house, coloring everything matador red.

Years later – when we lived in Seroe Colorado, Aruba (from which you can see Venezuela on a clear day) – Pop explained that Venezuela's oil is "sour (heavy)

crude,” which means it has a lot of sulfur. Venezuela’s crude oil is shipped to Aruba where the sulfur is processed out, and then sent to refineries along the Gulf Coast as “light (sweet) crude.”

There was a giant yellow pile of sulfur by the refinery and at the edge of the lagoon where we lived in Aruba. (I sailed often in that lagoon, literally a fish’s jump away from giant tanker ships.) Aruba is a coral island so the ocean is VERY deep right up to the shoreline. Pop’s job then was to find ways to use that sulfur in commercial products. Karma, I guess. Or maybe just the malicious management at Exxon.

The U.S. has had sanctions against Venezuela for the last 17 years. Since nobody else wants Venezuela’s sour crude (or has the ability to process it), their main source of income is gone. Now many able-bodied Venezuelans are seeking asylum in the U.S. – because of a cruel blockade by America.

A very similar situation applies to Cuba (one of my best friends in Spain, Jose Ferrer, was Cubano.)

Pop’s job was basically to help start up new refineries and to train local engineers to run them afterward. It was the best of America: exporting good jobs and good technology. All that EXTREMELY stressful work he did, driving him to an early death at age 60, has since been squandered by political maneuverings and get-rich-quick Boards of Directors.

The result is bankrupt Venezuelans and Cubans, proud and noble peoples forced into abject poverty –

while the rich elites get richer and the American standard is blackened.

Shame on them. Just – shame.

We returned to Baton Rouge for a couple of years after Caracas. Back to Walnut Hills Elementary School. Playing with Skipper, Ray, Chuck, and Stewart in the neighborhood. I fell and banged up my forehead with a scar once (which, as soon as it healed, I banged it up again in the exact same spot. Two-two.).

I told you I was hell on wheels.

Grandpa Howard died in '61. That's when we built the small house on Lake Rosemound, with money he left Pop. I was fascinated by the grungy Crocodile Dundee-esque dude (except Louisiana has alligators) who built our boat dock, mucking around in the mud, POUNDING the piles lakeside.

According to my psych-ward timeline, I had a girlfriend Robin about this time. Vague memories of a blue bikini. Stealing away on our ski boat to cruise past her place on Lake Rosemound. Never even met her. Always been shy with the girls (so far, at least). I suppose that's what happens when your roots are shallow, moving around so much.

We left for Germany in the spring of '63. Pop supervised the construction of an oil refinery in Ingolstadt. We were there for a year or so. My three sisters and I went to a Berlitz school (we were half the students). Mom went to one of our classes, learning German. I can

remember a few German words. Still retain the accent, too.

Pop was already fluent in German, thanks to growing up with his German-speaking Grandma. We had a Taunus. Driving across the Alps with chains. A ski vacation in Switzerland. Wobbling down the ski slopes at Interlaken. Ice skating on a lake near our house in Ingolstadt. Cold, always very cold. Screaming around the house on roller skates in green silk pajamas, ROLLING to scary classical music. Rachmaninoff. Beethoven.

“This damn kid’s batteries just plain NEVER run out, do they?”

Our landlord at 12 Geimersheimer (isn’t it strange the things that stick in your head?) dumped a load of manure in our yard that spring. Talk about smelly. Our house had only a small gas-fired water heater over the bathtub. Everybody took a bath before me. So, I bathed in a tub full of cold water, three-times used by my older sisters.

No better way to establish the pecking order, once and for all time. Alas, a Spartan doesn’t complain. Not about dirty water. He dances, in silk PJs, to scary classical music.

Next stop was Catania, Sicily, for another sixteen months or so. Pop was Esso’s go-to man for starting up new refineries. We lived on the upper floor of a tall apartment complex in the middle of Catania. Pop had to drive an hour+ each way to the refinery down the coastline.

The property manager always greeted us down at the ground level, “Buon Giorno!” And that’s what we called him, Buongiorno. We dumped a load of purple grapes on the laundry on a clothesline on a balcony beneath us once, my sisters and I. (Finally, we do something together.) I’m sure Buongiorno wasn’t so happy with us on that day.

Pop had a bad accident in the kitchen once (he always cooked breakfast – bacon and eggs, bacon and oatmeal, bacon and cold cereal – always bacon, the old Ozarks hillbilly who grew up chronically deprived of protein), pouring a pan full of hot grease on one hand. Terrible red scar.

My job was always squeezing fresh orange juice for everybody. In Sicily, and sometimes in Spain, we had RED oranges. Hmmm. Tangy! (Back stateside, it was frozen orange juice mixed in a blender. Breakfast American style.)

Mom, as usual, did all the grocery shopping, also getting us to school and back. All this in a foreign language (she wasn’t good with languages, either – even after many years in Spain later on, she continued to use the present tense for everything). Mom was quite the Spartan herself, never complaining, always eager for the next day – with four rambunctious kids in tow, no less.

Too bad they don’t give medals to Moms.

I began my training as an electrical engineer with a 220 Volt SHOCK while fiddling with some wires. (Listening to a Beatles tune at that exact INSTANT. Ouch!)

Mt. Aetna erupted that year on July 4th. I must have studied Italian in school because I recall a few words and to this day and still have the fun, lyrical accent down pat. (Learning new Italian words never fails to elevate my mood. Spanish also, if to a lesser extent.)

We got lost in the dense fog of Milan once. Pop drove around for hours, refusing to get directions. This is so NOT the lesson you want to teach your young son who soaks up every act, utterance, and emotion of the old man. (Mom would call off distances from a map and he could add them up in his head.) Not that anybody complained.

We had hamburgers at the US Naval base at Sigonella on weekends sometimes. I can still taste that American beef. Toured a US aircraft carrier docked in Palermo once. I had a little yellow ball that I adored. Lost it on the carrier somewhere.

Pop always said that his favorite people were the Italians (and Sicilians). We went to the beach in the summer. Rocky shoreline. Umbrellas against the sun. Clear, warm water. Folks changing clothes in these little stand-up tents.

Back to Baton Rouge for a year or so. My sisters went to junior high/high school. We were close enough that I could ride my red Schwinn to school when it wasn't raining. (LOTS of rain in Baton Rouge.) I always loved cycling. Wherever we went, I had a bicycle. Just love tooling around. The freedom. That's me, a free spirit.

Our next move was a major one because we packed up all the furniture to bring with us. (Germany and

Sicily were furnished rentals.) Atlas Moving. Wood shavings everywhere in the house. Strong hands wrapping everything in big sheets of paper. Packing Grandma's Blue China (which I have now) in wooden crates.

We lived in Benicasim when we first got to Spain. (Noisy, I mean NOISY propellor plane ride across the Atlantic.) This was a small coastal town. Our apartment looked out on the Mediterranean.

There was a diving platform a good ways off the coast. I swam out there once and GASHED one heel on some sharp barnacles on the platform. Lots of blood. By the time I swam back to shore, the salt water had all but healed it up. (Nobody asked Pop how to fix that gruesome injury . . .)

We soon moved ten miles down the coast to the south into a house in El Grao, the port city of Castellon de la Plana, in a nice residential area about two blocks from the beach. Pop worked at a refinery down the road in El Grao.

Our house in El Grao (Nurilliar by name – all the de lujo houses had names over there) came with a gardener. He kept the grass trimmed with clippers. The shrubs.

They paved the subdivision while we lived there. A very old man cracked giant boulders into small stones for the substrate. I mean, really – one. old. man. And a whole neighborhood of giant rocks to crush. (This is me, promising never to complain about retirement

again.) Mom would send me out with a cold beer for him now and again. I'm sure he was eternally grateful but would probably have preferred wine.

The first thing we did after we moved into Nurilliar was to build a basketball goal out of the wooden 2x4s from the Atlas moving crates. The driveway sloped down to a garage under the house. The basketball area was at the bottom of the U-shaped drive. I spent many happy hours shooting hoops there.

Not long after we moved in, word came from back home that my friend Skipper Hoover had been killed. By his own father, in a farming accident. Ran over him. I remember getting the news. In a small sunroom of the house, surrounded by windows. Where Mom used to take Spanish lessons with Mr. Perez. Learned the word "perezoso" from him (Spanish for lazy). Lazy bear – "oso" means bear.

(You might have observed how I never fully processed the gruesome death of my BFF. This would come crashing to haunt me later on – you guessed it, at the worst imaginable time.)

They blockaded all the streets around our neighborhood each spring for a professional motorcycle race around the perimeter. Long straightaway along the beach. Round the curve – one foot out on the ground with a metal sole plate on the shoe (observe how his little tyke didn't miss a damn thing) – down the road, past the 18-hole golf course. Back onto the loop.

Susan Hadlock lived near the golf course. I had a crush on her for a while. So did everybody else. I'm not good with competition.

Esso had a school for the American employees. It was in a small villa in Benicasim. A young couple from Kalamazoo, Michigan, the Rushcamps taught all the classes. A Spanish lady with a wild, looping signature taught us Spanish. Pop's big boss, the refinery manager, J.B. Arbor, (Julius Ballenger, I believe) lived in an estate in Benicasim a block off the beach road. Their giant yard took up a whole city block. He had four sons: Tommy, Darrell, Larry, and Don.

I went to school with Tommy and Darrell, both about my age. LOL. Tommy had a New Orleans Saints lunch box (they were the worst team in the league, perennial failures). We played soccer at lunch every day. Tetherball, too. The Arbors had paella sometimes and invited me over. That's a Spanish dish with chicken, rice, and spices. Every Sunday supper was nothing but ice cream. (You can be sure I made an excuse to drop by for that.)

My three sisters went to a boarding school in Switzerland. La Chatalenie. The house was always so empty when they left. My younger brother John was 3-4 years old by now. He went to a Spanish kindergarten. I remember a photo Pop took of John, sitting in a field of picked cherries. Brother John never spoke a word to any of the other kids at his daycare center. But when he took Spanish in high school stateside years later, he had a perfect accent.

In grape season once, we went to stomp grapes with the locals. (Maybe that's why I never liked wine.)

The village of Benicasim (we had lived in the resort part along the coast) had a “running with the bulls” like they do in Pamplona every year. I ran with them once. Got cornered by a small bull – sharp horns, right – there! Folks pulled me over the wooden barricade with seconds to spare. Crazy American kid is - okay!

We had a small Seat (the Spanish edition of Fiat) station wagon. At one point I slapped a Mad Magazine sticker on the car, “This Car Sucks.” Pop was mortified and made me remove it ASAP. Something about big problems with the authorities.

Another time I went a little crazy and SMASHED all the windows in an apartment complex they were building behind our house. Don’t remember any punishment. But I sure felt bad about it. Still do. I suppose Pop paid the damages and then some. I hope he didn’t get in hot water at work. (Remember, we’re living in Franco’s Spain now – the evil fascist dictator.)

I puttered all over with my clunky old Spanish bicycle. Dark blue. Odd valves to pump in air with a strange hand pump. Once I went ten miles down the beach road to play Risk with my friend Jamie.

Pop belonged to a tennis club on the road from El Grao to Castellon. They had clay courts. Best play surface ever. Good for his bad knees. My sister Regan was an excellent player and won a trophy there one summer. She dated some guy named Enrique. I think he proposed to her even. By this time, she was in college at LSU. Belonged to a sorority. Studying to be a school

teacher. Math. Elementary school kids. Ended up marrying a Cajun, Michael Normand.

We had two Irish Setters, Rough and Ready. I cooked a little ground horse meat with rice in a big vat for their food when we couldn't get dry food for them. Ready got pregnant one year. My Irish friends Shamus and Dermot helped deliver the puppies. (All that goo in the whelping me want to up-chug.) Irish friends for Irish Setters. Priceless. Motley bunch of puppies. Probably any number of fathers.

I liked the beach. Sand castles. There was a long stone breakwater for the port of El Grao I would climb out on. Crabs everywhere. Spiky sea urchins. All sorts of fish. Even octopuses, slithering away in a cloud of black ink. Fishing boats leaving early. Returning late.

Pop brought John and me to a small barbershop in the village of El Grao. The barber was named Juan. Manual clippers that PULLED half your hair out of your neck. Hot towel when you're down. Powder.

A panaderia down the street from the barbershop there in El Grao had fresh loaves of bread. Homemade potato chips, too. Our favorite grocery store was in Castellon, Arcusa's. He stocked some American items for the expats. Slicing bacon from a giant slab. Milk came in triangle-shaped packages. Corn Flakes was the only cereal we could get.

Regan used to bring whole boxes of Dentyne gum for Pop every time she came from the States for vacation. She and I teamed up to play Mom and Pop for doubles whenever she was in town. Pop was the Old Pro. Mom

had a good forehand. Regan was almost as good as Pop (the Georgia Tech champion). I managed. Years later, Mom and I played tennis every Saturday morning. She made sure I never hit it to her backhand. I haven't played tennis since Mom passed away, going on 20 years ago.

There were nice shops in downtown Castellon. I bought Mom a wooden fox figurine for Christmas once (different colors of wood for the ears, tail). I still have it, nobody else wanting it from her estate.

Gramm visited a few times. LOL. Pop used to joke to her that the small stone walls built by farmers to segregate their fields were Roman ruins. Yeah, there was a lot of friction between them two.

There was an old Roman tower in the mountains inland of Benicasim. I hiked up there once. Wherever we drove, Pop would always stop to take photos of these giant black bulls on the tops of hills, advertising a liqueur, Osborne I think. A really nasty red toxin he just loved. Cinzano, maybe. Mom and Pop drank cheap wine on occasion. Never had a taste for it, myself. But then, I wasn't a teenager yet.

On the road south to Valencia was Sagunto, a small town with an important Roman fortification on a hill above. A few years later, Pop had an artisan custom-make tiles at a shop in Sagunto. Installed the tiles in their retirement home in Lago Vista, north of Austin.

We were in Valencia one year for the Fallas, giant papier mâché figures they set on fire. The locals had

these funny fireworks that you grind with your feet to POP them off. Sparklers. We didn't dine out much, but the local cuisine was awesome. Paella was my favorite.

I suppose most of the culture that I loved is gone now. Replaced by American fast-food joints. High-tech discos. Elite's boutique shops. Fast cars. Beautiful women. Extreme wealth on display at every opportunity.

Makes me want to burn it all to the ground and return it to the paradise I remember. Old ladies in black splashing water out of a bucket to clean off the sidewalk. Kids on bicycles. Soccer balls everywhere. Old men smoking Un Equis Dos filter-less cigarettes (coffin nails!), arguing over the latest soccer lotto.

A tall, blond American kid speaking a little Spanish could go anywhere at any time of the day without the least bit of worry. To the beach. The stone pier. Anywhere. No worries. Kind people everywhere. A few pesetas for a loaf of bread. A sack of Sugus from a local store. A fistful of red licorice. A blueberry snowcone.

Cycling on the sidewalks. The cobblestone streets. I tooled around everywhere, night and day, year in and year out. By myself. My folks hadn't the least bit of reason to be worried. (Hey, from this kid's point of view, Franco's Spain was A-okay.)

Castellon and the whole coastal area was a great place. Nice weather all year. It got a little crowded along the beaches in the summer, but not overly so. The long, arching beach road from El Grao north to Benicasim was ten miles of desolate, windswept beach.

These days that arc of a beach is solid houses, a mile deep inland from the coastline. I'm sure the whole area is extremely crowded in the summer. The house we lived in El Grao is worth multiple millions now. Nobody but the filthy rich can live in places like that. The Arbour's estate in Benicasim (if it still exists) would be a billionaire's summer home.

Nobody will ever have the experience I had, ever again. It's far too expensive for any locals anymore. Juan's barbershop is probably an exclusive boutique for the super-rich. Pop's refinery went through several owners and is now shut down, scrap metal for the tall apartment buildings lining the beach most likely.

The tennis club still exists. Probably costs an arm and a leg to join. Back then it was in the middle of nowhere (like the club where we played in Baton Rouge, Bocage). Now it's surrounded by houses and tall buildings. Bocage is in the middle of a commercial area, too. No more fresh air and country quiet while you're enjoying a game of tennis on wonderful clay courts. Just smoke. Congestion. Stress. What's the point anymore?

There are so many tourists in Barcelona up the coast to the north nowadays that the locals are furious. "We want our town back!" I'm sure the whole coast is the same way.

Since Spain joined the European Union, it's become like Florida is to Americans. The retirement state. Where all the people from up north have second homes to escape the harsh winter.

Got ambitions of retiring in Florida (Spain), do you – where property is ten times its real value, if you can find it. In the winters, all your neighbors will be rude, rich Yankees. Summers will be crowded with rude, noisy tourists. Fat tourists in Florida. OBESE. Why spend a lifetime saving for retirement when – It's. Not. There. Anymore.

If I was a Ukrainian now, I sure wouldn't want to join the E.U. Within a few years the rich folks will run your property prices up so you can't even live there anymore. If you do remain, you'll be relegated to a mere servant to the rich and powerful elites. (Of course, if Russia takes over, it'll be the same damn way.)

The worse part is that all those second homes? They're not just empty in the summer. They're rented out on Airbnb or Verbo now. Filthy rich people, deducting the cost of their mortgage interest on their second homes – now they're renting it out to make an even worse killing. Your neighbors in-season won't just be rich folks. They'll be strangers. Partying. Don't give a sh*t about your domestic tranquility.

The Castellon coast is one big rental. No culture. No order. Just narcissistic rich people jacking off the world. Thus is the fate of all the beautiful places in the world. Even the nice places in the frigid north. Doh! Summer homes for the filthy rich who live in the south.

Four

The idyllic childhood is fixing to take a hard left turn toward the Dark Side. I suppose that's what growing up is all about. Puberty. Adolescence. No more sheltered cocoon from the evil outside world. No more comfy incubator. (Yeah, right, try telling that to Gen Xers or all the other modern cohorts still with their heads in their social media balloon – at age 30. Still living at home!)

The end of Elysium? But all that happens is Pop gets assigned to the head office in Madrid. We're still in Spain. Madrid's an awesome city. The El Prado museum. Spicy potato crisps at a kiosk in Plaza Major. Casa de Campo, the giant park in city central with birds and ducks and happy kids, couples, and tourists. The Metro (subway). Big city life at its finest – nothing better in the whole world. Not Paris. London, Tokyo, London.

The same excellent Spanish people live in Madrid. The same wonderful weather. Enthralling culture. The same freedoms for the blond-headed American kid with

the blue eyes and the broken Spanish. Taking the Metro to all points. Bull fights. Steaks afterward (the bulls they just killed) at Casa Paco's.

And, yet. There's not a doubt in my mind that my folks absolutely DREADED moving to Madrid. Why? It's not that our Spanish homeland was any different. It's the whole rest of the world that has changed. And the entirety of that change was represented by that Leviathan of American culture, The American School of Madrid. Henceforth abbreviated ASM. It as a real, live high school just like back in the States – along with all the alcohol, drugs, and social craziness that was the 1960s and early 70s.

My folks were ready for Madrid. My older sisters, too, having been exposed to the cultural tectonic shift at boarding school in Switzerland and college in the U.S. Regan remained in college, but Kelle and Leigh Erin both returned to the house and went to ASM with me. (NOTE: I have absolutely no memories of my little brother John from this point on. I just don't. I makes me sad. But there it is – a vacuum. Maybe he was stuck in the same no man's land I experienced growing up; maybe I was just an egocentric, narcissistic teenage bum. Most likely, a little of both.)

This is the late 60's, folks. Imagine what has been happening all this time I was having the time of my life growing up in the Province of Castelo. The Civil Rights movement. Riots and anarchy on the streets. The Hippie revolution. Drugs. Woodstock. The Viet fucking Nam War. Gays on the march for recognition. Everybody was

protesting - everything. And getting high while they were doing it.

But you know what? There was one place in the world where none of this caused the slightest ripple in the space-time continuum. Franco's Spain. The fascist state run by Generalissimo Francisco Franco. El Caudillo. There were no riots. No drugs. Americans were not spat on. Hippies were nowhere to be seen (except in the upstairs bedrooms in our new home). Gays were still in the closet.

I never saw any TV news. Pop must have read the International Herald Tribune, but I never did. The Viet Nam war was no closer than my friend Pepe Oulahan's severely depressed father, who was a correspondent for Time magazine. I didn't know what a homosexual was until I was a senior in college. Didn't care then. Don't care now. Never met a real Hippie for three years after that. Had no inkling what racial strife was until, hell - well into my 60's when Obama got elected. Learned all the racial bigotry I know from the master himself, Donald P. Trump.

First, let's settle into our new home in beautiful, wonderful Madrid.

It was most definitely a step up. Sure can't fault the folks for lack of class. It was a three-story castle on the outskirts of Madrid in Aravaca. Mom had her pool, an above-ground ugliness that still got the wet job done. A giant yard the size of a city block was enclosed in a stone wall. Rose garden. Eucalyptus trees in the back. Grass.

Room enough for our German Shepherd, a black purebred. (Mom sold the pick of the litter one year to none other than King Juan Carlos's family across town.) I still couldn't mow the lawn or do yard work. Their gardener brought in a small herd of sheep now and then to mow and fertilize the yard.

Pop did, however, remember my mechanical inclinations. He bought me a little mini bike, which I enjoyed no end. My friend Eric, an Air Force brat whose folks were at Torrejon Air Force Base (now a Spanish Air Force and Space Force base) had a go-cart which he kept at my place. We raced around that yard so damn much the beautiful grass was worn down as thin as Pop's ragged old dress pants (which were practically see-through). I spent many a happy hour working on the mini bike and go-cart engines. Mission accomplished, old man. Thanks.

The house had been headquarters of the resistance during the Spanish Civil War. Pop found a Nazi dagger in the basement. The owners demanded he return it. He didn't (engineers can be SO stubborn). It's on display in my house to this day – stubbornness and all.

There was a concrete pill box on the street right outside the front gate. I dug it out, fixed it up, and thereafter kept a bottle of Bacardi rum stashed there. Great house for parties. They even had postcards I could give out to my friends as invitations, with a map on back.

ASM was in Aravaca, on the other side of the small village from our house. Kelle and Leigh Erin went to the school with me for a year or two. Kelle ended up eloping to Morocco with one of her teachers (then disappeared

back to the states after that). Leigh Erin got bad into drugs, too. Her room was a small room at the very top of the castle. Some guy pulled a knife on her, I recall. She disappeared back to the states as well.

Years later Leigh Erin pulled out of an alcoholic nose dive, got herself a degree in chemistry, and a good job with the State of Texas. Kelle roughed it with a draft dodger by the name of Dale Klimek, living on the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia, counting salmon for the fisheries. Got divorced. Married a Newfoundlander, and lived forever after in St. Johns, happy as a kitten in fresh litter.

And Regan? Steady as the rain Regan, she moved right along in college back home in Baton Rouge.

I grooved to the music, for the first time. Bob Dylan. Led Zepplin. Blind Faith. Santana. All I heard was the good vibes, though, not the dark social subtext behind the beats. Sure, I was the dutiful rebellious teenager. Smoked cigarettes a few times. Got a liter of beer at the Plaza Mayor bars once in a while with a side order of spicy hot papas (fries).

I stole thousand-peseta notes out of Pop's billfold now and then so I could ride the Metro to my friend's houses. Grab a hamburger at Woolworths with the gang. Take a taxi home when I got blitzed out of my mind. Even skipped school one day for a cerveza blowout with my friends Joey Martinez and Jose Ferrer. We all got suspended. But hey, that's what kids do.

All of this thanks to - The American School of Madrid. For the very first time, I was surrounded by

friends. Had a girlfriend or three. Connie. Angela, who was Spanish – I suppose it was prestigious for Spanish kids to attend an American high school. Leslie Brock from Houston Texas (my favorite until the bitter end), complete with a bronze peace sign on a string as a sign we're going together. Making out. No hard-core sex. Just dancing to the music and hanging out.

We moved to Mirasierra after my sisters left, to a smaller house. This was an exclusive neighborhood on the north side of Madrid, much closer to Pop's office – but an hours-long bus ride to ASM in Aravaca. Pop drove the same ol' "This Car Sucks" Seat station wagon to work. Mom had a cute little two-door sporty car (you could operate the radio with a foot pedal). Both vehicles had manual transmissions. We had a pool in the back yard again.

No go-cart, but Jose kept his Bultaco dirt bike at the house for a while – ZOOMING around the hills just outside the neighborhood. Pepe Oulahan lived nearby with his Time magazine dad and an older brother. (Had my first – and last- scrambled eggs with ketchup one hungover morning in their house.)

Pepe, Jose, Joey, and I tried to start up a band (I played organ, Jose base, Joey guitar). Pepe's brother had a band set up in the basement, and we tried their equipment on for size. Not gonna happen.

On the plus side, it was closer to Woolworths (American-style burgers, which we SMASHED flat – a rum chaser, beers), our groovy hang-out spot, and only a short taxi drive away from the closest Metro station.

A taxi with its green “available” light was never more than a wave away, safe as can be, and very inexpensive. The Metro was clean, fast, safe, dependable, and even cheaper. Loved the Metro.

Eva Peron, the wife of Jose Peron (by now deceased, the evil dictator of Argentina) lived in the same Mirasierra area. Another fascist, like Franco – the world was not friendly to their type anymore. The liberals were by now fighting to yank funding from our war against the Communists in Viet Nam. Fighting for gay rights. For the whole free-sex-and-drugs agenda. They had the balderdash to mix in Civil Rights to that whole mess – which was the one reasonable “rights” among the lot.

It makes me melancholy, to think back on those waning days of my youth. Moreso, how they were the scourge of the liberals, even back then. How DARE you have a happy youth!

They were safe and healthy days. Normal. Hearty. Plenty rebellious enough but still full of love and stability at home and in the community. I owe my sanity and the good life that followed to Franco and his “fascist” Spain.

Reading Hitler’s Table Talk conversations recently, I believe Franco’s Spain was the kind of Europe that would have come to pass if the Nazis had won. Hitler had no desire to impose democracy or fascism or any other form of government on people. The Fuhrer supported religion and Christianity and Islam and any practice of faith.

Hitler's role model was Rome and the "Pax Romana," maintaining law and order for nations, prohibiting wars between and among them, and recognizing every form of government and religion so long as it fostered peace and happiness, and moved a nation towards a common destiny.

I know they did the Holocaust. I wonder, though – if their rage wasn't against the elites and the wealthy manipulators. Many of the super-rich of the day were Jews. Caught up in the movement, the Nazis wrongfully swept all Jews into the mix. I still think the Allies knew about the work camps from the very beginning. Later during the carpet bombing campaigns, they never hit a single camp nor the rail lines serving them. Why not?

Somebody should investigate that, rigorously.

More and more, I think the liberal West WANTED the Holocaust to continue. Facilitated it. Burned the flames of racism to move it along. What a wonderful opportunity to obliterate conservative values, by forevermore associating it with Hitler and the Nazis. That's certainly what has happened. It's still happening, today as much as ever. The liberals will never let it go. Never let the world move beyond it. Why should they? It's the perfect foil to their own nefarious ends.

Yes, I know adults despise Franco. He's second only to Hitler in the lexicon of evil leaders. He's even worse than Mussolini, who after all had the panache to stand tall before a firing squad. I'm not judging them as an adult though, but as a child.

Liberals, more and more, want every child to grow up in an incubator. Bombarded with Sesame Street propaganda. Molded into a materialist, consuming machine. Devoid of personality. Sexuality. Happiness. Ambition (other than to work like a slave in a world of Amazon-esque factories run by A.I. and robots with ruthless precision.)

I think building a wall around our youth is the way to go. Tactful isolation is healthy. Freedom. Tons of exercise. Let things happen when they happen (love, lust, sex) naturally. Turn off the TV. Take away their smartphones. Burst their social media bubble. Give them a pencil and paper. A basketball. Chalk. A BB gun. A single-speed bicycle.

I say again: You can't ask for a better environment for a kid growing up than Franco's Spain. All that revolutionary chaos was kept out of sight and out of mind. There was space to mature and grow into adulthood in a natural, healthy way. I was strong, active, personable, tolerant, and mature.

Kelle and Leigh Erin got blindsided by all that hippie sh*t. They lost many good years recovering. The rest of the world got sucked right in and never recovered. We're in a tailspin to this very day. Down the drain. Into darkness. Round and round. More darkness. Faster and faster. (A dark recurring nightmare from my younger years.)

Anyway, off the soap box. Feet back on the ground in sunny Spain.

I had two almost normal high school years. A flourishing social life. I didn't play any sports like I probably would have done back in the States, but I had a steady girlfriend for a while. Then another. I probably would have had a muscle car back home. (When we returned for my senior year, Pop bought an Opel – a little, very energy-efficient sedan.)

Jose's mom was the local distributor for Bacardi rum. "Cuba Libre!" They lived in an apartment downtown. Mostly we hung out at Woolworths. The parks. Hit the flea market sometimes. I had an old great coat, made me look like Sgt. Pepper on the cover of that Beatle's album. Beer. Rum. Only got crazy drunk once. They stuffed me in a taxi and gave the driver directions to our house in Aravaca. He pulled up to the front door, knocked, and Pop hauled me in.

Only in Franco's Spain.

My grades in Madrid were mediocre at best. Got a D in Santoro's Spanish class. "Vete hacer punetas." Which literally translates to go make cufflinks but really means "Go to hell." My bete noir was language tenses. (On the plus side, four years later I placed out of three years of Spanish at the Naval Academy, so I must have learned something.)

Got blood blisters on my feet once playing basketball in my bare feet on the asphalt courts at ASM. Ouch! Always loved basketball – to a fault. The coach, Schwartz by name, gave me a Presidential Fitness Certificate one year. Not many American kids would qualify these days, not with 85% unable to even qualify for Army Basic Training. Sad.

Pop had to return to the Castellon refinery. They rented an amazing villa in Benicasim. It was right on the ocean. On a cliff above. There was a cave dug out at sea level. Pop bought a big orange raft row boat. I only took it out once. Stepped on a sea urchin. OUCH! My heel was stuffed full of spikes.

They rushed me to the Esso clinic at the refinery where the doctor attempted to YANK individual spikes out. Didn't work so well. Then they took me to a Spanish clinic. Got a salve for the heel. In a few days, the white puss just pushed the spikes right on out. Painless. Brilliant.

I loved hanging out on the rough coastline below our villa residence in Benicasim. You could watch the octopuses in the surf. Very sneaky characters. Pretty speedy too, when you spook them.

I missed all my friends in Madrid, but not for long – off I went to boarding school in Rome, Italy. (Esso guarantees employees an education for their kids. If they couldn't go to a local school, Esso paid all expenses to send the kids away.)

The Franciscan Brothers at Notre Dame International School For Boys got me into shape in zero time flat. I got straight A's there and pretty much A's for the rest of my academic career. I only remember Father Raymond. Taught religion. Always "tenting" his fingers.

The school had great food. I especially enjoyed the music appreciation class. Watching Bart Star and the Green Bay Packers football highlight reels. Speed reading!

I was captain of our flag football team. Went out for the winning pass in the championship game – fumbled the ball. Story of my life. Oddly enough, I don't recall a formal P.E. class.

Tommy and Daryl Arbor were at the school. We were friends again. Tag in the swimming pool. I tried out for track. Loved the fresh grapes at break time. Just not a track person.

I was a Roman. Packed up a brown bag lunch every weekend and disappeared into Rome. Took the busses everywhere. The Forum. The Spanish Steps. Had a tour book and ate it all up. Heaven on Earth. (Damned if I know how I still got such good grades.)

After Rome for a semester, it was back to Baton Rouge. I remember the trip back to the states from Rome, which I took alone. I had a stopover in Madrid. Went to see my old flame, Leslie Brock. I remember footsteps in the snow when I arrived at her place. I imagined she had been pacing, waiting for me.

We kept in touch by letter, Leslie and I. Maybe six months later I bought a nice gold ring (with a "C" for Clark) and sent it to her. Never heard back. Years later, I found the ring in Mom's jewelry box. Not sure how that happened. Not sure if I want to know, either.

So, we're back in the good ol' U.S. of A now. While they painted and remodeled our house on Cottonwood, Mom, Pop, John, and I lived at our camp in St. Francisville. (Again, I don't remember squat about John through this entire period.) Pop and I commuted to Baton Rouge in his bronze Opel (we drove a cranky old

Ford Mustang loaner until the special-order Opel arrived – terrible car, Mustang.) I had to listen to his favorite New Orleans News radio station. WWL. I dropped Pop off at the refinery then drove to Robert E. Lee High School for classes.

Once we moved back into town, I rode my red Schwinn to school. This was my senior year, but I was a couple of years ahead of the curve because of my October birthday. I took a correspondence course in accounting and graduated a year early at the tender age of 16. With my October birthdate, this was numerically two years earlier than most kids. No wonder I didn't have any friends to speak of.

I remember the typing class with a stern Black woman. I gave a rousing speech lauding J. Edgar Hoover for another class. (I'm sure THAT went over well.) Civics class (where my neighbor Rhett Lorio wore his Army ROTC uniform on dress-up days) was taught by our coach in a temporary building out back. Coach wanted me to be on his wrestling team. But I couldn't do sports after school because Pop and I were commuting (at the time).

I took Latin all that year. President of the Latin Club (teacher's favorite, which I'm sure went over well with my peers – what could “the most courteous camper” do? I'd just spent a semester in Rome itself). We had a Toga Party at the end of the semester. I went with a cute dark-haired girl. Brought her home afterward. Her family was Jehovah's Witnesses and wouldn't let us go out to a dance or club afterward. Evil rock and roll music. Dammit, struck out again.

I was nominated for the National Honors Society, but right before graduation they got hold of all my bad grades from ASM and wanted me to revoke it. I refused. Didn't even attend graduation.

Pop bought me a Honda 175 motorcycle. (Something about a bet when the Dow Jones passed 1000.) I rode it to classes at LSU the following year. Made all A's. A grad student taught trigonometry. Piece of cake. Psychology was okay. Not hard at all. Struggled mightily in physics (no-calculus physics even). I must have spent hours in the professor's office (he was Dean of the Physics Department, too). Days. Weeks! Dropped out of an architecture class. Just could not do perspective drawings.

They asked if I wanted to rush Pop's old fraternity. Didn't interest me in the least. What DID interest me was a hardback book Gramm gave me on the U.S. Naval Academy. (Before that she softened me up with a John Wayne album, which I actually listened to - even liked.) I applied with my congressmen. Didn't hear back by the end of spring semester.

I had a part-time job at a typewriter repair shop for a little while. Didn't last more than a month or two. After that, Pop paid me a working wage for doing repairs around the house.

I spent the LSU year cleaning up and painting the outside of the house. We sold the place and packed everything up for one last move, to Aruba in the Netherlands Antilles. Right before we left town, I got a

chance to be on a list to go to the Air Force Academy. Or a direct appointment to Annapolis. I took the latter.

The appointment was by Congressman John R. Rarick, later a Judge in East Baton Rouge Parish. Heaven knows why I was chosen (although I suspect Gramm used every ounce of influence she could muster. Thanks, Gramm. I love you.) The draft had just ended, only months before – so I imagine many better-qualified guys dropped out. Not me. I had no idea a war was even going on!

All I saw was the U.S. Naval Academy photos in the old book Gramm gave me. (Grandmothers can be SO sneaky.)

As an aside, John Rarick was cut from the same fabric as George Wallace. Reporters called him “the leading racist in Congress.” He regularly belittled Supreme Court Chief Justice Marshall and even Martin Luther King. Mostly he was worried about the Black Muslims, which turned out to be prescient.

Judge Rarick later ran for President under the American Independent Party ticket, Wallace’s old party. I didn’t know any of this, of course. Maybe his office called people at Robert E. Lee High School and heard about my lofty praise of J. Edgar Hoover. Maybe they liked that I grew up in Franco’s Spain. A kindred spirit. Whatever it was, I thank you. I did you proud, Sir. Oorahhh!

I tried to learn sailing in Town Lake (failed miserably). Pop bought a Sunfish when we got to Aruba, and I did

better there. Then it was off to Annapolis Maryland. My first roommate, Miguel Beccerrel, was a Black fellow from Puerto Rico. We likely took the same flight to the Washington DC airport. Packed us into a bus. Carted us to Annapolis. Shaved our heads. Stood us up tall and give us the oath to “Defend and protect the Constitution of the United States.” Boom. It’s done.

(I take my oaths VERY seriously, by the way. That’s what this book is about.)

It was all downhill from there. Straight downhill. Down a very steep hill. Straight to Hell. How come?

I ended up in one of the two U.S. Marine Corp companies, 15th. So much for Gramm’s country club fantasy.

I was on Parris Island.

Boot camp on steroids.

Bummer.

Five

My roommate Plebe Summer at the Academy, Miguel Beccerell, had spent the previous year at the Naval Academy Preparatory School. Without him, I would have washed out within a week. Sooner. Hours. Minutes, even. I mean, really seriously – come my first Sunday morning and a few hours of personal time, I was on the phone home, in tears, begging Mom and Pop to get me the HELL out of there.

I was in terrible physical shape. Completely undisciplined. Didn't know word one of military terminology. Nothing. Nada. Zilch. I was absolutely, totally unprepared for the experience. It was D-Day on the shores of Normandy, getting beat into shape by none other than George Patton himself. With his horse baton and pearl-handled pistol. Nazi sharpshooters over the sand dunes. Tanks. Grenades.

This wasn't the Annapolis you see in the movies. This was 1974. During the Viet Nam war. Captain Hodory was right out of combat. Chest full of ribbons. He wasn't

preparing us for cushy duty on a ship. He was preparing us for combat.

Eventually. Well. I didn't just survive. I thrived! At the end of two years when I left, everybody had me pegged to be a six-striper, Brigade Commander. I was gonna be the first Admiral of our class. That wasn't my opinion, but the general consensus. "Peer grease" we called them, peer evaluations. I was on the Superintendent's List perennially – excellence in sports, academics, and peer grease. Two stars on the lapels of your dress uniform.

My squad leader for Plebe Summer was another Black guy, "Killer" Miller. Golden Gloves Boxing champion. Mean as a horse's ass and twice as cruel. Until our C.O. Captain Robert W. Hodory, USMC showed up on the scene to one-up him. Doh! More like three-up.

Captain Hodory was the demerit champion of the Brigade, and proud of it. Feared far and wide by every mother-loving Midshipman until the very second they graduated and strapped on their silver Ensign bars. To make matters worse, we were billeted on the third floor of Bancroft Hall. Three floors, running. Up. Down. Up. Down. Many times each day.

My one, single, solitary advantage over my classmates was that I was well acclimated to the extreme heat and humidity of Annapolis in the summertime. Right there on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, humid as all get-out 24/7. While my classmates were panting and sweating buckshot and begging for salt tablets, I was cool as a cucumber (comparatively speaking).

Being so damn out of shape, I suppose had its advantage too. As soon as I hit the rack at night, I was out cold. Hot as it was at the end of the day? (There was no AC in Bancroft Hall. If anything, all the heat from the lower floors rose to our level.) Not a problem. I was ready for a skirmish with the z monster.

Gramm died a month into Plebe Summer. We were at lunch formation. I got called to the phone. They asked if I wanted to go to the funeral. I said no. Put it out of my mind. I'm glad she got to see me at the Academy, though, real glad.

It took a little steam out of my sails, knowing she was gone. Slowly, inevitably, one event after another vented more and more steam from those sails. But we'll get to that later. For now – let's have some FUN!

Once I got over the initial SHOCK, it wasn't so bad. It also helped to be in better physical shape. Only took a couple of weeks getting up at 5 AM for an hour of calisthenics and running (in formation, singing – salty old Navy yarns, great fun!) around the artificial turf fields looking out on the sunrise over the Chesapeake Bay.

The worst part was the total loss of freedom. I'd always been a free spirit; so, it was rough having zero free time. There was a total lack of privacy as well. I'd always had my own space, at home and beyond. Now I had a roommate in a small room, and I was surrounded by folks 24/7. Our dorm room door had to remain open at all times. Couldn't close it until the end of Plebe Year.

Mom and Pop came up for a Parent's Weekend. I saw them briefly. They brought me an old Underwood manual typewriter and my tennis racquet. I got regular letters from them that summer and all Plebe Year. The highlight of my day, seeing a letter in my mail slot. Mom sent a box of homemade cookies (well, slice and bake, chocolate chips – my favorite!) now and then. Shared them with my roommates.

There was a great deal to learn in three short months that first summer on the Chesapeake. We were in formal or informal classes every minute of the day. Morse code. Knots. Signal cards. Learning minutiae about The Yard from a little book called Reef Points. The full name and hometown of everybody else in our company. How to polish shoes. Stand straight. Salute. Stand at port arms. Eat a “square” meal. March.

Several times out marching, on a command of RIGHT FLANK, I made a smart LEFT – grumbles as everybody had to hit the deck for fifty pushups. We learned etiquette. How to make a hospital bed. Fold clothes. Clean the room and the shower. “Eyes in the boat!” at the table. “Brace Up” when you couldn't recite the ten items on the supper menu. (The food was very good.) How to stand at ease. “Port – arms!” Pa-rade Rest.

Killer Miller was a superb teacher. Patient. Clear. It's quite amazing how much we learned.

My favorite memory of all time, hands down, was an afternoon we spent out cruising the Chesapeake Bay on the Academy's giant sailboat. Huge sails. Mechanical

bollards reefing in the lines. Keeling over in the wind. Ahh....

Even better than my first intercourse. (Which was quite a disappointment. Bo-ring.) That won't happen for 3 or 4 more years, by the way. In Plano, Texas. On Thanksgiving vacation. In her folk's house. Maybe that was the problem. Not enough romance? Not enough – danger?

At the end of the summer, Killer Miller told me he didn't think I'd make it when we first started (and, like, for the next eight weeks . . .) Well, that makes four of us (counting Mom and Pop). But make it I did, and once classes started. Boom. I was on solid ground. It was still murder. Torture! Every day, every minute. But I made it through Plebe Year. I did well, in fact, ranked 20th in my class, studying mechanical engineering.

I remember, clear as night, my first day of classes that fall semester, striding away from the morning formation in the front of Bancroft Hall toward the classroom buildings. Past Tecumseh (bronze statue of an Indian chief, right there in the brick walkway – all painted up for the occasion). It was cool. Dry. I was on top of the world. Strong. Confident. Ready for anything. Best feeling in the whole world. If you could bottle that feeling, you'd be a billionaire. Alas, but I suppose the bottle would be full of sweat, tears, blood, and raw cat guts.

Classes were also held on Saturday morning, so it was a very busy schedule. All the courses in your

academic major plus Navy ones – a public speaking class, the History of Sea Power, informal ethics instruction by Captain Hodory in the company wardroom (only TV we could watch, but it was off limits during Plebe Year), navigation, YP command (Yard Patrol boats, which were miniature destroyers with twin propellers on which we learned to “drive”), a different sports skill each semester (boxing, judo, gymnastics).

After just two years I had 124 credits (which included advanced placement credits I got for Spanish) which is enough for a BS at other schools.

In the fall the whole Brigade had a parade once a week. “March In Review!” There were regular room inspections, so we had to keep everything immaculate. (Dust on top of the door – demerits. Lint under shoes in your closet. Demerit. White film on the shower stall. Demerit. Scuffs in the wax on the floor. Dirty windows. Sloppy bed. . . Captain Hodory never got married. Doh!) We had to stand 24-hour watch once a month or so.

We had lots of small things to memorize every day. The full menu for the next three meals. The exact number of days until Christmas vacation, graduation, and the Army-Navy game. The current Officers of The Watch. Three articles off the front page every day plus three off the sports page. These were a special trouble for me because I knew zero about current events or any sports so I couldn’t ad-lib like everybody else.

Upperclassmen also assigned special reports. “Clark, I want to know all about the Aegis shipboard defenses system this evening.”

Aye, aye. Sir. (My eyes never leaving the boat.)

The whole brigade went to all home football games (our mascot was a Goat, but there was also a dude in a gorilla outfit who pumped out pushups after every score). We beat Notre Dame that year. Little ‘old Navy!

We beat Army, too. (I won an Army bathrobe, wore it often.) H. Ross Perot made a bet with the Brigade over the Air Force Game. “If Navy wins, I’ll send a couple of Middies to Hawaii for vacation with their sweethearts. If the zoomies win, you have to get a haircut just like mine.” Of course, I signed up for the bet. I didn’t go to the game out in Colorado, though – I volunteered for watch that weekend – but Air Force WON.

Come Monday morning, I went to the barbershop down on the ground floor of Bancroft Hall and got my head shaved. Then at the evening meal, they made an announcement that you could donate to a charity instead. Gee, thanks, Mr. Perot.

Our daily uniforms were all black. Shirt. Shoes. Socks. Tie (with a “spiffie” underneath to keep the shirt lapel down and the knot erect – don’t ask). Belt – with a shiny, spotless brass buckle. No “tattletales” (loose threads) on your shirt or trousers. We had small whisk brushes to get lint off the back and shoulders (wet the brush, then BRUSH down your classmate’s back in the mad rush before midday formation), especially for noon inspections on Thursdays, when Captain Hodory

inspected. We also had to “tuck” the shirts in real tight at the back. (Your buddy had to do that for you, too. INHALE. Squeeze. Don’t breathe.)

There was a laundry room in the basement where they steam-cleaned the shirts and pants. Everything else went out once a week in a white net-mesh bag. One set of bed sheets lasted two weeks: after the first week, you move the bottom one to the top and vice versa. I don’t recall having blankets. It was VERY cold in that big marble mausoleum, too.

Plebes rotated duties to YELL out the menu three minutes before formation. So you rattle it off in the company area then run as fast as you can down three flights of stairs, across the main floor to the formation out front. If you were a second late – you guessed it, demerits.

Saigon fell in the spring of ’75, late in Plebe Year. I suppose everybody – especially seniors – were relieved. I don’t recall feeling anything. All I know is that, after the Viet Nam war ended, the edgy discipline and tangible danger devolved into the ambiance of just another elite college for Yuppies. Not exactly what I signed up for. This didn’t enter my conscious mind at the time, but I think it was there.

The dream is over. The conviction that we could win. Save the world from communism. We’d been effing defeated. We scurried away with our tails between our legs. Captain Hodory the combat veteran was no longer the role model to shoot for. His kind went out of style along with Richard Nixon.

I probably would have thought about all this at the time. However –

As I said before, there was zero free time. Zero freedom! This lasted for the whole, long, interminable, miserable Plebe Year. There were only two breaks. Christmas vacation (I came back from Aruba with a lovely tan), followed by the “Dark Ages” when the weather was miserable and cold. Having no hair (after loosing the bet with H. Ross Perot), it was exponentially cold for me.

There was a Spring Break in early March. Around that time was Saigon and visions of people being evacuated from the embassy (the one time that year we could watch the TV in the wardroom). The whole fiasco was only a blip on the radar for me, though - soon faded into the landscape of frantic chaos that is the life of a Plebe.

I got demerits Plebe Summer and marching duty for taking one more meat paddy from the breakfast tray than my peers. The demerits were wiped clean at the end of the summer. It seemed a harsh judgment, but I didn't complain. I sailed through the rest of Plebe Year without any demerits.

I had three roommates. Robert Romaine from Pensacola, a decent enough guy but a little on the effeminate side. Rodriguez was a mechanical engineering major like me. A good guy. We played tennis a couple of times. Then he became a manager for the tennis team, after which time he wasn't involved in the regular routine as much.

My best friend was Morrison Ray, a management major. His goal was to keep his vision 20/20, sign up for the easiest major possible so he could get good enough grades to land a slot in flight school at graduation, train on multi-engine jets, then become a commercial pilot. And that's exactly what he did. Seven years of education on Uncle Sam.

Athletes in the Brigade had all kinds of special privileges. One of my classmates in 15th company, Fritsche, was a lineman for the football team. After Plebe Summer, we hardly ever saw him. He ate at a different "training" table, didn't have to go to parades, and pretty much skated on everything. He had a sloppy uniform. A sloppy room. (His poor roommate, Findlay, damn near washed out from demerits.)

One semester I got to register for classes with the jocks. Both my physics professor and chemistry professor (Schmerling) gave out answers before all the exams. That's the kind of education athletes got.

I remember a surly, arrogant Second Classman (a junior, seniors are called Firsties; Sophomores, Youngsters), Bowman, who lettered on the pistol team. Talk about a rigorous sport! We only saw him at the table in the off-season. He acted like it was an extreme imposition for him to be at our table.

Back at you, Mr. Rogers.

I'd guess that almost half the Brigade was on one sports team or another (not all at the same time of the academic year, of course). This bothered me. I got the training to be a Navy or Marine officer. Their training wasn't even up to a public college education.

Worse yet, with none of the regular duties and extremely easy classes, they got much better grades and therefore got the pick of the open slots in the fleet at graduation, when everybody chooses from the available jobs according to their overall class rank.

Doh! Our whole damn society is sports-crazy. I told a Ford car dealer manager in Lenoir City, Tennessee a few years ago I went to Annapolis. “Oh! One of our best clients is an Annapolis grad. He played football. What did you do?” He was nonplussed when I said, nothing. As if to say, “If you weren’t on a team - what a loser.”

Actually, in military terms, I was the winner and his car-crazy friend was the loser. But that’s not what matters to either the Academy or the public at large. I’m sure the quality of leaders would be infinitely higher if they eliminated service academy sports altogether (that is, competing in college leagues).

Can’t they just compete among themselves, plus VMI and Citadel maybe Texas A and M? I bet if they did that, Navy would beat Notre Dame every time.

The old rationale for high-profile academy sports used to be that it attracted people to military service. Sorry, but that’s so not working anymore. 85% of youths can’t even qualify for enlisting in the Army, much less for one of the service academies. Kids don’t give a crap about duty, honor, service, sacrifice, or the Stars and Stripes. Give up my smartphone for a whole summer? OMG. A whole effing year?! No TV. No movies. No Tick Tock.

No. Fucking. Way.

At the end of Plebe Summer they have a ceremony where they grease up an obelisk in The Yard, Herndon's Monument. Then the Plebe Class has to make a giant scrum (as they do in rugby) around it, take a little Plebe sailor's hat (which has a blue rim) on top, and replace it with an all-white sailor's hat.

My favorite statue in The Yard was of Tecumseh, the Native American chief. You met him already.

In front of Rickover Hall (named after the nuclear power submarine fanatic whose criteria for hiring was, "How fast can you make me angry, mister?") is a string of bronze dots in the concrete, the path of a laser to determine the speed of light. That was the last scientific achievement of any merit they did at the Academy.

Rickover Hall was made on land recovered from the Chesapeake Bay (rather, the Severn River). The whole building is sinking now! Can't no engineers at the Academy save it, neither.

Early in the academic Plebe Year, everybody gets assigned a sponsor, a civilian who works in The Yard. Mine was Carl Rountree (and his wife Linda), a young dermatologist from New Orleans. We hit it off right away. They ended up "adopting" all my roommates, too. Right before I left, we painted a bedroom in the basement of their home on the north side of The Yard for – you guessed it – a love nest for none other than Midshipman Frische, the football lineman, and his girlfriend.

Dr. Rountree had been drafted while still in medical school. When I knew him he was, in fact, studying for

his medical board exams. (How he could practice medicine in the Navy Hospital is beyond me.) He absolutely HATED the Navy. Bolded and underlined HATE. As a somewhat empathic person, a lot of that rubbed off on me. Slowly. Inevitably.

It was a pleasant escape, to visit the Rountree home now and again. (Less so when all my roomies came along.) Linda would make Angel Food cake (round, hole in the middle), literally dripping with rum. I'd bring it to the company area and share it with everybody.

“Who me? I didn't know it had rum inside!”

I used \$5000 Gramm left me to buy a dark green Audi Fox at a dealership in Townsend, Maryland. Best feeling in the universe, driving that new car off the lot. Freedom. Independence. The Audi High didn't last very long because you aren't allowed to drive, much less own, a vehicle within seven miles of The Yard. Only Firsties (seniors) can have cars within the Academy grounds.

I rented a garage in Annapolis and kept The Fox there. It was registered in my sister Regan's name, so technically I didn't own a car within the 7-mile circumference.

I'm not sure when I purchased the car (or even how I got away from the Academy to do so), but buy it I did. And I had it by the end of Plebe Year. We had a week or so of slack time before going out to sea on a summer cruise.

My roommates and I – including another Midshipman in our class who was from Louisiana, Bubba Lilly, packed camping gear in the Fox and headed out to Ocean City for a couple of days on the beach. (Bubba's major was Russian. He graduated, got assigned to a rusty old ship, hated every minute of his days in the fleet – left the navy after his obligation and became an executive for a telecommunications company. Good people. The best.)

Back in Ocean City for a little well-deserved R and R... We met a group of young ladies from Washington DC and had some alcoholic spirits. Miss. Alexis Langley was diabetic, but drinking a little wine. Probably shouldn't have let her drive my brand-new Audi Fox. Faster. Faster!

Around a curve in the pitch dark then – boom! – across the beach and - SLAM! – into the Atlantic Ocean.

Waves breaking on the hood. Water rising up from the floor. (We must have been pretty damn blitzed because it took a good while before we reacted.) We scrambled back to shore.

I went running down that rural lane, BANGING on people's doors. (This was very early in the AM on a Sunday morning in the middle of the Bible Belt.) Somebody finally answered. A farmer. Put us on his tractor. Drove us back to the scene of the tragedy.

"Gosh, darn." He said when we caught sight of a green metal top of my pride and joy. "I been pulling cars

out of the drink for years. Ain't never seen one in that far out in the surf."

We got 'er out. Gave 'er C.P.R. FINALLY got 'er started. Got 'er back to his place. To a filling station, where another hearty Delaware soul washed the salt water off with a power spray. Then sent us on our way.

"Ah, these Middies. What would we do without them?"

As dawn was turning into morning, we returned to the campsite. Packed everything up. Got back to The Yard with mere seconds to spare before Liberty Call was over. Forever after, I was known as "Wild Bill and the Swamp Fox." That damn story spread around the whole effing Brigade.

Soon thereafter, I contacted Ms. Lang in DC by phone. She was off-putting, to say the least. "All I need is for you to tell my insurance company (USAA) it was an accident." She wouldn't do squat.

So – cross my heart and hope to die – I lied to USAA and told them I was the stupid doing the driving on that dark and stormy night.

Later that year I had to replace the starter, which got all rusted out from the salt water. More and more things went wrong over the years with that poor, ill-fated vehicle.

At one point, circa 1982, broken down outside the Las Vegas Audi dealership, surrounded by dozens of parts I had replaced over the last eighteen hours – the manager came out and offered me a job as a mechanic. When I said no thank you he said, "Well, at least let me

put you up at a nice hotel room for the night.” Now that I could handle.

Toward the end of my Youngster year, the Swamp Fox lived in the Rountree’s garage inside the Academy gates. Talk about an adrenalin rush, driving past the guard shack – shades, wool cap, avoiding eye contact – on the way out. . . To freedom! I didn’t use the car except when we were on leave – at which time it’s legal – but I loaned the keys to my classmates now and then to “Go over the wall.”

There was one, and only one, area of privacy allowed us. A small metal lockbox. The car keys were in there. Everything else was wide open. If you can’t trust future Officers of the United States Navy, then who can you trust?

(If you can’t trust the whole goddamn Brigade from keeping your Audi Fox a secret, then what are we even here for?)

Never being high in the trusting category, I do believe people knowing about the Audi Fox wore down my nerves that next year. It wasn’t a matter of IF they would catch be red-handed but WHEN. That was a Class A offense. Maybe several of them. That would get me EXPELLED and shipped off to the fleet as a perennially seasick swabee.

Again, this never entered my conscious mind but I’m sure it – dwelled. Deep in my subconscious. JAWS. Waiting to CRUNCH on me and my little green car friend.

After Plebe Year we could have personal items of clothing. Even wear them once in a while. I had a Bulldog USMC shirt. One time when I wore it, all my classmates accosted me – RIPPED the shirt off my back. Hauled me down to the Reflecting Pool. TOSSED me in! Say – what?

Never figured that one out. Not sure if I want to.

We could also have a stereo. I liked Elton John songs a lot at that time. Blasted them out. Had no idea he was gay. Had no idea what gay even WAS.

Maybe they thought I was homosexual – which was a criminal offense in the military at this time. Just my luck, to be discriminated against for something I wasn't even guilty of being. (Full disclosure: Once I learned Elton John was gay, I never listened to another song. Like, can't they just let us enjoy their music without tying a boat anchor around it?)

The summer after Plebe Year everybody goes out on a cruise in the fleet. I got assigned – with about 40 other Middies – to the U.S.S. Spartanburg County, a Tank Landing Ship. Flat bottom. Big ramp to drop down on a coastline – to offload tanks. Vehicles. Troops.

Belowdecks was a large room where all 40+ of us slept in hammocks. (Think Marines dismounting to storm the shores of the Bay of Pigs.) We sailed up the Atlantic Coast to Nova Scotia and back.

Not much busy work for 40 kids in dungarees on a ship that size (small). I ended up in the engine room, scrubbing the metal decks clean with a toothbrush. I kid you not. Extremely HOT. NOISIER than you can

imagine. But, hey, I was a mechanical engineering major – well, here's your mechanical and there's your engine.

Scrub! There – you missed a spot.

The old salts said the Atlantic Ocean was as calm as they'd ever seen it. With a low draft and a flat bottom, the Spartanburg RODE WITH THE WAVES. I'm afraid I wasn't a good Spartan, however.

Seasick as a dog, this is me - subsiding on chocolate milk and crackers the whole miserable week-long trip. As soon as we hit the dock at Nova Scotia, boom - Midshipman Clark was - gone for the hills.

I ran into a guy who ended up giving me a little tour of the area. Bay of Funday was nearby. Lots of nice coastline. Upon my return to the ship after liberty, a very dark and strange thing happened.

Several people took me and pretty much interrogated me. In a dark place. Angry voices. No faces. I suppose they thought I was gay – apparently, the dude who showed me around was a homosexual (although I'm not even sure of that) – and they wanted to roughhouse the truth out of me.

All they got from me was – can I please go now? My ship leaves like – very soon. I, mean – the seasickness is miserable.

But the engine room – needs my TLC.

When classes started my Youngster year, back at Bancroft Hall, Rodriguez said he'd been on a destroyer in the Pacific. Typhoon. Waves as tall as a skyscraper. He loved it! Note to self: you do NOT want to get assigned

to a surface ship after graduation. Especially a SMALL one. That BOBS around.

I hate to admit it, but Youngster Year was kind of boring. Learning navigation on the big charts was fun. My first engineering class was a hoot. Didn't pay much attention to the Plebes, as I probably should have. Field ball in the afternoons (lacrosse but with a soccer-type ball). Tooling around The Yard on my new bicycle. Rum cakes. Marching in parades. Losing multiple football games at Navy Field.

We had liberty on Saturday afternoons, but I never ventured into Crab Town. As empathic as I was, I think I sensed the animosity in society at large against military types. Saturday evenings Mo and I sometimes went to the gym for a pickup basketball game.

I tried the choir once. Love the Chapel. The stained glass windows. But singing like that? Not my cup of java.

All this year, the barracks was constantly full of JACKHAMMERS. GRRRR. They were remodeling the bathrooms in our company area. Next year women would be among the Plebes, and our company was to have several. This was very disconcerting (or maybe it was just the total, complete absence of SILENCE that year). GGGRRRR. You know me. I cherish my SILENCE.

Women can't bear firearms, so the ceremonial swords seniors get to wear for parades and formations will go away. The ladies will be able to close their door rooms for privacy – which is understandable, but – zoom! – there goes half the stress of Plebe Year. Many other rules will go away. Traditions. Athletic standards. Dress code.

Can they carry M6 rifles for parades?

Hey. I'm all for training women to be officers. But, personally? I was a terrible student at ASM in Madrid, surrounded by girls and dating and parties and socializing. Then, in the all-male boarding school in Rome, I straightened right up. Women are an extreme distraction for me. The hormones. The – everything.

One more nagging worry that year to resolve.

I went to my sister Regan's wedding down in Marksville, Louisiana at one point. I wore the formal Dress Blues uniform. I'm sure that went over well – Saigon had just happened, and this moron is showing off his military cred. I wasn't being proud. Or arrogant. I was just – happy.

I wore the Dress Whites, back home in Aruba, a couple of times. To church (not a good idea). Out on a date with Monique Schmitt, a very sensual lady and the pear of my eye at this time. Never saw her again. (Whatever happened to, "I love a man in a uniform?")

The rest of that summer I had to make do with teaching little kids how to swim in a lagoon at the Esso compound. Which was a real hoot, actually. My co-worker was a cute gal, Mary, who went to college in DC, although I never got past the zinc smeared on her nose against the sun.

That summer I was out sailing my little sunfish every chance I got. Pop and I were in a father-son sunfish race. We were making the last tack for a finish line. The boom swung around. Smart. Clean. Right on the money. And. And – the boom KNOCKED Pop off the boat!

“And this guy is going to the U.S. Naval Academy?”

Back at the Academy to finish out the summer, I was a Company Commander. Not a job I liked (well, the organizing was fine). I assigned my 2nd in command to march the group around. Did. Not. Like. Doing. That. (giving orders, calling cadence)

We went to Pensacola for a short trip on a small T-6 trainer jet. When we landed, I stepped out with both my gloves full of vomit.

Next stop was a couple days on a Boomer (submarine). Halfway through the cruise, we surfaced, and Midshipman Clark was the first one out the hatch – verging on a nervous breakdown from claustrophobia.

Then, after a week playing soldier at Quantico in the heat and the bugs; well, that wasn't my thing either.

All things considered, I wasn't real sure WHAT I wanted to do after graduating. Probably nuclear power – but that's submarines - or aircraft carriers. OMG. A surface fleet?!

Then Captain Hodory (who was by now a Major – apparently the promotion board was impressed by the thousands of demerits he awarded, far outpacing all his peers) set me up to go to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs as an exchange student. Now THAT put wind back in my sails.

I was very motivated henceforth. NASA. John Glenn 2.0. The Space Program. Bring it on!

Events of the following spring; well, complicated things somewhat.

My roommate Morry Ray's parents came down for Parent's Weekend. They took me and Mo out to lunch. Turns out the dining establishment was outside the seven-mile limit.

We got hit with a Class A offense being outside the limit without authorization. (Plus a second Class A for drinking, but I talked Major Hodory out of that one: if you're outside the 7-mile limit, there's no rule you can't have a grog with lunch.)

Hello? I had no control of where we were going. I had no idea we even were outside the 7-mile perimeter. I'm not even sure if I knew grog was an alcoholic beverage.

Captain Hodory hated my guts after that. How dare I deprive him of 150 precious demerits (75 for me and 75 for Mo). I certainly had no respect for him after that. Just raw fear. That's no way to be a leader of men. Especially not a service academy, where you're setting the example for future leaders.

Zoom, zoom – away goes the semester at the Air Force Academy as an exchange student. But every bad had a silver lining or at least a bronze one. We did march off our demerits in record time. We did get to go on spring break (which I'm sure pissed Major Hodory off no end).

We drove the Audi Fox up to Mo's home in Howell, Michigan. (Stole a "FOX" front license plate from some car en route, drunk as a, well, sailor. Sorry about that, whoever we stole it from. But it was very nice. Stayed there 'till the bitter end in a junkyard outside Austin, Texas.) That week in Michigan, I knocked out a par round on the golf links. Best round of golf I ever played.

Mo and I displayed our two Black N's in our dorm room. (Same as the letters for the sports teams but BLACK. This very nicely symbolized how I felt about the jocks.) My esteem in my peers zoomed up. How does that work? Apparently, I was TOO good. TOO smart. But now – this guy is a real – leader?!

Like, helping everybody with their math homework isn't enough? Crashing an Audi Fox into the Atlantic Ocean? Sharing rum cake? Handing out the car keys to all askers so they could go out “over the wall” on a date? (Like, you can't make it a double and take me along? Please?)

I don't know what flicked the magic light switch, to make me the swashbuckling Captain James T. Kirk Star Trek leader. (Wouldn't see that show for 10+ years.)

And, yet. Somehow I was still, well – lost. In two years I had proven myself to be an excellent student. A good subordinate. Cheerful. Helpful. Very well-liked. What more could I have done? They all said I was going to be Brigade Commander. The first Admiral of our class. Okay. Where's the beef? How do I get from here to there?

Maybe it was the bad influence of my sponsor, Dr. Rountree. The Audi Fox. The doubts I had about getting seasick. Airsick. Claustrophobia. About women joining the Brigade (honestly, they should have prepared us better for that one).

You've seen the other doubts and issues I had along the way. There was nothing really major in and of itself. But cumulatively? Yeah – that's not good. The problem

is that nobody counseled me with a single. Solitary. Word. Not any squad leader I ever had. Certainly not my sponsor Dr. “get the fuck out of the Navy while you can” Rountree.

Major Hodory never sat down his star Midshipman for a little chat. He should have! But, no. He was a cold fish – not even a salmon but a slimy sea slug. Honestly? I think he was the first real villain in my life. He was a tough Marine, sure - but never EVER a leader. Discipline was the for-all to him. Leadership from a thousand cuts (demerits).

So. There I was, a natural leader. It was effortless for me. Clean. Honest. Somebody should have told me that. That was my C.O.’s job. Instead, I think the Major took advantage of me. I was like a young kid in a family without a father, who takes the father’s responsibility on.

Major Hodory just set back and let ME do HIS job. With everything else going on, the stress damn near killed me. As it was, it gave me schizophrenia (we’ll see the proof in all its glory later on). FACT.

This is not on me. It’s on Major Hodory, pure and simple.

Back home in Texas at the end of my Youngster summer, I resolved to resign. Pop had retired and was building a house north of Austin. I didn’t even talk it over with him or Mom (or any of my classmates. No. Body). I just jumped in the Audi Fox and drove straight, non-stop back to Annapolis. Submitted my resignation. Boom. It’s done.

Except - it wasn't. Days went by. Then weeks. The Superintendent and Commandant had me to a meeting, said they'd send me to Cape Kennedy to visit with NASA for a few weeks.

"Too late for that."

Major Hodory never called me. Doesn't that say it all? (Like, people submitted observations on each Midshipman at our "trials and tribulations" that summer – this guy was seasick as a dog. Airsick. Claustrophobic to a fault. Refused to march his command around – Hodory just ignored their reports. Let him suffer. This is fun!)

Let me state this categorically: The first and last and ONLY person in authority to EVER ask me to share my issues was the Duty Officer who asked for me to submit a statement on why I was resigning. I said, in effect, I was under constant stress that never diminished.

Stress? Because of all of the above unresolved issues. Career counseling for one. "What do you want to do?" Or maybe, "Can we help you learn how to march people around?" How about, "We can do things for seasickness and airsickness."

I was caught in a super-achievement loop and nobody thought it was. Just. Too. Much.

Another way to put it, I think they were actually glad to see me go. Hodory. The Superintendent. Commandant. My classmates. Years later, right after the VA rated me 100% disabled, I was BANNED from our class reunion. Don't come, said the 15 Company Commander. We won't let you show your respects to

our fallen comrades. Your good friend McNerney, who had recently deceased.

You're banned! Reiterated by the President of our class – a retired admiral. What more can I say?

Anyway, back to being in limbo at Bancroft Hall, waiting to be discharged from the United States Navy. It drug on. And on. ON! (They were delaying it so that the academic year started, at which point I would be obligated to go enlisted to serve out my commitment.) I knew that. They knew that. It only made me hate the place that much more.

Then Pop had a heart attack back home.

I said, please finish the paperwork so I can return to my family. Enough is enough. They didn't do squat. So, I called Congressman Rarick's office, the man who appointed me. I explained my situation. I was on the road back to Texas within a day or two.

It was a sad day, that one. Very sad. I had arrived with such high hopes. Gave myself heart and soul. Sure, I screwed up plenty of times. But isn't that how you build character – and loyalty? I was the best of the best. They failed to nurture me or teach me how to be even more. So, hey – I ain't got nothing more to learn here, not if you won't teach it to me.

I'm history. Thanks for the memories.

Now that I've written this, assembled all the events in short order, organized what happened, and sorted out my feelings, I do believe I made the right decision in leaving. I have no idea why people behaved the way they

did, from my peers to my C.O. and beyond, but one thing's for sure: my leaving was for the good of the service.

I wish I could say that everything is uphill from here. That Annapolis prepared me for a sterling career and a happy life. Sorry. We'll have a little fun in Austin and then in The Big Easy, but afterwards, events will make Annapolis look like roses.

Best put your seat belt on. The ride gets pretty rough from here.

(Damned if I say this, but Annapolis did prepare me for it all.)

Six

It only occurs to me now, as I write these words on 10-23-2023 that I believe everybody who I ever told about going to Annapolis – which is pretty much anybody I ever knew for any length of time – assumed I washed out. That includes my whole family. My nieces and nephews. Any employer I ever had. Hah! What an effing loser. . .

That was their first mistake. They'd pay for it – every time; well, they're paying for it now, in this epic journey we're on.

But, really. It never even occurred to me they'd think I washed out. Of course, since they also knew I was schizophrenic, telling them I was near the top of my class would have confirmed their worst suspicions. Maybe this is a case of the subconscious blocking that out so I wouldn't get into that much more trouble.

Damn subconscious was all beat up as is; give a guy a break!

Anyway. Back to reality. Austin. Texas. August, 1976.

As much as Spain protected me from the chaos of the '60s, the U.S. Naval Academy served the same purpose for a good part of the '70s. I've yet to really confront all of that, personally. The hippie-drugs-sexuality revolution mixed in with Civil Rights and backlash against the evil Viet Nam war. If anything, I will now be more isolated than ever from the zeitgeist. Before I was a clueless hillbilly from Podunk USA. People understand if I'm not hip on all the goings on. Give Forest Gump a break, will 'ya?

Now I'm ex-military. Ex-Naval Academy no less. That throws up a whole new set of hates in people's minds. I could at least be a deserter. A protester. Vamoosed to Canada to avoid the draft. But OMG.

He volunteered. Gave it his all. Shows no remorse. No regrets. Even PROUD of what he did. They SPAT in his face, even – and he carries on, The Last American Hero. Talk about walking around with a great, big TARGET painted on your back.

We'll see how far that goes.

(If you want to chuckle, that's okay. I know it's impolite, but I don't mind. Makes me laugh, too. Sure, it was morbid as hell at the time, but looking back? How the F can this poor guy keep getting mixed up in the most godawful situations? Hey – you ain't seen NOTHING yet. . .)

O-kay. It's the trailing days of the summer of '76. I'm living in a duplex in Lago Vista, Texas, right behind the

elementary school (A retired USAF couple lived in the other half.) My folks' house was under construction a few blocks away on Lynn Lane. Steep lot. Dramatic view of Lake Travis below. No - spectacular view. The concrete slab was laid by now and some of the framing.

It was too late for me go to the University of Texas in Austin (about an hour away), so I rolled up my sleeves and Pop's contractor Jim Brown put me to work on the construction crew. Which wasn't really a crew at all, just two Black dudes, Benny and his uncle Jimmy.

Benny was a barrel-chested man, strong as an ox – a master carpenter. Jimmy was an old geezer, smoked a lot, but pulled his weight (which wasn't much because he was real thin. Sorry, only kidding). The three of us built the whole damn house from the slab on up to the wood shakes on the roof. Quite an education for me. Thanks, y'all. I've used the important skills you learned me time and time again.

Just about the time we finished Pop's house (he designed it), school started, and I moved into Austin. I was two years into my mechanical engineering degree, and so it took me a good two more years to finish.

The first place I lived in was a tiny apartment north of campus off Speedway. Then I moved into a one-room efficiency a block off campus. Cooked on a hot plate. Not a happy place to live. Even less happy when I met Joe Roehl, another resident. He was gay. First gay person I met. He was apparently enamored with me.

Oh, God. What do I do? I'm not a rude person. I do NOT like to offend (well, in person at least – on paper is

a whole ‘nother ball game, I would learn an eternity later.) I did my level best to avoid Joe Roehl at every possible opportunity, believe you me.

Note: Joe Roehl somehow kept track of me, which is VERY creepy. For years. At one point he wrote a long letter to Mom. (Which is, like - MUCH creepier, how he found her address.) Trying to get her sympathy. Hah, good luck with that, Homer. By that time he was in New Zealand, dying of AIDS.

Should I feel guilty? Anything?

I ran into Tom Alleman in a mechanics of materials laboratory. We became friends, and I moved into a nice apartment with he and his other two roommates, Ronnie Bell and a biology grad student. Mike Hinds? (Who spent long overnights locked in his room with another guy “playing dungeons and dragons.” A semester or so later, I figured out they were being - gay.)

Ronnie was a country music hick. Thick Texan accent. Drove a giant tank-sized Buick car. He was an electrical engineering major. Quite happy with his C-average grades. (Hey, I was always happy to get Cs in my EE classes, too.) A regular guy who played a decent game of racquetball. Lizard skin cowboy boots. Cowboy hats. A genuine John Wayne type.

Tom was tall and thin. His girlfriend Susan was short and a little on the chubby side, but a ball of fire. (They eventually got married.) Tom was a waiter in Sue’s sorority house. (Why they would never set me up, I’ll never know.) Summers Tom roughnecked on oil rigs for

Global Marine. On “drill ships,” instead of a fixed offshore platform.

We all watched Texas Football on TV. We were #1 the next fall. Earl Campbell. Ham, Lam, and Jam Jones. Russell Erxslaven. Awesome team. Unstoppable. The Audi Fox – adorned with a #1 in white shoe polish – made a splash on The Drag after one momentous victory.

One semester the faithful wheels had major problems. The engine needed a new head. (That makes two of us.) Being two ME majors, Tom and I rebuilt the engine in our living room. (Which was already a workshop because Tom’s hobby was assembling grandfather clock kits.)

I shouldn’t say this, but I honestly thought it was a goddamn miracle when – after umpteen fiddles – the engine actually started up. Every ME major should rebuild an engine. It teaches you a lot of good things. Every engineer should also have to drive around in what he just fixed, too. On Eisenhower’s Interstate. At highway speed... Faster!

Talk about - stress!

The spring before graduation I hit it off with a cute redhead, Susan Poag. We played tennis some (I rushed out and bought all new tennis duds, including SHINY WHITE tennis shoes for the occasion).

That summer I drove down to Daytona Beach, where she was staying with family. Saw her briefly. Then, when I was out body surfing, I got NAILED by a surfing board right behind the shoulder blade. Hurt like hell. Still

hurts to this very day. (The shoulder and especially the missed opportunity with Ms. Poag.)

Back on campus for the last summer school session, I took the Senior Projects Class. Students in groups do real-life projects for sponsoring companies. Ours was Reynolds Aluminum which had a bauxite processing refinery down in Corpus Christi. The climate was so humid, that the bauxite caked up in blocks and couldn't be extracted from their storage shed.

We cooked up the brilliant idea of shaking the bauxite loose (from below, where a small railroad track with cars gathered the bauxite) with a BLAST of compressed air. One of the team did all the fluid dynamics calculations. Me and the other guy built a giant box to test it. (Yes, this is me – assigning all the grunt work while I do the PR.)

The Reynolds Aluminum company executives came up to Austin to see our wonderful, clever, engineering solution to their vexing problem. We hooked everything up. Turned the compressor on. The experiment EXPLODED! Brown bauxite dust flew everywhere. Coughs. Wheezes.

Thus awaits my glorious career as a mechanical engineer.

The following semester was my last one as an undergraduate at Texas. I took several trips to visit companies around the U.S. TEAM ("Total Energy Management," a solar energy outfit in Washington DC with, they claimed, a decorated Marine or two from that

famous Iwo Jima photo holding up the flag on their Board – might impress other folks, but sorry, not me.).

A John Deere factory in Moline, Illinois designing parts for farm implements. Texas Instruments up the road in Waco (tiny parts on a dot matrix printer). The Inland Drilling Group with Exxon in New Orleans. They all offered me jobs.

I accepted the Exxon position. Why? The obvious. I met a cute girl on the St. Charles Avenue trolley street car when I was on my visit – tooled around all night – had a heck of a good time. By daybreak the next day I was so damn tired, well... I – accepted Exxon's generous offer.

Things weren't going so well on back on campus. I had a girlfriend (distraction for Mr. Bill!). Played intermural soccer to impress her. Plus all the away trips on interviews. Well, my studies faltered.

I was failing Gary Vliet's graduate class on solar energy. Too much heavy math. WAY too much. I'll never be able to catch up ("Not sure if I even WANT to sir.")

I had a meeting with the engineering dean and managed to convince him to give me credit for a couple of "Ship Systems Engineering" classes I took at Annapolis. Phew. I even managed to graduate with honors. An "Engineering Scholar" no less.

So, hey – things are looking good, y'all. Wa-hoo!

Exxon in New Orleans was awesome. Our office was a block off Canal Street and we could lunch every day in the French Quarter. Shrimp sandwiches at a little bistro.

I had my own office. No windows, but – wow, private. Four white walls. Beautiful.

I had an apartment out in New Orleans East, on a lake. Wonderful pad. Bought a bunch of halfway-decent furnishings for it. Took the city bus to work every day. Gravy street.

Then a month after I started, I got a phone call. It was Mom. Before she said one word I knew. Pop had died. Heart attack. Working on his garden in the backyard. Exactly how an old Ozark Hillbilly would want to go, with his fists full of fertile earth, his face red from the damn western sun that always dried out his tomato plants.

I drove back for the funeral. When I returned, I was a whole new person. I was still happy and outgoing, but suddenly more focused than ever on – learning. I soaked up the information like a dry sponge. Couldn't get enough of it. Aced the month-long drilling school in Houston. Aced the Well Control School out in Friendswood toward Galveston.

Dean Mutti was my boss. Great teacher and very patient. I used to think he worked too much – like, supervising a dozen young engineers? (Ever look in the mirror, Mr. Bill?) Charlie Chadwick was the head of the Inland Drilling Group. Exxon probably saw me heading into management like Mr. Chadwick; never saw it going that way myself. I was in it for the technology.

Tom and Ronnie came to visit from Austin. Tom had come at Pop's funeral. (Was that kind or what? He's good

people.) We went downtown to the French Quarter. Got into a burlesque club.

I was ogling the lady dancers. . . Until Ronnie said they weren't women. Gulp. I was so embarrassed. I never even talked to them again. (So. I've now met my first gay man. My first transvestite. What's next – oh, Hippie!)

I never went to any Mardis Gras events. Never had much of a social life. Tooled around the lakeshore on my bicycle a few times. That's about all I ever saw of New Orleans. Didn't really have any friends in the office.

We got invites to eat high on the hog sometimes – salesmen – so I at least had a chance to enjoy the exquisite cuisine in the French Quarter. I love spicy food. Cajun cooking. One event sponsored by a service company: a giant table covered with spicy crawdads.

“Roll ya' sleeves up. Suck on dem critters. “

P.J. Trajan was my favorite person. He was a drilling superintendent, supervising all our people out on the rigs. He was an incorrigible Cajun. He'd find a stack of pink “message” slips on his desk after lunch. He'd toss the lot in the trash!

“If it's important they'll call back.”

Walter Skaggs was another superintendent. I ran into him in Church in my tiny little town a couple of years ago – all of FORTY YEARS since I knew him. Major league coincidence. Scared the living crap out of me. Haven't been to church since. He passed away not long after.

Got myself promoted into the exploration drilling group, I did. New office. My new boss was John Darby (disabled, one hand was all mangled up, brilliant engineer, great boss). With a window! After only one year. Worked on designing a wildcat well in Port Hudson, north of Baton Rouge on the road we drove to St. Francisville and our camp on Lake Rosemound.

It was everything I could have hoped for. An excellent manager. Fascinating work. I loved going out on the rigs for special jobs. All the tech. Engines. Motors. I even had a half-way friend in the exploration group, Hyatt (?).

And then. I decorated the walls of my office with sci-fi space posters. Not exactly the ambiance you would expect. But I was smarter than I had any right to be, and I suppose people overlook the obvious when you're working your tail off.

The reader will recognize the telltale subtext. Bill's an engineer. He's honest to a fault. His actions are a clear and direct mirror of his brain. Something nefarious is brewing. (The pity is, I didn't see "the paintings on my walls." Nor anybody else.)

I terminated my lease in the New Orleans East pad and moved in with – well, the first Hippie friend I ever had. Dan P. Short, a geologist in our office. He was laid back. Cool. Drove a white Porsche. Cocky. Smoked pot. The man.

But, yeah – not a good kind of person for me to be around because I absorb attitudes like a hungry

vacuum. And the more stressed out I get the more and worse I absorb. Bad news bears for The Z.

Three young ladies occupied the other half of the duplex. Tina, Linda, and Maria Aguillar. I started seeing Tina, a legal assistant downtown. We never made it past the couch. She wasn't the most attractive of the three, but definitely the most intelligent. (See there, how easily I'm able to insult all three young ladies with a single sentence?)

Suddenly the long hours, the weekends on duty in the office, the long trips into the field to work 48 hours non-stop, the drive back half asleep in a rental car. It was too much. Can't I have a life in the deal? I joined a health club nearby, swam laps some. Had my eye on a Triumph motorcycle with spoked wheels, bribing myself to stay with Exxon.

Then Dan P. Short left. Landed a killer job at three times the pay in Houston. A new engineer in the office, a Vietnamese guy named Ba Do, moved in to share the duplex with me. Smart guy. Nice enough. Something about a brother who had been in a re-education camp in what is by now Communist Vietnam. Hmmm. Can I tell him, "I tried to stop all that?" No. That would be rude. Ever the Southern Gentleman.

You can see where this is leading. Mr. Bill is overworked and overwhelmed again. No vacations. No fun in the French Quarter. I should have been thinking of buying a house and getting a mortgage by this time. Instead, I – well, I don't quite know what...

Then my sister Kelle visited from Canada. A week later we were on the road, headed out west. I'd resigned from Exxon. Free again...

Lost - again.

I don't think Mom ever forgave me that decision. Leaving Annapolis had already broken her heart. (I can only hope she assumed I washed out; but I think the Academy sent them my grades each semester, and I surely told them, too.) My leaving such a great job with Pop's venerable alma mater; well, I think it gave her grave misgivings.

As well it should have.

I don't rightfully know why I left Exxon. I do know that Kelle was always my favorite sister growing up. After ASM when she ran off with the teacher to Morocco and then disappeared with Klimek in the wilds of Canada - well, I'd never seen her.

Don't I have a right to catch up, with family, with lost - friends?

I don't think my boss at Exxon even said, "Take a couple weeks' vacation. Think it over. Please." He just - let - me - go. I'm not sure I want to work with ruthless people like that.

As it was, it was clear Exxon had me on a fast track for management. A couple of years in drilling. Then in reservoir engineering. And on up the ladder. Nobody asked if I wanted that. If I wanted to stay in drilling. I was actually thinking of being a field superintendent at that point. Two weeks on. Two weeks off. I liked that idea.

I was also, deep in my consciousness, more than a little upset that I was making such good money. Compared to Pop – after a lifetime of service. His last office was a partitioned cubicle in nowheresville. That rankled. And here I am, fixing to go down the same path to perdition?

I think I was also a little bit upset about working for Big Oil, too. Pop was avidly green. A report came out about that time, the first authoritative one, about climate change. (Exxon et al fought to keep it from the public domain.) Not sure if I ever even read that report. . . But I might as well say I did to rack up a few brownie points.

Hah! I used to bring in cookies or a pineapple upside down cake to the Exxon offices now and then (always liked to cook). This wasn't to make points. I was just happy to be around – well, family.

When I moved in with Dan P. Short; one time I made brownies with pot sprinkled it. (Maybe that's why they didn't object to my leaving.)

Anyway. Kelle and I spent a few days with a US Park Service friend of hers in the Grand Canyon that she'd met while working as a tree-planter with Klimek. We hiked the Canyon trails. One day I hiked 50 miles down to the very bottom of The Grand Canyon from the rim with a backpack full of supplies and wine for a permanent settlement down there.

I hiked back out the same day. My knees never forgave me that one.

Next stop was Kings Canyon. Camping out. Pulled the front seats out of the Audi Fox and sunned for a

spell. Then to Vancouver, BC where Kelle's good friend Kevin Gushue was in "prison" for captaining a boat full of marijuana across the border. (He later got a full pardon.)

Ahhhh. But what a prison it was. Spacious lawn. Fresh salmon grilled for the honorable guests. Fences a child could get through. But, hey – it worked.

Kevin was released only a few days later and never looked back. He became Tourism Director in St. John's Newfoundland – even met Queen Elizabeth once when she came across the big pond for a visit.

Kelle, Kevin, and I rented bicycles. Rode around Victoria. Stayed with a group of tree-planters Kelle had worked with before. Now, here we have an example of authentic hippie sapiens. No drugs. Just high on nature and the environment.

Well, The Family were a little cuckoo on UFOs, but nobody's perfect. (My first exposure to the whole UFO thing. Didn't even register with me, it was so damn absurd.)

I read Dune that long summer. My all-time favorite novel. It made a tremendous impression on me. Space. Mentats. Spice. (Yeah, I know. Engineers aren't supposed to have an imagination. Dreams. Hopes.)

Kevin and I played racquetball. Once. I'd played often when I was at Texas, with Tom and/or Ronnie, but nothing since then. Kevin considered himself quite the superb athlete. He was flabbergasted when I beat him. It

was effortless. Not cocky. Just expert. I don't think he ever forgave me that beating.

(Maybe you begin to see why people get so ticked off at me. I just – DO – things. Without thinking. I give EVERYTHING my ALL. That's unforgivable.)

Pop's last words to me, in a letter, were "With a little tact and tolerance, you'll go a long way." As you can see, I STILL haven't learned – either.

Then, well – back to the racquetball game, and – I got a look at some gruesome SCARS on Kevin's back. Terrible SCARS. Something SNAPPED in me. Flashed me back to when my childhood friend Skipper Hoover got run over by his father on their farm.

I clearly never properly confronted that tragic loss – until NOW. I went a little crazy. Retreated. Isolated myself in a remote hotel room. Read The Bible. Revelations. Searching for meaning. An explanation.

Why the F me, God?

Kelle and Kevin finally found me. I was still out of it. They put me on a plane back to Austin and drove the Audi Fox back themselves. I think I remember seeing Mt. Saint Helens erupting as the jet drove by. That makes two of us.

It was a dark episode. Mom made me see a therapist when I got home. I went twice. Told the doctor it felt like her meds were dissolving my brain. Never went back. Mom wouldn't let me stay in the house. Not anywhere near her precious son John Wesley. (If I hadn't seen much of John up 'till now, I sure as hell wouldn't from this point forward.)

I got a small apartment in Austin. Signed up for some classes in Roman history at the University of Texas. Never went, to speak of. Ended up withdrawing. Even thought of the Presbyterian Seminary in town.

I built a nice coffee table with a router for my new apartment. Sanded it down nice and pretty. Stained it. Then I - gave it to a pretty girl who lived down the hall. A Jewish girl. With a jade Star of David necklace.

I suppose she was offended. I only wanted a – friend.

Excuse me, but if she wasn't at least going to invite me out to lunch or over for brunch or a brew, why the hell accept my beautiful coffee table? It's not as if I was an ogre living under a bridge. I was attractive. Blond hair. Pale blue eyes. Happy. Intelligent. Friendly.

And yet – never, not once, one forward advance by a girl. Not in high school. College. Or anywhere in between. Then, by the time I started losing my hair (a few years from now), it was too late. What am I doing wrong, here?

I chalk it all up to how Hollywood portrays engineers as the supreme nerds. And you wonder why we work so damn hard to make this a better world. Well, maybe you don't – but I sure do.

Is it curtains for The Z?

Yes, I'm beginning to transmogrify into a non-violent sociopath. Stay tuned to see just exactly how any number of your most powerful, respected citizens helped to further me along that dark and dastardly trajectory.

Seven

It's the "Dark Night of the Soul" for our anti-hero.
Resigned from Annapolis. Resigned from Exxon.
Rejected by my family. Living on rapidly dwindling
savings. No direction forward. Devoid of all ambition.
Burnt. Out.

You'll remember that my head was always in the sky.
From the "two-tvos" at the Caracas airport as a little
grunt. To the (promised) semester at the Air Force
Academy as an exchange student. Doh! That Captain
Hodory yanked away like Lucy and Charlie Brown's
football.

The USNA Superintendent and Commandant saw
that spark, when they offered to pack me off to Cape
Kennedy down in Florida for the summer. The sci-fi
posters in my window office at Exxon.

Well, here I am. Watching the original Star Trek on
cable in my little apartment a few blocks north of the
University of Texas campus. First time watching Star
Trek. Hell, practically the first time watching TV, period.

"Now, isn't this interesting – a new kind of freedom. In
your head. Spirit. Tie me down with worries and debts
all you like. My brain is free – free as a bird."

Can you see the wheels starting to spin up? Like that
hyperspace drive on the Battlestar Galactica. Grinding
years of data. Augmented by visual stimulation from
Star Trek. The NASA Shuttle. The US Navy. Exxon. UT
Austin engineering.

I get all the orbital elements on the planets from an astronomy almanac. Pencil. Paper... Hey, there's an idea. The Solar System and the planets. I think I see a pattern there.

I draw a loop. It's one segment of a wave. Like an ocean wave. I put the planets on it. They move with the wave. I experiment with different wavelengths. Find the sweet spot.

When you peg the planets to the wave, their motion up and down defines their orbital plane in the celestial sphere. Their motion back and forth defines the ellipticity of the orbit.

I take that loop. Draw a series of patterns with it. Adjust them. Expand them. I match these patterns to the Schrodinger Electron Cloud Plots. I have a new model for the atom now.

"Wow. Is that cool or what?"

I throw together a bunch of applications, based on Star Wars tech. A faster-than-light X-Fighter. A light saber. Anti-gravity. Illustrate everything. Fluff it up with some engineering words.

Assemble everything into a formal manuscript, A Journal of 21st Century Technology. Send it off to a bunch of publishers. To NASA. While I'm waiting to hear back from the publishers, I get a response from NASA.

Deep breath!

"Your manuscript was reviewed by both an engineer and a scientist. Although their interests and backgrounds are different, they both agreed that your

concepts about the Unified Field Theory appear to be so profound as to be years ahead of the scientific thinking in the areas in which you delved.”

Beat.

Ummm. . . What’s a Unified Field Theory? I’d never heard of that. Didn’t have the first inkling. Wouldn’t actually, for many years to come. Turns out, it’s the combination of the four fundamental forces of nature in a single set of equations. Gravity. Electrostatics. The weak nuclear force. The strong nuclear force.

O-kay. Still doesn’t mean diddly. Wouldn’t mean squat to me for a good 20+ years.

That’s as far as I got at the time. All I wanted was to make some cash. I sent NASA’s letter to TAB Books, one of the publishers I’d written to. Kim Tabor called me a month later. “Sorry. It’s too advanced for our readers.” She was in tears. They had sent it out to experts for evaluation and everything. Bummer.

NOTE: I met Kim Tabor again some ten years later. She was an acquisitions editor at McGraw-Hill by that time. She remembered me right off the bat.

Ms. Tabor became the editor for my two textbooks, *Retrofitting for Energy Conservation* (the very first textbook on energy conservation from a major publisher) and *Electrical Design Guide for Commercial Buildings* (how to use energy efficiently in buildings, still in print to this very day)

I shopped the Star Wars manuscript around town to different science groups on and off campus. No luck.

DARPA. The U.S. Navy. Many others. “Sorry, Charlie. We don’t want Tuna with good taste. We want tuna that tastes good.”

I ran out of money. Got booted out of my apartment. Lived in the Audi Fox. Got the windows bashed in. Had to abandon my wonderful forest green car a block from the bus station in downtown Austin. Hopped on a Greyhound. On the long ride – you guessed it, heading out west. . .

Suddenly I realized that all this time I owed what little freedom I had to that marvel of engineering, the Audi Fox. It was my one loyal friend through it all. My R2D2. More!

Rest in peace, little buddy. I’ll keep you in my heart always.

I ended up homeless. Sleeping on the streets. On park benches. In Minneapolis. (Fortunately, it was summertime.)

I kept my Kelty backpack with all my worldly belongings in a locker at the Greyhound Bus terminal. Cleaned up in their washroom. The insides of my Vasque Backpacking Boots rotted out. Summer peaked. It was hot as HELL outside. I was hungry. Desperate.

Then the Salvation Army gave me a room. A bath. Put clean clothes on my back. Food. Counseling at a group meeting.

I made my way over to the local Army recruiting office. Took the ASVAB battery of tests. Got the highest score they’d ever recorded. They gave me a choice of job and duty station.

“You name it. We’ll get it for you.”

I chose 93E weather observer. White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, the heart and soul of the military space effort. Tell me. Is America the goddamn mother fucking greatest place on earth, or what?!

I called Mom. She wired me some money to take the bus back home until I had to report for Basic Training at Fort Jackson.

She wouldn’t let me stay in the house. I had to camp out on the community campgrounds. She put me to work fixing things around the house. I wonder what Brother John was thinking all this time? Nothing good, I’m quite sure.

I know what Mom was thinking: Get this dude in shape before the Army chews him up alive.

Basic was a blast. M16s. PT every morning. Decent chow. The old shoulder injury from the surfboard chasing down Susan Poag in Daytona Beach still nagged. So my Drill Sergeant (a gung-ho Black dude) gave Platoon Guide to somebody else. Fine with me.

Once my Drill Sergeant told me, “You have the greasiest skin of any white kid I’ve ever known.” These days that would be considered racist. Not back then. Everybody was green. There WERE no races. Just soldiers. Which was a liberating kind of freedom. Thanks, sarge.

We learned tank silhouettes. How to strip down the M16. Firing on the rifle range. Marching. It was fall. Cool. Crisp. I do so love the military. . .

Then. My knees started to act up. Got them looked at. “Sorry, buddy. We’ll have to put you on physical therapy and recycle you to the next class.”

No way, Jose.

I took a fist full of aspirins and passed the damn running test. At Fort Ben Harrison, my next stop, I was in a couple of weeks of physical therapy. Learned exercises to keep the knees on spec. Been doing them faithfully ever since.

At Chanute Air Force Base, where we did our 93E weather tech training, I was made Platoon Leader. Wore a red braid on my shoulder. I was a PFC at this point. Made Specialist Fourth Class after we graduated.

My Annapolis aversion to marching people around? Not a problem. At one point I was marching my Army platoon to classes. It was cold. Snowing. The Air Force platoon in front of us on the runway was going SOOooo slow. . .

I gave the guys (and gals) “DOUBLE TIME” and we ran on by those slackers.

94E Weather Observer is actually one of the toughest MOS’s in the Army. (That’s’ Army speak for Military Occupational Specialty.) Several of the people in my class had bachelor’s degrees. Zajaz was agriculture. Beuchel. Smart folks. Good folks.

It’s too bad things went south for all of us later on. For them. For me. This time it wasn’t just me getting into trouble, though. I drug a whole bunch of folks down with me.

We're fixing to get into some deep sh*t now, folks. From here on out to the present day that crap just keeps on building up. That's why I'm writing this book. I don't much mind getting the tarnation beat out of ME. But when it involves other folks? That gets me mad.

You do NOT want to get me mad. When you do, you get a scorched earth epic like this thrown in your effing face.

They say in screenwriting, especially in dialog, that every statement is like a bullet. You have to make it count. Either you advance the story, give some insight into the character or – preferably – both. Cut everything else. From here on out things move pretty damn fast.

If you were upset by the paucity of verbiage up to this point, you'll be positively apoplectic henceforth (Hey, I'm schizophrenic. I do NOT have to adhere to the usual etiquette of writers, much less all the melancholy puddle of barfing similes in your typical autobiography.)

So, it's silver spurs to the belly of this beast. "Giddy up!"

Mr. Bill arrives at White Sands Missile Range with his Army duffel bag. Nothing else. Not even any civvies other than the clothes I had on my back when I showed up for Basic Training. Why not? Because I haven't been back home to Texas and, in fact, I'm not welcome there.

You wanted freedom, Bud - well, you got it. (You gotta love Mom, how well she handled this reprobate of a son she has.)

WSMR is a remote installation. Middle of the desert. Tumbleweeds and rattlesnakes. Tucked between two mountain ranges, the Organ mountains to the west and Ruidoso and Cloudcroft to the east.

I was a high plains drifter, although I never ventured beyond the post to visit the White Sands National Monument. Or the Trinity Site, where the A-bombs were tested. The Apache Ski snow resort. Nobody asked me. Nobody told me. So, Mr. Nobody didn't go.

I'm not even sure if I was aware of the local attractions. Probably not.

My roommate in the barracks was E4 Ken Barkman. Not quite a hippie (he drove a motorcycle but also had a - van), but still a good soldier. He was to become my co-conspirator but then a victim.

Later on, when everybody else in the barracks was throwing hate words and fastballs at my groin, Ken – well, was just – quiet. I thank you for that, even if I only now just realized it. I didn't deserve your silence. Still don't.

As in all modern adventures, this one started with a Honda 750 Shadow (my new wheels, just like Ken's) and an Apple IIE computer.

This was pretty close to the very first computer you could own. No on-board RAM. Everything was stored on a big 256K floppy disk on an external hard drive. Your Apple watch has 1000 times the computing power and storage capacity.

But, hey – back then? I had real POWER at my disposal.

I was attached to the Headquarters Company, but 93 Echos worked for the Atmospheric Sciences Laboratory (ASL). LTC Ellis was the head of ASL. I met him once. (Which was once too many. Enough for him to become the next villain of this sordid tale.)

Our duty place was C-Station, run by Dave Novlan, the lead forecaster. He was a civilian as were all the other forecasters under him. There was a small group of us 93Es under a sergeant.

In the middle of the post was an outside museum of – you guessed it, missiles. Nazi V-2 rockets (brought there from Peenemunde after the war along with hundreds of Nazi rocket scientists and all their equipment, literally with whole trainloads of people and equipment – the rail cars included: Operation Paperclip).

Strangely enough, I never even visited that museum, either. Or maybe not so strangely, knowing me. I had only ONE thing on my mind for the next two years.

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to advance the project that NASA thought so highly of.”

That meant zeroing in on the one real chunk of beef in the whole manuscript, the Solar System model. Everything else was built on that – first the electron model, then all the Star Wars engineering applications.

The problem is that I had work to do. Weather observers send up balloons and then track them on a rusty old portable World War II-era radar. At C-Station, we worked shifts at the forecasting desk, sorting weather maps, taking observations. Jotting down the wind speed. Cloud cover. Temperature. Humidity.

WSMR was a MISSILE RANGE. They shot off MISSILES downrange to measure performance, so the aerospace engineer types needed to know all about the wind speed and other conditions at altitude. (The Space Shuttle Colombia landed there, right before I arrived.)

I liked the work well enough. But I had a MISSION to do. So, I volunteered to take the graveyard shift. Remained on the 10 PM – 6 AM shift for close to two years. That gave me lots of quiet, quality time at nights to work on my Big Theory.

I input all the solar system data, trying to improve my model. Our dorm room was full of computer printouts, my dot matrix printer, and the Apple II E computer. (By the time all this was over with; well, I'll just say I've never owned another Mac.)

The thing about the graveyard shift is that when I returned at 6 AM, everybody else was just waking up. Cleaning their rooms. Polishing the hallway floor. Breakfast in the Mess Hall across the post. Morning formation. PT sometimes (group exercise).

I had to participate in all that. Then I'd manage a few hours sleep, until the afternoon when the work day was over. Dinner. NOISY barracks. So, at best, I got maybe six broken hours of sleep. Sure, you get two 24-hour days off a week, but you never adjust to the regular day.

They used to call me The Professor around the barracks. It was good fun. Until, well - until it wasn't. At which point I became the Great Satan.

The Downfall started innocently enough. I went to the High Energy Laser Project (HELSTAF, President Reagan's trillion-dollar "Star Wars space laser," as he called it) a few miles north of the installation with a scientist from ASL, Mark Hines.

I suppose word got around about my research and my sergeant volunteered me. (I NEVER volunteer. Not after two years at Annapolis where volunteering led to nothing but grief.) The more likely reason is that I already had a Top Secret clearance, on account of Annapolis.

WSMR was a high-security installation, but HELSTAF was the ultimate in security.

HELSTAF. You can google images of the place. A giant dome in the middle of the desert. Large parking lot out back, full of cars. Inside – well, where are all the damn people that belong to those cars? Never saw anybody.

Very strange. Exactly who and where are they spending those trillion dollars? (Later on, when I went full schizo, this was ample fodder for many a conspiracy theory – Roswell was only a couple of miles away off White Sands Proving Ground as it was known back then.)

Our job, Mr. Hines and I, was to measure the particle count in the laser room. You're expecting a high-tech lab with giant computers? Scientists in white lab coats and thick glasses?

Sorry, just a bunch of gigantic mirrors. Lenses. A wall of computers, sure, but no scientists. No clutter. No nothing.

So, LASER. ROOM. When a laser HITS a particle of dust it EXPLODES. Consequently, dust is very bad. Motes of dust. Drifting in the air. Your normal room is thick with the stuff. Bad idea, for a trillion-dollar space laser.

We had a big heavy gizmo on wheels that was pretty much just a huge vacuum cleaner. Technically, it was a “particle counter,” and literally measured the particles of dust in the air. (Yes, this is me, a government worker, spending an entire day for a mundane job.)

So, we fired up the monster. Took readings. Then Spec 4 Clark lugged it to another spot. Fired it up for more readings. And so forth. (All the while, I was studying this place, recording everything in my boilerplate brain for future reference.)

I mean, really, people. This place was a tomb. Or perhaps it was just under construction, dummy... Still.

They never had anything to show for that trillion dollars (equal to \$3 trillion in 2023 dollars). No space laser, for sure. What the HELL did they spend all that cash value on? Think: the Pentagon’s infamous \$1000 toilets and multiply that by three million.

Anyway. 40 years later, it occurred to me (better late than never, right?) – all the UFO crazies said the Roswell UFO was brought to Wright Patterson Air Force Base outside Dayton, Ohio. That’s 1500 miles away.

White Sands was, like, 5 miles away. They’d just developed the Atom Bomb down the road at

Alamogordo. That whole damn area was sworn to secrecy until hell freezes over.

And they bring the flying saucer to – where? (I hope you're getting the gist here – schizophrenics have a lethal affinity for conspiracy theories, especially if they involve aliens and UFOs and nefarious military organizations. X Files? In other words, Mr. Bill is slowly, inevitably, going. Over. The. Wall.)

Please note: this thoughts did not occur at the time, but some 20+ years later, after I had was expelled with extreme malice from the University of Texas a semester short of a Ph.D. Yeah, I was pissed off – you will be, too.

Anyway, back to 1984. We're a-fixing to meet Big Brother.

After a long, tough day on the job, Mark Hines and I got back to ASL. I had mentioned my NASA research. He asked to see the manuscript. I showed it to him. He liked it! Suggested I talk to LTC Ellis, the head of ASL. And, to a fault, I always do what people suggest.

I had a meeting with the good colonel. Showed him my research. Not interested. Then, upon my return to the barracks, I realized I'd left behind my little business card album/holder/folder (see-through pockets, 3 per page where you slide business cards).

Cards from the dozens of organizations I'd contacted about my NASA research after I got that amazing letter from NASA. UT labs. DARPA. The US Navy. The Israeli Embassy in Washington DC. Many others.

I don't even know why I kept the damn business cards. Nobody was interested.

I asked LTC Ellis to return the album/holder/folder. He refused. I insisted. He STILL refused. I'm not sure if I ever returned the damn thing. Whatever. I let it go. Got back to my research, which by now had evolved into analyses of the motion of each planet relative to a new celestial plane.

I know what you're thinking. This guy is wrapped up in a as magnificent an obsession as the HELSTAF space laser herself. Hey, that's okay. You're in good company. VERY good company, as we'll see later. However. Just so you keep on reading, I'll spill the baked beans.

The Titus-Bode Law helped discover the planet Uranus. It predicts the rough ratio of the planets' orbits around the sun. There was a space missing. They found Uranus there. So, ONE law made TWO people forever famous after discovering ONE planet.

Do that math, if you can.

Well, my model assembles all the planets into a single model. There are nine planets times six orbital elements each equals 54 unknowns. My rough model was able to reduce this down to just two elements per planet. It eliminates 42 unknowns. (This process is formally called "regularization," coming up with new models that eliminate unknowns in a solution. Not that I knew this at the time.)

Just like you sixty seconds ago for you, I had no idea what I was doing. I was solving a baffling puzzle. A fascinating puzzle. And I was close. Very close.

The data in my new computer printouts was no longer random. The motion of each planet was an oblong circle around its point on the curve. Regular motion around a single point is a simple function: radius of circle and time rate of motion.

Moreover. And here's the fun part.

My model explains the retrograde rotation of Venus and Uranus (they rotate opposite to the direction of the other planets), the ring systems around Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune AND – here's the kick-ass mind-blow: Earth's moon is right there. Front and center. In direct harmony with the Earth. Right in the middle of the goddamn waveform that explains all of the aforementioned planetary motion.

(No known theory explains the moon's motion in this way – not even now, in 2023.)

So. Take a deep breath. Relax. Remember what happened to Galileo? When he said the solar system rotated around the Sun and not Earth? He spent the last decade of his life confined in his house, by order of the Church.

And Copernicus? The dude who came up with the sun-centered heliocentric model? He was so afraid of repercussions that he didn't publish his work until after his death. And here I am with a slick model that implies everything really does revolve around EARTH?

Ouch.

But, hey. Nobody knows any of this yet. Certainly not me. I don't know squat. It wasn't until I took Victor Szebehely's Regularization class at the University of

Texas at Austin in 1997 (15 years from now) that I knew what I was doing.

Dr. Z was the top worker in Celestial Mechanics of the modern era. That was the last class he ever taught. If I hadn't taken this class, you wouldn't be reading this right now.

And – to really blow your socks off, get this: that Regularization class was the most advanced class in the Celestial Mechanics program. It would take me 3 years of graduate classes in orbital and celestial mechanics AFTER Dr. Z's class to understand even a FRACTON of what he was lecturing about. And yet.

And yet.

I did follow the “regularization” part. Dr. Z knew that. He gave me an A in the class, after I presented this research as my class project. He said, “All you need to do is solve for the time function and you'll get your name lit up in lights.”

However – you're dreading what comes after my “howevers,” as well you should: Dr. Z passed away a few months later, right after I started grad school. My new advisor HATED that research. The Graduate Advisor later wouldn't even let me use that class for credit toward my Master's Degree.

This ethereal dream should have died with Dr. Z. But it didn't. Taking that class was one last shot in the dark for me. You'll see. It panned out. I finally KNEW that I was on the right track. There was no DOUBT whatsoever that my project had merit. Four years of grief later I was STILL convinced. And 20 years after that I'm still there.

Taking one last shot in the dark.

Not to pop the balloon before the fat lady sings by sharing all this tech stuff. There's still all sorts of drama to come – more than you could possibly imagine.

I felt it necessary to tell you that the NASA research isn't some grandiose delusion. The symmetry of the analysis made it very clear to me at the time. NASA saw it, too. I just want you to go forward with the same conviction I had then. So you don't think I was grandiose or schizophrenic in the classical sense.

“I may be crazy but I'm not dumb.”

For future reference: I'm rated 100% disabled by the Veterans Administration now. That sounds REALLY bad, doesn't it? But the VA rates you relative to how you were before onset. Right now I have an absolute, extreme phobia for math. Any math. All math. An engineer who can't do math? Yeah, that's 100% a lost cause.

Okay. Now you know exactly what I was working on. Maybe you can even feel some of the excitement and motivation I felt. It's elegant. Beautiful. Simple.

Still, I didn't yet know anything about Regularization or planetary motion in the orbital mechanics sense. I was just fitting a new model to a bunch of random motions, of some abstract things called “planets.”

I mentioned my manuscript to Mark Hines, who was a physicist, to get an idea if I was wasting my time or not.

Ditto with LTC Ellis. I wasn't pushing. Shoving. Bullying. That's not me (not at least until I get on paper, a new "freedom" I was to discover very soon).

I was a little boy who found a "two-two" and wanted Pop to tell me what the F to do with it. (As an aside, I never heard one single foul word in our house, from anybody – ever, not even as adults. Not even until the bitter end.)

I told you earlier I do NOT volunteer. I learned my lesson at Annapolis. Volunteer and you get your head shot off with a double-barrel shotgun. My one mistake was my failure to realize that other people DO volunteer.

My half-hippie roommate? E4 Ken Barkman? He hatched up the brilliant idea to write a letter to the Commanding General of WSMR, Major General (2 stars) Niles Fulwyler. Oh. My. God. He just did – what?

"Be that as it may" Ken Barkman wrote to the general, saying something like, "You just HAVE to see what this guy is working on."

Gulp. Here we go again, folks.

The good general invited me to give a presentation to himself and the two top scientists at HELSTAF. Something about a new laser design Ken hatched up for me. (Note to self: If they ever give me the Nobel Prize for this damn sh*t, I'm going to insist that Ken is awarded it with me because without him NONE of what's to follow would have happened.)

So, Ken and I polished our brass, put on our dress green uniforms, and went to the Headquarters building behind the giant American flag at the entrance to WSMR.

I'd prepared a poster slide show. Printed out all my planetary motion plots. Yanked a few laser ideas out of the old Star Wars how-to tech manual. We were rocking. Literally. Listening to ZZ Top in the barracks. Cranked up LOUD.

I mean, REAL LOUD. The whole damn barracks (except for me) knew where Spec 4s Clark and Barkman were going. Sharp Dressed Man. Two Rough Boys going Nationwide. They done Got Me Under Pressure but I'm a still gonna Give You My Lovin'.

The presentation went well. A couple of hours, and I got exactly what I was hoping for. God bless the United States Army. We received a letter a week or so later, "Thanks for the presentation, but it's too theoretical." Sounds like a rejection letter, doesn't it?

More like a big sigh of relief.

There was no "we love your idea, come develop it at HELSTAF." I didn't give a hoot in hell about lasers. I was an orbits man. Space. Planets. NASA. Ken may have been disappointed, but not me. I was relieved.

There was no "crazy idea" in the good general's letter; no "you're an embarrassment to the uniform" (this would come soon, in very short order – as in, right now). Just, "Thank you for your effort, and good luck in your future endeavors."

A week later I received a summons to the Mental Health Clinic on post. Huh? This is interesting. It was right across the street from our barracks. I go over. Take some psych tests. Have a nice, long chat with Captain Mark Chapin.

The good doctor said LTC Ellis had referred me for a psych evaluation. Ellis thought I was being paranoid, maybe even schizophrenic. Captain Chapin gave me a clean bill of health. He said, "LTC Ellis is just jealous you had two whole hours of face time with General Fulwyler, whom he's hardly ever even met."

It's too bad Captain Chapin didn't tell me, "You. Do. NOT. Want. To. Make. LTC Ellis. Jealous."

Please note that LTC Ellis sending me for a psychiatric evaluation is an action of "command influence."
(Because had he called my sergeant, Dave Novlan at C Stationi, or Mark Hines they would ALL have said this guy is firing on all twelve cylinders.)

This sort of "command influence" was very common back then – probably still is – for the military (and everybody else) to use their position of authority to label their enemies and use a damnable psychiatric diagnosis to get rid of them.

It's a very effective technique. Too bad for LTC Ellis, Annapolis had hardened me to that kind of attack. Prepared me. Wound up the toy soldier and set him in motion. Click. Clack.

"Take me to your leader."

I brush it off. A week later, I hopped on the Shadow 750. Cruised on down to a computer shop in El Paso to load up on supplies. As soon as I arrived, the owner gave me a message.

Call the post. They said it's urgent. "Who even knew I was coming here?" But I called. It WAS urgent. Return to the post ASAP.

So, I JUMP on the Shadow 750 and scream back to WSMR. I get hauled in by the Military Police. "LTC Ellis said you were trying to defect."

Saayyyy – what?

A very long and uncomfortable interrogation ensued. Evidently, LTC Ellis was offended by Nathan Belkind's Israeli Embassy business card in my card album/holder/folder. (LOL. This reminds me of my sister Leigh Erin calling a brassiere, "an over-the-shoulder boulder holder." Texas humor, gotta love it.)

Well, I'm thinking at this point – that explains why the S.O.B. didn't return the card album/holder/folder to me.

I got steamed at the MP Captain and his MP Sergeants crowding me. I mean, REALLY steamed.

Those cards were when I was a CIVILIAN. It's MY goddamn research. Even the sh*t I just talked about with the general was MY damn work. Done on MY time. With MY computer. I can goddamn well do what the hell I want to do with it.

"We have rules about service members contacting foreign entities."

That business fucking CARD was received LONG before I enlisted. Call Mr. Belkind. Do your fu*cking research before you accuse me of any damn thing.

(If you've been paying attention, and I won't blame you one bit if not; well, you'll recall how being an Elton John fan got me to being discriminated against as a homosexual at Annapolis...

It's happening again. Now I'm a despicable, deplorable JEW just because I contacted the most high-tech folks on the planet, and they actually wrote me back a nice letter – which dozens of red-blooded AMERICAN organizations did NOT do.)

And please note THIS: Mr. Belkind was to do me another giant favor (which turned into a curse, as things generally do in my life) later on.

The MP Captain accused me further, “You have Top Secret clearance.”

Which does NOT apply to any of my scientific work. Sure, if the general and his cronies at HELSTAF gave me a little office and some computer time on an Army mainframe. That's different. But they gave me the finger and that's goddamn that.

The MPs let me off the hook. “We're just glad you I know the rules now.”

Fine. It was over. But it wasn't. The Professor was no more. Now it was The Traitor. I was a persona non grata.

The Army looks after its own.

A week later I totaled the Shadow 750, may she Rest In Peace. Mechanical malfunction. Reeled off the road. Nosedived into a sand embankment.

Two hours later, I wheeled the poor bike into the company area, just as they were lining up for morning formation. The Shadow was a total wreck, wires and parts sticking out every which way.

I banged up the knees a bit. Ripped the crap out of my uniform. It's a miracle I wasn't killed. As it was, I CRASHED the motorcycle down in front of the formation (not really, but I should have) and went to stand where I'm supposed to be in formation.

That's one way to keep The Traitor from defecting. Wreck his wheels.

I bought a used Fiat Brava at the White Sands Federal Credit Union down the road not long after. A block off the lot the engine BLEW UP. I had it towed to the company area, then over to the Auto Craft Shop on the other side of the post.

Blown piston. Gonna have to rebuild the engine. I looked around at all the shop tools. Folks working on engines and transmissions.

"We can give you all the advice and help you need."

Huh. I rolled up my sleeves and for the rest of my time at White Sands, I spent all my disposable income on auto parts and all my free time in the Auto Craft Shop.

If wrecking his wheels doesn't keep him from defecting, keep him busy rebuilding them.

I never bonded with the Brava like I had done with the Audi Fox. It did become the focus of just as much trouble, but – honestly – after rebuilding the engine and

the transmission from scratch I could never really get it to working very well.

(Where was my old Texas roommate Tom Alleman when I needed him?)

Life in the barracks all this time was – odd. Now that my research had been given the thumbs down by the Big Brains, there was no pizzazz associated with The Professor.

I didn't have time, actually, to do any more work on the Big Theory because every waking hour was spent in the Auto Craft Shop. (Which I enjoyed no end. Always wanted to rebuild an engine.)

The Big Theory was done for, though. Over. Fini. I was glad. No more albatross. I can have a life. Free time. Be an auto mechanic. Be cool.

It was a still bad situation for me. No more respect from folks. Suspicion on the whole defecting accusation. The MPs were billeted in our barracks, so word got around about our confrontation.

Everybody else in the barracks worked in the ASL building with LTC Ellis. Nor was I shy about the meeting at Mental Health. The stench of mental illness must have reeked.

The stench of marijuana, too. Ken Barkman and the folks in the room next to ours (two rooms shared the same bathroom) smoked pot often in the bathroom. The

quarters were so close, I probably inhaled as much as they did.

The Company Commander gave random urinalysis tests every week, and if my number ever came up for sure I'd be nailed. Like, that's the last damn thing I need right now.

"You didn't inhale? It was only secondhand smoke? Yeah, I have a space laser to sell to Israel, too."

Well, you know me. My emotions are never far from the surface. Around about now there were plenty of emotions boiling. Plus. I HATE drugs. After what they did to my sisters Kelle and Leigh Erin?

Well, the last bit of camaraderie I could muster, as misdirected as it may seem – being isolated, alone, stressed out – well, you know what's coming. Things – happen at times like that.

Ken Barkman and all my buddies for 93E school had dinner at our squad leader's house one night. Six or eight in total, other than myself. Senior enlisted now. Our squad leader was an NCO. Broiled rattlesnake.

Our squad leader loved to cruise the tarmac on his Harley speedster, running over snakes sunning on the blacktop. Come on, try it – tastes just like chicken. Sorry, Charlie. I never liked Ronnie Bell's snakeskin boots, neither. It's – gross.

Playing UNO, they passed around a joint. I toked up like everybody else – that's me, always going with the flow – but the next day when I got my head back?

I was pissed. I hate that shit. I'd lost control of my brain – my one last refuge – for a while on that crap. . . I

was tired of breathing it in our barracks room. In our bathroom.

I saw all of them getting ruined like what happened to Kelle and Leigh Erin. So, I sat down at work that night. Wrote a letter to my C.O., Captain Greenmeyer. Slipped it under his door the next day after morning formation. There. It's done. Finally, peace in the barracks.

Why do I always hope for – expect! - the best?
And get the worst.

Eight

The folks at White Sands and the Headquarters Company where I was billeted should have known.

An ex-Naval Academy dude shows up. Starches his uniform. Airborne boots polished to perfection. Walks tall and carries – an Apple II E computer. Who knew an E4 could wreak so much havoc? Not me. I only did what I had to do.

Before picture: The Headquarters company never had group PT in the morning (running, calisthenics). Rarely any group activities at all, in fact. A bunch of slackers only one baby step above civilians.

After picture: Everybody got out of the rack for PT every morning. Mustered at the athletic field nearby. Went for a nice run. Sang fun Army songs. (Not as good as Navy songs, but nobody's perfect.) The 93E squad even met for fitness on other days.

Company baseball games. Fun with the other folks in the barracks at happy hour - at picnic tables I built out back of the company area.

I ended up getting an ARCOM later on, the Army's top peacetime award. Something about "staunch individualism... impeccable moral fortitude... improving the life of the enlisted on post." An Army Commendation Medal. It was a private ceremony. Just me, Captain Judith Hlavac, and First Sergeant Rios (Hispanic, First Cav in Viet Nam). Not published in the post newspaper, either. Then they shipped me off. Good. Effing. Riddance.

What the F happened?

Imagine you're a Company Commander, Captain Greenmeyer by name. Some piss ant E4 shows up. Causes LTC Ellis to come down on your case – several times. Has a run-in with Mental Health. Gets in a fracas with the Military Police. Accused of TREASON.

You're on the Commanding General's radar now too, and not in a good way. This is SO not an individual you want in your command. Fortunately, this is the United States Army. We have methods. Solutions.

Then a gift from the Divine Providence slides under your door. The meddlesome E4 goes too far. He accuses his peers of using pot.

Hah! Got you this time, sucker. The odds of eight respected senior enlisted, ALL guilty of drugs, at the SAME time? Astronomical. Even I can do that math. Slam. Dunk... But. What to do?

Well, you call all the accused into your office. You tell them they've been accused of doing drugs. You order them to wait outside while medics show up to take a

urine sample. They see the written statement on your desk. Handwritten. Signed.

But – what if they didn't see the signature? You have the First Sergeant call Clark in. Tell him it's for his own protection. . .

As the accused are all standing in line to give a sample of pee. But. Look. Clark wasn't in the office getting read the riot act. But - he's giving a urine sample?

Bingo. That afternoon, working in the Auto Craft Shop, they show up. Why did you turn us in? Fists are raised in EXTREME anger.

Folks run to intervene.

I'm taken by another NCO to his house on post for the night. Relieved of duty at C-Station. Assigned to a new room in the barracks. Given mundane chores to do in the company area (building picnic tables, which I actually enjoyed and was quite good at) so they can "keep an eye on me."

It's for my own protection.

Meanwhile. All the accused remain at their work stations. I see them at meals every day. Formation. It was nice to be on an eight-to-five schedule, but – really?

Tempers rise. Never far from 212 F. The threats continue. I write a letter to the post Inspector General. I should be transferred to a new post ASAP. That's what the Uniform Code of Military Justice says, the UCMJ. Not just any post, but at least a 24-hour drive away.

"We can't do that. Your car isn't running yet."

I complain again. I accuse my sergeant of infidelity with a cute blonde junior enlisted girl. I accuse others of doing hard drugs – on the job – at C Station and elsewhere. More offenses. Everything I’ve ever seen that is against the UCMJ.

(Remember me? Always quiet – observing. Memory like a steel trap? “The most courteous camper” – until I’m cornered – and enclosed.)

Captain Greenmeyer is relieved of duty and replaced by Captain Judith Hlavac. She brags to the formation (with me standing right there), “Nobody uses drugs in this company.” A week later, the urinalysis test come back. All positive.

The. Sh*t. Hits. The. Fan. Discipline is handed out. Hard-earned ranks fall down. Pay is cut. Benefits dropped. And it’s all on me. Talk about teed off!

I’m STILL not gotten off post. I finally get the Fiat Brava going; barely. I drive it home on leave.

A friend of our family is an undercover cop for the Austin Police Department (the ex of Mom’s piano teacher, actually). He says, “Do NOT go back there. They’ll kill you. Drugs? Drug DEALERS?”

So, I write to my US Congressman, J.J. “Jake” Pickle, to – well, please help get me out of this pickle.

I receive “Eyes Only” orders from the Pentagon. My new MOS will be Chaplain’s Assistant (my request, suggested by my platoon sergeant back at WSMR, Sgt. Kelly – a Black man; have you noticed that Black dudes always keep me out of trouble?).

Until your school starts out at Fort Ord in California, you're assigned to the Main Post Chapel at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

When I arrive at Fort Sam, the Command Sergeant Major (the top enlisted person on post) orders me NOT to tell ANYBODY anything that happened at White Sands.

I'm sorry, but – shove it all under the carpet? For the good of the service? Are. You. Kidding. Me? Like – what are you gonna do if I disobey your orders, court-martial me?

I write a detailed statement about all that happened at White Sands. Submit it to the FBI office in Austin.

“Not our jurisdiction. Contact your Inspector General on post.” I show it to Colonel Sanders, the Chief of Chaplains, my new big boss. To my NCO. They read it. Approve it. So, I submit it to the Fort Sam Inspector General's office.

I get called into my C.O.'s office a few days later. I was ecstatic. My orders to Fort Ord finally came through for Chaplain's Assistant School. Yay! There's a God after all.

Big sigh.

I get read the riot act. Medics in white show up with a straightjacket. ZIP me in. Haul me across post to Chambers Pavilion, the local insane asylum. Lock me in a pink-padded cell.

Gee thanks, God.

Months later, my Army attorney, Captain Paul Franco, got hold of the documents. The IG had taken my statement and, in his own words, “obliterated all the names, places, and dates for purposes of confidentiality” and submitted it to Dr. Gabriel Durand-Hollis, the Chief of Psychiatry, for evaluation.

(Obliterated? Like, who uses that word?)

Chaplain (Full Colonel) Sanders testified at my medical tribunal that, come first thing Monday morning (the above events happened late on a Friday afternoon), he went to see Dr. D-H who, according to Chaplain Sanders, said I was “the sickest of the sick” and that he was determined to prove just that.

This is a Chaplain. A Colonel. He testified under oath that “other than some problems with his car, this man was okay.” Thanks, Fiat Brava. Were’ cool. I hope your new owner treated you well when we swapped cars. (Mine crapped out within weeks.)

Chaplain Sanders testified I was a good worker. Submitted all sorts of Work Orders to get the Chapel fixed up real nice and pretty. “I want him back to work.”

The word of a full-bird Colonel carried zero weight with the shrinks on my medical discharge tribunal.

The psychologist did a full psychiatric evaluation. I got a copy of it. I wrote a rebuttal that was longer than their report, citing that almost everything in the report was incorrect. It was as if this was the report of another person, who really WAS a severe chronic paranoid schizophrenic.

After a few weeks in pink PJs on the psych ward, I worked in the Occupational Therapy unit at BAMC (in civilian clothes). I wrote my rebuttals on an electric IBM Selectric typewriter there at the Clinic. The OT folks liked my work, gave me a certificate of commendation.

Again. Didn't mean squat to evil Dr. D-H.

The psychiatrist did several interviews. I got a copy of their evaluation. Again, I wrote a rebuttal that was longer than their report, citing literally everything they said was incorrect. This time, I recognized the schizophrenic in their report, one of my fellow patients. I recognized his syntax, the things he said. Derrick by name.

To whit, I was framed. By somebody ELSE'S psych profile!

Mom came down from Lago Vista to talk with Dr. D-H. (Remember, she had a degree in psychology. She talked their language.) Finally, the cavalry shows up.

After Mom left, all the nurses on the staff were saying, "She's as crazy as you are."

Forever after, Mom would say, "That was the most evil man I ever met." Meaning Dr. D-H. Who, by the way, was Hispanic, spoke broken English at best, and was a real jerk. Why shouldn't he be? He had a terrible job.

"Clean up on isle WSMR. Somebody dumped a load of sh*t in our laps."

Dr. D-H presented my "unique" case to all the mental health workers at BAMC (Brooke Army Medical Center). Two of those doctors would later be the judges

(along with one line officer) on my Physical Evaluation Board (PEB, a formal tribunal). They both, poisoned by Dr. D-H's presentation, said I was unfit to remain in the service.

The line officer said I was okay.

This was a LEGAL board, mind you. Those doctors judging me were prejudiced. They should have been excluded from the panel. Captain Franco subpoenaed Dr. D-H to testify. He didn't appear.

Like, don't I have a right to confront my accuser?

PEBs normally last fifteen minutes, half an hour max. Mine lasted 3 hours. I was grilled the entire time. I have the official legal transcript. It's 20 single-spaced pages. Tough questions. Hard questions. I was articulate in my responses. Patient. Descriptive. Helpful. Level-headed.

No normal person could, after listening to me testify for three solid hours without a break - watching me testify, watching me handle deftly every probe; tactfully and accurately.

No normal human being could ever, possibly have said there is one single, solitary thing wrong with this guy. (Other than the fact that the brass insignia on my lapels was tarnished and black.)

And yet. I've appealed the case time and time again since then to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records (ABCMR). EVERY TIME – it never gets past the medical doctors, who always concur with the diagnosis.

“Severe chronic paranoid schizophrenia.” There is no worse mental condition in the lexicon of psychology.

This, people, is a clear and unequivocal example of “command influence.” It’s either investigate a spate of OFFICERS (forget about the poor enlisted guys who were caught up in the mess; they’re now irrelevant – hell, those guys are HEROES) and senior officers who ignored the clear mandates of the UCMJ, placing my life and health in jeopardy for no reason.

Either investigate the accused. Or. Get. Rid. Of. The. Bastard. They chose the latter.

I’m sure LTC Ellis had a long and successful career. Heck, he probably got promoted for getting rid of the troublemaker.

My whole case probably became the new standard of excellence at BAMC. “Give this guy the Clark Treatment.” All the staff probably joked later, “The moron tried to pull a Clark Maneuver on us. We sure showed him who’s boss.”

To retrace just a little bit. I got sent home after working on the Occupational Therapy clinic for six weeks or so. Found a place in College Station. The PEB date was a month or three off.

I worked night and day gathering evidence for Captain Franco. Letters evaluating my research and writings. References. Dr. D-H and the shrinks on his staff all said it was pre-existing. Nothing the Army did wrong.

That was very much contrary to the facts. I was a senior student leader in my MOS. A Platoon Leader in Army terms. I ran PT. Marched folks around. Supervised the barracks. Captain Chapin’s clean bill of

health from WSMR was important too. The meeting with General Fulwyler. But Dr. D-H dug in his heels.

It was just like Chaplain Sanders said under oath, he was hell-bent on proving I was the “sickest of the sick.”

Okay, sure. I can understand his first reaction. That first weekend on the psych ward, I told the duty nurses I’d been to Annapolis. Had a degree in engineering. NASA wrote me a nice letter that got me in to see a general and scientists from HELSTAF. Sounds damn grandiose even to me. When Mom came in she no doubt said all of the same.

“She’s as crazy as you are.”

But, I mean really – once they got my personal file. Doh! There it is. My Texas transcript. My Annapolis transcript. One call to General Fulwyler confirms all the rest. But these guys didn’t back off.

They wrote my life history accurately in their narrative summary but STILL insisted on their original, seat-of-the-pants diagnosis.

Why didn’t Dr. D-H come to the tribunal to justify his decision? Because IT WASN’T HIS DECISION. There’s no other possible explanation.

Exactly WHY did he make that decision? How did he justify it?

The main evidence Dr. D-H – actually the ONLY evidence – against me was the NASA letter. Clearly, it was a “grandiose delusion.” I gathered several expert comments on that research that my lawyer Captain Paul Franco presented at the tribunal. In the end, they said it

was not evidence of pre-existing mental illness (it was all service-connected).

But it was too late.

As soon as I got back home after the tribunal, I burned everything. Threw the Apple IIE in a dumpster. All my research notes. Every. Thing. It stayed thrown away, too.

I wouldn't spend ten seconds thinking about that goddamn project for the next ten happy years. The only thing that remained was the NASA letter. Buried somewhere in all my things. God only knows how it survived my angry, ruthless purge.

I was living in College Station now. Home of Texas A and M University. Great school. Beautiful campus. Fields and cows everywhere. Love that city.

I tried classes, in the physics program. Got a job as a lab assistant. Didn't work. I tried, really hard. I saw a lady therapist at the TAMU Mental Health Clinic. She taught me meditation. I was able to stop smoking once and for all.

I was on Social Security Disability or SSI by now. Mom was my sponsor/payee until I could find full-time work. Rick Palmer, a civil engineer neighbor grad student at TAMU was kind to me. He was on the Aggie's (water) skiing team. Belonged to a Christian rock music group. One of the original Christian rock bands, I suppose.

I went to Rick's church in Bryan (which is right next to College Station) one Sunday and got "dunked" in a

big vat of water in front of the congregation. He was a good Baptist, even if I wasn't.

But I tried, really I did. I still try.

I took a couple of Judaism classes at the TAMU Hillel, Rabbi Peter Tarlow. He had a degree in psychology and was studying for another in sociology at the time. I told him my past. He was sympathetic. I needed work, desperately. Something to do. ANYTHING. Please.

Rabbi Tarlow let me paint the inside of the Hillel (no pay, and I convinced Mom to pay for the paint). It was something. I made some friends, although I'm not sure they liked the wild, bright colors the Rabbi and I chose. I never converted.

Somehow with all that had happened I just well, didn't see God anywhere. Not in Rick's Baptist church. Not in Rabbi Tarlow's Synagogue.

I've been through my fair share of bad situations before, but it was always my own fault. This time was different. I didn't really do anything wrong. Why did so many people hate on me after that?

At no time did I tell anybody, this research is the greatest. All I ever wanted was an honest opinion of its value. NASA liked it. I was just doing my due diligence and respecting their evaluation.

(The Army nurses got hold of a newspaper clipping from WSMR about a laser contract. "You were going build the Star Wars laser all by yourself?" Jazzing about it. What fun. Tormenting me. Can you blame me for "obliterating" everything?)

But, yeah. I was depressed, all right. All the time, energy, and grief I'd put into that NASA project. I thought destroying my research would make it all go away, tossing it. Wrong! I felt miserable. What have I done? It's gone, and there's no way I'll EVER get it back...

All the EXTREME injustices at White Sands, on the Psych Ward, and then the Tribunal. My own attorney even concluded his arguments with, "This man deserves to be out of the service." What kind of lawyer stabs his own client in the back? It was all just too much.

About this time, I had some kind of problem with the Dean of Students, Dr. Poenish; with grades or something. Had to write a statement, I think, so I could go on probation and remain in school. Mentioned something about "suicide" in my statement. (If nothing else, I'm honest.)

The EMS bus showed up at my apartment the next day. Got interrogated for "suicidal ideations." They released me.

A few weeks later a lady neighbor in the apartment complex got in a bad fight with her man. Windows were KNOCKED out. Glass everywhere. I ran over to help her out. Got CUTS on one arm.

The EMS bus showed up. They took one look at the cuts on my arm and off Mr. Bill goes to Rusk State Hospital. Attempted suicide.

Couldn't EVEN talk my way out of that one.

While I was at Rusk, I missed a disability review appointment with the Veterans Administration. They

bumped my rating down from 10% to 0%. It would remain right there for many years – fine with me because I was appealing the discharge.

I only realized I had VA benefits at all some 10+ years later when I was walking around a new VA hospital in Temple Texas just constructed by my employers.

I had done a lot of the electrical drafting and even some of the electrical analysis for that place, the Olin Teague Medical Center – for which I wrote a really cool dBase computer program . . . and, talking to a veteran – he said I was eligible for benefits.

Meanwhile – back at the institution for the insane (talk about SCARY – there was a fenced-in area for the CRIMINALLY insane. Yikes stripes beechnut gum.)

A month after I was hospitalized at Rusk State Hospital, I appeared before a judge (It was a very terrible place, just like in the horror movies – WORSE than the movies!). . .

The hospital staff insisted on committing me permanently. I told the judge it was all wrong. I went to the Naval Academy. I can do this. Please. Give me a chance. I'll make you proud.

They released me.

Rick Palmer came to pick me up. Drove me to Mom's house in Lago Vista. We three sat down and hammered out an agreement. Rick's brother Randy was starting up a dairy farm in Vermont. He needed help.

“I’m an engineer. I know all about construction – I built this house we’re in!” (Gonna have to watch out what you say now that everybody thinks your schizo.) I gave the Palmers all my Social Security money. They give me room and board and let me work.

Rick shipped me up to Vermont.

I worked 18 hours a day for six or eight weeks, helping to fix the place up. The cows were a blast. We gave them all names (the shape of the black spots on their fur made them easy to distinguish, different personalities – quite charming ladies). They always go to the stall in the morning. They’ll rub against you “liking” you like cats do. Except they’re so big they can break your ribs!

I’ve been a vegetarian ever since. Cows are people. BETTER than people.

Too bad, but all good things come to an end. In my case, quickly.

I couldn’t drive the tractor straight to plow – the very first time in the seat. I couldn’t keep up tossing hay bails into the trailer (who’s automatically in physical shape for brutal work like that?) I asked to stay in the house on Sundays when Randy went to Church. Downtime? After working like a horse, 18 hours a day?

Sorry, Charlie, slaves do as they’re told.

I saw a shrink in the town nearby, which was Middlebury. They put me on anti-depressants. Didn’t like them one bit. Made me feel dull. Dumb. Like a sack of flour. I had to hike the 4 or 5 miles into town once a

week to renew the Rx because Randy couldn't take time off the farm to do that.

(You see where this is going – after 6-8 weeks everything is fixed up and working. How am I going to get rid of this psycho? Although. All drugged up on that Draino sh*t – maybe he was right. . .)

Randy packed me up and put me in a local home for crazies in town. I had to walk several miles to work on the farm after that. If he'd bought me a bicycle (with my own money) I wouldn't have minded the halfway house at all.

Randy's folks would come over from upstate New York to help on weekends. His mother was diabetic. She mended one of my shirts real nice. A red flannel shirt. It was getting cold out by now.

Randy's father was a school teacher, had to retire because of issues with his vocal cords. He was a real jerk. I didn't much like him. I think the feeling was mutual.

And so, Randy carted me up to Burlington and dumped me on a psych ward at the Vermont Medical Center. (So much for that idea, being a Christian. Much less a Baptist.)

I suppose it's just as well. A Vermont winter with the cows would have destroyed me. And, in all honesty, drugged up on anti-depressants I probably wasn't much of a good worker.

Anyway, once on the psych ward -

I attempted suicide. (Who leaves the whole bottle of pills with a depressed person?) I took a fatal overdose. (I

checked the official medical documents years later – no way I should have lived).

Somehow I survived (although I had brief BLACKOUTS after that – still have them).

It turned out to be a pretty nice psych ward. A whole damn lot better than Rusk State Hospital. (Vermont takes care of the disabled INFINITELY better than Texas. Soon, I'd have FAR more proof of the quintessential redneck Texan culture.)

It took a lot of TLC, but the doctors – and fellow patients - fixed me up just fine.

I took the bus back home. Mom found me a crummy old apartment in Lago Vista where I could stay. Bought me a “baby shit colored” Datsun (another colorful expression from Leigh Erin) to drive. I was still on SSI now.

(The Palmers should have reimbursed me every damn thing. Ingrates. Then they had the unmitigated gall to send us their family “newsletter” periodically... ???)

I got me a night stocking job at a grocery store in Cedar Park, the H.E.B. Then a day job at Sonic-Drive flipping burgers. I became an assistant manager there and quit the H.E.B. gig. I wasn't making good money, but I worked like a dog and never missed a shift.

Before I left H.E.B., the manager gave me a reward for the good work I did. A free weekend for two at a

luxury hotel. I gave it to Leigh Erin and her husband Danny Jandle (rhymes with cancel, a master carpenter; and I mean MASTER Carpenter).

Bless her heart, but about this time Mom got the swift idea of loaning me money to build a small house. A contractor friend of the family (Mom's piano teacher's husband) built me a 600-square-foot, tiny one-bedroom house on a lot I selected.

It had a couple of scrawny oak trees in the backyard. 21203 Paseo de Vaca. A block away was the community park grounds and Lake Travis. (Mom's house was about half a mile away, up – WAY up on a hill with a panoramic view of the lake.) We got some cheap furniture and I was all set up.

Thanks, Mom.

Ma' set me up on a mortgage (8%) and I paid it down faithfully. I gave the “baby shit colored” Datsun to Leigh Erin's husband Danny in payment for him doing the finish carpentry inside. Now I was driving a very well-used green Isuzu Brat (two fixed seats in the back). Great car. Lots of fun.

Somewhere back in all the haze of abandoning the Audi Fox and living on the streets, I wrote a \$125 check that bounced. There was consequently an outstanding warrant for my arrest.

Driving my little green Brat to work one morning, I got stopped by a cop for speeding. (A steep hill going DOWN into Jonestown – speed trap!) He officer hauled me away in his cruiser, leaving the Brat by the roadside.

My lady boss at Sonic (who drove the same road to work) saw the Brat, got worried, and started calling around. (Better boss than I had at Exxon or Annapolis or the Army or, well, any other time to come.)

Carol (my boss at Sonic) convinced me to go off the antidepressants. Never woulda done it otherwise, and this story would have been over. Thanks, Carol.

Poor Mom, she got me a good lawyer for the bounced check offense, and I pleaded out. Got put on probation for a year. Oh, boy - a chance to go in and chat with the nice probation officer every few weeks. I was told it would be expunged from my record at some point.

Well, no good deed goes without a reward, and Mom's fixing to get what she's been praying for. (Mom was a very devout and good Anglican and a pillar of her beautiful little church on a hill in Lago Vista. Which just went under, and they gave her bronze plaque to my older sister Regan - at my request.)

A few months later, I was having lunch with Mom at her country club in Lago Vista. It was one of those inscrutable moments of karma that are so hard to explain. We were talking about me being an engineer. Working at Sonic.

Where's the future in that? I'm sure I was terrified of hoping for more. Don't. Rock. The. Boat. Much less trying for more.

A man at the table next to us begged to interrupt. He owned NPS Industries in Austin. A fabricator of steel

equipment for the nuclear power industry. Would I like an entry-level job in sales?

I actually refused!

Then John a week or so later – God bless him, but Brother John really WAS there all this time – he cornered me at a family dinner at Mom’s house.

“You moron. Fu*king call them!” Thanks, little brother. I love you, even though I was a terrible big brother growing up. And after.

Well. I called NPS Industries. I got the job. Sales! Steve Taylor was my boss. He was quite the wrangler. Buy a hundred thousand zinc screws at one price. Sell them for a fraction of a penny each higher elsewhere. Bolts. Stainless steel. Carbon steel. Galvanized. We did it all.

Then I got bumped up to estimating. Steve Taylor was still my boss. Steel I-beams for the construction of power plants. Piping supports. Struts. I picked up a textbook on steel design and studied at night.

The building opposite NPS was occupied by a very small startup company called Dell Computers. We had some of their very first personal computers.

NPS was a great place. I made some friends. Went out to happy hour once. Had my eye on a cute lady in the front office. It was the first – and last – time I ever went to a happy hour event. The first and last time I went to ANY sort of social after-work event with my co-workers.

A few months later I got into their engineering group. They were all Muslims. Perhaps six of us in a small

room. Tall drafting tables, tall enough to stand up and work.

One guy, Mehran - said he learned English by watching soap operas. They were wonderful. I was so happy in that little group. They'd just gotten a new computer that did a lot of the piping support design. I learned it. Real fast.

It was only a matter of time before that damn piping design computer program shut down our engineering group. We all saw it. It was very sobering. One person on that Satanic program could design ten people under the table.

These days, people are ignoring the new AI trend. Don't. AI is lethal. One blink of an eye and you're fu*king out of a good job.

In any event, NPS itself didn't last very much longer. Tragedy struck. Apparently, they had put in a bid on some structural steel for a job but didn't quote the traceable kind of steel, which is exponentially more expensive.

(EVERY steel ANYTHING that goes into a nuclear power plant HAS to be traceable.)

Nuclear Power was on its last legs in the U.S. at that time, and this was the straw that broke the company's back. I feel so bad for the nice man from Secaucus, New Jersey who pulled me out of the gutter, brushed me off, and made me an engineer again.

The whole shop shut down. Koros Derekshani, the engineering boss, gave me a good recommendation. He

worked tirelessly to find good jobs for ALL his people.
(Why do the good bosses always lose?)

“Praise be Allah!”

Nine

Thanks to Koros Derakshani's recommendation, I landed a job with a consulting firm in town, O'Connell Robertson and Associates (ORA). Otherwise, I would have ended back at Sonic. Thanks, Koros!

The ORA staff consisted of a secretary/accountant, three designers/draftsmen, an architect, an electrical engineer (Zane Burley), and four principals (just like they have in law firms). The principals were Bill Adair (a Professional Engineer), Rick Burnight (a licensed Architect), Jerry Hammerlun (an attorney), and the president of the firm Noel Robertson (no degree or license). The year is 1988.

We were on the top floor at 800 Barton Springs Road. The principals were all in window offices with a truly spectacular skyline view of Austin from a block off the shores of Town Lake. My workspace was in the "bull pen," partitioned spaces in the interior separated by four-foot walls. Each work area had a large drafting

board on one side, facing a small built-in desk and a bookshelf.

A few years after I left, they built a giant parking garage across the street, transforming their spectacular view into – ugly concrete. Hah. Is there a God or what?

I was hired for my mechanical engineering degree but I started off as a draftsman. Manual drafting. I learned HVAC design along with drafting. (I really enjoy drafting by the way, an artsy skill I used often later on. Evil never wins. . .) I also did electrical drafting for Zane, who's cubby hole was right next to mine.

We designed large buildings. ORA's specialty was hospitals. We also did a ton of work for the Austin Independent School District (AISD), some for the military, and quite a few good projects for the State of Texas's Energy Conservation Office (SECO). I imagine having a disabled veteran on the senior engineering staff helped them land a lot of those plumb projects.

Bull pen? Sure, the Texas Longhorns played across town, but it still sounds kind of - industrial. Antiseptic. Plugging engineers into little cubicles. But I actually enjoyed it. I could hear every conversation in the office from my desk, which was right in the middle of everything. Learn a lot that way.

And you know me, I soak it up like a bone-dry sponge.

After four years I became licensed as a Profession Engineer (which requires five years of working under a P.E. – but I had one full qualifying year at Exxon).

Eventually, I was able to “seal” (authenticate with an embossed or ink seal like Notary Publics do) HVAC, electrical, and energy conservation projects. I did smaller, simpler projects at first, but I also participated in all the hospital and other projects. Bill Adair did the major HVAC projects. Zane Burely all the major electrical projects. I did the smaller ones, both HVAC and electrical (with some review by Zane and Bill).

Very soon I could do almost all of the electrical (lights, power, signals), but HVAC for giant buildings is very complicated. Bill had his own draftsman, Roy Phillips. I was Zane’s draftsman/designer, both for manual and then CAD drafting. Eventually, I did all the AISD projects – design and drafting of all the engineered systems. Sometimes even little architectural details as well.

Around 1991, three years after I started, computers made their way into our workplace. Computers were clunky at first, but very quickly manual drafting turned into computer drafting using CAD (using a mouse with MANY keyed buttons). Bill Adair never learned CAD. Zane Burley? Hell, I think he still used a slide ruler. (Only kidding, but he was elderly at best and not a computer person.) I picked CAD up very quickly and soon I was designing and drafting simultaneously.

There are a lot of calculations that go into the engineering design. Lighting levels. HVAC sizing. Energy analysis. We had representatives for lighting manufacturers do the lighting calculations (every room requires a specific light level, and there are thousands of

fixtures to choose from and hundreds of bulbs, colors, etc..).

I used dBase to create a nice lighting calcs routine which was used on all our projects thereafter. I also built a program for that VA hospital in Temple, Texas to do short circuit and other electrical calculations. There were no commercial programs otherwise available to do these analyses. I wrote papers on my computer programs and presented them at the Hot and Humid Climate Symposium in Dallas every year.

One year I presented three tech papers in Dallas!

ORA had a major contract with SECO, the Texas State Energy Conservation Office. One year we had a contract to do energy audits of a dozen small hospitals in central Texas, the Small Hospital Energy Management Program, SHEMP for short. A few years later, there would be monster computer programs to do an annual energy analysis of buildings. Back then we just had “nomographs” which are graphs that approximate energy consumed by walls, windows, and floors, based on annual weather inputs.

It’s a time-consuming, painstaking process, using those nomographs. I came up with the brilliant idea to transform the nomographs into mathematical equations. It was tricky. The equations were really ugly. But when you build them into a spreadsheet, the calculations were instantaneous.

I did the math, but Patricia House presented the results to the SECO office across town, to get approval. (How is that fair?) I drastically reduced the firm’s time

and expense to fulfill that project but didn't get any credit.

So what did I do? Doh! I wrote it up and presented the method at a Dallas symposium the next year. In retrospect, I think this didn't go over well with ORA. Now everybody could use that method to bid on energy conservation projects.

I was the Design Review Engineer for the SECO program, which was the largest Energy Conservation program in the world at the time (funded by an oil overcharge settlement some years before). I reviewed the blueprints for every major project and submitted comments. Cutting-edge projects that would be years before going mainstream. Ice storage. Load shifting. Time of Use analysis. All extremely powerful ways to lower energy costs.

The Austin school district (AISD) was big on Ground Source Heat Pumps GSHP). You drill holes in the ground, insert a piping loop, and instead of rejecting heat to the outside air with a fan, you reject heat (or, in the winter, absorb heat) to the ground. GSHP systems are much more energy efficient. I designed maybe a dozen systems for AISD, with maybe 30-50 cooling tons each.

I belonged to many engineering societies. Lighting. HVAC. Electrical. I was on the Editorial Board (my name was listed on their masthead) of Engineered Systems Magazine, the flagship magazine for our industry. I also published a regular series of articles on saving energy in Texas Schools magazines. The Austin

American Statesman newspaper had a small box on the front page with my energy tips.

KFON AM Radio (a Clear Channel station whose office was down the hallway from ours – also with a Top 40 and a country western station) ran regular 30-second spots I recorded every week, “BTU Bill’s Energy Tips.” One year my brother John, a graphic artist/journalist by now, made a small booklet of all my energy tips with fun little illustrations.

We had tons of work, and I kept very busy. My brother John worked as a temp for a while, helping do the grunt work on a really big project; he said I worked three times as hard as anybody else in the office. I did all my AISD and other small projects and also did design work on pretty much every project we had. I still have all the time sheets.

Somewhere in there I got called into Noel’s office. Something about finding my personal diary on my personal computer I kept in the office (to do my dBase programs), where I poked fun at the principals. I had to confess about my Army psych past.

A condition of my employment thereafter was that I see a therapist every week. That would be Dr. Hillary Parra, at the Austin VA Clinic. I learned a lot from her – and I would need it all, you can be sure.

If you thought I was busy before, my workload doubled now. (Remember the medieval, frightening Rusk State Hospital, the living epitome of what all good Texans think of the mentally ill?)

If John said I was a workhorse before; now I pulled a whole team of horses. Impossible deadlines on all my projects. Entire designs weren't approved – do it all over again!

I no longer got approval to present papers or publish magazine articles. I was Chairman of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Geothermal Energy Committee at this time. I had to send my keynote speech for the annual meeting to be given by a subordinate.

At one point, I went to see a patent attorney to see if I could secure any sort of rights to my computer programs. He was an Annapolis grad. Wow! Finally, somebody who's on my side. He negotiated with ORA. But then. He - ended up representing THEM against ME.

I submitted a grievance to the Texas Law Board. He won, of course. Nothing unethical at all about stabbing your own client in the back. Not if your client was a mental case. Texans are mighty damn proud of their extreme bigotry.

After all I'd been through? Huh. I took it in stride. Found new outlets for my energy. Bigger outlets! I had been writing a book on energy conservation, and it was accepted by Business News Publishing (the parent company of Engineered Systems Magazine).

I was appointed by my Texas State Senator to a brand-new licensing board, The Psychological Associates Advisory Committee (PAAC) as a public

member. Those are school psychiatrists, for young kids. This, of course, went over VERY well in the office.

The PAAC Board's large certificate hung in my little office space. They could hardly stand the sight of me or my certificate at this point, I'm quite sure. They relocated my desk to a new addition area.

Out of sight. Out of mind.

Along the way, before – they'd brought me to several meetings across town to SECO to discuss my Lone Star Energy Conservation design reviews. They'd ask me to write up notes afterward. They were quite detailed. Hammerlun said several times, "What, did you bring a tape recorder?" That's the old Academy training at work – where we had to remember so many odd details every day? Excellent short-term memory.

So, maybe they moved my office out of earshot because they didn't want me "recording" everything.

Then they threw me the ugliest project you can imagine. A giant GSHP project for the Austin Community College (ACC), for their multi-story classroom building on Rio Grande Street. There were no existing blueprints. It was a VERY old building. None of the electrical or HVAC was organized much less lined out on paper. I was given the entire job – new lighting, new HVAC, new signals, the whole shebang.

I got 'er done. Showed the plans to Bill Adair. Do it over again. EVERYTHING!

I'd already done it in record time. Now I was given HALF the time. But I got 'er done. Wrong thermal heat recovery system, he said now. I want you to use McQuay's enthalpy wheel. (The principals were tight with McQuay's rep and took him hunting on their deer lease all the time.)

But my Trane design is a fraction of the weight – sitting on top of a 100-year-old building full of students on a roof made of crumbly old concrete that we don't know sh*t about? Our structural engineer said it's okay. The old man with Parkinson's?... .

Well, when the blueprints went out for bids – with MY engineering seal on the drawings – the Trane system was spec'd out.

You know what's coming. Bigots always react the same way. I was hauled into a meeting with the four principals. You're fired. You belong in academia. You're grossly incompetent. There are no laws against firing somebody because they're too smart! (Really, quote-unquote.)

Texas is a “right-to-work state.” Yeah, tell me about it. “Right to fire!” A year later McGraw Hill published my energy conservation textbook (BNP ultimately drug their feet). The following year they published another textbook on electrical design (which is still in print, 25 years later).

Gross. Incompetence?

As I walked out of that meeting – where I had expected RIGHTFULLY that I would be promoted to a principal

of the firm... I was white as a sheet. (This was on April 1st, by the way. I have the time sheet.)

As I walked out of that glass-walled conference room with the million-dollar view – boom. Paul Tutt was right there, the AISD Superintendent – the man who loved my work on his schools. Best designs. Clear. Efficient. Lowest bids. Excellent supervision during construction. (I was absolutely fascinated with GSHP systems.) All the contractors loved working for me. Threw in their lowest bid. Still made more money than on other projects.

How, exactly, do you explain to your best client that you just fired your best engineer – hell, the best engineer in town? I. Have. No. Idea. But they called Paul Tutt into a private meeting. Twisted is arm somehow. Who knows.

Bill Adair showed my photo to all the employees after I packed all my things and left. “DO NOT LET THIS MAN IN OUR OFFICE.”

Excuse me, Mr. Adair. While you were holed up in your extremely messy office with the million-dollar view doing calculations on your kindergarten pocket calculator, I happened to be making friends in the office. Talking over the 4-foot walls with them. Motivating them.

I hollered with them when we worked all those Texas football weekends when the Longhorns scored. While you were out on your tax-deductible deer lease “marketing” to your corrupt industry co-conspirators.

An architect friend of mine who remained at ORA told me not long after the firm hired three engineers (and one full-time draftsman also, I believe) to replace

me. That's how much work I did – for a fraction of that they even paid that new draftsman.

They paid me at best \$10 an hour (given all the overtime I did) and billed their clients \$100 an hour for my services. Well, now they could bill their clients \$100 an hour for THREE engineers – do that math.

Sure, I could have asked for a raise. Probably should have. Maybe they would have respected me more. Promoted me. But I'm a schizophrenic. I know people are afraid of my illness. There's a million mistakes I could make on any given job. Talk about liability!

Maybe their liability insurance carrier made them pay higher premiums because of me. Maybe having a disabled veteran on the senior engineering staff for ten years, and the extra points you get when bidding on all the federal and state projects ORA got – maybe they didn't need me anymore.

All this time, I was just happy to be doing engineering. I didn't care a hoot about the pay. I was happy to wake up at 5 AM to drive my faded blue Geo Metro to the express bus stop in Cedar Park. Arrive at the office by 7:30 or even 7:00 when the traffic was light.

Get a day's work done by the time everybody else showed up. Take off at 5:30 after everybody had left for the day (leaving any earlier just got you caught in traffic), get home by 7:00. Supper. Knee exercises. Hit the sack.

Now that I am 25 years older and a few days wiser, I realize that ORA took a big risk hiring me. Or, at least,

keeping me after they found out I was schizophrenic. I was smart enough to recognize that at the time. To accept it. I was resolved to be my usual cheerful, happy self, and to enjoy the work for as long as I could.

The next step for me at ORA would have been for me to design the really complicated designs that Bill Adair and Zane Burley did. I guess that was just too much for them. I still hate their guts. Always will. But I did have some really excellent times with the guys in the bull pen.

Oh, wait – there's the soap box . . .

Excuse me, but compare this to how gays behaved back then and trans people now. “We demand rights. Recognition. NOW!” Wait in line, people. Women have been waiting patiently for ten thousand years. Let them earn their just due. Show some respect. Humanity. Dignity! You’ve been hassled for – what? Once or twice. During the maybe last couple of years?

Gird up your loins and deal with the stress and hassles for TEN years. NONSTOP. Show your meddle. Earn your campaign ribbons. Show the world you have every right to be there. THEN raise your hand and ask if you can please do the work you are overqualified for.

I appealed the firing to the Texas Employment Commission (TEC), demanding “sweat equity” for all I had contributed to the firm. ORA’s attorney principal, Hammerlun, testified under oath that the \$30,000 I got when I left was that equity. Lie. That was the distribution from my company retirement fund.

This telephone hearing, by the way, took place in Dr. Hillary’s office at the VA. I was working for Jasmine

Engineering by now, and Jasmine refused to let me go to the TEC offices for the meeting. So, I set it up to coincide with my weekly VA therapy session and made the phone call from right there - with Dr. Hillary listening in.

Incidentally, Doc Hillary cut me loose soon thereafter. "There's nothing more I can do for you." Excuse me?

I just got FIRED. With MALICE. I had to appeal from inside your effing office because my next employer refused to let me fight ORA and her hero Noel Robertson?

(I later figured out that after ORA, I didn't have any private medical insurance the VA could bill, so- viola! You're all cured, Mr. Bill.)

I appealed to the Professional Engineering Licensing Board later on. PE's are required to seal all projects in which they participate. Working on a new appeal, I realized that ORA only let me seal the AISD projects (and a few others) where I did all the design work.

Every OTHER project where I participated - doing calculations with my computer programs, doing Zane's electrical design, or Bill Adair's HVAC analysis - should have had my seal also. (I have all the time sheets proving this, by the way.) Pretty much every project that ever went out the door should have had my seal on it. The PE Board didn't do anything. (With my luck I would have been the one who got in trouble.)

Bill Adair new I did fully half the work he got credit for. Zane Burley (who wasn't a principal) knew this, too, regarding OVER half the work he did.

Maybe the other principals Rick Burnight, Jerry Hammerlun, and Noel Robertson didn't know this. All they saw was the small AISD projects that went out the door with my seal. (Although all the other projects were listed on my official time sheets.) As it was, and an attorney I talked to a few days later said just this: "So, they got credit for all your work. Get a grip."

What's going on here?

These are rational people taking vicious action against something of an authority figure in the Austin engineering community. I was well-liked by the contractors in the field. My office mates. A disabled veteran.

I think what set them off was an article I had published a month or so prior in HPAC Magazine, one of the industry rags with HVAC and mechanical news for our industry. It wasn't the stature of Engineered Systems, but it had a wide circulation, and everybody read it to keep up with developments in the industry.

The article suggested a link between bad Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). ADD was increasing at epidemic proportions (still is, in fact) back then. In school children. Who interested me. A lot. All those AISD projects I put my best effort into? The appointment to the Psychological Associates

Advisory Committee? Energy conservation articles targeted at public schools? B.T.U. Bill's radio spots?

But first, a little SCIENCE.

HVAC design at the commercial level is a great deal more than just maintaining a comfortable temperature and humidity. You also must provide fresh air because people need oxygen to breathe, and the carbon dioxide we exhale must be gotten rid of. A typical classroom full of students must have the whole volume of the air exchanged with 100% fresh air 6-10 times per HOUR.

The equipment I got fired over was a "heat recovery system." Twenty classrooms in a building with 20 students in each equals 400 people. The entire volume of that whole damn building has to be ventilated out 6 – 10 times each HOUR. The heat recovery system was to try and recover some of the cool from the air exhausting and transfer it to the fresh air going in. (Vice versa in the winter.)

When the "enthalpy wheel" McQuay system that ORA ended up installing failed, the whole building had zero fresh air. My design had no moving parts, so it was impossible to fail. My system was actually more energy efficient too. (I did a very thorough engineering analysis which I showed to Bill Adair. He. Did. Not. Care. He wanted the McQuay wheel installed.)

Be that as it may. . . What happens when that outside air system fails?

Carbon dioxide builds up inside the classrooms. Available oxygen is diminished. This is just what happens when you go to a very high altitude and come

down with “altitude sickness.” Which is oxygen deprivation. Except our situation is worse: you have a lack of oxygen as well as carbon dioxide buildup. (CO₂ is toxic.)

What’s the connection I alleged? Well. The symptoms of ADD are exactly the same as “altitude sickness.” In order of increasing exposure time: Poor attention span. Confusion. Lack of affect. Psychosis. (I would dare add “sexual confusion” to the list now.)

My article simply stated the above. I suggested: what if bad indoor air quality has something to do with the ADD epidemic among school kids? Kids spend all day in classrooms. Shouldn’t we investigate, as engineers – especially as Professional Engineers, whose #1 Prime Directive is to “protect the public health?”

Now let’s talk about the ENGINEERING.

You have an inkling of the huge VOLUME of air that’s sucked into that classroom building to keep the air fresh and healthy. In Austin, and along the whole Gulf Coast, that air is very humid. That air does NOT cool down until you wring the water out of that air. That costs a boatload of energy.

If you close off that outside air even halfway, you can decrease the facility’s utility bills by half. (ballpark estimate) THAT’s how much energy it takes to maintain a healthy 6-10 air changes per hour.

Public schools are always short of cash, now more than ever. So much so that practically nobody has PE classes for kids anymore. They’re too expensive. Way back then, President Clinton tried to get \$1 trillion from

Congress to bring the nation's schools up to 1990 code standards. Never happened.

The 6-10 air changes per hour is the ASHRAE standard. (It varies for occupancy, activity, etc.) The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-conditioning Engineers, ASHRAE is the global standard of excellence. But it's just a STANDARD.

There is no ENFORCEMENT mechanism.

PE's design to this standard, but the facility engineer has no obligation to check or maintain anything once the system is installed and OPERATING.

There are no penalties for bad IAQ. No oversight to look for bad IAQ. (All you need is a CO2 meter in the air stream to check it – similar to a smoke detector.) Nor can you really tell the IAQ is bad other than “stuffy air.” (And perhaps a rash of kids coming down with ADD.)

Now for the LEGAL angle.

Obviously, kids getting ADD is a terrible thing. But a link between ADD and air quality? O.M.G. The school district being held liable for closing off the outside air to save on their utility bills?

That's HUGE. Armageddon!

Jerry Hammerlun, the attorney principal at ORA saw this subtext in my article. He knew damn well that sh*t flows uphill. Kids get sick. The School District is served notice. OMG. How come the engineers that designed our goddamn system didn't ENSURE oversight? They can do that? Sure. With a \$100 CO2 sensor. They didn't?

Hey, you people told me to lower the utility bills at all costs.

I must have said a hundred times in my McGraw-Hill textbook, *Retrofitting for Energy Conservation*, “You do NOT sacrifice air quality to save energy.”

Well, maybe it’s all a grandiose delusion. There’s no scientific evidence that IAQ and ADD are connected. These days, with the whole trans LGBTQA+26 crowd, and the notion that bad IAQ might cause “sexual confusion” . . .

Like, who’s going to fund THAT investigation? North Korea? Hamas? Russia!

Yeah. I really screwed up this time. Hoped for the best and got the worst.

But, wait. We don’t KNOW that’s why they fired me. Sure, the liability implications for the HVAC industry are terrifying. Holding consulting engineers liable for something they designed 30 years ago? Fifty! Forcing them to perform oversight for every system they install?

Are car manufacturers liable for defects for the life of their vehicles, making allowances for wear and tear? Every other manufacturer? Why the F not building manufacturers? It’s a damn miracle they AREN’T. (Actually, you can see how they have achieved that “miracle.”)

How DARE this upstart engineer even SUGGEST the idea. Much less put it into PRINT.

Yeah. You see it too, don’t you? I’m quite sure that article was a mitigating circumstance, too. But there’s still no PROOF. A legal problem requires legal proof.

Ahhh, my friend. But there WILL be proof. DAMNING proof. And, as you have no doubt learned to expect in this sordid nightmare tale, it blindsided me at the worst possible time. . .

But let's not put the cart ahead of the draught horse. Back to the present.

With all that had happened to me before, THIS time I had a backup plan. I had met a nice lady while investigating the ACC Rio Grande Campus. Dr. Connie Park, a school psychologist. Native of South Korea. Attractive, very. She was fascinated by engineering. We became friends.

She had just purchased a house in Round Rock, north of Austin. It was a ratty old house, but the living/dining area was big enough to do group sessions for a contract with the state she had on the side. Counseling for sex offenders out on parole.

We reached an agreement – as the romance moved along from first base – Mr. Bill will help you fix up the place if he can use the back bedroom as an office. Agreed! We did some painting. Sheetrock work. One of her patients did the electrical. Another refinished the wood floors. The house still looked like crap outside, but inside it was looking good.

It was in a central location. Perfect for a consulting engineer office. (If you're wondering at this point about me dating a Ph.D. psychologist – ironic, maybe, but she did know about my past history.) I never set up the office, of course. It was just a diversion, for both of us,

starting up a nice relationship. Two workaholics doing a work project together?

If that's not love, what is?

I'd dated several other girls while at ORA - even moved in with Channa for a few months, from Laos I think. A counselor at the School for the Deaf. LOL. We went to see Schinbdler's List for Valentine's Day. And she didn't even break up with me! (Talk about a keeper.) Still needed me to dig her a giant garden in the backyard. Paint her house. Once the place was fixed up, she sent my big cat Gateau and me packing back to Lago Vista.

A Hispanic lady. I was at her house in Austin (on the other side of the tracks) when Schwartzkoff invaded Iraq. Didn't last, either. Later a one night stand with a nurse.

Even a date with a black DJ at the radio station. Morganna McAnn. (She visited my house in "whiteyville" once. You can see why that didn't last. My wonderful little green house? How DARE you.)

An adorable blonde with MS who came to a company function with me one 4th of July. (my favorite of them all.) Even a Black woman who had a side job teaching cheerleading routines to high school kids.

Lots of very smart single women in Austin. Never shoulda left. Haven't gone out on a date since. Pity. I miss that. Lots.

Anyway. All the architects at ORA did outside jobs. "Pro Bono" work, as lawyers do. You get paid a little for it, but

a fraction of what they'd have to pay a large consulting firm. I did quite a few jobs like that.

I regularly sealed HVAC drawings for Comfort Mechanical. My friend Badoui at Comfort (a Palestinian, I believe) and I had talked about going out on our own. You don't get paid much for those jobs, but it's a good feeling, helping out.

Basically, Badoui did the HVAC design for some large building. I reviewed his drawings, made some changes (did some calculations as needed), and sealed it. Never had any problems whatsoever. Not long before I left ORA, Badoui died. He was a good man. Very jolly. I liked him a lot.

“Praise be Allah!”

By the time ORA fired me; well, I got right back on my feet – running! Within a week I had a whole library of design manuals from all my industry rep friends in town. Trane. HVAC. Lighting. I had my own copy of AUTOCAD. A halfway decent computer with a big monitor. All my engineering design computer programs.

Connie and I set up our own DBA (Doing Business As) company, ARK Associates (the common denominator of Park and Clark). Got liability insurance fairly cheap with Schumer. Paul Tutt at AISD gave us our first official job. A gas-fired furnace needed replacing. I printed out the blueprints at Miller's Blueprint downtown.

Too bad it was also our last job.

Connie had a roommate. She was a real peace of work. Connie was so cultured and nice. The roomie was a wall of bricks. Assistant principal at Austin High School.

Never saw it coming...

One fine afternoon Connie and I were on the cusp of – you know what. In the front room of the house in Round Rock. Breaking in a nice new couch.

Then there's a KNOCKING on the door. Screaming. YELLING.

I struggle off the couch, button up my trousers – open the door. WHAM. I was right on back in grade school at the principal's office.

Connie's roommate and I got in a tussle out in the gravel driveway (I didn't do crap, never been a fighter, never). She BEAT on me in the driveway. Neighbors showed up. The cops.

She YANKED hairs out of my head. Ouch. I need that hair. (I was going bald by this point in time – some much for the lady friends.)

The cops broke us apart. Asked if I wanted to press charges. I said no. Got in my faded blue Geo Metro and drove home to Lago Vista.

Connie and I talked it over a week or so later. Yeah, her roommate is gay. No, I do like you but I'm - well I don't know what I am. Probably bisexual. We parted ways. I lost my Ark Associates office and – again – all the time and money I put into the place (I traded Pro Bono

services with one guy to install her kitchen counters, etc.)

About Connie. Look at this evil woman. I don't give a hoot in Hell if she's a Ph.D. psychologist or not. Nobody has the right to be bisexual like that, indulging her hedonistic lust (using her psychology skills on us, to boot) to destroy the feelings I had and those of her ugly horsefaces roommate. (Connie was quite attractive, as half of lesbians seem to be – she could have any man she wanted!) “Oh, boy. I can have my cake and eat her too.”

Oh, but wait – the donkey won the contest.

They lived happily ever after in their beautiful Lakeway house. Hey, this is working out. We can have an open relationship while Connie seduces all the hapless men she likes. When the jerk gets too close; well, we can fix that.

(Which leads me to that uncomfortable statistic that 50% of all homosexuals are HIV-positive. That means, on average, every gay couple has at least one HIV-positive partner. How's that a relationship? One drop of blood and – boom – welcome to the HIV club. Women? Menstruating several days each month?)

Anyway, I just met my first lesbian and my first bisexual. I was ticked off, sure. But not prejudiced. I don't want to be prejudiced. It makes me feel dirty. It's not as if I didn't have plenty enough reason to be.

I have a book called *Thoughts and Feelings, The Art of Cognitive Stress Intervention* (1981). Chapter 14 is on *Orgasmic Reconditioning* – the idea of getting aroused by say a Playboy centerfold, and transferring it

to – well, your real-life girlfriend. It works! (Can't say I've ever tried it. But it wouldn't be in that book if it didn't work.)

The next edition (that came out in 1982) left that chapter out. The whole damn practice has been banned! Why? Because it makes homosexuals look like – well, they can be “fixed.”

My point is this: Orgasmic Reconditioning can be used for many things. For example, a wife whose husband has lost all his hair, and she doesn't find him attractive anymore. The husband whose wife has become overweight. The ugly kid (male) who's only attracted to the hot chicks.

None of them (were you one of them?) can any longer benefit from this very simple and effective technique. Why not? Because homosexuals (who incidentally, I've read – in their own somewhat disgusting postings online – “get off” on porn, often – as in VERY often) banned it!

Here's a scientific study that will never happen: Put a homosexual on a desert island without all that porn stimulation. Will he still be gay a year later? I posed many other such experiments (scientific studies that will never happen) investigating the homosexual phenomena, in one of my philosophy books later on.

Hey, if they want to be gay. Hallelujah! Have fun. Enjoy your time on Earth.

But just because social media gives you the pulpit to bully people, that gives you no right whatsoever to eradicate important tools that can help other people get

the max out of THEIR time on Earth. That includes folks who want to stop being homosexual. Sure, right now it may be hopeless but absolutely no research has been done on the issue. Personally, I think it's a valid area of research.

All this happened within a few weeks of leaving ORA. I felt like I'd been set up by Connie and her co-conspirator roommate. You get him to fix the place up, then I'll get rid of him. Probably should have pressed charges for battery, but this was Austin. Very gay friendly. A high school principal versus an unemployed veteran? Not good optics.

I wasn't big on lawyers either, not after what happened in the Army – then the patent attorney who turned on me and joined up with ORA to rob my swank computer programs (which somehow never quite got to working right after that.)

I moved on. That's what I do.

However. I'd lost my appetite for being out on my own. All that planning. The nice office in Round Rock. I didn't have room for all the tech manuals my industry rep friends gave me in my tiny little house. Had to throw them in the trash. That cost me. Because those thick books come out of the industry reps' shallow pockets.

All this pretty much ruined any future of hanging up my own shingle as a consulting engineer in Austin. "Clark Engineering." Has a nice ring to it. Solid. Reputable. I'd like that. Really I would.

I still have my Texas P.E. license.

Connie was a real bitch. You can get into big trouble, showing that kind of disrespect to a Professional Engineer. Theft of services. Theft of – everything! But, again, Austin was extremely liberal. Asian? Female? Bisexual? Three strikes and your out – of the door, buddy.

Gee thanks, Connie.

I had an interview with Jasmine Azima, P.E. Iranian, about my age (she called herself “Persian.”) Jasmine Engineering. A minority woman-owned business. Sounded like a good opportunity. Really liked the idea of working for a woman. Apparently, Noel Robertson gave me a good reference. (Or maybe not. You’ve already seen how Jasmine refused to give me time off work to go to the TEC grievance meeting against ORA a few weeks later.)

“I’ll give you every Friday afternoon off.” Pretty much the same pay I was getting at ORA (not that pay mattered much to me.) I’d do all the engineering. They had a CAD computer. One worker. Just opened a new office in the ground floor lobby of an office building downtown. Plenty of work lined up already. Main offices in San Antonio.

All that was pretty much exactly where I was with Ark Associates, so I took the job. (Stupid me, I should have talked to the designer she’d just run off.)

A week later, I was working well into Friday evening. Then Saturday all day. Well, I was beginning to regret

my enthusiasm for working for a woman-owned
minority business.

But not for long.

There was too damn much work to be done! And you
know me, working my buttocks off is a cure for my
broken heart.

(for a while)

Ten

The theme for this chapter will be that all-important law for Professional Engineers: employers are required to give us the time, equipment, and support (workers – draftsmen, designers) required to do the job assigned to us.

If you're to be responsible for "the public health" as P.E.s are, then all your energy should be on the engineering design. Your employer must give you all the tools you need to complete that critical job - AND - the time to do it.

My first project at Jasmine Engineering, Inc. was a TB clinic for the City of Austin. Tuberculosis. Very tricky. You have to orchestrate the air supply so that the TB patient areas do not contaminate the public or other areas. (Just like with the whole Covid situation, isolating Covid wards from the main HVAC air supply system.)

Starting to work on this interesting project, I suddenly realized that (1) their CAD computer was slow

as a turtle and worthless, (2) the help was named Skipper and he had never set foot in an engineering office before, and (3) there was nobody else! No secretary to answer the phone or do the typing. Just Jasmine's assistant, Coy Ballard, who was the "office manager" (gay, landscape architect, basically a pencil pusher).

Jasmine was a P.E. in mechanical but never did any design work or any other kind of work other than snag one City or State contract after another, touting her woman-owned, minority business credentials. Coy whipped out the contracts like a Wild West gunslinger.

Apparently, my resume opened all doors. And, believe you me, Coy and Jasmine knocked on them all, with total disregard for my ability to complete the work as promised to the client.

About Coy. Competent as an office manager. Not a bad person. Buy gay, flaming gay. Flamboyant gay. I mean, look at this guy, I'd say to myself at the time. That's not being feminine or effeminate. (Mom would say "prissy.") My sisters were nothing like that when I was growing up. No girl I've ever dated or worked with, either.

What. Is. Going. On. Here? Well, Mr. Bill just met his first uber-gay individual, peacock feathers and all.

Personally? I think these poor people and the whole LGBTQA+26 spectrum (here we go, insulting half the universe with my shotgun analysis) have been brainwashed by advertising. Why spend \$350,000 raising a child – the going rate unless you're a Black

mother, 85% of whom are single and depend on \$20,000 of government largess each year to raise your family of 4 (talk about systemic racism – only \$20K???) – when you can spend that \$350k per child, on – well material goods. Egoism!

How come nobody's trying to put Black fathers in the home to raise their kids??? Single mothers everywhere need a man in the house. Their kids have a FAR greater chance of being one of those LGBTQA+26 crowd, when absent the nuclear family as a unit.

Doh! Wall Street, therefore, loves – absolutely LOVES – breaking up families like that. Easy money!

Otherwise, I've now met my first homosexual, lesbian, and bisexual (Coy, Connie, and Connie's roommate). All three ended up miserably. The only good thing to come out of all that is that very soon (after the summer from Hell at Jasmine Inc.) I can be prejudiced as much as I damn well please. I already had a free pass, being schizophrenic; but – “Do unto others as they do unto you.” I can live by that principle, too.

Don't those people know anything about optics? All the Blacks I have ever met – yes, and dated – have been upright and decent. My drill sergeant in the Army and at Annapolis; my roommate Miguel, Plebe Summer – Jimmy and Benny, building Pop's house.

Hello, me Black you White. Back at you, 'bro.

Everybody is green in the Army, they used to say. That's been my perception – and ambition – my whole adult life. But these guys. We're purple. Pink. We LOVE

colors that clash. We absolutely adore clashing. How else are we going to groom the next generation?

I'm sorry. You people done clashed the wrong guy this time. And, if you hadn't noticed, I. Do. Not. Forget. Anything.

Otherwise. I'm telling you this a little ahead of when the actual feelings transpired, reference gays. Why put the cart before the horse? Because you need to read the "subtext" in my Jasmine story. Sure, she's the owner and the Big Boss. But she's hardly ever there (her main office is in downtown San Antonio; the Austin office is a new office, hardly more than an experiment). Coy Ballard is in Austin all the time. He. Runs. The. Show. In Austin.

So, all these bad things building up steam over the following pages? I write as if it's Jasmin's fault. That's not true. It's Coy Ballard pulling the strings – and the noose! – tight.

Why homosexuals DESPISE schizophrenics is a mystery to me. I suspect they realize that gays, like psychic vampires, LOVE to "turn" nice guys like me, unassertive, courteous – but something BREAKS in your brain when you resist. That something that BREAKS leaves you schizophrenic.

But watch: Watch how Coy uses STRESS to knock down my defenses. Then, when I persist, more STRESS. And more. . . Standard MO when gays have their next victim in sight.

Only a theory.

I got my computer friend Steve Weitz out in Cedar Park to stop by and tune up Jasmine's pathetic CAD computer (even with all his best programs, the turtle still couldn't cross the road.). Jasmin got really pissed off and didn't want to pay Mr. Weitz.

So, I brought my own PC into the office. Skipper was a decent guy and sharp. I showed him how to operate my engineering design programs (which suddenly worked to perfection), and got him doing lighting calculations. I did all the design and CAD work myself.

Our "office" was an open retail space at the bottom of an office building on Congress Avenue. A couple of tables. The computers. That's it. Just me and Skipper all day (he worked 8 hours. I worked 12+ and with a 90-minute commute to and from Lago Vista each way PLUS a 20-minute walk each way from public parking ten blocks away under the Interstate).

Jasmine just parked on the street outside. She must have gotten dozens of parking tickets that summer. Probably paid parking fines worth more than she paid me (which I later calculated to \$5/hour including overtime.)

I never got the health insurance she'd promised in my interview. Never had a day off (including weekends). Never even had a chance for my regular Saturday morning tennis with Mom out in Lago, much any dinners at her house when my sisters or brother came by.

Skipper quit real soon, after which time I did everything myself. Jasmine hired a draftsman after a couple of

weeks. He was a Navy veteran. Nice enough guy. I thought he was a slacker, but that's only because he was forced to work on an incredibly slow CAD computer.

Put the best Formula One driver on a tricycle and he's still just on three wheels. Jasmine never did buy him a new computer. I don't even know why he kept working for us.

After a month in the office space, we moved up to nice offices upstairs. I had a private office. I brought all my design books from the house. There was a drafting board where I could review and mark up drawings. I had my own PC and monitor and printer – still my own tech - (and software, my suite of engineering design programs), and maintained a very heavy workload.

In addition to marking up drawings and supervising the draftsman, I also went with Jasmine and Coy to any number of interviews for new work.

They were REALLY nice jobs. BIG jobs. Jobs I'd never, ever have gotten out on my own. (Think: women and minority set-aside jobs from the State of Texas and the feds. These days they call it “systemic discrimination” and demand more.) But we had a good system going, and the work was going out the door.

I was working 16-hour days, 7 days a week, but the expectation was for that to even out at some point. I asked for faster computers. Another draftsman. A designer. I needed all three desperately. Jasmine refused.

Remember the PE Rules? She's required to provide me with all the time (at the rate of 8 hours a day),

equipment (state-of-the-art computers or at least reasonably fast ones), and personnel (secretary, designer, draftsman) necessary for me to do the work assigned to me.

Did NOT happen. ANY of it.

I seemed like Jasmine spent all her time interviewing secretaries. Dozens of them! When she finally hired somebody, they never lasted very long.

Jasmine could have helped with the workload. She did HVAC and rudimentary electrical design skills. But no, she and Coy seemed oblivious to the excruciating hours I was working. When they arrived in the AM, I'd already put in a day's work.

After they left, I put in another days work before I drove back home to Lago.

Well, you asked for it, Mr. Bill. You wanted to run the show. Do big projects. Be a principal (or at least act like one). So, I sucked it in and did what I had to do.

It's a new operation, a new office, and we're building up a client list. I'm getting to know lots of new architects who teamed up with Jasmine Engineering on projects, and making a name for myself in the biz.

Then we interviewed with SECO, the State Energy Conservation Office, for a big project down in San Antonio. I knew the bosses at SECO, and we sailed through the interview. It was for an MHMR (Mental Health and Mental Retardation) campus with maybe ten large buildings to analyze and recommend ways to save energy. I told Jasmine we could handle the work. And

we could have, if she'd hired some qualified people to help me.

I'd guess her fee for the job was maybe \$350,000. My salary, by comparison, was \$32,000 or about \$2500 a month. By the time you add all my overtime, that was \$5/hour, but that didn't matter to me. We were building a brand. A business.

My point is this: \$350k is a LOT of money. That much money means a LOT of work has to be done. Thousands of man-hours.

The design documents were due at the end of the summer. That's in two months. We visit the site. They're all very old buildings. The facility manager has blueprints for all the buildings, but the drawings are very old and a lot of modifications will be needed to update the blueprints. That means a walk-through of each building. Legwork. LOTS of legwork. AND the MHMR campus is down in San Antonio, which is a two-hour drive from Austin.

I tell Jasmine I need help. And SOON. I'm up to my gills in all these other projects and hardly have any time left over for this one.

She hires a civil engineering grad student from the University of Texas. Part time. He helps "taking off" building dimensions – walls, windows, to input into my energy analysis program. She wouldn't buy a commercial, approved energy analysis program.

So, the grad student and I tabulated the data into my energy analysis program, the one I did for the SHEMP hospitals – which was approved by SECO, which is who

we were working for on this project. So, it was logical to assume we could use it again.

Chatting with my grad student helper, who worked beside me in my office, I found out he's here on a green card. Not authorized to work. I tell Jasmine.

"He's working for free," she says (after a VERY long pause). I say we need more help. Qualified help. This guy doesn't know squat about energy conservation.

"He wants to learn." But, Jasmine - we're falling way behind.

She ignores me. Coy ignores me, too – ever the silent witness. I run into a friend doing a much smaller SECO project that summer – maybe two buildings, much more modern – and he's worried about me. REAL worried.

"Come on, man. A dozen buildings? You haven't even completed the site work yet? It's killing you!"

So. Here we are. I can only spend a couple of hours a day doing engineering calculations on the MHMR project (out of 16 hours a day I was putting in). At one point I submitted a whole stack of projects to get typed up by our secretary. She lost everything! I had to do it all over again.

Hello? A \$350,000 fee and Jasmine has essentially spent ZERO dollars of that – the grad student is working for free, and my hours are all outside my 8-hour day. Or on weekends. Four weeks left to go?

Jasmine and Coy seem flabbergasted that I am constantly begging for help. Qualified help. I have no idea what was going on in their heads.

Maybe they expected to make a \$300,000 profit??

I submit what projects I could do (there were several small projects for each of ten buildings, lighting, HVAC, electrical). The review team checks them out. We go over for their comments. SOLID RED INK.

Jasmine and Coy are ticked off. Well, what the F did you expect?

Still no new help. No faster computer. No experienced secretary. What did they do?

They bring me over to a bank across the street and have a Notary Public authenticate my signature on a letter they wrote that says, "I overstated my qualifications. I accept that I will be locked out of the office except for the 9-5 workday. I accept a \$10,000 reduction in pay to \$24,000." (Their draftsman was making more than that, MUCH more.)

So. I still had all that work. The deadline was coming. But now I had only eight hours a day. The same excruciatingly slow computer and draftsman. . . Finally, I convinced them to hire somebody else.

They hire Patricia House, with whom I'd worked at ORA on the SHEMP hospital audits (she's the P.E. who showed my mathematical model of the nomographs to SECO, presumably claiming the work as her own). I get

them to hire two more people, Larry Werner, a plumbing/mechanical designer with 20+ years of experience, and another designer with 20+ years of experience.

Then I pack up my books and - leave. "Life's too short," Dr. Parra told me the week before.

My last sight was those three people plus Coy and Jasmine at the conference table pouring over the blueprints. Something that should have happened two months previously. I'd guess it took them a couple of weeks to finish what I had started - and Jasmine still made a \$100,000 profit on the thing.

Okay, so it was bad experience. I let it go.

They didn't.

Again – instead of focusing on getting the goddamn MHMR project out the door – Coy and Jasmine filed a grievance with the P.E. Board – TWO of them. Mr. Clark absconded with some of our books and documents when he left (not true, and I proved it easily, because they HAD no books or documents!)

Mr. Clark ran off with a bootleg copy of our AUTOCAD computer drafting software and even used it to design a project on the side. (This was the early Wild West days of computers. The EXCEPTION was people who actually had licenses to their computer tech.)

Well, yeah – I loaded their AUTOCAD on my own computer (with their permission; actually their INSISTANCE) because the company didn't give me a computer to work on.

And no, I did do one project on the side when I was with Jasmine (one day's work for which I got paid more than she paid me for my entire time working there), but I happen to have my own personal CAD license from when I was doing projects as Ark Associates.

I was cleared by the Board on both charges.

NOTE: At this time I presented a grievance of my own to the P.E. Board. All my time sheets, showing I worked 16-hour work days non-stop for three months, averaging \$5/hour. That I had no decent computer to work on. No qualified help. No secretary.

None of the things the RULE said I should get. The PE Board didn't do a damn thing. Not even forward the grievance to Jasmine like they did Coy's bitching to me.

In fact, the PE Board sicked AUTOCAD on me!

At one point defending myself with AUTOCAD I said, "You people should fu*king talk to ORA. They only have one copy of AUTOCAD and twenty people have been using it for five years."

They did check with ORA. Fined them a bundle I'm sure, half a million dollars maybe. Offered me a free copy of AUTOCAD. I told them to go to Hell.

All this in just three months. The summer from Hell.

Aside from all the drama, what bothered me most is that the P.E. Board didn't have my back. Not even close. Those guys can do more than suspend a license. They can award hard time in jail. There are no appeals. You can have an attorney, sure, but engineers are your jury.

Their engineers. And, clearly – correct me if I’m wrong – I’m batting zero for ten in with engineers.

Which reminds me. Somewhere in there, I interviewed with Green Engineering. Tom Green told me in the interview that all the engineering firms in Austin get together each year to discuss the salaries they pay their people. Ummm. Free enterprise? Competition?

Racketeering!

I know, it’s disappointing. Engineers have such a great reputation, don’t we? In fact, effing engineers belong right down there with lawyers, politicians, and the National Enquirer (huh. I bet they’d publish that ADD article...).

If you’re thinking all this grief wasn’t circumstantial, I’m with you. The same ADD/IAQ drama that got ORA so ticked off? I may be paranoid and schizophrenic but I do know how to fend off those kinds of thoughts. But – I mean, wow. What just happened? How could they possibly get away with sh*t like that?

But, still. . . Maybe this will make you think it’s more than a conspiracy theory:

I was on that psychology board all this time, remember? We had our first meeting. Somehow, I got permission from Jasmine to go. (Maybe I said it was a doctor’s appointment with the VA. “Going to see the psychiatrists. Adios!”).

I brought the article on the IAQ/ADD theory to the meeting. Presented it to the Board. Their legal counsel

refused to let them consider it. Hello? ADD? Air quality. School psychologists?!

I resigned from the PAAC Board on the spot.

Back to the real world. I hustled around and worked out of the house. Got odd jobs with architects I'd worked with at ORA. Met a few new architects in all that Jasmine crapola. Jobs with Comfort Mechanical.

Another engineer friend threw some work my way on a big computer fab facility going up in town. Referrals led to more work. A church in a strip mall. A nail salon in one of the shopping malls. A garden center in South Austin.

Zooming around town in my little Geo Metro.

I work very fast. Always get the job done on time. Courteous to a fault. Folks liked my work. Never had any problems with the designs. (One project I did for Paul Tutt at AISD was a mirror image – we laughed about that. See how much stress I've been under?!)

It was hard for me to get paid for my work, though. I got my little brother (who is actually a good bit taller than I am, by the way) John to help out – journalists are TOUGH – I gave him a percentage. He got them to pay up right away. Thanks, bro.

Lago Vista is an hour's drive from Austin where all my projects were. That drive got to be a little tedious. A friend of mine Larry said The Delphi Group needed a P.E. I interviewed with them. Larry worked for them as a draftsman/designer.

Ron Gauny was the big boss. Mark Randolph was the CFO and #2. I took the job. Part time. I could drive into Cedar Park and take the express bus, clear across to the south side of town where their offices were. Finally. Peace on earth and good will to all men and women.

I brought all my outstanding jobs to their office, and we finished them there. That was our deal: They got the fees. I didn't care for the money. I just wanted the work. A quiet, dependable job working as a P.E. That I got. They were very good people. My immediate boss was Eddie Bloomquist. Great fellow; quite rotund. Eddie knew everybody in the biz. I mean. Every. Body.

Eddie even gave me permission to take a class at the University. It was a new beginning. Thanks Ron. Thanks Mark.

Larry may not know this, but one of the drawings I gave him to do was the old Solar System model from the infamous NASA research.

Yeah, we're going back to THAT now.

You best strap on your crash helmet, girls. Because Mr. Bill has been toughened up a good bit by all those evil engineers. I got wheels now. A house to stay in. It's high time I got back on mission.

Let's do this.

Eleven

You remember Zane Burley, the old coot whose cubicle mine faced, the electrical engineer for whom I did the drafting and design? Gray hair. REALLY sloppy markups (think doctor's writing). But I read it fine, and learned a lot from him.

LOL. When things were beginning their downward trajectory at ORA – right after they moved me to a new office space far, far away in a new expansion area on the same floor. I brought Connie up there to show her the view one night.

Well, one thing leading to another as it always does with me, we ended up half-naked on the glass table in the conference room. Dark... Skyline view of the city... Full moon...

ZANE BURLEY walking out of the elevator!

We scurried to make ourselves presentable.
Explained why I was there.

Phew. That was close. . . Kind of makes you wonder, though. Zane did live a few blocks from the office.

The firm must have had an APB (All Points Bulletin like they do on Dragnet) out on me with the building security. If this guy uses his key card to enter the office during off hours. CALL US. NIGHT or DAY.

Call. Us.

What. The. F? What is WRONG with these people? I work like an effing slave for ten damn years. Make them a bloody fortune. And, what – they watch my every move? Suspect me of, God knows what?

Stealing a drafting pencil?

Anyway, rewind to April 1993. I sent a slightly detailed report of my NASA research (what little I could still remember) to a professor at the University of Texas across town, Victor Szebehely. I said I'd read his book *Adventures in Celestial Mechanics*, and I'm enclosing a short paper on a little theory I had. Could he please share with me any ideas?

He wrote back. Recommended I submit my paper to the *Journal of Celestial Mechanics and Dynamical Astronomy*. I did a little more work on the details and submitted it. No luck. It wasn't up to their standards by any way, shape or form.

A year later, I wrote back to Dr. Z, with two more short papers I had worked on about the NASA research. He wrote back, a handwritten note again - suggesting I try a more popular publication instead of a scientific journal.

As good fortune would have it, Zane was an astronomy guy. We made those special glasses to watch a solar

eclipse then they dropped by. Stood outside on the tile patio looking down at the little moon-crescent shapes in the shadows.

Zane was like a grandpa to me. He had a giant poster of a POLAR BEAR in front of his desk. I met his wife at July 4th receptions ORA had on the patio, to watch the fireworks over Town Lake (now it's over the concrete parking garage.) They had a place on Canyon Lake down near San Antonio.

Zane used to show me copies of the local astronomy club's newsletter, The Sidereal Times. (I had a framed copy of the NASA letter in my little office space. Only one person ever asked me about it. William. He had been a monk for a while before he studied architecture.)

I sent one of the short papers I'd sent to Dr. Z on the Solar System to the astronomy club – with details like I talked about earlier, but with a new sketch and a couple of tables showing calculations. They published it. May 1994.

The class I took when I started working for The Delphi Group in the spring of 1997? That was Victor Szebehely's Theory of Orbits class on Regularization. It was the very last class he taught.

Dr. Z was (I later learned) fighting cancer at the time and in chemo. I presented the NASA paper as my class project. Got an A. He REALLY liked the project. "All you need to do is figure out the time constant and you'll get your name lit up in lights."

I'd destroyed all the NASA research, but I worked so damn long on it, the method was hard-wired in my

brain. The first couple of summaries were like I did originally after the original inspiration, when I was in that apartment uptown off Speedway, watching the Star Trek TV show for the first time.

For Dr. Z's class project, I completely re-did the work I created on the Apple II E computer at WSMR, but this time using a spreadsheet to do the calculations and plot out the results. It was basically doing the analysis all over again.

I got the same results, which is a good sign – if you reach the same result through a whole new analysis.

Dr. Z and I talked a little in his office after class one day. He encouraged me to go to grad school. When I finally decided to give it a try later that semester, he gave me a letter of recommendation. As former Chairman of the Aerospace Department and, well – the smartest guy on campus and the most important researcher in Celestial Mechanics of the modern era (none of which I knew at the time) well – all I need to do now is pass the damn Graduate Record Exams.

I take the GRE tests. They were on a computer. I aced the math. The reading comprehension went okay. But I thought I did really bad on the vocabulary part and damn near deleted the scores. (You can delete them and there will be no record so you can try again from scratch.) But I - accepted.

Turns out my vocabulary scores were excellent!! The test gives you harder and harder words if you give the right answers. Who knew? (I'd had grad school in the

back of my mind for years already, studying GRE words on the bus all the time.)

So. Mr. Bill goes to grad school!

It's the fall of 1997. My book Retrofitting for Energy Conservation had just come out from McGraw-Hill. I'd just submitted the final draft of Electrical Design Guide for Commercial Buildings. I recall making corrections to their proofs on the bus ride to campus.

I was on a fellowship - \$1000 a month – and worked as a Teaching Assistant (TA), mostly for a statics and dynamics professor, Anthony Bedford – teaching evening homework classes, grading papers, grading exams, holding office hours to help.

Dr. Szebehely passed away right after the semester began. My new advisor was Roger Broucke, probably the #2 most important worker in Celestial Mechanics of the modern era. Short. Rotund. Belgian. Jolly. VERY thick glasses. Couldn't hardly see behind his outstretched hand.

Mars was in the news a lot at this time. Bad news, actually. Several landers had failed to reach Mars. NASA failed. Japan failed. The Russians failed. After a year of basic orbital mechanics classes, I decided to make a computer model of the Earth to Mars trajectory.

Dr. Broucke was a real computer guru. Wrote several programs in machine code. Who does that?! His language was FORTRAN.

dBase, the program I'd used to make all my engineering design software (which at this point was on

the label Bar X Software, my new DBA operation; and I was giving away free copies to help sell my McGraw-Hill textbooks) was very similar to FORTRAN, so that's the language I used.

Not many people used FORTRAN. I had to purchase my own compiler and do all my programming at home. (They had a computer lab on campus. But no FORTRAN.) Everybody used C+ and C++. This would be an issue later on, but for now, I was racking my brains trying to solve an impossible problem.

The Earth to Mars trajectory is EXTREMELY nonlinear. The only way NASA or anybody else can get a solution is with a genetic algorithm. Basically, you try one solution a dozen times, take the result that gets the closest to Mars; use that solution to generate a dozen more trajectories; take the closest one, etcetera.

I took my approximate solution and plugged it into one of those optimization routines I'd learned. It locked up the routine. Bad news bears.

I had divided my model into two parts, separating the problem roughly halfway to Mars. It was a standard NASA trajectory with a couple of thrusts to get away from Earth, another thrust at "conjunction" (about halfway there), and then a couple more thrusts to get into orbit around Mars.

Getting away from Earth is no problem. The killer is landing on Mars. What happens is that the spacecraft is in an elliptical orbit (with the Sun at the main focus), and the elongated part stretches out to Mars.

That e-long part of the ellipse is where the spacecraft goes the slowest. Meanwhile, Mars is on an almost circular orbit. The thrust the spacecraft needs to match your spacecraft to Mars is on the order of 2.5 kilometers/second.

Huh. 2.5 km/sec. That doesn't sound like very much.

Convert it to English units, and it's over 5000 miles per hour! That means when you approach Mars, the Red Planet is going 5000+ miles per hour faster than you are!!!

You can see why the genetic algorithm is needed. Raw Cray supercomputer POWER.

I bundled up all my computer printouts and plots and color diagrams and brought them in to Dr. Brocke's office one day. This is my third semester or so, the spring of 1999.

Looking at my diagrams (holding them real close, his eyes were so bad), Dr. Broucke mentioned something like, "You know you can integrate backwards in time if all the forces are gravity." That's how they study the evolution of the solar system – where all the forces in the model are just gravity – as it evolved from the past.

I don't know, maybe a few weeks later I stopped. Looked at my data. And there it was. O.M.G.

I'd long since split the impossible problem in half at the middle. I can solve the conjunction-to-Mars problem and the conjunction-to-Earth problem (integrating backward in time) and just splice them together at conjunction. It took some fancy programming tricks and a gazillion trials. But it worked.

Yahoo! I got to Mars.

You hear the deadly silence? The pin drop?

That was the last conversation I had with Dr. Broucke, other than related to his courses in Celestial Mechanics I took. (Hint: Mr. Bill's 20-page algorithm running on a desktop PC for 30 seconds doing better than NASA running millions of lines of code on a Cray Supercomputer for days on end?)

“Oh, no. It's Mr. Bill.”

SPLAT!

Dr. Broucke and I didn't even talk when I went in to get advice on course selection for that semester. (Mom called him at some point to see what was going on. She said he talked about the weather.) As time went on. . . at the end of each semester, I just filled out the form with the courses I wanted to take. He signed it. That's that.

This went on for two years.

I took SIX credits of “Thesis Classes,” which are so your advisor can help you write your Master's thesis. No feedback from Dr. Broucke. Nor with EIGHTEEN credits of “Research Classes.”

All I got from Dr. Broucke is, “It's Department policy to not give feedback to any student until they pass their Ph.D. qualifying exams.”

How the F does anybody get a Master's Degree based on a thesis?

To hell with you, then. I was busy otherwise, taking all the classwork for an MSE – then for the doctorate. I was

going for a Ph.D. anyway, and the ASE Department has an option where you can get the doctorate without first getting a Master's.

But still. Can't you look at my result? Read the code – it's only 20 pages long. I even made a self-extracting executable zip file. Extract it. Input a few numbers. It calculates the full trajectory. Prints out the entire flight path solution in three dimensions.

Five. Minutes. All I ask is. Five. Minutes.

None of the half-dozen orbits people would tell me squat. It was infuriating!

I guess they thought I was cheating. But I wasn't. My little routine came up with a direct solution every time. No genetic algorithm iterations. Directly to Mars every time. 20 pages of FORTRAN code, compiled, running on a 486 PC spit out a solution in 30 seconds. Boom. Done.

I assumed, at this point, that my Mars Pathfinder routine wasn't good enough. I need to do more.

So I tested out a few ideas. I added some options to the routine. Try them out. Refine the code. I FLASH on a way to not only get to Mars but figure out how to use 15% less fuel. Not just on my special orbit. But using 15% less fuel on ANY trajectory to Mars.

Fuel not used on actually getting to Mars equals a large payload. More time on station. More room to carry a dirt sample back from Mars. People get

dissertations for figuring out how to save a few GRAMS.
How about TONS!

I complained to the Chairman of the Department, Dr. Dolling. No comment.

So. You wanna play hardball?

I boycotted all my classes that semester. Dr. Dolling gives in and sets up a seminar where I can present my Mars research. “The Earth to Mars Trajectory as a Four Body Problem.”

Like, with all the failed Mars missions lately – wasn’t ANYBODY interested in a “faster, safer, cheaper” Mars solution?

A couple of the orbits professors showed up at my seminar (Dr. Broucke wasn’t even there). NASA was there, a man from Houston. I explain my results. There were a few questions. We’re done.

I ran into Dr. Abusali, one of the associate orbits professors who works at the Texas Center for Space Research in north Austin, a year later. He was surprised I was still on campus.

“Wasn’t that your dissertation defense?” No. I still haven’t taken my exams yet.

What was the reaction of the tenured orbits professors at the seminar? They finally did a study of my project (more on this later) a year+ later. In the report, Dr. Schutz writes, “We didn’t ask any questions because we didn’t want to embarrass Mr. Clark.” (quote-unquote, in an OFFICIAL document that was used to EXPEL me)

They assigned me a second advisor after the seminar, Dr. Cesar Ocampo. I brought all my Mars research into his office. He gave me a big stack of NASA's computer-generated solutions, called "pork chop plots." I take them home.

I returned the NASA plots a week later. My solution isn't in there.

Dr. Ocampo made some snide, snotty remark. . .

I just turned around and left before I said something like, "My Mars solution has a way to shave 15% off the energy used for every one of your goddamn NASA pork chops. Put that on your barby and grill it. "

Dr. Ocampo quit as my advisor.

They assign me a new one (a new second advisor, that is), Dr. Wallace Fowler. I try and talk to him about my Mars project, to get some feedback, but he always tells me, "Not until after you pass your Ph.D. qualifying exams.

We're in the spring semester of 2001 now. I'm scheduled to take the written qualifying exams in the first week of June. The math exam is a killer. I've been studying for that damn exam for three solid years. It covers the equivalent of an entire undergraduate degree in math, and then some. I audited the two-semester math course one year. Took it the next.

Then – having bypassed the exams the previous summer because of really bad vision problems (severe dry eye, as in EXTREME) – studying it all this year.

I'm still damn frustrated about my Mars Pathfinder 1.0 solution. I had no idea what the problem was with all those professors. Nothing else to do but to create a better simulation for them. Maybe that will get their attention.

So, I buy a copy of Winteracter, a FORTRAN application, and create a GUI (Graphical User Interface), a full-blown Windows application with all the bells and whistles.

(Yeah, this is me – the CEO of Bar X Software.)

Help screens Color graphics on the screen. A series of inputs. I put it on the web. Folks love it! THINK MARS. The Mars Society Folks. Several professors at other universities use the program in their classes as an educational tool.

But it's not just a Mars Pathfinder 2.0 routine. It's a test platform. Hundreds of folks trying it. No errors. No feedback. This damn program actually gets a solution to the infamous Mars problem.

The folks at UT? No comment. They refuse to try it. "Pass your qualifying exams first."

Sorry, guys, too late for that. . .

If you're not counting, I have now created THREE excellent dissertations: (1) a computer program on the Mars trajectory that is a superb educational tool, (2) a direct solution to the Earth to Mars trajectory, and now (3) a way to shave 15% off the energy needed for ANY mission to Mars.

I write up a paper on the program. Submit it to the student section of the Institute of Astronautical and

Aeronautical Engineers, the AIAA, the main organization for aerospace engineers. They put it on their website. I tell my advisor. He calls the AIAA and has them remove it immediately.

Say – what? Hello – hand raised – I’m a Professional Engineer. You can’t do that.

The same paper is accepted at the annual Mars Society meeting that summer. Normally they pay for grad students to go to seminars like that to present their research. Hell, to show a poster – much less present a formal, official scientific paper.

(You’ll recall that I’m, like, very good at science papers. I’ve published more papers than many tenured professors.) Not me. I can’t go to the MARS Society meeting to talk about my MARS research while all the world is trying to land successfully on MARS. I have to withdraw the paper from the conference.

It was never published. Not then. Not since then.

Come June, I pass two of the written qualifying exams but fail the math. Three math professors give me a three-hour oral make-up exam. I don’t miss a single question in all three hours. (I had taken classes from two of the professors but not the third. Fortunately, I researched her, found out she taught Fourier methods, a very small part of the whole math curriculum. I boned up on that area – extensively. . . Good thing I did that because ALL her questions were in that ONE small area.)

Hah. One of the professors, Clint Dawson, actually voted that I failed the oral math exam. I didn't miss a single question! He's now Chairman of the Aerospace Department. Doesn't that say it all?

After I failed the math exam, Dr. Broucke quit as my advisor. He's retired now. Out of the picture.

Now Dr. Fowler is my only advisor. I have a meeting with him at the end of the summer. He tells me, "All you need to do is pass the oral exam, write up your Mars research, and you'll graduate next semester." (Not the math oral exam. The Ph.D. qualifying exams have a written and an oral part.)

Dr. Fowler wants to set up a time to do a practice exam, like professors always do. I say not yet. Dr. Broucke just quit and I need to find another professor to do the oral exam.

Based on my experience with the math oral re-exam, I need to find out their specialty and study it exhaustively. Dr. Fowler says that's okay. Just make it soon before you forget all your orbits.

A few days later, I get hauled in and read the riot act by my Graduate Advisor, Dr. David Hull. He's the optimization guru in the Aerospace Department. (Hint: the ONE man who should have been the MOST interested because I just came up with an awesome new way to optimize trajectories, his main interest in life.)

"You're barred from registering for classes for next semester. If you don't pass the oral qualifying exam

before the end of the semester, you're out of the program."

Say again? Isn't this where you put me on probation? Like you would do for any other student? I just passed the damn written exams, the toughest set of exams on campus. Hell, in the whole world (everybody else gives those exams one each semester. We take all three in one week).

My value should have gone way UP.

Not way DOWN.

Enough already. I get all my Army and VA disability papers and bring them over to the Office of Students with Disabilities. I'm disabled. I'm 45 years old, therefore a student older than average. I'm a Viet Nam veteran. That's three protected classes. I request your assistance to get reasonable accommodation.

"You have to submit a formal statement in writing."

I go home and get to work on the grievance. It's not as if I haven't had a LOT of practice writing the damn things.

Twelve

It seems obvious now. I should have known it then. I'd learned plenty of practical psychology from Dr. Parra. And from my Mom while we chatted, playing tennis. From the many books I'd read on the topic.

Professors have giant egos. Aerospace professors in the middle of the NASA culture have even BIGGER egos.

NASA Culture? UT Austin? Well, all the Mars data was processed at the Texas Center for Space Research out in north Austin where Dr. Fowler and all the other ASE professors had second offices. NASA in Houston is right down the road. Most of the nerds at JPL you see celebrating after a successful space mission are UT graduates. In short, UT Austin was "JPL East."

Big egos despise bright young students bursting with bright ideas.

When big egos realize that brilliant idea came from a schizophrenic brain?

EXPLOSION!

It didn't help any that 9-11 happened that semester. The Twin Towers attack in NYC.

I stopped by Dr. Fowler's office right after that. Ready to set up a practice exam with him for my oral qualifying exam. He was playing a child's video game on his gigantic Mac computer screen: BOP Osama bin Laden in the Bora Bora caves to kill him.

"Go away. Can't you see I'm busy?"

I just stood right there, watching him. He stood up and then proceeded to tell me ALL about – his prostate cancer treatment. How they put little radiation pellets down there. He's on hormones. I feel all so very weird, he says.

I backed out of his office. That was the last time I talked to him. (He survived the treatment. He's on the faculty to this very day, spent radiation pellets and all.)

I submitted the document explaining my situation to the Disabilities Office, as they had requested. They suggested I talk with somebody in the engineering administration over in the dean's office. Dean Armstrong, I think. I never did. Clearly, they could care less.

Note: The following January, the Disabilities Office denied ever receiving any document from me – and told me to resubmit it. This is how they got out of not handling my grievance at the time, thereby giving the ASE Department time to expel a disabled 45 year old Viet Nam veteran post haste.

About this time, I tell Dr. Hull in his office that I'm schizophrenic and that just I talked to the Disabilities Office, seeking extra time to prepare for the oral qualifying exam.

"You're not schizophrenic," he said emphatically. You still have to go easy on me because I'm a Viet Nam veteran and older than average student.

You know that demeaning look. Blank stare.

I went to the library, found the website for ABET, and submitted a grievance. ABET is the licensing authority that allows universities to award engineering degrees.

I'd already contacted the Graduate Dean the previous summer. They said it sounded like "neglect," and told me to come in and talk about it. I never did. I should have. But every time you appeal to a higher authority, it comes back like a ton of bricks.

Dr. Fowler quit after that.

It's called retaliation and retribution for me contacting ABET. ABET never even did anything. (I later told them in excruciating detail all that I'm telling you now. They studied it. Their response? "Texas didn't do ANYTHING wrong.")

Dr. Fowler said in his letter, "I've done ABET audits all my career. This is an outrage."

Yeah, so is professors doing oversight on their own damn programs. No wonder you people aren't afraid of anything I do. You aren't even afraid of putting all this in writing. On University letterhead (I have whole stacks of documents detailing all of this in great detail. I'm only providing a brief outline here.)

Fortunately, I was ahead of Dr. Fowler. I'd already found five other professors (you need four to be on your dissertation committee – that would be three plus Dr. Fowler – but I'd gotten five just in case so I didn't need the sick bastard anyway) and set up a time and date for my oral qualifying exam.

Not a damn thing Dr. Hull my Graduate Advisor could do now.

Except.

They set up an “ad hoc committee” to review my research. (A review mandated by Dean Armstrong I believe; proof positive the Disabilities Office DID receive my original grievance and DID act on it.)

It's now just two short weeks before the oral qualifying exam – in the middle of the Thanksgiving Break, actually - and now they ORDER me to show up for a meeting to DEFEND my research.

Excuse me, but what exactly is the priority right now at this minute? For the last THREE YEARS, you people have been telling me, “No comments on your Mars research until you pass the qualifying exams.”

So now I'm supposed to drop everything. Spend three days writing everything up nice and formal, then another whole day to go to campus to talk about it. FOUR DAYS when I should be cramming for the #1 priority of all grad students, passing the qualifying exams?

I copied a few of my Mars documents and sent them in. See you at the oral exam.

The exam was in two weeks. I put a stop on my mail. Unplugged the TV and the computer and crammed my heart out. Come D-Day, I cleaned up and headed to campus.

I arrive at the appointed time at the Department office. The secretary Rita (a friend of mine, she lived in Lago Vista too) told me. “Didn’t you get our letter? You were expelled already.”

Who expels somebody with a - LETTER???

Clearly, the “ad hoc committee” did not understand my Mars research. Apparently, they disliked it SO much that they found it just cause to EXPEL ME on the spot. In so doing, they have just required me to show evidence of having done dissertation-quality research before I ever entered the doctoral program whose very purpose is to teach you how to do research.

As an aside, observe if you please, that it’s the Disability Office who set this all up. The people who were supposed to DEFEND me.

The official chain of events was this: After the “ad hoc” meeting, whatever they decided - Dr. Hull polls everybody in the department. Nobody will be my advisor. I’m thereby expelled.

I didn’t receive a copy of the “ad hoc committee’s” evaluation until the following April. That means they did not look at my materials at that time.

Early the next semester, I submitted a nice, clean, formal thesis report. Went to Dr. Fowler’s office at the Center for Space Research to submit it.

The security guard SHREDDDED it. . . As I watched.

(This was so offensive to me that I didn't think – until this very moment as I write these words on 11.2.2023 - I should have submitted that Thesis to the appeals committee; as it was, they had no idea I had completed the Thesis – which was basically a triple DISSERTATION.)

Immediately after I was expelled, which was in early December 2001, I emailed 20+ experts all over the country and asked them to please look at my Mars website, download my program, and give a few comments.

Every last one of them did just that (each one spent more time on my Mars project than the sum total of the time spent on it by the totality of professors on campus in the previous THREE effing YEARS). I gave their letters to Dr. Hull as part of my appeal.

He threw them out. Said they had no bearing on the situation.

(AGAIN! I was so damn outraged by what he said that – you guessed it, I did not occur to me until 11.2.2023 that I should have submitted those comments to the appeals committee. That would have changed EVERYTHING.)

If Dr. David Hull had read those comments, he would have seen that at least five of those experts wanted to be on my dissertation committee. You can do that. But you still need one UT professor.

I never had a chance to shop around for that one professor – and there were several who were interested.

Dr. Bedford, for whom I'd worked as a TA all those years already said he was interested. Dr. Chambers was another, an orbits associate professor. My friend Dr. Abusali.

But no, I was – gone.

The final report from UT President Faulkner (now the Chancellor of the whole UT System) had excuses for everything.

Dr. Broucke's neglect? Professors aren't required to help you on your research when you sign up for "Thesis Research" or "Research" classes.

"All you had to do was knock on our door for comments on your work."

Ultimately, I was told by Dr. Lee Smith, J.D. the chief legal officer on campus, that I was prohibited from contacting anybody involved in any of my research. Furthermore, if I ever tell anybody anything about what happened, the University will "file a civil suit against you and take away your home, your property, and all your belongings."

Like everything else, I have his letter saying just that (plus whole pages of unmitigated malice against me).

Look at this chapter. Look at all the hundreds of man-hours devoted to interviewing all those people on campus and preparing their final report (10 pages from UT President Faulkner).

It could have all been avoided if somebody, at any point, had sat me down for five minutes to let me explain how I got to Mars. Not some ad hoc committee

of professors outside the orbits group. That's entrapment!

Even Dr. Schultz, who did the final evaluation clearly didn't understand. My only fault is that he didn't understand my explanation – that hundreds of students and those 20+ professors at other universities clearly did.

The Disabilities Office asked for another statement the next spring. Said they never received the first one. They investigated all my claims. Interviewed many professors.

Dr. Broucke has been retired for three years. Don't blame him for ignoring you.

The paper to the AIAA was taken down because it wasn't accepted at a Department Seminar that semester by Dr. Lightsey. (Sorry, I sent the paper to the AIAA. The AIAA accepted it. The AIAA liked it.) There WAS no such department seminar that semester.

Are you keeping track of the hundreds of ADDITIONAL man-hours needed to prepare this second six-page letter from the Disabilities Office?

"You should have taken the qualifying exams one year after starting graduate school" was the main reason cited by the President of the University.

The ACTUAL rule is one year after earning your Master's Degree. You take one or two years to get an MSE. (Or maybe longer if you got your undergraduate degree in another discipline AND that was 20+ years previously, as was my case.) Then the following year you

take the math course to prepare for that qualifying exam.

I could have filed a lawsuit for a hate crime. But it was a whole year before their final decision came back. You guessed it: the statute of limitations for a hate crime in Texas is – one year.

That last semester, after 9/11 and until I was officially expelled, Mom had issues with back pains. We played just a little tennis on Saturday mornings, then none at all.

The day I got expelled my sister Regan drove Mom to the doctor's office. When they stopped by my house that afternoon to see how my oral qualifying exam went – well, Mom had just been diagnosed with terminal bone cancer.

She had at best one year to live.

The following summer, after I had submitted my grievance and tried to submit my formal Thesis/ Dissertation and then the letters from the 20+ experts, I got a call from Jasmine's attorney. Remember Jasmine Azima, P.E. the "Persian" entrepreneur P.E.?

The City of Austin had filed a \$1 million lawsuit against the firm for gross negligence. This was for the South Austin Transfer Station (SATS), where they compact garbage and send it away on a giant trailer. It was the last project I sealed at the firm. All the plans were already done. The only thing I changed was to alter a restroom HVAC to handle more humidity.

According to the architect of record, the contractors had installed many windows backwards. Water leaked in. The HVAC can handle normal humidity levels from doors opening and closing, but not a massive amount from an influx like that. The moisture caused mold on the walls. People got sick.

The City Attorney was asking \$1 million for renovations. I was brought in at the very last minute, a Haily Mary. That's me, everybody's go-to man. Even the loyal opposition.

Does this bring to mind the old IAQ/ADD controversy?
Time to get rid of this guy once and for all?

Talk about a terrible feeling, walking into that courtroom to give my deposition, and seeing all the contractors lined up on the City's side – people I'd worked with on AISD and other projects, anxious to destroy me. But why did the City Attorney call me in at the last minute?

Years before – but long after I had walked out at Jasmine - I had been asked to redo the engineering design for the SATS facility, as problems were developing in the building. I wrote back saying Jasmine was “the worst, most unorganized, most unethical company I'd ever worked for.” (Pop always told me, “You'd go a long way with a little tact and tolerance.” Sorry, not my forte.)

The attorney for Jasmine's liability insurance carrier spent WEEKS coaching me on how to give the

deposition. (“I’ve never spent so much time answering so damn many questions from a client.” Lawyers. Don’t you just hate them? Especially when they say this while earning, like - \$250/hour.).

My attorney – paid for by Jasmine’s liability insurance company, was especially INSISTENT on CONVINCING me to “bend the truth” and help Jasmine get off the hook. Lawyers may find it easy to “bend the truth” – when it’s MY neck in the noose. But winding me up to send out to commit obvious PERJURY?

My own goddamn attorney????

When I arrived at the deposition, I told the insurance carrier’s representative that I was NOT going to commit perjury. They settled on the spot.

It was the end of my career as a Professional Engineer.

Ironically, I’d brought an autographed copy of *Retrofitting for Energy Conservation* as a gift for Jasmine. It was the only copy I ever autographed. Maybe it’s worth something now.

My life sure isn’t.

All this happened the summer of 2002, while Mom was still alive. (One last drama to entertain Mom with. . .)

Meanwhile, I was working furiously to smash together all my research into a formal dissertation to submit to the plutocrats on campus.

Yeah I know, I always have so much hope when none should rightfully exist.

That old NASA research? I had some time to think on all that. Makes me recollect a project I proposed to my solid state physics professor while I was working on the original Mars trajectory problem.

It was a model of the semiconductor junction diode, based on orbital mechanics principles. Very simple. Very elegant. What we know about transistors is all based on statistical methods. My model was 100% fundamental mathematics.

It's too bad, in these 20 years working on my new MATHEMATICAL model, who knows? We could have transistors that are ten times as fast now. Solar panels (which are just great big transistors) ten times as efficient.

Global Warming could be a fading memory instead of an existential threat.

Oh. The NASA research. That model of the atom based on the Schrodinger Electron Cloud plots? That wasn't a Unified Field Theory at all.

The REAL UFT is that little solid state physics model I just talked about. All the fundamental forces are there. Gravity (it's an exact scaled-down model of the Mars trajectory algorithm), electrostatics – that's in how the semiconductor behaves, and the weak and strong atomic forces.

Semiconductors have two halves, just like my Mars model. One weak. One strong. Held together by

electrostatic forces. (The Mars model is, of course, “held together” by the Sun’s gravity.)

It’s too bad I couldn’t talk to my old EE professor about this model. But Dr. Smith banned me from talking to anybody. That ban is still in effect. Bummer. Don’t you just HATE lawyers?

That fall of 2002, right before Thanksgiving (Mom’s birthday is around that time and the whole family always gathered to celebrate both together), the last word came down in the form of President Faulkner’s letter. Appeals denied. You’re expelled.

Mom passed away the following day.

A few weeks later, I got an appointment with the VA. Before I went, I talked to my Texas State Veterans Representative. He told me, “When they ask how you’re doing, they don’t mean that very day but over the past year.”

In all my previous disability reviews over the past 15 years, I was real happy. I love hospitals and doctors. “How are you feeling, Mr. Bill?” Great. Excellent. Love hospitals. . .

This time I gave the doctor the whole shebang. My disability rating was increased from 0% to 100% almost on the spot. A year later it was upgraded to Permanent and Total.

Gee thanks, Texas. This is me. I’m so damn phobic I can’t even LOOK at a math equation anymore. All my machinations have since involved only the graphs; no new ones, just the 150+ illustrations in my final

dissertation. That's the sum total of my math efforts in the last 20+ years.

Once Mom's estate was settled, I sold my little green house and moved out of Texas. I have not since set foot in that fu*king state. And all my family live there around Austin. Haven't seen them - none of them - since.

Around this same time, as I was heading to Vicksburg, Mississippi to find a house to buy, there was a class reunion at the Naval Academy. Ex-Middies are always welcome at those events, whether or not you graduated.

Not me. Not this time. My company commander – a classmate who now represents us in the Class of '78 activities and events – BANNED me from going. This was confirmed by the President of our Class.

Gee thanks, Annapolis.

Too bad. I was needing some quiet time in that beautiful Chapel in The Yard. A visit to John Paul Jones's sepulcher under the Chapel and the granite dolphins over his coffin would have done me some good right about then.

That's okay, some other time, Admiral Jones.

I'm on the VA payroll now, Sir.

I have a mission to finish.

Anchor's Aweigh.

Thirteen

Yeah. That would be a great place to end this story, wouldn't it? Drama. Sad ending. The hero fades into the burnt orange sunset.

They thought it was over, Texas did. My family certainly did, once Mom's estate was settled. Adios, psycho. See you – nowhere. And, you know me, I soak up emotions around me like a sponge.

Okay, it's been a good run. Let's do this.

I thought about it, suicide. MANY times. I'm schizophrenic now – big time. Audio hallucinations. Voice overs. The whole shooting match. Suicidal ideations were my new BFF.

Soon thereafter I learned what was wrong with my vision. Severe, extreme dry eye. The VA docs put punctal plugs in (blocks what tears you do make from draining into the nasal cavity). Maximum Restasis Rx. Legally blind. Another 100% disability.

My worst fear just came to pass. Going blind. Not being able to read. The one last escape in life. Closed. SLAMMED!

Bummer.

But a true thriller has two endings. The first one is where the anti-hero learns something important about himself. Duh. I really am schizophrenic. What that means, in the present context, is that everything I've written is wrong.

Not wrong in the facts. Wrong in perspective. It's time to fill in the blanks. To fess up that it wasn't me against the world. It was me with a ton of moral and emotional support.

Let's start with ORA. My first three years with the firm were awesome. My learning curve was screaming in an upward trajectory. Manual drafting. HVAC. Electrical. Computers. CAD was a titanic change in the industry. Computers too, doing all our calculations.

The going joke was, "Think back before computers. Remember all the free time you had? Now. Tell me – how much free time do you have now." None. Absolutely none.

For year after year. Just the regular engineering workload was brutal enough – now you add transforming EVERYTHING to CAD and computers? Slow machines. Clunky software. Networking 20 computers together. Establishing new drafting standards. Layers. Colors. Fonts.

Once you figure everything out – boom – it changes. New plotters. Faster computers. A new mouse. Work

like hell figuring it out. Then - boom - it all changes again. Windows. Spreadsheets. New commercial software everywhere you look. It's no wonder I had no social life. Not with having to spend two hours a day on the road, commuting to Lago Vista.

A year after I started with ORA a THERMONUCLEAR EVENT hit the HVAC industry. The Montreal Protocol, better known as the Freon Ban. Freon-12 was banned. The total cost of renovating all existing commercial HVAC systems over the next ten years or so was \$1 trillion. We did that.

Or, rather Bill Adair did that, in our office. That's why I never saw him. He was overwhelmed doing the extremely complicated chiller renovations.

By the time I was fired, hey - the Montreal crunch was over, and they didn't need the staff. It was a layoff.

Sure didn't look or feel that way to me. A short scene in one of my screenplays had me in my little bull pen office when Bill Adair showed up, a pink slip in his hand. I hugged my computer. "I don't want to go. Texas is a right-to-work state. I have a right to work!"

The truth is, a whole lot of my skills were now being done automatically by REALLY sophisticated CAD programs. They could draw ductwork automatically. Circuit lights. Do lighting calculations. Even fill out light schedules on the blueprints. Remember NPS when one computer program to do piping support design put our whole engineering group out of work? Bam! Same thing at ORA.

Good work. Gone.

I have a lot of wonderful memories from ORA. Noel Robertson always arrived almost as early as I did (at least when the express bus was on time or when the traffic was light). He was a friendly, jolly fellow. A great leader.

Jerry Hammerlun the lawyer? At least he brought me along to meetings with SECO. I met his skinny wife at company functions. We talked some. It's not as if I was that congenial myself, with a perpetual dislike of AUTHORITY thanks to Captain Hodory and all that happened at White Sands and BAMC.

Bill Adair (Aggie, grew up in Guam, a military brat, commuted from Dripping Springs in a rusty old pickup, true Texan, runner, ankles were always CRACKING as he walked) would stop by my little office area now and then. "Okay, you've been awful quiet lately. What's going on?"

Ummm. Well, I just bought this dBase program. Building a lighting calcs program. I – I'm using my own computer. On my own time.

"Sure. Go ahead. Put your hours on your time sheet. Good work."

Say – what? Really!?

After the evil patent attorney turned on me; well, Bill Adair was working on a marketing plan to sell the software commercially.

Bill Adair even had a contractor friend of his (robust dude, always wore shorts even in the winter) try out the energy analysis program. I had it on a 3.5 inch floppy,

self-extracting executable. Very commercial-esque.
Same with my lighting program.

If Bill Adair hadn't supported my computer exploits, I'd never had a chance of doing the Mars algorithm. Thanks, Dude. Sorry I was such a disgruntled employee toward the end.

That bull pen office space? We were a smooth, engineering machine. We had to be. Even though I never did any chiller retrofits (the big, complicated projects to get the world up to speed with the new ozone-safe refrigerants), I handled the heavy lifting on all the smaller projects. Bill Adair and Noel always reviewed my designs, though. Zane Burley, too.

But over time I was getting more and more right.

There was constant chatter in the bull pen. Clark Lilly (electrical, extreme extrovert, cheerful and exuberant, US Navy Vietnam vet) on one side and Larry Werner (tall, balding, deep voice, talked slower, superman worker, tank driver in Vietnam) were my buddies.

Roy Phillips (Christian, quiet, the adult in our little group) was there, too. He was Bill Adair's draftsman. Complex engineering projects needed the best damn draftsman in Texas.

We were always fooling around.

One time the big bosses had a photographer in the office to take PR pix for marketing. We spent DAYS cleaning up the place. Right before the photog arrived, I snuck over and put a small bottle of white-out on the giant blueprint plotter.

It showed up in the final PR photos!

Rene, the secretary, ordered out breakfast tacos sometimes. Popcorn smelling up the whole office in the afternoons. Long weekends working on rush projects. Working with extra help brought in for the really BIG projects. My sister Leigh Erin came in to help Patricia House (young, I convinced her to get her P.E. License later on, gave her a reference) with the SHEMP energy audits, and my brother John came in for another rush.

Then, when the blueprints went out the door, we got back into the routine again.

It was effortless, that constant ebb and flow. Well done, Bill Adair and Noel Robertson. (Similarly on the architect side of the office.)

It's too bad once the Montreal Protocol Chiller Retrofit days were over, and CAD took over, I was shown the door. Me and every other "triple threat" (folks who could design HVAC, electrical, and plumbing; I was unique, because it could also SEAL all three disciplines – plus energy conservation and now software) in the industry. I really did like the manual drafting. All the stuff computers started doing.

My hate has heretofore been grossly misdirected. I should have taken my angst out on the goddamn computers, not my superiors.

All things considered, it was fun and challenging, stimulating and VERY creative, too. But nobody will ever have that experience again. There won't be any Aston Martin (made completely by hand) A/E

(architectural/engineering) projects all done by hand like we did. Never!

I know it sounds like progress to you – computers doing the grunt work - the “hard” work. But you can’t beat it. As the fighter jocks used to say at the Academy, “Accelerating off a carrier flight deck is better than sex.”

It’s true. Engineering design at ORA was that way. Exploration drilling at Exxon. Structural steel design at NPS Industries. Building the Mars FORTAN routine at Texas.

Nobody even does research in orbital mechanics anymore. A current professor at Texas told me – “Nobody’s interested in Mars trajectory analyses. Anywhere.”

I was the last grad student at the last university in the world to offer a doctorate in celestial mechanics.

Where’s the fun and challenge and thrill of accomplishment that defines engineering anymore? Gone. Obliterated by computers.

Tell me again why the F we have computers doing all that fun stuff? It makes me cringe to think of all the really excellent jobs AI will obliterate. Why kill yourself throwing away four years of your life studying for an engineering degree? Computers will have eliminated that dream job by the time you get there.

And if not, your professional life will be just like mine – constantly moving from one career to another, one industry to another – barely one step ahead of “progress.” (Never having any free time for a life because you’re learning a whole new trade.)

And guess what? If this sh*t happens in engineering, it will happen everywhere.

Watch out. It's coming to your career field. When it does come, it will effing knock you flat. Just like it did me.

My mentor at Texas, Dr. Roger Broucke was in his late 60's. Short. Chubby. Frail. Disabled. Sure, he "neglected me," but we had some nice talks. His dissertation was on the Three Body Problem. Nobody, I mean NO BODY, in the universe knew more about the 3BP than Dr. Broucke.

Going through all my old Texas records – angry, FURIOUS – trying to get back at Texas – I found an email he sent me early on, when I was starting the Mars problem. He was SO excited.

"It has been 22 years since I have studied the Three Body Problem." I know I made his life miserable, and it makes me sad what an absolute boor I was. But it helps to know that I brought him at least a little bit of sunshine.

Dr. Broucke was a computer nut, just like me. FORTRAN fan. There's not a language more elegant or functional than FORTRAN. Not a compiler more efficient than the Lahey-Fujitsu, either. (I bought it, loved it).

Dr. Broucke gave me his 7/8 Runge-Kutta integration routine to use in my Mars Pathfinder program. (OOPS. Would you look at that – he really DID help me out!!) His RK 7/8 is extremely compact and as accurate as you can get. It's the engine that runs the whole machine.

Absolutely flawless program. A real Mona Lisa.
Michelangelo's David.

Dr. Broucke didn't like the Aerospace Department any more than I did. Not one bit. And I'd only had a couple of years to build up resentment. He'd had DECADES of abuse.

He HATED having to teach Statics and Dynamics – which is like having Einstein teach kindergarten math with wooden blocks. Even after his vision was so bad – he would ask me to please sit in the front row so he can see me – teaching statics to a hundred students in a giant LECTURE HALL!?

Dr. B told me he and Dr. Szebehely were on a committee in 1960 that was set up to decide if Relativity or Celestial Mechanics had the correct explanation for all the “Relativity” phenomena. Bending of light by the sun. Time slowing slightly in orbiting satellites.

Relativity is all STATISTICS. Celestial Mechanics is pure MATHEMATICS. Equations. Often very SIMPLE equations. And, yes, we have explanations for all the “Relativity” phenomena.

The committee voted for Relativity. R.I.P. Celestial Mechanics. That's me, the last starfighter.

Dr. B was Catholic, and not shy about it. He used to remark often in his lectures about the many “little miracles” in our field. Awesome phenomena, extremely complex – mind-boggling complex (even for a steel-frame brain like mine). . . all boiling down to a single

equation. And not just any equation. ALGEBRA. At most high school TRIGONOMETRY.

It's staggering! Truly, even an ingrate like me can't help but marvel at the "Intelligent Design" of the cosmos.

You don't have to wonder anymore why evil, heathen statistics and Relativity won.

Dr. B worked an innocent little problem in one of his C Mech graduate classes. I found it in my notes: Assume light is a photon (a particle of pure energy). Now calculate how the sun's gravity affects that tiny bit of MASS as it goes by the sun. The result: The sun's gravity bends that PHOTON exactly HALF that observed in actuality.

My theory, years later, is: what if light turns into photons as it approaches the sun and, because of the extreme gravity, two photons spiral in a DNA-type double helix? Which bends exactly as observed.

Would you rather that or four years of graduate school to understand tensor calculus and astrophysics? That's the power of Celestial Mechanics.

But, alas . C Mech was banned in 1960. It. Is. No. More.

Full disclosure: I wrote a book called The Geometric Derivation of Relativity, which showed all our "Relativity" explanations.

Isaac Newton's Theory of Gravity was created strictly from geometry, by the way.

Dr. Broucke received his doctorate in Belgium. He was fluent in Dutch and Russian (an important scientific language, especially in Celestial Mechanics). He told me he and his wife (they had one daughter) went to Moscow on a vacation one time.

He spent the whole time in the library, studying Russian tech papers!

Dr. Broucke started his career at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, JPL. “The girls are very pretty in California,” he said. Many of the students in his C Mech classes were female. After growing up with three older sisters, I can understand how the rigorous math appeals to them.

(Actually, the math wasn’t so bad – at most calculus and differential equations – hell, kids learn that stuff in HIGH SCHOOL now. More power to you.)

One of the intractable problems I had was setting up the motion of the spacecraft when you’re very close to Earth or Mars. It acts like a singularity when you’re programming it. Pulled my hair out (and by this time, I didn’t have any to spare).

Dr. Broucke suggested a way to approach that problem. I figured out a different way and moved on. But he kept right at it. Not long after I was expelled, I found out he published a paper on that problem. Something about motion around unity. He passed away not long after I left Texas.

Thanks for the memories, Dr. B.

One more plug for C Mech from my last dissertation. The N Body Problem studies the sum of the forces of

MANY bodies on a single, much smaller object. Imagine the Starship Enterprise zooming through a cluster of stars, spinning the turbines approaching Warp One (the speed of light). The N Body Equations reduce down EXACTLY to the same equations as for static flow in fluid dynamics.

What that means is that, according to Relativity once Scotty announces “Engines can’t take it, Captain” it’s too late: The Enterprise has been smashed to smithereens.

They literally hit a BRICK WALL.

Well, in C Mech’s universe, that “brick wall” is a FLUID. And fluids aren’t just water or oil. An extremely thin vapor is a fluid.

Albert Einstein stole the whole idea of Relativity from the French worker in Celestial Mechanics, Henri Poincare, who developed it based on a super-thin “aether.” This is an old-fashioned term for very thin vapor. And so, in a C Mech world, Warp One is no problem. A million dust particles per parsec. Warp Two? A thousand particles per parsec. (Well a parsec is technically a unit of length equal to 3.26 light years, but you get the idea.)

Tell me, do you like Poincare’s “aether” or Einstein’s BRICK. WALL.

Now that I think back on all that happened at Texas, it occurs to me that Dr. Broucke was a real champion. Who else would let a grad student choose their own courses (you want your specialty to be in solid state physics? I absolutely forbid it) at registration time?

While I was doing my Mars thing – first getting a seamless trajectory, then figuring out how to save 15%, then the semiconductor model (and a dozen other informal papers which by the time all was said and done turned into a whole Fractal Theory) I was absolutely UNTOUCHABLE.

Nobody dared offend Dr. Roger Broucke. He was my shield of immunity. I didn't know this. He never even hinted at it. But there he was. Jolly Dr. B pattering along, teaching his C Mech classes that I absolutely adored.

Even if trajectory optimization wasn't his thing, he knew I was moving right along.

One semester he gave out a list of potential dissertation topics. Our semester grade would be based on a short discussion of how to approach the problem. I chose something with the Mars trajectory. I SOLVED THE PROBLEM. A DISSERTATION problem, did it in a few days, brushed it off – I sure hope I get an A in that class. (Didn't even keep a copy. Can't duplicate the process, but I still have his assignment paper from the class. One day I'll give it another go.)

Dr. B gave seminars sometimes. I remember one was a study of all the planets that orbit Jupiter. (Most comets that enter our solar system DO orbit Jupiter, which is pretty amazing.)

Why would Dr. B give me free reign?

Maybe Professor Szebeheley mentioned my NASA project to him, the one I did on the solar system model.

Dr. B had access to the letters of recommendation when I was accepted to grad school. Also my transcript where I got an A in that class. Dr. Hull my Graduate Advisor may later have felt justified in REFUSING to let me use those 3 credits toward my Master's Degree (which I got right before I was expelled – smart move. For once in my life I read the writing in blood on the walls – did all my paperwork around Halloween. Folks in the graduate dean's office were all in costumes), but Dr. Broucke knew better. Sure he did.

And all the angry letters I wrote. No advising. No help on my research. I bet Dr. B thought, "This young man had better get used to the haters because everybody hates Celestial Mechanics."

Or maybe even, "This guy is a real fighter. Perhaps he will have the strength of will to save our Celestial Mechanics."

I was a bull in a China shop, literally. Once the Mars Pathfinder 2.0 algorithm was done, I was cruising.

Then, when Dr. B told me that Celestial Mechanics was banned and doomed?! We'll see about that.

My mission hereafter was to crank out a menagerie of ideas to breathe a little life back into the discipline. Something, anything. Didn't have to be a formal paper. Just a sketch. An outline. A summary of an approach to a problem, like Dr. B's dissertation homework problem.

Anyway, about that NASA research and the Schrodinger Electron Cloud plot model. The original model of the

atom, the Bohr Model, was based on the Two Body Problem (one large body + one very small one; nucleus + electron).

The equation for gravity is EXACTLY the same as the equation for electrostatics except for a constant to account for the difference in scale.

You remember that C Mech is 100% mathematics? Well, that MATHEMATICS in its entirety is derived from Newton's Law of Gravity. Just like an upside-down pyramid: everything can be traced directly back to that ONE gravity equation.

So, you know what? NASA was right. Using the waveform of my Solar System Model to generate plots of atoms around a nucleus was SPOT ON.

(C Mech people regularly publish work on subatomic phenomena as well as Relativity phenomena.)

Too bad I didn't realize my old Schrodinger Plot atomic model was viable until long after I was expelled. Not that it would have made any difference. But my point in mentioning this is: Dr. Z saw that value of my Solar System model right away.

That NASA letter was in my application to grad school. It was in my department file. Hell, it was hanging on the wall of my office space in the grad student ghetto up on the top floor of the Aerospace Building, Woolrich Labs.

THAT'S why all the orbits people HATED me. THAT's why the whole goddamn campus plutocracy HATED me.

(After I was expelled, waiting on the appeals, I made copies of that NASA letter and put it on bulletin boards

all over campus. The physics department. Astronomy. The Union. Every. Where.) It was me versus Relativity.

They won. Game. Set Match. I was “obliterated” after all that, or at least I should have been. But I wasn’t. How come?

You remember how I had to boycott all my classes one semester before Dr. Dolling the Chairman of the ASE Department set up a seminar for me to talk about my Mars Pathfinder 1.0 routine? Did you, just for a second think – “That’s odd. They were already wanting to get rid of this reprobate. How come they just didn’t let the S.O.B. wash out right then and there? Doh! Problem solved.”

Well. It just so happens I was at this time a regular columnist for the student newspaper on campus, The Daily Texan.

I think it was Captain Franco in the army who told me while we were preparing my defenses before the PEB tribunal, “People at White Sands are absolutely TERRIFIED of your writing skills.” Given the circumstances, it took some time for this to sink in. Years of time. But sink in it did.

I tried out this new superpower in 1999, two years after I started at Texas. I wrote a novella called Behold Leviathan and self-published it with First Books. (I recently released a new edition called Eyes Only.

The book was a dark, scary regression into the horrors of my Army situation SMASHED into a modern satire of the environmental situation. Got some decent

reviews. Never sold any copies. (One chapter is an excerpt of my Army tribunal transcript.)

My nephew Adam Normand read it, “Boy, did you get hosed.”

A few years ago, Adam wanted to bring his young family to visit my house in the Appalachians of western North Carolina. “My kids want to meet their brilliant Uncle Bill.” I told him they could come if you tell them “your brilliant schizophrenic Uncle Bill.”

They never came.

Anyway, we’re back at Texas, a couple of years into grad school. I get upset about something, write an angry column, and fire it off the editor of The Daily Texan. They print it!

I bring another one in. I meet the nice lady editor (had a crush on her). “Love to have columns from the engineering nerd side of campus.” (Oops, this is gonna take a heap of work, Mr. Bill.)

She asks me to be a regular contributor. So I write a few more. Bring them in, hook up with one of the staff to fix all my typos and grammar mistakes.

One of the columns was an absolutely vicious, rabid attack on Professional Engineers. “How could you let all those Aggie students in College Station build that gigantic mountain of logs without an ounce of oversight?” The bonfire of logs had collapsed that year, killing 12 young people.

And so, when I threatened Dr. Dolling he likely thought, “This jerk is going to write a fu*cking column in the paper.” So I got my Mars seminar.

Big sigh. A few days later, I was also asked not to write any more columns for The Daily Texan. Damn, that very same day I brought in a stack of editorial cartoons I had created. Left them there.

(Not a pretty hand, but decent enough, after my manual drafting training – certainly good enough for a Podunk college paper).

With all due respect, I suspect the real reason I was let go was the Ralph Nader versus Patrick Buchanan debate on campus I’d set up (using my cred with the paper – doh! – without the pretty lady editor’s permission).

“You – WHAT? Two fucking LIBERALS debating in George Bush’s backyard? Are you INSANE?! People ELECT me for this editor job. You want them to IMPEACH me now? Tar and FEATHER me?”

Sorry, lady. I still love you. I made you the hero of my smash screenplay JUMP GATE, about my grad school years. Will you forgive me? Go out on a date?

Lunch. tea... i’m still at t-sip you know. . . really. . . i. . . am. . .

Oh well, at least I got to do the Mars seminar. That was key to everything.

I also kept writing columns. “Take an angle and go with it,” the love of my life taught me. OMG. Another superpower! I added a section on my Mars Pathfinder

2.0 website online for “The Pelican’s Briefs,” with my cartoons and new analyses of news and events.

My favorite cartoon shows a goofy Saturday Night Light puppet SMASHED by a hammer of SPECIAL INTERESTS.

“Mr. Bill for PreSidEnt.” Oh no, Mr. Bill.....

Anyway, this is the point at the end of Act Two where the anti-hero, on his journey, has failed miserably. But he’s learned something about himself (“I’m schizophrenic. No big deal.”) It’s where you can bring back characters from very early in the story. In this case, the folks I grew up with: Family.

That year after Mom was diagnosed with bone cancer and until I got the final letter from UT President Faulker? We should talk a little about that year. It’s important.

So far it looks like Mr. Bill is a strong, valiant, soldier of fortune taking on the powers that be. A bit quirky. Somewhat outspoken. “You’re such a nice person when I talk to you,” Dr. Fowler wrote when he retaliated against me and quit as my advisor for contacting ABET. “But in writing you’re a – monster!” (Excuse me, sir – but, back at you.)

So far it was just me against Leviathan.

Not so. Saturday mornings I always played tennis with Mom out in Lago Vista. I talked about all this grief with her. With her psychology degree, I’m sure she said all the right things.

Once or twice a month somebody or other visited Mom in her gorgeous house overlooking Lake Travis with the beautiful pool in the side yard. Leigh Erin and Regan (both of whom were single mothers with three kids each) lived nearby. John lived in Austin. EVERYBODY loved Mom's wonderful cooking.

When Mom visited Leigh Erin in Dripping Springs or Regan in Johnson City, I always drove her. There were plenty of occasions. Birthdays for us and all the kids (Regan's Adam, Alicia, and Jonathan alias "Norm" and Leigh Erin's Luke, Joe, and Sarah). Graduations. Christmas. Mom's birthday at Thanksgiving.

I must admit to spending everything I could for my nieces and nephews. I gave Adam my favorite programmable calculator (the HP that I created the SECO nomograph equations with – I really liked that calculator. Leather case and all).

(You'll notice I have more of an affinity for tech than people – thanks to my fond memories of my surrogate incubator mother. One day, in a not-so-distant dystopic future when nobody wants to be engineers, they'll RIP babies out of the womb six weeks early and raise them in an incubator.)

Adam teaches high school math now (Regan's profession.) Norm is a coach. Alicia married an electrician who works in refineries up north. (She enlisted in the Air Force with the sole purpose of finding a husband. Hey. It worked.) Sara is a genetic engineer (went to A&M – maroon carrots?)

Luke got a degree in physics and works for an oil company in Houston. Joe was the smart one – skipped college to work at a convenience store, making good money right off the bat. They all have kids now, I suppose. I’ve never met any of their kids. Hell, I’ve never SEEN any of THEM for 20 years. But they’ve been there.

“I’ll be a good uncle one day, I swear I will.”

I’ll cut my teeth as “anchor man” of the Class of ’78 at the Academy, too. Do right by Dr. Z and Dr. Broucke. Make Mom proud so she can rest in peace. Carry on the engineering tradition of Grandpa Howard and Pop.

Mom was on the Lago Vista School Board for many years. When I was at ORA I ran for an opening on the board. Sarah and Alica stormed the phone lines, exhorting folks to come and vote for me.

My one campaign event was a debate with the other guy. “Lago Vista needs a football team like they need a hole in the head. We should concentrate on academics!” I said.

“You’re campaigning with a hidden agenda,” was his response.

Excuse me? Who’s? Hiding? What?

And since when is ACADEMIC an evil “agenda” in SCHOOL? (Oh, I get it now – 25 years later. Ha-ha. School isn’t to teach kids the three R’s. School is for indoctrination.)

Well, all the whole family, they all had front-row seats as Bill picked up his britches after the Army debacle and made a name for himself at ORA. Felt my

disappointment when I was fired. Then all the terrible sadness, when working for Jasmine the lady entrepreneur turned out so badly.

Then the triumph of getting accepted at grad school. The Mars success. (Mom was absolutely enthralled by ALL my research.) The crashdown when I was expelled with such malice.

Remember how Dr. Hull barred me from registering? Well Mr. Bill, he wasn't going nowhere. I had to raise hell to even take classes the next semester, which was the spring of 2001. I mean REALLY raise HELL. The Dean's office. The Registrar. I guess they assumed I'd slink away with my tail between my legs.

Sorry, I got FAMILY.

My whole damn family was expelled when you fu*kers booted me. They were CRUSHED every bit as much as I was. More!

I'm a schizophrenic. My feelings are at an absolute minimum volume level. Not theirs. They're all very smart people. Noble. Never took a penny from the government for nothing. Never been to jail. Never did no wrong. This is OUR country. We've been here since the goddamn Mayflower.

How DARE you do what you've done.

How did I remain on campus? Well. Going by the University's own precious rules, I got my bachelor's degree at Texas, back in '78. With honors. Engineering scholar (Regan and Pop came to campus for the nice presentation that summer).

Anybody who graduates from UT is automatically eligible to take classes on campus. Hell, I'd just received a 2nd degree, a Master's. And this jackass Dr. David Hull barred me from registering??

I went in to the math department to register for classes. I was going to carry on the family tradition and get a teaching certificate to teach mathematics. The counselor sat me down and (with all due respect to Dr. Broucke, whom I am now back to hating with all of my energy) spent a goodly amount of time with me, going over all my transcript, talking at length about my goals and interests and overall spending more time with me, figuring out my path than all the aerospace professors had done with me in all my registrations and counseling for the entire previous four years.

I ended up with a couple of undergraduate classes that were my favorites of the whole Texas episode. An introductory class in complex analysis. Another in advanced applied linear algebra. And a history of science and technology in the ancient world, taught by Dr. Riggins. My paper for that class was on Roman Aqueducts.

I once told Dr. Riggins, "I've spent more time with you talking about this project than the sum total of all the time I spent with my advisors and professors and mentors the previous four years in grad school."

You're kidding he said. "Most definitely not," I responded.

I didn't take classes that summer. I dropped out of my fall classes (more math) as soon as I got the final letter from President Faulkner.

Never got the math certificate.

Otherwise, that year – well Mom went through chemotherapy but continued to get worse and worse. My three sisters and John all took several months off work so they could stay in Mom's house and look after her. Staggering their time off.

The only time I had alone with Mom was one night "babysitting," when I got a DVD movie, Godzilla (1998) with Matthew Broderick. I liked the film. Mom was so not happy that evening. (Maybe you can see why they never let me alone with her again; I sure can't).

My brother John? He found reruns of Magnum PI for them to watch together. Mom LOVED Tom Selleck. That hunk of a hero.

Kelle came all the way down from Canada and her job as a city planner in St. Johns to spent a few months with Ma' Regan, too, teaching little kids math in Johnson City. They were good times, quality times, until the end.

My little green house was a mile or so away at the bottom of the hill near the POA campgrounds. I walked up to Mom's house most evenings after I got back from classes on campus. I helped prepare supper. Had dinner (Mom spoiled us on all her best dishes.) Did the dishes afterward – that was always my job, as in since, forever.

On weekends Mom's grandkids would show up when they could. I don't think there was a single moment when Mom was alone that year.

That Christmas Eve – right after the cancer diagnosis, which was around Thanksgiving. I went to services with Mom at the beautiful Anglican Church in Lago. I wore a bright green – I mean BRIGHT green – shirt.

Musta caught the preacher's eye because he stood me up and with two other unwilling victims, wrapped a rough rag round our heads and appointed us the "three wise men" for his sermon. I still have that green shirt. I wear it once a year, every year - around Christmas time, thinking about that evening. Thanks, Jesus.

Sorry, those people who strung you up like they done.

The last thing I told Mom – we'd just received President Faulkner's letter a day or so previous – was that I swore to never, ever give up the good fight. How could I? With a champion Mom like her? All my wonderful family? I've been a real jerk since then; but, hey – they deserve better.

Mom died in her sleep when Leigh Erin was on watch.

Mom was always a big swimmer. Loved the ocean. One of the highlights of that year was taking her to an IMAX show on campus of dolphins. Amazing creatures. So smart. Corralling a whole school of fishes with consummate ease.

Anyway, Leigh Erin took Mom's ashes out to California and poured them into the ocean.

So, Mom's gone now. The matriarch of the family. She was a good friend and my champion. With her gone – well, evidently it was through her sheer force of will that everybody had to be nice to Bill the schizophrenic black sheep.

Now that she's gone, the glue holding me to the family just kind of disintegrated. It was part them and part me. Can you blame them? After all this time, pumping me up to succeed in grad school and I fu*king blow it.

Who wants a loser in the family? We're winners. Mom could waste her energy on you as much as she wanted, but not us.

Regan decided she was going to buy Mom's house from the estate. I wanted to, but Regan was the executor of the estate and the new matriarch. I could have easily afforded it. My share of the estate plus sale of my house plus a small mortgage.

I mean I REALLY wanted that nice house. I helped BUILD it. I LOVED swimming. I'd lived in Lago Vista since 1984. But no, that wasn't to be.

As it was, folks still kept going to Mom's house. Birthdays. Holidays. More and more, I wasn't invited.

I may be crazy, but I'm not dumb. I can read the writing in matador red lipstick on the walls, too. They put psycho Bill to work painting Mom's rent house for sale.

Then painting some in Mom's house for Regan to move in.

Once my usefulness was done, that's all she wrote. I'm not a Clark anymore. New administration. New rules. I never even played tennis with Regan – she was still quite good.

Okay. This is me. I just got put on disability by the VA. I'm now officially "the sickest of the sick." Who wants somebody like that around their young kids?

Would YOU?!

Mom didn't have a prejudiced bone in her body. She had a degree in psychology. That was a keen interest for her: helping people. She'd been right there with me since day one, seen all the horrors I'd been through, like I've been telling you about.

She'd seen the sickly little boy grow through a whole war of confrontations on account of my schizophrenia. She was always the wannabe doctor, with a psychology perspective on life.

I was her creation, from the scars on my arm and toe all the way up to my balding head. I was her Frankenstein. Had all the stitches to show for it.

Nobody else in the family knew even a fraction of what I've told you. I'm sure this will be as much a shock to them as to you. More!

The mild-mannered, happy, shy, "most courteous camper" – wrecking a full-fledged broadside against Texas? The Naval Academy? The United States Army!

When I started this chapter, it felt like thus far I was writing about a different person, the “old me.” It’s true! He’s my hero. That strong, bold, sensitive engineer.

I’m not that person anymore. I’m schizophrenic now. I finally realized that, after the VA’s evaluation. SUDDENLY I realize I’ve been schizophrenic ever since Dr. D-H said I was. Well, more or less.

Dr. D-H said the catalyst was when Pop died. It’s more like when Pop had his first heart attack. THAT was the real shocker. He wasn’t immortal after all. Perfect!

The Almighty Father. (It was always, “Our Father, who art in Heaven, Howard be thy name . . .”)

Pop, with his stick figure drawings. Always writing in print letters. My engineer old man. The Esso mechanical pencils I had when I was growing up. The cross-hatched engineering pads of paper. Steeling his tools. Repairing my mini bike to impress him. Doing chores without a peep of complaint.

(Maybe you get a sense now that Dr. Broucke and I had the same kind of relationship? “Give this poor kid some slack. He’ll find his way. And dazzle me when he gets there.”)

Getting lost on the subway in Paris when everybody else was enthralled by the Louve. Wow. Their subway runs on rubber wheels. How’s that work?

(Yeah – they actually let a young boy loose in the middle of Paris. Go for it! Get lost – I did. . . But I found my way back, not knowing a word of French.) Fascinated by Roman ruins.

Bullfights in Madrid. Lunch on beef you could cook on the SIZZLING hot plate (or not). The Nazi dagger Pop stole out of the place in Aravaca. “Look, Bill – it still has no rust.” Coats of armor in the Paradors (old castles in Spain converted into hotels).

I was thrilled by all the same things he was – that nobody else in the family noticed. Pissed off at his Red Corvair because it was designed so badly. Beating the living CRAP out of that damn car.

Yeah, this kid’s an engineer, all right.

There was a bond between Pop and me. An engineering bond that nobody else could ever understand. Tools. Tech. Machines. My favorite book he gave me was a series on How Things Work. Learning to fish. Hunting. I love the outdoors, just like Pop always did since he was a desperately poor kid growing up on an apple orchard in the Ozarks. I gave up a career in the Navy so we could hang out for a precious couple more years. It was worth it. Wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world.

So, yeah. Dr. D-H was right, damn him forever. I really AM schizophrenic. Been that way since the day I drove the forest-green Audi Fox out of The Yard at the Naval Academy.

So, now what? This is an old, familiar place for me: Failed. Fired. Booted out. But it’s worse this time, much worse. Mom is gone. My family – those silent heroes who were there supporting me all these years? They’re gone too.

It's me and Jaxx my cat (long hair, bright blue eyes) in my little green house near the lake. It's pretty damn lonely.

Right up there, at the top of the hill – I can hear Max, Mom's black German Shephard BARKING at all hours. I loved that animal. He'd go berserk whenever saw my faded blue Geo Metro show up to drive Mom to the tennis courts.

Mom had an indoor cat, too. Pluto. We always played when I went over. He used to climb up on the counter in the kitchen and JUMP up into a wood slat trellis over the fluorescent overhead lights and we'd make a game of it.

When Mom died (he was there on her bed 24/7 the entire time, never more than an arm's stretch away from her), nobody wanted him. John tried to make him an outdoor cat. Got ticked off when Plato started moping at the door.

I adopted Pluto. He stayed for a while. But it was a very small house. Jaxx was already there. Well, Plato got loose one day. I hope the dog catcher never found him. That he didn't have to spend the rest of his life in a cage at the SPCA.

Nobody else in the family cared about Plato (Kelle was a real cat lover too) or how much Mom loved that damn cat. Mom was gone now. Plato's a nuisance. Good riddance.

Same with brother Bill.

But, guess what?

Cats have nine lives.

Mine ain't used up yet.

Fourteen

There's always a point in the "hero's journey" when the mentor goes away. That would be Mom. My Jedi Master. My Bene Gesserit mother. I'm on my own now. I still have the mission – save Celestial Mechanics. But how?

All my social support network is "obliterated." My family. My engineering career. Any hopes of finding professional references to finish my Ph.D. somewhere else, much less get a job in Aerospace Engineering.

It's the quintessential, "Where's God when you need Him the most-est?"

As stubborn as the "Luck of the Irish" has been with me so far, it came through one more time. (You gotta love it, don't you? How this dude keeps pulling a rabbit out of the top hat? I know I shouldn't laugh, at my own story – but this is starting to be a lot of FUN. . .)

There's something else that's been going on here. From Annapolis, thrilling to register for classes on a computer teletype machine (the very first campus to do so). Then loading a stack of punch cards into a mainframe at the computer center at Texas circa 1978. Using the very first FAX machine at Exxon to send data to the office from the field (a tube-shaped gizmo, like the original gramophones).

The remote terminal in my office at Exxon where I could run hydraulic analyses. The Apple IIE PC that got me into so goddamn much trouble at White Sands.

The little structural steel design program on one of Dell Computer's first terminals when I was at NPS Industries back in Austin town. The FUCKING CAD software that took my job at ORA. (I remember the very first email I sent, to the ASME Committee. "Try it. You'll love it.")

The spreadsheet program that helped me recreate the Solar System model for Dr. Z's class. The FORTRAN compiler that made my Mars Pathfinder work.

There was something brand-new out there, y'all. Something that absolutely INFURIATED the folks at the University of Texas. It was – and remains - an existential threat to the whole damn Deep State military-space-industrial complex. (No, not me stupid. Although it's on my list.)

Oh. My. God. The God Damn mother-fucking son of a bitch just did an end-run, full-reverse, roll out around the whole faculty, and put all his Mars research on the internet.

I kid you not. They were absolutely NOT prepared for THIS. I was on the internet with my free UT account pretty quickly after I started grad school. As soon as McGraw-Hill published Retrofitting for Energy Conservation, I was working on using the internet to give away my software to help people save energy. I took right to HTML. Everything was hand-coded back then. It was a steep learning curve, but I'm not afraid of steep. Or learning.

My first working website had sections of the Retrofitting book and free download links for my computer programs. This was no small feat. Dial-up was VERY slow. I mean, excruciatingly slow. I had to figure how to create a ZIP file. Set up the installer on PCs, etc.

Yeah. I do like those computers. I know how frustrating they are, especially coding. And especially in the beginning. THE BLUE SCREEN OF DEATH. Losing an entire hard drive.

But, you know what (and only young folks will be able to relate to this) – computers are . . . relaxing.

I don't know if this is relevant, but I met Kim Tabor (the editor who did my two books at McGraw-Hill) up at a Dallas engineering conference one year. Drove up there with my Black DJ friend, Morganna McCann.

The cops stopped us! White man and Black woman on MY Interstate? How DARE you.

I had a very nice talk with Kim at the conference. She was quite surprised. "Your aren't ANYTHING like all the other ornery, stuck-up, arrogant people who write

my other books.” She’s an Orthodox Christian. Lives in the Big Apple. Doesn’t even own a car.

Not ANYTHING like all the other petty, stupid print media people I’ve met.

Back on campus. Everything was going smoothly. I never sold very many copies of the McGraw-Hill book, and I’m not sure if my website ever sold any copies either, but it was fun.

Until I got called in the Student Legal Services office on campus. (Tell me, please – doesn’t that name sound like “Lawyers Who Help Students” with legal problems like with a landlord. Defaulting on a student loan. Divorce.)

Well, at first it seemed like an answer to all my prayers. It was late in the spring 2001 semester. I was having all those intractable problems with the Department over my Mars project (which I had just placed on the web and invited people all the world there to play my Mars game).

Finally, somebody on my side. And an attorney. Excellent.

I was accused of “using university servers for commercial purposes,” i.e. selling my McGraw-Hill textbooks (both were in print now). The attorney handling my case (female, one lazy eye – focuses wide) was peeved. “This is the second time I’ve talked to you about this.” Not true. I’ve never seen you in my life and, believe, me I would remember. I – I, have a bad eye problem too, you see.

Well, this new accusation was serious. Very! I spent several days preparing a formal, legal defense. (Which included an email from Dr. Fowler encouraging me to put all my Mars research on the internet. “It won’t do anything but increase your prestige.”)

Excuse me, but what kind of advisor tells his own grad student to give away all his valuable research? It was all copyrighted, *ad infinitum* – but still.)

This was only a week or two before my written qualifying exams. Which consisted of three three-hour exams on half a dozen graduate courses each; on orbital mechanics, estimation theory, and math. I had spent every spare moment (other than time now and again coding, which was relaxation time for me) for the last sixteen months cramming for those exams.

And. Now I have to spend a whole week defending myself to this lady practicing law under a deceptive title?

Mom came to town with me. Sat in the meeting. I honestly think I would have been expelled right there, if not for Mom as a witness. I don’t recollect how I got off. But I did have everything free on the website. Excerpts. The software.

There was no “BUY THIS BOOK NOW” banner. And, like - what professor doesn’t advertise their books on their official university websites? Except. I wasn’t a professor. I was a lowly grad student.

And even my own advisor(s) hated me.

You can see now why I failed the math qualifying exam. I was an absolute nervous WRECK. You're not supposed to put your name on the exam. I screwed up something badly, ended up writing my name on a page for some reason. Doh! You failed!

(I accused the math teacher, alias Dr. Clint Dawson - of hating me - which he did; he actually failed me in the oral exam even though in three solid hours I didn't miss a single question.)

So, Mr. Bill learned his lesson. He got a commercial server and moved everything there. My URL was inviticus.com It would later become quite well known in the conspiracy/UFO community. "The Texas X Files" I called it.

Which was actually a wonderful idea, moving off Big Brother's server. (Thanks, Dr. Fowler for turning me in to Student Legal Services - even if he wasn't the one, I do know for a fact that the lazy-eyed lawyer called him because Dr. Fowler said in writing that was one reason why he quit as my advisor. . .

Dr. Fowler couldn't get this bureaucrat to postpone the hearing for two lousy weeks until after my written qualifying exams; the very exams about which he had been telling me for years now, "No Mars feedback until you pass our exams.")

Why was moving to a commercial server such a great idea? Because now I didn't have to be careful about what I put on the web.

The Retrofitting section of the site was now expanded to a whole new section on my other textbook. Another section (each section had maybe 15 sub-pagers accessed from a sidebar menu) with all my Bar X Software programs. Then the Mars Pathfinder 2.0 website (illustrations and help files on the sidebar menu) where everybody could download the program and try it.

Wow. This dude has TWO McGraw-Hill textbooks? Shit. His own Bar X Software? Excellent. I don't have to worry about viruses if I download and try it on my computer.

I sent out THOUSANDS of emails (this was before spam blockers, not that this was spam) to all the Mars groups. The Mars Society chapters. THINK MARS. You name it.

I also posted on the News Groups. Think THOUSANDS of notices. So, yeah. I got the word out and in a very big way.

I was real DEMON on the internet. God's gift to troublemakers. May it always remain so.

This wasn't just fun, either. These people to tried my program were my beta testers. I wanted to know if there were any problems. There weren't.

Everybody in the world visited that Mars website – everybody in space or aerospace or interested in NASA or Mars – everybody but the professors in the orbits group at Texas (you can be sure I emailed them at talked to them after class).

Whenever we had a little extra time at the end of class, I used to talk about the Mars program in the classes I was TA for. One semester I gave everybody in my Statics and Dynamics homework sections extra credit for writing a paragraph on Mars.

That class is required for all engineering majors, so we had all kinds of fun ideas on civil engineering issues. Electrical. Architectural. I put all their essays on my website in their own little section.

Dr. Bedford, the professor for the class, didn't notice all the REALLY good homework grades everybody had that semester.

After I was officially expelled, waiting on the appeals, I created a new section (by now there were 4 or five sections, all accessible from the top of a sidebar menu) called "The Center for Celestial Mechanics."

I put the formal papers I had written on the Mars Pathfinder 2.0 there (the ones the AIAA and Mars Society accepted), plus a short paper on my semiconductor model (along with two small books explaining the basics of Solid State Physics used in the model).

The formal Thesis I wrote on my Mars research (the one that the security guard at the Center for Space Research shredded, on instructions from Dr. Fowler) was there.

A whole book I wrote on all the orbital mechanics equations involved in the Mars Pathfinder – essentially an introductory text on interplanetary trajectories.

Half a dozen other draft papers I had written, as I explored new dissertation ideas (realizing early on that Mars might not pan out).

Again, nobody in the Department was aware of ANY of that material. At one point my graduate advisor Dr. David Hull told me, “I don’t care what you write or how you present it, I will never read anything you write.” Those are his EXACT words.

And, again, this is the Department’s expert on optimization, especially TRAJECTORY optimization. Aerospace engineering? Spacecraft? Like, maybe - when a spacecraft takes off it’s on a TRAJECTORY. And stays on one forever thereafter?

It’s kind of funny, in a morbid sort of way. I mean, I was literally running circles around these people. I’d been doing Ph.D. level research since that NASA letter, and especially since the semester before I started grad school and I presented that paper in Dr. Z’s class on Regularization.

Virtually every class I took after that was to advance that research. Why? Because it was evident that nobody believed my Mars solution was possible because there was no THEORY to support it.

There actually WAS a theory. Part of the Three Body Problem called the free-return trajectory. But since nobody was conversant on the 3BP and because Celestial Mechanics was banned – I had to find a new THEORY.

That's where the new semiconductor model came from. Transistors work because a special application of voltage across unique materials causes a SUPER FLUID flow of current. Fast. Unexpectedly fast. Exactly the result of Mars Pathfinder.

New transistor model? No way! You're in ORBITAL MECHANICS.

(Imagine the optics for a second: Austin, Texas was the epicenter of the semiconductor business. The modern Taiwan and San Jose California rolled into one. And those guys weren't interested in a whole FUNDAMENTAL model of the transistor?)

They couldn't even listen to themselves. The New York Times bestseller, *The End of Science* had just been published. It was a smashing hit, hailed as a hallmark creation from sea to shining sea.

The basic gist – it was a compilation of dozens of interviews of all the top experts in every field (including several at UT Austin) – was that all modern sciences were based on STATISTICS and because probabilities are inherently accurate, science can progress no further.

“Brilliant. Groundbreaking. Revolutionary.” Solid State physics is 100% statics, too.

Excuse me, sir? May I please ask a stupid question? My new model is MATHEMATICAL. Not statistics. Not probabilities.

M. A. T. H. How is that not interesting?

But, no. They were too busy patting themselves on the back. All these fat heads had spent their whole careers publishing EASY papers on SIMPLISTIC computer applications (hundreds of tech papers, dozens of tenures – by astronomers who “discovered new planets” – by programming a computer to find them! NO WORK WHATSOEVER. Tenure.)

And here we are – this wonderful book says we don’t have to work anymore; as if they ever worked in the first place.

Can you even IMAGINE what AI will do?

Anyway, back to reality. I’m expelled for good. I keep fighting with my website for a while longer. While I try to get help from the Ombudsman on campus. “Go away.”

The U.S. Department of Education. (Sorry we can’t help you because you cannot provide the original letter that started our problems with the Office of Students with Disabilities. Which I DID have. Which I DID send to them.)

Mom’s attorney laughed when I talked to him. “File a suit against the University of Texas?! LOL.”

The ACLU. “Sorry. Not unless you’re gay or a minority.”

The Texas P.E. Licensing Board. “Out of our jurisdiction.”

Back to ABET with ALL the formal documents
DETAILING on UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD
everything I’ve been talking about and all the

retaliations after I had contacted them a year before.
“They didn’t do anything wrong.”

That’s all she wrote. Ain’t nothing more I can do.

One last stab and I dumped every last shred of research I had done in the last four years on a whole, new giant section of my website. FIFTY little papers.

All manner of wild and crazy ideas from Celestial Mechanics. There was all the old science: My Mars Pathfinder research. The transistor model. The model of the atom. Plus ENGINEERED ideas. APPLICATIONS for celestial mechanics, which I would later call “Temporal Mechanics.”

10,000 notices in all the space-related NewsGroups (literally, I did a Google search and Dr. Google counted the notices I posted).

My final act was to take a bound, nicely formatted copy of the above ideas, in a new dissertation called “The General Solution to the Unrestricted Three Body Problem,” and drop it off a Dr. Lee Smith, J.D.’s office.

After which time he forbade me from contacting anybody on campus involved in any way with your research.

I emailed somebody after that, somebody on the Student Council I think – one of my former students was a higher up – the email bounced. I tried somebody else, just to be sure – my email was blocked. That ban remained in effect until Dr. Smith retired, some 15 years later.

I later added a couple of sci-fi chapters and self-published it, Lulu.com, as The Conceptual Design of a

Constellation Class Starship. (Remember my old manuscript about al the Star Wars tech?)

Not even the Star Trek crowd were interested. Are you serious? Science fiction is about pushing the homosexual agenda on society at large. We aren't about space exploration at all. Go away!

Okay. I can take a hint. No offense meant. Good luck with all that.

I put my little green house on the market. I found a seller even before it was listed, the property manager at the campgrounds right down the hill. He and his Mrs. had been living in a GIANT recreational vehicle.

My house wasn't much bigger, but they closed in the carport later on. It was a good house for me. Great location, right there by the lake. I hope the oaks in the backyard are doing okay. The pyracanthas in the front. Yeah, its hard to grow grass in that soil, as little rain as the area gets.

I've followed the Lake Travis water level online ever since. It's sixty feet low again this fall. I really do wish I could have done more to help folks save energy. I'll keep trying. Enjoy the house, buddy.

Hook 'em Horns.

Then the voice came from out of the wilderness, "Why don't you make a movie about what happened at Texas?"

No, it wasn't an audio hallucination – which I now had frequently – but my neighbor Rita (her exact words, by the way: you really do have to watch what you say to me because, like Hammerlun and those old meetings at

SECO, I remember everything), asking after all my appeals and other efforts were exhausted.

Screenplay? Hmmm.... My novella Behold Leviathan had some catchy dialog. It was all centered around a courtroom drama, too.

Huh. I'll give it a try.

I studied a few books on screenwriting. It's quite a challenge, cramming all that into 20,000 words. Character development. Dialog. Conflict. Action. Description.

Kind of like a building where you cram all that information from the different disciplines into many overlapping layers, onto the blueprints.

Sure I'll try that.

So, I learned all the margins and formatting. Typed it all up on my computer. Sent out query letters. There was a little interest. I sent out a few hard copies.

"Sorry, A Beautiful Mind just came out." And., "We only do movies on schizophrenics that win a Nobel Prize." And, finally, "If even a fraction of what you say is true, nobody will touch it. Too much liability."

Damn lawyers, anyway.

You can see now why Texas was fearless in putting everything down on paper. So bold with their discrimination. Ruthless. Malicious. Doh! They had absolute confidence the word would never get out.

No book publisher will dare touch this material you are reading, either. The only way out is to self-publish it.

Hell, I got so damn many debts that I got nothing Texas could even take from me if they won a civil suit. You want my mortgage? You can have it. Mountain of credit card debts? The house full of books I can't even read anymore? Anchor's aweigh!

Now look who's the fearless one!

Got myself a few more words to spit out before I hit the 80,000 recommended maximum. You up for a few more tall tales, friend?

So, here I am, packing everything up to move to a new house in Port Gibson, Mississippi, just south of Vicksburg. Our camp wasn't too far south from there. I'm, a-going back home.

Ain't no place in Texas for no schizophrenics.

Sad day, leaving that little green house. Clothes line under the oak trees in the back. I love clothes dried like that. Saves energy, too. Long walks along the lake around the park and the camping grounds.

Going for a swim when the lake was up in the inlet just down the road. (Nerve spasms that last semester at UT, from the EXTREME stress, when I was swimming.)

Forgetting to put the parking brake on in the green Isuzu Brat, parked on the street. Zoom! It rolls down Paseo de Vaca and SLAMS into the stone wall around the camping grounds. (I was oblivious.) Cops found me in the house.

"Do you own a Bratt?" Ummm.... Who's asking?

All the letters-to-the editor the local newspaper published for me, angry words against Texas. (Folks came up to me at Mom's funeral. "You're the guy writes all those letters!" Umm – who's asking?!)

The day Mom came over and BANGED on the front door, and she sat me down to watch the news about 9/11 coming down.

Four years after living there, my nephew Luke comes over one time - says, "That blue on the top of your washer and dryer comes right off." The stickie wrap for shipping. "Doh! I knew that." Heating water on the stove after the water heater went out and I couldn't afford to fix it. That last summer when the AC went out and I couldn't fix it neither. (The new owner replaced both.)

Mom calling when I was living in town with Chana. "Your house is leaking!" A water pipe had frozen. Then BURST. (The house was lonely, all that long cold winter. It worked! I was back home in no time.)

A possum having babies in the garage closet. Little baby mouse-sized possums hanging by their tails off my bicycle spokes. (I left kitchen scraps outside for the critters all the time.)

The same possum using her last ounce of energy to crawl back home and die in my front yard. She got a proper burial, for sure.

Clark Lilly, our resident gardening expert in the office at ORA, telling me, "Sure, you can pump the raw sewage out of the sump into the yard." (I had a grinder

pump that tied into the city sewer system. Costs a FORTUNE to buy a new one.)

Thanks, Clark - you just killed the nice cedar out by the street I watered like that.

Changing the oil for my little blue Geo Metro in the grass. Dumping the oil illegally in the lot next door.

Washing down the vinyl siding every few years for a shiny new house. The pyracanthas in the front of the house Mom gave me as a welcome gift when I moved in. Love those orange berries!

Feeding the deers with deer corn. Hungry deer standing RIGHT THERE, staring into the window when I forgot to feed them.

The landscape timbers I used to frame in around the pyracanthas I stole (along with the rocks) from the elementary school landscaping one dark and stormy night. (Mom was on the School Board at that time. Oops.)

Jaxx the cat drinking water out of the fish tank. (Not sure if that's healthy but she didn't mind.) Running outside when HAIL STORMS came - to tuck the little car under trees for protection. Or cover it with a thick blanket. Both!

Trying a hundred different tricks to keep the damn squirrels out of the bird feeder. (How come all those smart scientists on campus can't figure THAT one out?)

Jaxx climbing up on the refrigerator then HOWLING because she can't get back down. BITING ME at the vet when I brung her in - then the vet

rushing ME into her office for bandages and a cleaning.
(Cat saliva is some kind of bad.)

The day when Mom and Regan brought Jaxx over from the pound. A tiny little ball of fur. Love at first BITE. Fencing in the carport (which was a terrible eyesore, made me look like a real redneck hillbilly) so Jaxx could be outside for some sun. My exercise equipment out there.

The tiny little bedroom when I threw away the bed and made it into my work office (then study space when I was in grad school). Slept on a floor mat that I rolled up every AM.

Bed? What's that? When the ladies stayed over for the night. Hmmm... Gonna have to plan for the next time, tired of all these rejections.

Morgan McCann the DJ coming over to "whiteyville" to visit. Only person from town who ever did that. Thanks, girl. (The apartment I leased for a season after she agreed to room together. Wrong! Somehow I never got billed for electricity . . .) I didn't never stay there, not once. Home is home, and that wasn't it.

It's good, to have roots. A place of your own. A retreat. Mom really hit a home run when she built that little green house for me. It was a real lifesaver.

Makes me want to support the crazy idea of the government giving first-time home buyers a guaranteed low mortgage rate. (Like, they bailed out all those Too Big Too Fail banks with, what \$10 TRILLION in ultra-low interest loans? Say – what?)

I did so like helping Mom out now and then. I did her gardening. Trimmed the tops off the damn cedar trees in her front yard so she had her blessed lake view.

I could hear her playing the piano way down there in my yard too. Nice toons. Comforting tunes.

Well, it's time for me to beat feet. Too much hate in Austin. Too many wounds. Deep wounds. Painful wounds.

The landscape my eyes see is a major battlefield. I lost every last battle. Badly!

It was an effing Slaughterhouse Five.

But the war ain't over yet. I'll be gathering my strength. When the storm hits, you won't know what hit you. Texas. It will be total, absolute annihilation.

Scorched earth. . .

A body can dream. At this point, well. . .

Maybe yonder in my new home I'll catch the "Deep South" head fever and get a hankering to spin some yarns. Tell my tale instead of SHOUTING it out from the highest building. Or the editorial page. Nobody ever listened anyways.

Hey, it's worth a try. Ain't got nothing to lose. I'm on the VA payroll now. And you know what they say to P.O.W.s, how you're supposed to do everything possible to escape. And you know me by now.

I don't much like being in confined spaces.

SUBMARINES!

Closed spaces drive me – CRAZY!! Time to assert some authority here. Pick up the intercom on the bridge.

“Now here this. All hands. Blow the ballast! Fins vertical. Engines off.

“Surface.

Surface!”

Fifteen

Right before I left Lago Vista, I had a visual hallucination. This was the first and only one I ever had (to the best of my knowledge. I'm fairly self-vigilant, but – you. Never. Know. Until it happens again.).

Note: I've never been on any psychoactive meds because they all have a dry eye side effect; any more dry, and I'll go totally blind.

It was dusk. My last day ever in Lago. I was taking one of my last walks around the campgrounds and lake near my home. I saw a woman. All in white. Kind of like a ghost.

Clear as day. Only for a short while. Then – poof! – gone. This experience stayed with me. Over time, it would become the speck of dust inside an oyster that becomes a pearl.

A black pearl.

Beverly McMillan was my realtor in Mississippi. When I'd driven over a month before to look at houses in the area, we talked a lot.

Her office was in Vicksburg, a little building next to her home. Spectacular view of the twin steel bridges going over the Mississippi River. Her house had been the scene of a murder, a Jewish heiress of the Levitz Furniture family. The body was never found. Blood everywhere. Still blood-soaked floorboards in the house. "Nobody else would buy it. We got it real cheap." The FBI investigated. Not even the tin hat paranormal crowd could figure it out.

"All the houses in Vicksburg are haunted," she told me.

Things got wooly before I even left Lago for Mississippi.

When I arrived in Port Gibson with Jaxx the cat (with the moving van full of our stuff a couple of hours behind – the movers were AMAZED at how much I had crammed into that tiny house - and lost money, too, had to rent a BIGGER truck), well I soon forget ALL about Lago Vista and Austin damn, Texas.

The closing attorney for the real estate deal had just been SHOT. Allen Burrell. DEAD. Age 53. Right in front of his office there in downtown Port Gibson where I was standing. Only a couple of days earlier . . .

Welcome to Mississippi.

You wanted grist for a good story? Well, we're a-getting there. Real fast, because Mom left me the Family Bible. Like I said before, I'd researched our ancestors a good bit before I left Austin. Wrote a novella about Col. William N. Brown, called *Deo Vindici*. Along with *Behold Leviathan*, it was on my Texas X Files website.

And here I am. Port Gibson was part of the Vicksburg Campaign and sieges and dozens of skirmishes back then between the Yanks and Confederates. All sorts of historical events. Col. Brown was in the middle of it all, chasing down Bluecoats.

And here I am, chasing down – lady ghosts. Murders. Haunted bloody houses in Vicksburg, site of the largest assembly of Bluecoat forces in the whole Civil War. Bigger than Gettysburg, even.

Ulysses S. Grant landed not far from Port Gibson on his way to Vicksburg. Burned everything else to the ground. Not Port Gibson. "It's too pretty to burn." Lots of churches. Gorgeous oaks along the main drag. All gone now, chopped down to make way for a four-lane highway. Not too pretty to burn no more.

How's that for progress?

I spent the next 12 months fixing up my new house. 206 China Street. Ripped the old carpet out. Painted all the rooms in different colors. Repaired sheet rock. Painted the exterior.

I found a bunch of old vintage Venetian blinds in the basement. Painted them. Put new rope inside. Hung them in the rooms. Gorgeous! Cleaned up the lawn and trees. Insulation in the attic.

The previous – the ORIGINAL owner had just died. Well into his 90s. He'd built the place out of red cedar trees cut off the lot it was built on. (Beautiful timbers in the attic.) The whole basement was chock full of junk. Well, not quite junk. He'd been a gunsmith. All his old tools were still there.

His wife had been the secretary at a military boarding school right down the road, Chamberlain Hunt Academy. They'd just recently remodeled all the school buildings (Ground Source Heat Pumps – God bless them). It was a Christian School now, for kids from broken homes. Drugs.

I interviewed for a teaching job there. Math. Science. They offered me the job. "Sorry, actually – I'm not quite ready for that."

Turns out, Lee Harvey Oswald and his brothers had went to Chamberlain Hunt, where the owner's wife had worked as school secretary. I found the records buried in the Warren Commission files. The owner of the house had been a – gunsmith!?

I later made my one trip back to Texas, to Galveston, house looking. Ran into a man from Dallas whose family had known Lee Harvey personally. Said Lee Harvey couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a shotgun, much less a moving target from the 6th floor at an acute angle through trees.

Soon thereafter hatched an idea for a screenplay, *Deo Vindici*. "God Will Vindicate," an old post-Civil War saying in the Old South back then. Didn't actually start

writing the screenplay. A few more things had to transpire first – and I had to be inspired by a new house.

Otherwise, all that hard work for those 12 months was good therapy. I listed the house with Steve Purvis. Then had him take it off the market almost immediately. (Here comes another amazing “coincidence,” because your average house in Port Gibson takes YEARS to sell)

A lady named French, had seen the listing – made me an offer! Steve Purvis closed on the deal, and even did it for just 3%. (I sold it for what I bought it for.) My new house was at 3030 Rose Lane in Vicksburg, just a block off Confederate Avenue which defines the battle lines of the confrontation back then.

The day I sold the China Street house, I was walking around the neighborhood and chanced upon Wintergreen Cemetery. Earl Van Dorn is buried there, a famous Confederate general. His is “the only grave facing South. His beloved South.”

A few steps away I stumbled upon the grave of my ancestor, Colonel William N. Brown.

None of the salient facts coalesced into a real story yet, not fit for the silver screen as a script. But we’re getting there.

After I moved into the Rose Lane place. Boom! Everything crapped out. God bless Beverly McMillan for buying a home warranty to go with the house because I ended up having to get a new gas furnace, new

air conditioning; and several new sinks. Electrical work, too. A good \$15,000 in repairs.

The house was in bad shape otherwise, too. Eight months of painting, scraping, cleaning, and more painting – and it was okay. Finally, I had a little leisure time. I got back to writing.

By now there was a computer program that formatted the screenplay for you, Final Draft. So that helped. And I had all sorts of ideas for the story, “An avenging Confederate general terrorizes a small Southern town.”

The lady ghost was there, too., She materialized in the flesh as a Banshee, the Irish wraiths who warn the Druid faithful of impending death. (My Grandpa Howard was a Druid O’Cleary, the keepers-of-history storytellers).

Over time, I started several other scripts and worked on the five of them to develop my skills. The biopic about Texas was tough. The hardest of all dramas to write. But I was determined, and I kept at it.

After a few years, I got restless and started looking for somewhere else to move to. That’s when I went to Galveston and talked to the nice man about Lee Harvey Oswald. My Pop had a letter signed by JFK in his belongings, which led to another screenplay project. And so forth. More story ideas. . .

Hollywood LOVES “based on actual events” tales. Hey, I’m an engineer. That kind of creativity doesn’t come easily. Fortunately, life gave me all the creative drama I could ever ask for.

I tried several times studying my old grad school math. I still had all my class books and notes. I reviewed all the prep notes I'd created for the qualifying exams. Still remembered almost everything. . .

Including all the HATE and MALICE. Just couldn't get past that part. Still can't. Can't even LOOK at a math equation without all that malice RUSHING back.

Can't hardly even look at ANY of my old ENGINEERING tech.

You can well imagine my frustration. All my life I'd been enamored with engineering. Now it was out of reach. Worse! Surrounded by a moat of despair. Burning oil. Demons. Holy terrors.

Back to my go-to solution when all else fails: computers and the internet. There ensued a long series of websites. News websites. Political analysis. I was vicious. Would have made my old lady editor at The Daily Texan proud. Ripping the powers that be apart. Republicans. Democrats. Everybody. When one site failed, I packaged the best columns into a book and moved on.

A book on movie reviews. Political satire. Philosophy (think Nietzsche 2.0. . . "If you criticize one group you're a bigot. If you criticize them all at once, you're a natural philosopher.")

Nobody escaped my ire.

Then, I created a small series of web pages (I was by this time using Wordpress, which frees you of all the tedious HTML hand coding) on my old Celestial Mechanics research. Not any math, mind you. Just the illustrations.

My final dissertation had 150+ figures, illustrating ALL my ideas. (Very NICE figures, too - thanks to my old mechanical drafting skills.) I'd had all that C Mech tech online a few times already, but it never took ahold of folks. It was too complicated.

This time around I used basic psychology ideas to illustrate it. Three Bodies? Doh! Id, ego and superego.

Gravity? How about a close "fly by" of somebody you're attracted to. On a close-approach trajectory. You're captivated. You end up in orbit. Crashdown!

Men are from Mars. Women are from Venus.

Psychology was a natural for me. I'd had plenty of "experience." The Army psych ward. Years of therapy with Dr. Parra at the VA Clinic in Austin. Talking about people all the time with Mom playing tennis.

Psychology had been my only defense against the Evil Empire. These days everybody calls it the Deep State. Back then it was kind of an illusion. A paranoia. Now? It's a fact of life.

Bane of our existence.

My little psychology experiment trying to use psychology ideas to get folks interested in Celestial Mechanics?

I ended up with a whole new psychology model. Based on MATHEMATICS. Whoosh. What an absolutely revolutionary idea.

All sorts of Mars applications in there. I even matched the Three Act screenplay structure to all the elements of an interplanetary trajectory.

Fun!

Then came another book I called “Temporal Mechanics.” Temporal as in “not celestial” and the second half was psychology, temporal as in “between the temples.”

Later came two more books – both still using the same 150+ figures – one all psychology called The Zen of Gravity and another mixing religion into the psychology batter, called Dark Side of The Force.

I self-published all these books, by the way. Originally I used Lulu. Then Create Space. Then it was Kindle Direct Publishing (an Amazon.com operation), which purchased Create Space.

I became quite expert at InDesign and Adobe Illustrator. Computers? Software? Ahhh.... Relaxing . . .

Remember my NASA presentation for Dr. Z. “Find the time function and you’ll get your name lit up in lights.” I found it. Finally. In the most bizarre and unexpected way.

All that maneuvering with the C Mech figures, a bunch of new Fractal Levels based on psychology ideas – boom. Time! A simple function. Wrapped up in quantum entanglement.

A Fractal Theory of Everything I called that book.

There's no other theory to explain quantum entanglement, only that Einstein thought it was possible. Nothing in Relativity. Astrophysics.

Stephen Hawking's String Theory? Are you kidding? No part of his entire body of work (and the thousands of papers it spawned) has ever been proved. There's zero physical proof. In fact, there's an axiom of String Theory that says it cannot be proven with physical evidence.

Isn't that the definition of mental masturbation?

And yet, ask any scientist, and they think Hawking deserves the Nobel Prize. And these bastards killed Celestial Mechanics? Which is the complete opposite: based 100% on fact. On. Hard. Core. Mathematics.

Is the scientific community INSANE or what?

You look into Alice in Wonderland's mirror at the end of Oz's Yellow Brick Road and what do you see? Me! Looking back at you.

My old Unified Field Theory? It's in there. One level of Fractal Theory among fifty. Hardly a footnote. Yawn. I moved on.

All this tech meandering unfroze the gears in my brain a little. I slapped together all my old energy tips from "BTU Bill's" radio show. Bought a bunch of new books. Write them all up in, "1001 Energy Tips," with lots of new, fun illustrations.

I paid Dorrance Books ten grand to publish it for me. I made the mistake of writing in the author's blurb that I was schizophrenic.

Bad mistake. REAL bad!

Their page proofs came back with literally thousands of grammar and typo mistakes. (MANY of which were theirs, not mine.) Their formatting had hundreds more glaring mistakes. I corrected everything and sent it back. They sent me the new proofs. Maybe HALF their mistakes had been fixed.

Sorry, Charlie – no more corrections. Not unless you pay a tidy sum.

They published the book. It was a horror. One example: I had written “professional engineer” and corrected it to read Professional Engineer. The final page proofs read “Pprofessional Eengineer.”

I ended up using InDesign and Adobe Illustrator to typeset the damn book myself. Published it with Kindle Direct Publishing. Then Ingram Spark. Barnes and Noble. A dozen ebook platforms. Lulu.

I spent \$5000 on marketing: postcards to every bookstore coast to coast. Magazine ads. Several magazine articles. Lined one room downstairs with carpet pad (walls, ceiling) to create a wonderful sound studio. Bought all the tech (microphones, mixer, even a setup for a video blog – this was in the middle of the pandemic.

I was ready for video interviews, too. Even had a teleprompter rig and a giant monitor to read off).

I created a podcast just like my “BTU Bill’s Energy Tips” 30-second radio spots. It was on all the podcast channels.

I created a GIANT new website. Wrote several new columns each day on new energy-saving ideas. Analyzing all the global warming “fixes” out there. Lots of visitors. Spent twelve months night and day promoting that damn book.

Everybody else in America despised the \$5 a gallon gas that was happening at this time. Not me! I was finally at the right place at right time.

Wahoo! This me, Bill – on the podium with a medal at last.

Wrong. Zero sales. Z. E. R. O.

(Regan said she loved her copy. Lie. I know. Because not one single, solitary paperback copy was sold at ANY outlet.)

It’s too bad. I paid for an official review by Reader’s Choice. The analyst loved the book! “Most interesting, well-written energy conservation book I’ve read. It left me with hope.” Gave it their top rating, five stars.

Yeah. Gimme a little of that hope, will ‘ya?

But, honestly. I’ve concluded that people don’t want energy conservation, especially the younger generations. They want it mixed in with the DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) agenda being pushed aggressively on Wall Street.

That is, F the environment if we can’t force-feed the entire trans agenda on the world. (Which is a real shame, because women lose out in their million-year-old campaign for equal rights.) Well, the natural world

loses out too, of course, but nobody cares about that part.

I'd given copies to the local paper (no comments). To the HVAC outfit in town (ditto). Just this past summer they took 6 weeks to repair my AC – hottest summer ever!

Had a custom “skin” put on my Mini, advertising the book. Signs all over town (like realtors use). Notices to ALL the local libraries and bookstores (Dorrance did that part - \$1000 worth of advertising, including ads at Amazon).

Not only did my book make zero sales. Same with the Dorrance edition. Thank you for sending me the royalty statements. Now I know what it's like when you rub a puppy's nose in his pee when he leaks on the kitchen rug.

I shut down my operation. Just like always before, I bundled up all my website columns into a new book, *Going Green*. Then got back to my screenplays.

Americans and their conspicuous consumption.

Why do I even try?

Sixteen

Other than the aforementioned writings; well, the day I left Austin and Texas is the day my social life ended.

Although I've lived in 3 different houses since then, I've had no friends. Neighbors, sure. No friends. Never

dined out once. No social life. No vacations. Never even spent a night away from the house.

After I was expelled from Texas like that? What with everything else that happened in Austin before that? Then lost the million-dollar civil suit. Banished from the family after Mom died. I made one last stab at life – only to get banned from my class reunion at Annapolis.

Okay, I can take a hint. This is me, going away. B-bye.

Had a couple more of those scary “coincidences.” Looking for a place to move to when I lived in Vicksburg, my preference was to buy some land and build me a nice house with a swimming pool and a basketball court. Chanced on a property outside Jackson, Mississippi. On Moncure Lane. Went to check out the lot, not yet recognizing the name.

Then when I arrived. FLASHBACK CITY. This is where one of the exploration drilling rigs I worked on at Exxon was. Gulp! The Moncure Wildcat. Got me in the Three Mile Club. (Three+ miles deep, a big deal back in '80. Still is!)

A year or so after I moved to a minuscule town in the mountains (the Appalachian Trail goes through here and we're at the edge of the Great Smokey Mountain National Park – never been to either); well I mustered the gumption to attend an Anglican Church in an historic chapel in town.

OMG. Who do you think I ran into? Walter Skaggs, one of the superintendents I worked for when I was at Exxon's Inland Drilling Group. Like, all of FORTY years ago! Old geezer remembered me. How we played golf

once. . . That was the last time I went to THAT church. Hell, to ANY church.

I don't much like it when God intervenes in the domestic tranquility of my life, as you may have surmised. Although, I must admit, these little asides do add a little pizzazz to an otherwise VERY boring story. \

Hey, thanks, Dude. I owe you one – or three.

My only friends since then (has it been 20 years? Damn) have been the characters in my screenplays. And my cats. First Jaxx. Then when she died of kidney failure, Oscar. Bevo joined the household a couple of years ago. HOWLING at the front door in the middle of a snowstorm. Welcome, friend.

Nuestro casa es su casa. Our house is your house.

I had settled in a tiny little town with a BIG footprint. (An old geezer down the street seen Sasdquach once. Cherokee kids over in Chenoah, too.) Robbinsville, North Carolina.

Right there at the foot of “The Dragon.” World famous motorcycle trail through the Tennessee Mountains. 320 curves in 11 miles of traitorous. A dozen crosses with fake flowers along the way.

My eye doctor finally found a prescription med where I get almost a day's work out of my eyes. (Relax, the VA is putting me back on the old Rx, so before this book comes out I'll be back in the Dark Ages.)

But I'm not complaining. I keep my eyes closed when I'm not reading (haven't read for pleasure in 30 years, my old sci-fi favorites). I use drops. Omega-3s.

Winters are the worst because the air is very, VERY dry. A humidifier helps a little. My eyes are red all the time (bloodshot). Folks no doubt think I'm an alcoholic. Tiny little town in the middle of the Bible Belt?

That's okay, I don't give a sh*t what they think.

I'm healthier than 85% of American youngsters (blood pressure, pulse, lipids). I stay very fit. My gold standard is that I can still qualify to enlist in the Army (75% of young kids can't) despite my disabilities. And the other 10%? I still love my country, despite all that has happened because I know they weren't true Americans who did all that.

Kids these days? They overwhelmingly favor communism over democracy.

Who, me? Wear the uniform? Not even on Halloween. (You want communism? You want to live a life like I just lived that you have just read all about?!)

Excuse me, but those 75 percent of youngsters who can't meet the bare minimum standards to enlist in the Army? Most are disqualified because of weight, but also mental problems and drug use. Surprise!

Marijuana these days is LITERALLY 100x more potent than the weed when I was growing up. Hell, that sh*t now is worse than hashish back then – cocaine even.

I mean, really, folks – the Army fitness bar for enlistment is very low. They know how to get folks into shape. All they need is solid bones with a few scrawny muscles attached. They can work with that. So, these kids must be pretty sorry specimens indeed.

This makes me think of the 60% of trans kids who are obese. Hello? The doctors don't see something odd when an OBESE male is convinced he wants to be an OBESE female? (Hint: body fat skews your hormones to the estrogen side. Doh! Of COURSE, he thinks he's female. "Lose weight, stupid. Then - Join the Army. "Be All You Can Be." After Basic Training and you still want to go trans; well, - we'll see.)

I still don't take meds for the schizophrenia. A couple of years ago I discovered that GABA, a very inexpensive supplement, helps a LOT. Wow. Excellent.

I only tried GABA because I read several formal, peer-reviewed scientific studies. I don't put ANYTHING into my body that hasn't been studied at length like that, for many years or investigation by impartial scientists.

(And trans kids dump chemicals into their system that have never been studied, not one iota? Obliterating puberty – that time when the body fine-tunes itself, coordinates the brain, heart, bones – every damn thing. You want to wreck your body like that?)

Our almost-nationalized healthcare system should have a rule. We'll take care of all the usual stuff. However, there's a maximum limit on what we will pay

if you are obese, smoke, do drugs, or any other out-of-the-norm stuff.

Wanna go trans? Okay, the complications are going to max out your supplemental - immediately. Need any help after that, it's on your dime. Now. How about let's go play soldier in the Army.

I'm sorry if I sound like such a bigot over the whole trans agenda. "Recreational" drugs. And obesity, to a lesser extent. You have to see where I'm coming from.

My brain is fu*cked up. Seriously so. You've seen it. With the hood propped open. The engine sputtering.

You want to be just like me? Everything odd you put into your body risks that. Everything that keeps your body off balance, to a lesser extent – O.B.E.S.I.T.Y. for one.

You truly get a kick out of weed? Try running six miles in the mountains. The endorphins will blow you away. Drug highs dissipate in a few hours. Fitness highs last for days – weeks. And. It's. Free.

Eat a healthy diet. You'll feel like a million bucks in no time at all. Still want to go trans? For God's sake, find out what your birth sex is like before you do that. Get through puberty. Have your first orgasm; and not with some centerfold or in a one-night stand like is the standard on TV in the movies.

Orgasm with love in your heart, not effing lust! Now. You still want to drink the Kool-Aid?

I keep a VERY strict routine. Thanks to Oscar the cat, I NEVER sleep late (except one day a year in the fall

when they do Daylight Savings time – and I mean really, just that ONE day).

I eat well. Don't smoke. No alcohol. Not even caffeine (which dries the eyes out). 45-minute walk 2x/day (FAST, enough so you can barely talk – any slower and it won't help your heart OR your cholesterol levels).

Weight-bearing workout most days on one muscle group or other (knee-, frozen shoulder-, and tennis elbow-exercises).

But most of all it's the ROUTINE that keeps me halfway sane. Up at the exact same time. Breakfast at the exact same time. Lunch. Dinner. A half-hour of TV with Bevo snoozing in my lap before turning in – at the exact same time.

I spend as much time as I can each day writing one thing or another. Studying. Editing my screenplays.

This. Routine. Does. Not. Change. It's 7 days a week 365.25 days a year.

Even a slight deviation as small as taking a morning off for a VA appointment throws me out of whack. It takes a couple days to get my sane back.

I can't complain about the VA doctors. Except. Lately, they really have gone woke, trying to make up for past injustices, I suppose. Anymore, the Hippocratic Oath doesn't apply to white people.

“To hell with protein powder. Eat red meat. Every day. Lots of it,” Dr. Hall told me.

My dermatologist said, “Stay off the Internet. Got any questions, ask me,” after I had 10 spots of skin cancer removed a few months ago.

(One of them was a GIANT mole on my nose that’s been there for 5-6 years – nobody ever noticed it before? Annual checkups? Starring RIGHT AT IT.)

I asked him a simple question about skincare. Didn’t answer what I asked about. This is me – on the web.

“Wear a shirt outside,” he said. The INTERNET said, “Shirts only block 20% of UVA and UVB rays,” especially cotton, which drops it to 10%.

Like, hello? Who would YOU believe?

It’s hard not to wonder where I’d be if Dr. Parra had kept giving me therapy back then. (I don’t blame her or the VA. The problem is with their FUNDING. The problem is Congress. The VOTERS – who apparently despise veterans.)

I probably would have done okay in grad school. Be a professor right now. Hell, maybe even a Nobel Laureate if my transistor model panned out.

The Solar System model? NASA would have saved multiple BILLIONS on their Mars missions, all the energy my Mars Pathfinder routine would have saved them. Hey, that’s not on me. That’s on Texas.

That’s on the whole evil “NASA Culture” that the US Navy investigation blamed for the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster in 2003.

What, with my 100% rating, I’d be a big shot at NASA by now.

I could see a VA social worker now, I suppose. It's not an MD therapist, but it's something. Except I have zero "social" now. Nothing to "work" on, either.

I can't even afford to go church (which is pretty much the social life here). Zero \$\$ for the silver plate. Not even \$\$ for gas to get there. Ran myself into the ground with bad financial decisions.

In retrospect, it was a kind of suicide attempt. It worked!

I'm sorry that 65% of Americans are also living paycheck to paycheck. It's a miserable way to live. A little oversight from the VA could have helped. One shred of interest from my family or neighbors.

But no, we don't want no schizophrenic in our family. In our neighborhood. Too late now. I'll be dirt poor throughout my "golden years."

I wrote a letter to the editor for our local rag The Graham County Star. Got people to take down all the "FREE INTERNET" spam signs along The Dragon, that breakneck road across the Tennessee mountains to Knoxville. Too distracting.

Complained once about the Tennessee DPS giving me a ticket when I was driving a NISSAN Armada (like, the biggest vehicle ever made – damn ride was so smooth, better than my old Mini roadster, didn't have clue one about my speed).

"Sir? . . . That fast? . . . Don't my disabled license plates count for something? . . .

"You trying to bribe an Officer of the Court?"

Yeah. I paid the \$250 fine by mail. Tucked a letter in the envelope, however; telling the effing judge to send some troopers to slow down the racing bikes on The Dragon so us mere mortals can cruise along at the standard 9 MPH over the speed limit that the taxi guy in Murphy told me is the limit on DPS radars.

I'm on good terms with my neighbors, but nothing more. I keep the yard up, pay my homeowners dues (for the most part; right now, on account of my financial straits, I'm paying my annual dues monthly).

I mind my own business.

I leave table scraps and nibbles out every night for a raccoon (who I've only seen once in the last six years – scared the both of us!!).

I whistle and bark at a nice black and white dog down the street when I'm out walking – he YELPS back (but HOWLS at everybody else passing by).

Haven't sold any screenplays yet. Conservative? Hollywood? BLACKLISTED!!! That's me. (Please don't tell them I said that. Only kidding.)

But, hey – I developed my writing “voice,” like you seen here, with all the crazy sentences and grammar bad enough to get me an express ticket to Hell. (Even after Dr. Grammarly underlines things for me.)

I look forward to the hummingbirds returning from Mexico next spring. I worry at the tail end of hurricane season, when they're making that trip, that it won't wipe out my little buddies. (They return to the exact same place every year in the spring.)

A really bad cold snap froze my pyracanthas out last winter. They grew back real nice this year, though. I'll be happy next year when they cheer up the place with those bright orange berries again.

(When you trim them, they don't flower the next season.)

Oh, and those audio voice-over hallucinations (when you hear somebody say something they didn't actually say) that caused me no end of trouble after I got expelled from Texas?

I was looking at one new house before I left Vicksburg, a real wreck that the realtor called a "fixer-upper." A real stinker. Hah! I had a terrible olfactory hallucination – s.h.i.t. smell.

Okay, brain. I get the message.

I found a "fix" for the voice-overs. Well, for one thing, they don't happen if you aren't EVER around people. Doh! Just. Stay. Away. From. People. It works – amazing!

Otherwise; well, I just watch Spanish-language TV now. Love those telenovelas, especially the older ones. I'm starting to get voice-overs again, even in Spanish. But, hey – when they start bothering me, I'll switch to Italian.

Ciao bella! Buongiorno!

I had a few video conversations with a nice lady in Brazil last year. She tried to help me learn Portuguese. Said I speak with an Italian accent, which evidently offended her no end. She told me to listen to Brazilian rock and roll music.

Get. Your. Accent. Down. Straight. Senior.

Oh, wait. Got a phone call . . . As in, like, the first one
– ever. (Other than spam calls.)

Yellowww?

. . . Mr. Christ? Oh, wow. What's going on, dude?

Long time no see.

Beat.

What did I do wrong this time?

“Now that you mention it, I just got a fax from
Brother Lucifer, asking for candidates.”

You called the right place. . . Oh, me? Sorry, guy. I
DO like warm climates but more as in FLORIDA -
warm?

“Shut up, O’Cleary. Your sister Regan put down a
bunch of chips, asked me to call you.”

Huh? You guys have a casino up there? Doh! Wait –
you know my ancestral name?

“Sinner ID on the phone? What kind of operation do
you think I’m running up here?”

About them openings in Hell, Mr. Christ, Sir. Got a
boatload of suggestions for you. I mean a whole damn
new wing of the insane asylum.

“Hang on. (Hollering across the room.) Mohammed?
Moses? Get over here. . . I’ll put you on speakerphone.”

(quietly) What about Brother Lucifer? Isn’t he the
one doing the recruiting? I don’t mind pissing you guys
off, but definitely not the Big Guy.

“And you wonder why my line is busy all the time.
Talk!”

Okay. (YELLING) Everybody got a pencil and paper.
.. Mr. Christ?
“Call me Jesus. Everybody does.”
Yes. Sir. Mr. Christ.
“William . . . “
Okay. This is me. TALKING . . .

Seventeen

Thus we end as we began, the perfect Hollywood “bookends” finale – the schizophrenic turns out to be nothing more than just that. . . The thriller movie has its second ending, and everybody is happy because it’s just like we suspected all along: The Z is merely a Happy Gilmer cajun on a Forest Gump ego trip with delusions of having A Beautiful Mind.

Thank the gods. Our venerable institutions and their brilliant leaders have honored the national civic with diligence, decency, and dedication. We can all sleep that much better, knowing the bastions of civilization are protected by their likes.

Not so fast, y’all. The fat lady hasn’t sung yet. (With all due respect to folks who are overweight.)

Why not? Because you all made the same mistake as Professor Szebehely in the infamous Theory of Orbits class where I presented my swank solar system model. And, stupid me, I believed him, too.

“Solve for the time unknown,” he told me, “and you’ll get your name lit up in lights.”

But, alas, I’m a severe chronic schizophrenic and everything that comes out of my head is flat-out wrong. Just like the “authorities” at Texas said.

Oh – REALLY?

Let’s talk about that solar system model of mine. I eliminated upwards of 40 unknowns. Instead of six orbital elements for the nine planets I had just two. Dr. Z was right – I didn’t have time. The question is: did I need it? I could care less about having my “name lit up in lights.” All I wanted was a goddamn Ph.D. F the “lights.”

Remember Copernicus, the man who came up with the heliocentric (sun-centered) model of the solar system? Before that, everything revolved around the Earth. That geocentric model was a complex menagerie of wheels, gears, and wheels-within-gears. The new heliocentric model had the planets in nice, circular orbits. Simple as can be. Nature loves simple.

There was no time in Copernicus’ model. All the planets were in circular orbits. They were all in the same orbital plane. We’d say now each planet was represented by a single orbital element, its radius from the sun.

Over time, the heliocentric model evolved to include time and the other five orbital elements.

NASA (in their 1982 letter) and Dr. Z wrongly expected a complete model that explained everything. But that’s not how science works. A model is just that. A MODEL.

The whole purpose of science is to advance MODELS to be more and more accurate.

My solar system model was FUNDAMENTAL. There were no underlying assumptions. Fundamental models are unheard of in science these days. They're heresy, and I was the heretic. I was burned at the stake by the Holy Inquisition.

I can say that because I TESTED my model. I discovered that it explained phenomena that had never fit into ANY model before: the retrograde rotation of Venus and Uranus, the rings around the four outer gaseous planets, and the moon's inexplicable way of always keeping the same side facing Earth.

That's how MODELS work. They help to explain OTHER phenomena. In so doing, with each new phenomenon explained, the model takes a baby step toward becoming a LAW.

Celestial Mechanics is now dead and buried. It's gone. Poof. A discipline that has spawned dozens of sciences from quantum mechanics to astrophysics. Boom! Thrown under the bus.

When you're fighting for the very survival of an entire science, there are no rules. Conversely, from the perspective of Texas, when you're fighting to keep an entire science dead and buried, there are no rules.

Texas broke every rule in their own regulations to get rid of me. Every oversight agency above Texas seconded their actions – ABET, the PE Board, the Texas Legislature, right on up to the US Department of Education.

Is that how you want science to work? Imposing mandates from on high? Beating up on a “highly functional” schizophrenic rated at 0% until by the time he’s expelled with extreme malice he’s rated 100% Permanent and Total, forever after unable to even LOOK at mathematical equations much less ADVANCE his work.

I’m not bitter. Or angry. It just think it’s funny that, not being able to do math anymore, I used all that energy and brain power to advance my work into an area where I’m untouchable – philosophy.

Evil never wins.

The End

