

P.E. & Dr. Blake Steidler
A Flagger's Journey

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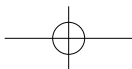
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Dedications

P.E and I would like to dedicate this story primarily to ourselves. We feel that everyone's attitude at FlaggerSource stinks therefore feel no need to dedicate this story to anyone else but ourselves. The names of businesses and people in this story are not real. Dr. Steidler carefully tweaked all names and businesses for their own privacy and protection. This story was written only for entertainment purposes and Pastor Edwards and I would like to give a shout out to anyone that has ever flagged.
"Hang in there buddy!" and God bless!

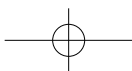
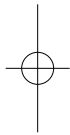
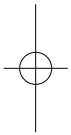


Introduction

They were just another shady construction business looking for live bodies to fill a big job. With an application not only just one page, but one sided as well,

FlaggerSource is prepared to overlook background issues and pretty much welcome anyone on board. The unemployed still milking the system, drop out of orientation like flies when the company manager scares them away with on-site construction pictures. A brazen spanish man built like a tank has some words for the nervous bunch of job seekers as they depart from the four hour non-paid orientation. "I'm on parole, I'm ready to do this!"

hollars out the burly man. The crowd giggles along with myself as we walk out the door. The ultimate question in mind still remains. Who will be the last flagger standing? Who can stand in the rain? Who can stand the pain of not getting paid? And who might fall in love? Let the Journey begin!



Chapter 1

The smile on his face only grew bigger, so he did what any professional scam artist would do, he covered up his leery smile with his right hand pretending to scratch his chin. He thought it was working. But it wasn't, us old heads had detected it for the umpteenth time. I seemed to be the only one amused by it. I wasn't afraid to put my time in at the gym and there wasn't a day that went by where I didn't pick up a toothbrush. But the old farts that could barely wipe their ass? Weren't amused. It would affect them the most.

The vice president of the company managed to keep his shady smile under control so that he could slowly lower his hand and face all the hundreds of employees once more. *Was it working? Were these flappers buying into my BS once more? Why do I have to do all of this? Shouldn't my wife the president of this gig stand here in this sweltering heat? Where is that wombat?* Ike Boner thought to himself. He cleared his throat and continued on with the line of BS that his penny pinching wife told him to say. *Just keep talking out your ass like you do when your around your buddies* She used to advise him.

Ike played his role. "I don't know what to tell all of you part timers, but if you do end up working your 40 hours a week for at least a year, we will offer you health insurance, but there is a co-pay."

The back of the crowd looked at one another and giggled. They had all heard this line of crap once before. Of the 685 employees was anybody blessed with Full Time hours? Most of the crowd was just hoping that this job could get them off of welfare but the numbers weren't looking too great. A twenty year old high school graduate was just wishing for the day he could finally say goodbye to his work boots on his feet. They were wrapped up in duct tape, and just barely managing to cling to his feet. And as for the rest

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of the crowd? This three hour safety meeting might be the only hours they would see all week.

Ike patiently waited for the giggles to subside before he would continue. He casted a furtive glance at his payroll lady. He had been plowing into her all week long with his buddies on his million dollar yacht while the wifey held down the fort in the unairconditioned garage. He doubted any of these low life flaggers had ever gotten the chance in their life time to even get near a yacht. Although he had heard some rumors that amidst the crowd was a flagger from his hometown with a \$10,000.00 dinghy, but as far as he knew, no flagger had ever gotten the chance to see it. That would always remain a joke in itself. Although the economy was way way down, things at FlaggerSource were looking way way up. After getting barred from the state of New Jersey, Ike Boner was glad he had taken his mother's advice and married a girl with money to bail him out of all his screw ups. Things were definitely looking up for big Ike. His wife was the brain, but his big sturdy hands were the manpower behind the whole operation. Guys like Ike Boner could laugh at signs like **D.U.I You Can't Afford It** because guys like Ike made signs of his own. Road Signs. Each and every sign tax deductible of course. His wife wouldn't have it any other way.

A hand of a brave new flagger went up and Ike pretended not to notice. Instead, he looked at the head of payroll lady as if questioning what line of BS he should come up with next. Teff winked at him and let him catch the sparkle of her big diamond ring. He already knew she was married, but that didn't stop rich guys like Ike Boner. Besides, she always complained about her husband not wanting children. *Go on, tell these losers what they want to hear* she silently told him. Teff and himself often used telepathetic body language to communicate with each other. Ike wiped the sweat dripping from his chin then placed his hands in his pockets to hide what little body language he could get away with.

"Yes, you have a question?"

The flagger did his best to maintain his composure. There was a lot of people shoved in this garage and he seemed a bit nervous." I was just curious, how do we go about getting full time hours?"

The smirk hopped back on the vice president's face and he was back to scratching his chin. He looked down and scratched his head for good measure." Well, you'll have to work really hard I guess and work your way up to a crew leader." The hundreds of newly trained flaggers looked around at each other in disbelief. Just how many trucks did this clown have? Crew leaders drove trucks. Did this con artist have 685 trucks hidden at his mommy's house? He surely couldn't fit them all in this garage.

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Another hand went up and Ike was really starting to feel the pressure. He cringed a bit as if the heat was causing him to have a headache, and then pointed his fat farmer's finger at the next query. This was the part that he really didn't like. Not knowing what kind of inane questions these toothless wonders would throw at him when he could be spending his precious time on the family's yacht. "Yes, you have a question?"

"Yeah, why are my paychecks always missing some hours that I have worked for?"

Teff walked away from the rest of the office girls to go use the restroom. Ike would have to be on his own for this one. That guy Tom over at the wage complaint department had proven to be a dick on countless times if she didn't be careful which flagger she decided to pencil whip. Usually she picked on the ex-felons. Nobody ever gave a shit about those guys. They had sucked off the system long enough. And she knew there was plenty of them out there in the crowd. Who else would take on a part time job with out benefits? Especially one that required you to live by the phone. A job where points would be issued to you should you decide not to bring your cellphone with you in the shower when you're on first call.

I watched the payroll lady flash her big shiny diamond at me as she furtively slipped past me to camp out in the ladies room. Unfortunately I was one of those sucker flaggers getting pencil whipped by little miss Wolf in Sheep's clothing. I was impressed how she had Tom over at the wage complaint office already wrapped around her little finger. I couldn't help but wonder what she did with all the money that she scammed off of the employees. With a turnover rate of nearly 85%, I imagined her little bit here, and a little bit there, **was really starting to add up**. Every time a new flagger walked into the office to fill out an application Teff looked at them as if they were a new pair of shoes. Because that's just what she intended to buy the very minute she had the opportunity to tinker with their first paycheck.

Ike scratched the back of his head to stall while he fished around for some more bull shit. It was really hard for him not to grin at this point. *Sitting on the yacht with his drinking buddies? or standing in this tropical jungle doing his best to blow smoke up everybody's ass. Why was it always the new people that asked all these stupid questions?* Ike suddenly came up with an idea. An idea that would shut them up for good.

"Will all of the crew leaders in this room stand up please?" He said raising both of his hands. The disheveled crew leaders looked at each other nervously before they arose from their seats. *What kind of tricks does this swindler still have up his sleeve?* They all thought to themselves. The sinister grin on Ike's face couldn't be any more ostensible, but when the economy is in the crapper, you gotta do what you gotta do and hope that the union can step

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in one day and fix things. But how? With millions on welfare praying for work and it only taking ten minutes to show someone how to flip a stop/slow paddle, what leverage did they have? The answer was simple. None.

The crew leaders stood there patiently and waited to see what was coming next. With dedicating 7 days a week of their time for three or four days of pay these dedicated poor souls were used to getting “F”ed. After a year of hell with this company, they had quickly learned that the good old days of counting sheep in their sleep were over. They were counting cars. Cars that they couldn’t possibly afford to buy with an annual income that would probably never reach the double digits. There would always be those college kids coming around in the summer that could flip that sign faster and scoop up all the hours then go back to their beer infested dorms when things got slow. Teff knew better than to clown college kids on their paychecks because their daddies were township supervisors. Their daddy’s owned businesses far more lucrative than this little FlaggerSource scheme. The well-heeled moguls and tycoons of Harrisburg had a special code of their own, *let’s keep new shoes on us, and only us.*

Ike placed his oversized fist over his chin once again. Another shady smile twitched on his face. He was about to drop the big one. The big one that would once and for all portray him for the weezling turd that he really was. His management skills took control of his body and he was feeling more cocksure than ever as he waved his big farmer hand at the helpless crew leaders. The super dedicated ones.

“These people here my friends,” He said with certainty, “Are the reason that you guys aren’t getting paid because they keep forgetting to turn in their time sheets.”

A dead silence permeated the tropical garage. *Did he just say that? Did he just blame all of the intentional office errors on the crew leaders? The dedicated ones that drove his crappy trucks all over God’s green earth for 2 hour show up pays and no drive time? After all the oil changes and paper work done on their time. Even the truck washes done on their time? No Ike Boner did not just say that. He couldn’t put the dedicated ones on the spotlight like that.* **But he did.** I tried not to laugh. As a guy I have always been amused at other guys aholeness behavior and this surely was the big one. It reminded me of a guy that I used to hang out with in Federal prison named Turtle, and Ike sure looked a lot like him. Turtle would be impressed with Mr.Boner’s big scheme.

There was dead silence in the room as if they were all waiting for Ike to announce that he was joking. I was grateful for the clown next to me loudly cracking his empty soda bottle because I didn’t want anyone to hear my laughter. I had already accumulated 4 shortages in pay and **none** of them had to do with paper work not being turned in by my crew leaders. Why would

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a crew leader not turn their paper work in? It made no sense? Because then they too would not be getting paid. Who would not want to get paid? Ike's joke brought no laughter amidst the 685 employees except for mine. But I was sure bottle cracking dude was doing his best to cover for me. I did my best to keep it under control. One of the more dedicated female crew leaders looked like she wanted to cry. Ike making an ass out of her was not cool in her book. Not after she spent two and a half hours at Pep boys for a stupid oil change, right after she had just did a job all the way in Maryland that took three hours to get there. Three hours that she knew she would never get paid.

Ike knew that his employees were not too thrilled with his ignorance. He had better pull a rabbit out of his hat. It was time to change the subject, and fast. All of the office workers kept their affable composure like Ike's wife the wombat had trained them to do. If Ike thought he was going to pull some shady shit like this on them he had another thing coming. They had plenty of dirt on him. They all knew about his pay shortage scheme because they were all in on it together. That was their company bonus. Whatever they could short chump out of the flaggers, was theirs to keep.

Ike looked at all 12 of his office girls and waved them up to the front where he was standing. Nobody budged. The office girls all looked at each other and thought to themselves *This rich male whore who drinks like a fish, conjures up stories for women on his yacht all day, isn't going to put my prettiness on the spotlight. Heck no, this funny man would not get a chance to publicly humiliate us.* Ike smiled like the show was just getting started. I remained seated in the back getting a little excited myself. As a new employee, I was totally unprepared for all of this funny stuff and was afraid I'd soon wet my pants from Ike's little show. These so called educated college bitches had been getting on my nerves all week. I wanted to know which one it was that kept putting me on call almost every time I called in for my daily assignment. Evidently I was not alone because the redneck clad in harley junk sitting next to me whispered a few words for the house. "That's the one. That's the one I'm sure that keeps putting me on hold for 15 minutes when I call in." Whispered Mr. stink breath.

I wasn't chuckling just yet. I was saving my chuckles for whatever trick the bossman had up his sleeve. He had already made an ass out of his crew leaders and now I wanted to see him go all the way with it and get the clowns in the office too. That would be funny. I knew one day I could write a funny book about all of this and get rich. Or probably not. But the show still went on.

"I need all of the office girls to come up here and stand." He said waving them on with no smile this time. I immediately lost interest. I could tell by his body language that he had no plans of humiliating them. Ike knew

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better than that. The wombat would be giving him crap all week if he tried a stunt like that. It was hard to find a rich lady to put up with all of his binge drinking and capers that ensued afterwards.

The girls reluctantly pranced their little fannies up to the front of the crowd and did their best to maintain a professional composure. As stingy as Ike and the wombat were, they doubted he was calling them up for awards or gold medals.

They all lined up like ducks and Ike pointed to the biggest one. The one I always wanted to date. She was wearing a neon green dress that sparkled and her hair was done up just so. She looked like a giant Peacock, yet I doubted she could fly. (Not that I'd ever seen a peacock fly.) I'm not usually attracted to the big girls but this one looked like she spent all day and maybe even the day before on her sparkly outfit. I was really turned on. That showed dedication. And the simple fact that she could be so dedicated to a clown outfit like FlaggerSource spoke great volumes. *If she can put up with a boss that's an asshole for all these years and still dress to impress, imagine what a guy dating her could get away with?* I thought to myself. I wanted to date her right then and there. Ike already had her broken in with his rudeness. I could be my regular jerk-off self and it would come as no surprise to her. I was already imagining myself kicking back on Ike's yacht and drinking a cold Corona while I had her make me a sandwich. I definitely had to hook up with this girl. I snapped out of my daydream when big Ike waved those working man's hands at my girl.

"I have an announcement to make in regards to my lovely assistant Jill. Jill has just been promoted to dispatcher. She will now be handling all of the dispatching." He said clapping his hands. The crowd went completely wild. It went so far as a standing ovation. Evidently I was not alone in taking a shining to this girl. The drunken red necks went wild, the harley dudes were on their feet, even the Wu-Tang wannabes seemed to be greatly relieved. I had no idea this girl was so popular among all of the employees but evidently she was. I looked around at all my competition. I hated competition. These toothless wonders had to go. The big girl belonged to me. I had already made up my mind.

The noise finally ended and Ike realized the good news of Jill getting bumped up to dispatcher was a good note to end on. The wombat back home would be impressed that he ended his meeting with some good news to keep the under paid flagger's minds off of their missing pay checks. Not to mention Teff could finally come out from hiding in the bathroom.

Ike looked at his wrist watch and dismissed the crowd. I was already making a bee line for the door. I have been diagnosed in the past of having a social anxiety disorder and big crowds like this exacerbate my condition, so it was best that I be the first one out, not to mention I didn't want anyone to ask me why I found big Ike's pep talk about health care so amusing. With

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my very first pay check being tampered with, I had already made up my mind that this place was a joke. I knew that my journey as a Flaggerman had just begun.

Chapter 2

After a year with FlaggerSource my day had finally come and I was asked to become a crew leader and drive one of their stupid trucks. Gas was climbing quickly to almost \$4.00 a gallon and I was sick of half of my paycheck going into my gas tank. All of their office errors and 2 hour show up pays for jobs 60 or 70 miles away was really starting to piss me off. It all came down to arithmetic, and I was usually pretty good at crunching numbers. Using one's personal vehicle for this job got you nowhere and they did that purposely to dupe you into taking home one of their trucks so they could finally brag about having you by the balls. The girls working for this unscrupulous outfit made it a game to see who could be the first to have one of the new flaggers wrapped around their little finger. The convicts of course were the easiest because the bitches in the office knew for sure they had nowhere to go. In their minds, their punishment shouldn't end after release from incarceration. Those system sucking varmints should be out there holding the flag for free just to pay back their debt to society. That would always be Teff's opinion on the matter. She knew with all of her prettiness, people would eventually learn to gravitate towards her opinion.

I could feel the morning sun already trying to make an imposing statement as I pulled FlaggerSource's freshly washed truck into the parking lot. I had been up since 5am but very much grateful that my job destination for the day was only 55 miles away from home. Just the week before, FlaggerSource had been sending me to Gettysburg almost every day. An almost two hour drive that I knew I would never get paid for. Nobody did. Nobody ever got paid for drive time other than the rumors I heard about the company's number #1 bootlickers getting thrown an extra 5 bucks for their inconvenience. I knew that if I stayed with this company long enough I might end up caving and end up being one of those bootlickers. I'd proba-

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bly have to first start seeing those 30 hours a week that the company advertised about before that would ever happen.

As soon as I parked the company truck I knew something was definitely out of kilter. I was the only one there. I knew the company was losing a lot of contracts due to unprofessionalism, but shouldn't there be at least another FlaggerSource truck or two? I was hoping that this wasn't another notorious *Office Error* in which I would only get paid \$22.00 for my 55 mile trip to Harrisburg. More like \$19.00 after Uncle Sam would get his cut. I was 20 minutes early like usual so I was trying not to jump to conclusions. Crew leaders like myself are required to show up 15 minutes early for all job assignments. Even when we report to the FlaggerSource office for more training we are required to show up 15 minutes early. 15 minutes that was on our time and FlaggerSource had some kind of right to not pay us for. Just two weeks ago I showed up to a job in York 10 minutes early and the company manager yelled at me for being a purported 5 minutes late because of the required 15 minute early show up. Since then I have made a point of showing up 20 minutes early to play it safe. I looked at my watch. It was 7:10am. Start time was 7:30am. I went about my usual routine of lacing up my work boots and tuning in to my favorite rock station while I wait for whatever crew helper FlaggerSource would send my way. I had scrawled on a piece of paper the name *Leslie* and had already taken all of the necessary precautions. 2 squirts of generic cologne from the Wal-marts. (I had a system that I utilized. 1 squirt for dude helpers and 2 squirts for the ladies).

My favorite radio station was momentarily keeping me entertained for the time being while I kept on the lookout for my partner. I couldn't help but wonder what Leslie would end up looking like. In my 13 months at FlaggerSource I had already seen it all. The majority of the females that made it with this company were toothless wonders that smelled like an ashtray. For some it was all they could do just to squeeze into their jeans in the morning. Some of them just didn't care and allowed the seams to rip from all of the McDoublers that they had stuffed themselves with from the hunger they had built up from standing there holding the stupid flag. FlaggerSource tended to be more lenient with their female employees because big Ike collected an extra tax incentive from the government for each female he hired. Not to mention some of the big ugly contractor guys often enjoyed the company of a woman to lighten the mood a bit. I looked at my watch. 7:35am and I was still the only one in the parking lot. I knew that the contractors usually didn't come out until about 8am so if Leslie was running late, her secret would be fine with me. For all I knew she could be coming from 60 or 70 miles away and caught up in traffic. I always give a 15 minute lee-way before I phone into the office and ask what's up with my help for the day. I knew the company manager would want me to call in the very minute a crew member was late but I was far from the type to snitch on everybody. Especially since

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pretty much about everybody in the company got screwed over by the company at one point or another so why make things worse?

The heat from the sun was already weighing in and it wasn't even 8am yet. A heat wave was coming in and I knew that today was going to be a hot one. I could feel my nerves building up as I scoured the parking lot looking for someone named Leslie. I looked at my wristwatch. 7:45am. I didn't have Leslie's number and I knew it was time to call into the office. I wouldn't tell FlaggerSource that Leslie was running late. I would just simply ask for the number of my partner. I've had to do this several times before. My cellphone was dialing into the office when I heard a rather strange rattle from across the street. I turned my head to see a little beat up Toyota Tercel in need of some TLC (tender loving care). At first the car appeared dark and vacant until I noticed the pearly whites smiling at me. My first thoughts were that it must be one of the brotha brotherman's from down the way, lost and looking for directions. Those thoughts quickly eradicated when I saw the yellow vest. I gave a shout out to "B" or "Gmoney", or whoever he was.

"Hi, I'm looking for Leslie. What partner did they give you?" I said, all hitched up high in my big white truck. The rattling from his grey little jalopy grew louder and he just smiled at me almost making me feel uneasy. I noticed his teethies were a bit whiter than mine and I was already getting jealous. I do brush my teeth daily but the years I had spent in Federal prison had drug me into a coffee addiction and it was starting to show on my teeth a little. I was too cheap to buy the \$40.00 Crest whitening strips.

"I'm Leslie." He said with a smile. I blushed a little and immediately apologized. He didn't seem at all surprised at my wrong assumption." Don't worry about it. I get that all the time. There's actually a lot of guys named Leslie." He said as if he's told this story a million times.

"Oh, okay. I'm not from around here. I drove over an hour to get here today. Been up since 5:30 this morning." I said just trying to make stupid conversation.

Leslie smiled, "You and me both. You know what it is. Took me almost an hour to get here too." He said looking behind him to see if it was safe to park. *Yeah, I knew what it was. Pretty much every flagger working for FlaggerSource knew what it was. My goal was to just find one happy flagger. Just one. I had better jobs before and knew that I would surely never be that one. I had a Christian friend from high school stuck at this dumpy job because of the economy. When people asked him where he worked, he just told them F&S construction because he was too ashamed to admit the name of the company he worked for.*

I got out of the truck and watched him park." I don't have extras of anything so you'll need your paddle and flag. Safety glasses too if you feel like

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wearing them. I won't say nuthn. FlaggerSource don't take care of me well enough to care." I joked. I wasn't joking. But I didn't want to say it in a serious voice to make him think I was a big time grouser. Nobody likes a poopy pants. It just really sucks wearing safety glasses in this heat when we're not exposed to flames or debris shooting in our face like welders and carpenters. Leslie picked up his beat up red flag and stop/slow paddle and headed over towards my truck. He smiled that big toothy grin once again for me. "I don't even think I have any safety glasses with me. They never issued me a pair."

I reached up behind my driver's seat and pulled out a brand new pair of safety glasses still in the wrapper." I got an extra pair if you want it." I said dangling it like a freshly caught fish. Leslie opened the hatch of the truck and tossed his gear in with the rest of the equipment." Naw, forget it. Wouldn't surprise me if we don't even go out today. I got 4 hours in yesterday and 8 hours was all I got in all last week. This shit is killin' me."

I tossed the safety glasses back behind the seat." Yeah, I hear you on that one. I'm in their crappy truck and I'm getting some hours now but they have me driving all over the country for it. I was in Gettysburg all last week. Almost a two hour drive. The traffic coming home on 30 is a real bitch!"

Leslie looked around as if he was expecting somebody. I knew it was shut up time about bitching about the company. This guy looked like he was one of those *seen it all, did it all* type of guys. There was a good chance we'd be spending the next couple of hours sitting in the FlaggerSource truck telling funnies about just life in general. The look on this man's face told a story all in itself. There was maybe a chance we were cellmates at one point and time years ago and just forgot about it. If that were the case then our conversations would probably be of a cooler topic. A cooler topic like um..say...women. If that were the case then I would have some stories for Leslie as well.

Chapter 3

There were tears in his eyes. Actually, there was tears in both of our eyes. We hadn't kicked each other's arses, no, we were teary eyed from laughing so hard. And the subject? Girls. Not just any girls. The big girls. Leslie and I both had had our share of big women in the past. He had told his story about the big girl that refused to turn the bedroom lights on and now it was my turn. I watched him try to dry up his tears of laughter. He let out one last bellyful of laughter. It was loud just like always when a brotha gets excited." Ahhhhhhhhh.....haaahhh...haaahhh.....you said the bitch ate a \$7.50 prime rib sandwich that you paid for while you was stuck eating some \$4.00 rat burger that tasted like shit, and then she had the audacity to ask you if you wanted a bite? Aaaahhhhhh....." Leslie had the funny man laugh and couldn't help but clap his hands together," And you said you thought the bitch should've been eating a sa-a-lad, that's funny. Did you take a bite of her juicy prime rib sandwich?"

After reliving in my mind the awful experience of Cathy the bar slut I had to keep my laughter spells under control the best I could." Heck no I didn't take a bite. I was too traumatized. She ordered up big for her 7 year old son as well. They both ate well that day. All I had was a 4.00 burger and water, my credit card got dung almost \$45.00 that day. Not to mention earlier that day I had taken her and her kid out to St. Clair to go four wheeling in my Jeep. Her kid had a blast that day."

Leslie started giggling again. Pretty soon it would be his turn to tell another fat chick story. "Ehh...hehh...and you said after all that you didn't even end up getting some that day?"

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"Nope. As soon as we got back to my apartment she took off and said she had to take her kid back to his real father. I guess she only got partial custody or something like that. Felt bad for the kid, he was dying of leukemia."

"Aww, that ain't cool." He said giggles finally subsiding.

I concurred, "Yeah that ain't cool." There was now dead silence.

"How long you say you was with her?"

"About 2 weeks. My relationships with women never last very long."

"I can see why. You told her she shoulda been eating a sa-a-lad."

I corrected him. "No, I never actually told her that. I said I was thinking in my mind that the bitch should be eating a salad."

"Oh."

All of a sudden a PLL utility truck pulled up along side of us. I looked around for the paperwork just in case we were getting signed out. With the heat wave we were having this week, I doubted we would be doing much work today. Our contractor's don't like going up in a bucket much with the 100 degree sun beating them in the face while they're stuck wearing thick rubber gloves that stretch all the way to the tips of their shoulders. I can't say that I blame them. But the short days due to heat don't help us much with paying the bills. We're not in the union like they are. Their pay is 4 times higher and so are their hours. So it can be hard to feel sorry for them. A wise old truck driver once told me years ago "*Money talks and Bullshit walks.*" There sure was a lot of truth to that. I'm sure a lot of us Flaggers grossing less than ten thousand a year would gladly put up with some more BS if FlaggerSource threw some more dollars at us so we too could breathe and live a little bit. It wasn't cool waking up at the buttcrack of dawn every day, not knowing how big of a lunch to pack, and somehow only ending up with a paycheck barely clearing a hundred bucks. And that's if you're lucky, less sometimes when Queen "B" in the FlaggerSource office opts to pencil whip you on your paycheck. She loves to shop and nothing impresses the bossman more than when he gets to pop in at the office and see her in a brand new red pair of "F" me heels. Girls like Teff would ride that man's coat tails until the money dried up. Ike always knew that, that's why he would never let go of his own wife, *the wombat*. The entire company would always stay in the wifey's name. It simply had to be that way.

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A big black burly man in a white polo shirt turned his truck off and walked over to us. He was a lot bigger and older than leslie but I figured since this was his people I'd kick back and let Leslie do all of the talking. Leslie was already yelling out the window.

"Hey boss, how are you doing today?" He said in a friendly voice. I knew right away that this man wasn't our boss for the day. He was dressed too neatly and looked like one of the higher-ups. He had big broad shoulders and looked like perhaps he had served his country back in the day. I could tell that this was one of those serious type of dudes that doesn't like to get too chit chatty. (That was another reason why I let Leslie do all the talking.) I also noticed the man in the white polo had quite a quizzical look going on. I'd seen that same look on many contractor's before.

The man squinted his eyes once more before talking. "Did FlaggerSource send you guys out here?"

Leslie lowered his head and made a funny face. He'd been through this drill so many times. *Go here, go there, oops we accidentally sent you there* was the FlaggerSource motto. Heaven help you if you tried getting lippy with the hung over office girls on the phone. That would get you put on call the rest of the week. It never financially behooved FlaggerSource to terminate it's employees. It was more fun for them to leave you on first call for a week or two if they didn't like your attitude. Leslie finally lifted his head back up and looked at the man. "Yeah, they sent us out here. We've been sitting out here for two hours. I don't know why we are the only ones out here."

We watched polo dude punch a number into his cellphone. He looked kind of pissed off but he didn't seem to be expressing his anger towards us. His company would have to throw a couple of dollars our way whether we did anything or not. Flaggersource charges these lucrative contractors by the hour. Our paychecks came from FlaggerSource, however, FlaggerSource gets to send these guys the bill. So far FlaggerSource had just made \$260.00 just from having this antiquated overmilaged piece of crap sit in their parking lot. That wouldn't include the bill Teff would whip up for the man power of Leslie and I to stand around and get burned in the sun. It was another \$40.00 an hour each for that. It was good to know that at least someone was getting rich off of this flagging gig, but it surely wasn't us.

The big man in the white polo got in his air conditioned truck and chatted on his cellphone. Leslie and I deduced that more than likely he was on the phone with the boss inquiring as to why somebody ordered flaggers on a day where the temperature was expected to reach in the hundreds, that was of course if PLL ordered us out here at all. We both knew that FlaggerSource was notorious for what they called "*Office Errors*" which happened quite a lot. "Office Errors" in which the only victims were the poor flaggers themselves, out of both time and money. I watched Leslie knead his

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forehead with his knuckles." I can't believe I came out here for this shit." He mumbled to himself.

I tried to cheer him up." I told you man. Gotta jump in one of their stupid trucks. They'll still rape ya for all your time but at least you won't be out any gas money."

Leslie slowly looked back up. I noticed his head was covered in beads of sweat so I turned the AC on for him. (We're not supposed to let the trucks idle for more than 15 minutes so we had to take our chill breaks in 15 minute intervals.)"Yeah, I have been thinking about it. Problem is,I know these mother "F"ers don't pay for drive time. I know if I take one of their trucks they're gonna send me to Maryland all the time and my girl won't be having it."

I tried my best to update my crew member." Naw B. That's only the big F-150s that they send to Maryland all the time. Gotta get in one of these little beat up Rangers. This truck isn't equipped with Maryland signs and equipment."

Leslie looked confused." I thought you said earlier that they sent you to Maryland about 2 weeks ago."

" I shook my head." I was in Maryland about two weeks ago, but that was before they issued me this truck you see. I had to drive my personal car 55 miles to the office and meet up with a crew leader in a big truck and then we drove 3 hours to Maryland. These little jobbers can't go to Maryland because Maryland mandates bigger signs that won't fit in these little Rangers."

Leslie was grinning from ear to ear. It was almost as if I could read his mind. I knew what question was coming next. "I already know how this shit works. I heard they ordered a whole lot of brand new trucks. The big ones. And they making everyone that's in a little truck, get into a big truck. What ya gonna do then?"

My partner was smiling but I was not. I knew that he definitely had one up on me. I didn't care that the advanced crew leaders thought they were so cool for having fully loaded big F-150's. More power to them and more work as well. I swear it seems like those bootlicking superflaggers act like they get to keep those trucks when they leave the company. I hoped that my life would never come to me waking up every morning and walking out to my big company truck with my nose in the air. Those other crew leaders would never get it in their heads that those trucks didn't personally belong

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to them. I chuckled for Leslie to show him I wasn't scared." They'll never put me in a big truck." I said.

"Why?"

"Because I'll play it off. I'll just say it violates the zoning laws where I live and my landlords would not allow such a big truck taking up space on their front lawn." I said assuringly. I had done a good stretch with a lot of playa playas in the joint. When I wasn't writing my novels I was watching carefully some of the best scam artists and playa playas in the world and learning how to mirror their behavior. Needless to say, I wasn't very good at it and I still sucked. We both jumped when we heard a tapping sound from the driver's side window. Mr. Polo dude was writing in the air with an imaginary pen. We both understood the gesture. We were getting signed out.

Chapter 4 The Next Week Working in Lititz

It was still my first month as a crew leader and I still didn't feel like I had any major regrets driving one of their stupid trucks all over God's green Earth. I did feel like I was getting used and abused, but I kept telling myself *what else do I have better to do with my free time?* I am 30 years old and it didn't take me long to realize that this time consuming part time job would never get me out of mommy's basement. With hours that fickle more than a dog's wagging tail, it took me almost forever to get my truckdriving school paid off. I never missed a day of class and pulled straight A's, but the economy was so bad I knew I would be stuck at this crummy job for a while. I tried not to talk much about my class A CDL because I didn't want any of the flaggers to think that I was better than they were. I had actually learned later that there were other flaggers as well that carried their commercial driver's licenses. There were even some flaggers that ran their own businesses at one point and time. In actuality, there weren't really any flaggers that were better than everyone else. Unless someone could turn that stop/slow paddle faster than the rest of us, there really was no way to tell apart the lazies from the hard workers. As a matter of fact, FlaggerSource caters to women and disabled people. It advertises right on the side of each and every one of their trucks **WBE/DBE** (women beneficiary employees and disabled beneficiary employees). Good ole Ike Boner and the wombat will do anything to get as many tax write offs as they can. I can't say that I blame them for that.

It was 8:20am and I was having a pretty good week so far. All week long I had been working for a contractor known as DillerPipeline which almost always ended up in 10 hour days. With paychecks that bounced all over the place, a good flagger always knew that you took hours whenever you could. The goal was to get as many credits built up in the summer time so you could kick back in the winter time and milk the unemployment. We knew

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which contractors doled out more hours, but it was up to the office girls to dictate which flagger went where. After all the paychecks the company had cheated me on, I knew somebody in there definitely had a hard on for me. I was just yearning for the day that they would hopefully fire me so I could release my story. It would be unprofessional of me to write a story about the company while still employed within, another reason why I never posted any work related stuff on facebook. Unprofessional.

I felt my cellphone vibrate in my pocket. I didn't want to answer it because both of my hands were currently busy unfurling a Road Work Ahead sign. I threw the sign in the grass and answered my cell anyways. It was a girl on the phone. My partner for the day.

"I am so sorry! I know I'm running late. I had to turn around and go back home because I forgot my stop/slow paddle. You didn't call the office did you?"

I picked the sign up from the grass with my free hand and then looked at my watch. Little missy was evidently running late. I was not surprised. It was rare that any of my crew members would show up on time. I was already getting used to it. It did piss me off that we were both on the same hourly rate. I was curious as to what became of my extra 36 cents that went along with becoming a crew leader. My guess was Teff felt that 36 cents better belonged in her classy leather purse to give it a better jingle. Sometimes I wondered if Teff had already married me in her mind because it really did seem like what was mine was "ours" or "hers" I should say. I became so delirious sometimes that I actually believed that maybe she was saving the money she swiped from my paychecks to start a special "Uncle B" account because maybe she felt I didn't know how to manage my money. I just might hear her use that very excuse in court some day.

I turned the volume up on my cellphone," No. I didn't call the office but I was just getting ready to, so I'm glad you called. I'm setting signs up right now so everything should be ready by the time you get here."

"Oh, okay,thanks. I should be there in like another ten minutes I think. I'm really sorry." She said softly into the phone. I had heard all of the BS before. I really didn't care that she was running late as long as she showed up. I knew I'd be getting some good hours today and if my partner decided to knock off work I'd be out a ten hour day and I didn't want that." Well, just get here as soon as you can." Was all I could think to say before hanging up the phone. I wanted to put the Road Work Ahead sign on the side of the street but the contractor had informed me earlier that would be a bad idea because tractor trailers needed as much road space as possible. Reluctantly, I set up the sign on the sidewalk which I don't think we're sup-

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posed to do, but oh well. I do whatever the person signing my paper work tells me to do. I'm sure by now FlaggerSource knows that. It doesn't make sense to piss off the person signing your time sheets.

I was just putting up the last sign when I saw a white Volkswagon Golf slowing down as it was approaching me. I was kind of surprised to see a cute red head behind the wheel. The minute I saw her I had already made up my mind that she was over qualified for a crummy job at FlaggerSource. I figured she would probably only stick around for a month at best. *Why stand out here in this sweltering heat bored out of your mind when you can wait on tables?* I thought to myself. I kept my cool as I watched this twenty year old looking cutie scrunchie her little butt out of the driver's seat and stand up to approach me.

"I am so sorry. I know I'm late. I'm a really good worker I just don't know what has gotten into me." She said yanking her jeans up once more. I had a laid back look on my face as if her being late didn't have the slightest affect on me. It didn't. And it wasn't like I was putting on a *put-on* just because she was cute. My partner for the day could've been that one fat guy that always drives me crazy and I still wouldn't have cared about my partner for the day being late. With the mounting unresolved pay issues I was having with FlaggerSource, I basked in each and every one of their screw ups. Everyone's always being late all the time only made me look like the better employee. Not to mention each time one of my partners showed up late meant a later time we could actually start working. It was rare that you could stumble upon a flagging operation that only required one flagger. I reached for the paper work and quickly had my partner sign in.

"What did you say your name was?" I asked.

"I'm Tara. I came all the way out from Hershey." She said while signing her name on the time sheet. Because I'm 30 now I'm no longer the horn dog that I was in my teenage years. It takes me a nano second to check out a chick and then the rest of my time gets spent checking out the car the chick came in. I guessed her Golf was probably only valued at 2 or 3 grand in the condition it was in, but I still wanted one. A lot of my friends drove those things around back in my early twenties and I figured they were probably good on gas. Not to mention if you were a music lover like me, you could have some serious subwoofers installed in the back of one of those things. Tara finished signing her name on the time sheet and then handed me back the clip board. I put the clip board on the passenger's seat and then grabbed a walkie talkie radio from behind the seat.

"I don't suppose you remembered to bring a radio did you?" I asked, already pretty much knowing the answer to the question. Every crew member is responsible for having their own radio and I knew that when I was just

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a crew member, I **always** remembered to bring my radio. (Now as for having working batteries, that was a whole other story.)

Tara just looked at me all dumbfounded like. I wasn't at all surprised." No. I never bought one. They never told us that we had to buy one."

I turned on my walkie talkie and turned it to channel 5 and then handed it to her." Here you go. I always carry an extra. Just make sure I get it back please." It was my last extra radio because one of the Ahole warehouse dudes up at FlaggerSource had stolen my other extra radio when I was called up there to switch trucks. I had already surmised that it was probably that bony little X jarhead kid that acts all bouncy all the time. That little prick had more bounces than Tiger from Whinney the Pooh and I figured the management kept that little guber around just for shits and giggles. With the stupid fishhook he always kept pinned to the bill of his cap, he sure made a pretty good mascot for the company. I imagined that the purported so called college bitches in the office liked having that bouncy little kid around so they had someone to tease. I had worked with him once before and had already made my determination that he was one of those paranoid gun nuts that constantly thought war was imminent. He had struck me as the type that would pocket another flagger's radio if he got the chance.

I looked at my wrist watch. It was 8:30am. Diller's pipe line workers were getting antsy and ready to lay some pipe. Start time was supposed to be 8am but this cute little red head had found a clever way to hold us up. I imagined that once they took a look at my partner they just might want to lay pipe all day long. The coolest thing about having a female partner (especially an attractive one) is that it increases your chances that the contractors will make it an easy day for you and not have you stand there for the whole 10 hours straight. Don't get me wrong, I've had many of days working the entire day without a pee break but it was rare that those days ever happened when working with a female. I guess the contractors just expected us guys to man up and hold it. Even if that meant purposely dehydrating ourselves and ruining our bodies for a measly eleven bucks an hour for a job that would never lead to full time. Never lead to full time no matter how much bootlicking you did.

Tara and I took our positions and let the morning sun tear up our albinoskin like it was roasting a marshmallow over an open flame. Because I was manning the intersection I got to use a red flag but poor Tara had to hold that stupid stop/slow paddle at the other end. We were only an hour into flagging but so far she was doing a good job. I felt bad that I got to hold a red flag weighing only a few ounces while she was stuck holding up a stop/slow paddle but I was only following company procedure. I had crew leading classes that I had taken and they had accentuated that crew members

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were not to man the intersections. Intersections were to be done by the crew leaders.

The traffic was considerably slow which came as no surprise at this hour of the morning. I was watching Tara roll up her sleeves to work on her sun-tan when something caused me to abruptly turn around. As soon as I saw the big yellow flashing lights I knew what it was. It was a QA, which was also known as the FlaggerSource police. Believe it or not FlaggerSource actually nominates one of its top bootlicking flaggers to patrol all the other flaggers to make sure they are doing their job correctly and work zones are properly set up. Every QA gets a big FlaggerSource truck fully equipped with a brand new lap-top with a GPS program to keep tabs on all of the employees. As long as you are properly flagging and everything is legit, a crew leader has no reason to fear a QA coming to nose around. I looked up at my partner to see if she noticed that the company police had arrived. She had no clue. Tara was still in La-La land.

I barked into my radio.” See, now you know why I was getting on your case just 15 minutes ago about putting on those safety glasses. Look who’s here.” I said patting my own self on the back. Tara looked in my direction to see the bright shiny woo-woo lights and the big Italian looking guy behind the wheel. I immediately recognized the guy. It was Johnny, everybody’s favorite QA. He had been a flagger at one time and understood that occasionally a crew leader might get confused with how to properly set up a work zone. If Johnny thought it was an honest mistake, he would fix the distance between the signs or just tell you about whatever petty matter it was that needed to be corrected before he would write you up. Nobody wanted to get written up because that would land you in trouble with the company. Everybody liked Johnny that knew anything. They all liked Johnny because they knew that he was the one QA that wasn’t about breaking everybody’s balls. If Johnny had to write you up then you definitely screwed up big time. I noticed he kept his beacon lights on even as he pulled up right along side of me. I could tell he was already in a good mood.

“Hey-y-y there buddy! I see you have all your signs put up. I drove around and let me tell ya everything looks good.”

I smiled for Johnny. I didn’t know his background, but I wasn’t the only flagger that thought he very much resembled an Italian mobster. I always felt bad that a dedicated working man at his age was stuck working for this dead end company. It always confused me as to why I would see him at the safety meetings dressed all natty to a tee and sitting in the front row giving his utmost attention. You know the economy is really in the crapper when you have people going out of their way to dress up for a part time job that tries to stiff you any way they can. In my book Johnny would always be the man. Once last winter he even bought me a cup of coffee when work was down

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to one day a week. His appreciation for what little things he had in life seemed to inspire us all. I always hoped he could find a better job but he always seemed to be content with the job he had. I gave a big grin for Johnny.

“Thanks Johnny. It was easy setting up because I’ve been fortunate enough to be at this location all week. I’m sure next week they’ll be bouncing me around again.”

Johnny concurred. He knew the deal.” Yeah, but I see they have you working with a nice little cutie over there. Is she doing all right?”

“ Yeah, she’s actually doing pretty good. I think she’s new but she seems to be getting the hang of it.”

Johnny looked at his watch.” Hey listen I don’t have much time so I have to be quick. I see your actively flagging so let me have the keys to your truck so I can look it over real quick. I’ll bring them back when I’m finished.”

“Okay Johnny.” I said handing him the keys. I had nothing in the truck that would get me in trouble and I knew the equipment in the back would be organized enough for his likings. I had seen other crew leader trucks that were trashed but that wouldn’t be me just yet. I was still trying to make a good first impression. I figured I’d wait another year before I’d turn my truck into a big trash can on wheels. A few more shortages on my paycheck and I would have that truck wishing it was sitting in a junk yard.

Johnny took a little longer than I thought he would, but he assured me that everything was okay before he handed me back the keys. My partner and I both waved to him as he drove away to go play peek-a-boo on the next poor unsuspecting flagger. I waved a few cars through and went back to my daydreaming mode. Or my story mode as I like to call it. There was this one day when the PLL trucks were off the road and we didn’t have to flag, a henchman asked me if I ever get bored just standing around. “*Heck no!*” was my reply, “*I got a circus going on in my head.*” The PLL dude just laughed and sensed that I had a very funny sense of humor. What he didn’t know was I wasn’t joking. I was serious.

Traffic was still maybe one or two cars every ten minutes and I felt justified to trouble shoot in my head some ideas for the next novel I wanted to publish. *The scene in my head was taking place in a big city more congested than a bees nest. In my mind I was imagining a scene where the bomb squad was responding to a suspicious package left in front of a Federal building. What the bomb squad didn’t know was the suspicious package was just a ruse. The bomber mastermind had rigged up a massive booby trap set to take out hundreds of people the very second that the bomb squad engaged the RF Jammer. That’s because the*

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bomber was clever enough to reverse it which would cause the detonator to be the very bomb squad themselves. My next story was going to be titled "Massacre in Gredina". I doubted I would ever type up this story looming in my head but I still liked to imagine the story in my mind. I was starting to notice that each and every one of my stories involved bombs at one point. My goal was to eventually write maybe a romance novel without someone getting blown up. My daydream was interrupted by the squealing of tires.

I immediately looked up the street to see what was going on. I saw my partner shielding her face from what looked like soda being splashed on her. I almost had to do a double take. I heard some teenage boys shouting out some obscenities and my first question was why? Why would some teenage boys all crammed in a big black truck want to harrass a hot chicky momma? Had my standards been lowered in my older age? Was she really not all that cute? Was that any way to get a girls digits? I was utterly confused. I knew I had stopped taking my psyche meds but I was pretty sure I wasn't hallucinating. The boys sped off and I saw her look down in my direction. I wanted to get on the radio and ask her what happened but then I opted not to at the last second. A cute girl like her would surely feel embarrassed to be degraded upon by a bunch of teenage punks. I was better off staring into space like I usually am on slow days like this and pretending I have no clue what just happened. I would of course expect the same from her if it had happened to me. I doubted she wanted the other flaggers to know she got soda splashed on her so I had to let this incident ride. Tomorrow would be another day.

Chapter 5

It was looking to be another hot sticky day and it wasn't even close to noon yet. I was happy to be flagging in a city only 30 minutes away from where I live for once, but not too happy because I hate flagging in the city of Lancaster. It always seemed to me that the city folk in Lancaster made their own rules and had vision problems because it never failed that the motorists out here blew past us flaggers like we were nothing more than light poles that had been painted yellow. Fortunately I was working with another crew leader that had been with the company longer than me so he was stuck working the busy intersection while I manned the side street with my stop/slow paddle. His name was Jerry and he had no problems admitting he was an alcoholic. I had worked with him several times before and I would always be amused at the alcohol vapors emanating from his breath each morning. His dark hair was always unkempt and looked just like a mop head that you would find in a janitor's closet of an old folks home that had been shut down for years. He always had a harried look on his face and I knew if I stayed at FlaggerSource long enough I too would have that very same look. Earlier this morning he had informed me of the mind games the girls in the office played on him to squeeze more work out of him. I could still hear his talk in the back of my mind. "*Oh there's my hero*" big Jill had told him the minute he walked in the office. Before he could figure out where she was going with this she had talked him into filling in for another flagger that didn't want to drive to Maryland. She knew that more than likely he was single and could easily be played like a fool. Jill had a way with people. She also had a way with me. She was the one that hired me. I was a little jealous that my future sugar momma was flirty with other men. Jerry assured me that she always acted that way towards everybody.

I held my stop/slow paddle firmly while trying to play hide and seek from the bright yellow sun. We're trained to stand X amount of feet from

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the 6 cone tapers, but on sunny days like this I usually find ways to cheat. I found myself stepping a foot closer to the taper every 10 minutes in order to stay in the tall shadow of the building in front of me. Jerry was too busy working the intersection to notice and he wasn't the type to fuss over the petty stuff. It wasn't like I was getting much traffic on my side street anyway. It looked to me as though Jerry was making his job look harder than what it really was. I kind of felt as though he purposely added all the theatrics with hopes that the contractor might slide us an extra hour at the end of the day when he signed our time sheet. There was a few snaggletooth women within the company that really knew how to play it off when it came to begging for a few extra hours when the contractors signed our paper work on short days. That was just a skill I never got good at. I wasn't the type to wine about my financial situations when the contractors were deciding what to log in as our end time on the time sheets. I had no kids to pick up after school, and I really doubted that the contractor dudes really cared how many hours I had lost due to rain the week before.

It was getting close to 11am and I knew that any minute all the section8 crackheads of Lancaster would be milling around in their pajama pants and waving their fanny at me. I knew that I was standing too dangerously close to the taper so I would have to suck it up and let the sun beat down on my face. When I looked over at Jerry my jaw nearly dropped. Somebody had accosted him and it definitely wasn't one of the crackheads in their pajama pants. No, this person stuck out like a sore thumb.

Jerry continued to flag while this man dressed up like a lawyer continued to ask him questions. I was too far away to hear what he was saying but I knew the lawyer looking dude was in a serious safety violation which was deterring Jerry from doing his job. Jerry did his best to ignore the man dressed up in a suit but the man wouldn't stop questioning him. My delirious mind began to play tricks on me. *Was this neatly dressed man asking him for a job at FlaggerSource?* I knew the economy was in the shitter, but come on now? If business men are out there holding the stupid flag then this country is having some serious financial issues. *But is the recession really that bad?*

A good 5 minutes passed by with this lawyer looking dude harrassing my partner. I was getting curious now and it looked to me as though Jerry had shook his head no a hundred times. The man finally gave up with Jerry and then turned around and noticed me standing down the side street. I sensed that Jerry no longer wished for the man's presence and I was getting ready to bark into the radio that the man needed to leave for safety reasons. I knew FlaggerSource would have a hissy fit if a QA came by and saw another pedestrian interfering with a flagging operation. I put my radio down when the man left Jerry alone and started walking in my direction. My curiosity was now utmost piqued at this point. I watched carefully as the man reached in his wallet and pulled out a business card. He was walking fast like he was in some kind of hurry.

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“Hi, my name is Jason. I’m with the Labor Union and I wanted to give you guys my card so you can call me when you get the chance. I know you’re worried about your jobs but I can promise you that you’ll stay completely anonymous.”

I was still very much confused.” What is all of this about?” I asked skeptically. I didn’t know if I was in trouble or what was going on. Jason gave me a look as if he was only trying to help.

“Look I know that you guys get treated like shit and I’m here to help. If I can get enough of you guys to sign I can get the union to step in and you flaggers can get treated better. I used to live in Delaware where there’s a company just like this and those guys get 30 bucks an hour. How much do you make?”

I giggled.” I’ve been with this company over a year and I still get 11 bucks an hour. So far I’ve already had 4 pay issues with this company. Two of them still haven’t been resolved.” I said proudly holding up four fingers to accentuate my concern. I was in my glory squealing like a pig about all the bullshit that went on within the company. I noticed Jason writing things down so I figured I’d give him a little more to play with.” Want to guess what I grossed with the company last year?” The pen stopped writing and I deemed at this point Jason might assume he was dealing with an eccentric man by the way I was bugging out.” I don’t know, what?” He asked.” Fifty three hundred bucks. These jerk offs took up all my time pretty much 7 days a week for fifty three hundred bucks. We don’t get paid for all the time we have to take calling in each day for our daily assignments. I can’t think how many times I used to call in and they would put me on hold for 15 minutes only to tell me that I was on call for the next day which basically meant I wouldn’t be working the next day. I swear sometimes I would hear those women giggle in the office when they knew they were getting away with clowning us.”

Jason didn’t even bother to write any of that down. I think I was throwing too much out there on the table for him and he pretty much wanted to make his point and go. I wasn’t the type to bite the hand that feeds, but with the company still owing me money and adamantly refusing to pay it back, I was among the many flaggers that didn’t have good things to say about FlaggerSource. And I surely wanted Jason to know that. I watched as he pointed to the phone number printed on the business card.

“Just call that number okay?” He said. In a blink of an eye our Flagger Savior was gone.

Chapter 6

As the summer progressed I was starting to wonder about my future with FlaggerSource. I have never been to college but I sure hoped my other credentials could land me a better job. I remember first taking on a job at the age of 16 washing dishes fulltime for a measly \$15,000.00 a year and now I was dedicating what felt like 7 days a week to my employer for an annual income of less than \$6000.00. From what I was hearing FlaggerSource hires people all year round on a daily basis, and after 90 days an employee was no longer valuable to the company. Something about FlaggerSource getting an \$8,000.00 tax incentive for each new hiree because the government was doing everything that they could to get people off of the *breadline* (unemployment). It seemed to me that the only flaggers able to move up in the company were the little GQ hoodrats doing their best to charm the *too much make up* bitches in the office. There was one little hoodrat already bragging to the other flaggers about getting into one of the office girl's panties at some party. I can't say that I blame those 4 foot pretty boys with the bling bling. Somebody's got to keep the rising PMS level in there under control. It may as well be the city boys with their twisted D.C caps and their dumb and dumber approach. That would surely keep those squirrely girls in the office in a perky mood.

I felt some anxiety as I lovingly guided my FlaggerSource truck down the windy road and looked at all of the telephone poles that PLL had marked for need of repair. It was looking like it was going to be more than a 4 hour day judging by the looks of all the adjoining poles marked with white spray paint. I didn't feel as though that many poles really needed replaced but it didn't surprise me because this was my hometown and I already knew that NewHolland had too much money. I was just glad to be working within a few miles away from home for once.

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When I reached my destination I was completely taken off guard. Although I was very close to home I was not the first Flagger to reach the job site. First crew leader yes, but definitely not the first flagger. There sitting in a huge green van was a red headed woman but it was not the same red head I had just worked with the week before. This one was about 20 years older but it looked as though she still had it going on. Evidently this woman was real eager to start work for the day. I had surmised at this point that she must be a relatively new employee. *Once she learns what FlaggerSource is all about I'm sure she'll settle down like the rest of em.* I thought to myself. She came at me right away.

“Yep, this is where we’re supposed to meet,” She said, “Suicide Sue is on her way. She’s leading this whole operation.”

I immediately felt relieved. Everybody knew who Suicide Sue was and as far as I knew everybody pretty much liked her. Suicide Sue had managed to stay with the company for a good three years and I was more than prepared to allow her to dictate today's flagging operation. 3 years with the company? Yeah, I trusted her judgement. It was always fun working with her because she had been there long enough and had more dirt on Ike Boner than any other flagger I knew. When rumors leaked out, she was the one to go to to ascertain those rumors. She was short, stalky, about my mother's age, but Suicide Sue still had plenty of pep in her. I'd like to see the welfare office try to reject her application if she ever felt the need to apply. Sue just had a way with persuading people to gravitate towards her opinion. Maybe it was the confidence in her voice, or maybe she'd just been in the business long enough to be able to sniff out all of the bullshit. She definitely knew when somebody was lying to her.

We both watched as Suicide Sue pulled her FlaggerSource truck along side of us. The moment we saw her we both knew immediately that something was wrong. The look on her face suggested that somebody had screwed her over once again. I had guessed at this point that it was probably one of the girls at the office. I've seen Sue often depressed, but today it looked more like an issue of being immensely pissed off and she definitely had her war face on. Because I'm not a chatterbox, I let Redhead do all the talking.

“Is something wrong Sue? You look pretty upset. Did they screw you over somehow up at the office?”

Sue picked up her clipboard containing the time sheets and started filling out a time sheet.” No, nothing is wrong. Just the usual bullshit. That's all.” She muttered not wanting to look at us. I knew she couldn't hide behind her hair because her hair was just as short as mine. I didn't know anything about her personal life but I had always deduced that she spent a good num-

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ber of years living alone. I've met others like her and thought that maybe there was a slight chance that she had just out and out gave up on men, but I really didn't know. I felt Red Head lady nudge me while Suicide Sue filled out a time sheet." I know what's wrong." She whispered. I decided at this point whatever was going on, it would be in my best interest to stay out of the picture. I didn't want to piss off people like Suicide Sue. We both watched as sue wrote the date and location on the time sheet. She signed her name and then handed us the clipboard.

"Here, you guys can sign in a while." She said handing it to me first. I immediately felt my guard go up. If she felt I was jumping on her time sheet she was crazy. After an accrued 5 pay issues with the company, I didn't trust FlaggerSource any more than I would trust a dog with a juicy steak sitting on the table. If I jumped on her time sheet then she would be the one keeping the blue carbon copy and not me. I would have no proof of whatever work we did for today. I tried my best to be cordial.

"Umm....Sue...I....uh...already made out my time sheet."

Sue shook her head. "Look dude. You can do whatever you want but more flaggers are coming and they already know they're signing their name on my time sheet. You know how these contractors are, they're often in a hurry and don't like signing two time sheets."

I knew Suicide Sue was right and I was wrong. A lot of times when the PLL contractor dudes are finished working they are in a hurry and don't like fishing around for all the job numbers that they are required to fill in on our time sheets. If I had a time sheet made out just for myself, a contractor just might bitch about it. I reluctantly signed my name on Sue's time sheet to keep the peace.

Flaggers started showing up the closer we got to the start time and miss Red Head and I could sense that Suicide Sue was still in dour mood. I remembered miss Red Head nudging me earlier on so I finally got the nerve to ask her why Sue was more infuriated than Sarah Palin losing another campaign. I knew that I had nothing to do with whatever was wrong because Suicide Sue was the type to tell you right to your face if she had a problem with you. Everyone always seemed to like her for that. She was the type that *"Told it like it was."* Some day I hoped to master that skill but with my social disorder I really doubted it. When people upset me I usually stick to the usual routine of lighting their house on fire, letting my dog poop on their yard, mailing them a bomb, or whatever. My psychiatrist assures me that I need to work on these things.

Red Head whispered into my ear." Sue is really pissed off in case you haven't noticed."

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I whispered back.” Why?”

“Her and Don have been fighting all week. She chewed him out pretty good yesterday. Just the other day Don showed up in her work zone in his harley and raised some Cain. The QA had to get involved and I think Don got written up even though he was off the clock when he did it.”

I was totally confused. I had worked with Don before when I was a crew member and he seemed like a really nice old man. Once he had saved me some gas and given me a ride up to one of our safety meetings. I imagined there was more to the story. I knew Don had been working for the past two months on a big PLL job in Morgantown and it made no sense why he would be coming out here and giving Suicide Sue some shit. They were both about twice my age and you would think they would know better than to act like that.

I whispered softly into the Red Head’s ear while Sue wasn’t looking.” So why are they pissed off at each other?”

“Because they’re fighting over me that’s why. I’ve been spending the past month working with Don over in Morgantown and now Sue has me over here and she doesn’t want to hand me back over to Don.”

I giggled. I couldn’t help but giggle. I looked Miss Red Head over once more and giggled again. The mysterious tension in the air was now finally starting to all make sense. There was no doubt in my mind that Don would take a shining to a girl like the one standing next to me. It was pathetic, but downright crazy. Miss Red Head had only been working with our company for two months and she was already privileged enough to stay at one location for an entire month. Evidently good looks matter after all, because this wasn’t one of those kind of jobs where one crew member can flag better than another crew member. All you’re doing most of the day is standing there and holding that stupid sign. This wasn’t one of those kind of jobs where an employer can say *Pete can stack 60 boxes in an hour and Bill can only stack 40 boxes in an hour so were going to give more hours to Pete*. I was getting very confused with the way FlaggerSource did things. The company sure seemed to show a lot of favoritism towards certain flaggers.

I played dumb.” So why would Sue be so upset if Don still needed you over at Morgantown?”

Red Head nudged me again in a playful manner. Perhaps one day I would try to request her presence as a crew member helper. I was, after all, 30 now and a cougar just might do me some good. Whatever got me out of Mommy’s basement I guess. I was getting tired of Ma and Pa taking all of

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my paychecks to Atlantic City and the spiders in that dank cold cellar I lived in were starting to get on my nerves. Not to mention that I was on my third air mattress thanks to our Siamese cat poking holes in it at every chance he got." Bad Pussy!" I used to tell him.

"Aw come on you know why. You don't think that after all these years she's still into guys do you?"

I continued to act confused. As a professional employee it is not my job to question another flagger's sexual orientation. My buddies and I always quipped up gay jokes just for shits and giggles so you never really knew for sure just who might be serious. I kept my whisper at as low as it would go."So you think she has a thing for you?"

Red Head chortled." Heh! She's been sweet on me all week. You think I don't know?" Before I could say anything I watched her lie face down in the grass and pick at a dandelion. Once I saw her booty trunk winking at me I silently told myself "*Yup, it looks like Suicide Sue has pretty good taste in women.*" I couldn't help but wonder how many two hour work days this Red Headed Booty bandit would put up with before she would decide to bounce from the company. And what freaked me out the most? She had a daughter about my same age whom I had just worked with yesterday.

Chapter 7

Fridays were always hectic up at the FlaggerSource office. Mostly it was because FlaggerSource always did all their stupid classes on this special day to get the welfare population up and working. There was no doubt in my mind that FlaggerSource somehow worked hand and hand with the government to keep people out of the system. The only people that constantly got injured from their evil little scheme were the workers themselves because I had yet to find a single flagger that was working full time hours. The smartest ones flirted with the chicken heads up at the office with hopes of getting on the paving jobs which sometimes paid twice as much. They would get their credits built up over the summer in order for them to receive substantial unemployment checks in the winter. That way they could sit by a nice warm fire while the rest of the dumb suckers like myself would be standing in an ice storm wishing for a piss break only to get a pay check about a third of the employees that bootlicked all summer long. I'm not one to philander, but I did notice the one day I flagged with the warehouse manager that he always made a point of referring to each and every one of those whores in the office as "Babe." I guess he was smarter than me. And evidently he was.

5:20pm (Getting a call from FlaggerSource)

"Hi this is Tyra from FlaggerSource. Are you ready for Monday's assignment?"

I hated this shit. I really did. Friday night and I have to spend my time (which I don't get paid for) and burn my cell minutes to listen to this new girl working in the office probably give me a wrong assignment. It happens quite often that they call you two hours later, while you're in the middle of

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dinner, to change your next assignment. But, because I can't find work any where else, I keep my cool and frantically scurry around to find pen and paper.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm ready." I say in my most cordial voice. Tyra very much sounded like a 30 year old dark skinned girl but I wasn't for sure. I guess I was used to talking to 911 operators like the ones I was used to seeing on Beavis and Butthead.

"Okay, we have you going to Abella Recon out in Lebanon with a start time of 7am." She said matter-of-factly.

Abella Recon? I had never heard of them before. We had numerous contractors we dealt with but I had never heard of this company before. After 14 months with the company, and not hearing of Abella Recon, I knew that could only mean one thing. Prevailing wage job. That of course meant big money. I had not yet been blessed with a prevailing wage job all year long. Because FlaggerSource never leads to fulltime, we jump on time and a half pay once we go over 8 hours. Only a fool refused prevailing wage jobs. The office girls are supposed to announce the rate of pay up front. But I guessed at this point Tyra might want to get in on the Flagger scam and parade around in some new "F" me heels just to be cool like Teff. I patiently waited for Tyra to inform me of the rate so I could write it down. There was nothing but silence. Evidently Tyra was still pondering whether or not I was just another new guy. With a purported 685 employees, I could understand her not knowing who I was. I tried my best to be nice.

"Abella Recon? So uh..... I don't think I ever heard of them. I'm guessing they're a prevailing wage job?" I braced myself for the bullshit. I heard some hesitation. A little hemming and hawing thrown into the mix. *Go ahead and try and play it off girl*, I thought to myself. *You know you want to be a scam artist like the rest of those bitches*. I heard her pretend to flip some pages. She was new, but not that new.

Her voice elevated with surprise as if she was reading my winning scratch off ticket." It izzzzz.....a prevailing wage job." She said feigning stupidity the best she could. I knew then and there that she was another one that I couldn't trust. I made a mental note of it.

"Well, how much is the rate?"

"Uh, says here \$13.87. You like to get that money don't you?" She said trying to flirt her way out of getting caught red handed. Usually prevailing wage jobs paid 16 and up. It dawned on me that maybe FlaggerSource was

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honing up on their new scheme to make it look good just in case in the event that they get caught.

“Of course I like that money. Who wouldn’t?” I said caustically. I didn’t understand why she came up with such a stupid question to deviate, but I was impressed that she was at least practicing her grifting skills to impress Queen B. I shut up immediately before I would end up getting too sarcastic and have no job at all for Monday. These swindlers don’t hesitate to put a flagger on call if they sense attitude. Being “On call” didn’t get your credits built up for unemployment. Nobody wanted a cold winter. I had woken up to see my breath all winter long and I was trying to save up for some fire wood. Burning up your chests and dresser drawers to stay warm isn’t cool and nothing sucks more than mildew getting into your clothes.

“Okay, I have you partnered up with Joey drenks. Do you need his number?” She asked. No I didn’t need his number. He had just called me 20 minutes before and already informed me of the company we would be working for on monday and asked for a ride. Why it ever happened that crew members got their assignments before the crew leaders? I did not know. But then of course this was FlaggerSource.

“No that’s okay. I’m pretty sure I already have his number.”

“Okay,bye.” Tyra immediately hung up the phone. I guess they hang up so fast in order to fool us into believing that they actually have a lot more work to do.

Scam artist I silently told myself.

Chapter 8

Monday turned out to be a nightmare. That nightmare quickly turned into a dream when the paychecks came out the following week. I ended up putting in a 17 hour day working with a 20 year old boy portraying himself as a tough guy with his rolled up sleeves. Unfortunately he wasn't so tough because I had to listen to him crying in the radio all night long about constantly running out of cigarettes and water. We flagged until almost 1am the next morning with nothing but a 5 minute break thanks to our savior Woodrow who was kind enough to relieve us half way through the day on his own time. The young buck and I had to pull a double shift and then still try to stay awake for the long ride home. I could still hear his moaning on the way home in the back of my mind after a 17 hour day. *I missed getting laid tonight, I can't believe I missed getting laid tonight.* I assured him that he would be fine the next few days because there was an excellent chance that FlaggerSource would keep him on call for the rest of the week. FlaggerSource had once been described as a *Feast or Famine* job. Do you really think those envious girls in the office want you maxing out your benefits in the winter while eating smores by a campfire? Get real. Those girls in there know what it is. It is what they make it.

After I tucked myself in bed by 3am I was not surprised to hear my cell ringing just several hours later. It was FlaggerSource giving me a wake up call to go to work. I guess they had concluded at this point that I was Superman or something. God forbid I try to get a good 8 hours of sleep after a 17 hour day. I didn't even know which office girl it was, but I carefully listened.

"Hey, after you get done working today we need you to come out to the office for your yearly review."

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Whoopdie stinking Doo! I thought to myself. I had heard about their stupid annual reviews and their stingy 15 cent raises. I wasn't sure I wanted to drive an hour on my time some 55 miles to pick up a lousy 15 cents and listen to these female clowns babble. Especially since I never really got a chance to get to sleep from the night before. I was definitely on cloud nine. (What I wasn't realizing was they purposely chose to do my review today knowing I would be completely out of it so they could blow more smoke up my ass and withhold my signed review without me having all my faculties to realize it. Yes, they were just that evil.)

I stirred around in my bed and looked at the alarm clock. I was too out of it to even read the time. I knew that last night my partner promised me that there was no way in hell that they could talk him into working the next day. Not after a 17 hour day many miles from home. I looked at my timex and noticed the date. Something just didn't seem right. "Hey you said yearly review. Aren't you about two months late? We're in June." I said. I knew what it was. Plenty of Flaggers had forewarned me about the intentional late yearly reviews. It was all part of the FlaggerSource scam to save the company money so that if you stayed around for a few years there would eventually be a year elapsing where the company would worm it's way out of giving you more pennies to add to your raise.

"Yeah whatever. Just come over to the office after work and ask for Clarissa. Bye." Phone hung up. I was not surprised. After 14 months with the company, I was pretty sure the big girl that hired me was the only one I ever got flirty with. I had no intentions of driving over 50 miles to take one of these scam artists out for a nice dinner. Not unless they let me in on the scam of course. I felt as though I was a little bit too honest for something like that. I wasn't down to my last dollar, but I was getting down to my last nerve with all the pay shortages.

After work I headed for the long journey to the office. Even though I had been with the company for a while, I barely knew any of the girls in there. And to be quite honest? I didn't want to know anybody in there. If they were going to continue to browbeat me on my pay it would probably be best that I never find out who these scammers really were. I've been known to be vindictive if I feel the need.

Just as I had imagined, the review went well. I had no points against me and Clarissa told me I was doing perfect and would receive a 45 cent raise starting on Monday. Now would I really see that raise come Monday? I guess that would meddle with the FlaggerSource scam now wouldn't it?

Chapter 9 July 15th.2011

I was in my 15th. month with the company and felt like I had pretty much seen it all. My nerves were getting shot because we were supposed to be in our prime flagging season but yet I wasn't getting hardly any digits being put on the books. I had already surmised at this point that I was in for yet another cold winter. Between stamps, photocopies, 2 dollar library fees for faxes and what not, I had already spent too much money just trying to procure the money my company had stolen from me. The clowns at the wage complaint stopped their investigation when they received a letter from the president of my company stating that not only were there no pay shortages, the big wombat had the nerve to state that I was actually over paid \$50.31. With all the previous lawsuits in the past, you would think wage complaint would have learned by now to give the flaggers the benefit of the doubt. **But they didn't.**

It was an awkward feeling standing out there in 100 degrees with long pants and sweaty butt not knowing for sure if your day would turn into another day of voluntary community service. At least pay shortages in the winter could be pacified with the adjustment in unemployment. It seemed kind of odd that FlaggerSource never screwed up anyone's paychecks in the winter time. But this wasn't winter time and I was staring at my weekly paycheck. \$115.76. I was fricken pissed. This was pay shortage number 6 for me. I knew there were other flaggers that had been with the company just as long as me and still had yet to deal with a single pay shortage on their check. There was no doubt about it. I was being singled out.

Many thoughts raced through my mind as I stared at my measley pay check that had been shorted for the 6th. time. I flipped open my cell phone and played the voice mail messages that I had saved from last week. I knew I still had a voice mail message from the oldest office lady promising that the

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missing money from the week before would go on this check. I looked down at the check once more. The money wasn't there. FlaggerSource had "F" ed me once again. They had "F" ed me to the point where I was starting to get a conflagration burning in the back of my pants. I had only worked a 4 hour day today, and I knew right now each and every one of those swindlers in the office was probably laughing knowing that I was opening my paystub that came in the mail. It was a Friday after all, and those bitches probably had plans of going out clubbing after work with some of my paycheck while I was stuck with a measly \$115 bucks. More than half of that would have to go towards my weekly rent. I hoped they planned on inviting me along to go clubbing since I was basically the one paying for it. I flipped open my cell phone and dialed wage complaint. I immediately recognized the voice. It was that old bird Tom. *Oh shit* I thought to myself.

"Hello?" Said the curious old bird.

I suddenly recalled Tom's ignorance from the last time I had spoken to him from months before. I really wished that they had other agents besides this old timer working in there. I knew Tom didn't much care for me. "*Next time when you write in a letter you need to be more concise.*" Was the old bird's verbatim advice, in a saucy tone of voice. It was only a two page letter. Maybe they don't get much free time in there, I dunno. I opted to remain polite and cordial despite the prior discrepancy from months before. I made sure not to identify myself. I looked at my watch. 12:30pm." Uh..yes...hi, I was wondering how late you people are going to be open today?"

There was some hesitation and I was hoping that the old bird didn't recognize my voice. My cellphone isn't registered in my name so I wasn't worried about caller ID.

Another pause. Then, "3:30 pm. I will still be in the office until 3:30pm."

"Okay. Thankyou. I might have to call back a little after 3." I said and then quickly hung up the phone. I was hoping I could resolve this pay issue with Queen B up in the office without having to get this old bird involved. I wanted to keep my job but I also wanted to get rid of this tab that my jerk off company was putting on me. Whoever thought the day would come where Employers would start borrowing money from their employees? With a \$115.76 paycheck you would think it would be the other way around. Other companies sometimes offered interest free hardship loans and I had **never** worked for a company that made you wait a year just for a 4 hour holiday pay like FlaggerSource does. It was now starting to make sense why Ike Boner gave away a cold half-eaten pizza as a raffle prize at one of his his mandatory safety meetings. I'll never forget the look on that cute black girl's face when she walked away with a cold half-eaten pizza that her boss had

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given her. It was probably covered in motor oil from all the Harley dude's mitts being all over it hours earlier, but yet the nice girl seemed very content. With noticing the dog tags wrapped around her neck, I almost cried when I got home realizing that she probably took that cold pie home to her family where they may have thoroughly enjoyed it. Those thoughts were quickly dismissed when I realized my mother would be the type to see to it that the oily pie not go to waste. All of the other flaggers joked on the way out how they would take that pizza and throw it on the windshield of one of the company's trucks.

I scrutinized my direct deposit paystub once again and immediately dialed FlaggerSource. I braced myself for whatever kind of BS they were going to throw my way. I knew one thing for sure, they were very good at making up stories. Perhaps they could one day write a book about suckering the poor into driving all over God's green earth and then not paying them for it. People just might read a book like that. They would want to know how they did it and got away with it.

"Hello FlaggerSource, this is Shara."

"Hi Shara, I need to talk to Teff."

There was hesitation. I guess the more they could stonewall, the more brownie points they could score with Queen B. "Concerning?"

I kept my cool. "My pay check is screwed up once again. Molly promised the missing money from the last week's pay would be on this check I need to speak with Teff."

"Teff isn't here right now. Do you have a number that she can call you back on?"

Oh, oh real funny Shara. I see everybody's got jokes. I've been working here 15 fricken months and you clowns call me every day for my daily assignments and now you want to ask for my number? I thought to myself. I had already identified myself, Shara had just personally shook my hand a few weeks ago because she was impressed with my doodles. She knew exactly who I was, and now she wants to play dumb and ask me for my number? I didn't get it.

"Yeah." I gave her my cell number. "Listen, I'm being dead serious. I don't care how long she takes to call me back, but if she doesn't call me back by 3:20, I'm going to have to call the wage complaint because they close at 3:30."

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The threat seemed to rattle Shara. I really didn't care because her encouraging me to continue on with my flower doodles on the back of the gas receipts got me a verbal warning from the operations manager. I was only doing as my overseers were asking and yet it almost got me in trouble with the company. Talk about people trying to get me, these bitches in the office actually were!

"Okay whatever. I'll let her know bye." She said hanging up the phone.

Chapter 10

I looked at my watch. 3:20pm. I already knew that the chances were pretty slim that Teff would return my call. I think the only time that girl ever called me was about 8 months ago, and that was only because she got an E-mail earlier on that day from the wage complaint. She was deftly skilled at covering her tracks and they even allowed her plenty of time to fudge the time sheets before she ended up only mailing in half of the time sheets that they were requesting. Sometimes I thought Queen B could make a perfect serial killer. With the way she covered her tracks and used her good looks to dissuade Tom, Teff could pretty much do whatever she wanted to. I'm sure a lot of those beefcake girls in the office looking like oversized pinatas would love to be in her shoes and fawn upon the great and mighty Ike Boner. At 3:21 I made the call.

After about the 6th ring I heard the old bird's answering machine pop on. I didn't even bother to leave a message. I knew that dickhead was there. Probably laughing because by now he may have figured out who I was. "*You need to be more concise.*" He had told me. I hung up my cell and tried calling once again. Still no Tom. Because he had burned me in the past, I guess this was his way of expressing his innuendo. I guessed that Tom wanted me to go deal with these people personally myself. And that's just what I was prepared to do. Those squirrely girls should know better than to tinker with an Ex-con's paycheck. I had heard many stories of them having to deal with some belligerent flaggers in the past. That's why the security in there is so great and they all hide behind bullet proof glass. It feels just like walking into a downtown city bank.

I got in my car and looked at my gas tank. 3/4 of a tank. I was pretty sure it would be enough to get me out there and back. I knew the company truck was equipped with a GPS system and I wanted to take these clowns by sur-

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prise. There were times before when I would have to make trips out to the office to pick up time sheets and I would notice the big dispatcher girl and Teff quickly scoot away in their cars upon my arrival. We were supposed to call in before we made trips out to the office because it was their trucks. I wasn't about to drive 55 miles and chance Queen B do a quick slip out before my arrival. I knew she was in the office and I was going to catch her red handed. Opting to use my own personal vehicle would be a wise move on my part. I knew those clowns stayed in the office until at least 7 and sometimes 8 or 9. All the office girls worked on Fridays. I knew Teff would be hiding in one of those back cubicles somewhere and there was no reason why we couldn't talk today.

I rolled up both my driver's and passenger's side window about two minutes before I pulled into the FlaggerSource parking lot. It was hot as Haities and I didn't want these clowns knowing that I couldn't afford to have the airconditioning fixed in my car. Not with all the numerous paystubs I was hoarding up over the months with most amounting to less than \$100.00. (I actually had more than several that were less than 50 bucks.)

As I walked up to the front doors I could already feel my blood boiling. I knew that these people were more than likely going to blow smoke up my ass and inform me that Teff wasn't there. There was no doubt in my mind that she was more than likely screwing off in the back cubicle. Probably painting her nails with the left over white out that she had smeared on everybody's time sheets. Just before I got to the front door I suddenly had an idea. In the back of my mind I could still hear Scary Sherry's voice giving me the best advice on how to get these idiots attention. *Whenever the shit gets too deep with these people, all you have to do is turn your keys in. It's not in our contract that we have to drive their stupid trucks. There's nothing they can do about it. Everybody does it. I did it once and they bugged me forever to take their truck back.*

I reached in my pocket and pulled out my keys. It didn't take me long to remove the company's truck keys from my personal key ring. I didn't want to be in there any longer than I had to because I knew all they would do to me is lie to me and act stupid like they had always done in the past. You really couldn't negotiate with a bunch of ignorant swindlers trained to talk out of their ass. I lovingly walked through the front door and approached the bullet proof glass. I noticed a few of them huddled up in one of the cubes. Perhaps they were playing rock, paper, scissors, I really didn't know but I wasn't going to let them ignore me and have me stand their like an idiot like they usually do. They have a sliding glass window at the front and I noticed it was opened. I noticed one of the office clowns seeing me standing there so I raised their keys high in the air for them to see what I was holding. They already knew I had been trying to reach them all day.

“ Thanks alot jerks! You people just love to ignore me all day!” I said loud enough for them all to hear. I was kind of surprised that they looked at

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me as if they felt threatened. My yell doesn't go real loud and I would have figured they were used to dealing with fussy people standing outside their bulletproof window. People a lot more fussier than me. I had heard many stories of flaggers leaning over the glass and yelling at the top of their lungs "Give me my money!" Those squeaky flaggers often got their checks written out just then and there before the cops would end up getting involved. So why did they all look petrified of me? I really didn't know for sure. I walked out the door and headed towards my car. I figured with all the money they still owed me they could use some of it to pick up their stupid truck. I obviously couldn't bring their truck out to them. How would I get home? Just before I put my seatbelt on I noticed the dispatcher trying to yell something out to me.

"Hey! Where are you going?" Yelled the giant peacock. I looked quizzically at the big girl that hired me. I could tell by the look on her face that she was hoping I would come back inside so they could enjoy bullshitting some more and act all stupid for what they had done. I think they wanted to taunt me a little bit more so that *I would* do something stupid. Then they would have better grounds to fire me. The whole thing felt like a big setup and I wanted to know why. Who was orchestrating these intentional ignorances? Why was I like a big play toy to them?

I raised 6 fingers in the air for her to see. By the look on her face I was starting to wonder if maybe now was a good time to stop daydreaming about this girl one day becoming my lover. There was more than enough there to love for sure, but I could see the impetuous look in her eyes. She wanted me to come back inside so the whole group of bitches in there could give me hell for disturbing their peace. I wasn't about to apologize to these crooks and I was smart enough to know that Jill would more than likely not side with me. Just a week or two ago I had faxed her one of my paystubs with the missing money on it and she just played stupid about it like usual. This key trick just simply had to be done. The company wasn't making money unless those wheels were aturning and after 9 months of missing wages? I saw no reason why FlaggerSource and I couldn't be on the same page before I continued to drive for these jerks. I splayed my fingers neatly apart so my big special green peacock lady could see all six fingers.

"Six times!" I said shaking my head. "You people got me six times with my pay. I don't know if I can deal with that." I paused before I shut my driver's side door. Perhaps the big girl had some parting words for me. She did.

She remained calm hugging the front door to the office. Little miss jitterbug was used to dealing with crazies like me. I did kind of wonder how many eccentric people she got to meet while employed with this company. I was still sure the government somehow dictated the whole FlaggerSource

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operation. Where else would clowns trying to get off of welfare find work in this economy? The Wombat for sure was probably getting all kinds of kickbacks to help bolster the *Jobs For Clowns* program to keep people off the streets.

Jill's eyes fluttered. I knew by the look she was brewing up an impromptu line of BS for me." I don't know what you're talking about. What pay issues?" She said feigning a look of surprise.

I wanted to make love to her right then and there. I was an honest guy but I wanted her to teach me her management lying skills. I smiled for her and then suddenly felt some movement in my pants. *Oh crap!* I thought to myself, *I'm really getting turned on by this big girl playing stupid about my pay. It's like I found my other half.* I had been single for 6 and a half years so it didn't take much to turn me on. I knew I better shut my driver's side door fast and get the hell out of there. I took one last look at my secret crush and took off. I knew at this point the squirrels in the office were probably laughing at this point. I knew that secretly the girls in there probably deemed the big girl as my girl. We never dated and I didn't even know her last name, but I did notice in the past that anytime I needed something important such as taking off for vacation or what not they would hand the phone off to Jill. To them I was Jill's secret lover. I had eventually picked up on that.

I yelled out my window once more for good measure before I left the parking lot." Six times Jill! They got me six times!"

My blood was still boiling and I was utterly confused as to why Jill was acting so surprised as to the way I was acting. Where did she learn to play so dumb? Did I teach her that? We never even had the chance ever to hang out? Where was she learning my tricks? Was she reading my novels? I didn't know.

As I eased out of their parking lot it was all I could do to keep from popping the clutch in my beat up Escort. My nerves had gone to hell and back. These people had "F" ed me from the door. I should've bounced from this company after they shorted me \$403.00 on my very first check. But I needed a job. I had spent 8 months prior living off of only \$200.00 a month in food stamps and going to school Full-Time. 40 miles away! No unemployment. No Cash assistance. The state had gone out of it's way to "F" me on that. And now all this? "F" it.

I got 4 minutes down the highway before Queen B was calling my cellphone. *Whallah!* I thought to myself *It looks like little miss pencil whipper was in the office after all.* (Pencil whipping was what we called cheating somebody out of points when we played scrabble in jail. Every time I looked at Teff that saying came to mind.)

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I rolled up my windows as fast as I could before I answered it so that I would be able to hear. Hopefully Queen B had a check written out for me and waiting on the front desk so I could turn around and pick up the keys. I doubted they wanted to drive 55 miles to go pick up their truck. It felt good knowing I had the upper hand. Evidently the saying *actions speak louder than words* was true because my turning in of the keys proved to be the only way to get Queen B on the phone. Those office girls are masters at stonewalling.

"Yeah?" I hollered into the mouthpiece.

Teff sounded confused." What's going on?"

"I don't know. Maybe you can tell me. I've only been trying to get ahold of you all day."

She started to talk really calm like a nurse trying to settle down a mental patient. I would be her mental patient for the day." Are you going to take the truck back?" She asked skeptically. I knew she was probably sitting back in her swivel chair waving her pinky finger with one hand and twirling the phone cord with the other. I had already made her shit list just for taking up a few seconds of her time.

"I didn't bring you guys the truck back. How would I get home? I left you guys the keys, you'll have to bring your own truck back."

Queen B finally sprung into action." Listen carefully. I need you to turn around and come pick up the keys. Bring the truck up here Monday morning at 10:30 along with the keys, and we'll talk about your suspension."

I felt my blood boiling. Not only did these assholes owe me money but now I would be missing work on Monday and she was throwing on top a suspension? Who the hell were these people? I felt my whole body turning red.

"Hey, I'll come back and pick up the keys under one condition. I want the money you guys owe me and I want it today." I said adamantly. *And I ain't taking no fricken suspension* I silently told myself. Just who the heck did these people think they were? Suspension? For what? Scary Sherry never mentioned anything about suspensions. If it was a suspension with pay I think at this point I would gladly take it.

Teff put to use her dissembling skills. I already knew she wouldn't go for it. They knew my address and it wasn't anywhere near the city. Only the fussy hoodrats got special treatment at FlaggerSource to get what they wanted. And guess what? I wasn't one of them." You already resolved the money

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issue with Bill remember? You spoke with Bill and he took care of it for you.”

I tried not to burst out laughing. Where was she going with this? Bill had been terminated almost a year ago and didn't even know who I was. It was just like Teff to try and pass the buck on Bill. Poor Bill wasn't even there to defend himself! Typical women. I didn't even know Bill.

“Ha, ha Teff very funny. I see your trying every trick in the book. But you're forgetting something. I'm the on that wrote the book remember? Call me when you have my money ready and I'll come pick up my keys.” I hung up the phone. There was no use arguing with a liar. Especially a pretty one. They always seem to win some how. I wondered how many tests she had cheated on in high school and gotten away with it. Then I stopped wondering. My journey as a FlaggerMan had just ended right then and there. I thought of my buddy Leslie. I knew he would be laughing right now if he got to witness the way these bitches were playing me for a retard. Then I thought about how much more he would laugh if he knew I wrote a book about it.

The End

Epilogue

Although it happens all the time, my turning in of my keys on 7-15-2011 was deemed a voluntary termination. They did that purposely with hopes of jacking up my unemployment so they could “F” me on the way out their door. A week later I did just as the refusal letter from the wage complaint instructed me to do. I consulted an attorney to handle the money shortage issues privately. Actually, I ended up consulting 3 attorneys just so I could go out with a little style. I even promised Tom over at the wage complaint that I would spend a thousand dollars in attorney fees to get my money back that FlaggerSource had stolen from me. I didn’t end up reaching that thousand dollar promise but I did come pretty close. And just like the story of my life, I ended up coming up short. In the end I paid out over \$850.00 in attorney fees and was awarded a last paycheck of \$32.46. I still felt as though I fought the good fight. My very first paycheck with the company still sits at the well-fare office.

FlaggerSource “F” ed me on my way in, and they “F” ed me on my way out. Yes, they “F” ed me all the way. I never got my date with that big giant peacock that hired me. I professed my love for her in one of my attorney letters. I even spent 9 hours stitching together for her a friendship bracelet the size of Texas, in which Christians may one day consider the “Mark of the Beast”. In the end, she broke my heart.

But the story didn’t end there. FlaggerSource still had one more trick up their sleeve and decided they weren’t finished with me quite yet. Two months after I was wrongfully terminated I finally walked into their office demanding my last paycheck and refusing to leave until I got paid. I was charged with resisting arrest and disorderly conduct. I was sentenced to 9 months in county jail and ordered to pay \$1718.66 in fines and court costs. To this day the company still sits on my money. I was eventually released 6-13-2012.

