

“THE RUNAWAY KID.”

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BY

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CHAPTERS

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INTRODUCTION

I, JP Harrison was one of six children in a home run by a dictator of a Father.

None of us boys could call our Father anything but, Sir.

Not by the name of Father, Dad, or Pa. Just by, Sir.

There were four boys and two twin girls in the Harrison household.

All of us grew up on our Dad's mental and emotional abuse, except me.

I kept running away from home.

The State of Alaska finally takes me away from my parents and makes me a ward of the State.

The State of Alaska then ships me to California to a reform school called Karl Holton.

The Judge calls me, "**The Runaway Kid.**"

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CHAPTER ONE

My name is JP Harrison. My Father never in his life gives me a hug or a kiss, sad, but true. I was born in Yakima, Washington on a military base.

When I was born, I had two older brothers.

Steve age seven and David age four. Three years later my twin Sisters are born in Okinawa, Japan. My Father is on active duty at the time in the U.S. Army.

My twin Sisters, Venus and Victoria are Daddy's girls. In my Dad's eyes, my Sisters can do nothing wrong. If they wanted something I had, I learned quickly to turnover what was mine to them.

I had to learn this lesson the hard way.

When I was twelve, a neighbor of mine, gave me a box of old donuts. I was eating my snack in my room when my Sisters came in after school.

Venus said, "Give me the donuts. I want them."

I said, "No, they are all mine."

Venus laughed and said, "Give me the donut box. If you do not, I will tell Dad you hit me."

I mistakenly said, "Dad will not believe you. You have no red marks on your face."

Venus slaps her face and replies, "I do now. Give me the donuts."

I repeated, "No, the donuts are mine."

Venus runs out of my bedroom screaming and crying fake tears to Dad, “JP hit me. I wanted a donut, and he said no.”

The next thing I hear are heavy footsteps coming down the hall quickly. My bedroom door burst open and there stands my Dad, all six feet six inches of him looking at me with a mean look on his face.

Behind my Dad, stands my evil sister, Venus, with a wicked smile on her face.

Without warning my Dad slaps me off my bed and I hit the floor hard.

My Dad says, “You Punk, Why did you hit your sister? Give her the box of Donuts, now.”

“Yes, sir.”

I am crying when I hand over my box of donuts to Venus, who is smiling.

“Here you go.”

Venus runs out of my room with her twin sister Victoria running behind her saying, “I want a donut.”

Venus keeps running down the hall saying, “No. They are all mine.”

My Father was in the Military 26 years.

Instead of living in military housing on base, my Father wanted to live in the middle of nowhere, far from the city of Fairbanks, Alaska.

My parents rented a log cabin with a fireplace as our only source of heat. Not a clever idea in the dead of winter when it is minus ten outside.

I remember waking up each winter morning with ice cycles hanging inside the bedroom windows. We had a large trash pit behind the log

cabin to throw our trash into. At night we would lay in bed and hear the bears roaming around in the trash pit not far away.

Every winter morning my brothers and I would have to get up early, put on our winter clothes, and go outside at five am, why? My Dad had to leave for work, and he needed our long driveway to the road cleared of snow. It was cold and demanding work.

Our Father said, “Shovel the snow to the right.”

“Yes, sir,” we said.

We did not listen to our Father the first time we had to shovel to the right the snow in our long driveway. We shoveled to the left instead of to the right like instructed to do.

“Once we finished shoveling the snow in the driveway, we came into the house and crawled back under the covers to get warm again.

Five minutes later our Father storms into our bedroom and tears off our warm blankets.

He shouts, “You Punks, Get back out there and shovel my driveway. Now I am late for work. I told you Punks to shovel the snow to the right.”

“We did, sir.”

We dressed quickly and went outside to see the driveway to the road all covered with snow again, just more of it. The reason our Father said to shovel to the right was the hidden wind was blowing left to right.

We did not listen, and we shoveled to the left, which made the wind blow the snow right back on the driveway. Not just were we cold, we had to work faster as our Father was yelling at us saying, “You Punk Kids. because of you Punks not following my directions I am late for work.”

There was no running water in the log cabin. To take baths my Father would pour cans of water into a rain barrel. Then my Mother would climb inside first and wash up, then my twin Sisters, then us four boys. The water was so dirty by the time I am able to take my bath.

In Fairbanks, Alaska there is an amusement park called Alaska Land. Every Easter there would be an Easter Egg hunt with prizes donated by businesses in the community.

The newspaper would print a list of which colored eggs were best. They did this a week prior to the hunt. Gold colored eggs were the best eggs to find. You would receive a gift certificate at a toy store.

This Easter Egg hunt was a huge annual event. The whole city would be there. I knew it was hard to find an egg with thousands of people doing the same thing, searching for an egg.

When we went to Alaska Land the year prior, we found zero eggs. This year I wanted an egg, and I had a plan. I borrowed a neighbor's pair of binoculars and went to the amusement park. I was fourteen years old.

Alaska Land was large.

Right in the middle of the park was a Mark Twain Riverboat docked by a large body of water. The park had a train that circled the amusement park. The park had seven lands to explore. The most popular land was the Western Town.

The crowds loved the gun-fighting duels, and gold-panning looking for gold.

I went to an isolated section of the park, dug under a tall chain-link fence, and made my way to the train tunnel. I hid in a dark corner and waited for the train to come into the tunnel.

They were evaluating the train and other rides before the park opened at noon. It was nine am when the train came into the tunnel.

I took the last row of seats and laid down out of site of the young conductor. I then hopped off the slow-moving train near the Mark Twain Riverboat.

I made my way to the Captain's wheel. From the high perch I could look 360 degrees at all the employees hiding the Easter Eggs.

I pulled out an ink pen and paper and started watching all the employees hide their catch of Easter eggs. They carried their dozen eggs in an open coverless egg carton. I was looking for Gold, Green, Yellow, or Brown eggs, as they had the best prizes.

You name it, the prize was there. Every business donated something for this extremely popular event. If you were lucky to find a hidden egg, you would report to the prize office to collect your prize.

I looked through my pair of binoculars and would follow a person carrying a gold egg in their open carton. I would write down where they hid the egg. In the Western town I saw one employee hide a gold egg in the gunslinger's statue's right boot.

I watched for over two hours and had a lengthy list of egg locations. I went back to the train tunnel and hid in a dark corner. The train came into the tunnel, and I hid in the back row.

I hopped out by the hole I dug and went home with my secret list.

I had one hour till the amusement park would open.

All my brother and Sisters were getting ready to go to the amusement park. My older brother was visiting us. He was a Marine in the Marine Core and immensely proud to be one, too.

I went to all my siblings and said, "I know where all the best eggs are hidden."

All my siblings laughed until I told them how I snuck into Alaska Land and where I hid to watch. I showed them the pair of binoculars I borrowed from a neighbor. After that, they all were on board my plan.

I gave each a section of the park to search once they opened the park for the hunt. We all would meet at the entrance to the prize office and go in together. Everyone was excited. They all knew they were going to get a prize.

My older brother drove us to the park. We stood out front with thousands of others and waited for the park to open at noon. We were so excited.

I made every one of my siblings swear to secrecy. I said we can do my plan every year from then on.

The gates to the amusement park opened after the Mayor and other city officials gave their speeches. A couple of helicopters were in the air broadcasting the event.

I ran to the gunslinger's right boot and picked up the gold egg. I ran to other spots and picked up more eggs. My siblings did the same thing.

We all met in front of the prize office. I had four eggs and each of my siblings had at least two each.

It was hard to even find one egg, so we knew we were incredibly lucky.

We went to the prize office, and I was the first one of my siblings to turn in my eggs. The clerk was surprised I had four eggs. She asked me my name. I said JP Harrison. I was handed my gift certificates and exited the office.

Imagine the surprised look on the clerk's face when handing out prize certificates to the next five kids. What is your name? Steve Harrison, David Harrison, Venus Harrison, Victoria Harrison, and Andy Harrison.

We made our way home and back to my bedroom.

We were sitting around saying what prizes we collected. One prize Venus had, my other sister, Victoria wanted.

Venus said, "No. It is my prize."

Victoria said, "Give me the prize or I will tell Mom what JP did."

My sister was only eleven at the time.

Venus looked at her and said, "No, it is my prize."

I said, "If you tell Mom, we all will be in trouble, and we all will have to return our prizes back in."

Victoria started crying and ran out of the room shouting, "Mom, Mom, guess what JP did?"

My Mother, named Bridget, walked into my bedroom, and collected all the prize certificates and marched us down to the prize office. Mom turned in the prizes and made us apologies for our crooked actions.

We sat around my bedroom with no prizes now. My punishment for being dishonest was doing all the dirty dishes by hand for a month.

As I did the dishes, I would think of the prizes I would have had if Victoria did not tell Mom I snuck into Alaska Land.

No doubt I was a clever child. I always found a way to get what I wanted.

Each night our Mother baked a cake for our Father. He told Mom, "I want a cake each night."

Every day after school I would walk into the kitchen and see my Mother baking away. Our Mother loved to cook and bake.

I loved to eat. I was known around my house as the garbage disposal. I would clean other family member's plates. I would ask, "Are you going to finish your pancakes? Can I have your potatoes?" I would do this everyday of the week. I was a chubby kid.

One night after dinner when my Mother brought in the cake for dessert she said, "I am getting tired of everyone asking me for the ninth and last slice of cake. This is what I plan to do starting tonight. We will make a game out of the last slice."

My Mother said, "I placed a hidden toothpick inside the cake. Which ever family member has the hidden toothpick in their slice gets the last piece of the cake. If no one has the toothpick, then Father gets the last slice."

We watched our Mother slice the cake into nine slices. We watched as our Mother handed us our own individual slice. We had to wait to eat our dessert till our Mother sat back down.

My Mother's cake was different each day. They all had whip cream in the middle and decorated with some kind of topping. My Mother was a baker. We would rush home from school just to lick the batter bowl.

I wanted the extra slice, but my odds were lousy in getting the extra slice. One out of eight were lousy odds.

My Sisters would smash their cake down looking for the toothpick. I ate my slice slowly waiting to see if I was the lucky one that night.

This looking for the hidden toothpick went on for weeks.

One day, I came home from school and watched my Mother remove the cake from the oven. She sliced the cake into three slices, placed whip cream on each slice, then stacked the slices back into a cake.

My Mother placed the toothpick in the cake, then spread whip cream frosting around the whole cake. Mother then add fruit, coconut pieces, cherries, and other toppings as decoration and placed the cake on the kitchen counter till dessert time.

When I saw my Mother hide the toothpick in the cake and cover the toothpick with frosting, I had an idea.

I went over to the cake, took my finger, and took a sample of the whip cream. I said, "This is good whip cream, Mom."

I then left the kitchen and let my Mother continue finishing the work to make our dessert ready. What no one knew was, I marked the cake plate with a small sample of whip cream directly over where the toothpick was. I was marketing my territory.

Later, when no one was in the kitchen, I would sneak in, find the whip cream mark I made on the plate and find the hidden toothpick. I then spread the whip cream back in place and kept the toothpick.

After dinner, my Mom would slice the cake into nine slices. Mom would give each of us our slice. When the family watched my Sisters smash down their slice looking for the hidden toothpick, I would quickly place my toothpick into my slice. Later I would say, "I have the toothpick."

"My younger Sisters, age eleven would cry out, "I wanted the toothpick."

Once my trick started working all I had to do was go home as quick as I could from school, sit at the breakfast table pretending to do my homework and wait for my Mom to insert the toothpick for that night.

Then I would get up, grab my books, take a sample of whip cream, mark the plate, and leave the room. Then come back when everyone else was not in the kitchen and remove the hidden toothpick.

The tricky part was inserting the toothpick into my slice of cake. In the beginning it was easy, the family was watching my Sisters smash their slices down.

After a week straight of me winning the extra slice of cake, all eyes were on me receiving my slice.

I would distract the family with a story from class. I would quickly insert the toothpick or have it in my hand and pretend I removed it from my slice of cake.

Every time I would say, “I have the toothpick,” my Sisters would cry.

One or both would say, “Why does JP always get the extra slice, it is not fair. I hate this game.”

This went on for weeks because I loved dessert so much. My Father once said to me, “You better marry a woman that loves to cook, as you love to eat.”

On occasions I could not insert the toothpick into my slice of cake. Too many eyes were on me. When no toothpick appeared, my Mother would say to us kids, “Sorry, I must have forgotten to put one in.”

After weeks of me winning the extra slice, I finally made a stupid confession to the whole family when Mom gave me my slice. I said, “I have to confess I stole the hidden toothpick after Mom placed the toothpick in the cake.” I said with a smile, “When no one was looking, I would take the toothpick and place it in my slice.”

My Dad said, “Tell me now, Punk how you did it.”

I pulled the toothpick out of my shirt pocket and explained how I marked the cake plater. There on that night’s dessert platter was the whip cream mark. Everyone was mad that I had been tricking them for weeks.

My Dad said, “For being dishonest, no dessert for you for a month. You also will wear the same clothes to school for a month.”

“Yes, sir.”

In bed that night my brother David said, “I wish I thought of that whip cream, mark the plater trick.”

I said to David, “I had to say something, it was getting old for me always winning.”

Why did we move away from Carson City, Nevada, and go all the way to Fairbanks, Alaska? I liked where we lived, the school, and my friends. The only thing I did not like was doing stupid chores our Father gave us to keep us busy.

There is a weed-type bush called sagebrush that grows in the hot sun of Nevada. It was everywhere. Behind our house we had a large dirt yard with thousands of sagebrush bushes.

One day, my Father said to us three boys, “I want you to go out back and pull the sagebrush out of the ground.”

“Yes, sir.”

David, Andy, and I watched our Father drive away to his place of employment, Joe’s Crow’s Mint, a small casino. My Dad was the food and beverage manager. A skill he learned in the U.S. Army.

My older brother, Steve was in the U.S. Marine Corps. He was away in Boot Camp. Lucky brother.

I hated this choir of pulling the sagebrush out of the ground. My Mother had to pull me by the ear to get me out of the television room. Mom would say, “Your Father will be disappointed if you do not do what he says. You do not want your Father angry when he gets home.”

I was pulling sagebrush in the hot sun. I was fourteen years of age when I decided I was not going to pull sagebrush anymore.

My older brother, David said, “Dad will spank you with a belt when he gets home after he finds out you did not pull weeds.”

“Mom will protect me. She will not tell Dad I quit.”

“Mom won’t tell but I will tell.”

“Why would you tell, Dad?”

“To see you get whipped with a belt.”

David laughs when he says that statement.

I sit by the locked sliding door and watch my two brothers pull sagebrush. David keeps saying, “You are going to get whipped when Dad gets home.”

“I do not care. I am not pulling anymore sagebrush.”

My Mother is standing behind me when I say, “I do not care. I am not pulling anymore sagebrush.”

I do not hear the rear sliding glass door open. I do not know my Mom is behind me.

My Mom pulls me up by the ear and says, “Get back out there with your brothers and pull sagebrush. You do not want me to tell your Father you refused to pull sagebrush.”

I break away from my Mom’s grasp and say, “I am not pulling anymore sagebrush. I hate this stupid detail.”

My Mom starts walking toward me. I run down the dirt road in front of our house to get away.

My Mom chases me a long ways. Mom trips and falls to the ground. I want to turn around and go back to help her get up, but I did not want to pull sagebrush, so I keep running.

Mom says, “Wait till I tell your Father.”

Our Mother would always protect us when my Dad was mad, or when he said his favorite phrase, “You are lying, Punk.”

I hide out in the sagebrush in front of the house till it grows dark. My Mother keeps looking out for me saying, “JP come in.”

I do not come in till hours after my Father returns from his job.

My Dad is mad. He says, “Lay on the couch on your stomach.”

“Yes, sir.”

The next thing I know, my Dad is holding my arms and my brother David is holding my feet. My Mother walks over and starts whipping my back with a belt. I start crying, “Stop, stop, I will pull sagebrush, tomorrow.”

My Father says, “Too late, Punk.”

My Mother finally stops whipping me with the belt. Then to my horror my Dad takes over whipping me while my Mother holds my arms. The only reason the whipping stops is because the belt brakes.

My Father says to David, “Go get me another belt.”

My Mother speaks up and says, “No. No more. I see blood coming from under JP’s t-shirt.”

I am in my bed crying all night. The pain is too much at times. My Brother David, sleeping in the next bed says, “I warned you to pull sagebrush with me, but you said no.”

I am moaning in pain and my brother is laughing all night.

I have deep scars on my back as a reminder to listen to my Dad.

My older Brother, Steve was lucky to escape the Harrison household. He did this by joining the United States Marine Corp.

Our Father required each of us every Sunday to write Steve a five-page letter.

My twin Sisters enclosed coins in their letters.

Steve called one day and said to our Mother, “No more coins. I have to do pushups for every coin I receive.”

Steve should not have told us that.

While in Boot Camp Steve receives five letters a week from his siblings and every letter has coins. This went on for four more weeks. When Boot Camp to be a Marine is over Steve went to his advanced training school which was for drafting. Steve is a good artist.

After graduating the advanced art school, Steve comes home for his thirty days leave. We are living in Carson City, Nevada.

Our family keeps moving back and forth from Fairbanks, Alaska to Carson City, Nevada. Why? I do not know.”

My Mother has Steve watch his five siblings while my Mother drives to Lake Tahoe to play Bingo. My Mom loves playing Bingo.

One day all my brothers and I are playing the boardgame Monopoly. Steve wants to be the banker. This way he can cheat and hide the play money he needs to continue. He always places his stolen loot under the playing board. He wants to win that bad.

We catch him cheating and bring this to his attention. He gets mad and flips the boardgame. Every game piece goes flying around the living room. Steve looks at us and says, “Now pick it all up.”

David and I make the mistake and say, “No, you pick it up.”

Steve bites his upper lip and says, “I am going to beat you up the Marine Corp way. We laugh at what he says till he bites his upper lip. We know from previous incidents that if Steve bites his upper lip, he is going to do it.

David and I run out of the house and climb a ladder to the roof. We pull the ladder up with us. Steve comes outside looking for us. We laugh and say, “You can’t get us up here.”

Big mistake on our part for letting our brother know we were on the roof.

Steve ran to the roof and jumped up. He grabbed the roof ledge and pulled himself up.

Steve was strong from doing all the extra pushups in Boot Camp from the coins we put in our letters to him.

The next thing we know our older Brother is up on the roof with us. We were so scared of our Brother that David and I jumped off the roof, ran into the sagebrush, and hid.

After three hours David says, "I am tired being out here. I am going in the house and getting my punishment over with."

"Not me," I say. "I am going to the garage attic and hide in there."

David goes in the house, and I hide in the attic. I fall asleep by the trap door. Suddenly my Brother hits me in the throat with his fist and says, "Get down here now."

I get down fast and I am crying. I say, "Do not hit me."

"I will not hit you. Come with me."

I follow Steve to David's locked room.

Steve knocks and says, "Open the door."

David replies, "No, you will beat me up again."

Steve says, "No, I will not beat you up. Let your Brother in his room."

I shout, "David unlock the door. I want to come in my room."

David makes the mistake of unlocking the door.

I went into my room followed by Steve. He beat David up and said, “Do not lock the bedroom door on me again.”

David was crying and replied, “I will not lock the door on you again.”

After Steve left our room, I said, “Why did you tell Steve where I was hiding?”

“He made me tell him where you were hiding. I knew not to unlock the bedroom door.”

I reply, “Steve told me he was giving you ten seconds to open the door, or he was going to kick it in. I believe he would kick the door in.”

We both lay in bed crying, wishing our Mother would return from Lake Tahoe from playing Bingo.

There is a stop sign when you come down the hill from Lake Tahoe. The cars stop, then turn left to go into Carson City, then travel on to the City of Reno.

Just before entering Carson City there is a Casino called Joe Crow’s Mint. My Father is employed as the marketing manager. My Dad has an idea to bring in the travelers from Lake Tahoe, to make them stop at Joe Crow’s Mint.

He makes coupon flyers for each adult in a vehicle. Our Dad places us boys one at a time to stand there in the hot sun by the stop sign. We are to hand each adult a coupon flyer.

The flyer is good for a free beverage, donuts, and five dollars in free slot play. On the coupon are free ice cream and video game tokens for the children in the arcade. The flyers work.

Hundreds of vehicles stop at Joe Crow’s Mint. My Dad is right. He figures the travelers will want to take a break from the long drive from Lake Tahoe.

The police let us kids alone because we were legal if we stayed on the median strip by the stop sign.

When a vehicle stops at the stop sign, I say, “Free slot machine play, and free ice cream for the kids, just one mile down the road on your right.”

I then ask, “How many adults in your vehicle?”

If the driver says three, I hand the driver three coupons.

My two other Brothers relieve me after I stand in the hot sun for two hours. My Dad picks me up and we drive back to the casino.

When we drive over the hill, I see hundreds of vehicles parked around the casino property. I say, “Wow.”

My Father travels everywhere in Nevada and California stopping at hotels to issue them casino brochures. Sometimes my Dad would be gone for days. It was nice having no strict Dad around.

Our Father makes us sleep on our backs, hands at our sides, and with the bedroom door open. Bedtime is eight pm sharp. We ask our Mother why Dad is mean to us, slapping us all the time, calling us Punks.

Our Mother says, “It was the war he fought in. It changed him.”

I wanted to play Little League baseball. I had no family support.

My Mom says they have no money for a glove, baseball cleats, or a uniform. Mom drops me off and pick me up after practice and after games we play.

None of my family goes to any of my games to cheer me on. I play at most, two innings a game in right field.

One of Dad’s rules is, no school friends over.

We had to make excuses why we could not have anyone over. We also could not go to their residences either. Our Dad said, "Play with your friends in the yard only."

Now and then our Mom would let a kid come in to use the bathroom or have a slice of her cakes she made every day. If our Dad were home, he would mess with the boy that visited.

Our Dad would ask the child questions he knew they did not have the answers for. The boys would say "I don't know" all the time." After the boy left to go back outside, our Father would laugh and say, "That boy sure is stupid, he knows nothing."

I asked my Mother why our Dad always made our friends think they were stupid.

Mom said, "Because his Dad did the very same thing to him."

Our older Brother, Steve was away in the Marine Corp. He would call Mom now and then. He was getting married and wanted Mom and Dad to come to North Carolina.

Mom said, "No. We have no money. Your Dad will not let me work, and we have only one income. Send us photos, Son."

My older Brother, David always picked on me. One morning I saw him putting Vitalis brand hair cologne on himself. He left the bathroom, and I had an idea.

I took the top off of the large bottle of Vitalis and peed in it. I replaced the cap and placed the bottle back on the shelf. This was my way of getting even for David hitting me all the time.

Every morning I would watch him splash the Vitalis on his hair and rub it in. David would see me watching him and say, "Why are you watching me? Go away. He would then shut the bathroom door on me.

This went on for weeks.

One morning David said to me as he held the Vitalis bottle up to the light. “What is this milky film in the bottle?”

I could not hold back anymore and blurted out, “It is my pee. I peed in your bottle.” I started laughing.

David put down the bottle of Vitalis and ran out of our room screaming, “Mom, Mom.”

I quickly took the bottle of Vitalis and dumped the rest of the contents in the sink and rinsed the bottle. I placed the empty bottle back on the bathroom shelf.

Mom and David came in the room and went to the bathroom. David held up the empty bottle of Vitalis and said, “JP peed in my bottle. He was getting even for me hitting him.”

Mother looked at David and said, “You know JP gets even with anyone that messes with him. Quit hitting him and get along.”

Mom then walked out of the room and there stood David holding the empty Vitalis bottle. David looked at me and I was laughing.

One night around midnight our Mother woke us all up and said, “Get up, we are leaving this trailer for good. Pack your clothes only.”

“Why, Mom?” We all asked.

Our Mother would just go from bedroom to bedroom saying, “Get dressed, and be quite doing so.”

We had two cars till the police took one. Why I did not know, but it was gone. We were packing when our Mother said, “Stay here. Your Father and I will be right back.”

Thirty minutes later our parents returned, and our Mother said, “Start loading the cars.”

Did my Mom say cars? I looked out the living room window in the darkness and saw our two cars sitting in the driveway.

I asked, “How did you get our station wagon back from the police impoundment lot? I thought you said we have no money.”

Our Father replied, “It is of no concern of yours. Get in the cars.”

I did not want to sit with my Sisters. They always took what they wanted from me. They loved being around our Father.

I asked, Mom, “What car are you driving tonight?”

“I am driving the Chevy Impala.”

“I placed my trash bags of a suitcase into the trunk and climbed into the back right of the Impala. David and Andy joined me. We watched our Sisters jump in the front seat of the station wagon. We heard our Father say, “Climb in the back seat, Girls.”

“Alright, Daddy.”

My Sisters did not have to call our Father, Sir. Just us boys. They could get away with murder in our family. They knew what buttons to push to get their way. My Sisters could do no wrong and they knew it.

While driving out of Carson City, Nevada our Mother looked worried.

“What is wrong, Mom?” I asked as she kept looking in her rearview mirror.

“We had to steal the station wagon back from the police. No way seven of us with luggage could fit in the Impala.”

“How did you steal the car back?” I asked.

“Your Father had an extra key. He climbed the fence, found the station wagon and after breaking the gate lock, we drove our car to the house to pick you all up.”

“Why are we leaving in the middle of the night?” David asked.

“There is a police officer that likes your Father. He came over to the house and warned your Father he was going to jail in the morning for theft. So, we are packing up tonight and leaving the State.”

“Where are we moving to,” I asked.

My Mom says, “We are moving to Fairbanks, Alaska again.”

I said, “We were there just two years ago. We are not moving back to the log cabin with the bears roaming the trash pit, are we?”

“No, JP, we are not. I do not like living in harsh conditions.”

“Where are we moving to then?”

“Just wait and see. Let me focus on my driving.”

Five days later we pull up to an apartment complex called Palm View in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Mom says, “Boys, we are home. I have the key to unit three.”

Dad walks in with my Sisters.

Victoria says, “This place is small. Where am I sleeping?”

Mom says, “You girls are in one bed, David and JP are in one bed, and Andy sleeps on the living room couch.”

Dad replies, “Once I find a job and income starts coming in, we will rent a house with five bedrooms.”

I hated going to school. I was not the studying type. I already flunked third grade. Now I was fifteen years of age. I started skipping school as much as I could.

Every night our Father would interrogate us about our day at school. If caught in a lie our Dad would slap us and say, “Lying Punk.”

My younger Brother, Andy hated oatmeal. My Dad made him oatmeal every morning. I guess he did so just to see my Brother gag.

One school morning my Brother was eating his oatmeal slowly. He looked up at the clock on the wall, waiting for the time to leave to catch the school bus. Andy was eight years old.

When the time arrived to leave to catch the school bus my Father said, “Wait.”

We watched our Father pull out a large empty jar with no label. He poured Andy’s oatmeal into the jar. He handed the jar to Andy and said, “Take this to school and have it for lunch. I will be coming to the school to check on you.”

Andy started crying. He says, “This looks like brain matter.”

Our Dad says, “Leave now for the school bus.”

We walk to the crowded apartment complex bus stop and join a dozen or so other children. Everyone laughs at Andy holding the jar of oatmeal. They say, “What is that? It looks like brains.”

Andy starts crying again and says, “My Father wants me to eat my breakfast oatmeal for lunch. I hate oatmeal.”

The school bus comes, and we all climb on board. Andy leaves the jar of oatmeal on the bus. Our Father knows Andy will not eat his breakfast oatmeal for lunch.

That night at dinner our Father starts interrogating us about our school day. He says to me, “What did you have for lunch?”

“I had spaghetti, sir.”

“Do you have any homework to do?”

“Yes, sir. I have math problems to solve.”

My Father then turns to Andy and says, “Did you have your oatmeal for lunch?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Where did you eat your oatmeal at?”

“The cafeteria, sir.”

“What did you eat your oatmeal with?”

“A spoon, sir.”

“Where did you get the spoon at?”

“The cafeteria, sir.”

“You ate all your oatmeal?”

Andy lies and says, “Yes, sir.”

My Dad gets up from his chair and walks over to Andy sitting at the end of the dining room table. Dad says, “You ate all your oatmeal in the cafeteria.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I say again, you ate all your oatmeal for lunch in the school cafeteria.”

Andy looks down and says, “Yes, sir.”

Suddenly our Dad slaps Andy right out of his chair. When Andy hits the floor, our Father goes over and stands over him. He starts slapping him saying, “You are lying, Punk.”

“I am not lying, sir. I ate my oatmeal in the cafeteria.”

My Dad slaps my eight-year-old Brother one more time. My Dad then grabs him by the arm and says, “You are a lying, Punk. You did not eat your oatmeal. If you did eat all your oatmeal, you would have found the spoon I hid in the jar. Now go to your room. No more dinner tonight.”

Victoria says, “Can I have his slice of cake?”

My Dad traps all my siblings in lies except me. I am too smart not to cover my tracks. I go to the cafeteria and confirm what is for lunch. The newspaper says one meal, yet we eat something else.

Once I confirm what is for lunch, I skip school.

I walk over to a large trailer park full of trailers for sale. I pretend I want a part-time after school job cleaning the trailers. I really go there to find out the owner’s name.

I asks, “Who owns this large trailer park?”

“Mr. Chris Wilson does.”

“Can I speak to him for a job?”

“No. That would be with John Jenkins, our manager, but he is not in today.”

I leave the sales office and pretend I am going back to school. Once out of site of the sales office I go to a furnished trailer for sale and walk inside. It was like I had my own place. I sit on the couch and watch television. I do this till it is time to catch the school bus home.

Now and then a sales agent with a customer opens the trailer I am hiding in, and the sales agent confronts me.

“Who are you? Why are you in here?”

I calmly lie and say, “My Uncle placed me in here.”

“Who is your Uncle?”

“I calmly lie again because I know they do not know if I am a relative or not. I say, “My Uncle is Chris Wilson.”

“In that case, I am sorry to bother you.”

The sales agent then says to his or her customer, “Folks, let us check a different trailer.”

All school year I skip a day or two each week and go to my trailer at The Hidden Oaks Trailer Park. I have it made. I just have to learn to lie.

At dinner, my Father questions me. I am ready for the interrogation. I look my Father in the eyes and lie.

“What did you have for lunch today at school?”

“Hot dogs with baked beans, sir.”

“You didn’t have hamburgers?”

“No, sir. The menu posted in the newspaper is wrong. We had hot dogs with baked beans. I loved the baked beans, too.”

If the school called my house about me missing classes, my Mother would answer the telephone. She would tell the school her son, JP was sick and at home with her.

My Mother would come to me and pull me by the ear and drag me to her bedroom. “The school called saying you missed classes this week. Where were you? “

“I tell Mom a lie and say, “I came home and watched television.”

“You walked two miles from the school and came home?”

“Yes,” I lied.

My Mother always covered for me when I did something wrong. She knew how violent her husband; my Dad could be. Dad had a bad temper. He would be worse after drinking whiskey and cokes.

Dad finally let my Mom take a job. He liked the extra income my Mom brought in. Mom found a job in a restaurant as a cook.

My Father would put David and I to work at his place of employment. My Dad was the manager of a warehouse of a local Department Store.

Each day we would report to our Father after school.

My job was sorting different hangers and placing them in the right boxes. I hated it. The hangers were in piles, and all tangled up. It took me hours to make a dent in the huge pile. Employees were adding hangers as I worked. I got no pay either.

After my Father left the Department Store, he became a restaurant manager of a large buffet chain. He put his sons to work here, too.

I worked in the kitchen doing the dirty dishes. I had to rinse, load, and stack the dishes that came to my section. It was a dirty job scrapping the plates of leftover food.

David worked making the salads. At night we would lay in bed and complain about the free work we were doing. David said, “I was so mad at Dad today I peed in the Thousand Island dressing bowl.”

“I laughed and said, “Gross.”

“If you tell anyone I peed in the Thousand Island dressing I will kill you.”

“I will not tell anyone what you did. I just will not have any dressing on my salads at the buffet restaurant.”

When traveling with my whole family our restaurant meal bill would be big. If the servers were on top of their game and gave us excellent service our Father would reward each with a large cash tip.

When leaving the restaurant my sister Victoria would steal the waitress's tip off the table. She would split her stolen money with her other sister. They did this all the time.

I slipped my Mother a note I had written earlier. The note said Victoria stole the waitress's tip from the table.

My Mother turned around and said, "Victoria give me the waitress's money you stole off the table."

Victoria hands Mom the money back.

My Dad pulls into the nearest closed business and says, "We are turning around and going back."

Our Father drives twenty miles back to the restaurant. Mom turns to Victoria and says, "Young Lady, we are going into the restaurant, and you will hand the waitress her tip."

"Do I have to give her the money?"

Mom says with anger in her voice, "We are not thieves in this family. The money is not yours. How would you like it if one of your friends came over to the house and stole your favorite teddy bear?"

"I would be mad. I would not speak to her again, either."

"The server works hard for her tips; She is counting on the money to live on. Come with me now."

Mom walks Victoria into the restaurant and makes Victoria apologies and give the server her hard-earned money.

As they are leaving the restaurant, Victoria asks, "Can I have an ice-cream cone?"

“No.”

I was in the eighth grade when I had to wear the same shirt and jeans to school for a whole month. This was punishment for doing something wrong at home.

I did not do recess during the thirty days I wore the same clothes. I had to keep my clothes clean, otherwise the kids would know I was wearing the same pieces of clothing every single day.

One day a student said to me, “You are wearing the same clothes every day.”

I lied and replied, “No, my Mother bought the same shirts and pants on sale at a department store.” I knew tomorrow I would wear something else. I produced a plan to do so.

My Father was home each morning and he made me put on the same clothes. I left the house and pretended I was walking to the school bus stop. I told my siblings, “I forgot something,” and I ran toward the house.

I went below my bedroom window where I dropped early a clean shirt of David’s. I put that shirt on underneath the one I was wearing, then I went to catch the school bus.

After school I placed David’s shirt under the bedroom window and went inside wearing the same old shirt. I said to Mom, “Why do I have to wear the same clothes each day?”

“Because your Father said so.”

I went to my bedroom and leaned out and retrieved David’s shirt and hung it back on its hanger. I did this every day for the rest of my thirty-day punishment.

One day David said his shirt smelled. He called for Mom to come in his room.

“Yes, Dear.”

“Smell this shirt. It smells.”

Mom smelled the shirt and said, “It does stink. It must be the water.”

David smelled other shirts of his that I wore and said, “These shirts smell as well.”

“I don’t know why,” Mom says. “I guess it must be the water.”

Mom smelled my shirts hanging next to my Brother’s and said, “JP’s shirts smell fresh. I do not understand why his smells fresh and your smells.”

I said, “It must be the water.”

My Dad wanted a motorhome. He applied for a bank loan and inflated his income. The bank approved him, and Dad arrived at our rental unit proud as a Peacock.

I knew my Dad could not afford his new toy. He would do what he always did and that was not make payments. We were down to one vehicle again. The creditors found the station wagon and took it back.

We always lived near military bases. We always shopped at the commissary. Our Father would also use the NCO Club, which stood for Non-Commission Officer Club. We would go there to have a meal and to play bingo.

Another reason we used the military base was to hide Dad’s motor home. Creditors could not come on base without a court subpoena. My Dad would ride around in his motorhome, take long trips to other States, then he would park his motorhome back on a military base.

After six months of not making payments the credit company started calling and mailing collection letters. Dad would take the letters and throw them in the trash. When they called, he would hang up.

Our Father did not feel guilty one bit. He treated it like a game of hide and seek. My Dad was good at playing the game. Each month he would rack up more miles traveling back and forth from Nevada and Alaska in his new motor home.

My Dad would still be driving his enormous toy if it were not for my oldest Brother Steven calling the collection company seeking a cash reward for turning our Dad in.

Steven needed money to buy a new car. He found his down payment in turning our Father in. Steven agreed to a thousand-dollar reward amount for revealing the location of the motor home.

Steven said, “Wire me the money, then I will reveal the motor home’s location.”

The collection agency wired my Brother his reward money and my Brother revealed that the motor home was on the Army base in Fairbanks, Alaska at their vehicle storage lot.

Steven said, “I am warning you to pick-up the motor home soon as our Father is getting ready to drive the motor home to Florida.”

The next day our Father went to the storage lot with his suitcases and found the motor home missing. My Father called the military police. A police officer said they received a subpoena for the motor home’s seizure.

Our Father was mad. He contacted the collection agent that had been looking for the motor home for over a year. My Dad wanted to work out a payment plan. The agent laughed at that idea. Before hanging-up he said, “Do you know how we found the motor home?”

“No.”

“We paid your son, Steven one thousand dollars.” The agent then laughed and hung-up.

Dad called Mom and Mom called Steven.

“This is Steven.”

“Why did you turn Father in to the collection agency? They have the motor home now.”

“I needed the reward money.”

“You know how much your Father loved his moto home. Give him a call and tell him you are sorry you turned him in.”

“Nope. I am glad I did it. I needed the money. I have to go, Mom. Bye.”

I heard my Father say to our Mother, “I will find a way to get me a new motor home again.”

In Fairbanks, Alaska my Brother David moved out of our rental house. He moved with a high school friend into a double-wide trailer. David came by every Saturday to pick me up. He told Mom we were going to the park to play frisbee. In fact, I was going to steal money for David.

I became a thief for my Brother. I did it to have a break from my strict Father and all his crazy rules he enforced.

There was a store in downtown Fairbanks called Brad’s Menswear. It was a two-story men’s clothing store. When I walked in to scan the place for money a salesperson greeted me.

“Can I help you?”

“I am looking for a suit for my Father. His birthday is next week,” I lied.

“Follow me.”

The salesperson took me downstairs to the suits department. There were changing rooms and more important a cash register.

The salesperson showed me racks of clothing.

I said, "This is perfect. I will come back tomorrow with my Brother."

"I am off tomorrow, but any of the sales agents will be glad to help you."

I left the clothing store and told my Brother my plan to rob the downstairs register.

The next morning David picked me up and we went to Brad's Menswear. The plan was for me to take a sale's agent downstairs. David was to follow ten minutes later. A different sale's agent did not escort David as there was already a sale's agent with me.

When the sale's agent went to help the customer which was my older Brother I hid in a rack of suits.

David looked around, then walked back upstairs and exited the store. I remained downstairs hidden waiting for the sale's agent to go back upstairs.

When the agent went upstairs to be with the other sale agents, I went to the register sitting there all alone.

I did not know how to open the register. I kept playing with different keys on the machine. At the same time, I was listening for footsteps. After five minutes of pushing buttons, the register opened with a loud ding sound. No one heard it as a sale's agent did not come downstairs.

I removed eight hundred dollars from the cash register. I went back to my hiding spot in a rack of clothes. Twenty minutes went by before a sale's agent brought a new customer downstairs. The downstairs was huge with dozens of racks of clothing.

I snuck back upstairs without the sales agent noticing. I exited the store and met my Brother waiting for me in his car. I turned over the eight hundred dollars to my excited Brother.

That night for dinner David came over. Mom made our favorite dish, Meatloaf. While eating our meal the television reporter said, “There was a robbery at Brad’s Menswear today. The thief got away with eight hundred dollars.”

David looked at me, then said to us all, “I have been in that store. It is huge with two floors of shirts and suits.”

I stole every weekend for David. I wanted out of the house, and David was my escape.

I stole from store back offices and crawled inside doggy doors at apartment complexes. One day my luck ran out.

The police arrested me and drove me to the police station. My Mom came to get me.

“I am not telling your Father what you did. It will be our secret.”

David was sitting in the passenger seat, winked at me, and asked, “Why did you do it?”

I shrugged my shoulders and replied, “For the fun of it.”

I told my Brother about a jewelry store we could burglarize. The old lady owner kept her business keys on a glass display case. I could take the keys, get them copied, then put her keys back on the display case counter.

I could do this if David came in the store after me and distracted the woman long enough for me to copy the keys. There was a key shop three doors down.

We went to the jewelry store called Mary’s Fine Jewelry since 1955. I went in first and started looking at bracelets for my Mother. David came in the store ten minutes later.

Just like clockwork I stole her keys off the display case and left. David kept the woman busy at the other end of the display cases.

Ten minutes later I was back in the store. I pretended to look at more bracelets while I quietly replaced the woman's business keys on the counter.

The next step of the burglary plan was simple. We would park in front of the downtown jewelry store. David would keep an eye out for citizens stopping to look at the window displays. He would warn me someone was coming with a walkie-talkie.

When it was clear to do so I would empty the jewelry display cases of the jewelry. I would not be fooling with the back office or the safe, just the display cases.

When the coast was clear I would exit the store with the stolen merchandise, relock the front door and we would be rich and free. That was the plan, anyway.

My Mom told my Dad I was stealing. He arranged for me to spend two weeks in the juvenile detention center to teach me a lesson.

I was having breakfast with the other kids when a news flash came on the screen. A reporter was standing in front of Mary's Fine Jewelry Store and said "Last night thieves broke-into Mary's Fine Jewelry store behind me. They cleaned out the display cases. I am with Mary now."

I could not believe my Brother and an unknown friend did my burglary.

The reporter asked, "What did the thieves get away with?"

"I had nine display cases with three shelves each. They took everything from the cases. The thieves did not touch my back office."

The reporter asks, "Did you have theft insurance?"

“No, I did not. The premiums were too expensive. I have been in the same location since 1955 and I never had a problem. I do not know what I am going to do now.”

The reporter approached a detective with his police shield sticking out of his breast pocket.

“Detective, can you inform my listeners about the burglary?”

“It was well planned. They wore gloves. We are processing the scene now. We are looking for witnesses that walked by the jewelry store between nine pm and nine am last night. I can not provide you with any other information at this time.”

I could not watch anymore news. The guards returned us to our jail cells.

I went with my Mother to visit David in jail. We could not talk openly about how my burglary plan went wrong.

David said to our Mom, who was crying, “My trailer roommate Patrick Collins did the burglary. He confessed to doing it. He kept the stolen items in pillowcases under his bed.

The police had a subpoena, and they came to my trailer and served it on me. The subpoena was a search warrant looking for the stolen jewelry. The police found the jewelry and arrested me for Being An Accessory after the crime.

Patrick said I participated in helping him. He said I watched for citizens approaching the window cases and would warn him using a walkie-talkie.”

Mom, still crying says, “The police have a shop owner that has you buying the two walkie-talkies.”

“I bought them for Patrick. He claimed to be sick and asked me to buy them. The police want to charge me with burglary, but they have no

evidence to do so. I did not do this burglary. I did not even know the stolen jewelry was in my trailer,” lies David.

Mom and I leave the jail and I say, “David is a Lier. Patrick needed a Look-out person and David was his look-out.”

“You are right, Son. I hope the Judge gives David a break. He never has been in trouble before.”

I ask, “Can David bond out?”

“Your Father is working on it as we speak. Let us go home. I have to make lunch and a cake.”

David left jail on his own recognizance and with a promise to appear.

Our Dad told the Judge, David would be at our house and could go nowhere alone.

That night in our bedroom David told me what happened.

“Before you start, why didn’t you wait for me?”

“I wish I did wait for you. I needed money and your plan worked to perfection. The problem was Patrick. He was to fly to Seattle and sell the jewelry there. Instead, he goes to a different jewelry store in town and tries to sell the items there. How stupid can one be?”

I laughed and replied, “He was very stupid.”

Dad hired a lawyer who made a plea bargain with the State Prosecutor. David was going to go to jail for two years. He would be out after 18 months with good behavior. He would remain in Fairbanks, allowing us to visit.

David did less than three months.

David was lucky the Jehovah Witnesses came to the jail to preach.

The head Jehovah, Tony took a liking to my Brother and went to the Judge. Tony told the Judge he could place David far away from anyone at the North Pole, in a village named Barrel.

Tony told the Judge David would be working in the kitchen for the men installing the Alaska Pipeline. Tony would be working in the kitchen, too.

The Judge said yes. David could go home and pack.

Our Dad said to David, “You are a convicted Felon. I hope you learned your lesson.”

“I did, sir, I did.”

We watched our Brother enter a bus with other Jehovah Witnesses on board. He waived at us as the bus pulled away.

Mom said, “David converted from being Catholic to being a Jehovah Witness.”

Venus asked, “What is a Jehovah Witness?”

Our Father replies, “A bunch of nuts that go-door-to-do bothering people.”

After six months the Judge reduced David’s sentence to time served.

David stayed in Barrel, an Eskimo village and worked on the Alaska Pipeline. David was born in Anchorage, Alaska, so being born an Alaskan allowed him to jump the employment line and join the pipeline installation. The Governor said, “Alaskans come first.”

David made thousand of dollars a week.

Dad asked for a five-thousand-dollar loan. He wanted to buy another motorhome. David gave our Father the loan. My Dad bought a new motorhome and started traveling once again.

Our Dad never paid David back his loan. My Dad never made vehicle payments either. He hid the motor home on military installations, just like he did years earlier.

One day I decided to run away. I took no clothing or money with me. I went to the Fairbanks Airport and asked about flights to Seattle. The best airline was Alaska Air.

I went to the ticket counter and lied, "My Mom is waiting for me in Seattle."

"Do you have money for a ticket, Son?"

I started crying fake tears and said, "My Mother said she will pay for my ticket at your Seattle ticket office at the Seattle Airport when I get there."

I approached the ticket counter with ten minutes till flight time. I looked at my Timex watch and started crying fake tears again.

I said, "I do not want to miss this flight. My Dad had a heart attack. My Mom and Dad were on a business trip. I need to see my Dad. I want my Mom."

It worked.

I left no note at home.

The airline let me use their telephone.

I called David in Barrel and told him what I was doing.

David said, "When you steal money mail me some."

"Tell Mom I flew to Seattle. Call her hours after I land. How do you like, Barrel?"

"It is very cold up here. I am ten miles from the North Pole."

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“I have an Eskimo. That is the only type women up here.”

“She must be ugly,” I said.

David laughed and said, “She is, but beggars can’t be choosey.”

“What is her name?”

“She is an Inuit. Her name is Aput. In Inuit it means Snow.”

“When will you come home and see Mom?”

“I will be there once the Pipeline project is complete. Six months’ time, I believe.” Why did you decide to runaway to Seattle?”

“I want to see the Space Needle.”

“Have fun, be safe and keep in touch.”

An agent escorted me to the plane. I sat in First Class too. I had sodas and a meal. My plan to run away was working.

It was past midnight when we landed in Seattle. I walked off the airplane and walked over to the ticket agent counter. It was empty. I spotted the cash register.

No one was around. I leaned over and pushed the cash register drawer and it opened. I scoped out the cash, closed the register and exited the terminal.

I flagged down a taxi and asked for the cheapest motel in the area. I counted my money as the taxi driver drove to my destination. I had nine hundred and sixty dollars.

The driver stopped at a Motel Six with a vacancy sign flashing in the window. I paid cash for the ride and gave the driver a ten-dollar tip.

The driver handed me his business card and said, “Call me anytime. I will come pick you up. My name is Rafael.”

I went to the office window and rang the bell.

A woman came to the window and said, “Yes, can I help you Young Man?”

I did a fake cry and said, “My Mom forgot to pick me up at the airport. She lives in Bend, Oregon. She told me to get a hotel room and call her in the morning.”

“Can you pay for a hotel room?”

“Yes, My Dad gave me some money before I flew from Fairbanks, Alaska to Seattle.”

“It will be forty dollars plus tax.”

I paid for my one-night stay and went to my room. I ordered Pizza from a 24/hour restaurant and ate while I watched television. I slept in my underwear so I would not wrinkle my shirt and jeans.

In the morning when I checked out, I asked to use their telephone.

I called my Brother, David in Barrel, Alaska.

“David, did you call Mom?”

“I did. I told Mom you just called me from Seattle.”

“What did Mom say?”

“What is JP doing in Seattle?”

“Did Mom say anything else?”

“She went to our room, and you were not in your bed. She looked for a note, but she found none.”

“I did not write one. I did not want Mom to come to the airport and find me.

“What are you going to do today?”

“I plan to visit the Seattle Space Needle”

“How are you going to do that with no money?”

“I have nine-hundred dollars. I stole the money from the cash register of Alaska Airlines at the terminal.”

“Send me money. Let me give you, my address.”

“I will mail you money when I steal again. I need to keep what I have. I will call you each day. When I do call, call Mom back and let her know I am all right. I do not want Mom to worry about me.”

“Will do. Have fun and be safe.”

I called Rafael, the taxi driver to come pick me up.

I entered his clean taxi and said, “The Space Needle, please.”

I loved riding the elevator to the top of the Needle. The elevator was located on the outside of the Needle and had glass walls. The view was fantastic. I bought a snapshot type tourist camera to record my adventure.

I walked around the City and rode the tourist bus. I ate lunch in a restaurant overlooking the water. I bought a toothbrush and toothpaste, a pair of pajamas and a new shirt. I bought a gym bag as a suitcase. I was having the time of my life.

No bedtime curfew, no stupid rules of my Dad to follow.

I spent three days in Seattle. I walked into the Kmart Department Store Security office. It was empty. I picked up the telephone and had the

operator give me an outside line. I called from Seattle to Fairbanks collect.

My Mom answered the telephone.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Mom.”

“JP, why did you run away?”

“I wanted to have an adventure.”

“What are you doing for money?”

“I stole money from Alaska Airlines at the Seattle terminal.”

“I raised you to be an honest man.”

“I am honest, Mom. I just need money to survive.”

“When are you coming back home?”

“I do not know. I ran away to have fun, to be on my own. I will call you tomorrow. I love you.”

I hung up the security office phone and stood up to leave. Standing behind me were two security officers in uniform.

One man said, “You are a runaway from Fairbanks, Alaska and you stole money from Alaska Airlines at our terminal. Sit back down. The police are on their way.”

I was sipping on a coke brought to me by a female guard and talking of my trip when a police officer walked into the security office.

“Stand up, Young Man and turn around.”

“I stood up and turned around. The police officer placed handcuffs on me and took me by the arm. He searched my pockets and recovered over eight hundred dollars.

The security guard said, “The young man told his Mother over the phone he stole the money from the terminal at Alaska Airlines.”

“The police officer asked, “What is your name, your age, your home address, and your telephone number?”

“My name is JP Harrison. I just turned fifteen, I live at 24879 Discover Lane, apartment 3 in Fairbanks, Alaska. My phone number is 907-355-2741.”

The Officer asks, “How did you get to fly without an airline ticket?”

“I pretended to cry; I told a lie to the ticket agent. I told her my Mother was waiting for me in Seattle. My Mom was paying for my ticket. I sat in first class.”

“Tell me how you stole this money I am holding in my hand.”

“When I exited the plane, I walked over to Alaska Airlines Ticket counter. It was midnight and no one was behind the counter. I just leaned over and opened the cash register. I stole nine hundred and sixty dollars.”

“At the police station you will be able to speak to your parents after I speak to them first. Let us go.”

Customers and employees were looking at me as I walked out of the store in handcuffs.

I shouted, “I am a runaway from Fairbanks, Alaska.”

At the police station the officers asked me questions about my State of Alaska.

“Is it cold there?”

“We live in a log cabin. Ice cycles are inside our windows when we wake up.”

“You live in a real log cabin?”

“A log cabin miles from town in a rural area. We throw our trash in a trash pit behind our cabin. The bears roam the pit at night looking for a meal.”

“Do you like living in the log cabin?”

“Yes and no. No, because when we take a bath, it is in the same water. By the time I climb in the rain barrel the water is very dirty.”

“You take a bath in a rain barrel?”

“Yes. We have no running water. My Dad pours gallons of water cans into a large rain barrel. My Mom goes first, then my twin Sisters, then my two Brothers, then me.”

“What does your Father do for work?”

“My Father just left the U.S. Army. He was a food service manager. He manages a buffet restaurant now.”

“What does your Mother do?”

“My Mother stays home and bakes us a cake every night.”

“You get a new cake each night?”

“Our Father wants a new cake each night. My Mom would slice the cake into eight slices. She hid a toothpick in the cake. If you had the toothpick in your slice, you got the last slice.”

“Why did you run away from home, Kid?”

“To get away from my Dad and his rules.”

“What rules are those, Son?”

“Be in bed at eight and I had to sleep on my back with my hands by my side. We have to call our Father, Sir. I can not have friends over to my house or go over to their house, when my Dad was mad at me, he would make me wear the same clothes to school for a month.”

The cops all laughed at that. “A whole month did you say?”

“A whole month. Friends at school laughed at me all the time. I had to steal my older Brother’s shirt to wear at school. I hate my Dad. He has never hugged or kissed me in my life, and I am fifteen.”

An Officer standing around me says, “I would run away too if I had a Dad like yours.”

Another Officer speaks up, “It is too dangerous to run away. There are criminals out there just waiting to take advantage of you.”

An Officer walks up and says, “Come with me, Kid.”

I walk over to an office. The Officer closes the door and removes my handcuffs. He hands me the telephone and says, “Speak to your Mom.”

“Hello, Mom.”

“JP, I just paid for your airline ticket to come home. I will meet your flight when it lands.”

“What about, Dad?”

“Do not worry about your Father. I will make sure no physical harm comes to you for pulling this stupid stunt.”

“It was fun running away. I got to visit the Space Needle, have lunch by the bay, stay up all night having pizza, and ...”

“JP, I was worried sick about you. Do not ever run away again.”

“I will not run away again,” I lied.

The police drove me to the airport and escorted me to my plane. I sat in first class again.

When my flight landed in Fairbanks, Alaska, a uniformed Policeman, and my Mom were waiting.

“Go to your room and stay there till your Father gets home. Then we will talk.”

“Can I have something to eat?”

“I will bring something to your room.”

I laid in bed thinking of where I would run away to next.

My Dad was out of town on a sales trip. My Mother came in my room with a tray of chicken and rice. She sat on the edge of my bed and gave me a lecture.

“Running away is dangerous. There is so much evil in this world. I love you, Son. I worried about you once David told me you flew to Seattle.”

“I was careful, Mom. I avoid strangers. I had fun.”

“You had fun? I was worried sick. I am going to the airport in the morning and speaking to security. How can an airline let a fifteen-year-old child with no luggage and no ticket fly? I cannot believe people can be that stupid.”

“What is Dad going to do to me?”

“I have no clue. Your Father wanted to leave you in the detention center. Dad did not want to withdraw four-hundred dollars for your

airline ticket. We also have to reimburse Alaska Airlines in Seattle about two-hundred dollars.”

“Do I have to go to school in the morning?”

“Yes, you do. I will be driving you. I will go to the airport and speak with security after I drop you off.”

I finished my chicken and rice.

“Do you want any more dinner?”

“I am full. I will turn in now. I hardly slept in Seattle.”

Mom leans over and gives me a kiss on the cheek.

“What do you want for breakfast in the morning?”

“A bowl of Raisin Bran with a banana.”

My Mom turns out my bedroom light but leaves the door open.

I plan to run away again that night. I just had to wait till my Mother check on me one final time before she went to bed.

At ten pm my Mother peeked in and found me asleep.

I was wide awake, just pretending to be asleep.

I waited thirty minutes before I climbed out my bedroom window. I opened the garage and took my bicycle.

I rode as fast as I could to the Fairbank’s airport.

I checked the directory screen for flights to San Francisco.

There was a Delta Airlines flight departing in twenty minutes.

I ran to the ticket counter and started my fake cry.

“My Mom and Dad were on a business trip in San Francisco when my Dad had a heart attack. I need to catch the next flight to San Francisco. My Mother will be meeting me at the gate.”

“How are you paying for your airline ticket?”

“My Mom said she is paying for the ticket at the airport.”

The female agent called for a second agent to come to her station.

“Cindy, cover my spot till I return from gate nine. I have to escort this young man to catch his flight. The plane disconnects from the gate in ten minutes.”

“What is your name I ask between tears?”

“Barbara.”

“Thank you, Barbara for helping me.”

“I have a younger Brother your age. You are about fourteen.”

“I just turned fifteen last month.”

“You have no carryon bag?”

“No. I got the call from my Mom about my Dad. My Mom said to get to the airport right away. She checked and noticed your flight was the next one leaving. My Mom said she will buy me clothes after we see my Dad in the hospital.”

The female ticket agent walked me to the gate. I was the last passenger to board.

The ticket agent smiled and said, “Here you go. Cindy will seat you and feed you a meal. Have a safe flight, JP. I will be praying for your Father.”

I give Barbara a big bear hug and say, “Thank you for helping me.”

2

CHAPTER 2

Cindy seats me in First Class. She says, “There is a thirty-minute layover in Seattle before your flight continues on to San Francisco. You will be staying on the airplane. We will depart again once the arriving passengers are on.”

Once in the air I have a hot meal and a can of coke. I look out the airplane window at all the lights of Seattle. I think about Mom and my Brother and Sisters.

When I land in San Francisco, I have no money. I start looking for a way to make me money.

I walk around the terminal. Customers are having meals and drinking beers. I see tip money on tables. I coolly walk around the different coffee shops and start collecting tip money. To my surprise no one stops me.

“I collected a hundred dollars in no time. I flag down a taxi and ask for the nearest Motel Six. I come to find out that a Motel Six room is the cleanest and cheapest.

I talk the motel clerk into letting me dial my Brother to let him know I landed safely in San Francisco.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Brother. I landed safely in San Francisco.”

“What are you doing in San Francisco?”

“Running away again,” I whisper.

“It is two am. I spoke to Mom at nine last night. She just checked on you. Mom said you were sound asleep.”

“I was faking it. I climbed out my bedroom widow,” I whispered.

“Did you leave Mom a note this time?”

“No. I need you to call Mom when you can. Tell her I am all right, and I am on the West Coast. Do not tell her I am in San Francisco.”

“Why San Francisco?”

“I want to walk across the Golden Gate Bridge. I want to visit Alcatraz as well.”

“What money do you have?”

“I have one-hundred dollars of tip money I stole off tables in terminal cafes. I spent \$20 for a taxi and my motel room will be forty, so I will have about forty left. I will find more money in the morning. I have to go; the clerk is returning.”

It is two in the morning when I hand the clerk his telephone back, then I lie, “My Mom is driving up from Los Angeles to pick me up later today.”

“The elderly clerk says, “I am only charging you twenty dollars for the room tonight. It is two am, the night is almost gone.”

“Thank you. Do you have vending machines?”

“Yes, right before your room there is an alcove. Here is your room key. I have you in room seven.”

“Seven is my lucky number. Can I have twenty ones?”

I hand the clerk a twenty-dollar bill.

The elderly man yawns. I yawn when he yawns. We both laugh.

I take my twenty ones and stop by the vending machine. I buy my money's worth of snacks, then enter room seven.

I strip down to my underwear. I do not want to wrinkle my clothes. I crawl into bed and start watching television.

In the morning I call my Brother, David.

“Hello?”

“Morning, Brother. Did you call Mother?”

“Yes. Mom is not happy with you. She wants to know where you are?”

“Call her back, say I am returning in three days. Tell her I am all right.”

“I will do that now. Be safe.”

“I am a smart kid; I will avoid strangers.”

I call for a taxi.

I tell the taxi driver, “Stop at a McDonald's first, then drop me off near the Golden Gate Bridge.”

“Why the Golden Gate Bridge?”

“I went to the library and looked up all the historical facts. Plus, my Dad was here in the military. We drove across the bridge daily.”

The taxi driver laughs and replies, “A few years ago I was a tour guide on a boat cruise across the bay.”

I say, “The Golden Gate Bridge construction began in the year 1937 at a cost of thirty-five million. It is 1.7 miles long, it is a 225-foot drop to the water, and it will take me about 1.5 hours to walk one way.”

“It will take you longer if you stop along the way and look at the stunning views.”

I say, “They laid over 80,000 miles of wire, the towers are 746 feet high and is painted in international orange.”

“You should be a tour guide young man.”

We stop at a McDonalds.

I buy my egg McMuffin sandwich and a coke. I climb back in the taxi.

The driver asks, “You are a runaway, right?”

I lie and reply, “No. I live in Alaska with my Dad. He bought me a ticket for San Francisco. My Mom had car problems and could not pick me up last night. My Mom lives in Los Angeles.”

“Why fly into my city? Why not fly into Los Angeles?”

“My birthday present was to walk across the Golden Gate Bridge and to take a tour of Alcatraz prison in the San Francisco Bay.”

“I will let you out here. The bridge is just down the road. It is a long walk.”

I ask the driver, “What is your name?”

“My friends call me Harry. Here is my business card.”

Harry hands me his business card. I grab my lunch and start walking toward the Golden Gate Bridge.

It takes me almost two hours to walk one-way. I stop to admire the stunning views.

I reach the end of the bridge. I plan to turn around to walk back across to my starting point when a man’s voice says, “Police. Come over here.”

I turn around to see two Police Officers in uniform.

“Come over here, Young Man.”

I walk over as calm as I can be. “Yes, sir.”

“What is your name? Where do you live? Where are your parents?”

“My name is JP Harrison. I live in Fairbanks, Alaska. My Mom lives in Los Angeles and is driving up here to meet me at the McDonalds on the other side of the bridge.”

“How old are you?”

“I am fifteen, sir.”

“What is your home phone number?”

“My home phone number is 907-355-2741.”

“What is your home address?”

“I live at 24879 Discover Lane, Apartment 3 in Fairbanks, Alaska.”

The Officer gets on his radio and says to dispatch, “Call 907-355-2741. Ask if they know where their Son, JP is.”

Two minutes later the dispatcher replies, “I just spoke to JP’s Mother. She says her son is a runaway.”

The Officer says to me, “The game is up. Turn around and place your hands behind your back. You are under arrest for running away.”

I ask, “How did you know to stop me? Other kids my age are on the bridge, too.”

“A concerned taxi driver called you in.”

I looked out the window at the city skyline as we drove into the city. I look to my left and there sits Alcatraz Prison.

I share my cell with a young man.

I ask, "What are you in custody for?"

"I ran away from home."

"Me, too," I say. "What State did you run away from?"

"No State. I live here. What State did you run away from?"

"Fairbanks, Alaska."

"I never have left the State of California. What is your name?"

"I am JP. What is your name?"

"Harry."

"I know a Harry. He was my taxi driver here in your city."

Harry asks, "How did you get caught?"

"A taxi driver named Harry called the Police on me. He dropped me off to walk across the Golden Gate Bridge and the Police were waiting for me on the other end."

"The taxi driver's name was really named Harry?"

"Yes. How did the police pick-you up?"

"I stole my neighbor's truck. I got into a chase with the Police and crashed the truck into a tree."

A guard with keys in his hand says to Harry, "Come with me, Harry. Your Dad is here to take you home."

Harry gathers his clothes and says, “Well, Mr. Alaska, I hope you do not have to stay in this cell too long.”

I shake Harry’s hand. “Be safe.”

“Have a good flight back home, JP.”

I watch my fellow runaway walk with the guard toward the front desk of the jail.

An hour into my stay a Police Officer comes to my cell and says, “After lunch we will be transporting you to the airport for your flight back to Alaska. Your Mother bought you a one-way ticket.”

A young guard asks, “Does Alaska really get dark six months of a year?”

“Yes. We get no sun for a long time. Alaska also is very cold in the winter. I remember last winter waiting for the school bus and the wind being brutal.”

A guard comes to my holding cell with a pair of handcuffs. “I will handcuff you in the front. Do not run on me or my partner.”

“I will not run.”

“My chart says you are an escape risk. That is why you have two guards assigned to your transport. A Police Officer will be waiting in Seattle for your connection to Fairbanks. The court is not taking any chances.”

The officers walk me to my plane. They take the handcuffs off when they do.

A steward says, “I will have you sit in the front row.”

I have a meal and I talk to a woman sitting next to me.

She says, "I was behind you walking to the plane. I saw a Police Officer taking handcuffs off you."

"I am a runaway from Fairbanks, Alaska. I ran away to Seattle last week. I plan to run away again to Los Angeles next."

"Why are you running away? Don't you want to be home with your Mother and Father?"

"I wish my Mom would divorce my Father. He is strict on us. My Dad has never hugged or kissed me. He never says he loves me. He just says, "You are lying, Punk."

"How sad to hear."

My Dad has stupid rules. I am fifteen. I have to be in bed, on my back, hands by my side at eight pm. I can have no fiends over to my house. I can not spend time at my friends houses either. When my Dad gets mad at me, he makes me wear the same clothes to school for a month."

"Did you say a whole month?"

"Yes. After awhile the other kids make fun of me, they call me, Stinky."

"What does your Mother do to stop your Dad being this way with you?"

"My Mom only stops my Dad from slapping us."

"Your Father slaps you?"

"My Siblings and I get slapped across the face at least once a week. We live in fear of our Father. When he pulls up in the gravel driveway someone says, Dad is home, go hide."

"You have to hide?"

"We do. We do not know what kind of mood he will be in."

“I can see why you runaway from home. You do not have any Grandmother with whom you can live?”

“No. I have no other relatives that I know of.”

“This is so sad to hear. You are a nice young man.”

“I am nice. I steal money because I have an older Brother that makes me.”

“Your older Brother makes you steal.”

“Yes. He is in College. He needs money. He picks me up and takes me places so I can steal. I do not mind stealing for him as it allows me to get away from my parents.”

“Have you been arrested for stealing?”

“Yes. The police just released me back to my parents.”

“Running away is dangerous.”

“I know. I am careful. I do not speak with strangers.”

“When you runaway what do you do with your time?”

“I sightsee and ride on metro busses.”

“Your Mother must worry about you when you run away.”

“I know Mom does. I can see the stress on her face and the stress in her voice. I want to stay home, but my Dad’s actions makes me want to leave. My Dad wants a cake each night?”

“Your Dad wants a cake each night?”

“My Mom says, “Yes, Dear and bakes him his cake.”

“It was nice talking to you. What is your name?”

“JP Harrison. What is your name?”

“Carol Jones. I am a marketing rep for a large Corporation. I travel around the West Coast often.”

“I like to fly,” I say.

Carol replies, “Me, too.”

Carol pulls a book out of her bag and starts to read. I close my eyes and take a nap.

When the plane lands in Fairbanks a Policeman in uniform boards the plane. He removes me from the plane saying, “Do not run. I am taking you to your Mother.”

“I will not run, Officer.”

Inside the terminal my Mother is standing there with folded arms. I can tell from her body language my Mom is not happy.

“I had to borrow the airfare from our neighbor. I have to pay Mr. Kingman back when I can.”

“Where is Dad?”

“You are lucky. He is away on a business trip. He does not know you ran away to San Francisco. I will not hide another one of your ventures from your Father. He may beat you with a belt. What ever he decides to do with you I will let him.”

“There will be no next time, me running away,” I lie. “It is good to be home, Mom.”

“Why did you runaway to San Francisco, Son?”

“I wanted to see the Golden Gate Bridge again.”

“I do not know what I am going to do with you, JP. I just can not have you running away from home.”

My Mom had a long speech for me driving home.

“You out on your own at fifteen is not smart. It is dangerous. One day the bad guy will win, and you will never come home again. Please do not run away again.”

I lie, “I will not run away again, Mom.”

“First Seattle, now San Francisco. How did you get money?”

“I walked around the terminal cafes and grabbed the tip money left by customers.”

“That is stealing. I did not raise you to be a thief.”

“I know, Mom, I know.”

My Mom and I continue our talk over dinner.

“Does Dad like his new job?”

“Yes, he does. He is a good talker. Customers are coming on board left and right. Your Father works long hours but is happy he has a good paying job.”

“What does Dad do exactly?”

“Your Father travels between three states passing out the company’s flyer on what business they have to offer. Your Father talks to his leads and asks them to just try his company. Then when they do, he follows up to make sure they are happy using the products.”

“What products are we talking about?”

“Cleaning supplies.”

“I didn’t know Dad was a salesman.”

“He did not either. He was willing to try it. The only thing he does not like is being away from me and you kids.”

“I just hope he will be in a good mood when he gets back. I do not want to run away again.”

“Your Father loves you very much.”

“Dad has a funny way of showing his love, slapping me and calling me a Punk.”

“I have to admit I hate it when he strikes you in your face with his open hand.”

“It hurts. I am afraid to come to the table for dinner. Dad gets pleasure interrogating me, wanting to catch me in a lie. Why do I have to call him, Sir and not Dad?”

“Your Father has been in the military too long. He likes it when you children call him, sir.”

“I have to start studying my schoolbooks or I will flunk ninth grade.”

“You flunked third grade already.”

“Any word from Steve in the Marine Corps?”

“Yes. He is getting married and wants us to attend his wedding in three months.”

“Wow, Steve’s getting married. We are going to the wedding, right?”

“No. Your Father said no.”

“Why not?”

“Father says we do not have the extra money to spend. We are just getting by as it is.”

“Why doesn’t Dad let you work like other wives?”

“I want to work but your Father wants me home to watch you children.”

“Steve is in the military, David is in Barrel, Alaska working in the kitchen, I can watch Venus, Victoria, and Andy after school. I can do that for you Mom so you can work.”

“It will not happen. Like it or not I am a stay-at-home Mom.”

“Too bad. We could use the extra money.”

“Set the table while I heat up the meatloaf.”

“Meatloaf. Are we having my favorite dish?”

“Yes. I wanted to surprise you. Just do not run away from home anymore.”

I hug my Mother and lie, “I will not run away again.”

Venus walks in the kitchen and hears our Mom say to me, “Do not run away from home anymore.”

Venus looks at me and says, “I am telling Dad you ran away again. Boy will you be in trouble. Slap, slap.”

Mom pounds her fist on the kitchen counter to get our attention.

“Venus you will not tell your Father no such thing. Do you want to see your Brother slapped in the face by your Father?”

Venus laughs and replies, “Yes, I do. Slap, slap.” She laughs running out of the kitchen.

Mom looks over at my worried face and says, “Don’t worry Son, your Sister will not say a thing.”

“You know my Sisters are Dad’s little pets. They can do no wrong. What is stopping Venus from telling Dad I ran away again?”

Just then the telephone rings.

Mom looks at her watch and says, “That is your Father. He told me he would call at six pm sharp.”

Mom wipes her hands and starts to walk into the living room when we both here “Dad, JP ran away again. Here is Mom.”

Mom gives Venus a mean look and picks up the telephone. “Hi, Honey, How has your day been?”

Venus looks at me and laughs, “Slap, slap,” and runs out of living room.

I hear Mom say over and over again, “Yes, Dear.”

I hear my Father shouting from his end of the telephone.

Mom hangs up and looks over at me.

“Per your Father, go to your room, you are not to have any dinner. He will deal with you when he gets home tomorrow afternoon. You are to come straight home from school to receive your punishment.”

“Dad’s going to slap me again I just know it.”

“I will make sure he only talks to you.”

“What else did Dad say over the telephone?”

My Mother cannot lie. It is not in her nature. The truth eventually comes out and my Dad knows it.

“Your Father is tired of you running away. He is tired of spending our hard-earned money on our Punk Son. This has to stop.”

“Venus and Victoria love to get me into trouble. They love to watch Dad slap my face. I hate them.”

“You do not hate your Sisters. Now go to your room.”

“I do not get my meatloaf?”

“I am afraid not Son. I will not violate your Father’s instructions.”

“This is not fair.”

“You can have your meatloaf for lunch. I will make you meatloaf sandwiches for school. Now give your Mother a hug.”

I give my Mother a hug.

I walk down the hall toward my bedroom. Venus sees me pass her bedroom and says, “Slap, slap.”

I walk into my bedroom and close the door. I crawl into my bed knowing tomorrow I am flying to Los Angeles.

Mom checks on me every thirty minutes.

Every time Mom pops her head into my bedroom, I lie to her and say,

“I will not run away again, Mom.”

I sneak into the kitchen at midnight and make myself three meatloaf sandwiches. I wash the knife evidence in the sink. I dry the knife and place it back with the other knives.

My Mom wakes me for breakfast.

“Time to get ready for school.”

I dress in a pullover shirt with blue jeans. I want to wear clothes that will be comfortable for a long flight. I have fifty dollars. That was all the money my Mom had in her purse.

After breakfast I give my Mom one last hug.

“Study hard, Son. I want a good report from your teachers when I attend the Parent-Teacher conference tomorrow night.

At the school bus stop my Sisters look at me and say, “Slap, slap.”

I walk into the school building with my Sisters. I attended a mixed school housing elementary and junior high students. I have two meatloaf sandwiches with me that Mom made.

I do not go to class. Instead, I walk away from the school. I hitchhike to the airport.

I walk up to American Airlines ticket counter with my lunch bag.

I am crying fake tears when I say, “I need to catch your ten am non-stop flight to Los Angeles. My Father had a bad auto accident. My elderly Grandmother just dropped me off.”

The ticket agent looks at me and replies, “That will be two-hundred dollars one way.”

I hold up my lunch bag and cry fake tears again, “Grandma says my Mom will pay for my ticket at the Los Angeles terminal when she picks me up to visit my Dad in the hospital. He may not live.”

“No problem young man.”

The agent prints out my ticket and asks, “No luggage?”

“No, Sir. My Mom will buy me clothes when I get to Los Angeles.”

“Here is your ticket. Flight 93 departs from Gate four.”

“What time will I arrive?”

“It is a five-hour non-stop flight. You will touch down at three pm.”

I take my ticket and say, “Thank you.”

“I hope your Father makes a full recovery I will say a prayer for him.”

“Thank you.”

As I walk to gate four, I am a happy young man.

By the time my Mom realizes I did not go to school I will already be in Los Angeles.

I sit on the airplane next to a middle-aged woman.

“What is your name, Young Man?”

“I am JP. What is your name?”

“You can call me, Jackie.”

“You live in Los Angeles, Jackie?”

“No. My daughter does. She just had a baby. I am going to visit my Grandson for the first time. Do you live in Los Angeles?”

“No. My parents are on a business trip. My Mom called my Grandmother and said my Dad was in a bad auto accident. I am going to see my Father. I was in school when I got the news. See, I have my meatloaf sandwiches my Grandmother made me.”

I show Jackie my lunch bag.

“My daughter and I can give you a ride to the hospital.”

“That is kind of you to offer me a ride, but my Mom is picking me up.”

“I can not wait to hold my first grandchild.”

“Is the baby a boy or a girl?”

“A girl.”

“Her name and age?”

“Alexis Rose and she is nine months old.”

“Do you have a photo you can show me?”

“I am afraid not. The photo is in my other wallet.”

“How many children do you have?”

“I have three daughters.”

“I am one of six children. We traveled all over the world as my Father was a Paratrooper in the U.S. Army.”

“Where were you six children born?”

My eldest Brother Steve was born in North Carolina, David was born in Anchorage, Alaska, I was born in Yakima, Washington, my twin Sisters, Venus, and Victoria were born in Japan, and my younger Brother, Andy was born in Homestead, Florida.”

“A big family.”

“Too big sometimes. When my Dad was working, we had a nice life. When he could not find work, we ended up in the poor house. My parents moved us to free military housing. My parents sold their blood to make money.”

“That sounds poor all right. How is your family doing now?”

“Steve went in the Marine Corp, David found a job in Barrel, Alaska working on the oil pipeline and the rest of the children are home.”

“You are fifteen, right?”

“Yes, I am fifteen, my Sisters are twelve and Andy is seven.”

“Where do your parents work?”

“My Dad is into marketing for a big corporation. My Mom is a stay-at-home Mom. She sometimes goes on out-of-town trips with my Dad.”

“Do you play football or baseball?”

“No. I want to, but my Mom says she does not have the money for a uniform or other equipment.”

Jackie says, “Bow your head, Let us pray for your Father’s full recovery.”

I reply, “I do not bow my head. Do you want to know why?”

“Yes.”

“My Dad made me go to church each week. I did not bow my head when asked to do so. My Sister, Venus told my Dad “JP did not bow his head.” Guess what my Father did to me?”

“I have no clue. What did your Father do to you?”

“My Dad slapped me in the face and said to bow next time.”

“I never bow again. My Sisters tell on me, and I am slapped in the face each week. That is why I cannot bow now.”

“Sad story Young Man. I have to take a nap if I want to be awake to see my grandchild.”

“I will give you my seat so you can stretch out. I spotted an empty seat in the front row. I will go sit there. Bye, Jackie.”

“That is first-class. The flight attendant will not let you sit up there.”

“I have no problems sitting where I want. I just flash my baby blue eyes and the women cannot say no.”

Jackie laughs at that comment.

“Watch. Here I go.”

I walk to the front of the airplane, and I sit in an empty first-class seat.

A flight attendant walks over to me and says, “Young Man, this is first-class. You will have to return to your assigned seat.”

I start doing my fake cry and say, “I need to take a nap. The lady next to me keeps talking. My Dad is in the hospital. He had a car accident. My Mom is picking me up. I need to rest.”

“You can sit there as long as the other passengers do not complain.”

“Thank You.”

“I hope your Father is o.k.”

“Thank you.

The elderly woman passenger I am sitting next to leans over and says, ‘I will not complain to the flight attendant. Sit there if you like.’

“Thank you.”

“I will pray your Father has a full recovery.”

“Thank you.”

When the airplane lands. the passengers start getting off.

I wait in my seat for Jackie to go by me.

When she does, I say, “See, I told you I would sit in first-class.”

“You do have pretty blue eyes.”

“Thank you.”

I walk outside and flag down a taxi waiting in a lengthy line.

I say to the middle-aged man, “What would you charge me to take me to the biggest mall in Los Angeles?”

“You are talking about The Grove Mall located at 189 The Grove Drive. It is thirteen miles from here. How about a flat fee of thirty dollars?”

“I can give you twenty-five dollars.”

“Show me the money, Young Man.”

I show the driver my fifty dollars.

“Hop in.”

I plan to spend my free time at the cinema having popcorn and soda. I want to watch at least three movies. I will pay for one, and sneak into the other two. I will then roam the large mall looking for a way to obtain money.

The taxi driver drops me off in front of the main entrance to The Grove Mall.

“Here is my business card. Call me if you need a ride to another destination.”

“I look at his business card.

Blue Eyes Taxi Service. Robert Miller-Driver.
(310) 589-3304

“Your eyes are Brown,” I say.

“My wife’s eyes are blue. I like the name.”

“The name is easy to remember.”

I put Robert’s business card in my back pocket. “I will call you if I need a ride. My plan is to find a young lady to take me where I want to go. That is why I came to a large shopping mall.”

“Call me if you cannot find a ride.”

“I will do that, Bye.”

I watch Robert drive away.

I walk to the cinema complex.

I buy a movie ticket to watch a western. I buy popcorn, soda, and I ask to use the telephone.”

I call my Brother.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Brother. I ran away to Los Angeles. I stole fifty dollars out of Mom’s purse. Call Mom and say JP is somewhere in California. Tell Mom I stole her fifty dollars.”

“Why did you run away again? I spoke to Mom last night and she said you promised to stay home.”

“I wanted to stay home but Venus told Dad I ran away to San Francisco. Dad is mad at Mom because she did not inform him, I ran away again. Dad now has a reason to slap me. I hate it when he slaps me and calls me a Punk.”

David laughs and says, “You are a runaway Punk.”

I say, “David, I had to take off again. Venus kept making slapping motions with her hands, and was saying slap, slap over and over. I have to hang up. Call Mom. Bye.”

I walk over to my cinema screen, climb to the top row, and have a seat.

I only watch one movie.

It is six thirty when I walk out of the cinema.

I walk around the mall looking for a pretty girl shopping all alone.

I find my next victim inside Barb’s Boutique in the men’s section.

I walk over to the pretty girl and say, “Excuse me do you work here?”

“No. I am a customer.”

“HI, My name is JP. I just flew into Los Angeles from Fairbanks, Alaska.”

“You are a long way from home.”

“To tell you the truth I am a runaway. I was supposed to be in school today, but I decided to skip and fly away instead.”

“How old are you?”

I lie to the pretty girl with long blonde hair, “I just turned sixteen last month. How old are you?”

“I am seventeen.”

“You sure are pretty.”

“All the guys I meet say the same thing.”

“It’s true, you sure are pretty.”

“Thank you for saying that.”

I stick out my hand and say, “I am JP Harrison. What is your name?”

The pretty girl shakes my hand and says, “My name is Linda.”

“Are you here with a boyfriend or with family?”

“I am shopping alone.”

“Why are you in the men’s section looking at shirts?”

“I have a Brother your age. His birthday is in a week’s time.”

“What is your Brother’s name?”

“Tim.”

“Do you like Los Angeles?”

Linda says, “I hate it. I wanted to stay in Denver. The city has cleaner air, and the people are friendly and nice. Here in L.A., they are cold and fake.”

“Can I help you with your shopping? I can try on shirts for you.”

“You do not mind helping me shop?”

“I ran away. I have all the time in the world.”

Linda laughs and says, “Try these two shirts on.”

“I will if you say, please.”

“JP, please try on these two shirts for me.”

“I will love to, Linda.”

Linda laughs at my comment.

I try on shirt one and walk out to show my new friend.

“I like that one on you.”

I try on shirt two and walk out of the changing room to show Linda.

“I am buying shirt one for you and shirt two for Tim.”

“You must be rich. The price tags on these shirts say forty dollars.”

“I come from a rich family. Both my parents are lawyers.”

“Your house must be big?”

“Six bedrooms, six baths and a swimming pool.”

“I bet you drive a Mercedes?”

“No. I drive a white BMW convertible.”

“It must be nice to have money in your pocket to spend on anything you want.”

Linda asks, “How much money do you have in your wallet?”

“I have no wallet. I have twenty-five dollars on me.”

“Do you plan to sleep on the street? Hotels cost at least eighty a night in L.A.”

“I will find money somewhere. I will steal it if I have too.”

“This the first time you ran away from home?”

“My third. First time was to Seattle, the second time was San Francisco, and Los Angeles makes my third city.”

“I like you, JP. I will buy you a meal in the Food Court when finished shopping for my Brother. Try these three shirts on for me.”

I hang around Linda for an hour. We shop at five more department stores. I try on shirts, jeans, and jackets. We are having fun.

“All done shopping, let us go to the food court. You must be hungry?”

I carry the three shopping bags for Linda.

“I am starving. I had a bowl of cereal for breakfast and chicken stew on the airplane. I have a packet of crackers left.”

I show Linda the packet of crackers.

She laughs and says, “You can order stew with crackers again if you want.”

“I want Pizza with a root beer.”

“You are a cheap date, JP. I like that.”

After our meal we exit the mall for Linda’s BMW.

Suddenly three security guards in uniform along with a female in plain clothes stops us.

“Back in the mall,” orders the woman in plain clothes.

I ask, “Who are you?”

“I am part of the malls undercover shoplifters’ detail.”

“We did not shoplift. The clothes in the bags all have receipts,” I say.

“Follow me to my office. I will show you what you both shoplifted.”

Inside the office the guards start removing all the clothing items from the three bags.

The female says to Linda, “Hand over the jewelry and cosmetics you stole from Barb’s Boutique.”

From Linda’s bra she removes a ring, a necklace, and a watch. From her waist she removes a small box of perfume.

The female lifts up a shirt and says, “Produce a receipt for all these item on this table.”

Linda bows her head and whispers, “I have receipts for six of the ten items in the bags. I did not pay for the jacket and three shirts.”

The female security woman says, “Here is a note pad. Write down both of you your full names, date of births and your home address.

Linda says, “JP is a runaway from Fairbanks, Alaska. He did not know I was stealing. I used him as a decoy cover while I shoplifted.”

The woman steps in front of me and ask, “Is your friend telling me the truth? Are you a runaway from Fairbanks, Alaska?”

“Yes. My name is JP Harrison. I will write down for you my home address along with our house telephone number.”

The woman looks at me and says, “Welcome to Los Angeles.”

Linda stats crying. She looks over at me and says, “I am so sorry for dragging you into my shopping spree.”

“I forgive you. Let us stay connected. I will runaway again and fly to Los Angeles. You can pick me up in your white BMW. We can go swimming in the ocean.”

Twenty minutes later a police officer in uniform knocks on the security office’s door.

The security woman in plain clothes says, “He is a runaway from Fairbanks, Alaska. He is not involved in the shoplifting of our merchandise. Linda here is the shoplifter. She stole a jacket, three shirts, a ring, a necklace, and a watch.”

The Officer runs us both on her walkie-talkie.

Dispatcher asks the Officer to call on a landline.

The officer calls her dispatcher on a landline and writes down information on her note pad.

The Officer steps in front of me and says, “You have a long wrap sheet for being just fifteen. My report says you ran away from San Francisco just yesterday.”

“I did. I love San Francisco. I walked across the Golden Gate Bridge. Do you know the span is 1.7 miles long?”

“That long, wow.”

The Officer stands in front of Linda and says, Young Lady this is not your first rodeo. Your first arrest was when you were fourteen. All the previous arrest have been for shoplifting. Why do you shoplift for?

“I like the excitement of getting away with the items I shoplift. None of the items I take are for me. I give the merchandise to friends and family.”

“I am taking you both down to the station for processing. Here are my handcuffs, Handcuff your left arm to his right arm.

Linda handcuffs us together.

We walk to the police car in handcuffs.

I say, “Interesting first date we are having.”

Before entering the police vehicle's back seat Linda says, Kiss me."

We kiss and kiss in the back seat from the mall to the police substation. Linda is the first woman I ever kissed.

The Police Officer says, "You two love birds knock it off. No more kissing on my watch."

Linda says, "Remember my home phone number, it is 847-6329. It is tip me twenty-nine."

"I can remember tip me twenty-nine. I will call you when I am back in Los Angeles."

At the police station I am fingerprinted and photographed.

The Officer takes me to a phone on a desk and says, "Call your Mother. I want to speak to her first, then I will let you talk next."

I dial my home number. When the telephone rings I hand the phone over to the Police Officer.

"Good afternoon, I am Officer Kelley with the Los Angeles Police Department, whom am I speaking with?"

Yes, Ms. Harrison your son is in custody. We can do that if you want. I will pass on your wishes to the Judge. Eventually your son will fly back to Fairbanks. When that will be is up to the Judge. Would you like to talk to your son?"

The Officer hands me the telephone.

"Hi, Mom."

"Now you are in Los Angeles. I cannot protect you from your Father. He will be home at four pm today, and I will have to tell him you ran away again. What is the Officer's name with which I was speaking?"

“The Officer is Officer Kelley, Mom. I am running away from Dad and all his slaps. Venus told Dad I ran away to San Francisco. I ran away to Los Angeles to avoid Dad’s slaps. Sorry I removed fifty dollars from your purse.”

“You stole fifty dollars from my purse?”

“Yes, I did. I have twenty-five dollars on me. I spent the rest on a taxi ride from the airport to The Grove Mall. I watched a movie at the cinema, then I met Linda.”

“Who is Linda?”

“Linda is a professional shoplifter. I did not know she was shoplifting. She was going to give me a ride to my hotel.”

“How did you meet this, Linda?”

“I saw her shopping for men’s shirts. I walked up and we started talking.”

“What happens to Linda now?”

“I do not know. Mall Security stopped us exiting the mall. Security found the items she stole. Linda told security I was a runaway, and I was not involved in her shoplifting.”

“That is how you got caught so fast?”

“Yes. Bad luck.”

“I bought you your airline ticket back home on Delta Airlines. I told the Police to keep you at least a week. I want you in your holding cell thinking about why you are running away so much.”

“Get Dad to not slap me and I will stay home.”

“I believe I can do that, Son.”

“I have to go, Mom. The Police Officer is motioning for me to hang up the telephone. I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, Son.”

At the Los Angeles Detention Center, a uniform Security Guard lays out the rules I must follow.

“Lights out at nine pm. No more talking till in the morning. If you have to use the restroom once lights are out snap your fingers. The guard in a control booth in the middle of the dorm will motion for you to use the restroom.”

“What time is breakfast?” I ask.

“You will be escorted by Security to the dining room around eight am.”

“Can I leave the dorm?”

“No. The doors are locked. There is a large recreational yard in the rear. You can go outside anytime from nine am to six pm.”

“How many kids are in this dorm with me?”

“Just over one hundred juvenile delinquents are in here with you. We have runaways like yourself, others are here for theft and assault. I advise you to keep to your self and not to trust anyone.”

“Is my dorm dangerous for me?”

“No. We have Security patrolling the dorm and the yard 24 hours a day.”

“When will I be able to fly back home?”

“Your chart says you will be here one week. Then you will be in front of a Judge. The Judge will decide if you stay here longer or if you go

home. Stay out of trouble, follow our rules and you will go home in a week.”

‘What is your name, Officer?’”

“I am Officer Jones. I am here twelve hours a day for three days, then for 4 hours on the fourth day. I will keep an eye on you when I am here. We have a nickname for you.”

“You do?”

“Yes, you will be called Alaska.”

“I like that name. It has a cool ring to it,” I say.

“Well, Alaska have a good night. Remember to snap your fingers to ask permission to leave your bunk.”

“I will Officer Jones.”

As soon as I am alone the other juveniles start chatting me up.

The juvenile next to me on the right is Bob.

“How long have you been here, Bob?”

“Two months. I have no family. I just bounce around from detention center to detention center.”

“How many detention centers are there in Los Angeles?”

Bob shakes his head and says, “I know of four, but I know there are more.”

“What crime did you commit, Bob?”

“This time I am in jail for auto theft. I pushed a lady down at the Mall and stole her Charger. The Police Officers chased me for five miles. The Charger ran out of gas.”

“Bad luck, no gas.”

Bad luck is right. What are you in for, Alaska?”

“Running away. This is my third time in a month. I ran away to Seattle, then San Francisco, and now Los Angeles.”

The dorm lights go out.

Bob whispers, “No talking or you will lose your privileges. This means no playing sports, playing pool, watching television. I mean nothing. Good night, Alaska.”

I lay in bed and think of Mom and my siblings.

I spend my week playing pool. We have a side bet I started. You have to do five push-ups for every pool ball the winner of the game wins by.

I win all the time. I have fun watching the other juvenile delinquents do pushups. I win by three balls a game on average. My secret weapon to winning is in the push-ups they do per game.

The other juvenile delinquents’ arms get tired from doing push-ups. This makes their arms tired. They shake slightly in their aim. The more I play the same person the more they get tired.

The juvenile delinquents love the challenge. I play and win every game of pool I play. They all want to beat Alaska.

I played baseball. I played right field. I was fast and agile. I chased every ball hit my way. I was sad knowing my week of fun was up.

I went in front of a female Judge.

The Judge says, “Young Man, I have good news. You are going back home today. Do you have anything you want to say?”

I look at the Judge and say, “Yes, Judge. Can I stay?”

“No, you are going home.”

I look at the Judge and say, “I will be back.”

“No, you will not be back.”

The Judge was right.

Two Police Officers escorted me to my airplane. A Police Officer greeted me in Seattle to make sure I got on the connecting flight.

Another Police Officer greeted me in Fairbanks, Alaska and drove me home.

My mother was happy to see me back home. Venus, Victoria, and Andy were doing slapping motions with their hands saying, “Slap, Slap.”

“Where is, Dad?”

“It is two pm. Your Father will be home at five. We will sit down and have a long talk about you running away.”

I went to my room to await my punishment. I lay in bed and thought of Linda and my first kiss.

Venus comes running to my bedroom. The door is wide open, one of my Dad’s rules. Venus says, “Slap, slap, Dad’s home.”

My Dad for once did not slap me. Mom made sure of that.

Dad says, “You are causing your Mother stress. I am not happy about you doing so. What is it going to take for you to get in line and not runaway?”

“I do not know, sir.”

Three nights later I sneak out my bedroom window and ride my bicycle to the airport. I do my cry act and board a flight for Seattle. I look for my house when the airplane is airborne.

A flight attendant walks down the aisle looking left to right at the passengers. She stops looking when she reaches me. The flight attendant walks to the Pilot's closed door and knocks.

A minute later the pilot gets on the PA system and says, "Evening, Folks. We have to turn back for the gate. We will only be ten minutes, then we will be on our way to Seattle."

When the airplane docks at the gate a Police Officer comes on board. He walks right up to me and says, "Stand up, Young Man."

When I stand the Police Officer handcuffs me in the back and walks me off the airplane.

Inside the terminal is my Mother.

The Police Officer unlocks the hand cuffs and turns me over to my Mother."

On the ride back home Mom says, "Pray your Father is still sleeping when we arrive home."

I do not pray. My Dad is still sleeping when we arrive home.

Mom says, "Do not runaway anymore, Son."

I lie and reply, "I will not run away."

Two days later, on a Saturday my bother David comes home for the weekend. He tells Mom he is talking me to watch the parade.

Mom says, "Be home at one. I am serving lunch at that time."

In David's car, David says, "You cannot be running away by airplane anymore. All the airlines have been advised about you."

“I want to fly back to Los Angeles and see Linda.”

“Who is Linda?”

“Linda is the pretty girl arrested for shoplifting. We kissed.”

“You kissed your first girl?”

“Yes, I did.”

I found out a Ferry departs Valdez for Seattle every day. I will drop you off outside of the city. You can hitchhike to Valdez; it is only three hundred miles from here on the coast.”

“Ok.”

“I will tell Mom I lost you in the crowd. Here is my address at college. Mail me money this time.”

“I will, I promise.”

I stand there by the side of the highway and watch my Brother drive away.

I stick out my thumb and start hitchhiking.

A semitruck carrying lumber stops and picks me up.

The middle-aged driver asks, “Where are you going, Young Man?”

“To Valdez to visit my Dad.”

The driver lives in Fairbanks, too

“What is your name? Young Man.”

“JP Harrison.”

“I normally do not pick up hitchhikers. You never know who you are picking up. You must be fourteen, am I right?”

“I just turned fifteen last month.”

“Are your parents divorced?”

“Yes. Three years now,” I lie.

“I stop on every trip at Mel’s Diner. Come in and join me. I will treat you to a hamburger.”

“Alright, Thank you. What is your name?”

“Connor Wilson.”

“I see you are hauling lumber.”

“Yes. I work for The Timber Mill just North of Fairbanks. I make the trip two times a week to the loading docks in Valdez. There are large ships that transport the lumber to Seattle, San Francisco, and other Western ports.”

Connor pulls his semi over when we arrive at Mel’s Diner. When we go inside all the employees call him by name.

“I love this restaurant. Tasty food, good service, and good desserts.”

“My Mom is a baker at my house. She bakes a cake every day for us kids.”

“Everyday? You must have a sweet tooth.”

“I do.”

“Besides the cheeseburger, try the apple pie. Again, my treat.”

“Thank you, Connor for picking me up.”

We have dinner, dessert, and talk to our server before getting back on the road.

“I need to take a nap,” I say.

“Fine by me. We will arrive in Valdez in an hour.”

“Near downtown by a gas station. I will have my Dad pick me up there.”

“I will wake you when we arrive in Valdez.”

“Thank you for picking me up and being my alarm clock, too.”

Connor just laughs.

I quickly fall asleep. It must be the motion of the semi.

Just after an hour Connor wakes me up.

“Here you go. There is a Shell Gas Station to my left. Thanks for the company, it made this trip go by fast.”

Connor and I shake hands and I step down from the semi.

Connor pulls away and right across the street at a stop sign is a police car. The Police Officer turns on his blue lights and drives over to me.

“Where are you coming from?”

I do not answer.

The Police Officer frisks me and pulls out my wallet. Inside is my high school identification card.

“JP Harrison, Eagle High School, Fairbanks, Alaska. What is your home phone number, JP?”

I do not answer.

“Dispatch, contact Eagle High School in Fairbanks. Have them look up a student’s home phone number. The student is JP Harrison.”

Five minutes later Dispatch contacts the Officer.

“JP Harrison’s phone number is area code 907, 335-2741. He lives at 24879 Discover Lane, apartment three.”

“Dispatch call the house, see if they know where there son is. I have a runaway.”

Five minutes later Dispatch comes on the police radio.

“JP Harrison’s mother says her son is supposed to be in high school. She said he ran away again without her knowledge,”

“Dispatch, show me enrout to the station with one runaway.”

The Police Officer places me in the backseat of his police car.

The Officer says, “Dispatch says you ran away again. How many times have you ran away from home?”

“This is me forth time. I ran away to Seattle, San Francesco, and Los Angeles.”

“You are a runaway kid.”

“I will be back.”

“If I spot you on the streets of Valdez, I will arrest you on the spot.”

A female Police Officer walks over to my holding cell and says, “Your parents are on the way here to pick you up.”

“When will they arrive?”

“Fairbanks is three hundred miles from here. In five hours, tops.”

“Can I have something to eat, please?”

“I will see what I can find, be right back.”

The female Officer walks over to my holding cell with a paper bag and a can of coke.

“Here you go. I had our kitchen make you two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.”

“Thank you.”

“You welcome. Why are you running away, home that bad?”

“My Dad is strict. I hate his rules he dishes out.”

“What rules are we talking about?”

“My older Brother is in the Marine Corp. My Dad makes me write five pages each weekend to him. I can not have friends over. I cannot spend the night with friends. I have to be in bed on my back with my hands by my side and the bedroom door open at eight pm sharp. If I do something wrong my Dad slaps me and calls me a Punk. Every Sunday I have to go to church, but my parents do not go. I could go on and on.”

“Go on tell me more.”

“When my Dad gets mad at me, he makes me wear the same clothes to school all month. He makes me work after school at his place of employment. I do not receive pay. At the warehouse job I had to sort hangers all afternoon, at his restaurant job I had to wash the dishes.”

“Stop, stop. I can see why you want to run away. Do you have other Brothers and Sisters besides the Brother in the Marine Corp?”

“David is eighteen and in college, I am fifteen, my twin Sisters are twelve and my little Brother is eight.”

“What does your mother say about the way your Father treats you?”

“My Dad has rules for my Mom as well. Mom has to bake our Father a cake each night. Mom cannot work; Mom has to have dinner ready at six pm sharp. I hate all the rules in our house.

“This is strange behavior for sure. I am here till midnight. I will get a chance to meet your Father and Mother.”

“They act different around people. They come across as nice Folks, When I show up at his workplace and mention I am his son, the employees say, “Your Father is nice to work for.”

“I wonder why your father has rules?”

“Because his Dad had rules for him.”

“Do not runaway, it is not safe.”

“I have no choice. I do not want to live at home anymore.”

“Enjoy your sandwiches. I will come for you when your parents get here.”

I am eating my second sandwich when an Officer approaches my holding cell.

“Your mother just called. Your Dad just got home from work. They will be here by noon tomorrow for you.”

“Where will I sleep?”

“In the holding cell. I will bring you a blanket and a pillow.”

The Police Officer returns with the blanket, pillow, a toothbrush, along with a tube of toothpaste.

“Do you need to use the restroom?”

“I do.”

“Bring the toothbrush and toothpaste with you.”

I am escorted to the restroom.

Once back in my holding cell the Female Officer comes over and hands me a stack of comic books. The Officer says, “Your parents are coming in the morning. Too bad. I wanted to meet them tonight. Do not runaway, it is not safe to do so.”

“Thank you, Officer for the comic books.”

“You welcome. Good night.”

I read three comic books then fall asleep.

In the morning, a young guard says, “Your parents are here. You will be going home now.”

My Dad is mad as hell. He whispers, “You Punk. I drove five hours straight to pick you up. I told your Mother this is the last time.”

Mom looks at me with tears in her eyes, “You are costing us money we do not have. Between airline tickets, hotels, meals, and gas we do not have money. Do not runaway again. This is your final warning.”

My Mom escorts me to their car. I get in the back seat. I am surprised David is in the backseat, too.

David places his finger to his lips and says, “Do not tell Mom I helped you run away. Tell Mom you lied to me that you had to go to the restroom and did not come back. I told Mom I looked for you at the parade but there were too many people.”

My Dad returns to the car and drives away.

Mom turns in her seat and faces me.

“The Fairbanks Police Department wants to talk to you and me about you running away. We have an appointment at ten am. The State is warning me that if I do not keep you under control then the State of Alaska will take over and make you a Ward of the State.”

“What is a Ward of the State?”

My Dad speaks up, “The State of Alaska will own you. They can do what they want with you. They can lock you up and throw away the key. You become the State’s problem and not ours.”

My Mom turns back around and looks straight ahead.

David opens a matchbook. Inside he wrote, “You are going to jail.”

I ask Mom. “Where am I going when we get home?”

Before my Mom can say a word, my Dad speaks up and says, “Wait and see.”

David points to his matchbook again with the words, “You are going to jail.”

We stop one-hundred-fifty miles from home to have lunch at a highway café.

During lunch I say to Mom, “I have to use the restroom.”

My Dad looks at David and says, “Go with your Brother.”

I walk into the men’s room and lock the door. It is a small bathroom with a window.

David stands out front in the hall.

I do not want to go back to juvenile jail. I climb out the bathroom window and run into the woods.

David knocks and knocks on the bathroom door. My Dad has the manager open the locked bathroom door. My Dad sees the bathroom window open.

Mom comes out of the restaurant calling my name.

I stay hidden for hours. I then follow the river toward Valdez.

I finally work my way to the highway and start hitchhiking.

A family of six in a station wagon pick me up.

“How far are you going?”

“To Valdez.”

The driver says, “We are going to Valdez, too.”

“Where in Valdez do you want us to drop you off at?”

“The Port. I am meeting my Dad at the Port.”

“Are you hungry? I have grapes.”

“I am hungry.”

The father of four is in the U.S. Army.

“Do you live in Valdez, Sir?”

“No, Young Man. I am on my thirty-day leave from the U.S. Army. I always wanted to see Alaska. I have a good friend in the Postal Service in Valdez. His wife just had a baby.”

“Are your parents divorced?”

“Yes. I wanted to visit him badly. I miss him.”

“Hitchhiking is not safe. This is why we stopped for you.”

“Thank you.”

“How old are you, fifteen?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We will be in Valdez in an hour. Drop you at the Port of Valdez did you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

“My name is Arnold, this is my wife, Peggy and the babies sleeping next to you are twins, age two.”

“I have twin Sisters, Venus, and Victoria, age twelve. They are Daddy’s pet; they can do no wrong.”

“You like Alaska, Son?”

“No, too cold for me. I like Carson City, Nevada. We moved to Fairbanks. My parents got divorced and now I am stuck here till I go in the Army.”

“You decided to go in the Army?”

“Yes, sir. My older Brother chose the Marine Corp. My father was Army twenty-years. We were born all over the world.”

Peggy looks at me and asks, “Where around the world?”

“Steven was born in North Carolina, David in Alaska, me in Washington State, my twin Sisters in Japan, and my little Brother, Andy in Florida.”

Arnold says, “I plan to do twenty-years as well. I want the pension the service offers.”

I make small talk with the couple till we arrive at the Port of Valdez.

“Thank you for the ride.”

“You welcome, Son. Bye.”

I stand there and take in the Port. There are cargo ships docked side by side.

I ask a worker, “Where can I catch a Ferry for Seattle?”

The worker looks at me and laughs.

“There are no Ferries to Seattle. There never was.”

I walk into a Cargo office and ask to use their telephone.

I call David.

“Hello?”

“David, I am back in Valdez at the Port. There are no Ferries to Seattle, there never was.”

“I thought I read somewhere that there were Ferries to Seattle.”

“You read wrong.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“I do not know. I will think of something. Was Mom and Dad mad I ran away again?”

“Dad was very mad; Mom was worried about your safety. Dad slapped me and called me a Punk for letting you escape out the bathroom window.”

I laugh and say, “Getting slapped hurts, right?”

“It does.”

“Call Mom, tell her I called you. Tell Mom I am hitchhiking across the State.”

“Will do. Do not forget me when you steal money.”

“I won’t,” I lie. “I have your college address in my pocket.”

I exit the Cargo office of a lumber company. I am standing there when I see a dock worker exit his Honda Civic without his car keys in his hand.

I go to the man’s unlocked car when the man climbs onboard a cargo ship.

I search for the man’s car keys. I find them above the visor on the driver’s side. I start the car and drive away. I do not know how to drive.

I check the glovebox. There is a map of Alaska and a pair of binoculars.

I look at the gas gauge. It is on half.

Fifty miles outside Valdez I stop at a gas station, and I go inside with the pair of binoculars.

I ask the clerk, “Can I fill up my gas tank? I left my wallet at home in Valdez. I will leave my pair of binoculars with you till I can return with cash to pay you.”

The clerk says, “Yes.”

I hand the clerk the binoculars. I fill my gas tank and pretend I am returning to Valdez. Five miles down the road I do a U-turn and head back toward the Canadian border.

Just outside Glenallen, Alaska a State Trooper pulls me over.

“Driver’s license and insurance card, please?”

I lie and say, “I left my wallet at home in Valdez.”

The Trooper pulls out a notepad and says to me, “Give me your name and date of birth.”

“JP Harrison. I was born on November 5th, 2007.”

“I will be right back.”

I watch the Trooper get on his radio.

The Trooper comes back and opens my driver’s door.

“Step out, Young man. You are operating a stolen car. You also are a runaway from Fairbanks.”

The Trooper escorts me to the back of his patrol car. He places me in the backseat and closes the door. He does not know it, but I hold the door handle open, so it does not lock.

When the Trooper returns to the stolen car to retrieve the car keys, I open the back door and run into the woods.

“The Trooper yells at me to stop but I keep running deeper into the woods. I hide by a fallen tree trunk.

The Trooper stops to listen for me running in the woods. I hear voices calling for the Trooper, does he need help.

The Trooper says, “Yes. Come down and help me find a runaway from Fairbanks.”

Four men with rifles walk toward the Trooper.

The Trooper says, “No need for rifles. We are dealing with a runaway kid. Help me find him.”

Suddenly a hunter says, “There he is by the fallen tree trunk.”

The Trooper walks over to me and says, “Stand up.”

The Trooper handcuffs me in the back and leads me up the slope to his police cruiser.

“Thank you, men for coming to my aid.”

The Trooper drives me to his station. He places me in a holding cell.

“What is your home phone number, Young Man?”

“907-335-2741, sir.”

The Trooper returns in ten minutes.

“Your parents will be here in the morning.”

“Can I have something to eat?”

“In a minute, Son. When I searched you, I found a gas receipt. I called the gas station. The clerk confirms you were there with a pair of binoculars wanting the clerk to hold them till you came back with cash.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why did you steal the car, why are you running away often?”

“I have a strict Dad with rules. I do not want to live in fear all the time.”

“Let me find you something to eat.”

The Trooper brings me two slices of Pizza and a Coke.

“You are being charged with a Felony, for stealing the Honda.”

“What is a Felony, Officer?”

“It is defined as a year or more in jail.”

“I am cold, Sir.”

“Let me roundup a blanket and pillow for you, Son.”

Every thirty minutes a Trooper checks in on me.

In the morning I have a bowl of cold cereal and two pieces of toast.

The Trooper says, “Your parents are here.”

On the way home my Mom asks, “Why did you runaway from us at the restaurant on the highway?”

“David said I was going to jail.”

“Why did he tell you that lie? You were coming home.”

“Mom, I have ben stealing for David every week. This is the reason he comes home on weekends from College. He said he needed money.”

“Thank you, Son for coming clean with us. We will keep you away from your Brother. David is a bad influence.”

Once back home I do not go back to school. Instead, I go in front of a Judge.

The Judge says, “Your parents can not control you.”

“We try your Honor.”

The Judge continues, “You runaway to Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, now Valdez. You steal money. You stole a car. You are behind in your education. This is what I am going to do with the Runaway Kid.”

My Mom looks worried.

“Stand up, Young Man.”

“Yes, your Honor.”

“I am taking you away from your parents. I am making you a Ward of the State. What this means, Son is The State is your parents now. I will be ordering you to a school for boys for your education. I am assigning your case over to a Probation Officer.”

My Mom comes to visit me daily.

“I warned you, JP, not to keep running away from home. Now the State of Alaska owns you.”

“It is all right, Mom. You know I cannot live with Dad. I just cannot.”

“Have you spoke with your Probation Officer, yet?”

“Yes. His name is Mike Edwards. He says they located a school out of State for me to go to. I will know the name of the school and where it is this afternoon. Mr. Edwards said he looked for an educational school as I was missing too much school running away.”

“Your Brother and Sisters are asking about you.”

“Tell them I am fine. Tell them I love them.”

“I will.”

“What are you doing with, David?”

“We told him to stay away and to focus on his college.”

Later that afternoon my Probation Officer comes to see me.

“The State of Alaska is flying you to Stockton, California to the Karl Holton School for Boys. This is an educational detention center.”

“How long will I be there?”

“Good question, I think at least a year.”

The next afternoon my Mom comes to say goodbye.

“Where is, Dad?”

“Your Father is waiting for me in the car.”

“Sad, I am going out of state for at least a year, and he does not want to say goodbye to his son.”

“You know how your Father is, JP.”

“Dad’s actions toward me is why I ran away so much, Instead of hugs, kisses, doing things with me, he instead slaps me, calls me Punk, makes me wear the same clothes all month, and makes me at fifteen be in bed, on my back, hands at my side at eight pm, when my friends stay up till at least ten pm.”

“Your Father works too many hours.”

“Wrong. Has Dad ever taken me fishing, camping, to Little League practice, attended any of my baseball games?”

“No.”

“Friends at school brag about what they do with their Dads. When Dad comes home, I hide. I do not know what kind of mood he will be in. Dad and I do not get along. He shows zero emotion. If I stay home, I will run away again.”

3

CHAPTER 3

The next morning my Mom comes to say goodbye to me.

“Your Father is thinking of moving to Florida. If we leave Alaska for Florida, we will stop by Karl Holton School for Boys and visit with you.”

“You mean you will visit, and Dad will wait in the car.”

“I will talk him into coming inside the facility.”

“Sad, you have to talk him into coming in. Why did Dad have six kids?”

“I wanted a big family.”

“You did, Mom, but Dad did not. He runs our household like we are in the military. Sad, we have to call him, Sir and not Dad or Father.”

“That is the way he is. Your Dad will not change.”

“Neither will I change, Mom. I will keep running away from Dad.”

My Mom stands up crying.

I give my Mom a hug and say, “Write me.”

I look out my jail cell window as my Mom walks to the car. I see my Dad slowly driving away.

The next day I have a visit from my Probation Officer, Mike Edwards.

“You will be leaving at nine am tomorrow for California. I will be driving you to the airport. Once you leave Karl Holton either you will

want to go home to your parents or fly back to Fairbanks and live with a foster family.”

“If I go home, I will run away again as I do not have a good relationship with my Dad. I plan to come back to Fairbanks and live with a foster family.”

“If that is the case, I will be your Probation Officer till you turn eighteen. Once you are eighteen you will be an adult and on your own.”

“You listen to me, Mr. Edwards. We can sit and talk. I cannot do that with my Dad.”

“Maybe he will change.”

I laugh and say, “My Dad is set in his ways. He will never change. My Dad will slap me and call me Punk as long as I am under his roof.”

“I called around regarding Karl Holton School for Boys. This is a new facility. Less than five years old. The facility houses about fifteen hundred young men. The age range is between twelve to seventeen. All the youths at this facility are there for their education. Like you, the youths are behind in their studies.”

“My Mom said my Dad wants to move to Florida soon. When they do move, my Mom will visit me, she said.”

“I can easily talk to your Mother. Your Dad hardly speaks. He nods often.”

“I am looking forward to my stay at Karl Holton. I plan to study as hard as I can. I want an education. I want to go to college.”

“That is good to hear, JP.”

“In my heart I know I am a good kid. I stole for my Brother. I stole so my Brother could pick me up and get me away from Dad. If given the chance I will be a good young man.”

“Prove it to the World. Go to Karl Holton, study hard, keep your nose clean and make this a fresh start for you.”

“I shake Mr. Edwards hand and say, “See you tomorrow.”

“Rest up. You have a long flight tomorrow.”

I look out my jail cell window and watch my Probation Officer drive away in a sports car with the top down.

The next morning after breakfast my Probation Officer drives me to the airport.

“Your Mom dropped off a suitcase of your clothing last night. I have the suitcase in the trunk.”

“Did my Mom say anything to you about me being a Ward of the State?”

“At first your Mom was upset with the Judge. Your Mom knows now it was the right decision. Your Mom knows you and your Dad do not get along. Your Mom knows you would keep running away.”

“My Dad slapped my younger Brother two months ago. Andy is eight years old.”

“Why did your Father slap your Brother for?”

“For lying to him.”

“What was the lie?”

“My Dad made Andy take a jar of oatmeal to school. My Dad told Andy to have his oatmeal for lunch. Andy hates oatmeal. My Dad knows he hates oatmeal. My Dad knew Andy would not eat his oatmeal. My Brother left the jar of oatmeal on the bus.”

“Why did your Father make your Brother oatmeal if he knows he hates oatmeal?”

“That is my Dad for you.”

“So, what did Andy lie about?”

“My Dad asked, “Did you eat your oatmeal at school?”

Andy said, “Yes, sir.”

“What did you eat the oatmeal with?”

“A spoon, sir.”

“Where did you get the spoon?”

“Cafeteria, sir?”

“Where did you eat your meal at?”

“Cafeteria, sir.”

“You ate your oatmeal with a cafeteria spoon in the cafeteria?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You ate all the oatmeal?”

“Yes, sir.”

My Dad got up from his chair, walked over and slapped my Brother off his chair. My dad said, “You are lying, Punk. If you ate all your oatmeal, you would have found the spoon I put in the oatmeal.”

“Wow, your Father was tricky.”

“My Dad knew Andy would not eat his oatmeal at school. He just wanted to catch him in a lie.”

“You live in fear of your Father because he plays mind games.”

“I did till I started running away. I was never home for him to play mind games with. I told Andy I would have dumped the oatmeal down the toilet. I would then see the spoon. Then when Dad asked me did, I eat all my oatmeal I would have said, “Yes, sir,” and produced the spoon. That is the difference between my siblings and me. I think it all out and they lie.”

“Sad you have to live that way. Now call me once a week from Karl Holton. Let me know how you are doing.”

“I will try calling you every Friday if I can.”

“We are here at the Airport. Let me get your suitcase. I will double park. Security will not issue me a ticket for illegal parking.”

“Why not?”

“I have official State plates on my car. When you land in San Francisco look for a man holding up a sign with your name on it. This will be your driver that will drive you to Karl Holton.”

“A man holding a sign with my name on it. Got it.”

Mr. Edwards sees me off. We shake hands just before I board.

“Have a safe flight, JP. Make Alaska proud.”

I laugh and reply, “I will.”

I fly first class from Fairbanks to San Francisco with a brief stayover in Seattle.

When I get off the plane there is an elderly man holding a sign that says, JP Harrison.

“I am JP Harrison.”

“I am Hector. I will drive you the eighty-five miles to Stockton. Welcome to California. Where are you coming from?”

“Fairbanks, Alaska, sir.”

“Please, call me, Hector, not sir.”

“Hello, Hector. I have to call my Father, sir and just sir. No Dad, Father, Pa, just sir.”

“Why?”

“My Dad was military twenty-six years. He ran our family of eight like we are his soldiers.”

“I work part-time as a driver for the school. Any questions?”

“How many youths go to the school?”

“I say about fifteen hundred.”

“How many to a cell?”

“No cells, Karl Holton does open bunk beds with a nightstand by each bunk.”

“Are there many fights?”

“Fights are rare. The kids have it made. Just go to class, keep your nose clean and study hard.”

“I plan to get as much education as the school offers.”

“What grade are you in?”

“I was in ninth grade when I started running away.”

Hector picks up my suitcase and we go to his car.

“Karl Holton runs on funny money.”

“Funny money?”

“The more you study the more money you can earn, The more money you have the more freedom. Everything you want to do cost money. Do not study, do not earn fun money and you end up in bed at eight pm.”

“Can you give me examples?”

There are pool tables in each dorm. To play, it cost one hundred dollars. If you want to take a bath instead of a shower that will cost, you two hundred dollars. If you want to stay up till eleven pm and watch television that will cost, you three hundred dollars. Everything you want to do cost money. Study and you earn money.”

“Can I play sports?”

“Again, it will cost you. Baseball is two hundred a day, same for football, and basketball.”

“Sounds like a college campus?”

“Similar, but you can not leave. The school has guard towers, armed guards, a fence with barb wire, and guards in each dorm.”

“How many dorms are there?”

“There are ten dorms spread far apart along with an administrative building. We have elderly Folks that visit each dorm building to play cards and keep you company.”

“Big question, how is the food?”

“No complaints as far as I know of.”

“That is good to hear. I love to eat.”

Hector pulls up to the front of Karl Holton School for Boys.

“We are here, Young Man. I will retrieve your suitcase from the trunk. Just walk in the pedestrian gate. Good luck.”

I shake Hector’s hand and say, Thanks for the ride.”

“You welcome. Study hard.”

“I will.”

The guard at the front gate calls the Administrative Building.

“I have at the Main gate a JP Harrison. Yes, sir no problem.”

The guard hangs up his receiver, turns to me and says, “Young Man, walk to the first building on your right. You will be directed to your Councilor’s office.”

“Yes, sir.”

I walk with my suitcase to the large administrative building.

A woman walks me down the hall and knocks on a closed door.

“Come in.”

The young woman enters with me in front of her.

“Bobby, this is JP Harrison. He just arrived from Alaska.”

Bobby looks up from his paperwork, smiles, and replies, “Thanks, Janet. Have a seat, Young Man. Welcome to Karl Holton School for Boys.”

“Hello, sir.”

“Call me, Bobby, everyone does.”

“Hello, Bobby.”

Bobby stands up and shakes my hand.

“Are you hungry? Do you want something to drink or eat?”

“A coke, maybe a sandwich.”

Bobby picks up his receiver and dials a number.

“Kitchen, this is Bobby. I have a new youth that just arrived from Alaska. I need a coke and a sandwich, please.”

Bobby turns to me and says, “You are my first youth from Alaska. You are a long ways from home.”

I nod my head in agreement.

“Here are the school’s rules. No fighting, no stealing, take a shower or bath daily, have three meals a day, and we meet nightly to discuss your educational progress.”

“Easy enough.”

“I read your file, JP. It is lengthy. You are marked in red as an escape risk.”

“I will not run away. I ran away only from my Dad. I am a good kid. I will be a model prisoner.”

Bobby laughs and says, “We do not use the word prisoner. We use juvenile delinquent.”

“Can you explain the funny money I earn based on my grades. Hector told me on the ride over here from the airport.”

“Your instructors or teaches will hand out homework. If you receive an A, you earn three hundred dollars. B score is two hundred, and a C

is one hundred. On the window ledges in each classroom are extra assignments. Each is worth fifty dollars. The more you study the more you earn. In your dorm is a posted list of activities you can do and what it cost.”

“What are the sleeping arrangements?”

“Bunk beds side by side, fifty on the right side of the guard station and fifty bunks on the left side of the dorm. Also in the dorm is a pool table, a large screen television, and you can take showers for free and a bath cost two hundred dollars in funny money.”

“Do I receive the funny money, or do you record the amounts I earn and use?”

“The amounts you earn and use. Our goal at Karl Holton is your education. You are fifty percent finished with the ninth grade. You should be starting the eleventh grade based on your age.”

“When will I be ready to leave Karl Holton?”

“I have no idea. It is not up to me. The board decides.”

There is a knock on the door.

“Come in.”

Janet walks in with a paper bag and a coke. “In the paper bag are two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Here is your coke, JP.”

“Thanks, Janet.”

“You welcome, Bobby.”

As I eat my meal Bobby says, “The primary function of Karl Holton is rehabilitation of you boys whose behavior problems are severe. Your home cannot control you. Karl Holton has ten dorms that can house one hundred youths per dorm. You will receive psychological and educational testing and given a thorough medical examination.”

“What about dental care, Bobby?”

“This week I will be scheduling a dental visit. You will walk to the administrative building. Janet or someone will walk you to the dental office.”

“Do I start off with funny money?”

“No. You have to earn it.”

“You will see me each night?”

“We will have counselling sessions consisting of both individual and group discussions. We just opened up our auto mechanics, and cabinet making workshop.”

“Bobby, what about visitors coming to see me?”

“Visits from parents are particularly important for our youths. If you save your funny money, you can go out for the day with your parents.”

“How much funny money will I need?”

“Two thousand dollars.”

“I will start earning and saving my funny money.”

“Our ultimate objective at Karl Holton School is to rehabilitate and return you back to your community. You need to demonstrate your ability to adjust to social life in the community.”

I say, “I will focus on my education while I am here at Karl Holton.”

“I will walk you now to Dorm D and introduce you to your new house mates.”

Bobby and I continue to talk as he walks me to Dorm D.

“We never had an escape from this facility. We have security with K-9 dogs walking the first perimeter fence, and armed guards in patrol vehicles patrolling the second exterior perimeter fence.”

“How long has this youth correctional facility been open?”

“Six years next month. Security inside the dorm is twenty-four seven. We have a posted guard in his/her cubicle that sits in the middle between all the bunks. The guard calls the administration office before leaving his/her cubicle to make their rounds of the bathroom, dorm beds, and the recreational room. The guard again calls the administration office upon his/her return to the cubicle.”

“Any dorm rules I need to know about?”

“Yes. Lights go out at eight pm. You have to be in your bunks at that time. If you need to go to the restroom you have to snap your fingers to get the guard’s attention. He/she will signal when you can leave your bunk.”

“What about letters home? Where do I go to mail my letters?”

“You hand the open letters to the guard in the cubicle. He/she reads them before asking you for the envelope. The guard then mails the letters for you.”

“Do you have a commissary where I can buy items?”

“You have to buy with real money. The State of Alaska gave me twenty-five dollars for you. Then you will receive ten dollars a month from the State of Alaska. With real money you can walk to Building B where the commissary is located and buy what you want.”

“What do most new offenders buy from the commissary?”

“Playing cards, writing pads, envelopes, stamps, ink pens, honey buns, chips, sodas, candy, and cigarettes.”

“I do not smoke but where does a juvenile delinquent go to smoke?”

“There is no smoking after eight pm. You can use the recreation room from eight am to eight pm.”

“What if a juvenile delinquent breaks the rules?”

“Simple. We have cells where you will stay twenty-four-seven for a period of time. No television or reading material.”

“Are there gangs in my dorm?”

“No. If one forms, we transfer each gang member to a different facility.”

“If I tell you something in confidence, you will not let anyone know your source, right?”

“Whatever you and I discuss, JP, stays between us only.”

“That is good to know. Kids talk too much in facilities like Karl Holton.”

“Here we go, Dorm D. Your home away from home.”

I walk into the dorm and all action stops. The other juvenile delinquents walk over to, Bobby.

“Morning, Bobby” says the crowd.

“Men, this is JP Harrison. JP is from Fairbanks, Alaska. Get to know JP and make him feel at home. Today there will be no group session. I have too much on my plate. I will be back in the dorm at five pm tomorrow.”

One juvenile says to me, “You live in Alaska? Isn’t it dark and cold? Have you seen a polar bear?”

Bobby turns to this juvenile and says, “John, show JP his bunk, he is number nineteen. Give JP a tour of the dorm.”

“Yes, Bobby.”

John offers me his handshake. “Come with me, let me show you your sleeping arrangements.”

I walk with John from the recreation room to where all the bunks are. I take in the site of a cubical in the middle, then fifty bunks to the right and fifty bunks to the left. You have to climb seven steps to enter the cubical which has a sign posted, staff only.

John walks me over to bunk nineteen.

“The nightstand to the right is yours. There are no locks on the nightstands. I place my snacks I receive from my mother in my nightstand.

“Have you ever had your snacks stolen?”

“All the time, which is why I eat the snacks quickly. Most youths receive no money from anyone, so they steal. Me, my mom visits every Saturday and brings me cash for the commissary.”

“No one better steal from me,” I say.

“I will call you Alaska instead of JP.”

“I like the name you just gave me.”

“Let me show you the restroom and shower area.”

John walks me into a large restroom with twenty sinks, ten toilet stalls and an open shower bay.

“See those five doors?”

“Yes.”

“You can spend your funny money on a private bath. I spend my money every Sunday for quiet time in a bath. The guard has to unlock the bath.”

“What does a private bath cost?”

“It is expensive but worth it. The bath cost three hundred dollars.”

“What about playing sports?”

“Let us go outside.”

John opens a door to the outside area.

“This door locks at six pm. If you try to exit an alarm sounds and the guards, come running.”

“I like my counselor,” I say.

“Bobby is easy to talk to,” replies John.

I look around the ball field. Youths are playing a baseball game. There are bleachers to sit in and a score board.

John walks me back inside the dorm.

A guard walks over and hands me an envelope and says, “Here is your class schedule. Go to the Admin Office for a set of clothing.”

John replies, “We all wear the blue in color uniform. It has KH on the front of the shirts. Laundry is every Thursday. Leave your dirty clothes in your laundry basket at the foot of your bunk. Someone collects the dirt clothes bag and brings you clean ones.”

“When do we eat?”

“Breakfast is at seven am, classes are eight am to noon and one to four pm. We have lunch from noon to one and dinner is at six pm. We walk to building C where the cafeteria is located.”

“I am hungry now.”

“Come to my bunk. I am next door to you in bunk eighteen. I have cookies.”

“I like cookies,” I reply.

We sit on our bunks and make small talk. John’s family resides in San Diego and comes up every Saturday to visit.

“What are you in for, John?”

“Auto Theft. I love stealing cars. When a police officer pulls me over for a traffic violation I run. I either wreck the stolen car or the Police catch me. I never have gotten away, but I tried to. What are you in for, JP?”

“Running away. I ran away to Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Valdez, Alaska. While on the run I stole money and cars. My Dad is ex-military and strict. I could only call my Dad, sir.”

“Tell me about Alaska?”

“It is cold this time of the year. We lived in a rural log cabin with no running water. We took showers in a rain barrel, we dumped our trash in a pit by the house, and at night the bears would roam the pit in search of food. Alaska stays dark about six months a year.”

The guard says over a speaker, “Lights out in thirty minutes.” John replies, “I have to brush my teeth and take a shower. Speak to you when I return.”

“I have to do the same, John.”

After my bathroom trip we slip into bed and whisper. The guard finally says, “Beds eighteen and nineteen no talking.”

4

CHAPTER 4

I have breakfast then walk to my classes. I stand up in front of each class and state my name, city, and State.

“JP Harrison, Fairbanks, Alaska.”

In the classes I hear “Wow, Alaska.”

After each class I would approach the teacher. I would say, “Please load me up with homework. I want to earn funny money, plus I want an education.”

While other juvenile delinquents played sports, pool, watched television, or played cards with our elderly guest, I would lay in my bunk and do extra homework.

During my first week at Karl Holton, I witnessed four youths go through a person’s nightstand and remove all the snacks.

When the youth in bunk eleven returned to his bunk I went to him and said, “Four youths stole your food. They are sitting on bunk three eating your food right now.”

I watched the four youths laugh at the boy while continuing to eat his food. One youth pushed him and said, “Get out of my face.”

The young boy walked back to his bunk crying.

I said, “Go fight for your food. Make the Punks give you your food back.”

“They can have it. I am not a fighter.”

The next day after school one of the four youths asks me to play baseball.

I walk outside the safety of the dorm. One of the four youths hit me in my right eye with a fist.

I hear a voice say, "Do not snitch on us, again."

The boys started laughing as I walk back inside the dorm.

The four lured me outside away from the guard to hit me. I was learning fast, but not fast enough.

That same night Bobby visited my bunk and saw my black eye.

"Who hit you?"

"No one. I ran into a doorknob."

The next morning, I walk over to the four as they were dressing and said, "I am a Harrison. Harrisons get even. I deserved my black eye for snitching on you, but do not touch me again. I will steal a baseball bat, then when you are sleeping, I will knock your heads off."

I walked away and went back to my bunk. I stayed in Karl Holton nine months and the four boys never bothered me again.

When classes were over, old ladies from the local nursing homes would be waiting for us in our dorm.

The women would watch television, play pool, or cards with the youths. I played cards every school day with the ladies. Having them over was like having a grandmother around. It was fun and made my time fly.

Most youths have it made. Their parents visited every weekend and brought them snacks.

One night I was hungry. About three in the morning, I snuck out of my bunk and crawled over to bunk fourteen and raided his nightstand. I stole his cookie box and crawled back to my bunk.

After I ate all the cookies, I placed paperback books into the empty cookie box and replaced the box in the boy's nightstand.

The next day the boy opened the box and said, "Instead of cookies my Mom packed paperback books."

A second kid looked at the books and said, "These books have Karl Holton stamped in them Someone stole your cookies and replaced them with books."

The next day after school I was playing a game of pool when the boy from bunk fourteen dropped the empty cookie box on the pool table. I pretended nothing was wrong and said, "Take the box off the pool table, please."

The boy looked at me, held up his fist and said, "I am going to blacken your left eye. You stole my cookies."

I tried to deny I did not steal his cookies. Bunk fourteen chased me around the pool table shouting, "I am going to kick your butt, Thief."

The guard came over and grabbed my arm and said, "Come with me."

I was placed in a holding cell for troublemakers.

Two hours later Bobby walks into my holding cell.

"I received a report you stole cookies from bunk fourteen."

"Yes, I did. I was hungry."

"I will buy the boy a new box of cookies and say they are from you. I will do this if you promise not to steal anyone else's food."

"I promise."

The next day I walk up to the boy in bunk fourteen with his replacement cookies. "I am sorry I stole your cookies. I love cookies and I was hungry."

The boy shakes my hand and says, “Thanks for my cookies. Would you like one?”

“Yes, please.”

I studied as often as I could. I wanted the best education I could get. I was in my bunk studying when the guard comes over and says, “Head to the Administrative Office you have a visitor.”

I walk over to the Administrative Office and the female clerk says, “Room two.”

I enter room two and there sits Mom.

Mom starts to cry as I give her a big hug. “Let me guess, Dad is waiting in the car.”

“Yes, Son he is.”

“Let me guess, Dad wants you to return in ten minutes.”

“You know your Father, always a time limit. When you leave the boy’s school come back home.”

“Nope. I will just runaway again, Dad and I do not get along. You see how he acts around me. I plan to return back to Alaska.”

My Mom dries her eyes and asks, “How is the school treating you, Son?”

“I love it here. I play baseball, pool, cards and watch television. The other youths leave me alone and I am advancing in my studies, too.”

“I spoke to your Councilor, Bobby, He says you are progressing well.”

“Bobby talks and motivates me every day of the week.”

“When will you finished here at the school? Do you know?”

“In six months, I will be released from KH.”

“I wish you will come home, Son.”

“If it was just, you at home I would say yes, but Dad is a thorn in my side.”

Mom looks at her watch and says, “I have to go, Father is waiting in the car.”

“You just got here, Mom.”

“I know, Son but I do not want to keep your Father waiting. Give me a hug and kiss.”

“I give my Mom a big hug and a kiss. When will I see you again?”

“We left Alaska. We are on our way to Clearwater, Florida.”

“What is there?”

“A restaurant job for your Father.”

“Are you still baking cakes nightly for Dad?”

“Yes.”

“How are Venus, Victoria and Andy doing?”

“They are waiting with your Father. All three miss you, they want you home as well.”

I give my Mom one more hug and say, “I am moving back to Fairbanks and living with a foster family. Bobby knows how I feel about Dad. I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, Son.”

“I look out the window and watch my Mother walk to the car. I watch my Dad drive away.

Bobby walks in and says, “Have a seat.”

I sit back down.

“Your Mother asked you to come back home, right?”

“Yes. I told her no. I will return to Fairbanks and will live with a foster family.”

“I have been in touch with your Probation Officer up in Fairbanks and he says he has a family for you to live with, Bill and Eva. Bill is a Professor at the University of Alaska and Eva is a stay-at-home mother.”

“Any children at their house?”

“One foster child your age, his name is Martin.”

“It was great seeing my Mom, but my Dad did not come with her to see me. If I go back to them no doubt I will run away.”

“I will walk you back to the dorm. We need to have a group session.”

Bobby and I walk back to my dorm making small talk.

In our group session I say, “The other juvenile delinquents complain to me of thieves stealing from their nightstands.

Bobby says, “The school will be installing padlocks and issuing combination locks soon.”

A youth suggest a councilor be able to take a youth off property to a cinema, and dinner.

Bobby says, “I will try my best for this to happen. I think a cinema and a meal will be a good reward for the right juvenile.”

The youths claim they are picked on by the gang of four that run together.

Bobby says, “We plan to transfer the four to other dorms in the near future. He is waiting on bunks to open up.”

The small group sessions help. I also look forward to my one-on-ones I have with Bobby.

One night John in the bunk next to me says, “Hey, Alaska, are you escaping with us tonight?”

“Escaping how? There is a guard in his cubical, the doors are locked, and there are guards patrolling the compound.”

John says, “See the guard in the cubicle?”

“Yes.”

“He is new. Every time a guard leaves his cubicle, he is to contact administration, and the guard contacts them again on his return to his cubicle. This is for his safety. This new guard leaves his cubicle and does not inform the administration office.”

“How are you going to escape?”

“Jack in bunk two will go into the restroom to smoke. The guard will tell him to return to his bunk. Jack will not go. The new guard will exit his cubicle and go into the restroom to get Jack out. When he does a group of us will be going in with pipes from the weight room to knock him out and steal his keys. We then will escape out the side door and make a dash for the fences. Being dark outside it will be hard to spot us.”

“What happens if the guard picks up his phone and makes a call, he is leaving his cubicle?”

“Then we have to wait till he or another guard exits without picking up the telephone.”

I look around at the other bunks and the juvenile delinquents are awake and looking toward the cubicle.

“When will Jack go into the restroom?”

“He goes in at eleven pm, two hours from now.”

I want to warn the guard not to leave his cubicle without notifying the administration office. To do this I pretend I have to write my Mother, but the second sheet of notepaper will be a note to the guard.

I start writing my Mom. I show John my letter and ask him how to spell transistor. I do this to show him I am writing my Mother a letter.

“John, how do you spell transistor? I want a transistor radio for my birthday next month.”

“Transistor is spelled transistor.”

“Thanks.”

I write to the guard, “Jack will enter the restroom to smoke. It is a trap for you to go into the restroom to bring him out. When you do, unknown youths will rush you with pipes from the weightroom. They will knock you out and steal your keys. Then an unknown number of youths will exit out the side door and escape the dorm. They know you do not call into the administrator’s office every time you exit the cubicle.”

I quickly finish my letter to my Mother. I snap my fingers for permission to leave my bunk. The guard motions for me to come his way. I walk up to his window, but a youth comes up from the other side as well. I can not warn him to read my letter.

The new guard says, “Letter home?”

“Yes.”

“Drop it in the pile. I have tons of letters to read tonight.”

I have no choice but to walk away and return to my bunk.

At eleven pm Jack request to leave his bunk for the restroom. Jack goes into the restroom and starts smoking.

The new guard gets on his intercom mike and says, “Jack, no smoking. Return to your bunk.”

Jack does not return to his bunk.

The guard again says, “Jack, no smoking return to your bunk.”

Jack continues to smoke.

We all watch to see if the guard picks up his telephone. He does not. He opens his cubicle and walks inside the restroom. When he does four youths run into the restroom.

Just then the recreation room double doors opens and forty men in riot gear rush into the restroom and break up the attack on the guard.

I was relieved to know the guard read my letter warning him of the escape.

The Police remove Jack and the four thugs that hit me in my right eye out of the restroom.

The next morning as I dressed for school a guard walked up and said, “Your parents are here. Go to the administrative office now.”

I am excited to see my Mom again.

The clerk says, “Room three.”

I enter room three and only Bobby is sitting there.

“Where is my Mom?”

“Your parents are not here. I lied to get you up here. I need to know how you knew about the escape attempt.”

“I was lucky. John, in the bunk next to me asked if I was going to escape with him around eleven pm. I pretended to write a letter to my Mom, but I was writing the warning notice for the guard. Karl Holton was lucky.”

“We sure were lucky. I want to thank you for warning our guard.”

“Where is Jack and the four thugs now?”

“In holding cells here in the administrative building. We will be transferring them to separate institutions as adults.”

“Good. I told them I would get even for hitting me in the right eye.”

“They were responsible for your black eye?”

“Yes. They told me to go outside to play ball. When I stepped outside, I was struck in the eye. No warning. Just smack.”

“Your warning shows you have a good heart, and you know right from wrong.”

“Tell the guards to call in when they leave their cubical.”

“I will do that. We will post a sign in red that says call in.”

Two weeks later I am told to go to the administrative office as I have a visitor.

I walk in and the woman behind the desk says, “Room one.”

I open room one and see my older Brother and his new wife sitting there smiling. My Brother and I hug.

“What a surprise, Steven.”

“I am on my way to Arizona to a Marine Corp base in Yuma. I just had to see you. Let me introduce you to my wife.”

“OK.”

“JP this is Helena.”

“Hi, Helena. Welcome to Karl Holton School For Boys.”

“My husband talks about you all the time. Steven says he calls you The Runaway Kid like your Mother does.”

“I only ran away because my Dad ran our house like we were in the military. I also ran away because my Dad called me a Punk and slapped me often.”

“And your Mother let your Dad get away with this treatment?”

“My Dad slapped all of us kids. Two months ago, my Dad slapped my youngest Brother, Andy right off his chair. Andy is eight. My Dad hid a spoon in his oatmeal and told him to take the meal to school and have the oatmeal for lunch.”

“Why hide a spoon in the oatmeal?”

“Andy hates oatmeal. My Dad knew Andy would not eat it. At dinner that night Andy lied and said he ate the oatmeal in the cafeteria with a spoon from the cafeteria. Andy lied and said he ate all his oatmeal.”

“My Dad got up from his chair and walked over to Andy. Dad asked, “You ate all your oatmeal in the cafeteria with a spoon from the cafeteria?”

Andy lied again and said, “Yes, sir.”

“My Dad slapped him right out of his dinner chair and continued to slap him on the floor saying, You are lying Punk. I put a spoon in the oatmeal.”

“Your Dad is a big man. I met Andy and he is a skinny little kid.”

“That is why I kept running away and I am glad I did.”

“Your parents moved to Clearwater, Florida.”

“My Dad moves almost every two years.”

Steven says, “That is the military in him.”

“Thanks for coming to see me.”

“I wished I lived closer.”

I say, “I see you love the Marine Corps. You have a Marine Corp t-shirt and a Marine Corp baseball cap on.”

Steve says, “We are giving you a break from the school. Bobby said we can take you to lunch and see a movie, would you like that, JP?”

“Yes.”

“Your choice, where would you like to have lunch?”

“I crave Kentucky Fried Chicken.”

Steven looks at his watch and replies, “The movie I want to see starts in two hours.”

“What movie is that?”

“Pretty Maids all in Row, with Rock Hudson.”

“I never heard of Rock Hudson.”

“He is an up-and-coming star,” replies Helena.

“I spend quality time with Steve and Helena. I had Kentucky Fried Chicken, and I liked the movie as well.

Steven shook my hand and dropped me off at the school gate.

“I will try to come back in a few months, and we can do this again.”

I give Steve and Helena a hug and say, “Drive safe to Yuma.”

I watch them driveaway.

The Guard says, Bobby wants to see you in room five.”

“Yes, sir.”

I walk into room five and there sits Bobby with a thick file on the desk.

“Have a seat, JP. How was your visit with your Brother?”

“Great. It felt good to be free. I had fun. I like his new wife, Helena as well. They make a nice couple.”

“I have good news, JP. I spoke to your teachers. They say you finished high on your exams, and you have finished the eleventh grade.”

“Man, it was challenging work. Eleventh grade, wow. I came into Karl Holton with a ninth grade education nine months ago.”

“The school is allowing you to make a choice, Go to Clearwater, Florida and live with your parents, or go back to Fairbanks, Alaska and live with a foster family.”

“If I go home I will runaway again as my Dad and I do not get along. I will go to Fairbanks and live with a foster family.”

“I agree with you, JP. I will put the paperwork in for the transfer. You will be leaving Karl Holton in three days. I will drive you to the airport when it is time.”

“Bobby, I like this school. I made friends, I play sports, and I study hard. What happens to my funny money account when I leave the school?”

“It goes away.”

“I will start spending my money then. Late night television and baths.

“Go for it, JP. You deserve the extra rewards. I am proud of you. You finished two-years of schooling in nine months, and you foiled an escape.”

“I will have a bath tonight.”

Bobby stands up and shakes my hand.

I return to my dorm.

I tell the guard, “I will have a bath.”

“Here is the key to room two. Make sure you return the key when finished.”

“Yes, sir.”

Two days later Bobby comes to my dorm. I am sitting on my bunk doing extra homework.

“JP, your transfer came in. Pack up, your flight to Seattle departs in three hours.”

I pack what little belongs I have and walk into the recreation room, and I walk over to Bobby and say, “I am ready.”

All the youths in the recreation room say, “Bye, Alaska. Do not runaway.”

Bobby drives me to the airport. He gives me information on the ride over.

“When you arrive in Fairbanks your Probation Officer and your foster father will be waiting. All I know is the foster father’s name is Bill. He is a Professor at the University of Alaska.”

“Can you contact my Mom, let her know I went back to Fairbanks?”

“I will do that, Young Man. I know your future is bright. Keep up the cheerful outlook. Enjoy your new family.”

I say, “Bobby, thanks for your counselling and your help. You are a good man. I will never forget you.”

Bobby walks me to the gate. We shake hands one more time.

Bobby says, “Keep in touch. Let me know how you are doing.”

“I will. Bye.”

I sit in first-class in the front row. I have a window seat. I look out the window and spot Karl Holton School from the air. For the first time I see how big the school is.

I make small talk with a businessperson flying to Seattle for work in the computer industry. He is excited about his new job.

In Seattle, a Police Officer in uniform is at the gate to greet me.

“My name is Officer Pete Mitchell. I will walk you to gate nine. Your flight leaves in thirty minutes.”

“Why the Police escort?”

“The State of Alaska is your parents. They are responsible for your welfare. They want a clean transition from the school you were at back to Fairbanks.”

“How do you know I am a Ward of the State of Alaska?”

“My station briefed me on what I was to do with you when we met. I will stay with you until your flight to Fairbanks departs. Then my dispatch will notify the Fairbanks Police Department you are on your way. My dispatcher says you are a runaway kid.”

“I was a runaway kid. I will not runaway again. I only ran away because I do not have a good relationship with my Dad.”

“Were did you run away to?”

“I first ran away to Seattle, then San Francisco, then Los Angeles. My Mom made sure I could not fly away again, so I hitchhiked to Valdez, a port town in Alaska. There never were ferries to Seattle, my Brother’s information was wrong.”

“So, what did you do when you discovered there were no ferries?”

“I stole a car and headed for Canada. A State Trooper pulled me over and arrested me for stealing a car.”

“That is why you were made a Ward of the State. Your parents could not control you.”

“Correct. I earned two-years of high school in nine months.”

“Good for you. An education is important.”

“How long have you been a Police Officer?”

“I am a Rookie. It will be six months next week.”

“You like being a Police Officer?”

“I do. The ticket agent says you can board your flight now. Have a safe trip and good luck.”

“Thanks, Officer, you be safe.”

I sit in first class. I have another window seat. I make small talk with a woman on her way to visit her daughter.

When I land in Fairbanks my Probation Officer, Mike Edwards and a middle-aged man are there to greet me.

“JP, let me introduce you to your Foster father. This is Bill.”

“Nice to meet you, Young Man.”

Mike says, “Listen to Bill and his wife, Eva, They are in charge of you. I will be in touch weekly following up on your progress.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Remember, call me Mike, not sir.”

“Yes, Mike.”

Bill says, “Let us get your bag. I want to introduce you to my wife and your Foster Brother back at my residence.”

“I have a Foster Brother?”

“His name is Sonny Michael Johnson. He also is fifteen. He is a good kid. Like you, he cannot have a good relationship with his Dad.”

“I am almost seventeen. I do not want to go back to school. I want to work, earn money, and buy my first car.”

“Fine with me, Young Man. Just stay out of trouble.”

“What chores around your home will I have to do, Sir?”

“Call me, Bill. We raise rabbits and use their skins to make mukluks.”

“What are Mukluks, Bill?”

“Eskimo type winter boots. They will keep your feet warm.”

“Do you have any rabbits as pets?”

“No. We have four dogs.”

“The Dogs names?”

“We have three males and one female. All were strays. We picked them up at the Humane Society. All are German Shepherds. We have King, Prince, Joker, and Bell.”

“Cool. I always wanted a dog.”

“You had no pets growing up?”

“Yes, we had a dog named Nugget when we lived in Carson City, Nevada.”

“Did it run away?”

“No. My Brother, David tried to kill it by hanging him up in the garage. My Mom dropped Nugget off at the Humane Society. I cried. I loved that dog.”

“What did your parents do to your Brother?”

“They did not have a chance to punish him. My Brother left the house and moved in with friends.”

“How many Brothers and Sisters do you have?”

“I am one of six. Steven is the oldest and is in the Marine Corps, David works on the Alaska Pipeline, then there is me, then there are

my twin Sisters, Venus, and Victoria, then my youngest Brother, Andy.”

“Why did you runaway all the time?”

“My Dad hit me, called me a Punk, and made me wear the same clothes to school for a month.”

“Really?”

“Yes. We had to call our Father, Sir. Not Dad, Pa, or Father, just sir.”

“He must have been Military.”

“My Dad was in the Army for twenty-six years. My Mom said Dad came back a changed man after the Vietnam War.”

“At my house you only have to be in bed by eleven pm and be up at seven am. Help us raise the rabbits and listen to my wife. Eva is a stay-at-home Mom. Just call her, Eva.”

“I can do that.”

We pick up my suitcase and Bill drives me to my new home. On the drive over Bill says, “I am a Professor in History at the University of Alaska. I have a job lined up already if you want it, JP.”

“I do, what is it?”

“My Uncle manages a car dealership. He will hire you to work in the garage. When a salesperson wants a car to take a customer on a test drive, he will call you to bring the car into the garage to wash, dry, and vacuum. Then return the car to the parking lot if the car is not bought.”

“Sounds fun.”

“It is challenging work in the winter. The cars are buried under tons of snow. You have a diagram map of where each car is. You will have to shovel a path to the car, call the tow truck driver to tow the car into the

garage. Then after it is cleaned, you give the car keys to the salesperson.”

“I am a professional shoveler of snow. Each day for a year my Brothers and I shoveled a path from our driveway all the way to the road, so, my Dad could go to work.”

“I will tell my Uncle you have shoveling experience. He will like that.”

“How much will I be paid an hour?”

“I do not have a clue. Ask that question to my Uncle when you meet him.”

“What is your Uncle’s name and when can I meet him?”

“You can meet him tomorrow if you like. Call him by his first name, Aaron.”

“I would like to meet Aaron and get to work. I want to save my money and buy my first car.”

“I will take you to my bank to open a savings account.”

“Please do.”

Bill says, “We are home. I have three acres. Come inside and meet Eva and Sonny.”

“How long has Sonny lived with you?”

“Sonny has been with us just over a year.”

I live with Bill and Eva for four months. Then I am brought to the jail by my Probation Officer. During my four months with Bill and Eva I hold down two jobs.

Job one was Noah's Car Dealership. I worked extremely hard for Aaron. It was challenging work shoveling paths to the cars buried in deep snow. When cleaning the cars, I found loose change which I pocketed.

A week before Christmas I cleaned a station wagon for a salesperson. When I brought him the car keys he said, "The car is not for me. Aaron wants them."

I knock on Aaron's office door.

"Come in, JP."

"Here are the keys to the station wagon. I washed and cleaned it for you."

I hand Aaron the keys.

Aaron says, "Thanks, JP."

I say, "You welcome, Aaron."

I turn to walk out when Aaron says, "JP."

"I turn to face Aaron when he tosses me the car keys and says, "Merry Christmas. The station wagon is now yours."

I cannot believe my luck. My first car is given to me by my employer and not my Dad.

I start to cry. I look at Aaron and say, Thank you, Aaron. My first car."

"Have Bill help you get your driver's license, then you can drive the car home."

"Deal. Thanks again, Aaron for my first car."

"Now you just need a girlfriend."

“I am working on that. I met a cute girl working at the library. Once I have my driver’s license, I will ask her out.”

“Her name?”

“Donna White.”

“When you are on a date bring her. I would like to meet her.”

“Deal. Thanks again for my first car.”

“JP, you deserve the car. You are a diligent worker.”

I shake Aaron’s hand and say one more time, “Thank you for my first car.”

When Bill comes to pick me up, I show him my first car.

I say, “Take me, please to the Driver’s License Bureau. I want to get my license so I can drive my first car.”

As Bill drives me home, he says, “You are seventeen now, an adult. Every time you want to leave my house I need to know where you are going and who you will be with.”

“I have no problem with that.”

“Good, I will take you tomorrow for your driver’s license. I have a manual at my house in a kitchen drawl. I will give you quick driving lessons.”

“Thanks, Bill.”

Bill says, “I landed you a second job at my University.”

“Doing what?”

“In the cafeteria serving the college students their meals.

“I know I will like that job. I can check-out the women I am serving.”

Bill laughs and says, “Do not bother the women. That will get you fired for sure.”

“I can look, right?”

“Yes, you can look but do not touch.”

“I have eyes only for Donna.”

“Good to hear. Donna at our library, right?”

“Yes. She is cute. I love her smile and her blue eyes.”

“Pass your driving test and take her for a spin. Just drive slowly. There is black ice this time of year.”

“What is black ice, Bill?”

“Hidden slick ice that will make you loose control of your car and make you crash. The ice is hidden. It happens fast. Your tires spin, you lose traction, and have no control. I will show you videos of black ice.”

“I will drive slowly when I own my first car. I do not want any speeding tickets.”

“I will buy your insurance coverage on your first car. You can pay me back a small amount from each paycheck.”

“Thanks, Bill. That helps me get on the road faster.”

“You start tomorrow afternoon in the Cafeteria. Report to Tonya Douglas.”

The next morning, Bill buys my car insurance, and teaches me how to drive. I drive slowly to the Driver’s License Bureau. The roads are covered in snow.

I pass the driving exam and the road test. The Examiner tells me, "Practice parallel parking."

I drive over to take Donna for a short drive.

I almost get in an accident. I am driving with Donna by my side, and we round a curve. There in the middle of the road stands a huge Moose. I am able to slide around the animal. This is three days before Christmas

Donna screams as I come close to the Moose. I am lucky. Somehow, I do not hit the animal.

The next day Donna hands me a toy car and a poem. She says, "Merry Christmas, JP."

I read the poem back to her. "These kind of wheels are a whole lot easier to control when it comes to dodging the Moose on a snow-covered road."

I loved working in the cafeteria at the University of Alaska. I met so many students. It made me want to finish high school and go to college myself.

There was this one petty student named Lilly. We had chemistry from the start. Sparks flew every time we met on the food line. Our conversations were brief as Lilly slowly moved down the service line. Lilly was five 'three," about nineteen with a warm smile, with brown eyes, and long brown hair.

One day while I served her lunch she asked, "JP, do you want to go to the all-night movies tonight at my dorm with me?"

"Yes, I would. Which Dorm and at what time?"

"Dorm J, eight-thirty pm."

"I will be there, Lilly. Thanks for inviting me."

“You welcome, JP.”

I call my foster Mom and say, “Eva, I will be late coming home. I have been invited to the all-night movies in dorm, J.”

“No. You cannot go. Come straight home after work.”

“I am going to the all-night movies. I will be home late.”

“No. You have to listen to me, JP. You will come home at your regular time.”

“No. I am staying and watching the all-night movies.”

I hang up the telephone and return back to work.

At six pm my Probation Officer shows up expectantly and he tosses me a pair of handcuffs and says, “Put these on. You will be staying the night in the juvenile detention center.”

“Why?”

“You told Eva you are going to the all-night movies, and she said, no. You told her you were going anyway.”

Laying in my bunk at the detention center all I could do was dream of Lilly and the all-night movies I was missing.

The next morning my Probation Officer, Mike Edwards, comes to my jail cell. He says, “Come with me. I will drive you back home to Bill and Eva.”

“Nope. I am never going back to them. They do not trust me. What harm would it be, me watching all-night movies with a student that invited me?”

“You are under their control.”

“Not anymore. I am seventeen. I will just stay here in my holding cell. I have a bed and three meals.”

“You may be here for months.”

“Fine with me. I do not want to be with anyone that does not trust me.”

I was into my third month of sitting in my cell at the Juvenile Detention Center when my Probation Officer comes to me and says, “Tomorrow morning your Father will be here to take you to Florida. You will live with your parents.”

I did not want to go anywhere with my Father. I did not want to spend another night in my jail cell either.

The next morning, I am brought to my Dad in the waiting room.

Once outside the detention center my Dad hands me my airline ticket and says, “Fly home, see Mom. The address is in the ticket sleeve.”

My Dad is hoping I will runaway instead.

I fly from Fairbanks, Alaska to Tampa, Florida. I call my Mom and she drives to the airport and picks me up.

In the car driving to our rental house in Clearwater my Mom says, “JP, welcome home. I missed you; your Sisters and Andy missed you. Do not runaway again.”

“I am over running away. I want to work, save my money, and go on my own.”

“Your Probation Officer for Florida will be at the house in the morning. He wants to speak with you.”

“His name?”

“Reginal Banks.”

“I can’t wait for all this probation stuff to be over.”

“Reginal over the telephone said your probation ends when you turn eighteen.”

“Eight more months to go till I am free.”

“We will go to Clearwater High School, and I will enroll you in the twelve grade.”

“I want to work, save my money, buy a car, and go on my own.”

“In suitable time, Son. In suitable time.”

“Dad gave me my airline ticket instead of escorting me home. Dad was hoping I would run away again.”

“That is not true. He had to go on base and update his retirement account.”

“He could have brought me along with him. Let us face it Mom, Dad and I do not get along.”

My twin Sisters were happy to see me. I was not happy to see them. I could still close my eyes and see them laughing and saying, “Slap, slap”

“Mom, where is Andy?”

“Your Father put Andy on a Greyhound Bus early this morning for Quantico, Virginia. He will spend a week with your older brother.”

My Dad comes home and makes a call to a Greyhound Bus Station in Ridgeland, South Carolina. Dad knows the timetable for Andy’s bus route to Quantico, Virginia.

My Dad asks to speak to his son in the restaurant.

The Bus Station pages Andy Harrison. Andy comes to the telephone.

“Hello?”

“I am checking on you, Punk.”

“I am in the restaurant having my lunch you told me to have, sir.”

“Good. Have fun with your older brother.”

“Yes, Sir.”

My Dad is very controlling.

The next morning my new Probation Office shows up for his scheduled visit.

My Mom and I sit in the living room and listen.

“My name is Reginal Banks. I examined your thick file of crime and running away. I wonder if you will give me a tough time, JP.”

“No, Sir. My running away days are over. I want to work, save my money, buy a car, and go on my own.”

“When you turn eighteen that will happen. Then if you commit a crime, are caught, and convicted, you will go to adult prison.

“My crime days are over.”

“Good to hear. I have three simple rules. One, never lie to me. Two, follow my instructions and rules, and three, go to school and obtain your high school diploma.”

I shake his hand and say, “You have a deal, Mr. Banks.”

I land a job working on the back of a City Sanitation truck. I work alongside three Black males. I am the only white man. The job is hard and smelly. I have a tough time lifting the trash cans to dump into the truck.

We had two routes. Route one was Mondays and Thursdays, route two was Tuesdays and Fridays. Wednesday, we drove both routes picking up heavy stuff that was not trash.

I liked working on Wednesday. After running both routes, we washed the truck and were done, yet we received a full day's pay.

The first Wednesday we worked, the whole crew washed the truck. The second Wednesday the three Black people say, "White Boy, you wash the truck all by yourself." They pulled out beers, sat under a tree and laughed at me.

"We wash the truck together," I say.

They just laughed, drank their beer, and said, Nope, You are washing the truck all by yourself."

I laughed back at them and said, "Nope, you three are washing the truck because I quit."

I walked away and went to the office. I collected my last paycheck and walked home.

On the way out of the Sanitation Department I passed my trash truck. There washing the truck was my work crew. I laughed and said, "Do a good job, Men."

I walked home and went in the kitchen. My Mom was baking a cake.

I said, "I quit the sanitation job. The three Black men crew wanted me to wash the truck by myself. I told them no. They said yes. I surprised them and just quit."

"Now what, Son? Your Father wants you working."

"I will go out tomorrow and find me a new job."

"Your Father will be happy to hear you are searching for work."

“When does Dad return from his trip? Where did he go, anyway?”

“Tomorrow night. Just a road trip in his new motorhome he bought.”

“I thought you said you both were poor, that you had no money?”

“David bought it for him. Your Brother bought it from a co-worker on the Alaska pipeline.”

“I do not want anything to do with David. He made me steal for him three years ago. He also lied to me about ferries going from Valdez to Seattle. I do not trust my Brother.”

“David called me last night asking about you. He said he will call back.”

“I do not want to talk to the Lier. I am not a thief.”

The next morning, I catch a Metro Bus to the beach area of Clearwater. I walk up and down the hotel strip asking for a job. At The Happy Island Inn, I get lucky.

The desk clerk says, “We are looking for a bellman.”

“Who do I need to talk to about the position?”

“Mr. Friedman. Let me call his extension.”

The woman says, “Mr. Friedman I have a good-looking young man that wants our bellman job. Yes, sir, I will.”

“What is your name, Young Man?”

“JP Harrison.”

“How old are you?”

“I am seventeen.”

“Mr. Friedman says he will see you. His office is down the hall on the right. Sign says Manager. Good luck.”

I ask the female clerk “What is your name?”

“Lilly.”

“I had a crush on a girl in Fairbanks, Alaska named Lilly.”

“You lived in Alaska?”

“Yes. My Dad was in the military.”

“We can talk later, go speak with Mr. Friedman.”

I knock on the closed Manager’s door.

“Come in.”

I walk into a large corner office. The manager looks about fifty years old.

“Come in, Young Man. Have a seat. Tell me about you.”

“I just moved here from Fairbanks, Alaska. I was living with a foster family. Before that I spent nine months at a boy’s reformatory called Karl Holton School for Boys. I am on probation till I am eighteen, eight months from now.”

“What are you on probation for? Stealing?”

“No sir. I am an honest kid. I ran away from my folks so much the State of Alaska made me a ward of the State. The State sent me to the boy’s school for an education. I did my tenth and eleventh grade while at the school.”

“I like your honesty, Young Man. I will try you. Can you start tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“The dress attire for your position are black slacks and a white shirt. You will have to get a haircut. Your hair is too long for this resort hotel.”

“I will cut it today.”

“Besides carrying luggage for the guest checking in and out, you will be delivering food and mail to our owner who lives in the Penthouse.”

“His name?”

“Walter Sutton.”

“How old is the owner?”

“Thirty years old.”

“I will leave now and get a haircut, then go to the store and buy clothing.”

Mr. Friedman pulls out his wallet and hands me five twenty-dollar bills. “Use my money for the haircut and clothes.”

“What time do you need me here to start?”

“Good question. Come in at eleven am, work till seven pm.”

“Will you feed me a meal while I am on the job?”

“Yes, in our restaurant. You will have thirty minutes to eat.”

“What happened to your last bellman?”

“He was arrested for stealing from guest rooms. We have another bellman you will be working with.”

“His name?”

“Paul. You will like him. He is honest, dependable and a diligent worker.”

“That is good to know.”

“Paul is also my son. You will have a good relationship with him, I just know it.”

“How old is your, Son?”

“Paul is twenty-five. He is taking pilot lessons as we speak. He wants to work for Delta Airlines.”

“See you tomorrow at eleven am. Thanks for the pay advance.”

“The money is not a pay advance. Call it a hiring bonus.”

“One more thing, sir. I have to get any job I land approved by my Probation Officer.”

“No problem, JP. Have him call me. I believe in helping people with a clean start. Good luck being our Bellman.”

“Thank you, sir for giving me a chance. I will not let you down.”

I walk down to the Metro Bus stop and wait for my ride to downtown.

I walk to a barbershop and have a seat.

“Next.”

I have a seat and the old man asks, “What type of haircut?”

“I am starting a new job as a bellman at the Happy Island Inn. I need to look professional. This long hair has to go. Make it short, please.”

“Short it will be.”

The old man never speaks a word. He just cuts all my hair off. When finished he holds up a mirror and asks, “How is this?”

I look in his mirror and give the thumbs up.

I pay for my haircut, and I give the barber a small tip. I say to him, “You will always be my barber.”

I walk down the street to a department store. I ask the clerk for help.

“I need three pairs of black slacks, three white shirts and black shoes if you have them.”

The male clerk replies, “I can help with everything except the shoes. You can buy them two stores down.”

Twenty minutes later I leave with my clothing.

I walk to the shoe store and tell the female clerk I need a pair of men’s black dress shoes.

When I have my shoes, I call a taxi for my ride home.

“I walk in the door and shout, “Mom.”

“In the kitchen, Dear.”

I walk in with my clothes and shoes in two bags.

“My Mom looks up and says, “I love your haircut. You know I always loved short hair. What did you bring home?”

“Three pairs of black slack, three white shirts and a pair of black dress shoes.”

“Where did you get the money from?”

“My new boss at Happy Island Inn in Clearwater Beach. You are looking at their new bellman. I told you I would find a job.”

My Mom stops from baking her cake and gives me a hug. “I am proud of you, Son.”

“Mom, why are the dirty dishes piled up in the sink for days now?”

“We are saving them for Andy to wash when he returns.

“I will wash them for you.”

“No, Son, Andy will do them when he returns from Quantico. This is your Dad’s wishes.”

I walk to my bedroom and close the door.

I work along side Paul for months. I tell him I want to go on my own, I need to get away from my Dad.

Paul says, “This is what I will do for you, JP. I will park my car in my driveway. I will convert my garage into a bedroom for you. I will give you a key to my house. Then you have a bathroom and a kitchen.”

“You will do that for me?”

“Yes.”

“I will tell my Probation Officer what you are doing for me. He will have to inspect the setup. If he approves, I will move in.”

“I take a quick break and I call my Probation Officer.

“Mr. Banks. This is JP Harrison.”

“Call me, Reginal, please.

“Reginal, I found my own lodging. I want to go on my own.”

“What is the address? I will inspect the setup.”

“2885 Springhill Circle in Clearwater Beach. It is a single-story house with an attached two-car garage. My co-worker lives there. Paul is converting the garage to a bedroom and giving me a key to his house. That way I have a kitchen and a bathroom.”

“Meet me at four pm tomorrow at the residence. It sounds like it may work.”

“See you at four pm, tomorrow.”

Paul and I move his second bedroom furniture into the garage. Paul hands me a house key.

Paul says, “Being in the garage instead of my second bedroom gives you privacy. You can have friends over, girls over too.”

I meet Reginal Banks at four pm the next day. I show him the bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom.”

“This works for me, JP. You can move out of your parents’ house.”

5

CHAPTER 5

I spend my first night in my new place. I am now on my own.

This arrangement works for two months. The hotel has rooms broken into. Management thinks I may be involved because a house cleaner saw me leaving a vacant room and asked, “How did you enter this vacant room?”

“I used my comb to push back the door lock. I went into the room to wash my hands as the front desk called me to carry an arriving guest’s luggage.”

The house cleaner told management what I had done.

“The manager says, “JP, I have to let you go. You have a criminal past. The police are coming, and they may arrest you.”

“I am innocent, sir. I just went into a vacant room to wash up. My hands were dirty from picking up trash. Breaking into the vacant room was wrong, but that is all I have done. I like my job. I am good at my job.”

The manager looks at me and says, “This is for your own good. The police may arrest you when they find out you broke into a vacant room. Then they will see your past criminal record. I can not have this, so go to our administrative office and pickup your last check.”

Just like that I was out of a job.

Paul comes home and asks me to move out and to give him his house key. I have no choice but to move back home.

One day I am walking around town looking for a job when I view an Army recruitment poster in a window. The Soldier is pointing saying, “Uncle Sam Wants You.”

I walk inside the recruitment office. A Sgt. Deacon greets me.

“Hello, Young Man. Do you want to join the Army?”

“Yes, sir.”

“The Army offers you thirty days’ vacation, job security, dental, and medical.”

“What do I have to do to join?”

“How old are you?”

“I am three months from being eighteen.”

“If you want to join now, I will need a parent’s signature. You are not eighteen.”

“My Mom will sign no problem.”

“Good to hear. You have to take a couple of aptitude test. I need to see your scores. Based on your scores I will know what schools the Army will approve you for.”

“Can I take the test now?”

“Go for it. Sit down at the corner desk. I will bring you the tests.”

“I have one problem, Sgt Deacon.”

“What is that?”

“I am on probation. I ran away from home four times and stole while I was on the run. I was sent to a boy’s school for nine-months. I am on probation for three more months.”

“Who is your Probation Officer?”

“Mr. Reginal Banks.”

“I know Reginal have him call me. Here is my recruiter card. Here are your two test. Each is about an hour long. Good luck.”

“I take the aptitude test which had a range of subjects including math problems.

I turn the tests over to Sgt Deacon.

“Come in tomorrow afternoon. The test will have been scored by then. Based on how well you do, I will know what schools you will be able to attend.”

“I shake Sgt Deacon’s hand and walk home.

My Mom is in the kitchen making my Dad his daily cake.

I say, “Mom, I am going in the Army.”

“Good decision, Son. Will the Army take you with your criminal record?”

“I think they will. My Probation Officer has to talk with my recruiter, Sgt. Deacon.”

“Do I need to do anything for you?”

“Yes, you will have to sign papers. Do not tell Dad I am joining the Army; he will just want to ruin it for me.”

“Your secret is my secret, Son.”

I hug my Mom and say, “Thanks.”

The next afternoon I walk into the Army Recruiting Office.

Reginal is sitting with Sgt. Deacon.

“Hello, sir, Hello Sgt Deacon.”

Sgt. Deacon looks at me and says, “You are one smart kid.”

I say, “Really.”

“Yes. You scored extremely high. Here is a lengthy list of schools the Army will send you to learn a trade. Sit at that corner desk and look over the list.”

I look over the list and I select Military Police.

“I found the school I want, Sgt. Deacon.”

“What school is that?”

“Military Police.”

“Why Military Police?”

“I walk around Clearwater and I am stopped a dozen times a day by the police and harassed. I want to harass back.”

Sgt. Deacon laughs at my comment.”

“The school is in Fort Gordon, Georgia. The school length is eight weeks. Boot Camp is eight weeks, and it is in Fort Knox, Kentucky.”

“When can I enlist?”

“Reginal here says you only have an 11th grade education.”

“Is that a problem?”

“Yes. To join the U.S. Army, you have to have at least a GED.”

“Where do I go for the GED?”

“The Army has a new program. We send you to Fort Knox to obtain your GED. If you pass and obtain your GED, you are in the Army. If you fail to obtain your GED, you will be honorably discharged.”

“I will not fail. You told me I am a smart kid.”

“For a kid with only an 11th grade education you are a smart kid. I think so and the Army thinks so.”

“After I graduate Military Police School where will I be stationed?”

“Where would you like to go?”

“To Europe. I want a break from America.”

“I can guarantee you Germany.”

“I will take it.”

Reginal says, “Your juvenile records will be sealed when you join the Army. You will have no criminal record and a fresh start at life.”

“That sounds good.”

“If in Boot Camp or at Military Police School, if anyone asks if you have ever been arrested say, no. I have sealed your records.”

Sgt Deacon says, “Bring your Mother in here tomorrow. Have her sign a document allowing you to enter the Army. Once that is done you can ship out by bus. I have a bus leaving every day at five pm.”

“I will have my Mom here by noon I want to ship out tomorrow at five pm.”

Sgt. Deacon and Reginal Bank shake my hand. They both say, “Goodluck.”

I walk into my kitchen and up to my Mother who is peeling potatoes and I say, “I need you to go with me at noon tomorrow to the Army

Recruiters Office downtown. I need your signature as I am not eighteen.”

“Wow my boy is now a man. The Army will keep you out of trouble.”

“I have Boot Camp at Fort Knox, Kentucky, then I go to Fort Gordon, Georgia to Military Police School which is eight weeks.”

“With your criminal record the Army will train you as a policeman?”

“Yes. My Probation Officer said he sealed my juvenile record. The Army will be my fresh start. Guess where I will be stationed?”

“Alaska?”

“No. Germany. I cannot wait to enter the Army. Remember it is our secret.”

I know the secret is our secret. I have news for you as well.”

“What news, Mom?”

“Your Father wants to move back to Fairbanks, Alaska. We leave at the end of next month.”

Dad sure likes to move you around. I bet you hate packing and unpacking our clothes and furniture?”

“I do hate it. This is why there is only used furniture in my home. I do not want to buy new and have it damaged. Your Dad says this will be out last move.”

“Dad lies. You move every two years. Dad loves to move. It is his way to avoid creditors.”

I look out the kitchen window which faces the driveway. I see my Dad driving up.

“Dad’s home. I will hide till dinner. Please do not tell Dad I joined the Army.”

“I won’t, Dear.”

“Thanks, Mom. I love you.”

At dinner that night my Dad asks me, “Find a job, yet?”

“No. sir.”

“You better be out there searching for a job, Punk.”

“I am out walking around all day filling out job applications.”

“This is what I want you to do tomorrow, Punk. I want a business card of each business you visit. I will check and you better not be lying.”

“I am not lying, sir.”

The next morning after my Dad leaves for his job I tell my Mom, “My Probation Officer will let me stay in his house till I leave for Boot Camp. Do not tell Dad where I am. Do not tell him I am in Boot Camp or later at Military Police School. I will visit you in Fairbanks on my two-week leave before deploying to Germany.”

“Give me a big hug. I am proud of you, Son.”

“Here is the address of the Army Recruiter’s Office. I will see you at noon to enlist me, right?”

“Yes, JP I will be there at noon.”

My Mom shows up at noon and signs my enlistment papers.

“JP, stay out of trouble and make me proud.”

“I will, Mom. Remember, I am staying with Reginal till I ride away to Fort Knox, Kentucky. What will you tell Dad where I am?”

“You landed a job with a large construction company, and they took you with them on an out-of-state job.”

“Thanks, Mom for covering for me. I do not want Dad causing me any trouble. I need this fresh start.”

“I know you do, Son. I know you do.”

I spend my last two days in Clearwater with Reginal.

Reginal drives me to the bus depot for my trip to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

“Remember, JP, no one will know your juvenile past. This is a clean start for you. Make a name for yourself. Stay connected, too.”

“I will, Reginal. I will never forget you. Thanks for everything.”

Before boarding the bus, Sgt. Deacon hands me a pamphlet.

He says, “Read this on your 12-hour bus to Fort Knox, about the Army’s GED program.”

I board the Greyhound Bus. I am off for Fort Knox, Kentucky.

I read the pamphlet from cover to cover a dozen times.

The Army runs a special enlistment program designed for disadvantaged youths. The program is for youths who do not have a high school diploma or a GED.

The program is called The Army GED Plus Enlistment Program. It enables applicants who do not possess a high school diploma or a GED to be sponsored by The Army to obtain a GED for enlistment purposes.

The Army has three GED study sites. Fort Knox, Kentucky, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and at Camp Robinson in Arkansas. The only

opening the Army had been the Fort Knox location. I have choice but to ride twelve hours from Clearwater, Florida to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

If I pass the GED Exam, I will proceed directly to Boot Camp.

Sgt. Deacon said to me, “This is the last year for the special GED program since it has met their enlistment for active-duty soldiers.” All future enlistments of recruits will require a high school diploma or General Education Development, also known as a GED Certificate.

The Army did the special GED Program to increase its pool of potential recruits. The Army, like all U.S. military branches has struggled to keep up with its recruiting goals.”

I checked out of the library two novels before I catch the Greyhound Bus. I pull one out and start reading.

Five hours later the bus driver says, “Folks, we are stopping for one hour. This will give you time to make any phone calls you need to make, to have something to eat, or to use the restroom. Everyone has to deboard. I have to gas up the bus and get something to eat as well. A fresh driver will be replacing me as your driver.”

I locate a payphone and call my Mom, collect.

“Yes, Operator I will accept the charges.

Hi, Honey. Where are you?”

“My new employer is half-way to Kentucky, what city I do not know.”

“Thanks for calling me to let us know you are safe.”

“Thanks for the forty dollars to cover me till I get a paycheck.”

“You welcome, Son. This call is costing us money. Your Father wants me to hang-up.”

“I understand. I will call you tomorrow if I can. I love you, Mom.”

“I love you, too. Bye.”

I have a breakfast meal which is served twenty-four hours a day. I wait for the new bus driver to announce we can board again.

I do not make conversations with any fellow passengers. I do not want anyone asking me questions. I might say the wrong answer.

Soon the PA System comes alive. “Attention everyone, the bus for Fort Knox is now boarding.”

I take a long nap. I eat snacks I bought in the restaurant. I read my second novel.

Finally, the bus driver says, “Folks it is three am. Welcome to Fort Knox. An Army Recruiter will be coming aboard. Once he is finished you may disembark.”

A middle-aged man in an Army uniform enters the bus with a clipboard.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, when I call your name, I will ask you to stand by the letter on the pavement I assign you to. Once everyone is off the bus you will be sent to that assigned letter’s barracks.

The man says, “JP Harrison, stand on letter C.”

There are nine of us standing on letter C.

A military man in uniform says, “You nine will be in Barracks, C. This barracks is for enlistees that need a GED. Pick up your luggage the bus driver set aside and follow me.”

I walk into Barracks C.

“Find a bunk. That will be your bunk until you either pass the GED exam or you are discharged from the Army. The Mess Hall is two

blocks to the right of your barracks. It is cafeteria style and open twenty-fours a day. Any questions?"

A man asks, "I need a Dentist."

"The Dental Office is inside the medical clinic located next door to the Mess Hall. I do not know the hours, but they will be posted on the front door."

Someone else raises a hand.

"Go ahead, what is your question?"

"I need to call home. Where can I find a payphone?"

"In the same building as the Mess Hall, there is a large room with twenty payphones on the wall."

The man in uniform looks at us and says, "Any other questions?"

No one speaks.

"Welcome, Gentlemen to Fort Knox. My name is Sgt. Tuman. I am the man assigned to your barracks. My room is behind you to the right I have a Message box along with a pen tied to a clipboard. Leave me any message you want. Just state your name, your bunk number, and what you need to see me about. I will reach out to you as soon as I can. You are dismissed."

I make it down to the Mess Hall and have a big breakfast. I then call my Mom, Collect."

"Hello, Son. Where are you now?"

"Lexington, Kentucky," I lie.

"That was a long drive."

"Over twelve hours. We took breaks every two hours," I lie.

“What were you riding in?”

“A fifteen-passenger van,” I lie.

“Have you had something to eat?”

“Yes, Mom. I had soda, snacks, donuts, and I just had a buffet. I am full.”

“Good to hear your new company is taking care of you.”

“I have to go, Mom. We have to board the van now.”

“Call me when you can. I love you, Son.”

“I love you too, Mom.”

I walk back to my barracks, find my bunk, and quickly fall asleep.

The next two-weeks I attend educational classes. I study the sample exams given to me to study.

I take the GED exam and pass.

Sgt. Deacon calls me with the good news. I am now a U.S. Army soldier. It feels good.

I start my eight-week Boot Camp tomorrow. I call my Mom with the news.

“Hello, Mom. I passed my GED exams. I have my high school equivalize diploma coming to me soon.”

“That is good news. Your Dad knows you are in the Army. The Army recruiter came to the house yesterday with forms for me to sign.”

“Dad was going to find out anyway. How did Dad act when he found out I joined the Army.”

Your Dad was surprised. He said, “You watch, the Punk will be running away from the Army.”

“Dad is so wrong. This is my fresh start.”

“Your Brother Steve wants you to call him. Do you have his phone number?”

“I do. I will call him now. I love you, Mom. Bye.”

“I look for my Brother’s phone number in my address book. I locate his name under Marine.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Steve this is private JP Harrison.”

“Cross the yellow line.”

“What?”

“When you get to Boot Camp cross the yellow line the drill Sergeant puts you on. The Drill Sergeant will ask you to cross the line, so cross the yellow line.”

“What happens if I do cross the yellow line?”

“Do it and see. Then call me when you can. I have to go. Talk soon. Bye,”

Steve was right. I was marched into a large empty barracks and told to stand on the yellow line. A Black male about forty years old walks in and says, “I am Drill Sergeant Brown. If any of you think you can kick my butt, then step across the yellow line.”

“I remember my Brother saying, “Cross the yellow line.”

I am the only private to cross the yellow line.

Sgt. Brown runs up to me with his fist clinched and says, “You think you can kick my butt?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are my Platoon Leader. He slides on my left sleeve Sgt. Stripes.

“You are in charge of your platoon. I instruct you and you instruct the troops.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Start now. I want the Platoon in marching order out front of the barracks in thirty minutes. We are going on a ten-mile hike.”

The Drill Sergeant exits the barracks.

I turn to the fifty men and say, “I am your Platoon Leader. I want you out front of our barracks in thirty minutes for a ten-mile hike.”

I want to call my Brother and tell him I crossed the yellow line. I will call him tonight.

The Platoon goes on the ten-mile hike. We sing songs as we march.

When we return from the march the Drill Sergeant says to me, “Have the men change uniforms and polish their boots. I will do an inspection in one hour.”

“Yes, sir.”

After the Drill Sergeant exits the barracks I say to the Platoon, “You have one hour to change into a fresh uniform, and I want your boots polished. I want you men looking sharp for Drill Sergeant Brown when he comes to inspect. Help each other get ready.”

That evening I call my Brother at his house.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Marine, this is Platoon Leader JP Harrison.”

“You crossed the yellow line.”

“Yes, I did. I was the only one in the Platoon to do so.”

“At the end of Boot Camp, you will earn the next rank, which will be E-Two. More money as well.”

“Have you spoken to Dad?”

“I did last weekend.”

“Did Dad mention me in Boot Camp?”

“He said, “You will drop-out, you are a failure.”

“I love Dad for his positive outlook on me. I am doing good because I was never home for him to mess with me. The best thing I did was runaway.”

“I spoke to Andy. Poor kid, he has it rough. He is the only Son left at home,” says Steve.

“Andy has eight more years of hell living with Dad. He will only be free of mental abuse if Mom divorces Dad.”

Steve says, “That will never happen. Mom will stay by Dad’s side and bake him a cake each night.”

“Mom does make great tasting cakes,” I say.

“I am proud of you, JP, but you made one mistake joining the Army.”

“What mistake was that?”

“You went Army and not the Marine Corps.”

“I never spoke to any other branch recruiter. I signed up with the Army because they offered me Military Police and Germany as my duty site.”

“Why Germany?”

“I wanted Europe and I wanted to get as far away as I could from Dad.”

“Keep in touch. Save as much of your pay as you can.”

“I plan to buy a car once I arrive in Germany.”

“Call or write soon, JP.”

“I will, Steve. Bye.”

I do not make it the full eight weeks as the Platoon Leader.
I lost my extra stripe because of a mistake.

Six Platoons were breaking down and putting back together our military rifles. We had to do the breakdown and assembly in the dark as well.

The Drill Sergeant says, “We have to learn to breakdown and assemble our rifles in the dark in case we are in combat at night and the rifle jams.

Once you are successful in breaking down and assembling your rifle you wait outside the building for the rest of the platoons’ soldiers to complete the task.”

Once all the soldiers were finished a Drill Sergeant yells, “Get inside now, Maggots.”

We all cramped in the doorway trying to get inside the building. A soldier says, “Someone lost their Platoon Leader stripe.”

I look down and my stripe was missing.

I say, “The stripe is mine, slip it back on for me.

The unknown soldier does.

The Commander walks on stage and looks my way.

He says, “Second Platoon Leader stand up.”

I stand up at attention.

The Commander says, “Are you in the Canadian Mounted Police?”

“No, sir.”

“Then why is your Sergeant stripe upside down?”

Everyone starts laughing at me.

My Drill Sergeant walks over and takes the Sergeant stripe from me.

From week four to week eight I have to do extra chores and I am not allowed to leave the base.

When Boot Camp is over, I am handed my orders to go to Fort Gordon, Georgia for Military Police School.

I ride the Greyhound Bus five-hundred-thirty miles to my new destination.

On a stopover for a meal, I call my Mom, collect.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Mom. I finished Boot Camp. I am on my way now to Fort Gordon, Georgia for my Military Police School.”

“How was Boot Camp?”

“I loved it.”

“Your Dad was wrong about you. He said you would quit and runaway.”

“I am a man now. I have a fresh start in life. I have a job I like, medical, dental, and thirty-days’ vacation. I also will ship out for Germany when I am finished with the Military Police School. The Army is my new life.”

“I am proud of you, Son.”

“How is Andy doing?”

“Your Brother is fine.”

“I see Dad taking all his frustration out on Andy. Poor Kid.”

“Andy is fine. Focus on your schooling. I have to hang-up. I am in the middle of baking your Father his cake.”

“I love you, Mom. Bye.”

What a difference between Military Police School and Boot Camp. I take classes half-a-day and ride on patrol in a Jeep in a mock town built for roll playing.

What you learn in class you apply on patrol. Fifty percent of the class takes turns being criminals. The other have are Police Officers on patrol.

Day one of the sixty-day school is learning police codes and listening to your assigned patrol number.

My first call while on patrol was a forty-five.

“Unit Ten, take a forty-five at 2387 Benson Street.”

“Unit Ten, QSL.”

A forty-five is a dead person and QSL means I acknowledge.

Every morning I look forward to fifty percent classroom and fifty percent application while on patrol.

On day two, the Platoon learns basic self-defense techniques in Judo.

My call that day was a thirty-two at 4881 Rosemont Lane. A thirty-two is a fight. My assigned partner and I rush to the scene and take control. We break-up the fight and try to find out who started it and why. If needed, we make an arrest.

I place a fellow soldier under arrest when he comes at me with a broken beer bottle. The soldier is acting drunk and doing an excellent job. I take the broken bottle away, grab him in a wristlock and walk him to the Jeep where I place handcuffs on.

My instructor walks over and says, “Private Harrison, you are doing a fantastic job.”

My eight-week school ends too soon. I feel confident in my abilities to do my job as a Military Policeman. I study the code book as much as I can. I know the crime statutes. I practice my self-defense.

My instructor, Sergeant Shoe, hands me my next duty assignment and says, “You have two-weeks leave starting now. You then fly military hop to Frankfurt, Germany. Call the number on the orders and someone will give you a ride to your base.”

I pack my duffle bag full of military uniforms and carry the bag over my shoulder. I wear a military uniform when I travel. People thank me for my service and help anyway they can.

At the Seattle Airport my flight departs in three hours from gate four. I walk to gate four and I fall asleep in my chair waiting to board the flight.

I wake four hours later and the plane to Fairbanks left without me. I cannot believe anyone wakes me to board the flight.

I picture in my head the ticket agent on the PA system saying, “Last call for flight twelve to Fairbanks, Alaska. Last Call.”

“They never walked over to wake me, and I was in uniform and with a full duffle bag. I walk back to the ticket agent and complain how I missed my flight.

The Ticket Agent says, “Sorry, Soldier you missed your flight. The next plane departing Seattle for Fairbanks departs in twelve hours.”

I ask, “What gate is my flight?”

“Gate three.”

I walk over to gate three and fall back to sleep.

When I wake, I have nine hours to wait.

I walk over to a small café and grab me something to eat.

I finally catch my flight to see my Mom.

I take a Taxi to their rental apartment.

I do not unpack my Duffle bag. I vision my Dad throwing me out of his residence and tossing my Duffle bag into the street.

At home are my twin Sisters now fifteen, Andy age ten and Steve, taking a break from the Marine Corp. I find my Mom in the kitchen baking a cake.

“Nice to have you home, Son.”

“It is nice to be home, Mom, but my stay will not last. Dad and I will clash. I am a man now and I will not put up with Dad’s stupid rules and demands.”

“Your Father is looking forward to seeing you.”

I laugh and say, “That is a lie. Just watch.”

My Dad arrives home at five pm. He does the same routine he has done for years. He sits in his recliner; my Mom brings him his whiskey drink, and the newspaper. Dad will sit and read till dinner. If you hang round him, he will just interrogate you.

I wait five minutes and enter the living room. I sit on the couch alongside my Brother, Steve.

My Dad puts down his newspaper and talks to Steve, completely ignoring me. I sit there and listen to their conversation.

My Dad says, “I want you to wear slippers in my house. Go buy slippers right now.”

“Sir, we do not wear slippers in the Army, we wear thongs for the shower. I will go buy me thongs.”

My Dad raises his voice, looks at me and replies, “Punk, you will wear slippers in my house. Now go buy slippers.”

“Yes, sir.”

I walk a couple of blocks to a strip mall. I enter a shoe store and buy Donald Duck slippers with a small head popping as you walk. I buy bright yellow ones.

I walk back home. I am gone less than twenty minutes.

I walk back into the living room wearing my slippers and I sit-down on the couch. I say, “Sir, I bought my slippers. Do you like them?”

My Dad looks at me and says,” Take your Brother’s dry cleaning to GHI Dry Cleaners.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Steve says, “My clothes are in a blue laundry bag.”

I grab Steve’s laundry bag and exit the residence.

I return to the strip mall and go inside Sally’s Dry-Cleaning Store.

I ask the clerk, “Where is GHI Dry-Cleaning at?”

“Two miles South at Spring Hill Mall.”

I tell the clerk, “Can you dry-clean all the items in my laundry basket?”

“Will do.”

“I am visiting your city from Seattle, when can I have my dry-cleaning?”

“Two days from today. Here is your receipt.”

“Thank you.”

The clerk smiles and says, “No, thank you for your business.”

I walk the two blocks home and hand my Brother his dry-cleaning receipt.

I say, “Here, Steve is your dry-cleaning receipt.”

I sit backdown on the couch.

My Dad asks, “Which Dry-Cleaning Store did you go to?”

“Sir, I went to Sally’s two blocks from here. Your GHI Dry-Cleaners is two-miles from here.”

“Listen, Punk. Go back to Sally’s, get your Brother’s Dry-Cleaning, and take the bag to GHI Dry-Cleaners.”

I am a man now and I will not put-up with my Dad’s demands anymore.

I say, “No. A dry-cleaners is a dry-cleaners, besides the dry-cleaning isn’t even yours.”

I turn to my Brother and say, “Steve, if there is any damage to your uniforms, I will give you the money.”

My Dad looks at me and says, “I am giving you one-minute to get up and go to Sally’s.”

I look at my Dad and say, “Thousand one, thousand two, thousand three, thousand four.”

My Dad gets out of his chair when I reach Thousand six.

We meet in the middle and start wrestling.

My Mom and Steve break us apart.

My Dad goes to my room and removes my Duffle bag.

He opens the door and tosses my bag onto the sidewalk. “Get out, Punk.”

I walk out, grab my Duffle bag, and walk to the strip mall. I call for a taxi.

The taxi pull’s up to the strip mall.

I enter the taxi and say, “Fort Grizzley, please.”

I ride to the base and enter the visitor’s center.

“Good Afternoon, I am Private JP Harrison and I need a room for twelve days. I depart for Germany at that time.”

The clerk makes me fill-out a form.

“Here you go. Do you have lodging for me?”

“Yes. Here is your room key. You are in room twenty-three. The Lodge is at 3498 Main Street. Please return the key when you check out. There is no house cleaning service.”

I call for a taxi.

“Take me to 3498 Main Street.”

I ask the taxi driver, “Do you know where the cinema, the PX, and the Bowling Alley are?”

“Yes. I will show you as we drive to 3498 Main Street. They are all near each other and six blocks from 3498 Main Street.”

I arrive at the lodge called “Moose Lodge.” I enter my room and lay on the bed. I fall asleep.

There is a knock at my door.

I open to see my Brother, Steve.

“I borrowed Dad’s car. Want to take in a movie, have dinner somewhere?”

“I would like that.”

My Brother and I have a great night. We exchange stories.

Steve drops me back off at the Lodge. We agree Steve will return and take me bowling.

One night I walk by the NCO Club for Sergeants. The NCO sign says 'Bingo Night.'

I walk in, find a table, and buy three bingo cards. I am playing my cards when I spot my Dad, my two Sisters, Andy, and Steve playing bingo, too.

I walk over and say, "Hi, Guys."

"Everyone is happy to see me except my Dad.

He says, "How did you get in here? This is for Sergeants and above."

"Front door. No one checked my rank, sir."

I watch my Dad get up and walk over to a man in a dark suit.

The man walks over to me and asks, "What is your rank?"

"I am a Private, sir."

"Sorry, you have to leave, this club is for Sergeants and above."

"Yes, sir."

I stand-up to leave. I drop my three bingo cards on the table. My siblings fight for the bingo cards. I turn to my Dad and say, "You are a Punk. I plan to never speak to you again."

I walk out of the NCO Club.

I walk over to the Cinema and watch the same movie I watched with my Brother, Steve.

I stay on base till my flight leaves for California.

My Brother never comes to visit me again.

I do not call my Mom, either. I do not need the drama. So much for the Harrison Family.

I fly free on Military cargo planes from Fairbanks, Alaska, to California, to South Carolina, and onto Frankfurt, Germany.

I contact the Army Base for a ride. A soldier in uniform arrives and drives me by jeep to the military base.

I check in and I am assigned to the 95 Bravo Military Police Unit in the German town of Gruen Stadt.

This is a missile base on top of a hill.

This base will be my new home. I will take advantage of my fresh start.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is James Paul Ellison.

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