

Idea and Stories From a VodkaHolic

By

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The gloomy weather was more than befitting. Color day should always be coupled with the dreariness this morning symbolized. The gray morning skies grew steadily darker as Mac watched the increasingly ominous thunderclouds amass across the distant horizon, impatiently awaiting the Bunn to finish filling the carafe. Why the hell the engineers responsible for creating a contraption of such high repute did not design it whereby the true caffeine junkie had to wait until the entire pot was finished always exacerbated his already peevish early morning color day moods, but remaining loyal to the Bunn was the right choice as it had proven its worthiness and durability compared to other brands. Besides, the epiphany to first place a mug and fill it, containing the most evil of evil cardiac coffees, then placing the carafe receiving the diluted remainder had been stymied for ages by his childish verbal tantrums, all of which concluded with similar menacing threats such as, "I'll kick your effin piece of crap ass, you sorry ass coffee makin' mof!" It was firmly decided that this story of a seemingly brilliant yet mentally belated shortcut to caffeine, a hindered path replete with invective Bunn vitriol accompanied with flailing arms and projectile spittle, would be taken to his grave.

How all of these coffee tantrums escaped Jeanette's eyes was amazing. What didn't escape her eyes was at times this brilliant idea went terribly wrong; the times it was forgotten that the mug had been placed and coffee overflowing flooding the counter tops, drawers, and kitchen floor, creating an embarrassing scene requiring Mac to contain the nasty outburst and assume his sheepish behavior, and once again keeping hidden the ugly. Maintaining an even minded demeanor was important. Jeanette frowned upon an adult, didn't think too highly of an adult, who lost their cool when innocent human blunder intervened.

Mac would pour in enough water to fill the mug twice, and even though the second mug was weaker than the first, it was well worth it; for any addict will attest to the fact that the day's

initial impact of caffeine is intensified proportionately with an increase of the active ingredient. That first cup *had* to be killer, to be jokingly cardiac coffee, because Mac had known for ages that it was this first caffeine saturated mug that worked its neuro-transmitting magic of unleashing the ephemeral high so desperately needed, especially on color day. The caffeine rush provided by the first mug was inimitable.

Coffee being relatively expensive convinced Mac that the continued failed attempts of striving to repeat that first mug's magic was wasting money and he thereby established his goal of one mug of the strong stuff, one mug of the weaker stuff, and help Jeanette drink her risible excuse for coffee, or as Mac put it, brown piss when she was at Mac's place. Besides, the lack of money in the past had precluded many a grocery store coffee purchase thus enabling him to realize that caffeine, at least with respect to himself, was not physically addictive. In caffeine's absence of just on day the 'two o'clock shakes' never materialized as thought, as undoubtedly they would in vodka's absence. His latest "It's all in your head, jerk-off!" caffeine epiphany to save money by giving up coffee was ultimately put to rest knowing that glorious morning rush, that caffeine buzz responsible for sending emotions soaring, would be too greatly missed.

Establishing goals had become increasingly important. Mac's second DUI within a five year period sounded a personal clarion to admit to ugly truths, to make the necessary changes. Adapting to small changes, such as limiting his daily caffeine intake, were viewed as being essential to achieve long term goals; long term goals requiring a disciplined mind, a tenacious way of life adhering to behaviors conducive to building character, confidence and self-esteem, long term goals that could very well be met with the total cumulative positive effects reaped from small changes. But these goals being long term were distant and nudged aside temporarily to tend the urgencies this second DUI caused.

He thought his first DUI was tough. Of all the deserved punishment exacted from the second DUI the most daunting proved to be color day. Color day was sanctioned by the courts obligating the convicted drunk driver to place a daily telephone call, listen to the recording informing the caller as to that day's color. If that day's color is the offender's randomly assigned color the offender is further obligated to make themselves present that same day prior to midnight at the predetermined location and subject themselves to a breathalyzer test rendering a .00 BAC. Mac's color was purple. How the hell could a color for eons being associated with royalty, wealth, prestige, and power spiral downward to being associated with convicted drunks?

Since mandated to make the daily color line calls two months ago he had been very lucky not to have heard the color purple any weekend. Today was Sunday and the rare dismal, early morning July Colorado summer day grew dimmer. A color purple on Saturday or Sunday translated into a very long day; weekend waits for the next bus was at least twice as long than weekdays. He calculated the weekend bus odyssey from his apartment to the halfway house where the breathalyzer test was administered to be two hours each way. Four hours! In a storm! The Bunn having done its requisite caffeine duty buoyed Mac's spirits as the loathsome call was made. The annoying three death rings summoned the computer generated voice from parts of hell unknown. Jubifuckilation! Beat another weekend excursion! His luck was bound to end.

Chapter 2

Nowadays any person's first DUI per se is not good. The legal limit being .08 allows very little, if any leeway, for anybody to legally drive when that person has had three drinks in an hour. This national blood alcohol limit has been the result of decades of social pressures, many of them due to the dogged determination and efforts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and have been effective, patently evinced by a declining road fatality rate involving under the

influence drivers. These social pressures coupled with stiffer penalties have worked. Gone are the days of an officer lecturing the inebriated driver to drive home slowly; gone are the 1960's to early 1980's television shows having most homes proudly and conspicuously furnished with, minimally, a small bar; gone are the movies hailing the leading besotted character. More firmly entrenched is the fear of being pulled over after knowingly having too much to drink; getting behind the wheel and receiving one's first DUI; the road vehicle checks putatively to nab drunk drivers; and the increasingly harsher penalties and fines doled out to drunk drivers, including the nasty work stigma and small town police beat opprobrium.

In the vast majority of states a second DUI racked up within five years of the first DUI conviction will bring the offender's life to an abrupt halt. The penalties, fines, opprobrium, and more than likely jail time in many cases precipitate this halt. Mac's first DUI was punished appropriately considering his .21 blood alcohol content as he was required to attend education classes designed to further indoctrinate all the drunk driving evils followed by the prescribed fifty-four hours of group therapy to deal with his possible alcohol problem and the automatic one year license revocation; the punishments being allayed by the state issuing a work permit allowing limited driving, and the presence within two blocks of his home a state sanctioned facility administering the required schooling and group therapy sessions.

Living in Colorado is living in a lot of carefree sunshine, endless beautiful summer days, and the summer of Mac's first DUI was no exception. The Saturday morning lessons and therapy classes were held late morning and the short nostalgic walks home, reminiscent of his boyhood walks home from elementary school, proved to be too powerfully enchanting, too winsome to the point Mac's adult inhibitions caved to childish impulses; convincing him puerilely that it would be justified to stop at one of three available liquor stores. Besides,

stopping to say hi with cash in hand to the liquor store owners, his best friends from Southeast Asia, strengthened his communal ties.

It was thirty six years before the law finally caught up with him, caught up with his drinking and driving, being what should have been well past the age to scare him straight to the point of not drinking and driving. The lessons to be learned from his first DUI were washed down and blurred beyond comprehension by countless fifths and indeed within five years of the first DUI Mac was driving home from what was hoped to be a harmless Sunday afternoon lunch and a couple of beers, and driving home rear ended a car stopped at a red light. Fortunately Mac was sober enough to be applying the brakes and the collision was minor, but realizing he was over the legal BAC limit, knowing he already had one DUI and the second would spell absolute doom, he panicked and fled the scene. Ignoring the still red light he sped off from the main thoroughfare taking the residential area streets the last few blocks home only to be arrested within an hour at his home as the police were quickly able to ascertain his present position certified with a car having a warm engine and bashed in front end.

The perceived eternity between arriving at his apartment and the police's arrival was a nightmarish ordeal of evil thoughts frantically swirling inside his inebriated brain. Notions conjuring a near future of abject existence replete with no car, no job, no nothing swelled the fear. His erratic pacing only exacerbated images of the nasty things certainly to befall him. "You idiot, you goddamn effin idiot! You've put yourself through a world of shit a few years ago! Now what!" were the immediate comments made to himself before angrily grabbing the phone to call Jeanette. His incoherent babbling made no sense to a completely bewildered Jeanette. She repeatedly pled to him to calm down and to slowly tell her what the hell was going

on. Her pleading was to no avail as heavy thuds ominously rapped on Mac's door portending an authoritative presence.

"Shit, that's got to be the cops," Mac mumbled these last words to Jeanette as he slowly placed the phone back on the receiver and with trepidation opened the door to encounter two of Lakewood's finest.

"Are you Kevin McGarrett?" asked one officer.

"Yes I am," please let me appear and sound sober Mac thought when answering.

"Is that your green Honda with front end damage parked in the lot Mr. McGarrett?"

"Yeah, that's mine." Mac replied, thinking, shit, they know who I am and most likely the prior DUI.

"Were you involved in an accident earlier today at Union and Alameda?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I bumped somebody's car at the light," was Mac's lame answer.

"Why did you leave the scene?"

Why did he leave the scene? How the hell was Mac to answer this? Should he be completely honest and tell these fine gentleman that unknown to them he had earlier drank a belly full of vodka and beer, and then some, and being scared shitless considering his life had come to a screeching halt for possibly years to come decided to flee? Should he spew out the fantastical excuse that the alarming minor accident caused a nasty bowel movement precipitating an extremely embarrassing situation; the unspeakable, forever to be avoided faux pas of crapping in one's pants, the malodorous evidence being presently washed, himself cleaned, followed by an urgent need to replenish something which required walking to the grocery store, all of which conveniently transpired an hour's time? That something desperately needed posed a problem, for his sloshed thought processes could be only so quick and creative.

Choosing the truth or lying was obviated when an officer sternly questioned, “Have you been drinking Mr. McGarrett?”

Repeating the risible and clichéd response blurted out by countless drunks, “I just had a couple of beers earlier today officer,” Mac realized both officers knew of his drunken state most likely manifested by his red, glassy eyes.

“Why don’t you step outside here and perform some sobriety tests for us,” one officer demanded.

Saving the officers their time and himself from neighbor’s gawking and sniggering, Mac threw in the towel telling the officers to take him in and do what they had to do. At least the sniggering would be lessened, but neighbors’ gawking eyes are inevitable in such a juicy predicament, as he saw several blurry people witnessing the scene of himself being led handcuffed to the patrol car. Then Mac blacked out.

It being Colorado law to take into custody the drunk driver and transporting them to a quasi-flop house after booking them at the police station was not unknown to Mac, and to date this was his third drunk tank visit.

The first visit was 1995, eighteen years earlier, and should have resulted in his first DUI, but for unknown reasons the cop was content transporting him to the downtown Denver drunk tank, detox center, to sleep it off. The reason for the drunk tank overnight stay was Mac’s drive downtown to visit a couple of his favorite haunts that were quick and easily accessed by taking the interstate that he lived immediately off of at that time. Having performed this drive several times while legally intoxicated never was a problem but maybe the last vodka gulp before departing proved too much as control of the car was lost along the relatively easy curve on I-25 just north of University Boulevard. This stretch became part of the massive Trex construction

project that drastically altered this area's appearance and in 1995 situated here was nicely developed recreational land most likely belonging to the University of Denver. When the spinning car came to rest about twenty yards off the interstate Mac did not hesitate to imperil his life by crossing the six lane interstate then venturing into an apartment complex's parking lot and essentially commandeering somebody's cell phone. A Denver police officer arrived at the abandoned car just as Mac was out of sight making his own tow truck plea for assistance. The tow truck the cop dispatched was arriving as Mac used up another life, re-crossing the interstate, and approaching the officer, huffing and puffing, exclaiming, "Hey! That's my car!" Cops aren't stupid. Not only are they not stupid but they're trained to spot drunk bastards, and inherent to so many of their jobs, they see and deal with them daily. There was no doubt in the cop's mind that he was dealing with a drunk bastard. Without any delay after Mac's drunk confession the officer yelled back, "You're going to detox!" No further words were necessary from either party. Perhaps it was the fact that the officer did not pull Mac over while Mac was driving drunk that explains the officer's inability to arrest him.

The year 2013 and present drunk tank awoken in, located in Lakewood, a west Denver suburb, was much, much smaller than the Denver tank, and this being Mac's second stay there, was not as easy to free himself. Twenty years earlier and possessing a clean slate, save a couple of speeding tickets, the only thing required to spring himself the first time was some 'counselor cajoling' to assure his ten o'clock in the morning release. The Lakewood counselors had his jacket. They knew at a minimum they had with them an individual with one DUI conviction and most likely having a drinking problem. This knowledge and the present law allowed them to keep Mac under their supervision, within locked doors, until he was able to register a .00 BAC via a breathalyzer.

The ability to drink a frightful amount of alcohol was natural to Mac as it is undoubtedly for most if not all people who develop the inability to stop drinking until they pass out once the drinking begins. Natural, not in the context that alcohol had been a major part of his family's customs, but natural in the context that he very, very much enjoyed the first altered state of mind and obviously could metabolize the alcohol efficiently as evidenced by the amount imbibed. Translation: booze played no part in his family activities but once he took his first sip of beer ever, the taste was developed and at the time the move to Denver occurred the accomplished boozing to date proved to be a mere warm-up.

The breathalyzer was administered beginning at eight in the morning and continued on two hour intervals. Finally, at four Monday afternoon his BAC registered .00.

“What time did the cop drop me off last night?” Mac asked the burly counselor, a counselor whose appearance suggested that of a rough and tumble past. The tattoos on his forearms of a slightly evil nature certainly were those of one who did not shy away from having too much to drink now and then on several occasions. Coupled with the natural glaring scowl and obsidian eyes Mac's personal prejudices swayed his thoughts to conclude this counselor definitely was no stranger to the ugly side of the legal system, but wisely chose to make no attempts to uncover his story, for he knew the quickest way to get the hell out of there was to agree with everything he asked and to ask questions sparingly, if any at all.

“It was about eight last night.” replied the counselor with a very smooth, calm and professional voice belying Mac's prejudices.

Knowing the routine of having to log the drunken driver's BAC upon arrival Mac asked what his was. “.34. Just shy of three and a half times over the legal limit. You were lit. You told me you drank maybe six or seven beers yesterday at Jose O'Shea's. Hell, I've been where

you're at and have been doing this for three years now. Took just a quick glimpse at you when you first sat where you're sitting now and knew not only did you have more than that to drink yesterday, but most likely had a lot to drink Saturday and probably Friday night. This BAC shit can be cumulative. Am I right or what?"

What was the use lying. This dude seemed cool, admitted he had past problems caused by drinking, and was sworn to secrecy. Secrecy, who gives a shit about secrecy! If a .34 BAC was registered here the law definitely had something as close as that registered, for the breathalyzer test being administered at the police station was the only thing Mac remembered between being cuffed and stuffed in the squad car and awakening Monday morning to this same counselor taking Mac's blood pressure as was strict policy. Strange how those black outs can work.

"I can see there's no use bullshittin' you. You're right," Mac confessed.

"Well, how much?"

"The usual Friday evening fifth, two Saturday fifths, and Sunday is beer day. Do you think Colorado will ever allow spirits to be sold on Sunday?"

The counselor didn't seem to be very amused with Mac's poorly timed humor. Why should he? He knew this was his second stay here and Mac's breathalyzer reading of .21 the first stay four years earlier followed by a frightening .34, clearly indicating an escalating drinking habit. Every day for almost three years this guy saw at least one person making the unfortunate return, for the worse off, their third and unbelievable fourth returns. The three years was plenty of time to have heard all the stories, all the excuses, all the fraudulent denials; but as would be expected the three years had not developed an icy demeanor, an aloof appearance, neither being an effective conduit to console an inmate seeking helpful advice.

Mac noticed the counselor's eyes quickly scanning an intake form and saw the counselor hinted at somewhat appreciating Mac's dry humor with a faint laugh. "Your name is Kevin, right?" asked the counselor.

"Yea, but everyone calls me Mac."

The counselor looked down again at the form and said, "Oh, short for McGarrett. Mac, I see this is your second DUI. The first DUI was less than five years ago. You blew a .34 this time. By Colorado statute, that's a mandatory six months jail time. You just told me how much you're capable of drinking, an amount that takes quite a while to get to. Either the jail time or your alcohol consumption better grab your attention because if neither of them do, I promise you your life is only going to worsen precipitously. If some sleaze ball Wall Street hot shot punk broker was selling shares of stock, each being part ownership of your life with the expectation the share price a function of your physical and financial well-being, I'd borrow every last damn share possible, short your ass, and eventually have money to retire comfortably."

Mac was awed. Here sits a dude more wont sporting an outlaw motorcycle gang jacket, yelling at his old lady to keep the bong filled and booze flowing, yet conversant with Wall Street lingo describing the concept of short selling, not to mention being learned enough regarding Colorado law to scare the shit out of him.

"Six frickin' months, no way! You gotta be shittin' me!" exclaimed Mac.

"No, I'm not. I'm sure you recall as a consequence of your first DUI conviction that you were ordered by the courts to visit with a counselor who assessed your drinking, and all other possible problems, in order to recommend x hours group therapy on top of the required twenty-four hours of education. The community service hours you will undoubtedly have to complete, the possible fines imposed by the judge, and likely probationary period tops off the court's

punishments. I'm sure you recall losing your driving privileges after your first DUI? You may have been granted a restricted license then but you can kiss that possibility bye-bye after blowing a .34, and after the automatic one year driving license revocation you will more than likely have to have installed in your car the breathalyzer device requiring the total absence of alcohol to start the car. Considering the fact you rear ended another car and fled the scene it may take you years to earn your privilege to drive; that is if the high risk insurance is affordable. What do you do for living Mac?"

Son of a bitch! It's not Sunday, it's Monday! Monday going on four thirty in the afternoon, the time Mac leaves for the day from the company currently employed at! Somewhere lost in his latest bender was the concept of time, a blackout. Previous benders could be the source of such jubilation-when regained consciousness lies by convincing Mac it being a dreaded Sunday and his emotions skyrocketing when to the morning paper proves it to be a beautiful Saturday. But, of course, the previous benders were usually the source of emotions plummeting knowing it was only Saturday morning, the entire weekend awaiting, and seeing the paper's thickness sorrowfully bemoaning the unmistakable sign it being another hated Sunday.

The hated Sunday, they had become quite frequent. The blackouts leading his sense of time astray were rare, and the looming Sundays usually dawned without any confusion it being Sunday, but more often with a brain lacking normal sleep and slowly recovering again from another alcohol induced endorphin depletion. Whether it being an accustomed pristine summer day, a brilliant and crisp autumn day, a wintry day normally ensuring happiness, or the first warm and rejuvenating spring day, the Sundays of late were those of deep depression. The mind and its thoughts at its nadir, an inescapable haunting abyss posing the only solution being to do nothing but remain trapped amongst the laughing demons while groping for any stimulating

thoughts to no avail. Mac's solution to this Sunday's day of gloom was to visit the always welcome Jose O'shea's, enjoy a nice lunch accompanied with 'a couple' of beers.

His alcohol muddled mind having been convinced it was Sunday precluded any necessity to call work. The counselor's questioning his occupation alerted him again of work, and his ability to realize it was Monday.

"Damn, I need to make a call! Where's a phone I can use.....what the hell's your name anyway?" questioned Mac.

"Joe."

Joe the counselor. Joe the burly, tattooed counselor seemingly possessing business acumen, legal wisdom, admonishing words, who with ease could bench press three hundred pounds. Could it be a stage name? Why the hell would this guy need to adopt a stage name for? He would tear to shreds any home invader. His inherent glare forewarning any idiot that screwing with me was at your own peril. Mac concluded that perhaps one too many trips to the 'Gentleman's Bar' without Jeanette's knowledge preconceived this silly stage name notion, and besides, this dude looked the regular bad ass intelligent Joe counselor.

"Listen Joe, you questioning me about my line of work got my head out of my ass. I forgot it's Monday. I thought it was still Sunday. I need to call work. This is the time I'm usually heading out the door for the day. The place was cool dealing with my first DUI, but shit, a second one? I gotta to be toast!"

"Out the office door, go left, first room on your right. Dial nine to get out."

Mac began to take a shine with Joe the counselor. His words of wisdom must have been spawned by experiencing a world of shit known to Mac; a world of shit into which Mac once

again had hurled himself. The alacrity responding to Mac's urgent phone call plea intimated Joe having to place a similar call at one time. Joe the counselor was someone Mac could relate to.

"Hi, Randy Mitchell please." Mac knew that the receptionist Alicia knew it was his voice, him finally calling, and Mac, without a doubt being noticed as absent by others and the news having reached Alicia no later than midmorning, thinking what scandalously juicy gossip Alicia's torpid mind must be aswirl with. The poor woman sits there hour upon hour with no other duties other than to answer the phone cheerily, promptly directing the call as she beams a welcoming smile to the infrequent company visitor. There are moments when several employees question the company's existence as the main telephone line, audible to those having workstations nearby, remains silent for the proverbial eternity. Twiddling her thumbs and leafing through senseless garbage is frequently interrupted by this and that employee with the time to deeply immerse themselves within the corporate grapevine, or the grapevine of any nature.

"This is Randy."

"Hey Randy, this is Mac."

Christ, what the hell to say now? It's four thirty Monday afternoon, the day is over. This is the same Randy to whom an identical phone call was placed four years ago. Well, almost identical. This was the second of its type, and when the type is bad any repeat of the bad type of news is always taken more bitterly, especially when the second round of the same type of bad news is much, much worse. The guy ain't stupid-it's four thirty Monday afternoon, no phone call as yet-the alcohol factor certainly entertained his mind by now. Just tell him the basics, leave the gore for tomorrow.

“I got another DUI yesterday. Do I still have a job?” Mac timidly asked, not even betraying a hint of selfishness.

“Ouch! Another one? Damn Mac, what are we going to do with you? Kinda figured you got into some trouble, keeping my fingers crossed it wasn't booze related. You home now?”

“No, I'm at the same detox center on Wadsworth I was last time.”

There was no use lying, the place's number already registered at work.

“Doesn't sound so comfy; as far as I know you still have a job here. Try and get some sleep tonight and we'll see you tomorrow morning, ok?”

“Sounds good, we'll see you in the morning.”

Mac's spirits were lifted a tad after hanging up the phone. Randy was a good boss, only three years older than Mac, and very much enjoyed an occasional stiff drink after returning home from work. That was what Mac respected the most in Randy. Randy enjoyed a stiff drink-singular, not plural. When he and Mac and at time other employees would frequent a bar close to work celebrating a work related success, Randy would faithfully contain himself to one Long Island Iced Tea. This stiff drink would last him the entire time, the minimum time being about two hours. This Mac found perplexing, amazing. Mac figured that Randy being married with two teenage girls demanded Randy to practice and display the responsibility important to nurture and cultivate success, and Mac figured correctly, for Randy's reputation was the solid reputation earned by an individual who practiced lofty habits.

What confused Mac was Randy's ability, and the majority's ability, to be satisfied with the minimal amount of alcohol. To stop, per se, Mac found amazing. The unfortunates, including Mac, could not stop. Each a fortunate and an unfortunate drinker initially sober consuming equal alcohol content satisfies the fortunate drinker yet commences the unfortunate

drinker to drink oneself unconscious became Mac's unsolvable riddle. The idea to stop drinking, the source of such euphoria, knowing continuing the action could and would lengthen the euphoria, became unfathomable to Mac and so many others.

"How was it?" Joe asked.

"Randy, that's my boss, he's a good guy. Took the news calmly, told me to get some rest, and he'll see me in the a.m. That's him though, the news will make it to the powers that be, then I'll know how it truly went."

"You're running out of chances Mac. The drinking is obviously escalating, second DUI, this one involving an accident and you fleeing the scene, it's time you seriously think of changing now for the better or stay way you're at an ultimately end in a premature grave. You ever think of going to AA."

"I have."

"What do you think is keeping you from attending a meeting?"

"No, I mean I have gone to handful of AA meetings in the past. Matter of fact, not far from here, on Kipling."

"What happened?"

"Well, first of all, too many chain smokers. Stunk like a filthy ashtray after every meeting. The old timers admonished the newcomers to sit and keep their mouths shut and just listen for the first sixty meetings. The stench of an icy reception was a perfect excuse for me to quit going and start drinking again. And I did, and here I am."

"I gave up on AA myself," Joe told him. "The first group I got involved with were, to me, a bunch of holy rollers touting the goodness of Jesus this and Jesus that, couldn't stand it.

Look at me. Do I strike you as somebody who dutifully attends Sunday sermons listening to some babbling preacher extolling virtuous activities?”

Mac was now convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that Joe the counselor was somebody he could definitely relate to.

“I’ll be the first one to tell you or anybody I look mean, hateful, lewd, rude, and crude, and I admit back in my drinking days I could be and was, and even though my personal views concerning religion spoke words to others not to bother me with it, I never hassled anybody about their religious views. I respected them, but just couldn’t get myself to agree with them. Look, I’ve been where you’re at, except it was my third DUI. I’ll skip all the happy bullshit details about that but...”

“Listen, I appreciate the talk. I’ve blown a .00, I’ve been here almost twenty four hours, I’m starving, look like shit and need a shower. Please, give me my personal stuff, let me call my ride so I can get the hell out of here,” Mac abruptly cut Joe off. Even though he liked this guy he was in no mood to listen to any type of any inspirational anecdote. He knew his life had come to a sudden halt. He just wanted to get the hell out of that dreary place.

“Yes you have. Go call your ride. I’ll quickly finish this paperwork for your signature so you can leave.”

“Thank you. Hey, I don’t suppose the cops were nice of enough to grab my smokes before they took me in, were they?”

“Cops nice enough to grab your precious smokes before hauling your sorry ass in after rear ending somebody’s car, fleeing the scene because you were sloshed and scared? Oh yeah, I forgot to give you those and their Martha Stewart styled care package they tenderly handed me with such care and sincerity when they dropped you off.”

Joe the counselor, legal eagle, business smarts, preacher man, and smart ass comedian.

While waiting for Jeanette outside the detox center Mac toyed with the idea of returning someday to visit Joe and listen to the rest of his story, maybe grabbing helpful literature the place offered. Maybe.

Chapter 3

“I was worried sick you asshole! Why did you hang up on me yesterday? I called you at least fifteen times after that, you shit!”

Mac’s call to Jeanette from the detox center was short and to the point. He politely asked her to come pick him up for a ride home and told her he would tell her everything when she got there.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” pleaded Mac. “Remind me what I told you yesterday, I only vaguely remember calling you.”

“You told me you screwed up big time, that you were pretty sure you hit somebody from behind and took off! I heard something maybe about cops, and you hung up!”

“That’s pretty much all I can tell you now, unless you want to hear about my latest night at the drunk tank. I do know I went to Jose O’shea’s around noon to get some food in me, and honestly, I did not sit there and pound the booze. I clearly remember being there and drinking about seven glasses of beer, leaving about four, and that’s where my memory gets fuzzy. I barely remember hitting a car and absolutely nothing from that point until I got home. I do remember taking a left from Alameda and Union where the accident happened onto Union and figure I must have zigzagged on the side streets to my apartment complex. Damn Jeanette, it was a beautiful Sunday afternoon and I’m blacked out driving drunk fleeing the scene of an accident on side streets where there must’ve been kids playing somewhere.”

For the first time since regaining consciousness this morning Mac finally had the sobriety and enough sense to contemplate the seriousness of actions, the selfishness. So easily a child's life could have tragically ended caused by him while completely being unaware the driving he was doing while very intoxicated. The consideration to think anything concerning the driver of the car he rear ended had yet to enter his thoughts. Knowing that he had awoken at the drunk tank and not in a jail cell convinced Mac that all was well with the other driver and no further thoughts were entertained.

“Jesus, Mac! Do you know how lucky you are? You could have easily killed someone! You asshole, why didn't you call me for a ride home? Do you know how damn worried I was after you hung up? I must have called you back twenty times last night, loser! Why didn't you call and come pick me up so I could join you, you dick! I would've gone with you, jerk! Why didn't you call me and tell me to come pick you up? You know O'shea's is one my favorite places, dilrod! I would've gone with you! What the hell am I going to do with you Mac! You ditch me, go out drinking yourself mindless, stupid enough to drive, hit someone, and think you'd be able to get away with it by taking off from the accident! There goes your license for God knows how long! Didn't you learn your lesson the first time! You're gonna have to go through all that crap again! What about your job? Second DUI since you've been there, they'll put up with only so much bullshit and risky behavior from any worker! Have you thought about that yet?”

This was the Jeanette Mac most admired and respected. No beating around the bush, straight to the pissed off point. Mac wasn't a person to like the “there, there, poor baby” crap in a situation such as this, and Jeanette wasn't the type of women to give it in a situation like this. Her raw emotions seamlessly growling through sentences being voiced with a crescendo

culminating with an abrupt, scary silence and death stare was always appealing to Mac. He needed this to subjugate his demons to a near uxorious state. But in Mac's eyes Jeanette's greatest attribute was her fondness for and ability to drink and drink a lot without becoming a giggling, embarrassing, immature spectacle when doing so when the two would go out to one of the few neighborhood bars they frequented. Jeanette loved her whiskey. Good whiskey, mind you, good smooth Irish whiskey for a perfect hot toddy. Jack Daniels was received as pure rot gut compared to the prestige flowing from a bottle of Glenlivet or Jameson and well worth the money Jeanette had. Jeanette was funny and enjoyed a good laugh, sometimes captivating a small bar crowd with a raconteur flair conducive to bring the house down, set the place on fire, and having free shots sent her way; although usually most nights men were content enjoying a quick peek at her curvaceous body, especially when shooting a game of pool and having decided to where her tight pink décolletage sweater and white jeans perhaps, thankfully, one size too small. She told Mac many a time that a body had to use their greatest asset to their advantage. Heavens to Betsy, Mr. Spock would be proud. Not he, not Mac, not any red blooded heterosexual male could ever argue with such flawless logic.

Mac wasn't the mad jealous type with women. He rather enjoyed knowing his girl received such attention. Besides, her magnetic personality, her delectable derrière was going home with him. Jeanette was thirty eight, looked great, five feet nine inches, possessed of sandy, wavy hair reaching the small of her back, beautiful cinnamon eyes with long lashes, thick eyebrows cambered to accentuate her friendly disposition, the epicanthic folds just beginning to reveal her age, perfectly thin nose, very high and stunning cheekbones always radiating an exquisite glow, and glossed full lips. Her fiercely independent side, bragging of owning her own

cleaning company, responsible for several employees, and her ability to curb Mac's impulses by stern admonitions complemented her irresistible softness.

Armed with a business degree and an inherent keen business savviness, Jeanette was determined to stake her own claim and starting her own cleaning company would not only maintain her active lifestyle but also obviate being knowingly and continuously victimized by a male dominated corporate America by accepting positions compensating her discriminatingly less just because she possessed female genitalia and secondary sexual characteristics that nature had worked on overtime. The day Jeanette entered Mac's place of employment mid-summer 2008 advertising her nascent business was Mac's luckiest day as he was by chance chatting with Alicia when she entered the premises. Their meeting eyes were those telling each the immediate attraction was rare. It transcended the physical plane onto one where both knew other emotional ties had to exist.

Jeanette was the best thing ever to happen to Mac and the fun they had together had been to him ineffable. The passion they shared for similar musicians and music genres was uncanny. The odds of guy like Mac meeting a women like Jeanette who enjoyed, so much, listening to a trio of oldies such as The Cowsills' "The Rain the Park and Other Things" then The Beachboys' "Good Vibrations" capped off with the Reflections' "Just Like Romeo and Juliet" were beyond computation; and to be in like Flynn Mac knew the all right buttons to push when at one of their homey bars making a late night selection of Billy Joel's "She's Always a Women to Me." That's damn right-a drop dead gorgeous, intelligent, successful, curvaceous tomboy with an attitude, who loves to have fun.

There was only on drawback: the drinking escalated.

“Let me bum a smoke, all right?” Over twenty four hours without nicotine or caffeine would make any light smoker or coffee drinker most cantankerous, put anyone in the mood not to want to listen to anything. Mac didn’t want to listen to her lecturing but knew it must be.

“There right there on the console.”

Mac didn’t care that he had to smoke one of Jeanette’s Doral cigarettes. The damn thing had nicotine in it and it wasn’t a Virginia Slims Luxury Lights 120 Menthol. He could never understand why, or how, his ex, Geena, ever smoked these nearly foot long needle shaped, sorry ass excuses for a cigarette. He was pretty sure one too many middle of the night convenient store excursions to fetch Geena a pack of her desperately needed, indispensable Virginia Slims Luxury Lights 120 Menthols caused their relationship’s demise. My God, when you get back risking a DUI in the middle of the night trying to placate a buzzed woman who is eagerly awaiting one of her cherished Virginia Slims Luxury Lights 120 Menthols and you bring home a box of Virginia Slims 120 Menthols the shit will indeed hit the fan. Undoubtedly a line such as “Just smoke the fuckin’ things” must have started something nasty. A man can take only so much.

“Thanks. Give it to me, I deserve it, I deserve to be raked over the coals, I’m guiltier than sin, guiltier than a pack of junk yard dogs. I mean it Jeanette, I really screwed up this time, went way overboard. My life is over for who knows how long. You know me and Sundays. Even though it was perfect day and you and I should have at least hung out together, I was feeling especially down in the dumps. I admit it, sorry babe, I didn’t even think of calling you, just on a whim got in my car and headed over to Jose’s.”

“Did you call work?”

“Yeah, but when I came to this morning I thought it was Sunday, didn’t realize it was Monday until just about half an hour ago. Randy at least seemed he was okay, but like you said, the ones running the show will have the final say.

“How bad is your car?”

“I honestly don’t know. The last thing I remember yesterday was seeing blurry images of my neighbors while the cops hauled me off. You have no idea how heavenly this smoke is. Subject change-how was your day? Let me hear some good news and tell me you bagged that account you’ve been going after, that office complex on Garrison” said Mac before inhaling another lengthy drag.

Jeanette made the left turn into Mac’s complex and seeing her instant beaming smile Mac knew. “I did! I’ll be meeting with the building owner and the four lessees over next couple of weeks to finalize the deal, you know get all the paper work completed and signed. I’m so proud of myself Mac. If it wasn’t for your sorry ass mishap this would be a perfect day.”

“Awesome, congrats! I knew it would come through for you Jeanette, you worked your ass off for it and earned it. You’ll be...oh shit.”

Mac was in disbelief as the sight of his recently purchased car came into view. The front end was totaled. Obviously he was going faster than his tainted memory had recalled. Obviously a miracle had transpired as he was approaching the intersection granting him just the amount of conscious reflex to avert absolute catastrophe.

“Jesus Mac,” sighed Jeanette. “You’re luckier than I first thought.”

“You ain’t kiddin’. Listen Jeanette, I don’t even want to look at it right now. Pull up to the entrance and I’ll hop out.”

“No, I’m coming in. I’ve got so much cheer in me right now it’s bound to get you feeling better. Just quit looking at it for now. I’ll make us a nice dinner. I’m assuming you still have those bottles of wine I brought over a couple of weeks ago?”

“Yeah, but alcohol is about the last thing on my mind, the last thing I should be thinking about.”

“I’m sure it is and you’re right, but I’m going to be a bad influence and celebrate a little as we planned, if I got this account, and I got this account, buster, so put on your happy face and let’s go!”

The ethics, the possible immorality, surrounding this disconnect between celebration and compunction was easily overcome as Jeanette’s salacious leer portended a very pleasing evening.

Chapter 4

The same grogginess would be engulfing Mac, presently sitting in the VP of Finance’s office Tuesday morning, regardless the wine he and Jeanette had drunk last night. Without the alcohol very little if any sleep would have been had, the sleep experienced being of such poor quality that going without would have sufficed just as well.

Insomnia had become more pronounced each time Mac swore off the bottle for whatever amount of time it would be for that particular time. He related a story to Jeanette when the two began sharing intimacies, secrets, and such, recounting his record six nights with no sleep following a nasty bender when he was between jobs collecting ‘funemployment’ benefits. The insomnia putatively caused by the sudden absence of alcohol, Mac hypothesized that perhaps the pineal gland was affected by the disruption or complete cessation of the gland’s ability to produce melatonin. Prior to this a maximum two sleepless nights was normal but as the alcohol consumption escalated so did the insomnia following each binge. The tale Jeanette listened to

Mac relate was one of a wondrous journey she and everybody should experience at least once as the mind loses all sense of time and an unexplored dimension is entered-the peripheral vision being visited by haunting, small, evilly shaped black wraiths quickly scampering away when viewed at directly; the mind convinced that snow flurries yet the warm air contradicting such a possibility; the audible hallucinations-was startling, but not enough to scare her away from Mac nor likable enough to want to experience such an unexplored dimension.

When Mac arrived at work that morning he knew something was wrong. The expected questions concerning yesterday's absence were replaced with quick glances and terse good mornings, nothing else. The moment of truth was nigh seeing his phone intercom light up and hearing Randy requesting him to Mr. Bivens's office. Mac walked bleakly to the corner office with forlorn thoughts to be confirmed entering the office and seeing Mr. Bivens, Mr. Randy Stevens, and the HR manager, Mrs. Hostetler.

"Please take a seat Mr. McGarrett," Mr. Bivens said.

Mr. McGarrett? Bivens hadn't called Mac Mr. McGarrett since his initial interview for the senior accountant position four years earlier. Mac's apprehension deepened. The palpable tension was intensified with the July sun filtering through open blinds covering the east windows of Bivens's office, glaring into Mac's alcohol induced sensitive eyes, causing him to squint and to slightly sweat.

"As you may well have ascertained Mr. McGarrett, Mr. Stevens told me yesterday evening of your latest DUI. I know Mrs. Hostetler explicitly expounded our corporate policy to you concerning any employee being arrested on personal grounds independent of company functions immediately following your first DUI conviction. I know this because I have here in front of me your signature on the acknowledgment form confirming your oral and pamphlet

receipt of said policy. Mind you Mr. McGarrett, what was just mentioned was the second time the policy was dictated to you, the first being the initial company orientation. Your alcohol abuse has become a corporate liability Mr. McGarrett. Whispers of smelling alcohol on your breath have become too prevalent. Indications that your drinking has affected your work are undeniable. Prior to your arrival this morning I have already discussed this serious issue with Mr. Stevens, Mrs. Hostetler, and the company president, Mr. Landau. The corporate policy is clear, Mr. McGarrett. You leave us the only alternative but to release you. When you file a claim for unemployment benefits this company will not counter with any protestations. Please, go with Mrs. Hostetler to her office to finalize the termination process then gather your personal belongings and leave the premises.”

Mac sat dumbfounded. He looked askance at Randy knowing his downward stare sealed his fate, nothing he may have said earlier on Mac’s behalf was to any avail, and Mac knew that everything Mr. Bivens said was true. He may have forgotten that a second employee arrest would be grounds for termination, but the reality that alcohol had disrupted his work in many ways had become a concern to Mac himself. The accounting job was highly repetitive, to him an endless rut, yet still demanding an alert mind. An alert mind that is not maintained by the increasing amount of alcohol he was consuming. Rather than pursue interests in history and sciences, forged in high school and college years ago, to enliven his mundane accounting position, he slowly slid off that path onto a riskier path of boozing. For Mac and millions of others this was the much easier path. But with an ever increasing tolerance to his cheap vodka, the weekend extensions beginning with inclusion of Thursday night soon to encompass Wednesday, Tuesday and inevitably Monday; and his fellow employee’s recommending

spearmint gum so often, Mac knew that if his drinking was not at least curtailed this moment would come.

Mac prided on having quite an extensive educational background including the sciences and mathematics in addition to a business degree, and that he also was not one to argue with the facts, the truth. His escalating drinking had allowed him to graduate with his second DUI and to being an employee too perilous to remain presently employed. These ugly truths were precipitated by the adrenalin shock when he paraphrased Bivens's soft phrase "release you" to the harsh realistic phrase "you're fired". Mac knew there was no sense arguing or debating the decision. Calmly he told Mr. Bivens the decision to terminate him was understandable, arose and left his office.

The goodbyes he shared with those few employees who visited his work station were rather quick, painless, and quite awkward considering not every day brings the firing of a drunken scofflaw. Their consoling words offering help were said clumsily and seemed to have been stumbled upon when it was clearly evident the well-wishers wanted to bark out, "You gotta quit drinking, you funckin' schmuck!"

Chapter 5

"You're going to jail Mr. McGarrett. For how long, I will determine shortly," the judge declared as Mac stood with absolute trepidation next to his retained lawyer. Albeit the range granted the judge by law in Colorado to pass judgment was known to be very broad, this judge had developed the reputation of being a hanging judge. Whether the story of her daughter being killed by a drunk driver years ago was apocryphal in nature, it was one not to ease any convicted defendant, and one instilling the idea that leniency would not be shown.

“There are millions of you in this country alone, Mr. McGarrett; millions of you struggling daily with an alcohol problem; millions of you the source of such tremendous financial waste and emotional turmoil. The money lost due to lost productivity, the family strife caused by alcoholism is staggering. It is an epidemic currently plaguing this country. This is your second DUI conviction Mr. McGarrett, and if any prior attempts were taken beyond those mandated by your first DUI they have without question been abandoned. What steps have you chosen to confront your drinking problem, Mr. McGarrett?”

Mac was at a loss. Never did this question being posed by the judge enter his mind before he pled guilty. “You are correct, your Honor. I did begin attending AA meetings shortly after my first DUI but quit going and unfortunately began drinking again. I plan this time to make more than earnest attempt at AA, to establish myself within a group I relate to and feel comfortable with, and to secure a sponsor, your Honor.”

“For your sake, I very much hope you do. I have personally experienced the so many horrors and terrible consequences of alcohol abuse not only in my courtroom but in my family as well. I am all too familiar with seemingly insurmountable problems that alcohol abuse creates. I am also familiar with the fact that alcoholism can be treated, and the persevering alcoholic can and will, by being tenacious, revert to their once productive and fulfilling mode of life. I therefore fine you two hundred dollars, and sentence you to two weeks jail followed by eighteen months of supervised probation. Good luck Mr. McGarrett.”

Convinced his lawyer called in at least one very good favor, Mac felt extremely lucky not to be sentenced to the prescribed and condign punishment of a mandatory six months jail time, let alone the possible maximum one year sentence. As the cuffs were put on and he was taken straight away to jail to serve his time, he nevertheless breathed internally a huge sigh of relief.

Mac was to realize shortly after his release how very well Joe the counselor knew his DUI's. Enjoying his first cigarette in two weeks, Mac decided to walk to the mini-mall, where tucked away discreetly near the node of the min-mall's ells, was located the unit in which Mac had to complete the necessary paperwork for his probationary period. This completed and not yet ten in the morning, Mac next went the courthouse, paid his two hundred dollar fine, and later that afternoon learned from the alcohol abuse counselor his final punishments of one hundred and twenty hours of community service, twenty four hours of driving education classes, and one hundred and twenty four hours of group therapy. Being unemployed and without a license for at least one year, Mac kept out of his mind Joe's premonition of what Mac learned to be termed an interlock device-the mechanism, like a breathalyzer, installed on a motor vehicle's dashboard requiring a .00 reading to turn the motor over.

One punishment Joe did not mention, nor did Mac foresee-Antabuse. The drug, when in one's system, intended to assist the problem drinker's urge to drink by creating an unpleasant reaction when drinking the smallest amounts of alcohol. As part of Mac's state supervised treatment he would have to be first examined and authorized by a doctor to allow the prescription and administration of Antabuse; the administration being monitored by a state certified counselor employed by the agency where Mac enrolled to complete the alcohol education and therapy sessions. Eighteen months on Antabuse. One and a half years that the state of Colorado is telling Mac if you choose to drink, drink at your own risk. Even though it may have been deemed safe to be administered Antabuse, the odds of having an unforeseeable, at worst fatal, allergic reaction did exist. The state empowered to tell an individual it is more than you driving drunk that is the state's concern; it is also you not being able to perform the legal act of drinking alcohol responsibly.

Mac thought this to be quite imposing, quite maddening. The state having such power to subtly coerce an individual to stop drinking alcohol via mandatory supervised administered medication could be argued by many as being totalitarian. But Mac had to temper all thoughts opposing Antabuse with the fact his drinking had become unmanageable to the point of driving with a .34 BAC, rear ending a car, fleeing the scene, continuing to drive the remaining half of a mile home blacked out, being convicted with his second DUI, and losing his job, ultimately due to alcohol. Perhaps it was just that an authoritative body did declare that his legal right to drink alcohol had become too menacing to society, and that body should be empowered to intervene temporarily, imposing a drinking moratorium, thus inculcating the offender with sober ideas leading to acceptance of an alcohol free existence.

The four month period between losing his job and facing the judge was one of apprehension, of actual fear of the uncertainty. A job hunt was not even begun. Why look for a job knowing you're off to jail in the near future? "Kevin, I'm sorry, Mac, everything looks great and we're prepared to make you an offer and would be very pleased knowing you could start as soon as possible. Are there any other offers being considered, any special events you are obligated to?" "Hey, fantastic! Well, now that you mention it, most likely I'll be going to jail to serve time caused by my second DUI conviction, possibly for a year. If you guys would be so kind as to hold the fort down, upon my release I'll report here bright eyed and bushy tailed!"

What was the use?

As usual, Jeanette was very supportive, always lending a caring ear. But the time running her growing business was very consuming leaving a diminishing amount of time for her to coddle Mac. They had discussed the possibility of Mac becoming her business partner. This

was dismissed pending his sentencing, but Jeanette did suggest to Mac to clean a couple businesses she had accounts with and she would pay him under the table.

Not one to pass on easy money, Mac accepted. Hell, it would give him an early start getting accustomed to using the bus. The necessary supplies were at the locations, and the evenings Jeanette was unable to drive him, the bus stop was right down street. Piece of cake.

Three and a half months into this arrangement Jeanette received the first of three calls, the first two from the businesses Mac was responsible to clean, explaining to her that if another cleaning was missed, her contract would definitely not be renewed. Knowing the bottle was involved Jeanette confronted Mac harshly, excoriating him and rendering the baleful ultimatum he would be dumped.

Mac hated to think the thoughts of what his life would be like without Jeanette. How he allowed the bottle to jeopardize this relationship, this relationship with his best friend-a fun, beautiful, independent, intelligent, and successful woman-was unfathomable. Yet he had allowed the bottle to do this. He allowed this with lame excuses, excuses befitting a child's imagination. Promises he made to himself to quit were broken so many mornings-caving to the bottle so he could, at least, stop the shaking, to be able to think clearly enabling him to know that he and not the bottle allowed this. "You're going to lose her, you're going to deservedly lose the best thing that's ever happened to you, asshole."

Mac did have to sober up though. He had a week before going in front of the judge to enter his guilty plea and learn his fate. If luck was on Mac's side and the judge was lenient, he and Jeanette planned a Thanksgiving get-together at Mac's for cooking, and festivities. As luck was on Mac's side and had to serve only two weeks, he would be released on a Thursday, continue cleaning for Jeanette, and the two would very much anticipate Thanksgiving.

Jeanette arranged it so she was able to pick Mac up the day he was released.

Thanksgiving being a one short week away convinced the two not to have any celebration involving liquor until then. Jeanette's cleaning business had grown to be thriving. Her successful business came to fruition because she made the resolution to drastically limit her drinking. She was aware that if she continued to drink, as she had for a period when she first met Mac, it would imperil everything she had worked so hard for. And Jeanette did possess that elusive willpower Mac could only grope at. She had the strength, the knowledge to be aware that she did have a high tolerance for booze; that she liked it too much, and for two years now drank sparingly. So many times Mac pondered why and how Jeanette was able to tolerate his drinking, and when asked Jeanette told him his sensitive side was too compelling to let go, the fact that he never once yelled at her, and that he was always supportive. It was these simple statements, simple words describing good behavior being the foundation of the intricate branches needed for any relationship to succeed, that Jeanette held most dear.

And Mac was true to this description; not only with respect to Jeanette, but with respect to others as well. But the night of his release Jeanette did remind him there was a limit, to not cross it, to be there this weekend to clean the CBM office. Having been told this and having two days before Sunday, once again Mac pondered wistful thoughts Friday morning as he walked to the liquor store.

Coming to consciousness that Monday morning to Jeanette's phone call cancelled the much anticipated holiday; she was livid, "You fucking drunk asshole! You didn't show up last night at CBM to clean! My contract with them expires next month and they aren't going to renew! Thanks, drunk! That's only my reputation you're ruining, jerk off drunk! I told you Mac, I told you if any accounts were lost because of your boozing I would dump your ass! I've

given you one too many chances now Mac, I'm done, I'm gone! Do not try and call to sweet talk your way out of this, asshole! You know me Mac, you know when I talk like this I mean it! Do not call, and do not come over!" Slam!

Jeanette did not get to her station in life by mincing words. Her business word, her business reputation was pristine, and Mac, knowing this, now being responsible for selfishly tainting Jeanette's most prized possession, dealt with his guilt and abject sorrow the way he knew best and continued to drink.

Regaining consciousness, sometime Thanksgiving early afternoon, Mac walked to the liquor store for the daily vodka rations, returned home to continue his latest bender. Only knowing it was dark and therefore sometime after five he realized his mail sat unopened, sitting upon a table situated next to the front picture window. Attempting to make the short journey from the couch to the table proved most difficult when Mac's foot became entangled within an area rug hurtling Mac toward the window. Thankfully his heavy sweater protected his elbow as it crashed through the window and he was able to sturdy himself with a table chair. It is Thanksgiving evening, he has no job, the women of his dreams no longer wishes him around, it is exceptionally cold out and he now has a broken window allowing the frigidness to gush in. Alas! It's worse! Mac is out of vodka and must make a hurried walk to beat the early Thanksgiving closing.

This accomplished he sat there on the couch neglecting the mail after enjoying a couple of chugs of vodka and was startled hearing knocks upon the door. Jeanette! Could it be? Great expectations were crushed seeing two of Lakewood's finest staring back at him, their severe faces implying no good.

"What can I do for you, officers?"

“Is everything ok here?”

“Yeah, fine. Why?”

“Received a call earlier about some shattering glass, and seeing all this shattered glass here begs the question. Mind if we step inside?”

“No, c’mon in. That was me, I tripped over the rug and my elbow went through the window.”

“You here alone?”

“Yeah, all night long. Feel free to check the rest of the place if you want.”

One of the officers didn’t hesitate and went down the connecting hallway to inspect the other apartment rooms.

“What are you drinking alone for? That’s never a good sign.”

A fifth of opened vodka sitting in open view and his declaration of being alone convinced Mac that this was a fair question requiring an honest answer.

“Officer, it’s Thanksgiving, my girl was supposed to come over earlier today but seeing she dumped me a few days ago kind of put me in the dumps so I’m down and drinking. Gimme a break.”

“There’s no one else here, place is empty,” the returning officer said.

“Guess I can understand your situation. Just be careful and don’t drink too much. Have a good night sir.”

They were gone.

Mac remained there oblivious to time, the cold air, and the vodka he was drinking. Not knowing what to think when there was another knock on his door, Mac was shocked to see the

same police officer who immediately said, “Mr. McGarrett, you are not supposed to be drinking.”

Mac blacked out.

Chapter 6

“Please, listen to me! I don’t have any health insurance. I lost my job about four months ago and didn’t bother to enroll in COBRA. Don’t take me to the hospital, I can’t afford it!”

Mac pleaded his case to the attendants on duty; what time of day, or what day it was, was unknown to him. The one thing he was sure of was the familiar surroundings. The drab interior of his drunk tank was a memory only four months old.

“Your blood pressure is much too high. It is this agency’s policy to take any individual transported here by the police to the hospital when the individual’s vital signs warrant it, and your blood pressure warrants it. Now please, let us do our job. Honestly, your health and well-being is our greatest concern. Trust me, you need a physician to examine you. Your heart rate is 130 and blood pressure 140 over 95! This could be serious!”

Persuaded by the attendant’s warnings Mac conceding the argument and was transported to the St. Anthony Hospital emergency room for observation. On a wall within the spacious emergency room a clock read 9:30 and the darkness outside obviously indicated it being night. Curious to discover the remaining piece of the puzzle, a nurse informed him it was Saturday. Saturday! What the hell happened to Friday! The last thing Mac remembered was it being Thanksgiving, sometime, and a pissed off looking cop telling him he wasn’t supposed to be drinking alcohol. Then boom! The lights went out. Mac figured the “not supposed to be drinking alcohol” must have been some tidbit that didn’t register when either the judge or the alcohol counselor, or both, mentioned it. It was his understanding that the alcohol consumption

was to cease when the Antabuse administration began, which was at that time two weeks in the future. It turned out to be a personally manufactured understanding.

After answering a battery of questions and three hours of intermittent emergency room physicians' monitoring, he was deemed healthy and safe enough to be discharged and was taken back to the Arapaho House.

The Thanksgiving holiday weekend confirmed there was not a booze shortage. Arapaho House was occupied to overcapacity as Mac estimated he shared the dingy confines with roughly thirty fellow drunks, most blotto. He laid there listening to the incessant snoring and flatulent cacophony and did his best to stomach the latest mephitic effluvium invading his nostrils.

One father and son duo brightened the stay with a somewhat entertaining and educational scene. Mac noticed a kid, looking eighteen years old, or so, disheveled hair, hung over as hell, sitting on his cot, head in hands, obviously deep in confused turmoil. Unbeknownst to Mac, this kid's dad, occupying an adjacent cot, came to consciousness. Completely lost at sea, investigating his newly found and foggy environs through bewildered, slit eyes, dad finally notices son, and asks him, "Dude, where the fuck are we?"

Son: "We're at a drunk tank dad. You totaled the car last night, dude. You lost it on a curve going too fast man."

Pissed off dad: "What the fuck you talkin about dude? You tellin me my fully restored '68 GTO is totaled?"

Son: "No, I aint shittin ya, man, it's totaled, dude, gone!"

Bewailing dad: "No! No! No! Not my baby! Fuckin son of a bitch, dude!"

A few moments following dad's most grievous car loss emoting he said to son, "Dude, when the cops show up make sure you tell them you were drivin, remember I lost my license, man."

Not so dutiful son: "Dude I just told you that you were drivin too fast going around the curve. I wasn't even in your car dude! I was followin ya in my car. Cops showed up just a couple a minutes after I pulled over, they got me on my own DUI dude! Dude, how do ya think we got here? The cops brought us here dude, they already know everything!"

Beaten dad: "Ah fuck man! Your old lady is gonna kill me dude!"

The comical scene these two performed also quickly taught Mac that it was not his future being witnessed but his present with coarser, cruder talk. This was his third stay at Arapaho House bringing to four the total number of drunk tank visits. His mind still alcohol polluted had the ability to formulate the alarming equation that he was no better a sophisticated drunk vis-à-vis the hillbilly moonshining boozer. Enough alcohol will eventually and inescapably place all sots on the same plane.

The attendants had yet to administer to Mac, when he requested sometime earlier, a breathalyzer since his arrival-that reading being a frightful .4. They knew damn well the amount of time required to metabolize a reading like this.

What remained of that Saturday night and Sunday morning he spent wandering the same hall, pacing aimlessly back and forth, anxiously looking at the clock each five minutes. This listless activity was somewhat enlivened by leafing through magazines not known to him, not of any interest to him, and with a blank stare gazing at whatever crap his fellow bickering drunks decided watching on television. Mac hoped that it was the irritability of being confined in this

place and not the nothingness afforded by 3:00 in the morning Sunday television programming being the root of such heated debates.

The Sunday breakfast was surprisingly nutritious. Oatmeal, fresh fruit and bread was served; simple and good, but impossible for his frail stomach to handle following an epic spree. Breakfast hour completed and the area cleaned, an attendant at 8:00 a.m. brought out the breathalyzer elating Mac's spirits. Having spirits swelled to be abruptly shattered was of late becoming commonplace to Mac and he knew the .03 reading required another few hours to be eradicated.

Thoughts of Jeanette dominated his mind the remaining hours-haunting thoughts. The selfishness he displayed, the uncaring arrogance, her reputational stain being his fault. The next six hours his mind was plagued thus, until, finally, at 2:00 p.m. Sunday afternoon, Joe the counselor displayed to Mac's widened eyes the most beautiful pair of fucking zeroes any eyes ever saw.

"At least you weren't caught driving, Mac."

"I probably would have been drunk and stupid enough to drive and get my last bottle Thursday night, but I let them repo my car; didn't figure it made any sense, especially knowing my license would be gone for a least a year, not being employed, and facing, what you correctly predicted a gazillion hours of this and that, needing lots and lots of money."

"You've been practicing, Mac. You blew a .34 your last visit and now a .4 this visit. I'm assuming correctly the company had no choice but to let you go?"

"I'm afraid so. It's worse; my girlfriend Jeanette was kind enough to let me work for her cleaning business, and I screwed that up as well."

"What happened there?"

“Instead of cleaning the office she was contracted to clean, the job she was kind enough to subcontract to me, and paying me under the table, I got bombed thinking I would have enough time to sleep it off but passed out. That was the last straw. She lost that account because of me, and this was after she gave me a redeemable chance. It happened before. I lost her Joe, I lost the woman of my dreams.”

“How long have you two been seeing each other?”

“Four years now.”

“Mac, four years is a lot of time invested in any relationship between a man and a woman. If she truly has deep feelings for you I’m sure that at the moment she wants to rip your head off, but a couple of weeks from now she’ll come around, cool off and be willing to listen to you. I’m not a marriage counselor Mac, but right now, you’ve got much more serious issues to deal with, mainly staying alive. If you keep drinking like this, you won’t have any worries, you’ll be dead. .4? In my time here I’ve seen that only a few times out of hundreds, maybe thousands. It’s obvious you’ve always had a high tolerance to alcohol, could always handle a much more than most others, but your body can withstand such punishment for only so long. I know you’re still young, but trust me, it is a matter of time.”

Mac knew that what Joe was telling him was the stark truth. He always could drink more alcohol than most and if his drinking did continue at such a pace it was a question of when, and not if.

“I’m not so sure about the Jeanette thing, but you’re absolutely correct about the boozing part. I don’t know why Joe, but once I start drinking the vodka, I cannot stop. If I run out and a liquor store is still open I will get more, that is if I haven’t passed out by then. I have no malicious intents, no conscious desire to hurt anybody when drinking, but I know my

drunkenness will both directly and indirectly cause harm to others. I will admit that, even though when I am drunk and my thoughts are blurred, I must pay a price to a person, and to society in general, for the harm I caused due to being drunk.”

“I’m glad hearing that your thinking is on the right path Mac. If I didn’t mention it your last visit, I too was right where you are. As you know I’m here and deal with it, hear it day after day, and share it at meetings. I know if I do decide to drink again that more than likely it will be controlled for maybe at most a couple of months, but without any doubt, I will be drinking every day, every day to the point of passing out. Of all the statements I’ve heard from so many alcoholics, by far and away the most common is “once I start drinking I cannot stop”. Mac, by whatever means possible, you have to stop drinking. I jotted down that you once attended AA meetings but quit going. To remind you, I told you my first AA experience basically sucked, as it does for most, but I stuck with it, found fellow drunks I could and do relate with and twelve years later I remain sober. Now listen Mac, I am not, I repeat, I am not trying to push AA on you. I know it does not boast the greatest success rate and it is just not the thing for many people for many reasons. When anybody is trying to quit drinking booze there is at least one undisputable fact about quitting, about quitting any bad habit that must be stopped, and that is the person quitting suddenly has free time on their hands, and lots of it. Whether it is going to a meeting, you must find something to do to occupy your time, your mind, your thoughts. Whether you, or anybody with any bad habit who wishes to change, dislike the term “higher power”, it must be accepted as fact that without some power being there to constructively fulfill the newly found free time, you will drink, the bad habit wishing to be rid of will continue. You MUST find that constructive thing we AA folk call our higher power.”

Joe was absolutely correct. Mac always knew he needed some hobby, some activity, to occupy himself the many nights Jeanette was working. The jobs he held rarely required time outside working hours; maybe this was subconsciously devised giving Mac an excuse to drink. The desire to seek positions requiring greater responsibility, more time, had slowly diminished as the drinking escalated. Never liking the group catharsis approach, Mac knew that AA would never be the thing for him, regardless the group, sorry your honor.

“You’re right Joe. And thanks for not pushing AA on me as the only thing possible. Joe, I’ve known what I’ve got to do to get me off the bottle, the best thing to keep me away from the bottle, for a long time-to get back into physical fitness. I’ve always enjoyed it, and back in the day was damn good at it. Joe, you got me hyped, psyched up! Now, please, let me out of here.”

“I imagine you’re more than ready to leave. You know, one more day and you would have set the record for this place.”

“Glad to disappoint you all.”

“Mac, whatever you may end up doing remember to start off slowly and do not expect great things to happen tomorrow.”

“Joe, the judge and counselor handed me everything you said plus in two weeks I must begin taking Antabuse while I am on probation. The judge sentenced me to eighteen months on probation, a year and a half. The choice is not mine, I must stop drinking.”

“I’m glad the counselor suggested the Antabuse treatment and it has been okayed. It just may be a life saver. And trust me, do not try and drink when you’re on it. I did, and wound up in the emergency room. They thought I had a heart attack until my ex was reached and let them know I was on it. Damn near killed me! So don’t!”

“I hear ya Joe.”

“One last thing: you say you’re psyched up, most likely because you’re getting out of here and to a lesser extent you’re determined to change, but you just ended what I hope was the nastiest bender of your life and no doubt within a couple of days the thought of drinking will come to mind, even if your girl calls you back with open arms. Take this pamphlet. If you need to call and talk to somebody do not hesitate. Remember that you still have two long weeks before the Antabuse treatment begins Mac. I do not want to see you back here Mac, you understand me?”

“Yes sir, loud and clear. Trust me, another night here lying next to a few farting and snoring passed out drunk strangers, I’ll be charged with aggravated something! I very much appreciate the advice Joe.”

“Sure. Go call for a ride and come back here to finish up and I’ll let you out of here.”

If there was one good thing about Mac’s benders it was that they created a hatred of vodka. The hatred created by drinking so much vodka in a five to six day period that merely thinking of vodka, its smell, literally made him almost vomit. His body being depleted would send signals to his brain that no more could be tolerated. And so it was this time as he lay on his couch the next five days without sleep, minimal amounts of food, and several trips to the bathroom to tend his diarrhea.

The hoped for phone call from Jeanette never happened, nor did he dare call her. The voice he remembered was final, resolute. The possible reconciliation he envisioned could only materialize by his soberness and carrying out the noble deed to speak to the CBM owner and aver his actions, and only his actions, were ultimately responsible. This he knew must be done as soon as possible, and come Monday morning planned to do so, as well as return the office key he held. If this good deed was to no avail only soberness and hope was his last alternative.

The CBM owner accepted Mac's apology graciously but informed him that Jeanette had already explained the situation and convinced her renewing the contract would not be regretted, that Jeanette would personally see to it herself. To Mac remained only soberness and hope.

The only thing different concerning Mac's second DUI's punishments, besides lasting longer, was the court ordered Antabuse. This began mid-December, 2013 and had for Mac two side effects. The first, lasting no more than a month, being a metallic taste when eating anything; the second, lasting the entire administration, being the Antabuse causing drowsiness, but the best sleep imaginable.

Mac became used to a life without alcohol after his routine became inured. The days were kept busy, and turned into months, with his job search in full swing, attending the driving education courses, and calling daily the color line. It was a double whammy for Mac. Not only was he court ordered to take Antabuse, virtually precluding the possibility to drink alcohol, he also was court ordered to call each day the color line and listen for the randomly chosen color of the day. Another week had passed, the color purple not having been randomly chosen, and as Mac stood there awaiting the wretched voice Sunday morning, a sense of defeat loomed knowing for certainty the long run of fortunate luck must end. Off he went on his first Sunday excursion leaving at ten that morning not to return until five that night.

Chapter 7

"I got dibs on that last donut!" Frank eagerly proclaimed his donut rights moments before polishing off his second one.

"Aw c'mon dad, you always get the last one. Let's split it," proposed Frank's bargaining son Luke.

"What was the key word you used Luke?" countered Frank.

“What?”

“The key word, the deciding word, the word dad; dad, that’s me, the guy who bought these donuts. I’m the boss, you know by now, the boss has the final say so,” explained Frank.

“You two have had enough already. I’m the mom who at any time will go on strike, and then what? No hot meals. Need I remind you both that I brought home a half a dozen donuts, two for each of us? Need I remind you that you both have already eaten your share? That puppy’s mine!”

Marge’s donut reasoning was very convincing, Frank and Luke conceded the last donut. The rapidity the donuts were engulfed by father and son could lead astray anyone attempting to keep an accurate consumption count. This was D-day, donut day, at the Easton household. D-day had become a much welcomed, rarely missed Saturday morning family ritual, faithfully practiced. The pastry served as dessert following the usual large breakfast including eggs, bacon, ham, and pancakes, pancakes topped with plentiful butter and syrup, of course. This large meal was not peculiar to Saturday morning. Rarely did a breakfast or dinner pass without seeing the kitchen or dining room table well stocked. Most dinners could be mistaken as being intended for Thanksgiving or Christmas, the desserts a pastry chef’s envy.

Marge and Frank Easton were in their late forties. Frank was highly educated, earning an AeroAstro Ph.D. in 2000, and that same year accepted a lucrative position with Lockheed Martin in Littleton, Colorado thus enabling Marge to postpone her career ambitions and become an efficient housewife rearing their agreed upon one child.

Marge and Frank met as graduate students at the University of Colorado. They shared interests not only including academia and leisurely social activities but also an affinity of physical fitness. Their hectic schedules somehow would find the time, at least four times a

week, for the two to meet and dutifully exercise. Their passion for viewing the beautiful scenery was augmented by biking and jogging together and their exercise routine would be restricted to a gym only upon inclement weather.

Married, graduated, and armed with master degrees, they departed Colorado in 1993, destination being MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts whereat Frank would earn his doctorate. Marge utilized her M.B.A., quickly ascending the corporate ladder. Her near six figure salary was ample enough to cover both their hefty school loans and for them to live relatively comfortable. The pressing responsibilities both experienced dwindled their free time, the allotted exercise periods more frequently had to be forfeited; yet they were still youthful, their frenetic job and studies limiting any noticeable weight gain.

They both dearly missed their beloved Colorado and were ecstatic knowing their future together was virtually secured with Frank's acceptance of Lockheed Martin's offer. The search for their first home resulted with an enchanting, rustic, ranch style home near Green Mountain in Lakewood. Frank's commute was rather long, but via C470, manageable. Besides, their large spread was close to schools, both Green Mountain and Carmody Recreation Centers, a park, plentiful Green Mountain hiking trails, and a breathtaking bicycle ride to Red Rocks Amphitheater; taken as whole, negating all commuting hassles.

Frank began work early October shortly to learn that Marge was pregnant, and Luke arrived late July, 2001. The weight gained during her pregnancy was stubborn and Marge aggravated this stubbornness by not completely curbing her appetite. Determined to shed the remaining pounds Marge was finally able to do so but had developed a very strong urge for sweet foods and the requisite exercising to remain thin, even with caring for a toddler, slowly became extremely difficult to accomplish.

This same time period Frank became awash in increasingly burdensome and taxing work related duties. He had been named director of a newly won government contracted project soon to be consuming sixty to seventy hours per week. Only periodically would his position require him walking to the work laboratory, and slowly his life became quite sedentary, arriving home being too exhausted to exercise. Their exercise regimen had to be curtailed, Marge being pregnant, and after Luke's birth and with Frank's hours they became extinct. Plans to hike Green Mountain or bike to Red Rocks were abandoned, replaced with exhaustion induced idleness punctuated by a decreasing number of neighborhood walks.

Marge's culinary skills improved greatly as more time was spent home, the household duties of cleaning and yard maintenance now being the charge of the hired maid and gardener. Day after day new recipes were sampled or created, their size gradually growing both in number of calories and servings. Frank's growing appetite, easily being whetted knowing this night's arrival home would be greeted with another aromatic redolence, supplanted notions to briefly exercise. By the time the new millennium was to arrive, Frank was convinced Marge was capable of hosting her personal cooking show, that she should use her M.B.A. and highly developed skill to open a culinary school.

Marge's accomplished cooking skills and more frequent fast food lunches did not come without costs. Frank's very highly compensated position had by mid-2003 allowed the Dodges to be living a financially insouciant life, but the caloric intake insidiously increased their physical girth to alarming proportions. Not only Marge and Frank's, but Luke's as well. The mountain bikes had become a garage nuisance and found a home tucked away in the basement with the other workout gear to collect dust. The once graceful love making became a shunned, clumsy act; the source of vindictive finger pointing. The one glass of wine per night had become one

bottle. The visits and outings with neighbors and friends had become very rare. The couple once capable to dutifully exercise at least four times a week had become obese, with an obese twelve year old child, capable of eating enormous meals daily with a celebratory D-day Saturday morning to boot; the obesity condemning them to being virtual prisoners of their own home.

The avoided obesity conversation between Marge and Frank was brought into their living room one late July Friday evening when, for the first time together, they watched and listened to a national broadcasted news piece describing the alarming rate at which obesity in this country had reached. The statistics they saw were most alarming and knowing that they were both among the obese numbers made them internally cower with shame and guilt.

Frank muted the television at the commercial break and broke the silence. “Honey, what the hell happened to us? Look at us, we’re fat pigs. It really wasn’t that long ago that we were working our religiously and eating sensibly. We’re only in our forties and we can only imagine doing the things we used to. That’s just you and me. Think about Luke; we’re guilty as sin, we just sat back and let him shovel all the food in he could handle. The poor guy’s too overweight to do so many things he should be doing. We’re directly responsible for his obesity, we allowed ourselves to remain blind since he was born.”

“I know Frank, you are absolutely correct. We are to blame, and the doctors have every right using us as their poster children. We both know that we have ignored their several admonitions concerning our weight gain. Frank, the years have gone by so fast, I’ve become a housewife obsessed trying to literally perfect my and cakes and eating them too.”

“I haven’t been the greatest influence begging you to make this rich dish and that pie.”

“For Luke’s sake, we have got to stop blaming each other and fight this battle of the bulge together.”

“I know Marge. For crying out loud, we’re professionals living in Colorado. You know, Colorado, the state boasting year after year of being one of the leanest states, weight-wise, in the country. We should be example setters, not having our cakes, and pies, and brownies, and tortes, and eating everything else too. I suggest when Luke has his annual physical exam next week that we all go together, meet with Dr. Singh and discuss these issues and do not leave until we have a plan laid out for all of us.”

“That’s an excellent idea. I’m sure the doctor can refer us to a nutritionist highly trained in matters such as ours. You saw on the news, the number of obese children and adults now in the United States; even though this is a lean Colorado, we cannot be alone, we see other fatsos around, and surely there must be several competent professionals in the Denver area. I’m tired of being fat, Frank. Hey, Fat Frank, I like it.”

“Although short, a serious conversation can make a man hungry. Is there any ice cream left, Porko?”

“Watch it, and we’ve got to begin this all by banning D-day.”

“Life without D-day, will we survive?”

Chapter 8

“I don’t understand Dr. Singh, Luke just turned thirteen. Diabetes is for older people isn’t it?”

“I’m very sorry Mrs. Easton. Three decades ago it could be said that the type of diabetes Luke may very well develop if changes are not made and adhered to was for older people. Very simply, there are two types of diabetes, Type I and Type II. Luke’s obesity may cause Type II. Both types involve problems with insulin, a hormone produced by cells in the pancreas. Insulin’s purpose is to regulate the amount of glucose, or sugar, in the blood. Type I diabetes is

the much rarer type and the tests I ordered definitively indicate Luke's pre-Type II diabetes, the much more common type and now becoming more commonly diagnosed in adolescents Luke's age. I very much wish you would have heeded my advice given last year. I know that obesity can be a very sensitive and strenuous issue for any child to cope with. I do remember gently warning you that Luke's weight was reaching the point requiring close attention, and that he had gained too much weight between prior exams. Again, I am very sorry. I have definitely concluded that Luke's diet and lack of exercise have caused his pre-diabetic condition."

"Dr. Singh. what are the possible consequences if Luke does develop diabetes?" asked Marge.

"Mr. and Mrs. Easton, the good news is that Luke is relatively young. The bad news is, if the strict regimen the nutritionist will outline for you is not adhered to, complications that may arise, if Luke becomes diabetic, are kidney failure, blindness, heart disease, nerve damage, and early death. Please, do not be alarmed, as I mentioned Luke is very young and by adopting a healthier life style all these very scary things can be easily avoided. As you may be aware, obesity in this country has reached epidemic proportions; obesity coupled with a sedentary lifestyle is the major causes of Type II diabetes. Experience has shown me that the best way Luke, a pre-puberty adolescent, may cope with the demanding changes is to make this a group effort regarding the lifestyle changes. I have you both here presently and remind you again that changes conducive to a healthier lifestyle will benefit all of you, and be especially supportive for Luke's sake."

Frank and Marge sat motionless; no accusatory stares were exchanged. For God's sake, they were highly educated, successful adults who didn't have the common sense to see something like this happening, how could this have happened? Marge did vaguely remember Dr.

Singh's friendly advice. "How could I have done this? How could I have done this to my own child, my own flesh and blood?" the word tormenting Marge. But Dr. Singh's suggestion to make these changes a family matter did console them, they now knew last week's talk was necessary and of urgency.

"Doctor, I, we don't know what to say. Yes, I do know. This was our fault. We didn't see this coming. Before you knew us we were in shape and intended to remain so. I got so wrapped up with my job and Marge discovered she was quite talented in the kitchen, the lack of time at times and stopping for burgers or fried chicken became normal, and as Marge told me the other night, the years just flew by and the fat crept in and decided to stay."

"I'm a doctor Mr. Easton. Frank, I have been seeing more and more obese patients with every passing year now, yes, even here in physically fit Colorado. Believe me, I am well aware how easy it is to resort to fast food with limited time, to stop at any convenient store for a quick snack. I very much enjoy a little junk food, but the key is moderation, or if necessary, abstaining. You are not alone, there are tens of millions of overweight and obese people in this county alone. You are highly trained professionals, you can cope with this, you will be determined to control Luke's diabetes, I have the utmost confidence in you both."

The drive back to the Easton home was mostly quiet. Luke was a smart kid, knew what kind of drastic changes lay ahead. Luke just turned thirteen a few days ago and the friendships that had been forged this short life were based upon mutual interests with school subjects and video games. He had already shown plenty of signs that he had inherited Frank's engineering aptitude and could be found for hours sitting at his computer, not wasting his time with mindless rot, but rather teaching himself and exploring the world of possibilities; present, as usual, at his side a can of soda pop and chips.

Twenty five years earlier it was rare seeing more than a couple of computers in any given high school. Luke was a charter member of the first generation of kids having at their disposal home computers that were finally easy to use, connected to the entire world, and very, very cool. With at least one intersection in every town in the country now being populated on each corner with a combination of fast food restaurants and convenient stores stuffed with junk food in tandem with millions of children glued to their seats viewing computerized fandangle the inevitable obesity epidemic was irreversibly afoot. Any one at least thirty years old visiting any public swimming pool clearly could see ample evidence that children were getting fatter and fatter; the once visible contours of the rib cage, the early signs of toned musculature had been displaced with rolls of fat, sagging pectorals, and protruding guts. The laity need not summon the greatest minds postulating genetic mutations; the answer had become ubiquitous. So many of these kids never had a chance to be fit; most often, both parents working serving as the catalyst to resort to fast food, and eating out more often in general, cultivating and nurturing any child's craving for fructose.

Compounding this fact's severity, with respect to Luke, was his parents' steady weight gain that conditioned Luke to eat much more than normal, and interpreting this as being normal. A dietary life of eating large portions, of having available copious snacks and soda was the only one he knew.

As both Frank and Marge breathed out sighs of relief learning that neither tested positive with diabetes they reassured Luke that they as well would make these difficult changes; that they would be there for him, no matter what. And they meant it. They loved him dearly. His dad and he for hours looking at pictures and talking about planes, their commercial and military histories, the trips to Frank's office always being beyond awesome, the future of space travel always on

tap to extend the fun; and his mom so often insisting that he help her in the kitchen preparing meals-convincing him that presently it may seem too girly-like but some day he would appreciate the knowledge-became many a source of laughter for both. Marge and Frank's weight gain had been the source of their bedroom frustrations and this friction had only been rarely witnessed by Luke. To date, Luke experienced nothing but a mom and dad who still truly loved each other, and the emotional bonds being strengthened by financial security. If not for the obesity, and still lacking spectacular wealth, his would have been a life of apparent privilege.

The transition to the nutritionist's guidelines was painfully abrupt. For Luke to adopt an array of alien foods, to have tantalizing thoughts of goodies teeming within his mind, understandably was very difficult. Marge knew this would be so as she explained to Dr. Singh that her cooking and eating big meals had somehow snowballed, and by the time Luke was five, had become firmly entrenched as a way of life, the only way of life, the way of eating, known to Luke.

Mom and dad stayed true, ridding the house of all temptation, supporting Luke with constructive words, and very often reminding each other that they were ultimately to blame. Doing this day after day was quite an accomplishment considering both were fending off their own personal sugar demons and the urge to devour a donut shop.

Mid-August brought to the Easton family elation seeing the scale revealing Luke had lost ten pounds. This most welcoming news to be buttressed with mom and dad both shedding weight. The strict diet, the tenacious perseverance, albeit incipient, was working. Family happiness abounding, into the group mentality was etched the idea that if we can do this for two weeks, we can do this another two weeks; and if we can do this one month, we can do it another month, and so on.

The beginning of Luke's school year mid-September introduced him to new students. Before this year Luke had been the object of minimal teasing, universally flung at overweight children from other children, but this year's immature ridiculing had intensified. The puerile sniggering became more caustic, but Luke was smart and knew if he continued exercising and eating right he would lose the weight.

Luke wanted to be skinny. He noticed changes to his body, the way he thought, the way he noticed girls. And Heather Delafuente sure did look a lot different too. Luke had seen her around school the previous year, and now Heather sat close to him in Algebra class. The variables x , y , and z were being innocently undermined with Luke's dreams of what Heather would be wearing today, how her hair would be set; oh, how very much he wished that today she would be wearing this outfit and tomorrow her hair fashioned just so. These hours of Luke's first magical teenage love could be equaled only with the fleeting moment when passing Heather in the hallway after fifth period smelling the sweetest perfume scent so gently and peacefully rising from Heather's suntanned, soft skin. Unknown until now, emotional places Luke would be sent if maybe, hopefully again, maybe, her brown eyes would meet his.

His heart beating, his palms sweaty, Luke, with additional confidence having lost ten more pounds, approached Heather Friday afternoon, wiser with fatherly advice and mom's well wishes, to be torn asunder as Heather denied his boyish invitation to see a movie together. Why the world would collapse upon him, how a girl could make him feel these terrible things coming with rejection had become his most humiliating and dejecting thoughts.

Mom and dad both shared the heartache, yet sensed that inside Luke was much more devastated than he appeared. Puberty had placed within this young teenager emotional sensitivities reaching deeper than most teenage boys Luke's age. The highs afforded by losing

weight and exercising did not outweigh these strong and sorrowful feelings he felt for Heather and succumbed one day walking home from school, stopping at the convenient store to buy that king sized candy bar. The soaring sugar high created radiant hopes Heather would someday say yes to his invitation. He had to have another candy bar. Luke was not satisfied until the third was completely eaten, then scurried with much guilt from the store.

It is now early April, 2014 and Luke continues nursing his emotional pain with the secretive sugar. Last fall Marge and Frank decided the best thing would be Marge returning to the workforce, better to occupy her time, and extending the housekeeper's hours and duties to alert mom and dad if Luke had not exercised as prescribed. An infrequent recalcitrance was understandable and allowed by mom and dad regarding the workouts, but what was punishable would be any knowledge of Luke abusing the junk food.

Ms. Abner, the vigilant housekeeper, informed the Dodge's that she neither witnessed Luke eating junk, nor did she find any incriminating evidence suggesting he was. Luke, even though being a thirteen year old oddity of neatness, certainly would have forgotten a secret stash by now. Certainly mom, dad, and definitely Ms. Abner putting Luke's clean clothes away, by now would have stumbled upon the remnants of one chocolate bar. This would provide the ammunition to confront Luke, to explain to him, to prove to him, that this is why he hadn't lost any weight for months; why he had gained weight. Mom and dad were trusting and wanted Luke to know they both trusted him and agreed not to invade too obtrusively, to accept Luke's word as truth he was abstaining from junk. Dr. Singh, hearing the same and seeing no alarming test results, felt obligated to say soothing, reaffirming words to Marge and Frank.

The white lies spoken to Ms. Abner were Luke telling her that he was going to the park or to the gym to exercise. So often these outings were instead trips to a convenient store, or

maybe today to a fast food joint. His brain, for the entirety of his life, had been conditioned and rewarded with sugar. Luke was smart, and hooked. Attaining his high by handing over his allowance money to some cashier was so much easier than doing all this strenuous physical fitness crap. He would not overdo it as he did once scarfing three huge candy bars within minutes, and having limited funds made this so. But yet this continued, and why not, the walking is good exercise isn't it?

How would a thirteen year old adolescent boy know if other guys felt these new, perplexing feelings; a very smart boy keeping his urbane words secret, unable to understand the uncultured crude prurience spoken between the skinny, 'cool' guys. The few friends Luke had served strictly to share his interests in computers and their adjunct activities. Talking about girls and especially feelings any one of them may have for a girl wasn't taboo but mentally awkward; the 'cooler' guys who, with ease, interacted with girls had emplaced an inferred stumbling block- a fat kid wasn't capable to own such things. The fixated eyes upon a cute girl do not go without notice to other interested teenage boys, but when the fixated eyes are those of a fat kid they can be punished with debasing, humiliating gibe. To this jeering Luke endured increasingly.

Luke's ingeniously sly routine kept in check mom, dad, Ms. Abner, and Dr. Singh happy noting his weight at acceptable equilibrium. To all, his emotional state was that as displayed by a normal kid, but maintaining his internal emotional equilibrium had become overwhelming. The dreaded, evermore teasing, the jokes, the locker room maligning palled in comparison to the daggers he felt stabbing his heart seeing Heather with friends, staring, whispering, giggling. The loneliest moments anybody may experience are those endured lying, unable to fall asleep, the tortuously painful thoughts trying to answer, why. Luke was finished suffering these moments, these unbearable times at night, lying there, eyes swelled with tears.

Chapter 9

“I’ll have the Lumberjack Slam, please.” Mac informed the waitress.

Making his way home that Sunday, Mac was in no hurry and decided to stop in at Denny’s for some chow. Why the hell not? He could always catch the next bus, and Denny’s, immediately off of Sixth Avenue and Union Boulevard, was almost always a happening place. A place he enjoyed going to with Jeanette, but, secretly, especially by himself. Not that Jeanette was bad company, she never was. Mac would like to go by himself, find a vacant stool at the long counter and strike up a conversation with whoever may be sitting by him. This was very much different than going to a homey bar by himself, the purpose of which was to be alone, to think alone, to observe. Denny’s served the purpose to actually mingle a little, to hear the opinions exactly why a person hated this and disagreed with that, and getting in his own two cents worth.

The normalcy of this counter was to be seated with men; it wasn’t the nature of females with something to say to be at this counter. Seated next to Mac today was a man obviously of dour mood. His head hung crooked, staring deeply into an abysmal cup of coffee. Cautiously, Mac asked this man to kindly hand Mac a newspaper section situated on the man’s far side. The man graciously obliged informing Mac it was pretty much the same old, same old.

The subject of the opening question being either sports or politics related, Mac was taken somewhat aback being asked if he was married. Not ready to divulge that he had been dumped by the woman of his dreams because he decided to go on a nasty bender rather than meet expectations, Mac kept it simple by answering no. Where this conversation may be going, Mac had no idea, but figuring he had nothing better to do, indulged his newest Denny’s buddy.

“Any children?” asked the man.

“No, no children either,” Mac detested hackneyed blather and omitted the ‘not that I know of’ crap.

“I realize that we’re complete strangers and I will be heard as lecturing parent, but believe me, believe me if you ever do have a child, do not ever assume that your child is happy inside.”

The man having now exposed his apparent sadness with these words stared longingly at Mac as if to elicit any consoling response. Sensing this man’s palpable and unmistakable pain, Mac did not answer with “I’m sure it was not your fault” but by asking him if everything was all right.

“I can’t believe how blind we were. My wife has an M.B.A. and I earned a doctorate from MIT. All that higher education and we still didn’t have the smarts to know how bad my son was feeling inside. It was all our fault.”

“The Massachusetts Institute of Technology?”

“Yes.”

Detecting no signs to think this man was lying-he looked smart, definitely wasn’t drunk, well kempt-Mac asked, “What wasn’t your fault, sir?”

“My son’s, Luke’s, weight problem. I got so wrapped up in my career and my wife in the kitchen, Luke came along, the years flew by, the next thing we know we’re being lectured to by Luke’s doctor warning us if Luke didn’t adopt a healthier diet he would more than likely become diabetic. When we were first married living in Boston my wife worked full time and I was working toward my doctorate. That’s when my wife started to seriously dabble in the kitchen. Every weekend she would spend hours in there perfecting recipes and creating her own; I mean

she discovered a she had a true passion for cooking, and goddamn, she got damn good at it, all of it. The weekends feasts couldn't come fast enough for me.”

The waitress placed Mac's meal, refilled his and Frank's coffee, and Mac's grumbling stomach having coaxed him that some kid's weight problem-some kid he never knew and most likely never will, wasn't his fault or problem-eagerly attacked his Lumberjack Slam. He washed down the first few bites with some coffee then water, his napkin tended to his lips and hands, gestured toward Frank with extended arm and introduced himself. The Denny's relationship now being consummated allowed Mac to ask Frank, “How old is your son?”

“He's just about fourteen now.”

“Fourteen!” Mac was thinking, what the hell is this guy worried about, his kid is only fourteen, he's got all of his teenage years left to lose the weight. Besides, after quickly scanning Frank, Mac figured this kid couldn't be all that fat; his dad looks a tad bit chubby, but nothing any fat farm needed to know about. “He's got plenty of time to lose the weight.”

“Anyone would justifiably think so, but that is where my wife's, Marge, and my guilt come into play. By the time Luke was five or so my job kept me busy for up to seventy hours a week, and Marge blossomed into a fantastic cook. Mac, I'm telling you this lady can cook. It got to the point I was eating larger and larger portions more quickly just to get to that goddamn apple crisp.”

“A la mode?”

“Homemade ice cream, Mac! Everything Mac, everything from scratch, homemade. We used to religiously exercise Mac. We let Luke eat and eat and eat because we ate and ate and ate. As he grew older it became obvious he was very intelligent. He spent most of free his free time sitting at his computer learning just about everything he could.”

“Any sports, physical activities?”

“Besides gym class at school, no, not until the doctor very strongly urged Marge and I place him on a very strict diet and begin an exercise routine. By this time my wife and I already had come to realize that our own weight was a problem and so committed ourselves to making Luke’s prescribed diet and exercise regimen a family effort.”

“I take it that it must be working. I have to say you don’t look heavy enough for somebody who has ate and ate and ate all the time.”

“I’ve lost close to one hundred pounds in the last few months.”

“Damn.”

“Marge has dropped quite a bit as well. We’ve both lost most of our weight due to guilt, shame, and grief.”

Mac tidied up his area during this moment of silence. He knew Frank wanted him to ask the question. Waiting for the waitress to further her distance after replenishing their coffee, Mac said somewhat forcefully, anticipating a milder response, “Well, what happened?”

“We learned that Luke was the target of a lot of ridicule from what I guess one would call the class bullies.”

Bullies: that was Mac’s cue to get in his Denny’s two cents worth. “I hate bullies. Ya know, you and I never had big brother looking out for us when we were kids. We never had news time dedicated to the hardships and horrors of being bullied. If I did have kids I would teach them to face that punk ass bully because most likely that bully was being bullied themselves or , just as likely, were insecure about some aspect of their life and exhibit the bullying-displacement behavior to compensate for their own inner pain. I mean, you’re a big kid who hurts inside. What quicker way for a bully to feel better than to pick on other weaker kids.

I would tell my kid that the vast majority of bullies would back down, at worst you might be on the receiving end of a knuckle sandwich, but would earn respect, a lot of respect that goes a long way. You just have to let them know to keep their eyes open for the friendly neighborhood sociopath who bullies just to get their rocks off; best to leave these budding criminals to the authorities. Facing a bully builds personal strength and the confidence a kid needs when they grow up and enter the capitalistic work force. When I was a kid I had a neighbor who was two years older than me and at least six inches taller...” Mac slowly quieted down realizing Frank really didn’t give a flying aitch about his bygone plights. “I’m sorry, started to ramble on there. The bullying must have been pretty bad.”

“Obviously much worse than he led us all to believe. He seemed to be doing fine. He had lost quite a bit of weight himself but planed out for a few months. The doctor saw nothing to be alarmed over. We found some love letters and poetry he had written for a girl he was smitten with. That’s when we knew just how badly he was hurting inside. We didn’t see it.”

Frank’s eyes had become tear swollen. Mac knew to keep his distance, keep his mouth shut-he knew the terrible secret was to be revealed.

“Our housekeeper found him. She didn’t have the strength to lift him. She called 911. It was a miracle that our neighbor was home that day. He was strong enough to hoist him and get that goddamn belt off his neck.”

The last thing Mac envisioned, the last thing anyone would envision, was to be sitting at his Denny’s next to a man pouring out his anguish, hearing of this man’s thirteen year old son’s attempted suicide. The moment transcended the ordinary into a subtle surreality akin to spirituality. Something Mac was quite klutzy at. The related story led Mac to conclude this guy and his wife were ultimately responsible for their kid’s state. It definitely sounded as if this kid

knew no other way of eating, and if he did, his response most likely being, “The hell with this healthy crap, I want the good stuff.” It certainly didn’t seem to Mac a “there, there, I’m sure you must have done everything you could have” was due this man. Mac, always abreast of current events, read and listened to reports describing childhood obesity as epidemic. All parents are ultimately responsible for their children’s behavior, regardless. But this man was torn to pieces inside; maybe had to get out of the house, away from things, find solace somewhere with strangers to rid his conscience of gnawing guilt. Searching for anything to say, Mac quietly said “Sir, you intimated your son is still alive.”

“He is. He remains in a coma. We don’t know what to do.”

Mac didn’t know what to do either. This guy needed spiritual assistance, not some dude making his way home from a Sunday breathalyzer, whose counseling ineptness regarding such a sensitive issue would shine if any words be uttered. But this guy has a doctorate from MIT. He ain’t stupid, he knows damn well the type of advice he needs. He just needs to hear something, anything any reassuring stranger was willing to lend.

Mac’s meal was finished, his fill of coffee completed, the next bus leaving Cold Spring Park-n-Ride in ten minutes. Leaving his customary generous tip Mac turned to Frank and after shaking hands left, saying “Sir, I’m very, very sorry for what you are going through. The only helpful words I can find are that somehow you and your wife must find something good mired in this tragedy, and it would seem to me the goodness you seek is contained in your son’s writing.”

A glimmer of hope overcame Frank’s appreciative eyes as Mac departed.

Chapter 10

Finding employment, changing jobs, years ago was much easier. The offers came quickly but had always resulted in some dead end mundane corporate accounting position. The unchallenging routine repetitive, and the free time furnished a la Excel convinced Mac that the jobs held to date could have been performed as a high school freshman, and drunk. The daily monotony was the source of most mental challenges, for it was the cause of such fantastic reverie, the careless, nightmarish numerical consequences having to be untangled month end.

It was also his perfect excuse to keep drinking. Knowing these jobs could be done most of the time with minimal effort kept the vodka flowing. The flowing vodka leading to two DUI's and a criminal record; a criminal record he foolishly allowed too many recruiters in on. Naivety, or perhaps alcohol induced confusion, led him to believe that discretion ranked as one of their 'profession's' more admirable traits. How foolish of him.

Mac allowed a background search to be conducted by one of the first employment agencies he interviewed with when his latest job search began, a search delving into his personal life and all public records. Calling this agency inquiring about the discussed opportunities and listening to the lame excuses aroused suspicion, but when was asked very early within the next interview if he had any criminal convictions he became paranoid. Another recruiter noticing something on her computer screen during an interview, never to be heard from again, and another admonishing Mac not to forget anything, emphasizing anything, when answering application questions regarding possible convictions transformed his paranoia to being convinced these sales people were spreading the news: "There's a guy going around town looking for work, but he's got a criminal record, do not touch him, bad news." The way this harmless

looking female recruiter said those words so nastily and the other obviously noticing Mac as a red flag on her computer screen betrayed their knowledge of Mac's convictions.

These specific people, accepted as sleazes by Mac, had to be avoided. He knew that they would not be able to sell his work experience with a criminal record attached to any company of any repute. Even if these recruiters' prospects would be scooping up horse shit after a small town parade-this, of course, being a lifetime opportunity for any prospect; that recruiter would be receiving pay for every scoopful of that once in a lifetime opportunity shit-they would not jeopardize their reputations . He had to steer clear hoping their gossipy tentacles left untouched some part of the metro area.

He began to doubt this as the months passed, his unemployment benefits consumed and personal savings being tapped into; the phone not ringing offering a job. Was it so evil, so damaging to a person, to be convicted of two DUI's? The fact that one of these involved a hit and run accident did figure into this question, but his resume was solid illustrating a worthy employee entrusted with confidential corporate information, and also in charge of the safe handling of thousands of dollars of cash on hand. The Great Recession wreaked havoc upon so many but he had weathered that storm and the economy was making a definite comeback; one certainly able to afford one lucrative opportunity for Mac.

His paranoia swelled, envisioning frugal companies not yet willing to receive consent to conduct a costly background check talking with previously dealt with recruiters asking if they may have encountered a Kevin McGarrett in the past, and the recruiter, certainly to be rewarded sometime in the near future, responding with, "Well, I really shouldn't be telling you, and you didn't here this from me, but Kevin has...." Those bastards! They must be!

He had to finally admit it. He had at least been branded, possibly black listed. The drinking severely wounded him and left its scar. A scar society had deemed warranted. Time was not ample enough to continue this way. It had become crunch time, when the tough get going, the time to concentrate on positive forces. And Mac indeed did have two momentum creating positive forces to brag of: he had been sober for months now, albeit Antabuse assisted, and was getting back in damn good shape. The job search and court mandated punishments did take up a considerable amount of time but there still existed that time void Joe the counselor had mentioned. Mac was lucky and knew that occupying this potentially dangerous time with exercise was his key to success.

No matter what activity presently occupies one's mind, the occurrences of past strange events or dreams will always have the opportunity to enter one's mind uninvited. At least this was so for Mac. Jogging around the track behind Green Mountain High School was a perfect chance for such odd things to pop in his head and it was the chance meeting with Frank that recurred in his mind the most. Yes, he did feel very bad for this man effusively emoting that Sunday afternoon at Denny's, but the more he thought about the scenario the more troublesome it became to him.

Luke was a manufactured sugar addict. The poor kid didn't have a chance. His old man told Mac essentially the same thing. As far as Mac knew, this kid was still lying in a coma, probably with no chance of survival. Yes, he is a teenager exposed to the inherent lassitude of being a teenager; but he was also an obese, teased teenager, his highly educated and successful parents being ultimately responsible for his obesity. Yes, his parents obviously love him dearly, did not do anything with malicious intent, but all this happened. All this did happen and cannot be undone. And, yes, Luke definitely is an extreme case of rare occurrence, but certainly

millions of children are exposed early in life, with no malicious intent, to crap food by caring parents who most likely crave this same crap and devour it with their kids. So many news stories cannot be lying declaring that childhood obesity has reached alarming rates; so many of these stories declaring that obesity in this country had reached epidemic rates cannot be false. The past decade's astronomical medical costs and health insurance premiums certainly must be strongly correlated to the obesity epidemic.

These were thoughts that bothered Mac. He knew damn well that no vodka distillery would ever have to take any type of responsibility for his own drunken behavior. He also knew damn well that no junk food factory would ever take any type of responsibility for making America fat. He knew that his actions were his responsibility, his drinking too much was just cause for society to brand him to the day he dies a potential menace. Knowing that he would be branded and labeled as a clear and present risk to all those conducting background searches, even if remaining sober to the day of his death, while millions of parents, who by now must be aware of the fat situation, continue to stay fat themselves and continue to shove junk food in their children; so many of them to develop fat related maladies, and receive the societal Richard Simmons "there, there, go ahead and cry, we know you can't help it, let it all out" consolation crap, Mac decided to quit these thoughts and act.

Chapter 11

"You will never convince me that no one, not one person, has died in the past decade because that one person was unable to afford health insurance allowing that person to receive a life-saving operation; and you will never convince me that obesity and soaring health care costs are not related. I have read too much recently to think otherwise." And Mac had educated himself the past few days before this week's alcohol group therapy session.

Sharon, the counselor, normally had an alcohol related topic prepared for the session, but it being difficult at times to have one she was thankful tonight Glen had begun the session stating how his life had turned upside down since his second DUI. The ranting and whining became contentious at times. The convicted drunk drivers who normally sat with very little to say during any session had reason to speak up, for their lives as well had been severely affected being convicted of drunk driving.

The biggest bummer of a story told that night was Aaron's. Aaron looked in his mid-fifties and was convicted of his first DUI more than decades ago. Anyone old enough in the group had a good idea that Aaron most likely was pretty schnoekered when he got pulled over. The time he told the group put his first DUI sometime in the early 1980's, the cusp, still the time when it was common for the officer to give warning and advise to drive home safely. Aaron had no such luck. He tended to the DUI's punishments sedulously, and realizing adulthood loomed demanding an ever greater sense of responsibility, swore off the booze. To this pledge he remained faithful until his second daughter's twenty first birthday celebration hosted by her closest friends at a bar very close to Aaron's home. Driving home, as Aaron will swear, after having his first three drinks in over thirty years, he was pulled over one block from home, the rest, history.

The scariest, biggest bummer of a story told that night was Matt's. Matt had way too much to drink that night ending with enjoying the scenery at Hooters just off Kipling and Sixth Avenue. Too bad for Matt that his .41 BAC, behind the wheel, route home was chosen to be Kipling southbound, on which, only a short distance from Hooters, control of his speeding vehicle was lost and crashed into the fence surrounding the Federal Center. That's Federal, as in federal property. Matt told the group this story not from his own memory but from what he read

in the state and federal police reports. Not having any recollection whatsoever of the crash or hours after, Matt is certain that he must answer to both state and federal charges; ouch.

Now these group therapy sessions lasted two hours a pop and had as few as seven or eight to as many as twelve people enabling each person ample time to voice themselves. The number of hours each person must attend group therapy ranged from eighteen to one hundred twenty four hours meaning repeat stories were common. Mac had already related his story a few times by now and decided to broach the topic of fairness. Not the fairness relating to what the courts deemed necessary and proper punishment doled out to each convicted driver; this group's membership had been mostly constant the past three months and the moaning and groaning concerning judges' arbitrariness had been discussed thoroughly.

He began by stating that he would be the first one to admit that everything the courts demanded of him was just and deserved and continued comparing, at its most fundamental essence, the similarity between an obese individual and a chronic alcoholic. To wit, once they start an activity they very, very much enjoy, neither have the ability to stop until, for the obese, no more food can possibly be consumed, and, for the alcoholic, the alcoholic passes out. Mac extolled efforts curbing drunk driving-drunk drivers do and will continue to kill innocent people- and he praised the judicial system and the state offering assistance and programs regarding alcohol abuse. But he made clear the overwhelming evidence evincing the scourge and astronomical costs associated with obesity. His impromptu speech's peroration claimed him having no knowledge, no researched evidence indicating, that an obese person be required to pay a higher health insurance premium for being, per se, obese, and they should pay more for being fat, and concluded with his no life-saving operation due to no health insurance because the health insurance cost statement.

The group fell silent. Sharon being middle aged and contently corpulent, looking somewhat guilty, scanned the group and noticed Melissa had the look of someone with something to say.

“Melissa?” said Sharon.

“Well, haven’t you heard of Obamacare? I mean I’m pretty sure that companies can fine their employees if they are overweight or charge them more for their health insurance premiums.”

“I did see that. First, remember that this is anathema to Obamacare and the pre-existing condition argument and no doubt the efforts of lobbyists and politicians pandering to corporate America and Wall Street. Second, I don’t think the corporation should be empowered to have any discriminatory influence regarding the obesity issue, or any other societal issue; the corporation is empowered enough, especially operating in an “at will state” and the Supreme Court deciding that they can buy elections. I want to go beyond Bloomberg and Big Gulps. Just fining the obese will not cut it for this guy. Everybody in this room has been convicted of at least one DUI, and that means that everybody in this room has, or most likely will, lose, what society has termed, the privilege to drive. My license is gone for a year to be followed by another year driving with the Interlock device hooked up and high risk car insurance to boot. I don’t know about anybody else in here, but life without a car and driving really, really sucks. That’s the biggie, something precious to us is taken away for a long, long time; and if you choose to cheat and get caught, the shit hits the fan with bigger, smellier turds. Just fining the obese without taking away something dear, a right or privilege to do something legal, will establish and maintain the same moral hazard created when the government bailed out Wall Street a few years ago slapping them on the wrist for being very, very bad boys. Too many financiers will remain

financial scum and too many obese will remain obese. No bankers directly related to the Great Recession saw jail time. I'm not saying any fatso should be shipped off to jail, but it brings me to my final and perhaps most important point. Everyone in this room is now branded, scarred. Because at one time, or others, as myself, we drank too much and made the willful act to drive a car as we were over the legal alcohol limit and were caught doing so, society has deemed it proper that society has the right to know this until we are dead. I use the words brand and scar because if I were to ask people to quickly define them most certainly a descriptive answer would contain the words "something ugly left on a body", and that's exactly what they are. Again, I cannot emphasize enough that I more than deserve the punishment given me, but because these records remain permanent, society has decided that so many doors, at a minimum, remain severely blocked to me and so many others. I just want to keep this argument to simplicity. You, me, and everyone here drank too much booze, when of age, a legal act, and then did something we were not supposed to do, namely, imperil society; and because we imperiled society we are rightfully being punished. And now we have, beyond any doubt, tens of millions of people eating way too much food, a legal act at any age, and, en masse, argumentatively imperiling society, and not being punished. This disconnect I do not fathom. Imperiling society with potential physical harm, as drunk drivers do, will always be viewed by most of society as being direr than imperiling society with potential financial and social harm, but you mark my words, the number of premature deaths directly linked to obesity will continue to rise and most likely peak only when the losses resonate close enough to enough powerful people who, by this time, regret that earlier, harsher steps had not been implemented to contain the obesity epidemic."

"Damn dude! Man on a mission!" someone shouted.

“Look, society is putting pressure on me to stop doing a legal act, to drink alcohol. Society is telling me I can’t handle it. Maybe they’re right.” Mac continued. “But considering the literature I’ve read and the figures seen I think it’s time society puts harsher pressure on the overweight and obese. I know we all have to eat and I can survive much easier and much healthier without the booze, but I’ll put any fat bastard on a diet granting them the right to eat as much fresh fruit and veggies they can handle.”

“Ya know, you’re right, now that you’ve mentioned it I have been noticing more and more fat people lately, especially kids. It’s kinda sad. I’ve never really thought about it the way you just told us,” one group member exclaimed, “but you are absolutely right.”

“I see what you’re sayin’ dude, about the damage and stuff. It’s like anyone in this room, or any one drinkin n drivin, coulda caused so much harm in just one night, like really hurtin or even killin someone, and we get punished big times and should. And now you gotta whole lotta of moms and dads who are fat and makin their kids fat, doin all kinds a bad things to these kids bodies, it just takes a lot longer for us to see the damage; like it’s in slow motion,” Jeff so eloquently paraphrased one of Mac’s points.

Jeff was in his mid-thirties, arrived at group therapy disheveled, talk indicating no more than a mid-high school education, but the mechanical aptitude he possessed belied all personal prejudices questioning his intelligence. He grew up in Golden with three brothers and their old man’s garage, tinkering with engines, transmissions, brakes, body work, you name it. He had the skill and knowledge to make most highly educated gentry feel and look an inept idiot in any garage.

Mac had gotten to know Jeff better during therapy session breaks. His repertoire including highly skilled craftsman became evident one break showing Mac interior and exterior

pictures of a house he had built; his and his wife's house he built from ground up high in the foothills ensconced and overlooking Idaho Springs. They currently lived in a one bedroom apartment preparing to move, and having received a nice pay off for their house from the city of Westminster and eminent domain, decided to build this house. Describing one second floor interior picture Jeff directed Mac's attention the several electrical outlets. There were outlets everywhere, no more than six inches apart, on every wall. "Do you know how much time and extra money went into that?" Jeff asked.

"Quite a bit, I imagine."

"I get done wiring all this crap, and the next thing ya know it's legal to smoke weed. Don't know if I can compete with the big boys."

Mac made a couple of stupid suggestions, but what became puzzling clear to him was questioning the value, time, and money invested toward a business degree to be utilized in capitalism.

"Jeff, that's exactly what I'm saying. The present message society is sending is that the harm caused to society by obesity is okay and does not warrant stiff punishment because it does not cause immediate physical damage, does not put anyone in a hospital for months, because one person doesn't kill another because one person is fat, because some fat guy who can't control his appetite doesn't end up taking a bite out of someone's ass."

Judging from the uproarious laughter the entire group, included Sharon, liked that last one.

"I've considered myself a news junkie for years and I do remember very well seeing and hearing stories of how obesity has become a problem for so many. The first time I remember one of these stories had to be about fifteen years ago," yet another member joined in, "and that's

a long time; plenty of time for society to get at least a little tougher on the obesity problem like it did with drunk drivers. You know, the more I think about what you've said, the more I agree with you. And besides, now that this state can legally get stoned and forever be tempted with the munchies, it's probably the perfect time to do something," Chris declared.

"What the hell put you on this war path? I mean did you see the latest news item, just decided to start reading about this, or what?" Nick, asking the question.

Almost certain that one group member would ask such a question, Mac's chance encounter with some guy named Frank at Denny's about three months ago was told. He ended by telling the group as extremely rare and tragic as this case may be that undoubtedly tens of thousands of much milder, yet similar stories had happened and are happening.

"Yeah, it's not like adults need to have every package, every burger wrapper, or whatever the junk food is delivered in to be plastered with warning labels saying if you eat too much of this stuff, like cigarettes and chewing tobacco are; sooner or later you will put on pounds, and most likely lots of them, It's common knowledge that if you eat too much garbage you will get fat. I don't think that some parents saying that they were blinded by their own crappy diet should be an excuse ridding them of the guilt of getting their kid hooked on the same garbage," Mark added.

Mac loved what he was hearing. When somebody suggested using social media as a tool to spread his word he at first did not like the idea. Supporting these websites did not sit well with him. Although virtually free to use, by using them he would obviously be supporting them, and the neo-mega-billionaires who founded them. Why the hell anyone would want to assist major stockholders to live beyond avarice's dreams for giving the people the Greek agora redux, or humanity's most accomplished opining platform at twitter with trending gossip had always

been an unanswerable question; but yet, unquestionably, potentially very effective. Putting his personal prejudices aside, he stated that if he did continue his campaign that social media would be considered.

“So what exactly do you hope to accomplish?” Nick again asking a question geared to pierce Mac’s ulterior motives. “If you get your food cops, see if you can’t get our licenses back sooner!”

“Yeah, right!” responded Mac. “I guess beginning with writing a petition would be a good place to start, filing it properly, getting the requisite number of signatures and presenting my case to the Lakewood City Council.”

“Sounds like you’ve researched that too.”

“I have. I’ve started the petition, too. I just wanted to throw out what I’ve said to see what kind of initial reaction there would be.”

“Did you ever think of getting this Frank guy involved? From what you told us it seems likely he would be more than glad to help some way.”

“You know, that’s a good idea. Assuming he is the Frank Easton he told me he was; a Frank Easton with a doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It’s hard to believe that there would be more than one Frank Eastons hailing from MIT in the Denver metro area. Maybe this is it. I told him that somewhere in their pain he and his wife must keep searching for some good. Excellent idea, thanks!”

Arriving home Mac opened up the browser, typed in Frank Easton, etc., and voila, there he was, picture and all. He was who he said he was, and Mac could now contact him.

Chapter 12

The following Sunday Frank had agreed to meet Mac at Denny's. Frank was at first reluctant to go. The decision to take Luke off of life support was not yet a month old, terrible feelings still especially haunting, but Frank did recall that something good may be found. Mac stressed he did not wish to make public Luke's tragedy nor his story the cause for any 'Luke's Law'. He recounted his story highlighting similarities between those who can't stop drinking and those who can't stop eating; admitting that the damages caused by alcohol are swifter and more severe, but exhorted him that the damages caused by obesity to society are present and escalating proven by researched facts. Frank, by experience, was well aware of obesity's insidious nature and the awful consequences it poised, and he was somewhat disinclined to offer any help based on his view being that Mac was seeking to exact some kind of revenge for what he was going through. Mac persisted stating that he did not physically harm anyone, staunchly agreed that those drunk drivers who did should be severely punished, and reminded Frank that drunk driver's actions of reckless abandon would remain a public record for life. This was late November, 2014 and Mac asked if Frank was aware of a report issued a few days earlier by the McKinsey Global Institute releasing data claiming the global cost of obesity had reached two trillion dollars a year. If this most likely fact did not patently evince that hundreds of millions of people are eating with reckless abandon, then nothing could. And Mac stated his case succinctly as: people who drink alcohol with reckless abandon are justifiably punished by society for the myriad physical, emotional, and financial damages they cause; people who eat with reckless abandon are not punished by society, period, for the myriad physical, emotional, and financial damages they are causing.

Frank was sold. He wanted to help, but he did want to use Luke's poignant story as impetus to the cause cé-lè-bre, but only to a few trusted people. He did not, and he already knew Marge absolutely did not, want to divulge all aspects of Luke's life. The short stories and poetry this young man created would perhaps someday be let known. These were words and thoughts delicately and tenderly woven so precociously expressing his deepest, newly discovered, entangled emotions. What Frank and Marge would like to let be known was one letter in which Luke described hating himself for cheating on his diet, not routinely exercising as prescribed, and being a prisoner in his own body, his mind and spirit trapped, able only to wonder what it would be like. Frank quickly formulated this letter, with his and Marge's sense of noblesse oblige, would be worthy adversaries to opposing forces.

The partially completed rough draft of the petition was presented to Frank who cautioned Mac that it may wise to lessen the impact of the arduous ordeals into which convicted drunk drivers were immersed. But this was an essential point; not to garner any public sympathy for drunk drivers, but that the stiff penalties work. They may not be effective to everyone the first time, like the repeat offending blockheads Mac represented, but they worked. Not intending overweight people having to be subjected to anything nearly as strenuous, a point needed to be made that imposing any regulation seizing any amount of personal freedom is effective. The imposition did make an individual think, positively or negatively, it did make the individual ponder the reasons why this is so.

“Do you have any regulations and accompanying penalties thought out yet?”

“Well, as you no, any proposal will be very controversial. Above all, I don't want children and teenagers to be affected, and I don't want to associate being overweight a driving impairment that alcohol obviously is. What I think society must do to seriously address the

obesity epidemic is take away, in this case what is deemed a privilege, from obese people the privilege to drive; to suspend one's license upon renewal if that person's body mass index surpasses their respective proscribed maximum. I know you're sitting there thinking what kind of a hair brain idea is that. A message needs to be sent to certain overweight people clearly stating that if you wish to continue eating with reckless abandon, assisting the worsening obesity problem responsible for so many societal problems documented beyond argument for decades now, you will now have to pay a price; these costs that your eating habits are directly causing can no longer be tolerated without some punishment, we have had enough. Believe me Frank, anyone who's lost their privilege to drive, knowing that if they do get caught driving when their driver's license is suspended or revoked that more trouble looms, the vast majority will do what they're told to do in order to get back their privilege to drive."

"Yeah, I can only imagine, and actually, I think your idea is pretty good."

"If any regulation was to be enacted, the opportunity to lose the required amount of weight must be given; perhaps following a three month campaign designed to give all drivers constructive notice, then a six months to one year period granting the affected drivers to lose the weight. I don't want it where too many people lose their driver's license. You know as well as I do that that will never fly; plenty of breathing room must be granted for everybody, but the message must be sent that the very overweight segment of society will no longer be given a free pass. I am not sure, but I wouldn't be surprised if the beginning of MADD was similar, the clear and scary message that some of us have had enough. Nobody was pouring the vodka down my throat, and nobody keeps shoveling the food in an obese person's mouth. I poured it down myself, and the obese people shovel it in themselves. I didn't need to keep drinking during any given bender, but I did. The obese people don't need to keep shoveling the food in, but they do.

I've caused societal damage and will be branded for life; the obese are causing societal damage and still receive a free pass. I'm not suggested that the obese be required to carry extra baggage with their names and reputations, but they must start eating responsibly or face consequences, and losing their ability to drive is the best way I could think of."

"Mac, you just might be on to something here. I'm sure that the opposition will be present, it always is, but remember, this is Colorado, perennially one of the Union's lean leaders. I certainly cannot think of a better state propagating a message stating that we are serious about containing the obesity epidemic. As you were talking I was thinking that with today's technology your idea seems economically feasible; sure, to implement the necessary equipment within the DMV's offices would be costly but convincingly well worth the money invested. This state certainly is teeming with marijuana sales tax revenues. What an excellent way to invest it."

"Frank, I was actually thinking of starting off with baby steps and contain this campaign to Lakewood."

"Well, if you want to take your case to the city council that's fine, but I suggest shooting for the stars; contact the locally elected state rep or senator, and maybe have a bill introduced this upcoming legislative session."

"Touché Frank, in for a penny, in for all the pounds lost we can get."

"Driver licenses do not need to be renewed for years. What about that?"

"I would not petition to change that, way to controversial; just leave that be, except the renewing drivers must report to a DMV office to renew, no more on line renewal option. Yeah, I know, that is the greatest barrier for this to happen, knowing the number of DMV offices shuttered long ago now."

“That and the junk food industry; I can already here top execs screaming to their hired lobbyists to scream to the legislature this is government overstepping its bounds.”

“Hmm, I never thought about those pesky people; they sure are something that will be confronted, not to mention the countless junk food votaries. Hell, if this Denny’s had available a complimentary bowl of Werther Originals I’d be showing up here every day incognito for a cup of coffee and a pocket full of those purloined gems. We all love our sugar.”

“Yes, I know. What exactly is it that you have in mind for me to do, Mac”

“I don’t have any connections to the medical field.”

“Ah, of course, the imprimatur the medical field offers, its cachet and prestige; an absolute must, not to mention its necessity establishing sanctioned BMI numbers to be presented.”

“The BMI numbers are there, they’ll most likely just need to be tweaked to be made agreeable amongst a bickering legislature, assuming it gets that far. Would you be willing to talk to your family doctor, the doctor who cared for Luke, and nutritionist who prescribed his regimen?”

“Yes, I would. I’m certain Dr. Singh would have an open ear to this idea. Not only did she lecture our family about a healthy diet, she mentioned dealing and caring for an increasing number of patients being overweight or obese. If the AMA declared war on the tobacco industry and having dealt with the obesity issue for years, if not decades-now, I do not see why it would not be willing to start a skirmish with the junk food industry.”

“Perfect. And one other thing: help canvass the area for signatures.”

“Mac, haven’t you heard of social media? You need to get a Facebook page established to best spread the word, get the petition on line.”

“Somebody in my alcohol group therapy mentioned social media. I’m not too involved in it, but I know it will help, so by all means it will be utilized. But people seeing us walking, especially here, around the Green Mountain area, may be easier to influence; that we’re serious about the issue, walking some tough hills garnering signatures supporting weight loss.”

“Touché back at you. Mac I better get going now, the time I allowed myself is just about up. Here, oh, let me put my home number on back, is my card. As usual, work keeps me extremely busy, and my wife and I have our workout session later today. ”

“I was going to mention that you look like you’ve shed quite a few pounds.”

“I, we, have. Marge and I are back to the exercise routine we strayed from long, long ago. It all started up in Boulder for us-working out together, that is. It took a tragedy, but we’re back and dedicated. The first day, weather permitting, we’re going to take that ride back to Red Rocks, and just last weekend we actually hiked all the way up Green Mountain”

“Awesome view, isn’t it? Take care Frank, I’ll be in touch.”

Chapter 13

What a schizoid state this would be. One face granting people the freedom to go ahead and twist up that zeppelin and pass that puppy around, another face telling the hoi-polloi if you’re too fat to drive you gotta lose the weight. But this is Colorado, and any area offering such vast arrays of spectacular natural scenery is destined to attract the gamut from the stoners to athletic minded people to the athletic minded people who enjoy getting stoned. So many people thinking the state’s influx, especially blue Californians, has morphed the state into a crucible generating transformative ideas at the country’s vanguard, must mean that Colorado must be the state issuing the proclamation saying you must eat your junk in moderation. Broadcasting the message from the state year after year, if not at the top, is near the top of the list of states

boasting the lowest obesity rate would be perfect; that this is how Colorado intends to maintain and improve its healthy image.

These thoughts Mac had in mind swimming his last laps at Green Mountain Rec Center. The endorphins were back. Jobless, no light visible at the end of the tunnel regarding the completion of his court ordered punishments, out of unemployment benefits and quickly consuming personal savings, he nevertheless was on cloud nine; this paradoxical state possible only with the presence of exercise and the endorphins it unleashed. Any job would be destined to be landed, and now he had a project to occupy his idle time. There was a lot of work to be done and finding help to assist placing all aspects of the plan on the internet ranked as number one on the to-do list.

Mac, never one to take exceptional scenery for granted—a magenta mountain sunset, an effulgent crystal blue-skied autumn day, and such—walked straightaway through the rec’s lobby, head turned left with eyes fixated and gazing with utmost respect and admiration at the woman bent over determined to clean that window to perfection. The way her....boom! “What kinda of a jerk off would put an effin pole here,” he uttered to himself. The laughter was familiar, unmistakably familiar.

“You’re supposed to watch where you’re walking buddy! What were you thinking of?”

“I was checking to make sure I didn’t forget my goggles. I always forget my goggles. Maybe I was enjoying some seductive scenery as well. It is a beautiful day out Jeanette.”

“You dickhead, same old Mac!”

“What are you doing here? I mean cleaning. You didn’t get into any trouble did you? This place has had a program established for years with the state for convicted offenders and such to fulfill their community service obligations.”

“No, I didn’t get into any trouble like you Mac. I started hearing rumors the rec center was getting fed up with people doing as little as possible, and way too many not showing up at all when assigned to.”

“Yeah, I must admit when I did my community service here after my first DUI, I was quite the slacker. But I am proud to tell you that my second round was taken much more seriously. Do you know Tom?”

“Yes.”

“Tom was so impressed that he cut me loose my last night. He said to me when I arrived my last night of community service, “Mac, how would you like it if I send you home right now. You’ve done such a stellar job and have earned.” I didn’t complain; just had to fill out and sign a form and he took care of the rest.”

“Well la-di-dah. Too bad more stud, super cleaners like you didn’t show up to save the program. I was awarded the winning bid a couple of months ago. Mac, you have no idea how mad I was at you.”

“What do you mean I have no idea; that was me on the receiving end of your tirade, remember? Why do think I haven’t made a single attempt to contact you? Because I was certain at the time you would try and kill me.”

“You’re right; the least I would have done was kick your ass. But Tina did tell me what you did.”

“Who’s Tina”

“She owns CBM, you remember, you were passed out when you were supposed to be cleaning her business offices. That was very responsible and noble of you, I must admit, and

thank you, by the way. But your boozing was way out of hand and I couldn't make myself call you."

"I don't blame you one bit. I deserved every last word you said. The drinking was way out hand, again. You might be pleased knowing that it has been months since I've had any vodka. You know, it's sad knowing that I couldn't have just said since I've had a drink; 'a drink' was replaced with 'since I had a lot of vodka' long ago. It's close enough to one year to call it one year now."

"Mac that's great! You should be very proud of yourself! I can tell you just got out of the pool by how red your face still is, but judging from the last time I saw you, you look much, much healthier than the bloodshot, slovenly pig you resembled."

"Thanks, I have come a long way, haven't I?"

"But you're on Antabuse though, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well, the important thing is that you're sober and have been sober. So how's everything else going? I see you still have wandering eyes."

"What are talking about?"

"Oh please, you were watching me wipe that window and walked right into this pole I know you've walked by hundreds of times by now."

"Okay, I'm busted; can't help notice you don't mind flaunting what you've got."

"I'm working here, bucko."

"Besides letting you know how fantastic you looked, I never once said anything the nights you wore certain clothing, letting the gentlemen clientele be aware of your billiards abilities, did I?"

“All right, I’m might be a little busted, too.”

“A little? Jeanette, you’ve got it, you know it, and you love flaunting it.”

“Mac! Why didn’t you ever say something like that to me before? The way I dressed bothered you?”

“Are you nuts? I didn’t dare say anything lest I upset you to the point that you would refuse dressing in such a manner ever again. Hell, I loved it, and never once did I argue with your point of using your best assets to their fullest potential. Jeanette, you’re blushing.”

Jeanette playfully slapped Mac saying, “Oh shut up, I am not. So how are you doing?”

“The best I can, I guess. I’m working on a project.”

“Oh yeah, what is it?”

“It’s a secret.”

“You tell me you’re working on a project, but it’s a secret project.”

“Well, yeah.”

“And how am I supposed to learn about this secret project?”

“Well, maybe I can take a bus trip or hoof it over to your place and divulge the secrets of my project some time.”

“Maybe if you did take a bus trip or hoof it over to my place you might find that I’m involved with some other guy.”

“Would I?”

“That’s my secret. You’d have to find a way to my place, maybe this Thursday night, to figure out my secret.”

“Maybe I’ll just have to do that. What are you doing cleaning while the rec is open? You clean after hours.”

“I just came in to clean that one window hoping to give someone a cheap thrill.”

“No matter what may happen, I’ll always respect the hell out of your sense of humor.”

“Who says I’m joking? No, I do have keys and have three of my employees do this job after they close Saturday night. As you can see from the slushy storm we had last night it made a mess of the windows. They called and asked if I could possibly have someone swing buy to clean them; couldn’t say know, too important, this client may lead to bagging Carmody Rec Center.”

“Hey, that sounds great. Oh, Thursday nights I have to go to my group alcohol therapy session until eight at night.”

“Well if you really want to tell me your secret, and if you really want my secret answered you’ll have to take a late bus, won’t you?”

“I reckon so. Maybe you and your mystery man can pick me up after my meeting?”

“The disclosing of our secrets depends on the bus, Mac.”

“Very well then, it was very nice to see you again Jeanette. Maybe I’ll see you Thursday night.”

“Maybe, see ya Mac.”

As Mac made his way out of Green Mountain Rec Center and down the fairly steep and long hill on Alameda Parkway, right onto Mississippi Avenue and the first left to his complex just off Nevada Place he knew things definitely were looking up. Jeanette seemingly receptive to the idea of giving their relationship another chance put him on cloud nine squared. He knew he must tread lightly, be cautious; he crossed the line, he lost her trust. Trust could only be earned with steadfast, honest behavior; staying true to your good word, and keeping it over time. To lose it once means twice the effort to regain. Truly earning Jeanette’s trust back, if it panned out,

would not commence until he had successfully completed his probation and discharged, completed the therapy sessions, and, most important of all, off the Antabuse. All this was a distant eight or nine months! The cloud nine squared elation would have plummeted to below earth level but the thought that Thursday was just two days away, plus the endorphin renaissance, buoyed the emotional high.

Accustoming himself to bus transportation following the second DUI was much easier; he lived in the same area and had to utilize public transportation for several months after his first DUI. Save the weekend, buses arrived and departed at about each half hour, and the nearest bus stop was usually nearby and ran punctually. Where he had to go for the alcohol classes was a very short walk, no more than five minutes, on the other side of Alameda Parkway, directly across the street from McDonalds and the Green Mountain Shell station, both serving as nice oases for Mac when waiting for the next bus.

When the weather was like it was this Thursday night, hovering around the freezing temp worsened with a howling wind and wet snow, McDonalds served as a godsend; ordering one cup of coffee was enough to keep managers' satisfied, otherwise glaring eyes was enough to signal a bus waiter that loiterers weren't welcome and to take refuge within the mostly exposed shelter. Mac didn't mind walking anywhere from his place, it was downhill everywhere except the walk to Green Mountain Rec Center. It wasn't the walking back home uphill, or the walking, per se, that bothered him, he enjoyed the exercise and scenery. It was the amount he perspired that was burdensome. Within minutes walking uphill the heat generated was sufficient to have his shirt nearly soaked with sweat.

Venturing to a couple of recent job interviews on warm autumn days with a rare humidity reading of fifty percent was a nightmare. Uphill, downhill, flat land, it didn't matter. The three

to four block walk from bus stop to business with the humidity was more than enough. Any interviewer must have been thinking instead of listening to a long response, “Is this guy this nervous? I wonder if I looked this nervous during some of my interviews. Good God, he sweats like a pig. Wrap this goddamn interview up and get this guy the hell out of my office.”

This was his first bus trip to Jeanette’s place which was about five miles away in Wheat Ridge, a few blocks west of Wadsworth off of 26th Avenue. After his meeting he walked over to McDonalds for a cup of coffee and waited for the next bus. He jumped on the #3 bus, eastbound Alameda, connected with #76, taking the northbound Wadsworth bus to 26th Avenue. The wait for the #76 was cold and wet, but the walk from the 26th Avenue stop, zigzagging, to Jeanette’s place was brutal. The wind had to be gusting up to thirty-five miles per hour, the snow wet and accumulating quickly made the last block a slogging affair.

Pounding on her front door Mac saw her peeking through the blinds and heard her call out, “Who is it?”

“Let me in Jeanette, it’s nasty out here!”

Jeanette opened the door and with a big grin asked, “How was the trip Mac?”

“You could’ve picked me up. Look at my pants and boots, they’re soaking wet, and my feet are freezing!”

“Pay back’s a bitch Mac!”

“I’ll have to make a note to pay closer attention to the weather forecast.”

“That would be a good idea. You’ve been riding the bus for how long now, again? About a year isn’t it?”

“Funny.”

“You’re in luck, I decided not to donate, burn, or throw away the clothes you have here. You know where everything’s at. Go get dried up, changed and tell me about your secret project.”

“I take it your secret man doesn’t exist.”

“Are you frickin kiddin me! Tonight’s one of the first free nights I’ve had to myself since I told you to get lost.”

Mac made his way to bathroom, grabbed a towel, proceeded to her bedroom to dry and change, hollering, “C’mon Jeanette, there’s more than plenty of guys out there waiting for you.”

“I know. Seriously Mac, I’m busy as hell, and maybe I got my eye on one lucky guy.”

“Really, somebody I might know?”

“You may have seen him around. Hurry up, I’ll be back in the den.”

Mac couldn’t wait. Damn, how he missed Jeanette’s den. This room expressed her tomboy side, and any man boasting of a man-cave could take note of several possible improvements to their own decorative styles. Nice and small it cozily accommodated two people warmly welcomed into the room with thick, black shag carpeting; each person occupying a huge recliner that a body melts into, and each recliner able to handle a sprawled sleeper or two nestled people; the best in home entertainment systems able to transform the watching of an episode of “Friends” into a worthwhile half an hour; the walls adorned with awards, accomplishments, and knickknacks showcasing a Jägermeister cuckoo clock, that’s right, a Jägermeister cuckoo clock. The best? The best feature was the darkly stained wainscoting accentuating the room’s elegant custom home theater feel. With the reading lights on and lambent anyone could lose a day there.

Scurrying back to the den he eased himself into the missed recliner and began relating his proposed campaign, including Frank’s story, to Jeanette. Recumbently attentive, at times

displaying expressions of sorrow learning of Luke's tragedy, but mostly quizzical and befuddling looks overcame her.

"You want to take a person's right to drive away from them if they're too fat? Are you nuts?"

"Aha! So you think it is your right to drive a car?"

"In today's day and age, hell yes; I don't know what I would do if I couldn't drive. Mac, I understand that it is considered a privilege, but I believe by definition it is a special right granted to someone."

"I'll take your word for it. I don't want to argue semantics, it's what you said about you not knowing what you would do. Knowing that you could potentially not drive if certain conditions are not met is enough to at least make a person think about change. Jeanette, the evidence is overwhelming and it has been there overtly for decades now. I just don't think it's equitable that some people who drink too much alcohol, and who have not physically injured or killed anyone, have their lives upended and branded with a permanent record endure this, while some people who continue to eat too much, over-contributing to skyrocketing health costs keep receiving the Richard Simmons treatment. It's time they pay the piper."

"Who the hell's Richard Simmons?"

"Richard Simmons? He's that anti-fat guru guy who wears a red tank top and those tiny red striped shorts; usually had a curly do going on, always super-sympathetic to his sobbing, overweight female clients, or whatever they're termed."

"Oh yeah, that guy! I haven't seen him for, I don't know how long. Whatever happened to him?"

“Haven’t seen him in ages either. Hell, I thought the guy was a riot, myself. You remember that game show *Hollywood Squares*?”

“Yeah.”

“This is going back damn near thirty years maybe, but I’m sure you also remember the center square always hosted by Paul Lynn, of “Bewitched” and Uncle Arthur fame?”

“Of course! I loved Uncle Arthur! And Dr. Bombay! What was the name of that snoopy neighbor lady?”

“Crabbits, or something like that. I’m sure the show’s on some retro channel. Well Paul Lynn went on some *Hollywood Squares* sabbatical, or something, for about two to three months, hell maybe he left the show, it’s been too long to remember, but anyway, Richard Simmons saved the day by hosting the center square. The dude was a riot! With his cackling laugh, sitting next to Phyllis Diller donning her trademark boa and that cigarette holding thing, those shows are a classic! Anyhoo, the soft approach isn’t working. Do you remember about, damn, it’s already been about seven years, there were these local tv commercials advertising some gym or workout program, and this, like really bad ass dude is yelling something like, “You gotta get off the couch, Chubby!” at some cowering obese, shall I say, model?”

“Yes! I do remember those! I wanted to kick that fucker’s ass! What an asshole!”

“Exactly, and I’m pretty sure those ads proved a wee bit too controversial and got yanked. Hence, the tough guy approach won’t work either.”

“Mac, I very well know that obesity is a social problem, and it is partly responsible for skyrocketing health costs, but there must be some middle-of-the-road solution, something not quite as harsh as losing your driver’s license.”

“The idea’s motif is universally practiced starting with children. When you or I were at one time babysitting a niece or nephew who was being a brat, we punished them by taking away something that they, in their minds, thought had no right being taken away. And why did we do this?”

“Because we’re mean, vicious, cruel, and love watching little brats writhe in mental agony.”

“Well, yeah, and it works.”

“I follow you Mac. Mom and dad did that to us when we were little brats. You’re right, it works.”

“I’m not trying to put the junk food industry out of business or telling people what to eat. I’m not asking to have them branded as being incorrigible junk food eaters. Like I said, it’s been way too much time now that the overweight and obese have not been punished in some way as are others that have and do cause societal harm. ”

“Bravo! You go dude. Hey, you ever see this movie?”

Jeanette got up and grabbed a cd case and handed it to Mac.

“No, haven’t yet, any good?”

“Haven’t watched it yet either; you game?”

“Sure.”

Jeanette put the movie in, turned to Mac saying, “Well then scoot your ass over and make some room for me.”

After getting nestled she softly said, “You know Mac, if you weren’t such a soft hearted super-sensitive, nice guy, I would have dumped you ass immediately. I have been keeping

something secret, though. Your cleaning jobs always got rave reviews. The best I've ever had. They kept me and my crew on our toes, you little shit."

"Jeanette! That wasn't nice."

"Strictly business, me being the boss and all the other boss stuff, that is. Listen, since I know you can't drink at the moment and need work, I'd be willing to give you those jobs back to get some money in your pockets until something better comes along."

"Deal, but I am starting to think that my number is up. I'm pretty sure my days of having access to sensitive corporate information required by the jobs I've held now for fifteen years are over. Trust me, companies don't want my kind of criminal record coupled with the ability to access proprietary data. What the hell am I thinking! You own your own business, Jeanette. If you had two candidates for a job, both being equally capable, but one had a criminal record, who would you choose?"

"Honestly, I would choose the one without a record. But Mac, I know you. You're such a nice guy, so many people at the last company you worked at had nothing but great things to say about you. You're a good worker."

"Thank you Jeanette, that was very sweet of you. But the company taking on the record is taking on an additional liability. I'm certain the insurance actuary, who doesn't know me, sees a potential hiree having a couple of convictions and the risks associated and presents to the hiring manager the frightening general liability insurance premium increase causing that manager to look somewhere safer and cheaper."

"I see you point now about creating a more equitable playing field, Mac."

"Are you going to drive me home tonight?"

"Hell no! You must learn your lesson not to drink and drive."

“You’re joking.”

“No, I’m not joking. I’m not driving in this shit. You’re staying here. Now let’s watch the movie. Oh, how rude of me. How was your booze, mental conditioning, thing-a-ma-therapy, whatever it’s called?”

“Not too bad, actually; but the punishment that I just can’t understand is the double whammy given me. I don’t know if I ever mentioned this to you before. As you know I am court ordered to be administered Antabuse, drink at your own peril. On top of the Antabuse, I am required to call to find out what the color of the day is. If it is purple, I have to go to this halfway house and be administered a breathalyzer.”

“What happens if you blow hot?”

“I’m sure the agency where I go for the group sessions must be notified, not to mention my probation officer, but I really don’t know what happens right then and there and don’t intend to find out.”

“Seems like overkill to me; could’ve just kept it to Antabuse and slapped you with a heavy fine. Where is this place you have to go to blow?”

“Sure looks like it was once, long ago, a hospital; wouldn’t be a bit surprised if it was originally erected as a tuberculosis sanatorium. I don’t even remember the place’s name. It’s on Kendall Street, couple of blocks north of Colfax. Oh, wait, it’s Intervention Community Service.”

“That’s not too far.”

“No, except weekends, bus schedule is running at like half capacity. But I never would have run into Frank that Sunday.”

“Do you have to go to the Taj to meet your probation officer?”

The Taj is the befitting sobriquet bestowed upon the Jefferson County Court building in Golden. Its purpose, façade, and conspicuousness, since 1993, very close to West Sixth Avenue destined this construct being tagged something.

“No, that office is in Golden tucked away in some strip mall. Hah! That reminds me. I have to report there just once a month. One appointment, within the first five appointments, I get there and discover I already have a new probation officer. When I asked what happened I was given some rude brush off by my new sweetheart probation officer. She looks no older than her early twenties, just starting a career, looks all sweet and innocent, you know, but she was ready to nail somebody. The first thing she asks me is, “What happened?”, and I say, “What are you talking about?” Immediately she replies loudly, “You tested positive for meth!” To which I replied, “I’m not even required to be tested for meth, I’m just required to be monitored for alcohol, and I don’t do meth. Are you positive you have the correct file there?” She looks me straight in my eyes with a nasty ass look on her, and asks, “You are Mr. Kevin McGarrett are you not?” And of course I told her that’s who I am. Finally she took a look at the folder’s tab and with head down says in a snotty tone of voice, “Oh, I grabbed the wrong Kevin.” No apologies, no nothing; she seamlessly segues into ragging me for not having found employment yet.”

Jeanette couldn’t help but to enjoy a good laugh.

“I imagine that’s a real fun place to work at,” Jeanette commented.

“Oh yeah, I can feel the vibrant camaraderie every time I enter. Each appointment is complete with both a probation officer bickering with another probation officer and a probation officer bickering with some offender.”

“Sounded like a perfect moment for you to blurt out one of your quirky sayings, like your ‘eeduhlee-beeduhlee toots’”

“Hey, you got that down pretty good Jeanette. Damn, it didn’t even cross my mind. Tell ya what, the next time Officer Crotchety spews out another false accusation in my direction she will quickly realize she’s messin with the Jinga Lebonx Kid.”

The Jinga Lebonx Kid. It was decades ago in Mac’s eighth grade English class that Mrs. Hott, whose unfortunate decrepitness belied her last name, assigned the students to compose an essay, the topic being chosen by each student. Mac’s essay briefly discussed British colonialism and used, somewhere in the essay’s body, the word jingo. Knowing for sure Mrs. Hott would be very much impressed, he was demoralized receiving the graded essay and seeing in thick red ink marginalia advising Mac not to use words that are not understood. This and the C plus prominently displayed at the essay’s top was sufficient cause to create great umbrage in this young man who pled his case vehemently to no avail. Thoughts such as, “What kind of teacher would stymie a kid’s education, even if the kid used a word incorrectly; the kid’s showing initiative, for crying out loud; a teacher is supposed to laud and spur students to seek knowledge, not shut it down,” occupied Mac’s mind at times the ensuing days. Sitting next to Mac in the English room’s back row of desks was Julie LeBlanc whose essay’s pristine A grade granted her license to once again relentlessly tease Mac; for Julie’s thoughts, spelling, vocabulary, and all other English class assets far outpaced his. Having had quite enough of her jingo related jokes, Mac decided to retaliate by placing an almost undetectable-blending evilly into Julie’s desk seat-camouflaged fart bag. Hearing a gargantuan fart all eyes turned immediately to Julie whose beat red face, belonging to such a dainty young woman of utmost respect and demeanor, screamed, with no words necessary, “Yes I am responsible for that hideous monstrosity of a fart.” Having

discovered Mac's diabolical fart bag too late, the entire class, Mrs. Hott included, laughing amok, Julie could only feebly throw the spent gas bag at him; and Mac, finding a moment to stop his uproarious laughter, spontaneously and coolly muttered to Julie, "Jinga Lebonx baby, Jinga Lebonx." Whence the Jinga LeBonx Kid. This alter ego Mac could never quite shed, he was only able to cultivate it over the year by increasing its repertoire with such annoying and quirky utterances as, 'arturo-agada-idi-amin-dahdee', and 'wowie-chuhwowie-mugowie' all long buried, but it was the Jinga Lebonx Kid's 'eeduhlee-beeduhlee toots' that stuck for life. Yes, in the eyes of Jeanette, this Mac character must have been an exceptionally super-sensitive, caring, nice guy.

Jeanette, playfully laughing, reminded Mac, "You're such a dick Mac."

"I know. Hey, maybe the next purple weekend I can give you a jingle and you can come over and...."

"Movie's starting."

Chapter 14

"Does your business's website get a lot of traffic?" Mac asked.

"Most of my new jobs are drummed up by my website. Why?" Jeanette replied.

Jeanette's truck was a block away from Mac's complex when the question of social media popped into his mind.

"Getting this crusade on line would be a good idea. Frank and somebody at alcohol sessions mentioned it."

"There's a few websites offering the user the opportunity to build their own site or have it built for them. Tell you what, since I'm enslaving you once again, I'll have more time on my

hands. I'll get a hold of Karla and we'll get together sometime soon. You can have a website up and running in no time these days."

"Enslaving me? My rave reviews merit enslavement? I was expecting a huge pay raise and a piece of your pie."

"Mac, did you really use Q-tips to reach tough places when cleaning the offices you cleaned. Tina asked me because one of her employees asked her one Monday morning why all these Q-tips were in her waste basket. You're the only other person where they could have come from and the cotton ends were covered with dirt, so we figured you must have been using them to clean with; and Lisa-she's Tina's employee-did notice how clean all the crevices were in the office."

"You mean you never have? Jeanette, I'm shocked. Yeah, that was me; must have forgotten to dump them before I left. At least I showed up to clean the joint. They're perfect for those tough-to-get-at places, like right here around your console and such. You know I'm a very neat person."

"Yes, I do. But Q-tips? You're out of control. I love it. I have my crew use them at a couple of other places now. Dude, that was an excellent idea, pulling in some extra revenue with it. How did you go from ear use to crevice cleaner?"

"Mommy dearest, I'm sure. My God, that woman made us do a thorough job cleaning our bedrooms. You'll have to dream up some marketing gimmick; might give you a short term competitive advantage."

"Already have. 'Jeanette's Cleaners-With a Q-tip Touch'"

"Not bad, catchy, I like it. Inquiring minds must be calling to ask what the hell your 'Q-tip Touch' is all about."

“They have. I think I’m fine as far as using their registered trademark name since I am using their product, but we’ll see; haven’t taken the time to research it yet. Okay buddy, jump out, I’m running late. I’ll call Karla later today and then get a hold of you, all right? Whoa, hey, almost forgot. Here’s the key to CBM. You start this weekend, okay?”

“Sounds good, take care.”

“You too, bye now.”

Nine that night Mac answered his phone, “Hello.”

“Hey Mac.”

“Jeanette! How nice to hear your ring, I’ve missed it.”

“Me too. Listen, I can’t talk long, wanted to let you know that Karla is away on business at the moment. Did you ever think of maybe just getting a Facebook page up to get your word out? It’s probably the quickest way I can think of. People do that kind of stuff all the time.”

“Do they?”

“Yes! I got my page up and running in a few hours, that’s with tons of distractions. I’m telling you it will be your best approach, best of all you won’t have to pay the monthly webhosting fee. At least get signed up with Facebook tonight and check it out; you’ll see how easy it is, and I’m sure tomorrow you’ll be coming up with some great ideas. Now put your anti-mega-billionaire crap aside. You know, you’ve called that Facebook founder Mark Superdick one time too many; I can’t remember his true last name any more.”

“It’s Mark Zuckerberg. Damn Jeanette, like I’ve told you, paying those Winklemoose dudes off with some sixty five million dollars to shut them up and be happy, and now with billions able to have those riding his coattails spruce up his intellectual property theft image, all

for giving to the people a modern rendition of an ancient idea. What about that rockin' robin place.”

“What rockin' robin place?”

“You remember that oldie, “Rockin' Robin,” Mac attempted to imitate Bobby Day's tweet-tweet chorus. “The site people log onto to opine, to tweet I believe it's called, you remember now, I call it rockin' robin.”

“Oh yes, poor Macky-wacky doesn't like the site's logo. Thinks the dove is too pansy-assed for him; thinks there should be a bad ass blue jay and a cardinal. Aw, poor little Macky-wacky. The world has spoken its overwhelming approval for Facebook and Twitter Mac, it's you against almost everyone.”

“I know, but you would actually argue against the aesthetic improvements offered by two beautiful birds?”

“Just quit being a humbug dickhead for a few hours, get on Facebook; and don't forget to leave an apologetic note to Mr. Zuckerberg. If what you're doing starts a frenzy, then I believe Twitter will come in handy. Do anything exciting today?”

“Not really, just got bummed out not seeing any sexy window washer as I was leaving the rec center. That's all.”

“Maybe next time; now get your butt on Facebook. Gotta get going, bye.”

“We'll do, bye.”

Mac logged on to Facebook, entered all the requisites, explored the possibilities, and realized he needed to think of some crusade title. Thinking that something along the line of the seat belt campaign's *Click It or Ticket* jingle would be effective, it proved difficult thinking of a

rhyiming scheme. The best he conjured up was *Lose It or Hoof It*. He decided to stick with this unless something catchier was proposed. The phone rang.

“Hello.”

“Hello, is this Mac?”

“Yes it is.”

“Mac, this is Frank Dodge.”

“Well hi Frank, how are you?”

“Fine, thank you. I got lucky; you’re the only Kevin McGarrett listed in the phone book.”

“I know, cool isn’t it? I’m like Steve Martin’s character in his movie “The Jerk”. Every time I get a new phone book I can’t wait to see if I’m still the only one listed, have myself a little victory dance celebrating another ten minutes of fame, and all that. What are you up to tonight Frank?”

“Good news Mac. I’ve already spoken with Dr. Singh who expressed her eager willingness to help. She loves the idea. Dr. Singh thinks that she and her colleagues have all but exhausted all plausible and feasible approaches combating the weight issue. She agrees that imposing the possibility to lose one’s privilege to drive if their BMI exceeds a prescribed limit may just be what the doctor ordered. Dr. Singh has even offered to write a paragraph or two to be contained in the petition with the imprimatur of the American Pediatric Association. This, of course, will take a little more time, but she assures me that her colleagues’ signatures will be ready and the disgust the American Pediatric Association has for obesity epidemic’s escalation certifies an easy approval.”

“Frank, that’s awesome. Dr. Singh is more than welcome to compose the entire petition if she wishes to.”

“I proposed the same. Dr. Singh countered that this being a joint medical and communal effort would best propagate the message that sterner efforts must be implemented to curtail obesity. I agree with her. She is also grateful and enthused that Marge and I will allow to be published the short story Luke composed; that is, using only Luke’s first name, so I tell you this in the strictest of confidence.”

“Absolutely, and yes indeed, I agree as well. Frank, I am right now on Facebook starting a page for this campaign and thought the title *Lose It or Hoof It* sounded good. What do you think?”

“Works for me; never was much of a wordsmith. I think it may definitely grab a viewer’s attention.”

“This is great news Frank. I was hoping to get a quick response from the medical field; it just may get the snowball effect in gear. I will forward you the petition I have written so you can read it and forward it to Dr. Singh. And please, by all means, have it redacted in any beneficial manner. I will not be offended the least bit.”

“Mac, I’m not done telling you the good news. Dr. Singh is very, very enthused about this idea. She is a doctor possessing the highest esteem and is very well connected. What I am telling you is if you thought you were going to have to immerse yourself into the how the workings of legislative processes operate, you need not worry. Unknown to me she is very much involved with state politics, especially since the medical marijuana debates, and has several able connections having the requisite experience to forge and have this introduced into the state legislature.”

“Shazam! So much for keeping this contained; sorry Lakewood, the big time is calling.”

“Whoa, slow down, now the bad news. Something big like this will take time to coordinate efforts, that is, to get persuade enough congressmen to get on board. But Dr. Singh did mention there is a possibility to have an obesity bill introduced sometime next year.”

“I’m not surprised to hear that Frank, I expected it. I don’t know if I mentioned this to you previously, but I think it would much less controversial granting all those who would be immediately affected by the law ample time to comply; not only that, but giving them ample room to comply with the law.”

“What do you mean by giving them ample room to comply?”

“With respect to an individual’s BMI, for example, if my BMI should be at X, the law allows X plus a little more. I want the people to burn me only in effigy, and not at the stake.”

“Very good, I assume all this is contained in the petition?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. Mac I want to reiterate, I am not exaggerating the exuberance displayed by Dr. Singh. This women was hyped, gung-ho, ready to declare war on obesity; she lives with it every day, sees the social and emotional fabrics obesity is tearing to shreds. She agrees that a tougher stance must be taken by society to change lifestyles for the better. She mentioned that there couldn’t be a better state in the Union than Colorado to send such type of message.”

“Hey, I was thinking just the same the other day when I was swimming laps.”

“Fantastic. Mac, I will let go now. Jot down my personal email address and send it tonight if possible.”

Mac jotted down the info, “Absolutely, thanks for calling, and take care Frank.”

“Bye Mac, I’ll keep in touch.”

Jeanette was right. By midnight Mac had his Facebook page completed but decided not to post the petition just yet; best to have Dr. Singh amend its content, hopefully with a medical association's backing. He decided to post a rudimentary shell covering broad ideas regarding obesity, citing the McKinsey Global Institute reporting the annual two trillion dollar costs related to obesity, urging anyone viewing his page to click on the report's link and scan it, and threw out the question asking if it was time that society take a tougher stance against the weight problem. Nothing was specified concerning the idea of people renewing their driver's licenses having to meet a certain BMI.

Surprisingly to Mac, replies were seen posted when viewing his page the next morning. Several replies had been posted. There must have been a couple of hundred. He was well aware that Facebook counted hundreds of millions of users and eliminated the thought that maybe him being fresh fish caused responses. He went with the notion that a hot topic was chosen and word spread quickly; real quick, it had been only a few hours.

The vast majority of responses favored a harsher stance and lent credence to Mac's belief that society in general was tiring of overweight people getting a free ride, that is was time chronic overeaters help pay for the costs directly attributed to them. His desire to post further aspects of the grand campaign was tempered with Frank's subtle admonition that something like this demands patience. Opposing eyes may be exposed early enough enabling a fiercer, more formidable defense strategy. But those in opposition-such deep pocketed opposition-most certainly had already faced an onslaught against them and are presently well prepared to unleash a worthy counter offense.

Egads! The Bloomberg mayoral attempt to limit soft-drink consumption was such a terrifying impingement upon the soft-drink industry that the issue had to be ultimately resolved

by New York's highest court. But Mac was confident that Dr. Singh and her allies will be more than knowledgeable about this case and others and be certain that the plan will be pushed through the state's legislature, endowed to enact laws via proposals heavily favored by the state's people. Time will not be squandered by any administrative body's risible promulgation.

The major concern to be faced would be an individual's freedom. The freedom to eat food, a very important aspect to one's existence,-the freedom to eat the food a person wanted to in any amount-being attacked, and that freedom being linked to driving a car will indisputably be the greatest outcry. A driver's license renewal being contingent upon that driver's BMI, the driver's weight? Government daring to be so intrusive? The "Heil Hitler!"s, and "Stay out of Colorado, if the hint of a double chin is espied by a cop, you'll lose your driver's license" were already resonating.

"Relax," Mac told himself. But the time was now; some town, some city, some state must take the initiative to effectively combat the weight problem. It has now been present for decades and proved it will not go anywhere without stiffer action. With this in mind Mac took that initiative and further posted the proposal's gist.

The first response boded very well. It was a short response, heard by so many times before, saying that she had tried everything to lose and keep the weight off but failed; maybe knowing that she would temporarily lose her driver's license if the weight was not kept off, she favored the idea as being the impetus long sought. That day other similar responses trickled in but equally matched with acerbic and scathing responses as well. It being a trial run, the mixed bag of responses was expected and did not hamper Mac's attitude.

Chapter 15

One month later, with making no changes to the posting, the vast majority did favor such a law. Mac had previously told Frank that he posted a general idea and Frank updated Mac telling him Dr. Singh was working frantically and to sit tight until the two would meet with Dr. Singh in two weeks.

Dr. Singh, who had no objection to a preview posting, at this meeting, updated them regarding the amazing progress she had made. Dr. Singh optimally wielded the vast network she had firmly established dispersing the campaign most effectively and efficiently. In this one and a half month, a formal initiative petition for a state statute had been finalized and filed with the Secretary of State's office. There still remained the long legislative due process between filing, revision, rehearing, titling, and possible appeals and submitting the signed petitions. Roughly 100,000 signatures would be required. Mac, having informed Dr. Singh that his page had received thousands of positive responses, was sure the needed number of signatures would be gathered in the allotted six months.

With a bastion of exasperated pediatricians, obstetricians, ophthalmologists, cardiologists, et al, all caring for the ravages of diabetes alone, the idea metastasized in Colorado's medical community and the backing of several highly esteemed medical associations had been earned. It was only mid-January; this extremely powerful coalition, headed by Dr. Singh with a squadron of petition circulators, could get this on the November, 2015 ballot.

Amassing the two hundred petition circulators and having each sign their respective affidavit was completed by the end of January giving them more than enough time before the early August deadline. Those involved assuming Colorado would be the optimal state for such an endeavor to date had not been disappointed.

Mac left his place every day at ten in the morning to start knocking on doors and to further spread the news. The first month was strictly spent in the Green Mountain area. Green Mountain and its surroundings are on the western bounds of Lakewood, equidistant from the northern and southern bounds of Lakewood. As the name implies, it is quite hilly, all the hills very long, a couple of them San Francisco grade. These hills made for a tiring day especially when many people were not home or not receptive to the petition. The usual four hours of canvassing in that area garnered him a few signatures. Some quick math told him that five hundred was the average number of signatures per circulator needed to get the initiative on the ballot. This being his brainchild prompted him to get at least one thousand.

The second day canvassing outside the Green Mountain neighborhood Mac had a welcome surprise seeing Joe the counselor from Arapaho House detox center opening the door. “Mac?” asked Joe.

“Joe! How are you?”

“Clean and sober, thank you very much. How about yourself?”

“With some Antabuse assistance, same as you now, for well over a year now.”

“That’s awesome Mac, glad to hear it. I can’t imagine you were just in the neighborhood and stopped by to say hi. I don’t remember if I ever mentioned my last name to you.”

Mac enjoyed a little chuckle, “No, I’m out and about getting signatures for this petition.” Mac held up his clipboard to show Joe. “I don’t suppose you’ve maybe heard about the proposed initiative *Lose It or Hoof It?*”

“The attack on fat people and not letting them drive, are you kidding? It’s all over the place.”

And Joe was right, constructive notice was present in the Denver Post and Westword, television ads, and all the local national television affiliates already had several news stories and commentaries concerning the issue, not to mention the medical community's roadside billboard advertisements strategically placed statewide.

"Yeah, I guess it is pretty hard to miss by now," Mac answered.

"What, are you into politics, don't like fat people, or extremely bored?"

"Well, believe it or not, the whole thing was my idea."

Joe's facial expression was one of doubt and confusion, jaw dropping, you might say.

"Get the hell out of here! You're kidding me!"

"No, I'm not. Seriously, it was my idea."

"How the hell did you go from almost setting a record stay over at Arapaho House to declaring war on fat people?"

"It's a long story Joe."

"This is your lucky day Mac, my wife is out of town for a couple of days. If you can spare the time, come on in for a cup of Joe's joe. "

"Why not, I could use a little break."

Joe let Mac in, who put his coat on a nearby chair, and the two made their way back to the kitchen. Joe was preparing a fresh pot of coffee and said, "I love my wife dearly Mac, but I must admit she is a tad bit on the chunky side. If she would have come to the door, she more than likely would have chased you off! You would have hard time defending yourself; I'm telling ya, when that lady gets pissed, look out. She's up in arms, can't believe any government would even consider such an obtrusive law. Here, have a look."

Joe snuck out of the kitchen and returned quickly handing Mac a picture.

“Meet Theresa. When she gets pissed, she’s Helga.”

Mac sat there with head down. Even though much prettier bulldogs have and will be seen, he still knew he had to say something, anything remotely nice and settled on, “Very nice Joe.”

“Can the crap with me Mac. I know she isn’t the prettiest thing, but that lady saved my life from the bottle years ago. I was damn near destitute and that angel saved me. That’s a whole different story though. Now, how the hell did you come up with this idea?”

“Before I get into that story, remind your wife, Theresa, that this will be up to the people of Colorado, the majority of citizens, telling the Colorado legislature they think it is the right thing to do; what they want, just like the pot issue. I’m sure there are tons of Coloradans saying they can’t believe the government lets adults smoke dope legally. It’s what the majority wanted.”

“Oh, trust me Mac. She’s well aware of all that stuff, even enjoys twisting up a big doobie now and then without worrying about it. Adept with the basics on how the state government operates, too.”

Mac, enjoying a little laughter, asked “You don’t get high do you Joe?”

“No, as much as everyone touted it, I never really enjoyed it. Theresa is mostly worried about having her freedom to eat what she wants restricted.”

“Let me go ahead and tell you my story, as quick as possible.”

Mac continued and told how he was making his way home from the breathalyzer test and the chance encounter with Frank, and Frank’s story, and how it quickly morphed into what it became.

“So you’re telling me that you want to level the playing field by making overweight people take some heat; just because you got obliterated, got behind the wheel, rear ended someone, fled the scene, and now most likely having a tough time finding the work you once had, overweight people should face the same music.”

“Joe, it isn’t just me. When I leave check out the Facebook page I started. Are you on Facebook?”

“No, but my wife is.”

“You’ll see; there are so many postings telling how having one or two, and even more, misdemeanors have caused these people so many problems in life. There’s one short story that comes to mind of an individual who pled guilty to a misdemeanor assault charge fifteen years ago. This person was in the process of moving out of his apartment and was to begin a new job within days. Late that night this person was all packed and ready to move his neighbor lady called the police because this guy’s tv was, according to her, too loud. The next thing he knows he’s arrested; in order to get out of jail, make it to his present place of work, and avoid problems that probably would arise at his future place of employment, he pleads guilty to a misdemeanor assault, hoping to avoid possible future problems. This person, whose jobs had always been exacting in nature, was held to higher standards by employers. His new employer discovered this unfortunate happening, understood his side of the story, yet had to stand fast according to the company’s zero policy and denied him employment.”

“Yeah, so what’s your point?”

“My point is this: Here’s this guy, who may have done nothing, and is branded for life convicted of misdemeanor assault; in today’s day and age? Please, have fun seeking a highly compensated position. That’s on one side of the spectrum. On the other side we have a huge

swath of society directly responsible for so many economical, emotional, and other societal damages that is not being held responsible for their actions. These individuals, the vast majority of times, commit this action with clear and sober minds.”

“What action?”

“Overeating; no reasonable person will ever believe that none of the chronic overeaters have never heard or seen reports detailing the societal damages their action is causing. Yet, it continues. Reports and literature have been present now for years and years. I’m sitting there one day and thinking that the big picture is pretty skewed. Too much time has elapsed precluding any plausible excuse for no action with teeth to it being taken. The amount of time that has passed only strengthens the argument that society is saying if the problems you are responsible for causing are so diffuse, hey, it’s okay, we understand, there’s no legal action we can take. Joe, like I’ve said to so many other people, I think it’s bullshit that one segment of society must pay for their harmful acts and another segment does not.”

“Yeah, I guess you have a point there; but for eating food? Don’t you think your pushing it?”

“Not just eating food, eating way too much food; and no, I don’t think I’m pushing the issue too far. Educate yourself; whether you continue to eat too much for years, or drink too much booze at on sitting, the odds of both personal and societal problems arising increase dramatically. And hey, you’ll find nothing of what I just preached in this bill.”

“Why’s that.”

“Dr. Singh has made this a medical community crusade, coupled with a very sad, poignant short story written by an anonymous boy; and that’s fine with me. Any hints of a diatribe I just spluttered would at least create a firestorm and most likely kill the initiative.”

“You actually think something like this has a chance of passing?”

“Here in Colorado, yes. The state is boasting quite often of its healthy fitness condition; and Joe, you’ll see that it is written to be quite lenient.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“If it does pass and is enacted it will not take effect until January 1, 2018. Right there, boom, two years is given for all people to attain their required weight to renew their licenses. And beyond that, the doctors have adjusted the BMI’s so that in the event of passage roughly one percent of drivers will be affected.”

“If you would have said BAC, no problem; what the hell’s BMI?”

“Body mass index; it’s a ratio of height to weight. If the BMI’s they use in their practices were used, way too many people would lose their licenses. Take you for example, you’re what, about five feet nine, but very stocky. Their adjustments take this into account. You won’t have anything to worry about.”

“How do they know all this?”

“With tons of accumulated data and statisticians.”

“So it seems to me, from what you just told me, that I can infer the medical community is firing a warning shot at the public; they’re not storming in and seizing any fundamental rights.”

“Exactly; Joe, even though Colorado does rank annually high in the country’s list of leanest states, the latest figures show that over half of adult Coloradans are still overweight. If the standard BMI’s were incorporated you and I would be affected. They’re tired of seeing it get worse and have concluded something harsher must be done. They’re not telling anyone what to eat, just to eat in moderation, more sensibly. At a minimum the medical community wants the

public to become even more aware of the weight problem, to get people talking about it, to put some pressure on society as they did with tobacco; and it works.”

“If you want to driver in Colorado, shelf those Twinkies, cupcakes, and/or Ho-hos for a leaner day.”

“Hey, that’s good! I’ll have to borrow it. So what do you say Joe? Can I get your signature?”

“Damn Mac, I don’t know. Theresa is bound to see my name as a petition signatory, there will be hell to catch, but I have been giving her subtle hints to lose a little weight. It’s less a weight issue to her than big government intruding even farther.”

“Remind her, this is not a governor’s executive order, but the will of the people through legislative action.”

“I will. Give me that damn pen. You know, it does stink having to lug extra, nasty luggage for life. Mac, I admit that I’m rough on the edges, and obviously drank way too much, and I also admit that I don’t need to be drinking anymore and don’t intend to start. But never did I permanently harm or kill anyone. I broke the law by drinking too much and then driving, and as a societal deterrent this fact remains overt and will dog me to the day I die; of course, my last admission being I was a three-peater.”

“Joe I hear exactly what you’re saying. Again, as I have told so many others, I more than deserve my punishment but don’t think I need to pay for it the rest of my life; and I am especially talking for people with one DUI enduring similar, though shorter lived, opprobrium.”

“Okay Mac, here’s my John Hancock. You working these days?”

“My girl Jeanette owns a cleaning business. She has me cleaning a few offices she has contracts with.”

“That’s good. Are you still seeking the work you’re trained for, what was it again?”

“The past fifteen of twenty years I spent in corporate accounting. You know, I about blew my top a few months ago. That was the last time I went into an accounting recruiting office. I initially talked with a very pleasant sounding female recruiter employed there, set up an interview time with her, get all gussied up the morning of the interview, head downtown, walk into their office, and I am met by, I imagine, the office manager, who immediately asks me loudly, “You do know that this office is strictly for professionals.” I’m a little bit confused and answer with, “Uh, yeah, that’s why I’m here.” This guy keeps pushing the professional crap at me, and I’m thinking two things. Number one, he’s already heard from his slimy colleagues that I’m less than zero because I allowed one sleazy accounting recruitment office to conduct a background search on me who spread the flaming news; and number two, what the hell is this dude doing here, his snappy dress code replete with hair goop begging for him to be among the corporate sycophant, toadies licking some boss’s ass. If this prick was sporting some cutsy-wutsy suspenders he’d belong on Wall Street doing what I just said. He was the final straw, I decided forever to stay away from these people of utmost ethical values.”

Joe enjoyed a good laugh, “You really don’t strike me as the office type. Maybe it’s time to do something else.”

“It is; the day I want to hear, let alone give a shit, about anything said at any water cooler ain’t gonna happen. And those special mornings of contrived, “Good mornings” responded with the obvious undertones of, “Ah, go fuck yourself,” they will be missed. I do much more prefer solitary work, physical in nature, and if all pans out I’m hoping Jeanette will be receptive to becoming a partner with me.”

“So your girl started her business ground up?”

“Yes. Her grandmother bequeathed ten thousand dollars to her twenty, twenty five years ago, or so, and when the ear of the personal investor dawned she opened up her own brokerage account. She did her homework, kept those emotions restrained, and bagged herself plenty of seed money to start her business.”

“Awesome. I wish I could restrain my damn emotions when trading, but the last few years with Congress holding the country hostage to debt crises, anybody could make emotionally charged, stupid trades.”

“You definitely show a good sense of business Joe. Do you have a business degree?”

“Hell no! Me go to college, I don’t think so. I sat at the computer after discovering Investopedia for hours and hours; still do, teaching myself basics and then some. I employ Investopedia and several other excellent internet sources of knowledge.”

“Damn, wish we had the internet at our disposal thirty years ago. Listen Joe, thank you very much for the hospitality, I really got to get going, and thank you for the signature, and don’t forget to vote and sweet talk Theresa.”

“Mac, we’ll do; glad to see you’re doing something with your idle time, you found an answer. Let me walk you out the door.”

Chapter 16

Mid-summer arrived with its usual spectacular Colorado weather. The 97,434 required votes was only fifty shy in mid-July. Three weeks remained to have petitions signed and submitted to the Secretary of State’s Office. Jeanette, having taken a few rare days off, and registering herself to become an official circulator, agreed to canvass with Mac one day. When she arrived that morning at his place Mac was sitting at the computer checking out the Facebook page.

“Hey, check this one out.”

He was referring to one of today’s petition responses. Jeanette read aloud, “You fucking food fascist scum! I’ll bar-b-q yer ass and feed it to my dog! You homo! Now quit botherin me! I was just headin out the door for a Double Whopper with cheese and to stock up on my Tootsie Rolls, you anti-Moon Pie fuck!” They both busted out laughing. “Maybe we’ll knock at this person’s door today Mac.”

“Let’s hope so. If it’s a guy I think he’ll much more prefer your rear end.”

“Nobody messes with this food fascist, now let’s go. When I was registering, I found out that Colorado has yet to allow electronic petition signatures. I figured you all were trying to make a strong point hoofing it.”

“I’m sure the state will allow this sometime in the near future when better authenticating can be done, or whatever magic they have in stored for us.”

Off the two went south on Alameda Parkway onto Bear Creek Boulevard and left onto West Yale Avenue, a very nice area intimating nothing suggesting hatred of food fascists.

“Did you by chance leave a warm and gracious message on our Facebook page recently?” asked Mac.

“What the hell are talking about boy?”

“Oh, just something referring to a strange type of barbecue and stocking up on junk food.”

“Do I look like I eat junk, you punk!” screamed the rather large, white haired, bespectacled, aging man with cane in hand, displaying two, maybe three, hard earned chins.

“Sir, with all due respect, we didn’t mean to offend you in any way. We, being legally registered and exercising our rights, just wanted you to take a quick look at what is being proposed,” Jeanette did her best to calm the moment.

“I already know what you’re proposing. You’re proposing more government, bigger government; more intrusive, bigger government telling me what I can and can’t do. Do I look like some blue Democrat progressive son of a bitch pig! Now get the hell off my property before I call the police!”

“Go eat some pasta, fatso!” certain that he borrowed a line from Dirty Harry Callahan, Mac couldn’t help himself.

“Mac!” cried Jeanette.

“What the hell did you just say, you little sumbitch turd!”

“I believe I just told you politely to shove it up your ass, old man. You drew first blood.”

“You little fucker punk! You and sugar breeches here come pounding on my front door, spreading your garbage, and your punk ass has got the balls to tell me I drew first blood? You little punk! If I was just ten years younger I’d step outside and kick your pussy ass!”

“You mean barbecue it, don’t you old man!”

“You jerks are always trying to change this thing or make that thing better when nothin needs fixin or changin. Why don’t you find somethin constructive to do; and why the hell do you keep bringin up barbecues for, boy? You gotta be some kind of weirdo or somethin, bringing up barbecues out of the blue. You’re one fine lookin woman, what the hell you wanna be seen with jerk off here for?”

“Mac, I swear if you say one more word, I’ll kick your ass! Please, don’t say anything, let’s quietly leave.”

“You best listen to that fine piece a meat, boy.”

“Who the hell do you think you’re calling meat, you wanna be washed up Colonel Sanders, shriveled dick, bigoted mother fuckin pig!” This was the side of Jeanette that really got Mac excited. “Why don’t you and the rest of you pussy red necks buy an island and live peacefully without change forever. I’ll tell you why, you racist rat, you all know that by sundown the first day together, there’ll be only one of you remaining, because all the others have been murdered by the last remaining red neck fuckin pussy!”

Mac thought it best to take control of the situation, grabbed Jeanette by her left upper arm and began tugging increasingly harder, “C’mon Jeanette, we better get out of here.”

“Let go of my arm Mac!”

“Okay, Okay, c’mon, I think you won it for us Jeanette, let’s go. See, he’s speechless, let’s make a run for it.” Mac whispered into her left ear, “I think there’s a good chance you got this old geezer sexually aroused, take a look at him down below, for cryin out loud.”

“Oh Christ, Mac, let’s get the hell out of here. Sorry for any inconveniences sir, you have a wonderful day.”

“Thank you sir, and please keep us in mind on election-day!”

They decided to call it a day and headed over to Frontroom Pizza for a bite to eat.

“Sorry about the penis diversion, I had to get your attention.”

“That’s okay Mac, I’m glad you did. Can you believe that guy, what a jerk!”

“Jeanette, I’m surprised that it has been this long that I came across somebody like that. It’s been, what, four or five months now. The message you read this morning wasn’t the first of its type, there’s been several, that one was pretty funny, but old geezer, he was a first. I’m actually glad you happened to be along with me.”

“I can’t believe he called me a piece of meat. He should have known better.”

“I, and others who know you, know better, he does now. Keep in mind he did call you a “fine” piece of meat not just “a” piece of meat.”

“Comforting.”

“Hey, check out how many signatures have been collected.”

“When are you going to get a smart phone, caveman?”

“I’m working on it.”

“97,425, how many are needed?”

“97,434, with the four we collected today that’s only seven shy. Here, let me see that gadget so I can enter ours.”

“I want to do it!”

“Please, by all means. Go to number of signatures collected.”

“Okay, I won’t be surprised a bit if the number is reached by the end of today.”

“Either would I.”

“I’m proud of you Mac. You certainly have changed your life around for the better. Not only with this project, but with the cleaning jobs I’ve given you. You’re still getting sparkling reviews, especially the bathroom compliments. You’ve earned my trust again. I know I can depend on you. Do you think you can continue like this once you’re off the Antabuse?”

“I got you to keep me in line, don’t I?”

“Yes, but I do still enjoy an occasional drink. Do you think you can handle that?”

“Yes, I do. Remember, the Antabuse doesn’t make me stop thinking about booze, its nasty effect doesn’t kick in until I drink booze. And if it’s not you I see enjoying an occasional drink or two, it will be somebody else; not to mention the liquor stores we’re surrounded by.

Hell, there's a store right over there a hundred yards from us and the three others we'll pass on our long half a mile drive back to my place."

"Yeah, I know, I see your point. How much longer until you're off the Antabuse?"

"Two more months, I'll be finished with the group sessions then as well. That, I am very much looking forward to."

"You don't think they're worth it?"

"It's not that, well, I'll never care for the group catharsis stuff, it's that all the counselors there are pretty hefty women, real hefty. One counselor actually has these disgusting rolls of fat around her calves and ankles. I know it's a sensitive issue, but damn Jeanette, it took some major couch potato time to get those things. A newcomer to the group tells me they're known as kankles."

"Kankles?"

"That's what she said, kankles. They kind of look like kankles if you think about it. Needless to say, this initiative is a sore subject and taboo during sessions. Just four more sessions and that's it."

"You know that I've always agreed with you."

"About what?"

"The major amount of couch potato time needed to pack on a lot of pounds; that essentially, at the core of the matter, there is no difference between the problems of overeaters and over-drinkers, and that is, once they start they have a hard time stopping. Enough of that, what I wanted to tell you is once you are off the Antabuse for a couple of months, right around the time your project comes to fruition, I think it would be time to make you a business partner."

"Jeanette, that's awesome!"

“You’re too much of a psychotic cleaner to go head to head with, you and your Q-tip idea.”

“You take any flak over that yet?”

“Haven’t heard a word yet; so what do you say, do you think you can handle it big guy? I’m more than ready for you to take over the accounting and tax functions. That never was my gig. As you know I want more time to grow this business, I need you to take care of the monkey work.”

“It is monkey work, isn’t it? Hell Jeanette, I’m sure you’ve seen reports estimating the number of jobs that will be lost to technology the next twenty years or so, the jobs that are highly monotonous, like accounting. Accounting is overripe for the picking. It painted a picture depicted the demise of accounting clerks, staff accountants, senior accountants, and such.”

“Is that all you do is find doomsday material to read?”

“Why, no, I find time to go out and pick fights with a shriveled dick Colonel Sanders now and then. That was awesome Jeanette! Shriveled dick Colonel Sanders! I’ve heard you plenty of times roll out some spontaneous good ones, but that outburst was definitely a classic! I loved it!”

“It was quite masterful, wasn’t it.”

“Indeed, and yes, I can handle it. You have no idea how much I was hoping that you would bring this subject up. We are a kick ass cleaning duo; I’m telling you, when you keep those cracks and crevices clean, the word spreads. Sounds dorky as all hell, but I know that you know this is true.”

“Yes I do, for a fact. Listen, on our way home I need to stop at Safeway and pick up a dozen eggs and some toilet paper. What are you doing tonight?”

“Sounds like I might be hanging out with you and paying Colonel Sanders a visit.”

“November is going to be before we know it. I must say that I am getting damn excited for you Mac. Do you really think this will happen?”

“Latest polls indicate so. You always have to keep in mind we’re in one of the fittest states, no better place to start a national campaign, Jeanette”

“If we did it with weed, we can do it with fat! And don’t tell me I haven’t earned the right to talk in such a way; I’m an official circulator with one good fight under my belt already.”

“No arguments here. We going dutch?”

“Sounds good.”

Chapter 17

The big guns finally emerged. They needed to. They were spooked. With well over 100,000 bona fide, registered voter signatures, clearly the vast amount of Coloradans wanted to send a message that Colorado will be the first state to take responsibility for the national weight problem. To the big guns against *Lose It or Hoof It*, this was something that could swell and spill over the state’s bulwarks flooding the country with anti-junk food poison severely damaging too many top and bottom corporate lines.

Colorado was not alone being a threat to the junk food industry. Lawmakers in Puerto Rico had in February introduced a bill designed to combat their personal obesity problem. This was the Colorado catalyst, the impetus, necessary to transform quondam brush fires into a state conflagration. The state of Colorado to be outdone by some United States territory? The healthy and fit Coloradans would have none of this rubbish and in droves relentlessly inculcated enacting this initiative into law will immutably affirm Colorado being the first state to seriously combat obesity.

Some of the big guns were heard chanting this must be the work of some diabolical entity. Only a twisted, evil government could conjure up the crucible of legally smoking dope then having to ward off the munchies to keep the weight off so one could drive legally; all staunchly averring their product's nutritional value when eaten in moderation. The state was soon awash with such literature. Appeal after appeal was filed questioning and arguing the legality, the constitutionality, and all other –alities imaginable. Dr. Singh and her cadre, with the backing of the AMA, stood their ground. The barrage of filings was met head on and each torn to shreds being countered with oceans of undisputable facts and figures; the special committees and courts ultimately paving the decisive road placing the petition on the November 3, 2015 ballot. The people had spoken.

The election-day weather did not disappoint. The usual clear morning Colorado sunrise remained so throughout the metro area's day. Gabber everywhere indicated complete lack of knowledge concerning who was running for what office or anything else at stake. So many "Who?", "What!", and "I don't know what you're talking about guy, I'm here to vote on the *Lose It or Hoof It* issue," were heard made this obvious. The massive voting turnout emerged to finally settle the contentious issue of having to be within the bounds of a certain BMI in order to renew a driver's license.

And that they did. A landslide, overwhelming two thirds of the people, voted yes. Yes, we can get high, repel the munchies, stay thin, and drive. We are Coloradans; we must remain at the vanguard! The state's vast majority declared that Colorado will be the nation's leader to effectively combat the obesity problem; no more pussy footin around, harsher pressure must be placed on the overeaters! Even with such a foreboding and ominous title the *Lose It or Hoof It* campaign had triumphed.

And so it was, effective January 1, 2018 all those wishing to renew their Colorado driver's license must do so in person to have measured their weight and height to be used in calculating their BMI.

Later that night at the downtown Denver Sheraton a large celebration was held. Dr. Singh was beaming ear to ear a coruscating smile fortified with a few glasses of deserved bubbly as she spotted Mac across the room and approached him.

"Mac!" no professionalism required tonight, the diminutive doctor did her best to wrap her arms around Mac's neck. "I am so proud of you! What an idea! Why didn't I ever think of it? Not even you and your girlfriend's slight scuffle could have stopped this train. This must Jeanette Leroux."

"Yes, this is Jeanette. Jeanette, I'd like you to meet Dr. Singh. She is the one I told you who really got this project moving and moving big time."

"Well hello Dr. Singh, Mac has mentioned your name a few times. How are you?"

"I am doing fantastic, thank you. Please, call me Abha."

"Certainly; Abha, exactly what scuffle are you referring to?" Jeanette asked.

"The little war of words you two had with Mr. Jenkins. By coincidence his grandchildren are my patients, have been for several years. Mr. Jenkins's daughter told me of the incident. For his age his memory of names is sharp as a tack. Now you two do not have anything to worry about; Amanda, that's Mr. Jenkins's daughter, has set him straight. She knows he can be an old coot, fuddy-duddy, harsh talking cuss. Jeanette, if that old man called me a piece of meat, I would not have hesitated spraying that old fart with my pepper spray!"

Uproarious laughter led Jeanette to whisper in Mac's ear, "Thank God we didn't go egg that asshole's house that night."

“Mac, I insist taking you up to the front so I can introduce the brainchild.”

Not having any choice Mac was grabbed on his left arm and whisked to be introduced to the crowd by Dr. Singh. Following the ovation Mac delivered a short and gracious speech thanking especially Dr. Singh and the AMA. He knew it best not to mention Frank or Marge at all, for solemnly keeping their story private was paramount.

“Frank, how are you. This is Jeanette,” Mac introduced Jeanette to Frank and Marge moments later.

“I’m doing great. Hello Jeanette, nice to meet you. This is my wife Marge.”

“It’s very nice to meet you Mac, Frank has talked of you quite often. Jeanette, it’s nice to meet you.”

Frank, gently placing his hands on Mac’s shoulders, “Mac, you were right, there was some goodness to be found.”

