

The Mine

Author's Note: Thanks to NV Cowboy for the use of his story "The Mime" which has been included in this story.

Chapter 1

Kenneth Heinz IV was a 4th generation scion of the Heinz family fortune, a distant cousin of Teresa Heinz, the Billionairess wife of Senator Kerry. He was so distant that Teresa wouldn't return his calls. Matter of fact, most of the family had written him off as a reprobate playboy who never grew up. If it weren't for his trust fund, he probably would be destitute and living as a homeless bum in Beverly Hills. One of his pet ideas was researching old mining claims. The one thing he had ever done right in his life was to hook up with an excellent geologist who used to work for a big mining company until he got tired of the Third World. When Ken wasn't getting blitzed in the local bar, he was poring through old mining claims at the State Archives. He had already located a few promising finds, but they were too small for his tastes. He had this grandiose plan to re-open a major silver mine and prove all those naysayers wrong, as he brought in the first million dollars worth of silver. He had a theory that some old mining claims were abandoned because 1800's technology wouldn't allow profitable extraction of the silver. With 21st century technology, the impossible was now the merely difficult. He had several other ideas, but they had to wait until he located a mine.

Steve Gibbons was out checking on another of Ken's WAGs. He didn't mind, they had located enough smaller claims to keep him in beer and food, as well as paying Steve's child support. He looked much like the other Desert Rats wandering the Northern Nevada desert, driving a Toyota Land Cruiser with a full off-road kit, mining tools, a tent, and enough food and water to last several weeks because you never knew where or when you'd find water in the Nevada desert, or if it would be drinkable. He carried a test kit to test for heavy metals and other dangerous contaminants, and a Katadyn Voyager filter to get all the bugs out of the water he could drink. He went armed 24/7 with a Para-Ord P-14 Limited strapped to his waist, a lever action 30-30 cowboy rifle, and a .308 M-1a National Match with 10 magazines loaded with JHPBT hunting ammo that was well hidden in a secret compartment of the Land Cruiser. He didn't have a hunting license on him, but it wasn't 4-legged critters that the rifle was for! He had a lot of valuable stuff in his rig, and knew of several miners who had been robbed and either killed outright or left for dead.

He had pulled some soil samples from Ken's latest find, and from what he saw, this one looked promising enough to venture inside the mine and check out its condition. He wasn't too worried about cave-ins because it was so dry in Nevada that it took centuries for the thick beams to rot. He always carried 3 lights with him, a fanny pack with food, water, and a awesome first aid kit. He also carried a respirator and a air monitor that constantly checked the oxygen level,

and for any explosive gasses. He used a safety line to the surface to find his way out – he got the idea from spelunkers who explored caves, who could get turned around in the darkness. It carried thousands of feet of fluorescent 10/50 Spyderwire on a self-deploying spool. Before entering, he tied the end to the bumper of his Land Cruiser, and double-checked his gear. As he entered the mine, he always said a quick prayer, even though he wasn't really religious. So far it had worked for 25 years of exploring mines. He could count on one hand the number of geologists who were still in the business after 25 years. As he walked in, he lit the bright Xenon bulb on his headlamp that was connected to a 6vdc 12Ah gel cell on his belt kit. This lamp had enough battery power to last over a week between charges, if the batteries drained too far to power the big bulb he still had a white LED array that would stay lit until the battery was totally dead. He also had a Surefire Aviator in his kit with 2 spare batteries. As he walked into the mine, he mapped the passages with a grease pencil on several sheets of acetate just in case things got damp. He inspected the beams holding the ceiling up, and they were in remarkable shape, with no signs of rot or deterioration. It was cold and dark in the mine, but he was used to the risks. Occasionally, he'd come across a colony of bats. Bats were the only thing that bothered him – he felt it was because of all the Vampire movies he watched growing up. The deeper he got into the mine, the more promising it looked. It was full of silver-bearing ore. He took samples at regular intervals, storing them in small jars that were pre-labeled with numbers. He simply wrote the number on his map to indicate where he took the sample. He had 50 sample containers on him. When he filled all of them, he would be finished. This mine was in good shape, so it shouldn't take too long to explore it. As he got even deeper into the mine he thought he was at least 100 feet down when he found it. He took out his handpick to take a sample, and his first effort almost bounced off the rock! Steve knew that Silver was almost always found in the presence of quartz, and by the looks of the mine walls, this area was the edge of a huge vein of microscopic silver, but the concentration of silver was so great that the dirt looked like it was made of pewter. He took another swing with his pick, and this time it bit. Quickly he opened a sample jar, and positioning it directly under his pick, worked the pick loose, dropping the sample in the jar. Steve quickly sealed the jar, marked its position on the map, then as excited as he had been in years, quickly made his way to the surface.

When he got to the surface, he hid his samples in another secret compartment, quickly broke camp, started the Land Cruiser, and headed home.

Chapter 2

8 hours later, Steve reached his home outside of Fallon, NV. He lived next to an old assay office that had gone out of business, and Steve had bought it lock, stock and barrel with some help from Ken. He lived in a mobile home on the property, and used the building and equipment to perform tests on samples he brought back from the field. Ken refused to allow an independent lab to test his samples. Steve thought that was a little paranoid, but didn't complain because it gave him a place to live, and he could do the basic tests himself. One thing that was immediately apparent after he did his preliminary tests is the concentration of silver in the ore went up progressively as he got deeper. His last sample was almost pure silver with a little quartz mixed in. He picked up a special cell phone from his Haliburton briefcase that had a one-time pad scrambling device attached, and dialed Ken's cell number. Ken had a matching unit on his phone, and it never left his side. When Ken finally answered the phone, Steve could tell he was in a bar due to the noise, and the fact that Ken's voice was slurred.

"Ken, I need to talk to you ASAP! I'm on my way to meet you. We need to talk face to face about this. Where do you want to meet?"

"Steve, I think I'm in a bar in Virginia City – I'm in no shape to drive, so you're going to have to come here."

"Ken, I'm leaving now, it will take about 8 hours to get there, try and sober up in the meantime – this is important!"

"You found something?"

"Not over the phone Ken!"

"Ok...OK! I'll see you in 8 hours – bye!"

Ken turned to the bartender and ordered another double Scotch - it didn't take him 8 hours to get sober enough to talk to Steve!

Meanwhile, Steve put all his samples and paperwork into a floor safe the previous owners had installed, and Steve promptly changed the combination, so he alone knew the combination. He packed his heavy artillery back in the gun safe, and moved the P-14 to a DeSantis Shoulder Holster with a double magazine holder on the opposite side to balance it. He shrugged his shoulders a couple of times to set the holster, put on a light jacket to cover the holster, then checked the contents of his briefcase. In it were his notes, and the one sample that showed almost pure silver. He locked the briefcase and spun the wheels to scramble the combination. Next he clipped the leash to the case that terminated in a handcuff. Steve thought that was way too paranoid, but as Ken was fond of saying "Just because you're Paranoid doesn't mean they

aren't out to get you!" Considering what he was carrying, and the potential value of his discovery, he was glad Ken was a little paranoid!

Steve got in the Land Cruiser, and noticed the tank was almost empty. He hit a self-serve station on the way out of town, paying attention to his rearview mirrors. He made a couple of random turns until he was sure he wasn't being followed, then headed out to US 50 to go to Virginia City. It would only take him 2 hours at the most, so he figured Ken would still be in the bar. Steve thought it better that Ken didn't know he was so close, just in case. He drove on through the night, and arrived in Virginia City around 10pm. He stopped at a convenience store, called Ken using a pay phone, got the location of the bar, and went to pick Ken up. Ken's driver's license had been revoked years ago for his 5th DUI in 3 years. Ken either took taxis, or else hired a chauffeured limousine to drive him around. Ken was a happy drunk, and most of his so-called friends were barflies that Ken picked up the tab for. When Steve arrived, Ken was seriously in the tank, and Steve had to get help to put him in the vehicle. Luckily Ken was sober enough to tell him what motel he was staying in, so Steve drove there, deposited Ken in his room, and got the room next to Ken's for the night. Steve made sure there was no mini-bar in Ken's room before taking a shower and going to bed. He slept restlessly, and finally he could hear Ken moving around by about 8:00 the next morning. Steve got dressed quickly and then quietly knocked on Ken's door.

He caught Ken just in time, he knew Ken's hangover cure was to get drunk again, and he was dressed, and about to find a bar that was open at 8:00. Instead, Steve offered to drive Ken to a restaurant and eat some breakfast and drink some coffee – he needed Ken sober for what he was going to tell him. Ken was his usual grumpy self in the morning, but Steve was brooking no argument. They got into the Land Cruiser, and stopped at a nearby restaurant. Steve ordered a big breakfast, and Ken just ordered a Bloody Mary - his second favorite hangover cure, and some toast with butter. Steve's plate arrived full of scrambled eggs, a large New York Steak, and hash browns. Ken started turning green at the sight of all that food, but was saved when the waitress brought his meal. He sipped the Bloody Mary, and between that and the toast his stomach settled down. Finally Ken felt good enough to drink some coffee, and after several cups, was finally wired enough to start sobering up. The restaurant was almost deserted, so Steve figured he could give Ken the preliminaries over breakfast. He walked over to the waitress, gave her a \$20 bill, asked her if they had a carafe for coffee, and when she said yes, Steve asked her to fill it with fresh coffee and leave it on the table. They had some business to discuss, and didn't want to be disturbed for an hour. Seeing how dead the restaurant was, the waitress readily agreed since Steve gave her about double what the meal cost. She paid for their meal, and pocketed the \$10.00 tip, and handed Steve the full carafe of coffee. He thanked her, carried the carafe back to the table, poured himself and Ken some coffee, then put his briefcase on the table, dialed the combination, and opened it.

"Ken you might want to read this. The preliminary numbers indicate a huge deposit of silver ore, and the best news is it is relatively shallow. I went to the bottom of the old mine, and I was maybe 100 feet down! There isn't much overburden, I found significant quantities of silver less

than 50 feet down. If we can get a permit to pit mine this, we could dig down to the silver, extract the ore, and eventually go underground to follow the vein when we go too deep to economically pit mine. With modern equipment, it would be much cheaper to remove all the dirt and ore and separate it later, than to continue to mine it in shafts like the old miners did. First thing we need is clear title to the site, then we need an exploratory team to dig some bore holes, then finally we are going to excavate the entire vein down to 2000 feet if it goes that deep, then go underground to follow the vein after that point.”

“Steve, how sure are you of those numbers – I haven’t seen concentrations like this since the Comstock mine.”

“Ken, I’ve got the sample right here – as you can see, it’s almost 80 % pure silver.”

“Steve, I need a ride to Carson City right now – the Department of Mines opens at 8:00 am, and we need to hurry up and file claims for a 10-mile radius of the site.

“10 Miles – are you nuts?”

“Relax Steve, I have some other ideas besides just a mine – I’ll buy as much land as I can around the site – I want to do something different. How’d you like to work at a self-contained town with one employer, and everyone got along?”

“You’re kidding, Right? It was tried in the 30’s when they built Hoover Dam - as soon as the dam was built, the town dried up and blew away.”

“Steve, how long would it take to mine out this deposit?”

“Best guess is 30-50 years for the existing deposit, plus whatever we discover while we’re down there.”

“Ok, and how long did it take to build the Hoover Dam?”

“I don’t know – maybe 5 years max. OK, now I get it – you’re planning on the project lasting long enough that they establish roots there and branch out to other activities as the mine peters out.”

“Exactly Steve – and we will interview people who move into our town – we won’t let any riffraff in, and we will have the best schools, medical care and everything the people could want! My family thought they were doing some good sending money to charities that put a Band-Aid on the problem. I plan on designing a model community that will fix the problem permanently! We’ll make the townspeople shareholders in the company, pay them well, and take care of everything they need.”

“Ken, that sounds like Socialism to me.”

“Steve, it’s not – here’s why:

In Socialism, citizens are forced by a coercive government to join the system against their will, often against their best interests. My situation is a private contract between an employer and an employee who is free to leave at any time. Everything I’m doing for them could be construed as benefits of employment, but I have totally cut out the middleman. Imagine if a doctor didn’t have to bill for services, didn’t have to fill out forms to justify procedures to Medicare or an insurance company, and was immune from malpractice lawsuits except for gross negligence – like amputating the wrong leg! They’d get paid by the mine company, partly in cash, partly in stock certificates. We’d build their houses for them, they would have no housing costs, no property taxes, no fees for gas or electric because we will be totally self-sufficient for energy. All they’d have to buy is their own food, clothing, gasoline for their personal car, any entertainment expenses, and a few minor expenses.

All their health, education, spiritual, housing, and recreational needs would be taken care of. They wouldn’t have to worry about getting laid off, and they could only be fired after numerous counseling sessions. We’ll be very picky about who we hire and let into our community, so that will eliminate a lot of problems.”

“Ken, how are you going to afford all this?”

I’ve already talked to some friends of mine who told me they could invest up to 100 million each into a silver mine if they got 30% of the stock, and 10% of the profit per year. I’m going to run this operation on a low profit margin, so they won’t cost us much per year. I’m so filthy stinkin rich that I don’t want a dime out of this, I just want to do the right thing for once. I’ve wasted my life being a drunken bum, now here’s my chance to make something of my life. And guess what – you found it for me!” Ken was practically gushing, so Steve shut him down fast.

“Ken, we still need to buy the land, and file a claim. We can’t do anything until we get that first.”

“Well, what are you waiting for – let’s get going!”

Ken seemed transformed – gone was the stumbling drunk of the previous night, and a real person emerged. His life finally had purpose, so he had some self-respect and would hopefully pull himself out of the bottle.

Chapter 3

A couple of hours later, they arrived in Carson City. Ken was wide awake and sober as a Judge. He even changed his clothes before they left. All in All, Ken looked like a new man. After driving around the State Capitol for 15 minutes trying to find a parking spot, Steve located one just as someone was pulling out, and zipped in right before anyone could cut him off and steal his spot. Steve remembered he was packing, looked around to make sure no one was within eyesight of him, and quickly took off the shoulder holster and slid it under the driver's seat, then picked up his Haliburton briefcase, and carried it into the lobby. Ken followed Steve, because he knew where he was going. They were stopped briefly at the metal detectors, and asked to open the briefcase. Ken stepped in, talked to the security guard, who immediately tapped his partner on the shoulder, and gave him a brief nod, then they were let through without any further delay.

"Ken, What did you say to that guard?"

"I couldn't help it, I showed him my State ID and he recognized my last name."

"Good thing Rank Still Has its Privileges."

"Let's get into the State Mining Office before they change their minds."

Ken set off at a brisk pace, and soon they were at the right office.

Ken knocked gently on the door.

"Enter"

Ken and Steve walked into the office of someone who needed to get outside more.

They were greeted by a man who looked 60 but was really 40 years old, with a grey wizened visage, short grey hair, horn rimmed glasses, and a pocket protector in his white button down dress shirt. He was probably wearing black slacks and black wingtips. When he got up to greet Ken, Steve confirmed his suspicions. They were in the office of a major geek!

"Ken, long time no see, what can the State of Nevada do for you?"

"Dennis, I need you to search deeds and titles for some land I have a mining claim to. I plan to exercise that claim, and need to buy 200 square miles around it for my mining operation."

"Ken, let me double check your claim first, then we'll work on the land deeds and titles."

Steve opened his case, extracted a piece of paper with the GPS coordinates of the mine, as well as the legal description. Dennis took the slip, and walked back into the stacks of documents. He was back 4 minutes later with a large sealed file folder.

“Found your claim – amazingly it was right where it belonged. Anyway, let’s go into the conference room. This is going to involve a huge amount of paperwork!”

As they walked into the conference room, they took seats near each other so they could pass paperwork back and forth.

“OK, first things first. Here’s your registered claim. It’s current for another 5 years. Since you are going to develop the claim, you need to fill out some more paperwork, and pay some fees to the State. How is title to be deeded to the property?”

“I’m sure my attorney has several Nevada Shell Corporations already on file, can I call you after I talk to my lawyer?”

“Sure, we won’t be ready to put the paperwork together for at least a couple of days. Next thing is we need to find out who owns the land around your mining claim.”

Dennis pulled out some paperwork, then some more, and finally a third piece. “Ken, today must be your lucky day. It seems all the land around the mine is either State or BLM land.”

“Won’t the BLM be a problem?”

“I don’t imagine with your family name they will raise any objections to selling you the land. The State land can be deeded to the mine, all it takes is paperwork. Because its open desert, we could sell it to you for less than 100 dollars an acre. I’m sure the BLM will be equally accommodating.”

“Dennis, I need to know an exact price because I have to line up investors. Even I don’t have that kind of money lying around. Also, I want ALL rights to the property.”

“That’s a little irregular for a mining operation. Why do you want all rights?”

“Dennis, I’ll tell you because I know and trust you, but this can’t leave this room. I intend to build a self-contained community at the mine site for all the miners and their families.”

“You mean a company town like the one they built for the Hoover Dam?”

“Exactly, except I plan on working the mine for at least 50 years.”

“Just how big is this strike?”

“Dennis, I can’t talk about that until I own all the land, the last thing I need is some problem buying the land to kill the mine project.”

“Very well, I won’t say anything.”

“Dennis, everything we say in this room is confidential, and if you breathe a word of this to anyone, you will be getting a call from my attorney!”

“OK...Lighten up a little Ken! I’ve been doing this for years, I can keep my lips zipped!”

“You’d better, this project could be as big as the Carlin Trend!”

“No Shit! Man, I better keep it zipped – If we’re talking that kind of money, I don’t want to be the reason the State had to pay a multi-million dollar suit!”

“Now you’re getting the picture. Is there anything I need to sign, or do I need to leave a deposit for the property?”

“Considering the size of the purchase, a \$100,000.00 deposit would be in order.”

“Would you accept a wire transfer from my trust fund? I’m going to need to know the account number to transfer it to.”

“Let me ask, I’ll be back in a minute Ken.”

Two minutes later Dennis arrived with his Supervisor.

“I understand you wish to wire transfer a \$100,000.00 deposit?”

“Yes Sir, that is correct. I could write a check, but frankly I doubt your bank would be able to complete the transaction without any delays. It’s safer and cheaper to wire transfer that kind of money. If you’d give me the deposit account information, I can call my banker, and the money will be wire transferred within the hour.”

The Supervisor left and came back with a form that had all the banking information on it.

“Here you go Mr. Heinz, sorry about the delay, but I had to ask the Director. When he heard your name, he told me to expedite your transaction. Therefore, I will personally handle your wire transfer, receipt and deed or title transactions.”

“I just want to make sure Dennis gets credit for all the work he’s done.”

“Very well Mr. Heinz, you can use the phone at my desk to call the bank.”

They walked into the Supervisor's Office, It was much nicer than Dennis' cubicle.

Ken dialed a number from memory, and soon was talking to the President of the Bank of America. Ken told him he was putting the conversation on speaker phone, then continued.

"Jim, how are you doing?"

"Fine Ken, what can I do for you?"

"I'm sitting in the office of the State of Nevada Department of Mines, I need you to wire transfer 100 thousand dollars from my trust fund to the bank here in Nevada that the State uses."

"No problem Ken. Can I talk to someone from the State?"

"Jim, he's right here. I'm sorry I never got your name?"

"My apologies Mr. Heinz. My name is Bob Jones."

"Very well, Mr. Jones- I'm prepared to transfer the funds if you have all the account information handy."

"Yes Sir, I do" Bob read off the account information, and Jim read it back to him.

Jim then spoke to Ken, "The money will be in the account within the hour. Could you e-mail a receipt to my attention, and give a copy to Mr. Heinz?"

"Yes Sir, Right away!"

Ken then thanked Jim and hung up.

Bob was visibly shaken, he'd never handled that kind of money before, and he was speaking to the President of Bank of America! He called the bank, and 5 minutes later, the bank e-mailed acknowledgment of receipt of the wire transfer. Bob made a copy for Ken, and e-mailed a copy to Jim at B of A, then he wrote out a receipt for the deposit to Ken. Ken now felt better since the state was in receipt of the earnest money deposit on the land. In another week or two, he'd own the land, then he could start exploration and building.

Chapter 4

Dateline: Reno, Nevada 2 weeks later

Ken was amazed at what he had accomplished in two weeks. Maybe it was because he was stone cold sober for the first time in years. The first thing he did after leaving the State Mining office was to drive over to his friend Sam's office in Reno, and offer him the job of Corporate Attorney for his new venture. Sam was the attorney who had successfully argued in Federal Court when his Aunt Theresa had tried to get his Trust Fund stripped from him and Ken institutionalized as too incompetent to care for himself. Sam did such a good job of defending him that not only did the judge rule in their favor, he further ordered the suit dismissed with prejudice, and that Theresa would not only pay all legal fees including Ken's, but punitive damages in excess of \$10 million. The result of that was that Ken was free to live his life as he wanted to without any further family interference, and the value of his trust fund had tripled. Sam worked for a prominent Reno Law Firm as a Junior Partner, so Ken's offer was generous enough that Sam gave the firm his notice and quit right then and there, but not before he finished setting up Ken's new mining venture using one of the Corporation's Shell Companies they had already set up with the State of Nevada.

They then drove to a large suite of hotel rooms where Steve, Ken and Sam all went over the entire project, wrote the prospectus and proposal for the venture. When they were finished, Sam called the people Ken had recommended who had shown an interest in this kind of project, and who had verbally pledged up to \$100 Million a piece, if Ken ever found a rich enough strike, never thinking he'd actually do it. Several days later when they had finished, Ken was looking better than ever, but Sam realized that Ken would never make the right impression with the people he needed to impress in a rumpled 5-year old suit, and he wasn't even going to get started on his physical appearance. Sam suggested that they take Ken to his cosmetologist for a complete make-over, then to his haberdashery to get several new suits. When Ken objected, Sam told Ken that if he wanted \$100 million, that he had to look like he was worth at least 10% of it. Ken relented, but then told Sam – No Armani's!

Sam laughed, "I doubt they MAKE an Armani Suit in your size!"

With that settled, Sam put all the paperwork in his briefcase, which was a much nicer version of Steve's briefcase, but just as secure. Sam made a few calls, and when they reached the lobby, the doorman ushered them into a jet-black Cadillac Stretch Limousine. Steve was impressed, but Sam said it was all part of the image. From here on out, they'd be traveling first class until they actually got the mine open. Besides, Sam told them, Ken's trust fund could afford it. They drove to an exclusive Cosmetologist shop, where not only Ken, but Steve got the full treatment, over Steve's loud objections. Sam placated him by telling him if he were going to be at the meeting, he couldn't go looking like a Desert Rat. Steve agreed, and submitted grudgingly to the preening and pampering. Several hours later, they drove to the haberdashery, where both

Ken and Steve were fitted for suits, and Sam ordered 6 suits each with all the accessories. When they were finished, they went back to the hotel to make some phone calls, and arrange the first meeting of the Nevada Silver Mine, Inc.

Several days later, they were flying a chartered executive jet to New York City to meet his prospective Board of Directors. When they landed, they were met by a chauffeured limousine, and driven to Rockefeller Center. The meeting was to be held in the Conference Center of one of the major investors. Several hours later, he had his financial backing, on the condition that he remain clean and sober. He swore that he'd never touch another drop of alcohol. Now that he was sober, he really didn't want to. With the letters of finance in hand, and a promise to tender Preferred Stock Certificates and Board positions to the 6 principal contributors, he left for Nevada. Later that afternoon, he arrived at the State Department of Mines. This time he was met at the door by the Director of Mines, who bowed and scraped like a lackey. It's amazing what 2 weeks, a make-over, limousine, and Letters of Credit worth \$200 Million can do.

The Director had all the paperwork transferring title to 250 square miles around the mine site to the corporation, and made copies of the Letters of Credit. When they were finished, Ken signed the paperwork, legally taking title to the land. He now had airtight deed and title to the mine, and 250 square miles of land around it, including all rights. Ken was ready to celebrate, and then remembered his promise. Instead the three of them had a more subdued celebration at a local steak house in a private room that Sam arranged for them.

The next day, they drove out to the mine site, and walked the site, while Steve took GPS readings for a later survey team and exploration team. They would drill 1,000 ft test holes in a grid to determine where the bulk of the silver was buried. Meanwhile, Ken was on the phone to a friend of his, placing orders for used mining equipment, including Haulpacks, Front-end Loaders, sorters/separators, smelters and other equipment. His friend nearly fell off his chair when Ken told him where he wanted them delivered, until Ken told him he had Letters of Credit in his possession worth \$200 Million. That got his attention. All of a sudden, the salesman was trying to sell him everything under the sun. Ken agreed to some of it, but said NO to most of it. Ken ordered used equipment where he could, and new when he had to. By the time he had finished, he had spent between the land and the equipment between \$30 and \$50 Million of the \$200 Million, and he still had a bunch of stuff to do.

When he finished, Steve used the Cell Phone to call a friend of his that owned a Mine Survey and Exploration company in Reno. His friend gave him a reasonable quote, and Ken accepted on the spot. That gave Sam an idea, and when Sam and Ken were done talking, Ken took Steve aside, and asked him if he wanted to be the Vice President of the Mine. Ken knew squat about mining, except how to locate promising sites in the archives. He didn't know anything about operations. Steve asked him how much it paid, and Ken asked him how \$1 million per year grabbed him. Steve's eyes almost popped out of their sockets, as his jaw tried to hit the floor. "Ken, are you serious?"

“Steve, this mine is going to earn between \$20 and \$100 million per year for over 50 years. Obviously, neither one of us is going to be alive for another 50 years, so I wanted to make sure I took care of the guy who gave me my self-respect back!”

“Ken, you got your own self-respect back, I just checked out a mine you found.”

“OK, whatever, but you’re one of the few people who believed in me when no one else did, and I can repay that kind of loyalty.”

“You know of course that my Ex-wife’s attorney will immediately try to grab it all.”

Sam chimed in, “Not if I can help it. By the time I’m through burying your assets in corporate paperwork, no one could touch you.”

“Nice to have a pro working FOR me for once!”

“Steve, as the Corporate Attorney, I also represent all the Corporate Officers, that includes you if you accept the position of Vice President.”

“Of Course I accept, I’d have to be nuts to turn it down!”

With that, they got back into the limousine and drove back to Reno.

Chapter 5

Dateline: Reno, NV two weeks later

Ken and Steve were in the Mine Office in Reno when the FEDEX driver showed up. He had a package that required Ken's signature from the Mining Survey Company. Rubbing his hands together gleefully, Ken signed the form, and the driver handed over a 3 inch thick document in a sealed FEDEX envelope. As soon as the driver left, he grabbed a penknife from his pocket and slit the package open. As Ken read the summary page, Steve started reading the body of the report, which was highly technical. When Ken finished reading, he jumped up and down yelling excitedly "We're Rich!!! I've Done it!"

When he finally calmed down, Steve walked over to him and gave Ken a big hug. "If these guys are right, the deposit we're sitting on is over 100 times the size of the Comstock Mine! Not only that, but most of it is shallow enough to pit mine for at least the first 20 years, then we'll have to go underground. Also, it says here there are sufficient quantities of other metals to make it worth mining them. I'm glad you bought all that acreage, it looks like this vein goes on forever – it's about 3 times the size of the Carlin Trend! We could easily mine this for the next 50 years at today's price. I think you should contact the board, and get authorization based on this report to double the size of the claim, and triple the footprint of the site itself!"

Ken got on the telephone to the Director of his Board, then e-mailed the summary sheet to him. He was so excited that he authorized doubling his share immediately, and buying all the land he needed. He'd clear it with the rest of the board. Ken called Sam into the room, explained the situation to him, and asked his opinion as to how best to expand the claim and the mine. Steve then explained the extent and expanse of the known deposit. It seemed that every bore hole had significant quantities of silver ore, and they had drilled over 1000 bore holes in a 2-mile square grid pattern, some going as deep as 1000 feet. The ore traces started at 50 feet below the surface, and went down several hundred feet in layers. Sam suggested chartering a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter to fly him to Carson City, where he would file the paperwork and fees personally. As the Corporate Attorney, he had full Power of Attorney to take care of it. As soon as they finished, Ken told Sam to do it, and to call him from Carson City as soon as it was done. Sam called the charter company at Reno-Tahoe Airport, and told them to warm up a Jet Ranger for a quick round trip to Carson City. He asked the manager where the nearest heliport to the Capitol was. The manager assured him that if there wasn't one at the capitol, he'd arrange transport to and from the Capitol. Sam told him that the pilot might have to wait at the airport for several hours. The manager said no problem, he'd reserve it for the rest of the day, but just bill them for actual time. Sam said he'd be there in 15 minutes, and hung up. Sam grabbed all the paperwork he'd need, stuffed it in his briefcase, and ran downstairs to jump in the limousine, told the driver to go to the airport and hurry!

An hour later, he was in the office of the Director of Mines.

“Sam this is most irregular, but all your paperwork appears in order, and you do have the right to expand your claim as long as no one else has a competing claim. The nearest claim is over 100 miles away, so you’re OK. I’ll handle the extra land transfers as well. All the land you require is state land, so there is no problem. All I need now is a deposit for the land.”

“Bob, I’ll do one better, I have an additional Letter of Credit here for \$200 million dollars, I’m sure that will more than cover the deposit, any fees, and the cost of the land.”

“I’m sure that would be sufficient. Let me give you a receipt for all the fees, and the sales of the land. If you could wait an hour, I can have the title transferred to the Corporation.”

“Bob, I’m not going anywhere until I have the title in hand – do you have a restroom? I drank too much coffee!”

“Sure, you can use the executive washroom, here’s my key – third door on the right.”

“Thanks Bob!”

About an hour later, the Director came out to the lobby with a huge pile of paperwork.

“Sam, let’s go in my office, we’ve got a pile of paperwork for you to sign, then the titles will be transferred to the corporation.”

They moved to Bob’s office, and Bob was passing paperwork to Sam.

“Wait a minute Bob, I specified all rights – it seems this land doesn’t include water rights – does someone own the water rights?”

“I’m sure that’s an oversight, let me go into the files and check the originals.”

15 minutes later Bob was back. “I’m sorry Sam, the clerk checked the wrong box, This is the corrected copy showing ALL rights are transferred.”

Sam carefully read over all the paperwork, and half an hour later, was ready to sign the title.

Bob handed him the form he needed to sign to transfer the title to the Corporation. Sam read it carefully, then signed for the corporation. Bob reached over to shake Sam’s hand “Pleasure doing business with you Sir.”

“Thanks Bob, now I have to go, The helicopter is waiting and the meter is running.”

“You flew a helicopter down here from Reno?”

“Sure did – rented a Bell Jet Ranger – we wanted to make sure we got the land quickly.”

“Well we definitely broke all speed records.”

“Thanks Bob, We appreciate it – now I’ve got to go!”

Sam turned and hurried out of the office, making sure he picked up all the documents. The Chauffeur saw him coming, and had the door opened and the car running before he got there. As soon as the door closed, Sam called the office on his Cell phone.

“Ken, Great News – I got all the land we wanted with All the rights, and we expanded the claim even beyond the boundaries you gave me – it cost less than a thousand dollars extra to triple the size of the claim to match the property the corporation owns. I have the signed title paperwork and the claim in my briefcase.”

“Great Sam! Excellent Work, now hurry up back so we can get the documents in the safe.”

Right as they ended the call, the limousine pulled up to the Jet Ranger, the rotors were already turning, so Sam thought that the Limousine driver had called ahead. Sam quickly stepped out of the Limousine, gave the driver a \$50.00 bill for a tip, then boarded the helicopter. As soon as he was aboard, the pilot radioed for clearance to lift off, and then the chopper jumped 50 feet into the air and tore its way back to Reno. The office building had a heliport on the roof, so the chopper pilot landed there. Sam stepped out while the rotors were still turning, making sure to duck until he was inside the doorway. As soon as he was inside the building, the Jet Ranger spooled up and took off. Sam took the elevator down to their office, handed the paperwork to Ken, got a big hug for a job well done, and Ken put the paperwork in the safe.

“Now that we’ve got that accomplished, what next?”

Steve spoke up. “Ken, the equipment should be delivered next week, and the ads will go out this week nationwide. Several papers had a question as to the wording of the ads.”

“Did they accept the ads as written?”

Sam jumped in. “Ken, Steve told me of the papers that objected, I called them back as the Corporate Attorney and talked to their legal department. They told the editor that it was OK to run as written. They thought it was bizarre, but legal.”

“I don’t care what those Whinny-Ass Liberals Think! I’m a private employer, and I can hire who I want, and when I want!”

“Ken, I’m afraid you’re going to have problems with Affirmative Action.”

“Why – I’m hiring Blacks, Mexicans, and everyone else!”

“OK, we’ll cross that bridge when we get there – just means extra work for me.”

“Sam, if you need to, hire staff. I can’t let my dream fail just because some nosy bureaucrat wants to stick his 2 cents in! You’re the Attorney – Deal with it!”

Ken went on, “OK, what do we have left to do?”

Steve decided to field this question.

“As soon as we hire the employees, we need to set up housing for them, power and water for the mine and the community, then we are going to need basic services, shopping, schools, basically everything a community has to have.”

“What about churches?”

“Ken, I sent letters to local churches, offering to supply the buildings if they would provide the pastors. We can pay them too.”

“Any takers?”

“So far, several non-denominational ministers have expressed interest, and several main-line churches.”

“Great, what else?”

“We’ve had the usual crackpots and flim-flam artists trying to get into the community – probably to fleece the flock.”

“OK, Steve, use your best judgment. What if we allow the members to select their own ministers, and have the people who are interested come to preach?”

“Excellent – it would work for an audition. We’ll pay the ministers per diem so they can’t take a collection, and will be unable to fleece the flock.”

“OK, next item. We’re going to need a lot of electricity to run this place.”

“Way ahead of you Ken – I have several friends who were into Alternative Energy, and a couple are Electrical Engineers, and one built and designed Steam generators. The first thing we need to do is set up a monitoring site at the mine to determine wind velocity and direction, as well as

the amount of sunlight – actually, we don't need the sunlight figures – I know what it's like out there after being a desert rat for 6 years. What they proposed is every house have a Thin-film PV roofing system, a Solar hot water booster, and fluorescent fixtures. They save a ton of electricity. In order to keep things simple, we want to make the mobile homes all electric, even if it's less efficient – that way we don't have to import propane. My friend has an idea for a huge Heliostat that can generate thousands of KWh per day. We can back that up with diesel generators, and also we can probably build a huge wind farm with those huge wind turbines that I'm sure you've seen in the Cajon Pass up I-15. Also, I had the survey company do some extra tests, and we might have geothermal capability right on the property. I'm sure Sam would love to file all the paperwork with the PUC for the corporation to become a Power Company so we can receive all the State kickbacks we can get by using geothermal and other Alternative Energy Systems."

"Great Steve, but what's all this going to cost?"

"Far less than the cost of running a 100Kv transmission line onto the property, and all the monthly expenses to the power company. I just thought of something – the power company can bill the Mining Company for all the power it uses – and we own both of them!"

"Steve, sometimes you're so smart you scare me!"

"OK, how about water?"

"Ken, once we begin de-watering the mine, we'll have more water than we know what to do with. We could put a huge treatment plant on the property, treat the de-watering output to better than EPA standards, and pump it to all the homes. Everyone would have their own septic system. I suggest putting the houses on 2 acre lots minimum so they have enough room to have animals or raise a garden. That reminds me, we need to grade roads and stuff. I guess we can use mine equipment for road building and snow removal if necessary. Also, I highly recommend we bury the electrical and phone lines."

"Why is that? I've always seen above ground telephone poles."

"For one thing it's cheaper, and safer. Also, we only have to dig one trench along the road, run the phone, water and electric in one trench. If you put the water on the bottom, the phone and electric systems are OK."

"Dang, that reminds me – PHONES! I know MA Bell is going to charge a ton of money to wire the entire complex for phones."

"Ken, I've got an idea. It will cost a bundle to install, but it would be worth it in the long run. How about running your own local phone company, installing fiber optic cable phone lines between the houses, and if they need to get out of the town, use a microwave system to tie into

the phone system. That way you can transmit TV and telephone as well as DSL quality internet access all through the same line. It would cost about the same as having Ma Bell come in and install conventional phone service, but this way you'd own the system, and the only cost would be the microwave access service. As long as no one dug up the fiber optic cables, they'd outlast the houses."

"Steve, I'm glad I'm paying you a million dollars a year – you're worth every penny! OK, let's make the arrangements and get this done. I want to get the best prices for everything, so think "economy of scale" If we're going to need 100 of something eventually and only need 10 now – get a contract for the 100 price, and have them shipped as needed."

"Ken, we need to interview the key people, then they can interview the supervisors, who can interview the employees."

"OK, but I want to make sure everyone we hire meets my guidelines that I laid down: No drinkers, druggies, problem children, Affirmative Action Crybabies, or other dead weight types, that goes for the families as well. Make it clear to them that we will not tolerate people who cause problems, or can't get along with their neighbors. Also, NO Lawyers!"

Sam kind of gulped at that comment, then he realized that with him and his staff running things – they didn't need any more lawyers.

"One other thing, if anyone has a propensity to sue instead of working out their problems civilly, I want them told to look somewhere else! Living here is conditional on working here, and working here is conditional on getting along, pulling your weight, and going above the call of duty if necessary! Am I clear on this?"

"Crystal – Ken. What are we supposed to tell them about wages?"

Steve, Sam – I'm going to explain my dream to you – so sit down, grab something to drink, and take a load off. Some would accuse me of Socialism, or something else, but I feel we do a worker a disservice if we pay the bulk of his wages in cash, then expect him to go buy everything he needs from someone who is out to make a buck. I propose that we take care of our workers, not as a Socialist Nanny, but as a caring employer. We can provide goods and services for a much lower cost than they can buy them on the open market due to the fact we can buy in huge quantities and pass the savings along to them. Also, we don't need to make a profit at our grocery store, only cover our costs, so the cost of food will be cheaper. Eventually people from surrounding areas might shop at our stores since the prices are much cheaper. I don't have a problem with that as long as we can handle the volume, since outsiders buying goods and services from us drives up the volume, which lowers the cost per unit. Remember when Hillary tried cramming Universal health care down our throats? Well it wouldn't have worked due to the huge amount of middlemen. Imagine this, A doctor is hired by the mine to work X number of hours per week at a fixed salary, and doesn't need to bill, cover medical

malpractice, or hire people to do billing or anything else not directly related to patient care. Hospital Care would be the same way. The costs would be so low it would be cheaper for us to hire the doctors and nurses directly instead of paying premiums to an insurance company. Employees and their families would have free medical care, and it would still be cheaper than paying an insurance company. We could do the same thing with dentists and optometrists. We could buy gasoline and diesel at huge discounts, and charge prices that would cover our costs including the kid to take the payments and run the pumps if necessary. We'd hire our own teachers, principals and administrators. We would have a lot more Indians than Chiefs, because we wouldn't have to justify our budget or teaching methods to hundreds of bureaucrats. We wouldn't need theaters, bars, or liquor stores since no one drinks, and the movies are piped right into your house free. Instead we would have community centers with dances and social activities, as well as gyms, pools, and other recreational activities. Personally, I'd love to have indoor and outdoor shooting ranges if we can work out the liability issues. Basically the only things people would have to pay for is their food, personal clothing, and personal gasoline. The mine would provide busses to run workers back and forth to the mines, and the kids to schools. If we have any senior citizens, we could provide van transportation for a nominal cost. Even with all these benefits, we'd still make money hand over fist, and we could pay our employees less in cash, reducing their income tax burden."

After a few minutes, Steve spoke first.

"Ken, it's a beautiful idea, and if Sam can work out the legal issues, it will not only be profitable, we'll have the happiest, most productive workforce in the USA."

Sam chimed in "It's brilliant! I can handle the legal stuff. I'd make one suggestion – I'd ban Unions."

"Sam, that's excellent – any employee who we hire should have to sign a voluntary waiver of union representation. Also, we should post the property as Private property, and tell Security that Union Officials are not welcome on the property. That includes the housing areas."

Ken, you let me hire the staff I need, and I'll make it happen."

"Sam – get on it today – I'm giving you carte blanc to hire whomever you need to."

"OK guys – let's make this happen!" With that the meeting ended.

Chapter 6

The next morning, they met back in the office. Steve talked to Ken, “Guess What? I was talking to a friend of mine the other day, and gave me a better idea for the communication system. He said that Fiber Optic was too expensive and fragile. What he recommended was Coax cable. He said we could run TV and Internet access through the cable. All we’d need would be to add conventional phone wire just in case someone doesn’t want to use their computer as their phone. He e-mailed me the plans, and even suggested a company that could build the entire system for us, including the microwave relays, the switches, and a huge internet server. We could also co-locate the mine’s computers so that administrative people could work from home several days a week, reducing day care costs. What we’d have was a secured Wide Area Network protected by the best firewall software, and DSL speed Internet access from anywhere on the property. We would literally be our own Internet Service Provider, so we wouldn’t have to pay anyone else, and we could hire the people to run the internet, and maintain the computer system for the mine. He said it would cost about \$10 million to do it right, but the annual costs would be next to nothing. Also, since we own the ISP, we could legally block access to Internet Pornography, which would solve a lot of problems. Seems a lot of good men have been getting sucked into it without realizing it, and next thing they know they are spending \$50.00 per month to a company that is no better than a drug pusher. They even sell lists to other scumbags, and send them e-mail to sign up for their “free” service. Of course they don’t find out there’s a fee until they get the bill the second month on their credit card.

“Damn it Steve, I want to make sure that NEVER happens to anyone who works for me! I know all about addictions, and I’m NOT about to help someone else get addicted! Make sure that the contract calls for an absolute internet block for pornography – All we need is for some kid to surf over to one of their sites!”

“All ready took care of it Ken. I signed the contracts for the service and installation last night. Also, I got some updated figures from the AE guys, seems we can be totally energy independent, including the mines, all the buildings in town, and all the houses for about what the Power Company would have wanted to run a 100KV line into the property. I called a company in Idaho who will give us a huge discount if we order all our houses from them. They have 10 models available within a few thousand dollars of each other, so we can offer the employee a choice. They’ll set up a factory next to us to build the houses, and deliver them and set them up for 1 low cost. They almost fainted when I told them I wanted between 10 and 30 thousand houses built in the next 2 years, and we could advance them the money to build the factory, and take it off the back end of the contract. Naturally they readily agreed. I got some quotes for a water treatment facility that could handle that kind of volume. I sent an e-mail to the director of the Nevada division of the AMA, asking for doctors that would be willing to work under the conditions stipulated, as well as nurses, and other technicians and everyone else we need to set up a major hospital and clinic. While they won’t be working in the Taj Mahal, they won’t have any overhead, and could end up significantly better off financially at the end of

the contract due to the stock bonuses. The director asked if HE could come and work for us. I told him we'd have to interview him for membership in the town and the company – we weren't just letting anyone in. He was surprised at that, then he remembered we were forming a “company town” and wanted to be careful who we hired.

That reminds me – we need to hire a security force. Before we can do that, we need to meet with the local Sheriff and get his blessing. I'd like to hire POST graduates, and get the Sheriff to deputize them so they can make arrests on mine property.”

“Steve, that's a lot of stuff you got done in one night – burning the midnight oil again?”

“No, it's just your enthusiasm is contagious. The Mine is all I think of, and I keep coming up with ideas.”

“Steve, you keep this up, and I'll have to raise your salary! Is there anything I can do?”

“Yeah, I need you to contact the major fuel distributors – not the local ones, the really big fish and get a contract for enough diesel to last us 5 years. The prices are going up again, and I want us to get our price locked in now! If you have to, call some of your Wall Street buddies, and get the names and numbers of the CEOs of some big suppliers. Don't talk to anyone less than a VP – no one else has the juice to sign a deal like we want, for the prices we want to pay.”

“Steve, I've got an idea – since we're buying all our fuel from them, how about leasing them some space to open a gas station?”

Sam chimed in, “Bad idea Ken, if you want to control the price they charge for fuel, you need to own the whole operation. All we need from the fuel company is the fuel and the equipment. We'll buy the tanks and equipment outright, pay them to install and maintain the equipment, and hire a couple of teenagers to act as attendants.”

“Ok, Sam, you're right – I need to remember the only way to really control costs is to own the whole operation. Steve, what's the status on interviewing the core people?”

“Ken, the ads just went out last week, and we're starting to get flooded by applications. We need to get some people in here ASAP to handle the applications.”

“OK, Steve, but I still feel WE should review the applications of the core people, interview and hire them. Then we can let them hire their own people with the understanding that THEY are personally responsible for anyone they hire. Sam, can you contact a local Temp agency to hire a couple of people with Personnel experience to review the applications. I want to see them before we hire them to explain EXACTLY what we are looking for.”

“Great idea Ken – If they've got the experience reviewing applications, and we indoctrinate them with who we're looking for, they could be valuable, instead of Personnel Drones.”

Sam left the room for a minute to make some calls.

“Ken, what’s the status of the mining equipment you bought?”

“It’s being delivered in the next two weeks.”

“I was afraid of that, it means we will have to sign a short-term contract with a local supplier and pay more until we get our own depot installed.”

“Not so fast, Steve, let me make some calls – If I can get hold of the guy I’m thinking of, he will give us a great price, and ship us the equipment right now, and send people to install it. While he’s installing the equipment, I have him supply a portable tank and keep it full of diesel. He probably knows a local supplier, and can buy for less than we can.”

“Great idea Ken – I love it when a plan comes together.”

Sam walked back in. “I called a Temporary agency the firm used, and they told me they would have 3-6 people here tomorrow.”

“Great, that is one problem solved, anything else that you need right now? OK, I need to make some phone calls, I’ll buzz you when I’m done so we can get back to work.”

Steve and Sam got up and walked from the Conference Room to their luxuriously appointed offices. They didn’t have any support staff yet, so Steve poured his own coffee from the coffee maker in the hall, then walked back into his office.

Meanwhile, Ken opened his Rolodex, and called a friend of one of his Directors who owned a huge Texas Oil Company. “George, Ken Heinz – thanks for talking to me. Anyway what I need is a huge fuel and equipment contract for a silver mine. I want a 5-year contract for enough diesel to run a pit silver mine the size of the Carlin trend and sufficient tankage and equipment to deliver it to Haulpacks and shovels. Also, I need enough gasoline, diesel and equipment to open a large gas station with 10-20 pumps.”

“Ken, what do you need all that for?”

“George, I’m the CEO of the Nevada Silver Mine, Inc. You know one of my Directors Patricia Russo at Lucent Technologies.”

“Ken, Patricia and I go way back – If she’s backing you, you’ve GOT to be legit! What can I do for you?”

“George, like I said, I’m the CEO of Nevada Silver Mines, Inc. We are opening a huge site in Northern NV, and we plan on mining silver for at least the next 50 years. We need a long-term contract with very favorable pricing, and all the equipment to store and distribute all the fuel

we'll need for a major silver mine. PLUS, we'll need a gasoline station capable of handling the recreational needs of all of our workers. We're setting up a Company Town, like they did for Hoover Dam, and we're looking at having 30,000 workers at peak production. We insist on owning the gas station outright, but we will give you a lucrative maintenance contract and fuels contract for the station. I'm trying to keep the middlemen out of this project, so naturally I thought you'd be interested in the project."

George did some quick mental arithmetic, they were talking enough diesel to run a major mine for 30-50 years, plus all the gasoline the employees would need. "Ken, we'd love to bid on the project, let me get George Jr. in on this, I can guarantee we will give you the best price and service possible."

"Great, have George Jr. call Steve Gibbons, our VP of Mine Operations – he'll know all the details. Thanks for your time."

When the phone call ended, Ken buzzed Steve, who picked up his intercom. "Go ahead Ken."

"Steve, you might be expecting a call from George Kranz Jr. I just got off the phone with George Sr. at Texaco. They are real interested in bidding on the project."

"OK Ken, I'll keep my ears open."

"I told George we want a sole-source contract for all our fuels and equipment – I want to get as long a term and as best of a price as I can. If they want to, I want them to be in charge of building the gas station, as well as the fuel depot for the mine."

"OK Ken, I'll let you know what they come up with."

Ken hung up the phone and realized he hadn't eaten anything all day. He buzzed Steve and Sam and asked them what they wanted to eat. Sam said there was an excellent Chinese Restaurant right down the street that delivered. Ken and Steve said that sounded good, and told Sam to go ahead and order for them. About an hour later, the delivery driver showed up, and Sam paid him, then they met in the conference room for a working lunch.

Chapter 7

Later that afternoon, Steve got a call from George Jr. at Texaco. “Steve, JR from Texaco here – got a minute?”

“JR – like in Dallas?”

“You would be surprised how many times I hear THAT lame joke! Daddy called me JR long before the show – OK!”

“Sorry, I just thought it was funny with you calling from Dallas, TX and all. Anyway, what can I do for you?”

“I need some information to work up a preliminary estimate of how much fuel you’re going to need.”

“JR, I can make it real easy for you – the mine is eventually going to be twice the size of Newmont Mine in Carlin, NV.”

“Steve – that big?”

“Yup, the preliminary data indicates a major shallow deposit of silver-rich ore that we need to surface mine to extract until we get too deep to surface mine. I think it’s going to take us 20-30 years to mine out the existing deposit before we need to look for more underground.”

JR just gulped in response. 30 years worth of fuel for 30-50 Haulpacks, shovels, loaders, graders and other mine equipment could easily amount to more than 1 million gallons per year. Between the fuel, equipment, tanks, and maintenance costs, the total contract could exceed \$100 million over 30 years. His commission alone would be in excess of \$1 million. Plus his dad said they wanted a contract to provide gasoline and diesel for a huge gas station, as well as the tanks and equipment. He’d have to be shrewd and get the best contract possible for Texaco. “Steve, that gives me an idea about how much fuel you’ll need, but why do I see that you want to own the gas station, our normal policy is a lease agreement.”

“JR – We’re insisting on owning the gas station and everything attached to it – you see, we’re going to sell fuels just above our costs including maintenance and salaries.”

“You can’t do that – every dealer in town charges 30-50% margin – they’d be driven out of business within a week!”

“JR, this station is on OUR property, and we control everything on it. If you can’t do this the way we want – We’ll find someone else!”

“Whoa, hold on a sec there pardner – I didn’t say we wouldn’t do it, it’s just very unusual. Where did you say this mine was anyway?”

“It’s in the middle of 300 miles of desert, the nearest town, Winnemucca NV is over an hour away. I highly doubt we’ll put a dent in your dealer’s profit margin.”

“OK, if that’s the case, it makes my job convincing the board much easier.”

“If we give you the contract, we need you to supply diesel in a portable tank immediately because we are having mine equipment delivered this week, and they need fuel.”

”OK, let me check around – if necessary, we’ll buy one from a local distributor and lease it to you.”

“What about the fuel for it?”

“With the quantities you’ll be buying, we can give you Distributor rates. You’ll have to pay to have it trucked from the refinery.”

“How about rail? We’ve got a rail line within a mile of the property, and we could easily build a spur line for deliveries.”

“Great Idea Steve, for the quantities you’ll be buying, they could load up a train with tanker cars, and deliver the whole load to you. It would be way cheaper than paying to truck 10,000 gallons at a time. You might also consider having the rest of your supplies shipped by rail for the same reason. I’m going to get busy on this quote. Can I have your Fax number so I can send this to you?”

“JR, I’d prefer e-mail if that’s OK with you – it’s a little more secure.”

“OK, what’s your e-mail address?”

“It’s steve@nevadasilvermineinc.com”

“Got it – you guys have your own internet identity already – you’re moving fast.”

“You don’t know the half of it – I’ve got about 5 hours of sleep a night for the last couple of weeks.”

“Well, get some sleep, and I’ll have this to you in a day or two.”

“JR, Time is of the essence for this quote – we have to have diesel on the property by the end of the week.”

“Steve – here’s what I’ll do, I’ll call a local distributor, have them deliver their biggest portable tank, and keep it full, and bill us for the fuel until we get this rolling – that way you’ll have fuel, and I won’t have to rush this.”

“You’re buying the fuel?”

“Of course, didn’t I just say that?”

“Thanks JR! Nice working with you!”

When they hung up, Steve quickly walked into Ken’s office. “Ken, you must have one heck of a contact at Texaco. They are going to have a local distributor deliver their biggest portable tank, keep it full, and Texaco is paying the bill until the contract is signed.”

“Steve, the cost of the fuel is a drop in the bucket compared to the potential contract – we’re talking about around \$100 million worth of fuel and equipment over 30 years, they can afford \$50 thousand worth of fuel and tank rental. While it is a nice gesture, don’t get swayed by it, and give them more profit margin than they should.”

“Ken, they were talking distributor rates!”

“Steve, that’s great, but did they make you pay for shipping?”

“He did mention us paying freight. Why?”

“We need to negotiate the freight costs, it could double the cost of the fuel.”

“Ken. JR suggested shipment by rail – that would greatly reduce our costs.”

“Good idea – see if they can negotiate a better shipping rate with the Railroad – they probably provide all their diesel fuel to run their locomotives. Also contact Southern Pacific directly, and get them to install and pay most of the cost of running a spur line onto our property. Don’t give them any more right-of-way than they need to run the track and install the switches – they always try to get more right of way then they need, then they sell it.”

Sam walked in at that point and overheard the last part of the discussion. “Ken – it would not be in our best interest to give them ANY right of way – just grant a temporary easement to install the tracks, without any transfer of title – if there is anything valuable under their right-of-way then they might try to take it from us.”

Steve commented “I’m REALLY glad we have a Pro working on OUR side!” and high-fived Sam. Ken thought about it for a minute, then he figured out what Sam was driving at – why

give anyone any access or right to his land? It would just be inviting trouble. That reminded Ken of something.

“Steve, make sure those utility contracts you’re signing don’t transfer any rights to our property. They should be a straight materials and labor contract, with no right of way or easements granted.”

Sam jumped into the mix, “Ken, as Corporate Attorney, I review all contracts before ANYONE signs them – that way we don’t get taken.”

“Great Sam, you’re definitely earning your keep. By the way, did those temps show up?”

“Just came in a minute ago – do you want to meet them?”

“Yes, bring them in.”

A few minutes later several very nervous ladies were ushered into the Executive Conference Room. Ken stood up and spoke. “Ladies, we need your help to quickly and fairly evaluate a huge quantity of resumes we are getting for our silver mine. Now before we start, I need to tell you what and who we are looking for.

First of all, we want qualified applicants – they must be the best at doing their jobs. Secondly, they must be willing to live and work in a Company Town. This means that the company will provide things for them that they would normally have to pay for. This will result in a reduction of pay, but they only have to pay for a few things in our town, like food, clothing, and recreational gas for their cars. We are looking for Conservative, God-fearing people, we don’t care where they go to church, as long as they go. We will not discriminate based on the color of their skin, but at the same time, we’re not interested in the type who is expecting a free ride, or sues everyone at the drop of a hat instead of working out their problems. We’re not interested in people with drug or alcohol problems, unless they have had a year in a 12-step program of clean and sober living. Unfortunately, the Federal government has attempted to dictate who we hire, but Sam here has a legal way around it. Sam ...”

“Thanks Ken. Ok, what we are doing is really a security check on people who are working in a sensitive environment if anyone asks. If they cannot pass our security checks, they cannot be employed. It seems that the people we want to exclude are the same people who can’t pass a standard security check. That’s our legal out. We want to hire the best people available, and also people we would be comfortable living and working with. What we need you to do is weed out the bad apples. Ken, Steve and I will be doing the final interviews for the key positions. The best way to do this is to sort all incoming applications into piles based on the position applied for, then rank them by experience. Once you have them ranked, we need to see the resumes for the key people, I’ll give you a list later today as to who we consider key people. You don’t need to make any decisions about people, just rank the applications fairly and

quickly. Once we get the various managers hired, they'll be responsible for interviewing their own people. Any questions?"

One middle aged lady raised her hand. Sam nodded, and she continued "Where is this mine, I know a bunch of people you might want to hire, that would love to live in a place like this."

Steve answered the question, "It's about 100 miles southwest of Winnemucca. Right now, it's the middle of the desert, but we are in the process of building a company town for up to 30,000 workers. We need to get the ball rolling as soon as possible. If you know people, get their resumes, and forward them to Sam. We can't guarantee anything, since we will be really picky about whom we hire, and frankly, there won't be that many admin positions because we aren't reporting to a holding company, or anyone else we don't have to. What we are looking for is heavy equipment operators, especially with surface mining experience."

When he finished, Ken asked Sam to handle the negotiations with the railroad. Ken asked him if he had any pressing business. "Not at the minute."

Ken said, "Great, here's the number for the CEO of Southern Pacific, they own the track next to our property, Bill Bliss is the CEO, he's a friend of George's at Texaco. Call him, and negotiate the best deal you can for them to lay a spur line from their track onto our property."

"Ken, how long do you want the spur line – our property is over 20 miles on a side now – 20 miles of track can get expensive. Maybe I'll talk with Steve, and find out where he plans to put the tank farm and warehouses for the project, and run the spur line to it."

"Thanks Sam – I'm glad I hired you guys – you seem to think ahead, and your ideas are saving the company a ton of money! Go ahead, get with Steve, and you two work out the details."

Sam and Steve met in Steve's office where he had a preliminary plan for the mine. They talked for a while, and agreed between themselves the best place to put the fuel farm, warehouses, and where to run the spur line. With their new information, Sam knew he only needed 10 miles of spur rail line. Sam walked into his office with the new information and placed a call to Bill Bliss. When he was finished, he had an agreement to split the cost of the spur line, and to get started installing it as soon as the contracts were signed. Nevada Silver Inc. got lucky since most of the railroad's track repair crew was idle, and the railroad gave the company a break on the price, because it would keep critical crews busy during their normally slack time when they faced layoffs. Bill e-mailed a copy of the contract to Sam, who reviewed it, and hand carried it to Ken for signature, then signed as a witness. They were getting 10 miles of spur line and all the equipment necessary to load and offload flatcars and boxcars at below the railroad's cost. But the railroad was getting a 30 year delivery contract. Sam insisted on an escape clause in case the railroad went out of business, or was sold in a hostile takeover, or was sold by the parent company. Bill agreed reluctantly, but didn't worry too much, because if Sam needed to exercise his escape clause, he wouldn't be working for the company anymore. By the time they

needed the spur line to deliver the huge quantity of materials and fuel they would need, it would be finished.

Meanwhile Ken called the company that was selling them the heavy equipment, and suggested if they could wait a week or two, they could deliver some of the equipment that could be transported by rail when they had the spur line finished. The salesman was ecstatic, it would cut his shipping costs by 2/3! Ken then asked for half the savings back as a credit. The salesman readily agreed, because it wouldn't affect his commission. Next he called the company that was going to build all the houses for them, and advised them that by the time they needed the houses and materials, they would have a heavy load capable spur line onto the property, running right past their factory. All they had to do was build a loading dock. The owner of the company took a look at his figures, then told Ken he could reduce his price by at least 10% due to the reduced shipping costs. Ken told him to send a revised contract to Sam at their legal office for review. Next, Ken called all the other suppliers who were shipping heavy items to them with the ETA of the spur line, and they agreed to ship everything that could go by rail that way. Ken asked them to review their contracts in view of the reduced shipping costs, and send amended contracts to Sam. When they were finished, Ken decided he wanted to make a road trip, called a dealership, and ordered a fully loaded Hummer. They said it would be detailed, fully fueled, and delivered within the hour. Ken made sure he ordered the fully loaded model in desert tan with the diesel engine, AC, leather upholstery, Automatic Transmission, and the Central Inflation feature. Then he called Steve and Sam and told them that they needed to clear the decks, and be ready to visit the Mine in a little over an hour. When Ken told Steve that he bought a Hummer for the corporation, Steve let out a Rebel Yell that made everyone on that floor jump about a foot. He always wanted to drive a Hummer! He told Ken that all he needed now was a cigar and an Austrian accent. Ken went back into his office, and made a few calls, then the Sales Manager of the dealership showed up almost exactly an hour later with the keys and a contract to sign. Ken signed for the vehicle, putting it in the company name, while Sam called the Corporation's insurance company, and advised them of the purchase. About 15 minutes later, they met in the lobby. Ken and Steve both had Eagle day packs with them, and when Sam asked "what's in the bag?" Steve told him you never go out into the desert without an emergency kit. Steve smacked his forehead, turned to Ken, and said that they needed to do some shopping before they went. Ken said "You're the driver, I just need to make one stop on the way out." The Hummer was sitting right in front of the door, Steve got into the driver's seat, Sam sat in the passenger seat, and Ken took the back seat. They threw their gear in the back, then got in. Steve turned the ignition, and the diesel rumbled to life. After adjusting his seat and the mirrors, they were ready to go. The first place they went was a sporting goods store Steve knew about to put together a kit for Sam and a vehicle kit. The Hummer was already equipped with a full emergency kit, but Steve wanted to add a few items. As they walked through the sporting goods store, Steve kept throwing items in the cart. He told Sam and Ken to buy some loose fitting tan colored clothes, a good large desert hat and some high-top boots and hiking socks. While they were finding stuff, Steve bought some clothes for himself, then he grabbed a large survival knife, and Sam looked a little funny until Steve explained to him "I know it looks like something Crocodile Dundee or Arnold would carry, but where we are going, a big knife is an essential survival tool." He got

him another Eagle day pack with a Camelback hydration kit, and all the various items needed for an emergency kit. Turning to Ken, Steve whispered something, and Ken nodded. Next they headed over to the gun rack. Steve selected a Mossberg 590 with the 8-shot mag and the bayonet lug, and filled out the paperwork while Ken picked out 200 rounds of buckshot and 50 rounds of slug. Sam spoke up again “Ken, is this really necessary?”

“Sam, you must have lived in the city all your life. Where we are going, the nearest town is over an hour away. I’d rather get pistols or something more concealable, but all we can buy and take with us today are shotguns, and they’re very effective inside 25 yards, or out to 100 yards with slugs. Steve is an expert with the Mossberg 590 because he spent the last 6 years prospecting for me out in the desert, he’s been in his share of tight spots. You have to remember, even if you can call the cops, they are at least an hour away, so you have to be able to defend yourself. The shotgun stays with the vehicle, so don’t worry about it.”

That mollified Sam, and by the time they were done, Steve had filled out the paperwork, and used his company credit card to pay for all the purchases, including 4 5-gallon water containers. Steve asked the store manager if they had a good clean source of drinking water handy. The manager told them to drive their Hummer around the back, and he’s show them where to fill up. Steve drove around the back filled up their water containers, and all 3 camelback units. Next they drove to Costco, stocked up on “traveling food” and bought a case of drinking water in 1 liter bottles. When they were finished, Ken said they had one more stop to make. He gave Steve directions, and they stopped in front of a tobacconist shop. When they walked in, Ken walked up to the proprietor, who walked into the back room, and came back with a big box. Ken handed him his corporate credit card, then they carried the box out to the Hummer. Steve couldn’t contain himself anymore, so Ken let him open the box. Inside was a box of Cohiba Corona Especial Naturals, a 100-cigar Burl wood humidor, a 5 cigar travel case, a Quantum Outback Lighter, and a pair of genuine “Arnold Swartzenegger” Ray-ban Sunglasses.

“I figured that since you had the Hummer, you should have the glasses and cigar to go with it.”

Steve had a good laugh, put on the glasses and grabbed a cigar. “I’ll Be Back! [fake Ahnold accent]”

Ken laughed and said “Don’t quit your day job!”

The three of them laughed their heads off, and Steve started the Hummer, and drove out of town to I-80.

Chapter 8

Once they had stocked up, they drove east from Reno on I-80 until they were just west of Winnemucca, NV then turned South on a dirt road that got worse as it went. Steve engaged the 4-wheel drive after a few miles, and everyone tightened their seatbelts to avoid getting thrown around the cabin. Ken said “Obviously we need to pave this road. We can’t haul heavy equipment down a dirt road in the winter.”

Steve told him “Ken, actually what I was told is to chip seal it. It’s not the top coat that determines how tough a road is, but the grading work underneath it. With the freeze/thaw cycles around here, you would constantly be fixing it. You’re way ahead of the game on cost per mile to chip seal – it’s a slurry mixture containing a high quantity of gravel, and is very tough, but cheap. Besides, do you really want to chop up your nice asphalt if you need to add water or power lines later?”

Sam spoke up “Speaking of which, I got a call from a friend at the PUC, in order to get all these energy credits, we need to have a connection to the grid. From what he said, the power companies will pay for at least part of the connection costs to co-generators, and from what Steve has told me, we should be generating a HUGE surplus of energy. He said the cheapest way to go as short as we need to go is to install a 500KV line, which connects up to the grid. It will cost about a million dollars, but our credits could equal 5 million per year, plus what we make back from the utility company that buys our power. He told me of a source for used and overstock equipment, and to talk to the power company, since their crews are facing layoff, and would love a 3-month project to install a 500KV line, and a substation. This also solves another problem – what if it’s cloudy out and we aren’t making as much power? We could buy enough power from the grid to avoid firing up our backup boilers to run the steam turbines. That can save us millions of dollars annually in fuel costs.”

“Sam, that’s brilliant, make it happen.”

“I’ll make the phone calls as soon as we get back to Reno.”

They drove on for a while in a Southerly direction, eventually, they crossed the railroad tracks, and about 20 miles later, came to a dilapidated mine entrance.

Sam was incredulous “This is It? Looks like a dump!”

Ken said, “Sam, don’t judge a book by its cover. It may look like nothing now, but there are millions of dollars worth of silver underground. I wanted to come out here to get the lay of the land. How much do we own anyway?”

Sam answered “Ken, as soon as we crossed the railroad tracks, we were on our property, and it continues at least that far on the other side of the mine. It also goes 20 miles to the East and West. We own over 400 square miles.”

Ken commented “I wonder what it would cost to fence this in?”

Sam shook his head “You’re kidding, Right?”

Steve answered for Ken. “Actually he’s not, in Nevada, if you want your property to remain private, you need to fence it, or else a nearby ranch could trespass without knowing it, and their cattle can legally graze on your unfenced property. Posting isn’t enough; there must be a physical barrier to prevent livestock from crossing.”

“Steve, you’re talking about fencing over 400 square miles of desert!”

“Why do you think they invented barbed wire – the Liberals act like its offensive and dangerous, but it’s safer for the cattle, they learn to avoid it instead of trampling and getting entangled in it. Besides, it’s cheap to put up and maintain. A good crew can lay over a mile of 3 strand barb wire per day by hand, and with power equipment, they can do over 5 miles a day.”

When they had finished, Ken got out of the Hummer followed by Sam and Steve, who unrolled a plan tube onto the hood with their plans for the mine, showing where everything would go. Ken noticed Steve had a good sense of details when all the locations on the plan corresponded with a good location on the ground. Sometimes plans are all goofed up because the plan shows something that should be built on flat ground was placed in a hole. Luckily the land around the mine was basically flat desert scrub, which could easily be graded, bulldozed and pushed into shape by the heavy equipment that would be arriving as soon as they got the railroad in. They walked around for a while, but no one volunteered to go down into the mine. Ken had been in too many mines to care, and Sam admitted he was claustrophobic. Half an hour later they were on their way back to Reno. Sam was on his cell phone, working on something. Ken was getting a well-deserved rest, and Steve was unwinding the best way he knew how, long drives along the desolate expanse of desert bisected by Interstate Highway 80. Several hours later, they got back to the office, Steve parked the Hummer, and they got back to work. Steve called Granite Construction and got a quote on 20 miles of road graded for heavy traffic, with a chip seal, and sent it to Sam for review. Then he called his friends that worked for the communications company, and got an update so he could update his Project Planner – a huge printout that spanned his entire office wall, from 1 foot off the floor to about 6 feet. It was his timeline to plan getting the mine opened, and the town built. Everything was basically on schedule. If the railroad got their track laid in time, everything would be ahead of schedule. Seemed a lot of this project hinged on the railroad – he thought he should give them a call just to check up. He called the Project Supervisor at the railroad.

“Steve, good thing you called. I’m all ready to dispatch the work crew, but we need a signed contract to get going.” Steve interrupted “Hang on a second, let me put Sam on the line.”

Steve paged Sam, and then filled him in. They decided to conference call. “Larry, Sam is on the phone with us, He’s the Corporate Attorney, could you repeat your last.”

“Sam, I was telling Steve we needed a signed contract before we could start anything.”

“Larry, I personally FedEx’d the signed contract to your head office last week, and I have a delivery signature card here with your CEO’s signature on it – you better check with them, and I’ll call you back in half an hour. Are there any other problems I need to know about?”

“Not really Sam – I’ll get back to you.”

When they hung up, Sam swore “Those SOB’s probably wanted to bump the contract a million or so, it’s an old dodge. I’ll call their CEO right now, and tell him if that work crew isn’t on the site tomorrow, I’ll call George Sr. at Texaco, and tell him his buddy Bill is holding up their project. He’ll read Bill the riot act – this contract is worth \$10-20 million a year to Texaco.”

“Go Get ‘em Tiger!”

Sam walked into his office, looked up the phone number for Bill Bliss at Southern Pacific Railroad. “Bill, this is Sam, the Corporate Attorney at Nevada Silver Mines, Inc. I just had a disturbing phone call with Larry your project manager. He claimed that he didn’t have a signed contract in hand. I don’t know what’s going on over there, but I have a delivery card from FedEx with your signature on it with last week’s date on it proving I sent it! If you don’t have a crew on this site tomorrow, my next call will be to George Sr. at Texaco. He recommended you, and you’re holding up a project that is worth over \$20 million a year to Texaco, and over \$100 million to Nevada Silver Mine, Inc.”

“Calm Down Sam, I’m sure it’s a misunderstanding – I’ll get right on it, no need to get George involved. I have the contract right here, and I faxed a copy to Larry last week. I’ll personally tell him to get a crew dispatched right now, with all their equipment.”

“Nice doing business with you Bill.”

As Sam broke the connection he thought to himself “Damn, I love playing hardball!”

10 minutes later a very apologetic Larry was on the telephone. “Sam, I’m sorry, some clerk misfiled the contract file. Bill just called, and wanted me to assure you the crew will be there tomorrow, and the contract will be completed on or ahead of schedule. Don’t worry about anything, I’m personally riding shotgun on this project. Bill told me exactly how big your contract with Southern Pacific is. If necessary, I’ll pull crews off other projects to finish yours.”

“OK, but understand this – that was a fixed cost contract – any billing for overruns or extra expenses are NOT authorized. If you want to do it on your own dime, then do it, just make sure the project is finished on time, and graded properly like the contract specs. We will be moving HEAVY Freight down that spur – it has to match or exceed the grade of the main line.”

“Sam, Bill explained the entire project to me – don’t worry, there WON’T be any foul-ups!”

“Just make sure there aren’t. Anything Else?”

“No, just wanted to say I was very sorry about the misunderstanding!”

When Sam disconnected, he walked into Steve’s office, and gave him a High-five.

“Damn, I love playing hardball!”

“Maybe I should have you represent me at my divorce – the Ex got me for everything but the shirt off my back.”

“Oh, really – tell you what, when things settle down, I’ll look into re-opening your case, and see if I can’t get you a better settlement. You weren’t beaten in court by your Ex, you probably had the best attorney that you could afford back then. Now that I’m on the case, I’ll see what I can do to re-negotiate your settlement.”

“Thanks Sam!”

Steve had got hold of the people in the Communications Company – and they e-mailed a quote to Steve, who forwarded it to Sam for review. Sam was going to be busy. Steve tacked a sticky note to the quote asking if they could dig the trench deep enough to bury power, water, and phone/CATV lines in the same trench, and what that would do to the price. Steve wanted 2 prices – they dig trench, or NSM, Inc. would dig trench. He figured as much trenching as they would need, they could lease a continuous trencher and cut all the trenches at once, including all the stuff needed for the mine. That gave Steve an idea, and he called their “personnel department” and asked that any resumes for anyone who was qualified to work a continuous trencher should be red-flagged to him since they needed that ASAP, as well as the grader, loader and other Road Construction crew to make the mine roads. Steve was trying to get people who could not only work in the mine, but could do things to get the community started, like build the roads, install utilities, and build the buildings. They were going to use steel buildings as much as possible to reduce costs. Steve then remembered they needed a Concrete Batch Plant on site for all the concrete work they would need, and called a friend that owned a concrete company, and had him e-mail a quote to him for a batch plant and enough Portland cement to do the job – they could use local rock and sand from their gravel pit. He’d need a couple of Concrete mixer trucks, pumper trucks and drivers for about 6 months to a year as well. Steve told them to plan on delivering everything by rail if possible to reduce costs. His

buddy said that would cut shipping costs almost 80%. Everything could be shipped by rail including the trucks.

Next he called Concrete Construction and asked them about chip seal, and if they could leave a plant there when they were finished so that the mine could manufacture chip seal to pave their roads. The owner of CC did one further, said that if they needed CC's equipment, he could lease it to the company since they were in a down cycle, and either train their operator, or lease it with a plant operator. Steve told him they would have a spur line in a week or so, and the owner of CC said that he needed to re-figure his quotes because delivery by rail would greatly reduce his shipping costs. He said he'd e-mail new quotes to him tomorrow.

Steve was impressed, it seemed the rail line spur was going to save them money instead of cost them money.

The next day, Bill called to tell Sam that the crew was on the site, and they would have the spur line graded, ballasted, and set including all the switches and other miscellaneous stuff they would need to ship freight down that line, load and off-load cargo within a week. He reminded Sam that anything they shipped by rail could be no higher than 16 feet tall or wider than 12 feet to fit through the tunnels, including the car – which limited them to 15 feet of cargo, because their lowest flat car was a foot over the tracks. The good news was weight over that section of track from Salt Lake City to Winnemucca NV was basically unlimited, but they did charge by the weight for shipping. He said they had even shipped Haul Packs and other large equipment via rail, broken down into components small enough to fit through the tunnels. Sam thanked Bill for that piece of advice, and drafted a memo to Steve and Ken. As soon as Ken got it, he called all his suppliers to remind them of the size restrictions, and they all assured him they had shipped stuff by rail, and were aware of the size restrictions.

Steve got hold of Jim, one of his friends who wanted to design and install the Heliostat electrical generating station, the wind turbines, and everything else. Jim told Steve there was a working heliostat along US 395 in the California Desert near Barstow called "Four Corners" because it was the intersection of 2 major roads and nothing else. It was a quarter the size of the design they wanted to build and it produced in excess of 10 Megawatts of power during a sunny day, plus all those wind generators, he figured their average daily output at between 50 and 150 megawatts, not including the power generated by the homes themselves, which were just about electrically self-sufficient. Steve told him about their 500KV line connecting them to the Grid that the PUC required to get all their Alternative Energy Credits. Jim told Steve that they would be a net energy exporter instead of importer, and to make sure they got a good rate for any power bought by the electrical companies, and to insist that they only pay the rate they charged other utilities for any power used. Jim also told Steve it would solve a bunch of problems like what if the sun wasn't shining, and there wasn't enough wind to replace it – they would have to install massive boilers to keep the turbines spinning. With this piece of info, they could cut the number of boilers in half, and save millions of dollars per boiler. Steve just kept writing down the savings from their good ideas.

When he ended the call, Sam buzzed him to say the quotes he wanted from the Communication Company were in. Steve walked into Sam's office, looked at the 2 quotes, and noted the one without the trenches was 1/3 the price of the one with. Steve grabbed both quotes, walked into Ken's Office, and asked him to call that Heavy Equipment dealer in Salt Lake City, and ask him the cost to buy or lease a continuous trencher that could cut a 3 foot wide and 6 foot deep trench mounted on a crawler body for off-road use. Ken said he'd get back to him. When he got back to his office, Steve found a resume on his desk with a red flag on it for a Heavy Equipment operator who was qualified to run a trencher, grader, loader, haul pack, and basically all mine equipment. Steve decided to give him a call.

"Hello, this is the Roberts residence."

"Hi, this is Steve Gibbons with Nevada Silver Mine, Inc. calling for Brian."

"One minute, let me get him."

"Hi this is Brian, how may I help you?"

Brian, this is Steve Gibbons at Nevada Silver Mine, I have your resume in front of me. I'm pretty impressed by the list of heavy equipment you are qualified to operate."

"Thanks, Steve, I used to work at Newmont until we moved to California to take care of my ailing mother. She died recently, and now I want to move back to Nevada, but as you know, Newmont has gone underground since then, and doesn't need as many heavy equipment operators."

"How did you get qualified on so many machines?"

"I worked different shifts, and guys would call in sick that worked a critical piece of equipment, so Newmont paid to get some of us qualified on different machines. I saw the writing on the wall, so to speak and took advantage of the situation to get certified on every piece of equipment they owned, so if there were layoffs, I'd be able to jump to a different piece of equipment. Then my mom got sick, and that was that."

"Brian, you have the qualifications we are looking for, can you come to the office tomorrow morning and meet with me. It won't be a formal interview, so jeans and a tee shirt would be fine. We're at 1900 Reno Blvd Suite 1400 in downtown Reno – say 10:00 am. OK – great see you then."

Steve was glad that he had found someone with heavy equipment experience to run stuff, because they were going to need them in a week or two as soon as the railroad was in to deliver the heavy equipment, they'd need it to build the loading docks, grade and level the areas where

the steel buildings were going, then to grade and pave the roads in the mining community. Finally, they were going to work in the mine for the next 30 years at least.

Chapter 9

The next morning at 9:45am, Brian Roberts walked into the 14th story offices of Nevada Silver Mine Inc. They had yet to hire a receptionist, so Brian walked down the hall until he literally ran into Steve. “Hi, you must be Brian Roberts. Would you mind waiting in my office a couple of minutes while I talk to the boss?” Steve showed Brian into his office, and sat him in a nice comfortable seat, and offered him a cup of coffee. When Brian requested it black no sugar, Steve was puzzled, but went to run his errand. A few minutes later, he sat down at his desk, and started laughing. “That explains it!”

“Excuse me Sir?”

“I thought I remembered something from your resume yesterday, but it must have slipped my mind – you just jogged my memory when you ordered your coffee black no sugar – the only person I know that ever drank their coffee that way was an old Navy Chief I used to know. Then I looked at your resume, and you’re an ex-Navy Chief Machinist. Mind telling me why you got out of the Navy.

“We’ll sir, it’s no secret – I was a stumbling drunk my last year in the Navy – I’d went through a divorce, and my ex got everything, including the kids. My life fell apart, and one thing led to another until one night at a bar in Subic Bay, I slugged an Officer so hard that I shattered his jaw. I was up for a courts martial, but my CO decided to intervene. You see, I had been a machinist mate on his Destroyer for my whole career, and made Chief just before my divorce, right after I re-upped. My Ex had a fit, said she was sick and tired of the Navy, and wanted out. Then I found out she was sleeping with my best friend. My world fell apart, I started drinking, and it got worse. Anyway, My CO was a mustang, and knew what I was going through, and talked to the base CO, then talked to me. I don’t know how many favors he called in, but he got me an honorable discharge, no time served, and the entire deal was conditional on me completing 20 AA meetings in the next 2 months. Well, let me tell you, I was facing 10-20 in the stockade and a dishonorable discharge, so I jumped at the offer. After I went to about 20 meetings, I started turning my life around, and 5 years later, I gave my life to Christ, and 2 years later, I re-married and we have 2 beautiful little girls.”

“So you’ve been clean and sober 10 years, and you were a Machinist Mate in the Navy”

“That was Chief Machinist Mate!”

“Spoken like a true Chief. Sorry about that – any way, you have supervisory experience, you’re qualified as an operator on just about every machine we need to run – ever run a trencher?”

“Yes Sir, did so about 20 years ago during summers in college when I worked for a Utility Company.”

“You worked for a Utility Company – I guess you know how to not only dig trenches, but how to lay conduit and pipe?”

“Yes Sir, by the time I was finished working for my Uncle’s company, I’d worked on every crew he had. While it was 20 years ago, I know the basics, and the rest will come back to me.”

“Brian – we are trying to set up a “company town” about 100 miles Southwest of Winnemucca, NV. This is not your usual job; a large portion of your pay will be as benefits, like housing, education for your children, and other things. Please read this, it’s quicker than explaining it.”

Steve handed Brian a folder with their plans for the company and community. It took Brian about ½ an hour to read it through, and when he finished, his eyes lit up.

“I’ve been looking for something like this – I always thought it was stupid to get paid \$20.00 per hour, and have to spend at least 15 of it buying things your employer could buy in volume much cheaper. I like your health Plan – It’s what Kaiser Permanente started out as – a closed –shop health care for the workers at Kaiser. I noticed that there is profit sharing?”

“Actually it’s a very generous profit sharing, up to 30% of your salary can be in general stock in the company – at the rate the value of the company will go up when all this silver hits the market, it could work out to millions of dollars worth of stock. We pay for everything except your food and clothing – I mean personal clothing – not your work clothes. Also the gas for your personal vehicle, but we are providing that at cost, with a 10% markup to cover expenses, like hiring a kid to collect the money at the pump.”

“You are giving us a house?”

“Not exactly – you have free use of it as long as you are an employee of the mine. If you voluntarily leave employment, you have to be out within 30 days.”

“And what if you’re fired or laid off?”

“That will be a rarity – first of all, we’ll be very picky about whom we hire, and any problems will be resolved before it’s necessary to fire someone. The exception to that rule is to use drugs or alcohol on the job. If you flunk two successive random drug checks, you’re out without recourse.”

“I notice there is no mention of Unions?”

“Ken decided from the start that Unions are more of a pain than they’re worth. Everyone will get treated fairly, but will be expected to give 100% to the company. We won’t hire anyone not willing to work their butt off to make this work. To make sure, every employee signs a waiver of Union representation before they are hired. The entire property is fenced and posted, and the

only way in or out is through the security gate. Any Union rep that shows up will be told to leave, and if they refuse, they will be prosecuted for criminal trespass.”

“About time – I got sick and tired of those whiny Union guys telling us what Rights we had, yet never talking about our responsibility to the company.”

“Brian, would you come with me – I have someone I’d like you to meet.” They got up and walked over to Ken’s office. Steve knocked on the door, and then they entered. Ken was just wrapping up a phone call, and shook Brian’s hand when he was finished.

Steve gave Ken the Reader’s Digest version of their conversation, including the fact that Brian was in AA and had 10 years clean and sober.

“Brian, I just kicked a 10-year drinking habit, anyone that can stay clean and sober for 10 years has my respect.”

“Ken, how would you feel about hiring Brian as a Mine Supervisor in charge of the Equipment – he’s operated just about every piece of equipment we have, including a trencher. And he was a Chief Machinist Mate in the Navy.”

“Really – how are your machining skills?”

“I worked on a destroyer – if you have a properly furnished machine shop, I can fix or fabricate just about anything, and I’ve worked on large diesel engines too.”

“Brian – we’d like to hire you, any problem with us running a standard background check on you?”

“Not a problem – you know practically my whole life story anyway.”

“Brian, pending the outcome of the security check, we’d like to hire you as the Mine Supervisor of Equipment – you’ll also be in charge of the machine shop. You’ll need to order the equipment, hire the workers, and supervise them. I’ll expect since you’re an ex-Chief that you are a hands-on kind of guy, which is what we want. You’ll have full authority to run your shop, and you report directly to Steve, who is the VP of the Corporation, and the Operations Manager of the mine. He’s a geologist by training, but he’s done a lot of stuff as well. As far as salary goes, we’ll start you at \$100,000.00 per year cash, plus 30% of your salary in stock. Since you have 2 girls, we’ll put you up in a 4 bedroom house – it won’t be anything spectacular, they are all UBC modular houses, but they are large and comfortable. The first couple of months, you’ll have to rough it while we get everything built, but we’ll do everything in our power to make you comfortable.”

“Ken, that will work great – we’re renting an apartment in town anyway, and have to give 30 days notice, and the girls are finishing up their semester in school. We could move after the end of semester, so all you need to do is set up some trailers for the crew that is getting this place set up.”

Steve spoke next. “Brian, I’ll call you as soon as I hear anything. It should be today or tomorrow.”

“Thanks Steve, any thing I can do for you while we wait?”

“As a matter of fact there is – if you know of any heavy equipment operators that would like to work for us, and you would personally vouch for, have them send their resumes directly to my attention, and put your name on it as a reference.”

“Now that you mention it – I do know a whole bunch of heavy equipment operators, I’ll have to check and see what they are up to. As far as vouching for them, I’ll have to do that on a case-by-case basis, since I don’t know some of these guys real well.”

“OK, if you can’t vouch for them, don’t tell them to put your name on their resume – that way I’ll know they’re qualified, but you can’t vouch for them.”

“That will work great – I hope to hear from you soon. Nice meeting you both.”

Brian reached out and shook both Ken and Steve’s hands, then turned around and walked out. He appeared to be walking a little taller as he left. Steve walked over to Sam’s office to have him run a background check. Sam had the Sheriff run Brian through the mill, NCIC, and even DOD. Several hours later, Sam got the reply back that Brian had been a model citizen after leaving the Navy, was current on all his bills, including child support, and still had his DOD Top Secret clearance, even though it was inactive since he quit the Navy. Sam walked the report over to Steve, who read it, then called Brian.

“Roberts Residence, Brian Speaking.”

“Brian, Steve – your Background check came back so clean it squeaked. Can you come in first thing tomorrow to sign some paperwork, and can you start work tomorrow?”

“Sure, I already talked it over with my wife – she’d love to live in a community like that – we worry too much about our girls around here. I’ll be in at 0900 tomorrow.”

“See you then.” Steve called Ken and gave him the good news, then asked if they could use one of the offices on this floor as a temporary office for Brian until he went out to the mine. Ken told him to open the office next to his, and get him some furniture delivered.

Brian showed up at 0900 the next morning, dressed in a suit and tie. Steve was impressed, then told him they only dressed up when they were in Reno – in the field, they wore work clothes. Brian said that was good, since that was the only suit he owned. Steve laughed and told Brian that there was a pile of paperwork in his new office to work through. Brian looked surprised until Steve told him it was just temporary, and not to get used to it. Brian breathed a sigh of relief and confessed he didn't want to become a "suit". Steve knew he had hired the right guy for the job, since he wanted a hands-on supervisor who wouldn't mind getting his hands dirty. Brian walked into his office, sat in the most luxurious chair he had ever sat in, then poured a cup of coffee and started into the pile of paperwork. By 5:00 pm, he was finished. He buzzed Steve, told him he was finished with the paperwork, and if it were OK with Steve, he was going home to be with his family, because once they started construction, he wouldn't see them for a while. Steve agreed, and told him to be back by 0900. Brian said goodnight, then put on his suit jacket, and walked out the door. Half an hour later, he was home playing with his little girls. His wife was overjoyed about his new job, but realized she wasn't going to see too much of him for the next couple of months. That night, she held him when they went to bed.

Chapter 10

The next morning Brian was in his office, and after consulting with Steve, was on the phone tracking down all his old friends from Newmont. Amazingly $\frac{3}{4}$ of them were available and interested. The ones Brian trusted, he told to fax or e-mail their resume to Steve Gibbons at Nevada Silver Mine, Inc, and make sure they used his name – and NOT to tell anyone else about that last part since it bypassed Personnel and went directly to Steve’s desk. The rest of them, he told to mail or e-mail a resume to Steve’s attention, but didn’t mention using Brian’s name. Within a week they had over 100 resumes from Heavy Equipment Operators and every other trade they would need at the mine –evidently word spread fast. Brian called an old Navy buddy of his from the Teams, who had retired recently, and was looking for something to do. He was a Chief Machinist Mate like Brian, but he had decided to join the SEALs. He was one of the oldest men to make it through BUDS training and be accepted into the teams. He lasted 4 years before a blown knee forced his medical retirement. Reconstructive Surgery made it good as new, but he was permanently disqualified from jumping. He still jumped with a civilian club, to the amazement of his orthopedic surgeon. He was looking for a security job, but Brian thought he could do one better. He had Jim e-mail his resume including his DD 214 to him. Brian called Steve and asked if he had a minute. Brian hand-carried Jim’s resume into Steve, and after Steve read it, he was impressed.

“Brian, this is one heck of a guy – but I’m confused as to what you want to do with him?”

“First of all, he’s a Chief Machinist Mate just like me, but he’s also a retarded Seal, so he could help set up the security for the project. I know you’re in the middle of nowhere, but even still, you need to think of security, since you will have millions of dollars of silver on hand between shipments. You can’t have an armored car driving through the gate every day. The amount of metal you’ll generate will require an 18-wheeler and an armed escort. He’s got the know-how and connections to get it done, besides I could use a second in command, since we worked together for years before he made the teams.”

“Since he’s a medically retired Seal and a friend of yours, no sense doing a background check. I’d like to meet him – can you schedule him in here in the next day or so? Also, I’ve been flooded with applications with your name on it. Did you know everyone at Newmont?”

“No, just about all the Heavy Equipment Operators and Craftsmen though.”

“Great – keep up the good work. You keep this up, and we won’t need to advertise.”

Brian called Jim, and he said he could be in at 0900 tomorrow morning. Brian suggested a suit and tie. Jim said he thought he had one lying around. Jim asked Brian if they could go out for a beer later. Brian said “That’s so NOT funny Jim! However, if you want, we can go out for dinner at a nice restaurant – my treat!”

“Brian, you’ve got yourself a deal.”

Bill Bliss was on the phone with Steve, and he had great news. The land was so flat from the rail line to the end of their spur that it was already graded dead flat, and they were finishing the ballasting. Once that was in, they would begin laying track. With the crew they had, it would be finished within a week, and able to take traffic. They were giving them 2 sets of switches, plus a Wye to turn around. This would double the speed of loading and unloading. Bill was FedExing a series of plans they would need for their cargo handling platforms, and all the hardware they would need for their fuel farm to pump directly from their tanker cars into the fuel farm. Bill said they could deliver gasoline as well as diesel and if they wanted to co-locate the fuel farms, it would save millions of dollars. Steve looked at his plans, and realized they had plenty of room to expand the fuel farm. He realized the pipeline to pump gasoline from the fuel farm to the gas station would be about 100 feet long, and they could have small underground tanks at the gas station, and store the bulk of the fuel at the fuel farm. Steve told Bill that was a great idea, and asked him how big his largest tanker was.

“We have 10,000 gallon tankers that can hold either gas or diesel, and we routinely move them along that rail line, so there is no problem on our end.”

Steve asked Bill’s recommendation for tanks, and he said they should buy the biggest tanks they can, in excess of 100,000 gallons, since they could haul that much in one trip easy. Steve thanked Bill, and called George Jr. at Texaco.

“JR, Steve at Nevada Silver Mine, how are you coming with that quote?”

“Just about finished, what’s up?”

“How many gallons of diesel do you think we’d use in a month?”

“My best guess is that Newmont goes through almost 100,000 gallons per month.”

“I was talking to Bill Bliss at the railroad. He suggested 100K tanks.”

“Steve, my honest opinion is you need more like Million gallon tanks, that way if your supply gets disrupted, you’ll have 10 months of fuel on hand. They don’t cost much more than the 100K tanks and the permitting is the same. I’d go with a million gallons of diesel, 100K of Regular and 100K of mid-grade. Skip the Super, most smaller cars don’t need it.”

“We also need diesel for the mine trucks, and most of the personal vehicles are diesels.”

“In that case, I’d add a 100K tank of Road Tax diesel – since you’ll get into huge trouble with the State if you sell non-taxed diesel for on-road use.”

“Glad you told me, I totally forgot!”

“I’ll process the permit paperwork for your tank farm for you, and we will ship the equipment the day after the contract is signed. The diesel tank should be on your property tomorrow with 10,000 gallons of #2 Diesel. Just call this number and give them this account number when you need it refilled.” (Writing)

“Thanks, JR, nice doing business with you – the railroad claims they’ll have the spur line done the end of this week, and Bill FedExed the plans we would need to construct all of our freight handling equipment.”

When Steve hung up, he buzzed Ken.

“Ken, make sure we are getting an Off-road fork lift and crane with enough lifting capacity to unload those trains until we get our loading and unloading docks built.”

“Already taken care of Steve, I also called that guy with the Concrete batch plant, and he said as soon as our Spur was in, he’d have it freighted up to the mine and set up.”

“Ken, we’re going to need some construction trailers and some housing trailers in a couple of days, can you call that guy that is building the homes and ask him if he has any we can lease. If he does, tell him to truck them down right now, and tell us when they will be there and set up. Also I need to get some porta-potties set up, and some generators, water, and a canteen to feed them.”

“Steve, I’ll get right on it – how many men are you planning on?”

“I’d like to say plan for 50 men, that will be enough to get things started. When Texaco builds the tank farm, they’ll provide all their own stuff. With the gear we should be getting next week, we can get the mine roads graded, and get the pads for the big warehouses done. Dang, I forgot to check with the UBC modular manufacturer how big of a steel building they will erect for their new plant. I need to know how big and thick of a foundation they need. I better call them right now!”

Steve called the UBC manufacturer, and found out they were building a 200K square foot building, that they would need a 6 inch slab of rebar reinforced 3500psi concrete and flat to + or – 6 inches across it’s full length. Steve said they would have a batch plant in place within a week or two, but they weren’t qualified to build or pour a slab that big or that flat. They said not to worry, they were sending down a crew to build the building including the foundation. He said they would appreciate if they could use the batch plant, and pay for the concrete. Steve gave him the number of the guy providing the batch plant, and told him to contact the company directly, and make sure they could handle that volume of high-strength concrete. Half an hour later, Steve got a call from the Concrete Company.

“Steve, I had a really interesting call with a gentleman from a company that wanted to build a 200K square foot building using 6 inches of reinforced 3500psi concrete. That’s over 3700 Cubic yards of concrete. The plant I was going to lease you can’t handle it! I thought you’d be making buildings a 10th that size. I have another batch plant that will handle that volume and more, but it’s 3 times the cost.”

“Go ahead and ship the bigger batch plant, and FedEx me a new contract. Also, go ahead and ship me 3500psi mix design Portland cement, instead of the 2500psi. We needed to build some bigger foundations of our own, and might as well build it out of 3500psi concrete. Do you know a good supplier for rebar; we’re going to need several rail car loads.”

“I’ll call our supplier and have him call you. He’s in Salt Lake City, and usually ships via rail to us – he has some specialized rail cars for carrying rebar.

Meanwhile, Ken was making arrangements for the temporary housing of the work crews. The UBC housing company did have some pre-built construction trailers and some they could easily convert into dormitories on the lot. They recommended getting some military surplus 110vac diesel generators, and the towable 500 gallon diesel tanks, as well as some “mules” or water tanks on trailers to make sure they had enough water. Ken called the local surplus store, and they had all the stuff they needed in stock. They could put it all on a flatbed trailer and ship it to the mine site. All of a sudden, Ken smacked himself in the head – where were they going to get water? Ken called Steve, he didn’t know, Steve called Bill Bliss, and Bill informed him they had a water line running parallel to the tracks and there was a 6” tap within 100 feet of their access road. All they’d have to do is run 4” pipe or better yet, run a hydrant and a long length of fire hose to a convenient spot, and install a manifold to supply them water. The tap had a meter on it, and the railroad could bill them off the meter. Ken figured they were 20 miles away from the mine site, and the water trucks would need a lot of water while they were earthmoving to keep the dust down.

Ken opened his Yellow Pages, and called a Piping supply company, and asked them which would be better. The guy who answered the phone was an old-timer who had retired from the construction business, and knew exactly what Ken needed. He recommended leasing a water system from another company which included the pipe, an overhead tank that could fill the water trucks, and enough plumbing to fill their mules for the crew’s water needs. He mentioned leasing shower equipment as well, since they would get dusty and dirty working in all that sand. When he gave Ken all the information he gave him a phone number and the name of a salesman he trusted there. Ken thanked him and called the other number. Good thing he took good notes. The guy he talked to was very helpful, and made several suggestions that Ken agreed to. Ken asked him when they could ship, and the salesman said they could ship with a verbal PO. Ken gave him a PO number, then e-mailed it, and requested a confirming PO prior to shipment. 5 minutes later the confirming PO with shipping instructions arrived in his e-mail. Looking at his calendar He realized it was Tuesday, and by Friday, the spur line would be in. He needed men at the mine site by Friday. He called Steve and asked him if Brian was ready to go by Friday.

Steve was talking to Brian, who agreed that he could go to the mine site on Friday and supervise things. Steve volunteered to go too, and they could take the Hummer. Thinking quickly, Ken said he'd call them right back, and called back the Military Surplus store. Yes they did have a Military trailer that was designed to be towed by the Humvee, and the diesel Hummer was the same size, so it could tow it easily. Ken asked them how much they wanted, then asked him to hold it for them for a day.

"Steve, I've got a line on a Military Surplus trailer for the Hummer. If you're going, you might as well be able to bring some stuff with you. Make a list of what you'll need for a week in the desert, and we'll get the trailer and bring it with you."

"Thanks Ken, we'll get right on it."

Hearing the conversation over the speaker, Brian was busy writing out a list of stuff the two of them would need in the desert for a week. He figured 10 gallons of water per day to be safe, added food, a propane stove, a 4-man tent with cots and sleeping bags, a 5-gallon camper's shower, 2 20-pound bottles of propane and the adapters to run a stove and a propane lantern off one tank. Then he thought of a folding camp table for the stove. He asked Steve if open fires were OK, and Steve said there was tons of sagebrush around there to burn. Brian added a Woodsman's Pal that he knew would make short work of cutting sagebrush for the fire. Then he asked Steve about firearms. Steve told him he always brought guns with him. Brian asked him if it were OK for him to bring his Para-Ord P-14 limited, and his Mossy shotgun. Steve said he had the long-range stuff covered, and he owned the same pistol, so that would work great. Steve added 500 rounds of FMJ 230gr .45acp ammo in case they had time to target shoot. Steve asked Brian if he had a CCW. Brian admitted he had never applied for one. Steve told him the corporation could pay for one, since he was probably going to need one. Brian looked at him funny, and Steve said that Ken was really security conscious, and since he couldn't get a CCW due to his recent DUI's, he preferred those around him were armed when they were out and about. Steve was armed 24/7, but that was a judgment call Brian needed to make. "If I could have a CCW, I'd want to be armed 24/7 – it's just such a hassle to get one in Washoe County."

"Sam can get you one with a phone call, all you have to do is drive over to the shooting range in Sparks, take a written test, and a shooting test. Since you're a Chief, you're probably a marksman with that .45."

"Well, I qualified Expert actually, but I haven't shot in 2 years."

"Brian, I've got a couple of hours to kill, I'll have Sam call the Sheriff, and we'll go over to the range in the Hummer and you can practice before you need to qualify."

"I left my gun at home."

"OK, we'll get it on the way. Do you have a concealed holster?"

“No, I always wanted a DeSantis Double shoulder holster – they look so cool, and with the double mag carrier, you have a lot of rounds on tap. I figure that, and a good Kydex IWB holster ought to work.”

“I know a dealer in town that carries both, we’ll get your gun, stop at the shop, then by the time we get to the range, the paperwork should have caught up with us.”

Steve walked over to Sam’s office, and Sam got on the phone to the Sheriff. Steve walked over to Ken’s office and said they were going to the range in Sparks, and Brian was getting a CCW. Ken thought it was a good idea, and told Steve to bring his Cell phone. Steve patted his pocket to make sure it was there, then they got up and left. The Hummer was waiting at the curb when they arrived in the lobby, so Steve hopped in the Driver’s seat while Brian got in the passenger seat. 5 minutes later, they were at Steve’s favorite gun shop, and half an hour later, they emerged with a DeSantis shoulder holster, and a Kydex IWB holster, and a double mag off-side mag holder. Steve bought 4 spare mags, then gave 2 to Brian, and they bought 1,000 rounds of FMJ ammo plus 200 rounds of Cor-bon Flying Ashcan JHP ammo. Next they stopped at Brian’s house. Brian’s wife was surprised by the Hummer, but recognized Brian. Brian gave Sharon the news that he was going to have to go out of town starting on Friday, and that they were going shooting, and the company got him a CCW permit. Sharon was very happy, because she new how bad things were becoming in Reno. After Brian grabbed his gun, they headed to the range. They were greeted by the owner of the range, who said the paperwork for Brian’s CCW was waiting, and all he needed was a copy of his driver’s license, and to pass a written test, and a shooting test. Steve asked if they could rent 2 lanes for a couple of hours of practice first. Steve bought a pack of B-27 targets, and when they got their lane assignments, they put on their earmuffs, and walked out to the range. They set up on adjacent lanes, and both clipped B-27s to their target holders, and rolled them out to 15 yards. Brian took his gun out of the case, emptied all the defensive ammo, and put it back in the case, and loaded the FMJ ammo in all his magazines. When he finished loading, he gave a thumbs up to Steve, and loaded. He started at a low ready position, and quickly brought the gun up, and as soon as the sights centered on the X-ring, Brian unloaded the entire magazine of 14 rounds in about 5 seconds. He ejected the empty magazine, left the gun locked open, and rolled the target back in. Steve’s jaw hit the ground. “I’d hate to see how you shot when you weren’t rusty!” Meanwhile the owner of the range was watching them shoot, walked over to Brian, and said “I guess we can dispense with the shooting test – you shoot like our instructors!”

Steve explained that Brian was a retired Chief Machinist Mate.

The owner’s eyes lit up, “I thought you were military trained, No one shoots Weaver stance like that unless they are military trained. Semper Fi, Bother! I was with the Marines in Vietnam.”

“Well Sir, I didn’t have the honor of serving during Vietnam, but some of my relatives are on the Wall.” The two Vets clicked immediately and the three of them talked for a while until the owner, whose name was Bob, brought out his Colt 1911 with a custom Vietnam Vet inscription

on it. When they were done admiring it, Bob set up on the adjacent lane, ran his target out to 20 yards, and put all 6 rounds in the x-ring.

“Nice thing about owning a range – I can shoot every day.”

They went back to shooting, and the CCW was forgotten. When they ran out of ammo, Bob signed off on Brian’s CCW, and gave him his copy. Brian reloaded his ParaOrd, this time with the Flying Ashcan rounds, reloaded 2 extra mags, and stuck them on the offside mag carrier, then topped off the P-14 and holstered it. He slid the shoulder holster on, and adjusted it, then attached the belt keepers to keep it balanced, shrugged a couple of times, then put his suit jacket back on. Brian put his CCW in his wallet, and said “OK, now I’m good to go.” Steve ran Brian back to the office to get his car, and Brian told him he’d be in at 0900 tomorrow.

0900 the next morning

Brian beat Jim to the office by a matter of minutes. They both walked up to the elevators, and rode the same car. They were still talking when they arrived on the 14th floor. Since they had leased the whole floor, Brian and Jim walked right into Brian’s office. When Jim saw Brian’s office, he was impressed.

“Brian, I know flag officers who don’t have offices as nice as this!”

“Well don’t get used to it, Friday Steve and I are going to live in the field for a week in a tent. We’re trying to get a huge silver mine and a company town up and running.”

“Brian, I know all about Company towns! Are you sure you want me here?”

“Jim before you say another word – you might want to read this. You still take your coffee black no sugar?”

“Yeah, just like they serve it in the Chief’s mess.”

“Great, let me grab two mugs – have a seat and start reading, I’ll be right back.”

Brian got up, and poured 2 mugs – he noticed they had the new company logo on them, he wondered when they found the time to do that. He walked back in, set Jim’s mug on the corner of his desk and sat back down, and went to work reviewing resumes that had come in overnight for the project that pertained to the Machine Shop or else Heavy Equipment Operators that Brian hadn’t contacted personally, but had heard through the grapevine. One of the resumes was for a Crane Operator with an Unlimited Weight rating. Knowing how rare those were, he kept reading. This guy was military trained, served in the Seabees and was working at the Ship construction yard in San Diego. Brian knew that yard was only staying open due to military repair contracts, so he was probably looking to jump ship. He hand carried the resume into

Steve's office while Jim continued reading, he asked Steve if they had hired a Crane Operator yet, and when Steve said no, Brian laid the resume on Steve's desk. Steve knew what an Unlimited rating meant, and decided to call the guy right then and there. Brian left his office, and walked back into his right as Jim was finishing up.

Jim closed the booklet right as Brian sat down. "Brian, I owe you an apology, and I'd love to meet the gentleman who thought this up. It has the best features of all the Company Towns with none of the drawbacks – it's basically a perfect setup."

"Jim, this has been the dream of a guy who once was a stumbling drunk like me, but had a dream. Steve was the geologist who discovered a huge vein of Silver Ore in an old abandoned mine that Ken had researched in the archives. The find is bigger than the Carlin Trend, and richer than the Comstock. They didn't know how to mine microscopic sliver in the 1800's, and the mine was abandoned and forgotten. Ken figured that some of the mines that were abandoned in the 1800's might be profitably mined with 21st century technology. The data they got back from this mine was good enough to get 10 billionaires to invest up to \$200 Million each in the venture."

"This is all well and great, but where do I fit in?"

"Your official title will either be Head of Security, or Assistant Manager of Equipment. I need a second in command, since I can't be at two places at once. I'm responsible for the Heavy Equipment and the Machine Shop. Since you were A Chief Machinist Mate, you're as qualified as I am to run the shop. Your background as a SEAL was interesting enough to get you the position of Head of Security. We need your help planning the security of the site. We'll be moving millions of dollars worth of silver around and out of the mine at a frequent basis, and that creates all kinds of security problems. Let me buzz Steve and see if he's busy." Brian leaned over and buzzed Steve, who said he'd be free in a minute. Seeing Jim's mug was empty, Brian brought the carafe in and refilled both their mugs, then they walked into Steve's office. Jim immediately noticed the expensive suit, and also the tell-tale bulge that he was packing. He looked at Brian, and noticed the same bulge. After shaking hands, he said "You guys really need to get a better tailor if you're going to pack with a shoulder holster."

"How'd you know we are both packing?"

"You both have a tell-tale bulge under your left armpit that is left by an improperly carried DeSantis shoulder Holster. Also, your tailor needs to re-cut your suit jackets to camouflage the bulge. Brian if you'll allow me to make a few adjustments, I can help you set up that holster."

Brian took off his jacket and the holster, handing the holster to Jim. Jim re-did some straps and clips, which re-oriented and lowered the holster ½ inch without changing the fit. "There, now try it on."

Brian was impressed, the holster fit like it belonged, and his draw was easier.

Jim asked him what he was carrying when he wasn't wearing a jacket. Brian showed him his Bladetech IWB holster. Jim asked him if he could make a few mods to it to make it fit better and conceal better. Brian handed it to him, and Jim whipped out his Gerber Multitool, loosened a few screws, and adjusted the angle of the holster slightly. "Tim Wenger at Bladetech made these holsters with an adjustable cant, but hardly anyone who doesn't wear one daily knows about it, what I did was set it up for a right handed FBI cant. Instead of the slide being straight up and down, the slide now cants to the rear by 15 degrees, it isn't much, but the FBI discovered 2 things. It conceals better, and draws quicker than a straight up and down holster. I'd suggest wearing it behind your right kidney, and the off-side double mag holder in front of your left kidney. By the way, good choice on the Bladetech, most guys go for leather for comfort, only to replace it 6 months down the line. You notice those little hooks on the end of the belt loop? They catch the bottom of your belt, and that's the only part of the carrier that is visible when you are wearing it. Makes it dang hard to spot. It's one of the few holsters that work with dress belts."

Steve spoke next, "Brian – where did you get this guy?"

"Actually, I've known him since I was a Machinist Mate in the Navy. He made Chief a year before me, so he's senior, then he decided to become a SEAL. I lost touch with him for a while, due to the security issues. When they medically retired him, and he became a Civilian again, I got a call out of the blue right after I was discharged. He helped me get through the first two years of AA, and was my best man at my wedding. He used to drink like a fish, but gave it up for me. Talk about Buddies!"

Steve spoke to Jim next, "I'm sure Brian has filled you in by now. What we need right now is a low-profile security plan to protect the mine and the community. We have a tough assignment for you. The security needs to look low-profile, but has to be capable of stopping a determined assault by a well-armed and trained force. We also need you to train our security force in unconventional warfare. I realize some things are classified, but even the non-classified portion of your training will be valuable. If we really need something, I'm sure Ken has the connections to get it authorized. We also want you as Brian's second in command, this will be in name only, since you guys will work as equals, and you both will report to me. You interested?"

"Steve, that was the understatement of the Century. Let me guess, you want a state of the art security system, and money is no object, and you want me to organize and train the troops? Of course I'm interested – I was thinking of hiring myself out to some Arab Sheik, but this would be the opportunity of a lifetime. Besides, I get to play with the Machine Shop as well. Are you installing a shooting range?"

“Ken wants an indoor and an outdoor pistol range, since the weather will get nasty during the winter, as well as an outdoor rifle range. We can build a 1000 yard range if you want, with as many positions as you need.”

“How about a fun house?”

“ You mean an amusement park?”

“Sorry, I meant a shooting house where you can fire live ammo and the bullets can’t escape. You need one to train the troops in room clearing exercises. We’d like to stop the MZB’s at the perimeter, but you never know.”

“OK, include that in your proposal, and I’m sure Ken’s interested. Speaking of which, how would you like to meet him?”

“I was hoping you’d say that!”

With that, they all got up and walked into Ken’s office. Ken got up and after the introductions were made, shook Jim’s hand. “Glad to meet you, I’ve heard good things from Brian. I’m sure Steve filled you in on our security needs. Mind you, people might think I’m a tad paranoid, but you know the saying “Just because you’re Paranoid doesn’t mean they aren’t out to get you!”

Jim started laughing at that, then said “Ken, let me tell you, I’m really impressed with your idea. You’ve given this a lot of thought, and I know it can work if we hire the right people.”

Ken asked him “If you had the budget, who would you hire for a security force?”

“Since this is a civilian operation, I’d have to hire POST graduates, and get them deputized by the local Sheriff so they would have powers of arrest. Beyond that, I’d prefer ex-Recon Marines, or Special Forces people. I don’t need or want line doggies or grunts. We will have to have a small but well trained force, and you might consider training all your mine employees to supplement the security force as an inner perimeter, and backup to the security force. I’m assuming most of the people you are hiring can qualify for a CCW, and own guns. If we got them all Bushmaster AR-15’s and got them to shoot at least quarterly, you’d have a very effective militia. Some of the Security Force would be designated liaisons to the Militia, and would be in charge of platoons of Militia members, as well as their security duties. Those would mostly be Delta or other SF types who are used to training guerrillas. Every member of the militia would have a basic load out of a Blackhawk Tactical vest, 30 20-rd mags, and 2 battle packs of Ammo, with a Camelback and miscellaneous gear on the vest. You can issue them with or without Level Iia bullet-resistant inserts – that’s your call, but the Security force should have Level III vests with inserts, and Level Iia vests available for off-duty or undercover carry. Since you guys obviously prefer the ParaOrd P-14, I’d make that or the Glock Model 21 with the 13-shot mags standard issue. Since the department will be deputized, we should be

able to purchase LEO only high caps at a much cheaper price. They'll need Civilian mags if they carry off the property. I'd get everyone a CCW if they want it. I'm sure the Sheriff will approve. Another thing you will want is what's called a "poor man's ROV" basically a remote controlled model airplane with a CCD camera mounted to the fuselage looking down. You could operate several of these 24/7 from one console that would keep an eye on the property. This would eliminate the need for roving patrols, freeing up your security forces for other work, as long as they have a "go bag" handy so they can drop what they are doing to respond to an emergency. Also, several of them should be cross-trained as EMT II and paramedics, as well as all OSHA required mine rescue training. Most of the SF types will already have the DOD equivalent of a High-angle certificate, so getting the OSHA and State certs should be a walk in the park for them. You might consider small armory lockers situated throughout the property, with the Security people having keys to them. You could keep all the gear there for several response teams, that way they'd not have to lug their AR-15's all over the property, and just wear their sidearms. Of course, on-duty Security people would have their full load out with them, but members of the Security team who are working other jobs at the time won't want to have to keep lugging their go bags and rifles around. Also, you'll want strategically located paramedic kits throughout the property, and EMT level kits available in tamper-evident cases to keep employees from "borrowing" stuff out of them. OSHA mandated kits should also supplement them, with the OSHA required storage container."

At this point Brian broke in, "Jim – you really need to write this down. It's fascinating, but we probably won't remember half of it."

Ken chimed in, "Jim, how'd you like to work for us as the Head of Security and Brian's Right hand man? I can pay you \$100,000.00 per year and 30% of your salary will be in stock. All your expenses except for your food and personal clothing, and gas are paid for. We even give you a house to live in rent free."

"Can I call my wife real quick – I want to say yes, but I want to make sure it's OK with her first."

"OK, Jim – you and Brian can go to his office, and if you agree, Brian will have a stack of forms for you to read and sign. Welcome aboard!"

They walked back to Brian's office, where Jim called his wife. "Marge, I have a job offer, No it's not in Saudi Arabia. We'll be living in this neat Company town southwest of Winnemucca NV. They want me for their Head of Security. Guess What, Brian is in charge of the Equipment and the Machine Shop, so you can hang out with Sharon. OK, thanks, I'll tell them."

"Brian, I accept – Marge said it was OK."

"Great, here's a stack of paperwork, I'll be back in a minute."

Steve and Ken were still in Ken's office when Brian walked in and gave them the good news. Steve walked out with Brian, walked into Sam's office, and asked Sam to process the paperwork for Jim to get a CCW. Since Sam still had a copy of Jim's DD 214, he knew it was a formality. He called the Sheriff, and e-mailed the top page of Jim's 214 showing a Classified Clearance – meaning that his clearance was so high that it was classified. 10 minutes later, the Sheriff e-mailed a copy of Jim's CCW back to him. Sam walked it into Brian's office, handed it to Jim, and introduced himself, then he had to leave since he was up to his eyeballs in Alligators reviewing contracts.

Later that afternoon, when Jim finished his paperwork, he was working on his proposal for a security system and security force, Ken called out of the blue, said he was hungry, and wanted to go out to eat. Brian told Ken he had promised Jim a steak dinner, and Ken said that would be OK with him. Ken called a local steakhouse, reserved a private room for them, and asked Jim to bring his notes with him. They all piled into the Hummer, and drove to the restaurant. It was a tight squeeze, but they weren't going far. They looked like circus clowns piling out of the Hummer when they got there, but there wasn't anyone around to notice, since this was a private exclusive dinner club for the movers and shakers of Reno. When they were shown to their room, a waiter asked if they'd want water, coffee or wine. They all ordered either water or coffee in deference to Ken and Brian. When they had looked at the menus, they all ordered the Ranch cut Ribeye steak, which was basically a pound of ribeye with all the trimmings. While they waited, Ken asked Jim if he could go over his notes.

This was the first time Sam had heard his proposal and was awestruck, and nervous at the same time – he wasn't used to being around guns, and had the typical big city aversion to weapons due to decades of what amounted to programming from the major media. He realized he had better get over it fast if he wanted to work here. Jim continued his presentation until dinner was served, then put the paperwork away while they ate. When they finished, they drove back to the office. Jim asked if they ever left, and Steve admitted they had been staying at the office, since it was cheaper than a hotel, and they weren't sleeping more than 5 hours a night, it wasn't worth the half-hour commute. They all had nice sleeper sofas in their office, and the executive washroom had private shower facilities as well.

Chapter 11

Brian and Jim drove in together since they lived less than 2 miles apart. On the way in Jim asked if he could make a couple of stops. The first one was to a gun store to pick up his P-14 that was back from repair. He had sent it to Para Ordinance over a month ago to have it thoroughly gone over since it had about 100,000 rounds through it. When he got to the shop, he opened the box, and there was a brand-new ParaOrd P-14 Limited just like his, with a note attached that ParaOrd had replaced his gun to use his gun in engineering tests since it had so many rounds through it without a failure. He had shipped a P-14 limited in stainless with 2 old mags, and they shipped back a brand new gun with 6 brand-new high cap mags, and a inscription that made Jim's eyes water when he saw it – it was the Official SEAL Logo in gold with the eagle, flintlock and trident. Jim correctly guessed that someone tipped off Para Ordinance that he was a retired SEAL. Brian was whistling when he saw the gun. “Are you going to shoot that?”

“Of course – a gun in a cabinet is a piece of jewelry. I'd be insulting them if I didn't shoot it.” Jim unpacked his DeSantis shoulder holster, bought 2 boxes of Cor-bon Flying Ashcan rounds, loaded all the mags, loaded a mag into the P-14, cycled the action, then topped off the mag, and set the safety. It was now “Cocked and Locked”. He slipped it into the holster, put the 2 spares in the offside mag carrier, and purchased a Bladetech offside double mag holster, and slipped it into his waistband. The spare mag went into his front-right pocket.

“You planning on getting into a shoot-out?”

Jim fixed Brian a hard stare “I had a swim buddy die when he ran out of ammo on an op. I swore then and there I would never be caught short!”

Brian apologized “I guess I've been a civilian too long – I should have remembered that.” and he purchased an offside Bladetech double mag holster, 2 ParaOrd 14 rd mags and a box of Cor-bon flying ashcan ammo, loaded the mags right there, and slipped the mag holder into his waistband. He noticed a slight protrusion out of Jim's shirt pocket. When he asked Jim what it was, he said it was an original Emerson CQC-6, and Jim opened it for him. It had Ernie's personal logo, and a double digit serial number. “When I left the teams, my CO made me a present of my knife. Officially it's considered “lost on a mission. We have one more stop to make.” They got back in Brian's truck and Jim gave him directions to a tailor's shop. When they entered, they were greeted as long-lost friends by the owner, who took them in the back, took their jackets, then took some measurements, and said he'd be right back. Half an hour later, he re-appeared with their jackets. When Brian tried his on, it fit better, and he noticed something, the jacket didn't brush up against his holster.

He asked Jim “What's going on?”

“Frank here is a long-time friend of mine who happens to be an excellent tailor. I have him alter all my clothes so I can wear them with as much hardware as I want, and it looks unaltered.”

Brian turned to Frank “How much do I owe you?”

“Any friend of Jim’s – No Charge!”

“Thanks Frank – I need your card so I can send some people over here.”

On the way out, Frank handed Brian his card, then shook both their hands. They got back into Brian’s truck and drove to work. When they got in, everyone was hard at work. Brian offered to let Jim use his office, and Jim said he was used to working in close quarters. They had another desk and phone moved into the office, and they quickly got to work. Jim was busy tracking down military buddies of his who were either LEOs or POST-qualified that couldn’t get hired by the big city departments because they weren’t Gay or Women. One smart-ass SEAL said he wasn’t GAY but definitely Happy. By the end of the day, he had a list of 20 people who would be interested in this project. He figured he needed 20 -30 people for a viable Security Force. He called the Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office, and introduced himself. Several minutes later he was speaking to the Sheriff. He was aware of their project, and was seriously interested in what Jim had to offer. When Jim told him he was a Retired Chief Machinist Mate and a SEAL, the Sheriff’s attitude changed. “Why didn’t you say so in the first place. I’m a retired Navy Chief myself.” They spent the next 20 minutes comparing notes, finding out who they knew and touching base. When they finished the small talk, Jim got to the point. “Sheriff, I was calling to get your permission to form a private security company for the Nevada Silver Mine, Inc. We’re in your county, and you’re responsible for law enforcement. All of the people I’m hiring are POST graduates. I know you don’t have the budget to patrol our compound, so I was offering our services if you could deputize our agents and give them arrest authority on mine property.”

“OK, you’re offering the services of your private security service as deputies of this department at no cost to the county?”

“Yes Sir, on 2 conditions. 1 – they are only responsible for Nevada Silver Mine property, and 2 – we need to use your jail facility to house prisoners. We’re not qualified or set up to house prisoners. We can’t really imagine any problems since we are going to be damned picky about who we hire. The only prisoners might be trespassers or other outsiders. One other thing. I need a LEO letter so we can order LEO only equipment for use on Mine property only. I promise no LEO only equipment will be used outside our mine property without your express permission.”

“Just what kind of gear are you talking about?”

“Nothing Full Auto or Class III. Basic bullet resistant vests, High cap mags for our pistols, Pepper spray, cuffs, that sort of stuff.”

“OK, I don’t see any problem. I want to interview everyone personally that I deputize, not to qualify them, just to know who they are.”

“No problem on this end. One other thing, several officers of the corporation, me included, have Washoe County CCW’s. Can you issue CCW’s good in Humboldt County.”

“Just e-mail me the Washoe County CCWs, and I’ll issue Humboldt County CCWs in those names. Anyone else from Nevada Mines that needs a CCW, just let me know.”

Great, I’ll make sure I stop in and say Hi the next time I’m in Humboldt County.”

“Please call first, it’s a big county, and I’m not always in the office.”

“Will do that – and again, thanks for everything!”

When he hung up, Jim turned to Brian “I just love the Chief’s Network – even the Retired Chiefs still honor the network.”

Meanwhile Ken and Steve were busy getting things lined up. Bill talked to Steve and confirmed that the spur line would be completed and available by 0900 Friday morning. Steve said he would contact their suppliers and tell them it was OK to deliver stuff starting at 1000 on Friday. Steve buzzed Ken and told him what Bill told him and said the first priority would be the forklift and the crane. Ken said he’d make sure they were on the first train. Bill told Steve that the crew had built a temporary offloading berm next to the tracks so they could off load the crane and the forklift without capsizing them.

Meanwhile, Brian and Jim continued to review resumes and schedule interviews. Someone walked into the office, who looked like he’d just got off work.

“Excuse me, I’m looking for Steve Gibbons.”

“Hi, I’m Brian and this is Jim. What was your name?”

“Hi, My name is George Williams – Steve wanted to interview me for a job as a Crane Operator.”

“Did you say George Williams?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Jim, this gentleman is a very rare breed, he was a Navy Seabee, and he has an Unlimited Crane license.”

Jim rose to shake his hand. “Nice to meet you, Brian and I are a couple of retired Navy Chief Machinist Mates.”

“I thought so. I can spot them a mile away. I’d love to stay and chat, but I can imagine Steve is very busy.” Brian escorted George over to Steve’s office and introduced him. About 15 minutes later, Steve buzzed and asked them both to come into his office.

“Do you gentlemen have any questions for George?”

Brian spoke up almost immediately. “What did you do in the Seabees?”

“I was an equipment operator. If it moves, I’m probably qualified to operate it. I’ve operated graders, dozers, loaders, dump trucks, cranes, fork lifts, you name it.”

“Could you go to work immediately? We are building a silver mine and a company town southwest of Winnemucca, NV.”

“Sure, the job I was on was through the Union – it was a temporary job.”

“Any problem working for a closed non-union shop?”

“No problem here – the Unions never did me any favors anyway – and they cost me a few jobs. How come?”

“Our boss is insisting on NO unions on this project, and every employee has to sign a waiver of union representation as a condition to get hired.”

“Sounds fine to me. I have a few questions.”

“George, before you ask, we have a bound booklet you might want to read about the project and the community, it should answer all your questions.”

Steve handed George a copy, and Brian asked him how he liked his coffee.

George said “Black no sugar.”

Brian smiled – George would fit right in. He handed George a mug of “Navy Coffee” – Black Hot and Strong, then went back to his desk.

About half an hour later, George finished reading the document “So where do I sign up?”

Steve started laughing, and told him that they had to do a background check, and if that came through OK, he wanted to know if he could start Friday but he'd have to live in a tent for the first day or so, then when they got the trailers moved on, they'd be living dormitory style in trailers until they got the houses built.

George said that roughing it was nothing new- they'd lived in worse conditions with the Seabees, and he'd love the work, and he was sure his wife and kids would love the fact that they didn't have to move all the time so Dad could work.

Steve asked George if he'd need anything to operate a 10-ton traveling crane that they needed to lift stuff off the railroad cars and set them on the road. George asked for a legal pad, and started writing a list of all the tackle and gear he'd need. Then he told Steve where he could buy all of it. Steve then walked George into Ken's office, who sat down and asked George what was the most money he had earned in his life.

"Frankly, the kind of work I do isn't too steady, so I might get a huge salary, but maybe only 6 months out of the year. If you pay all our living expenses except food, gas and personal clothing, I think 50,000 would be more than enough."

"George, thanks for your honesty – we didn't have a clue what to offer you – OK, how about \$50K starting, and 15% of your salary annually in stock."

"Ken, you've got yourselves a deal." As he reached to shake Ken's hand, Steve interjected, "Whoa, hold on their partner, we haven't done your background check yet."

At that point, Sam walked in – "Excuse me Steve, but George's background just came in – I need to talk to both of you – privately."

They got up and walked into Sam's office, and closed the door.

"George, there are some troubling elements about your background, If you want to work for us, I need honest answers."

"I know what you're worried about – we have about \$50,000 in collection accounts because my girl was in an auto accident, and we couldn't pay the hospital, and the guy who hit her didn't have insurance."

"Thanks for being honest George. I need to make some phone calls, If you could wait in Steve's office, we might be able to help you."

As soon as the door closed, Sam got on the phone, and verified George's story, also the fact that whoever they hired as an attorney should have been disbarred for incompetence since he didn't go after the driver's employer since he was driving on company business.

Sam buzzed them back in. “George, I’ve got good news, I verified your story, also I did some checking, and your so-called attorney should have been disbarred for incompetence. With your permission, after you are an employee, I’d like to re-open the case and see about going after the driver’s employer. I’ll only ask for costs if we win from you, unless we get the court to grant costs. Anyway, I see no reason not to hire you.”

Steve spoke up. “George, do you want the job?”

“I don’t know what to say! Of course I want the job – did I hear you correctly, you said you’d take our case on contingency?”

“As soon as you’re an employee with your permission. Since this case never when to trial, the statute of limitations hasn’t run out, and I’ll file an immediate cease and desist order against all the bill collectors.”

“Thanks, of course I’ll agree – you’re a gift from God!” George shook Sam’s hand, walked back into Steve’s office and signed all his employment papers, then walked back into Sam’s office and signed a retainer agreement. 5 minutes later, Sam had contacted the credit bureau and got the contact information for all the creditors and collection agencies. He called a judge he knew, and got a Temporary Restraining Order against all the creditors and collection agencies, then e-mailed that order to the contact list. He put a paralegal on the case, who identified the employer of the driver, and served them with a suit claiming damages. They claimed he no longer worked for them, but the paralegal stuck to his guns, saying when the accident happened he did, and he admitted on the police report that he was driving for his employer. The employer gave them their insurance company contact information and policy number. The paralegal called the insurance company, notified them of the claim, got a claim number, and started the paperwork. A week later, the insurance company settled out of court for the medical bills, costs, and \$50,000 pain and suffering. Sam called George back into his office, and gave him the good news. George said, “Sam if you were a girl, I’d kiss you! so I guess a handshake will do.” While they were shaking hands, Sam gave him a cashier’s check for \$50,000. “That’s yours, free and clear – they paid our costs, and all the medical bills.” George didn’t know what to say, but was walking a little taller. He deposited the check on the way home, took his family to dinner. and spent the weekend relaxing. Monday morning he was back in Reno.

Brian and Jim had been busy in the interim. With the inclusion of George, they needed a bigger tent, and more food and water. The surplus store had a big canvas tent for sale that slept 10, with all the poles and everything. They doubled up on their water, and Friday morning, they went shopping, picking up all the gear they’d need for a week in the desert. They stopped first at the Surplus store, bought the tent, trailer, 100 gallons of water, sleeping bags, cots, stove, lantern, 20 pound bottles of propane, the camp table, and a bunch of other stuff. Next they went to a sporting goods store and bought the rest of it including 1000 rounds of 45acp FMJ ammo. George already owned a Glock model 36, so they got him a CCW, and a IWB holster with a

double mag holder. Finally they stopped at a grocery store, and bought all the food they would need for a week, including a case of drinking water. They stopped at Brian's house on the way out and filled all the water containers from his hose. When they finished, Brian hugged Sharon and the girls, then they set off for Winnemucca. 3 hours later, they arrived at the mine site, and verified that the spur line was indeed in place, and that they had run all the gear they said was needed. They quickly set up camp in a spot that wasn't going to be used for anything in a month or two, and was out of the way. Right as they finished, they heard a train whistle. They made their way to where the train was supposed to drop off their heavy equipment, and there was a traveling crane, an off-road forklift, a large bulldozer, and a grader. A railroad employee was assisting the engineer in backing the cars down the spur line, and when they got the traveling crane into position, George got the permission from the engineer to move the crane down onto the berm. He crawled up into the cab, thankfully noticed that they had shipped the crane with a full tank of diesel, and proceeded to start the engine. He left the boom resting on the block, because he was going to use it as a fulcrum and a stabilizer while he turned the track. He knew he couldn't put much force on the boom, but just having it in the block gave him some extra leverage and a balance point. When the diesel was warmed up, he activated the track controls to spin the track on its axis, and slowly engaged the throttle. The crane creaked and groaned, but finally started turning. When it was facing down the dirt ramp, George unlocked the boom, retracted it and raised it to its neutral position so it didn't affect the balance of the crane, then re-engaged the crawler treads, and slowly navigated down the berm at a snail's pace. George learned long ago that you never moved a traveling crane under its own power any faster than you had to. When they finally had it on the ground, everyone let out a big sigh of relief. Meanwhile Brian had climbed into the cab of the off-road fork lift, after sizing up the situation, decided he could drive it off carefully, turned on the motor, let it warm up, and left the forks in their stowed position since they would just get in the way. He carefully engaged the drive to turn the forklift in its tightest turning radius, and by backing up and pulling forward as far as he dared, got the front wheels lined up with the berm so they could safely exit the flatbed. Once he started down, Brian knew there was no stopping it, and let it roll down the rest of the way, and stopped it once he was on terra firma again. He was shaking like a leaf, and said to himself "That was stupid, I'm never doing that again. Meanwhile, George had driven the traveling crane over to the bulldozer, and did his own rigging job to connect to the lift points of the bulldozer. When the hardware was good to go, he crawled back up in the cab, extended and locked the outriggers, and had Brian handle the choke cables as the hook came down. When it was safely hooked, Brian crawled down as fast as he could and got as far away as he could, while George maintained tension on the line. Assured that everyone was clear, he started the winch motor, and slowly lifted the weight until it was free of the flatbed, then carefully turned the cab to set the load down on a safe spot. When the load was down, Brian climbed up and released the hook, and George winched it out of the way. Then both of them removed the cables, and while George moved the traveling crane to the grader, Brian drove the bulldozer a safe distance away and parked it. They repeated the process for the rest of the heavy equipment. finally the boxcars were pulled up, and Brian determined that the loads were critical, and the off-road fork lift could handle the loads, then he fired up the forklift and unloaded the boxcars and piled the goods next to the rail line in a neat row. Steve talked to the engineer who told him

tomorrow they would be getting the concrete batch plant, a load of Portland cement, several railroad cars full of rebar and some more miscellaneous supplies, like concrete forms for pouring the loading docks. Later that afternoon, they were done unloading, and the train pulled away, leaving some box cars and some flatbeds full of stuff that didn't have to be unloaded yet. They heard the twin blasts of an 18-wheeler horn announcing a delivery. It was towing their diesel tank, and the truck behind it was a double-tanker full of diesel. They dropped it where Steve told them to, and emptied the double tanker of diesel. Steve signed the invoice for 10,000 gallons of Number 2 diesel, and noted the Bill To address was Texaco Corporate in Dallas, TX. Brian then topped off the tanks of all their heavy equipment. When he finished it was getting dark, so Steve started dinner. When it was full dark, Steve lit the lantern, then George and Brian came staggering in exhausted, and plopped down in their chairs. Both of them drank a couple of quarts of water before they said anything. Steve made Chili Mac for dinner, then after a few minutes they were so dog tired they crawled into their cots and fell asleep with their clothes on.

Chapter 12

The next day the trio was up at sunrise. Steve made breakfast since he got up first. He made a pot of camp coffee, and scrambled eggs (powdered) with diced ham (canned) and salsa (jar). When he had a burner available, he toasted some bread. The smell of coffee awoke Brian and George. As soon as they had finished eating breakfast, the porta potties showed up, and just in time. They brought their own fork lift, so they let the driver and his assistant set them up. They set up 10 porta potties down wind from the tent, since the trailers were going in upwind of the tent when they showed up. As soon as they were set up, they used the facilities. Steve tossed them a tube of Purell to “wash” their hands. No sooner than they had finished cleaning up the camp, then the train showed up. With groans of exhaustion, they headed over to see what they had delivered. This time, the engineer uncoupled the cars, had Steve sign for them after he verified everything, and the train drove off. Since there was no point in unloading everything until the crews showed up, they left them on the siding. Steve called Ken and told him what had been delivered. Ken told him that Concrete Construction promised to be there today to build their chip seal road. Since they had nothing to do until they showed up, Steve set up some empty cans at various distances, and told them the name of the game was to make the can jump then hit it again in mid-air. Since George with his six-shot Glock was at a disadvantage, Steve stipulated no double-taps. Steve went first, and even though he was able to make several cans jump, he couldn’t hit them in mid air. George went next, and went six for six, but still couldn’t hit any in mid air. Then it was Brian’s turn. He pulled from his IWB holster, shot the first can, and before it could hit the ground, drilled it in the center. He did that with 2 other cans until Steve called the game.

Brian later explained that they used to do this all the time when they were bored, except it is much more challenging aboard a ship in the ocean when you are shooting at floating 5 gallon drums off the fantail with a 6-shot box stock 1911. They were also at least 25 yards away before anyone got off a shot. They put aside the guns and decided to play cards, not knowing that both George and Brian were Navy trained cardsharks. Steve was out of his league, but he was having too much fun watching George and Brian go at it to care. Finally the twin blast of a diesel air horn called the match. “Saved by the bell” Steve muttered. A huge convoy of 18-wheeler low boys and crew-cab F-350’s hauling gooseneck trailers pulled up the dirt road, and disgorged a crew of over 50 road workers. Seeing the porta potties, they decided that introductions could wait. Steve was amazed at all the gear they were hauling, then their oil tankers showed up, and the gravel trucks. Concrete Construction owned a gravel pit right down the road, so they could keep the gravel coming, but the oil was coming from Winnemucca until they could set up a tank here. After they had relieved themselves, and passed the Purell, the “bosses” met and shook hands. Steve was introduced to everyone, and even George and Brian knew a few people on the crews. They set up their gear and got right to work. Steve’s cell phone rang, and it was the boss of Concrete Construction saying their truck that was hauling their grader broke down just outside Fallon and couldn’t make it today. He asked how big their

grader was, and he told Steve it was a 36 foot blade. Steve told them he had a 36-foot grader and an operator there now.

When he calmed down enough to talk, he said that if they could use their own grader and operator, he would not only delete all grading costs from the contract, but reduce the overall contract by 20%. Steve said OK, and to contact Ken and Sam at the home office. Steve asked Brian when he last operated a grader, and he said it was almost 10 years ago. He asked George, and George admitted the last time he operated one was over 20 years ago. Steve told Brian he was elected. The foreman from Concrete Construction met with Brian, told him their plan, and what he needed to do. Brian got the grader, fired it up, and drove it to the near end of the road. The foreman told him the setting he wanted the blade set at, and to make his entire pass at that depth. He handed him a HT, and if he had any questions, to haller. His name was BJ. Brian started whistling Willie Nelson's song "Back in the Saddle" and BJ started laughing. Someone had pity on Brian, and threw him 2 bottles of water, one frozen, and one cold. He climbed up in the cab, set the blade, and started grading. At 10 miles an hour, it took 2 hours to grade the first pass. When he finished, he turned around and called. BJ was impressed with his first pass, and told him so. he gave him the blade setting for the second pass. He hoped they could get it flat and level in 2 passes. 2 hours later, Brian was finished and ready for a shower and a gallon of ice water. As he finished, they sent the off-road rollers down his path to compact the dirt. Brian had to settle for the ice water, and poured some of it over his head. As hot and dry as it was there, he was dry in half an hour. They had the final grade an hour later, and sent the gravel trucks out to spread gravel, and had the rollers roll it in while they got a second load. When they had 2 layers of gravel in the road, the pavement layer was sent to the end of the road, set up, and filled with gravel and oil. The burners were ignited to heat the oil, and when it reached operating temperature, they started laying chip seal, as the gravel and oil trucks tried to keep it full. As the roadbed was laid the rollers started compressing it. By the end of the day, they had 20 miles of chip seal laid. The next morning, it could take unlimited 18 wheeler traffic, so the 18-wheelers left by a different route to let it cure. Brian was dog tired, and George was tired just watching him. They ate dinner and fell asleep.

The next morning, the concrete batch plant showed up on the railroad with the operator and a crew to set it up and install it driving up from Reno. When they saw the traveling crane, they asked Steve if they could use it. Steve said he needed to call their boss. They were on the phone a minute later, and he was greatly relieved that they had a traveling crane with them, since their crane was broken. Steve was pissed, and asked him how they were going to install a batch plant without one. Horrified that Steve would justifiably cancel the contract then and there, he offered a huge discount of 50% if they could use his crane and operator. Steve asked how big their crane was, and he said it was a 10-ton traveling crane. Steve put George on the phone, who asked some pointed questions, got honest answers, and was OK with helping assemble the batch plant. Brian turned to him and said "Make sure you bring plenty of water George!" George just glared since he knew that it would be hotter than an oven in the cab of that crane. Luckily, the foreman brought detailed instructions for how to assemble the batch plant, including lifting points, rigging setups, and lift and turn weights. George asked Steve

where they wanted the batch plant set up, and it wasn't too far from the railroad, so they could handle it. The tractor/trailer combo was just strong enough to move the pieces the 100 yards they needed to move. George lifted the heaviest piece off the train first, since he had to be on both ends of the move, and set it gingerly onto the lowboy trailer, who drove as slowly and carefully as he could over to where it needed to go. Meanwhile, George retracted his outriggers, set the boom in the travel position, and motored over to the batch plant site. He made it there half an hour after the truck, but they weren't in a hurry. They were busy digging footings to put the plant up on, and finished right before the crane got there and set up. When George was ready to lift, he had everyone clear out except his rigger, rigged the plant to lift it onto its moorings, and after carefully checking everything, slowly lifted it into place, and set it exactly on its moorings. The crew quickly bolted it in place while the crane was still attached, then the rigger signaled George to slack the lift cable and release the plant. He crawled up the plant, and removed the cable, and brought it back down for George, who was glad he didn't have to climb up there and get it! Meanwhile in a stroke of genius, Brian had realized the other pieces were small enough that he could pick them up with the forklift, and either carry them over, or else place them on the lowboy. By the time George was ready to lift them into place, Brian had the pieces where he needed them. George was amazed, but didn't complain. They finished installing the batch plant in half the time it would have taken, so Steve called the concrete guy, who said he would adjust the bill accordingly. The only thing they were now missing was the rock and sand to make concrete with. Thinking fast, Steve called Concrete Construction and asked if they could buy some gravel and sand to make concrete while they waited for the equipment that was to be shipped to start their own gravel pit. Steve had to laugh, within a month, they'd have more sand and gravel than they knew what to do with. The owner of CC readily agreed, since Steve had been so amicable about them using NSM's grader. They had some gravel trucks stationed at the gravel pit, and if they needed gravel and sand, and they needed to do was call. Steve was going to be racking up one heck of a cellular phone bill at this rate, and decided to find out who had service out here. Next he called Ken and asked about the Concrete mixing trucks and pumping trucks, and who owned the Cellular Phone service out here. He found out the trucks were on their way, as were the pumps, etc. and the crew from the UBC modular factory would be there tomorrow with the trailers and stuff. They figured they would do it all at once instead of making two trips. Steve heard that, and got Brian going on grading the spots for the trailers to rest on. Meanwhile, George started moving the crane out of the way, then started making dinner since everyone else was busy and it was getting dark. When Brian finally knocked it off at full dark, he had most of the trailer's spots graded off. George made hamburger helper since none of them were very good cooks. No one complained, since they were all too hungry and tired to care. Shortly after dinner, they all went to sleep in their clothes.

The next morning after breakfast, they were surprised when the guys from the company that was going to install the temporary water showed up a day early. Since they weren't in anyone's way, Steve told them to go ahead and set up. 6 hours later they had running water, a tank to fill up the water trucks, and best of all SHOWERS. As soon as the enclosures were set up, the three of them took a nice long shower and changed clothes. Meanwhile, the trucks with the trailers

and the setup crew for the UBC factory were delayed by vehicle problems. Since they weren't critical to the first part of his project, Steve wasn't too upset and got an updated ETA for them of tomorrow morning. They spent the rest of the morning unloading the boxcars and flatcars to make room for more deliveries. Good thing too, because later that afternoon, more heavy equipment started showing up. Since it was light enough for the traveling crane to pick up, George was busy while Steve kept track of inventory, and Brian ran the forklift again. They were running out of room to stack stuff, and hoped the concrete trucks would show up soon so they could pour foundations and erect some of these steel building parts they were unloading by the pallet.

Their prayers were answered by a train that arrived later that afternoon with the concrete mixing trucks, concrete pumpers, and 100 foot boom trucks. Again, George was busy lifting them off their lowboys while Steve took inventory and Brian unloaded the palletized stuff.

Later that afternoon, Steve got an update that the entire crew from UBC would be there tomorrow morning. Steve told them that the Concrete Batch Plant was there, they had access to sand and gravel, and they had 5 bulk loader cars full of 3500psi Portland cement, enough to build a small stadium, as well as 3 flatcars full of rebar. The owner of UBC was impressed, and promised their crew would be there first thing tomorrow. Since Steve finished before anyone else, he made dinner that night, which was Hamburger Helper "lasagna". By the time they were finished working, all Brian and George wanted to do was eat and sleep, and frankly sleeping was a higher priority. The high carb meal, plus total exhaustion guaranteed a night of soundless sleep, except for snoring.

The next morning Brian and George awoke to bacon, eggs (real) and pancakes, courtesy of the UBC crew who brought them some fresh food, their trailers, generators, and best of all, Air Conditioning! They moved the trailers into place, anchored them against the high winds they could expect around there, and the "Three Amigos" moved into one trailer, and the UBC crew moved into the other. That night they would sleep in real beds with Air Conditioning. Talk about The Life of Riley! This morning they had work to do. The UBC crew worked like beavers setting up forms, tying Rebar, and getting ready to pour. Meanwhile Steve was on the phone with Concrete Construction, arranging delivery to their batch plant of sufficient quantities of sand and gravel. What CC suggested was to keep the trucks rolling until their sand and gravel piles out in back of their batch plant became unmanageable. Since the trucks weren't doing anything else, they could start now, and steadily deliver load after load of sand and gravel to their site. Steve said "Bring them on!"

Half an hour later, the first truck showed up, and by that evening, they had huge piles of sand and gravel. The plant manager was happy as a clam, and started the batch plant. Brian took a break from running the forklift to take a loader and grab a bunch of Portland cement for a test batch. George commented that if they were going to do much more of that, they'd be better off with a gantry crane setup over the tracks, with several 18-wheeler low boys to offload to. Steve called Ken, who called Bill, who said it was a great idea, that he didn't know they had a crane

operator who could run a large gantry. He knew where an old used one in good shape was – in one of his train yards. he'd talk to the yard manager about dismantling it, and shipping it to them. Ken asked how big it was, and Bill said they had a 100 ton capacity, which was more than a railcar could carry. Ken told Bill to get back with him with a cost, delivered and set up. Bill said if they could use his 10-ton crane to set it up, it would greatly reduce the cost of sending another crane and operator there. Ken told Bill he'd have to get with Steve and call him back. Ken called Steve, who talked to George, who said "Yeah I can handle that." Then Steve called Ken, who called Bill, who called his yard superintendent, who said he was trying to get rid of that monstrosity for years, and if they wanted it, they could have it for the cost to dismantle and re-assemble it. He told Bill it would take a week to disassemble it, and pack it for shipment, and about \$1000.00 worth of crane time to dismantle it. Bill tacked on the shipping cost, and told Ken they could have it for \$10,000.00 as is. Ken grilled Bill until he included a 90 day warranty to make sure it worked. Bill said he could have it there in a week or two. Ken called Steve and told him it would be there in a week or two. Steve changed his plans to include a gantry crane to unload cars. Then he remembered something on Discovery Channel about them picking up Containers from a ship with a special grapple and dropping them on 18-wheelers. He asked George if this crane could do it. George said "Sure with the right gear, but then it would be specialized for grabbing containers and couldn't be used for other stuff. I prefer a simple hook system with rigging and cables. It's much more flexible. Besides, we can still pick up containers with rigging and cables – it just takes longer." Steve called Ken and gave him the good news. They still needed to build loading/unloading docks, just not so many of them. George gave Steve some BAD news – "These cranes have to be heavily anchored. We're talking 3 feet of reinforced concrete, and huge bolts and nuts. But in the end, it's worth it."

Steve called Ken back and asked him how much more heavy stuff will they ship after all the equipment is loaded, since it will take at least 2 weeks, and also a huge cost to install it – George said each leg of the crane – and there are 6 of them – requires a 3-foot deep reinforced concrete footing, and huge bolts to install. Then Ken thought about why Bill was so eager to get rid of it, and remembered it was old and bulky. Steve asked George if there was anything that they were getting that either couldn't be delivered on a roll-on roll-off flatcar, or lifted by either the traveling crane or forklift. When George said NO, that's all Steve needed to hear. He told Ken to call Bill back and cancel the deal for the crane – they wouldn't need it. Ken called Bill back and gave him the bad news. Steve was now back to plan A. Loading Docks and lots of them. Steve asked George if there were any other ways of offloading the Portland cement quicker. George said that they could do it with an Archimedes Screw. Steve looked at him a little funny until he explained it was a kind of conveyor belt but faster and enclosed to keep dust down. Steve asked where you could get one of those. George told him that all grain silos had one to lift and move grain. Again Steve called Ken, who called around and located one used in Winnemucca, and the dealer was willing to deliver. Steve asked Ken if the dealer knew if it could handle fine powders like Portland Cement. Ken asked the Dealer who assured them it would work since they also used them in flour mills. Steve asked them to deliver it tomorrow.

Chapter 13

Back at the office Jim was holding down the fort, and was busier than a One-armed Paper Hanger since he was trying to line up Security Staff, and answering Steve's and Brian's phones. He wished he was out at the mine site with them instead of stuck in the office, but he realized he was the least qualified to do what they had to do at the site. At least Brian and George were heavy equipment operators. Ken and Sam were nowhere to be found, and Jim realized they were busy too, probably fielding questions from the field, and coordinating deliveries. Brian kept Jim posted, but it wasn't the same. Jim did his best to review applications, and several times he asked Ken's opinion. While Ken didn't know construction, he could spot a phony from a mile away, and culled the resumes of people who weren't scrupulously honest with their experience. When Ken finished, Jim sorted the remainder by job specialty.

Back at the mine, they had just finished breakfast when several things happened at once. The train showed up with another delivery, and the dealer with the screw lift showed up dragging the lift that was built onto a trailer for portability. Steve hoped it ran on diesel, since they had no gas available yet. When the dealer showed up, that was the first question he asked. The dealer told him that most farm equipment was diesel to make things easier on the farmer so he wouldn't have to buy diesel and gasoline. Steve showed the dealer where to drop the trailer, and the dealer showed Steve and Brian how to set it up and operate it. Brian backed the bucket of the loader under the discharge chute, and the dealer started it up and started transferring Portland cement. When the loader bucket was full, they shut it off, and Brian carried the load over to the Concrete Batch Plant. Right about that time, George started unloading some more heavy equipment, including a large dump truck, a water truck and a lighter weight hydraulic crane on wheels to help assemble the buildings. George wasn't too keen on using a huge traveling crane to erect buildings. This crane had a longer boom, was more maneuverable due to the wheels, and could easily lift all the building materials. Best of all, the cab was air conditioned.

George quickly unloaded the heavy equipment, and Brian traded the loader for the dump truck, which could haul 10 times the load of the loader per trip. He backed it up to the lift, and jumped out of the cab, loaded the truck with the lift, and drove it to the batch plant. Within a couple of hours, they had a huge pile of cement, sand and gravel next to the batch plant. Brian drove the loader over to the batch plant, and the operator told him which hoppers to fill with which material. Then they ran a pipe over to the water supply, since it would need lots of water to make concrete. When the hoppers were full, Brian backed a concrete mixing truck next to the batch plant, and waited while the operator warmed up the equipment and tested it. He set out 25 gallon buckets to test slump, which gave a good indication of the mixture by how firm a cone of concrete was. Brian thought the operator knew his stuff when the first batch passed slump. The foreman of the UBC Company's building crew told Brian they were ready to pour, and they had a competent driver and operator for the mixer truck. Brian was glad to relinquish the

controls, since concrete work was 99% waiting around and 10% driving like a madman to keep the concrete pump full.

Brian checked with Steve, who was looking at grading sites for their buildings, and grading and compacting sites for loading docks. Brian got in the grader, and George was helping the construction crew with placing rebar, and operating the concrete boom. Their driver was working like a beaver on Methamphetamine trying to keep the concrete pump full, and by the end of the day, they had their slab poured, and the workers were going to town floating, leveling, compacting, and working the concrete. George finally got some time off, and used it to take a breather. Brian was rummaging through the shipments, and found the custom forms they needed to build their loading docks, and got some of the guys from the UBC crew to help set the forms and install the rebar. George figured he'd pour the concrete tomorrow, and within a week, they'd have real loading docks. When they finished that project, Steve had their building foundations staked out, so Brian finished grading and compacting them. He hoped he could talk the UBC crews into forming their foundations as well, since they had the forms and the knowledge. Steve got on the cell phone and called the owner of the company, and suggested just that. The foreman had told his boss how helpful they had been with erecting the foundation, so he agreed to just charge them labor for the crew. Steve told him to e-mail the contract to Sam's attention, then called Sam to let him know what was going on. Sam complained that it was a madhouse at the office, and Steve said he should see how busy they were there – they were working 12 and 14 hour days to get stuff done. Sam clammed up real fast. Steve made a big pot of Firehouse Chili for both crews, and when they were finished working, they sat down and ate chili, and went to sleep in their respective trailers, some wise guy suggested leaving a window open so as not to destroy the trailers in case there was a Methane explosion. Since no one smoked in bed, there was little chance of ignition. Asphyxiation, maybe.

They all survived the night, although one crew member was almost banished to the tent for the night.

The next morning, the UBC crew helped set the forms, and rebar, then helped pour and float the concrete. Then they helped pour the loading docks, even though that wasn't part of their original agreement. The next day the assembly crew would show up to assemble the steel building. The foreman took Steve aside and made him promise that he wouldn't serve chili that night. Steve thought fast, and came up with an alternative. He'd make a huge pot of cheese and macaroni. The foreman said that would be great. Steve went to make dinner while Brian and George finished up working with the crews.

This evening went OK since no one was banished to the tent, and the crew packed up and left the next morning after removing the forms from the foundations. They left the forms on the loading docks since they were NSM's forms, and the bigger blocks of concrete needed longer to cure. Steve was looking at the foundation of the UBC building, and noticed a whole bunch of

bolts sticking up. The foreman explained that when they set the rebar, they tied the bolts to the rebar so they would be imbedded in the concrete. They were used to anchor the building. He said that if Steve looked at their foundation, they would see bolts sticking up as well. It was a common Steel Building technique to use embedded bolts to hold the support girders. That way all they had to do was to lift the girders and guide them onto the bolts, and bolt them down to fix them in position. He said they used to use drilled and driven lead anchors to act as nuts, but this was easier as long as you located the bolts exactly. With modern GPS equipment, and surveying gear, it was a snap.

The foreman said the rest of the crew was waiting for him, shook Steve's hand, and got aboard the last truck. The three amigos were at a loss for what to do while the other crew arrived, so they looked at the plans, and thought they could start grading roads to keep the traffic onto roads to compact them. Steve thought that was a great idea since they weren't going to need the grader for a while. He called Concrete Construction and asked if they had roadbed available. The foreman laughed and said that the boss had told them to stockpile roadbed because the way we were working the mine site, the roads would be in before we had our gravel operation in. Steve agreed with him, and asked him to start shipping roadbed when the trucks needed stuff to do. He'd show them where to pile it. He told Steve that the chip sealer was sitting on their lot since they figured the mine site wasn't finished with it.

Steve figured the owner of Concrete Construction was either a smart businessman, or psychic. if he'd hauled it all the way back to Reno, it wouldn't have been economical to use it again. Since it was less than 5 miles away, they could use it cheaper than leasing their own. Steve called Ken and told him to cancel the lease on the chip sealer. They could use Concrete Construction's unit for now. Ken said that someone must be watching out for them, because the company that was going to lease it backed out since it was needed elsewhere. Steve called the owner of Concrete Construction, and told him he wanted to use the chip sealer. He told Steve the unit would be in Winnemucca for the next year, and was available for the next couple of months. After that, he'd need to call and see if it were available, and reserve it. Steve thanked him, and got off the phone, he needed to talk to Brian. "Brian, we have at least 2 months to use the chip sealer before Concrete Construction might need it for another project, Let me look and see if any roads don't have buried utilities that we can grade and chip seal now. We'll grade all the roads as time permits, but let's grade the ones without utilities right now while we have the chip sealer."

Brian thought that was an excellent idea, and surveyed the map with Steve, and found out that most of the Mine roads didn't have buried utilities, just the roads in the Village, as they were calling it. Brian decided the first thing to do was to extend the mine road to the railroad depot. They wanted it to be very heavily compacted, so Steve wanted that road done first. Steve handed Brian a GPS unit, connected it to his laptop, and downloaded the route for the main road to the depot. Brian was amazed. If he had this technology back when he was working for his uncle's company, it would have reduced their workload by half. Steve handed him a remote GPS antenna with a mag mount, and a long cable to plug into the GPS. He also had a power

cord to plug into the grader's electrical system. Once he got everything plugged in, he fired up the grader and proceeded to the end of the road that CC had built. He turned on the GPS unit, selected the next waypoint and pressed the GOTO button. Immediately the screen changed to a compass rose showing which way to go, and how far until the next waypoint. When he reached the next waypoint, he repeated the process. Within an hour, he had the roadbed exactly where he wanted it, so he shut off the GPS, and made a secondary pass, then gave Steve the GPS unit back to program another road to grade. Steve was on the phone to CC and asked them when the trucks were showing up. The yard manager said that one ought to be coming up the drive now. Steve slipped the driver a \$20.00 and asked him if he could dump spread his load along the road from the end of the gravel. He said that they would have done that for free, but thanks for the tip. Steve just smiled and told him to keep it. The driver got on the radio to the other driver and told him to follow him, and dump from where he stopped dumping until he ran out. It took 4 loads to put in the first layer of gravel roadbed. The truck driver said to just let them drive on the gravel, and it would naturally compact. When they started seeing dirt through the gravel, they'd lay another layer, then they could bring in the chip sealer. It was cheaper than hiring the whole crew to compact and lay chip seal all at once. Steve thanked him, and told him if they had any beer, he'd give him a 6-pack. The driver said "Thanks anyway, I'm a recovering Alcoholic." Steve made a note to himself to get a large cooler full of ice and liters of bottled drinking water the next time they were in Reno. By Friday, the UBC manufacturer's crew was finished with the heavy lifting, and Brian needed a break as well. Steve told the UBC crew to keep working, they had to run to Reno to get some stuff, and they'd be back Monday.

They all took showers, packed up their camping gear, got in the Hummer, and drove back into Reno. Brian went home and went to sleep, while Steve crashed on his sleeper sofa.

Monday morning, the met back at the office. Steve went to Costco and bought a pallet load of liter water bottles, the largest coolers they sold and enough ice to last a week. Steve was going to make sure everyone who came to the site got a liter of ice water to go. Ken knew how hot it was out there, and definitely approved. They restocked their food, while Brian and George got caught up with Ken and Jim. Jim was now a little gladder he had stayed at the office, since they both looked like they had been pulled backwards through a combine thresher. Jim gave Brian a list of potential applicants for Heavy Equipment operators. Brian grabbed a red marker, and tagged the ones he wanted Jim and Ken to interview ASAP – they needed the help. Brian found out from Ken that the trencher was being shipped as they spoke, and it should be there Monday or Tuesday. That changed Brian's plans, and he asked for the resumes back, and doubled the number of people who needed to be interviewed ASAP. Steve called the Communications company to let them now the spur line was in, and the loading docks would be finished by Friday. They said to expect delivery of all the cable, and the equipment Friday or Saturday. They asked that they just move the cars off to the side and don't unload anything until their crews got there Monday. Steve had no problem with that – it meant less work for them. Steve told Brian that as soon as the trencher showed up, they would have to start cutting trench for the utilities, so the grading would have to wait. Brian was cool with that since the grader didn't have an air conditioned cab, and the trencher did.

They left a few hours later after packing the Hummer and the trailer full of stuff. At this rate, they'd need an 18-wheeler to bring back all the stuff they had left up there. When they got to Winnemucca, the UBC crew had finished assembling their building, and had started on theirs. Steve asked the foreman what the heck was going on. He told him that George's and Brian's help had put them so far ahead of schedule that instead of refunding half the contract, they decided to erect their building while they were there. One of their guys was a qualified crane operator, but not as experienced as George. As soon as George showed up, he relinquished the controls, and George got back to work. With George swinging the iron, they were moving a lot faster, since George was better at placing the supports, and they didn't have to manhandle them into place. Shortly, the frame was up, and they were bolting it in place, then they started on the sheet metal skin. The evaporative coolers would have to wait until they had water and electricity, but at least they had a huge dry storage area. When they finished, Steve passed out the water bottles, and the crew took showers with their clothes on, and when they dried off, piled back in their trucks to the trip back to Idaho.

Once they left, Steve located a couple more roads that didn't need utilities, and Brian got to work. The GPS was a modern marvel, and he could grade accurately without having to follow and interpret a Surveyor's stakes. Steve called the CC gravel yard, and they got the trucks rolling. This time when they showed up, Steve handed them each a liter bottle of ice water. They truck spread the gravel down the road as soon as Brian finished grading it. Working this way, they had doubled the miles that were graded and at least gravel covered to keep dirt down and make the road stronger. They finished right around sunset, so Steve made dinner as Brian and George finished their projects. They were so tired they ate without comment, and fell asleep in their clothes.

Chapter 14

The Trio awoke to the sound of a train whistle. They quickly got up and dressed, grabbed something to eat, and hustled over to the depot. Since the loading docks still weren't fully cured, George had to pick the trencher up with the traveling crane and set it on the ground. George had to be very careful since the trencher weighed almost as much as the crane. George asked Brian if he could add ballast to the back ballast rack. Brian picked the ballast up with his forklift, and carefully set it on the ballast rack. George then set all the outriggers, and attached the rigging to the lift points of the trencher. Crossing his fingers and saying a quick prayer, George climbed into the cab and lowered the hook while Brian set the cables onto the hook, then quickly scrambled down and got clear. George had figured all the factors just right, and as he engaged the winch, the trencher floated off the flat car. George didn't lift it any higher than he had to, and gently swung it over and set it down next to the ramp. He released the tension on the hook, and the trencher settled on its suspension. George released enough slack so the hook cleared itself, then he winched the cable back in, and secured the boom in its travel position and shut everything down. George said a quick prayer of thanks, then climbed down from the cab to the applause of all the railroad workers. The engineer told George how much trouble their crane operator had trying to get the trencher onto the flat car. George admitted it was easier to get it off than on since he had a much bigger area to put it down in case he got in trouble.

With the trencher down, they could get started on trenching all the utility lines. Steve showed Brian all the utility lines that had to be dug on his laptop, and downloaded the data to his GPS unit. Steve told Brian all the trenches needed to be at least 6 feet deep and 8 foot would be better to guarantee the water lines were below the frost line as required by code. Brian said he'd set the trencher to 8 feet to be on the safe side. Brian measured the continuous cutting wheel and buckets and noted that they had mounted the 36 inch wheel as requested. This trencher would dig a trench, clear the dirt, and deposit it in a pile next to the trench all in one pass. Since it had hardened ripper teeth as well as buckets, it would chew right through rocks. Brian took about half an hour to familiarize himself with the controls and to read the operator's manual that someone had thoughtfully enclosed. After making sure it was full of diesel fuel, engine oil, and hydraulic fluid, he started the monster up and engaged the crawler tracks to motor over to the starting point of his trench network. He turned on his GPS, put the antenna up on the roof, located the first waypoint, and punched the GOTO button, as before, the GPS unit gave him range and bearing information until he was exactly on the spot he needed to be. He double checked his coordinates, and when he was sure he was where he was supposed to be, engaged the trenching wheel and the dirt transporting belt. Next, he punched up the next waypoint and the GOTO button, and the compass rose pointed him in the right direction. When he was lined up, he lowered the trenching wheel and started digging. When he reached 8 feet, he advanced the crawler, and started digging a trench. The alarm buzzed when he reached the next waypoint, so he hit the GOTO button again to go to the next waypoint in sequence. The compass rose indicated a slight turn to the right, so he turned the crawler while he continued digging, making a gentle curve in the trench, then engaged both tracks moving forward slowly. The soil was

very sandy, so the trencher cut faster than he was used to. By the time the Communications company crew showed up, he was several miles ahead and gaining steadily.

Since the Communications guys were only going to lay the conduit for the coax cable system and a phone line, Ken had a crew show up at the same time with pipefitters and roughnecks to set the water line and the electrical lines. The water line was heavy weight 8 inch or 12 inch pipe depending on how many branches were planned off the pipe. The electrical conduit was heavy duty ABS plastic rated for strength and electrical insulating capability. It was the same as used all over Nevada for the last 2 decades. This crew wasn't permanent employees since Ken knew they didn't need large crews to lay pipe and conduit after the main system was in. Meanwhile Ken had a problem. He needed a source of water for a huge community. George suggested they drill multiple wells spaced equidistant throughout the property to minimize pressure drops if one well pump dropped off line for any reason. Brian knew a drilling company with experience drilling and installing municipal water well systems. Ken gave them a call, and they agreed on a price for 6 wells and all the pumps and tanks. Ken ordered tanks twice as big as they needed to be, he claimed it was for firefighting, but he knew if the power went down, the water in the tanks would have to last. The contractor wanted to install 50,000 gallon tanks, but Ken ordered 6 100,000 gallon tanks. The contractor told him the big tanks were 50% more than the smaller tanks, but Ken insisted. They finally settled on a price, and Ken had them e-mail the contract to Sam's attention for review. Ken called Steve and told him they'd have water service in a week or two. Steve told Ken they'd be ready for it in a week or two.

George was busy with almost continuous rail deliveries. Most of the stuff they pushed in front of the new UBC manufacturer's building since it was supplies for building houses. As more and more heavy equipment rolled in, George was hard -pressed to offload it by himself. He reached Steve on the radio and said he was swamped and needed Ken to send some heavy equipment operators to move this stuff since Brian was busy digging trenches as long as he had daylight. Steve asked him what he needed, and George said he had all kinds of gear that needed to be moved away from the rail line, so if he could send a half-dozen operators that can operate at least 2 or 3 pieces each, he could get it all moved, and also have them help out elsewhere. Steve relayed the info to Ken and he promised to have 6 permanent employees there tomorrow morning.

When he finished the calls, Steve realized he didn't have anything to do right now, so he got on the phone with his buddy that was designing the AE system. He told Steve that everything was on track, that he was about ready to send Ken a final contract, and after the contract was signed, they would ship everything in the next day or so. Steve realized there wasn't anything else he could do today, so he went over to the mine site, and started staking out the excavation so the equipment operators knew how far to move the dirt they were digging out. When he finished, it was almost time for dinner. Steve wanted something special to celebrate a job well done, and broke out the ribeye steaks he had hid in the bottom of the cooler, and the cast iron skillet, and was grilling them in the skillet when Brian and George drove up. Brian said he was hungry

enough to eat a horse – Steve asked him if he'd prefer cow. The hungry look Steve got encouraged him to serve the steaks quickly. After dinner, they fell asleep in their clothes because they were too tired to get changed.

The next morning, a couple of F-350 crew cabs pulled up, and 8 guys got out, including Jim. Brian was glad to see his old friend, but was confused as to why he was there.

Jim explained “Ken said he needed a driver, and asked if I would volunteer, so naturally I said yes, I was going stir crazy in the office.” He looked around and saw two huge buildings, the concrete batch plant, and the railroad depot. “Man you guys have been busy!”

Brian told him, “You haven't seen the half of it! I spent the last couple of days digging trenches while a crew followed along behind laying water pipe, power and phone lines, and telecommunications cable. We're almost finished. Want to see?” Jim didn't have to be asked twice, so they jumped in the pickup and took off. Meanwhile, George was organizing “The New Guys” by the equipment they operated, and then drove the lot of them to the railroad depot to move all the heavy equipment out of the way for now.

When Jim and Brian drove up to the trencher, Jim was impressed “You drive that monster?”

“Yeah and it's a real kick!

“That thing makes the Hummer look like a matchbox car!”

“Jim, the cutting wheel alone is almost 40 feet in diameter. How'd you like to go for a ride?”

“Is there enough room?”

“It's a two-seater. The only way you can teach someone to operate this monster is to get in the cab next to them. Go ahead, crawl up there and take the seat on the far right, and I'll sit in the operator's chair.”

When Jim got into the cab, he noticed the GPS unit. “Nice unit – you know it as accurate as the ones I used in the teams?”

“You're kidding – Right?”

“Nope, this is a GPS Surveying Instrument – you need a license to own one. They're accurate to within a foot out here in the open.” Jim noticed the antenna “Ooops – I hope you haven't moved that antenna since you started cutting?”

“Why's that?”

“The GPS display on the dash is actually telling you the position of the antenna, not the receiver. Luckily, it looks like your antenna is in line with the cutter.”

“Why would that be a problem?”

“All your locations would be off the difference between where the antenna was located and the centerline of the cutting wheel. Did Steve tell you where to put it?”

“No, I just stuck it on the roof where I could reach.”

“Well in that case I definitely think God looks out for Fools and Kids. You managed by blind luck to put it right where it needed to go.”

“Well, you know the old saying ‘I’d rather be lucky than right!’”

With that, Brian started the trencher. Jim was impressed by the sound of the huge diesel. Brian then turned on the GPS, verified his position, selected the next waypoint and pressed GOTO. The compass rose gave him the bearing and as he moved forward, the GPS counted down the range to the next waypoint. As he reached the end of the trench, he started the cutting wheel and the conveyor, then slowly lowered the cutting wheel into the trench. When the wheel reached 8 feet, he advanced the tractor drive and started cutting. Jim watched intently, and after an hour, Brian asked him if he’d like to take the wheel. Jim said yes in an instant. Brian stopped the machine, switched seats, then talked Jim through the restart sequence. As soon as the machine was up to speed, Jim advanced the crawler and started digging the trench. He had a real steady hand for a beginner. After about an hour of driving, Brian told him he was qualified to operate the machine by himself. Jim looked like Christmas had come early. Since Brian didn’t have anything else to do, he stayed in the cab and caught a quick nap. About an hour later, Jim was still cutting away, and had even switched way points when they came to the next one. Later, Jim remembered he had to drive back to Reno that evening. “Brian, I’m really enjoying this, but I have to get back to Reno ASAP – I was supposed to have the truck back tonight – it’s a rental.”

By now they were miles away from the truck, so Brian called on the radio, and Steve came up to the trencher in his truck. Jim shut the trencher down, and they both climbed down. “Steve – I certified Jim to operate the trencher, so if you need him to run it while I’m doing something else – go for it.” Jim jumped into the pickup and said thanks to Brian, then Steve drove off. Brian climbed back into the cab, and started digging trench again.

Steve made dinner again that night – this time for 9 people. They all claimed bunks in the first trailer, so they wouldn’t have to run 2 generators for the AC units. They were all asleep minutes after going to bed.

Chapter 15

The next morning, Steve was hard-pressed to cook breakfast for 9 hungry men on one 2-burner stove. He vowed to call Ken that morning, and have someone bring out a 4-burner stove on a stand so he could do this right. He had to feed the men in shifts, but since he had plenty of hot coffee ready, they weren't too grumpy. Brian took advantage of the lull in the work to organize things. He got to know all the "New Guys" as the Trio was calling them, and what they could and could not do. Checking with George, he found out that they really didn't have anything for them to do since they moved the equipment out of the way. Overhearing their conversation, Steve decided to take advantage of the situation, and get ahead of schedule. Since Brian had completed the trenches, and the crews had finished laying all the pipe and conduits, Steve talked to Brian and asked if they could start grading roads in the Village, and preparing and rough grading lots for when the UBC buildings were going to be ready. Since they were all within a couple of hundred square feet of each other, they would build a standard lot, and cut it slightly oversize so that all the models could fit. While they were doing that, they would install the transformers, phone boxes, and other connections, and leave the wire coiled up, and the pipes capped and marked so when they moved a house onto the lot, all they'd have to do is dig the foundation, connect the utilities, and they would be good to go since the PV roofing would be installed at the UBC factory. Since they were moving houses on mine property, and the roads were big enough, they didn't have to build the house in two sections to transport, and could build and transport the house in one piece at a huge savings in building and transporting costs, since there were no overhead clearance issues, and the roads were wide enough to take the largest house they were building as one piece.

Steve entered the data into his PDA, and if they could get the roads built in the next couple of weeks and the lots started, it would cut 6 months off the length of the project before startup. Ken would probably dance a Jig when he heard that, and he was German. Steve got the "New Guys" started right after breakfast, and programmed the roads they needed graded into Brian's GPS unit, and the locations of all the lots. Then he called CC's gravel pit, and told them they would need a steady supply of roadbed since they had pushed up grading the roads. They could start delivery this afternoon if they didn't mind dump spreading the loads. The pit boss was ecstatic, he was almost ready to lay off 2 of his drivers because it was so slow. Steve said that they would keep them busy for the next month or two barring any major complications. Ken wasn't the only one who would be dancing a Jig.

Next Steve called Ken, and when he told him that they would be able to cut 6 months off his estimated startup date for the mine, Steve heard a funny noise over the phone, and realized Ken WAS dancing a Jig. When Ken calmed down sufficiently, Steve gave him a long laundry list of stuff they needed, including the 4 burner stove and stand. Ken said he'd have Jim drive it up today with the rest of the stuff he wanted.

Minutes after he hung up, Sam ran into Ken's office thinking something had happened to see Ken dancing on his desktop, whooping and hollering. Sam thought Ken had lost it, and was ready to call the funny farm when Ken saw the strange look on Sam's face, hopped down from his desk and explained things to Sam. A 6-month acceleration of their project would save them almost \$10 Million. Sam felt like joining Ken, but didn't know how to dance. Jim ran into the room with his P-14 in his hand, and saw them dancing, so he figured everything was OK and quickly holstered his weapon before either of them saw it.

"What's this, some strange new Religious Sect?"

"Jim, Steve just called and told us they can cut 6 months off our estimated startup date of the mine!"

"So?"

"So... It will save us \$10Million – that means we turn a profit our first year – that means everyone gets a raise, which means those stock options could increase by 30% since they're based on your salary!"

When Jim figured out what they were talking about, he felt like joining them, but figured they didn't want to hear any Sea Shanties – they could get extremely profane.

After everyone settled down, Ken handed the list to Jim and asked him to take care of it, and would he mind driving it out to the mine that afternoon?

"Yes, Sir!" Jim was out the door like a shot, and on the phone ordering like mad – he wanted to get where the action was. Two hours later, he had a list of the items and their cost. Sam approved the order, and Ken signed off on it, then Sam did something very unusual – he handed Jim a Platinum Corporate Credit Card – he told Jim it had NO limit, but he was responsible for all charges on it, and had to get a receipt for everything and turn them into Sam. Sam told him that if he ever bought anything that was unauthorized or without a receipt, it could be grounds for termination. Jim told him not to worry, when he was in the Teams, he had a Government Credit card that he had to use just like this one, so he was used to it. He told Sam he once bought a \$30,000 boat with one once, when the Teams needed a replacement right then and there. When Sam heard that, he calmed down a bit. Jim got in the truck and went shopping. Two hours later, he had everything on the list, so he called the office and told them he was en route to the Mine. Later that afternoon, he arrived at the mine, and he was very warmly welcomed – he had 2 more pallets of drinking water and enough ice to keep a flock of penguins cool in the Sahara. He handed Steve a box from a Surveying Supply company that contained 4 more Survey GPS units like Steve's with a USB connection so Steve could download data to them, and 4 external antenna units. Steve programmed the units, then drove them out to where the "New Guys" were working, and showed them how to use them. Having the extra units would greatly speed up the work, since everyone knew where they were. Steve also handed out

some Garmin Rhino 220 units with a GMRS/FRS Radio and GPS unit in one. These weren't as precise, but had the added feature of the radio. Steve had programmed the frequencies and tones into the radios at the same time he programmed the GPS units. Steve, Brian and George each got a Rhino unit, and the last one was given to one of the "New Guys" that didn't need the precision GPS unit. Steve took the battery charger and a box full of NiMh batteries and connected the charger to the generator using a multi-tap surge protector so they could power other stuff off that line.

Steve and Jim set up the 4-burner stove and stand, took down the 2- burner unit and stored it back in its box, then unloaded the rest of the stuff. When they finished Jim told Steve that he had to get back to the office, shook his hand, and left.

Meanwhile Brian was busy grading all the roads, and the CC dump trucks were working like beavers dumping gravel behind him. One of the "New Guys" knew how to drive an off-road roller-compactor, so they borrowed CC's unit, and started compacting the road bed in preparation to chip seal. Later that day, another trainload of stuff showed up for the UBC manufacturer, it was their heavy equipment including huge saws and other tools. There were carloads of materials as well, including the PV roof shingles. George called Steve and asked what they wanted to do with this stuff, so Steve called the UBC manufacturer, who said their set-up crew would be in first thing tomorrow, and to leave it on the siding in front of their building. Steve called George, and told him not to worry about it, they'd be in tomorrow morning to set up the building and install the equipment. As the train crew positioned the cars, George noticed that they had poured a full-length loading dock to ease loading and unloading of cargo.

Brian was getting ahead of the dump trucks, so he called Steve, who remembered they now had 2 dump trucks the same size as CC's. He checked with Brian, and found out 2 of the NG's could operate any size dump truck, and they weren't doing anything with a higher priority than the roads. Steve called the Pit Boss at CC, and asked if they could use their 2 dump trucks to speed the process up. He said OK, so Steve called them on the radio and asked them to get the dump trucks fueled up, and follow CC's dump trucks to their pit, and help transport and dump spread gravel. With the 2 additional trucks working, they started catching up to Brian, who kept grading roads as they graveled them and the other NG compacted behind the dump trucks. The rest of the NGs kept up grading and clearing lots for the houses. At the end of the day, Steve made dinner for everyone. It was much easier now that they had a 4 burner stove. Jim brought a fire ring from home and someone gathered the sagebrush they had bulldozed over to make the road, and soon they had a blazing bonfire while they ate dinner. They sat around the fire for an hour after dinner, talking and joking. When the fire died down, they headed for the showers, then bed.

The next morning, the crew from UBC showed up with a bunch of F-350 Crew cabs pulling huge trailers, and a couple of trailers that were living quarters and a mobile office. They were completely self-contained, except they asked to tap into the water supply so they could have

showers and cooking water as well. While some of the crew set up the trailers, the rest drove over to their building, unhooked the forklifts they tailored with them, and got busy unloading the cars. They set up the equipment, laid out the materials, and hooked everything up so they were ready to start building. They stayed at the mine for 2 weeks getting everything set up, then they left, only needing to connect the building to the AC service so they could start building. When they were finished, they had emptied all the rail cars parked in front of their building, and several they didn't have room for, which freed up a lot of room in the rail depot. Good thing too, since George was handling about a dozen boxcars and flatcars a day full of supplies.

As components arrived, they were moved to where they were needed by an ever growing crew. Ken and Jim had been busy hiring people, and instead of making them wait until the mine opened, asked them if they minded working as general laborers. With the employment situation in Nevada, dozens of unemployed mine workers jumped at the chance to get started early. Steve, Brian and George were so busy they wished they had been cloned. Even Jim came to the mine to get into the act. Several more trailers were moved onto the property, as well as a full-time canteen. Good thing too, since Steve couldn't possibly cook for all those people. The components for their power plant arrived, and they leased several tractor-trailer lowboy rigs to haul the components from the track to the power plant site. Some of the biggest components, the steam turbines and generators, just barely fit through the tunnels on the railroad, and luckily were just light enough for George's crane to swing onto a lowboy trailer and over to the waiting power plant. They built a huge building to house 5 10MW steam turbines and generators.

Nearby, the heliostat was being installed. It was several miles of highly reflective metal parabolic reflector troughs reflecting sunlight onto a 1 inch copper tube that had been coated black to increase absorption. This trough was aligned in a Southerly direction, so that from dawn to dusk, the sunlight was striking the tube and heating the pressurized working fluid, which transferred it's heat to a huge liquid-to-liquid heat exchanger, where the distilled water on the other side instantly flashed into steam, was stored in an accumulator, and when the pressure was high enough, was discharged into the steam turbines. During the summer, the system produced enough steam to run all 5 steam-turbine generators. Two of the turbines had back-up boilers to make up for the lack of solar energy in inclement weather. Even on cloudy days, the heliostat would produce power. At the same time a wind farm of 50 10-Kilowatt wind turbines was installed in the windiest part of the property, on 300 foot towers. When George was finished unloading trains, he helped erect the towers. The power company was in the process of installing a 500KV line from their transmission line to the mine's power plant.

When they were finished, Ken arrived at the mine to cut the ribbon to officially open the power plant, even though it had been producing power for a week while they tested everything. For the immediate future, they would be a power exporter, since their demand was so low. The power company was loving the cheap electricity, and was able to cut back running their boilers to generate electricity. As soon as they had power, the UBC manufacturer was in business, and orders were pouring in.

Once they had the basic infrastructure installed, the workers turned to getting the mine open and operating. All the heavy equipment that wasn't needed elsewhere was diverted to removing the overburden, and setting up the actual mine, including the processing plant, smelting plant, offices, and storage facility – which resembled Fort Knox.

Jim took this time to introduce himself to the Sheriff of Humboldt County, and introduce as many of his key personnel as possible to the Sheriff. He approved of everyone, and deputized them on the spot. Jim kept sending people to the Sheriff as they were hired. Eventually he had a full-time security force of 30 officers, including 10 women. He realized he needed to hire women for various reasons, and hired the best women available. He even got Ken to accelerate installing the shooting range, and they also built a building for an indoor range, but put it on the back burner until the weather warranted moving indoors. Jim was training his troops, and getting them certified in everything they would need. Most were already certified by the DOD, and all they had to do was pass a test to get certified by the state.

Ken had a brilliant idea, bounced it off Sam, who called a friend at the ATF, who told them how to get an FFL for the company. They formed a LLC as a subsidiary of Nevada Silver Mines, and got the FFL for the subsidiary – Nevada Guns. That allowed them to buy guns at cost for the Security force, and also they would open a Sporting Goods/Firearms store for the employees as soon as they were ready to open the Village. The men were looking forward to that – they'd be able to buy guns and ammo at huge discounts – no more than 20% over cost due to the higher overhead of maintaining all the paperwork and everything the ATF required for a gun shop. Jim hired a friend of his who had been a Military Armorer and was a gunsmith since he retired from the Marines to run the gun shop and act as their chief gunsmith and armorer for the security force.

The Sheriff gave their Security Force a Law Enforcement Letter, and that combined with their FFL, allowed them to buy any semi-auto weapon they wanted, as well as a truckload of gear. They ended up equipping the Security Force with ParaOrd P-14's, Bushmaster AR-15's, and a Sam Brown full of gear including a top of the line Motorola police radio, a double-cuff carrier, Police-only strength OC spray, tasers, batons, and Level III vests. They later placed an order to Blackhawk Industries for their Tactical Vest with a Level IV insert. These and the AR-15's were stored in the strategically located arms lockers. Most of the Security Force was a part-time force, working other jobs in the mine, and the gate guards, communications people, and the Officer of the Day were the only full-time personnel. They were all trained as EMT II and some were military trained Paramedics. They all had access to first-aid kits appropriate to their training, as well as beepers and radios they kept on them 24/7.

As everyone was employed, they picked which house they wanted. There was a limited selection to keep costs down, but they had a wide choice of interior decors. They were all electric, which used more power, but eliminated the need for propane. As the factory started finishing houses, they held a lottery for who would get the first house. Part of the crew was now diverted to pouring foundations and getting hookups ready for the houses. The

communications company had installed everything they needed to connect every house into a Wide Area Network, and the Internet at DSL speeds. They also had free local (within the company property) calling, and a cheap long distance service. Ken was looking into installing a Cellular phone system, but was getting the runaround from the FCC. They had already drilled, installed and tested the water system, and they were getting good clean water from all 6 wells, so there was no need for the water treatment plant, which saved them several million dollars. They continued expanding the heliostat system by adding more collectors, and soon they had enough steam to keep all 5 turbines running all day, and a couple of hours into the night until the steam loop cooled. During the day, the power flowed from the mine to the grid, and at night, a tenth of that flowed back into the mine. As the mine grew, those numbers would change, but they were so far on the positive side of the balance sheet that the power company was paying them several hundred thousand dollars a month.

When the first house was finished, they held the lottery drawing, and George won. He called his wife in Reno and told her to start packing, they were moving that weekend. George went to the factory to view his new house. It was a 3 bedroom 2 bath house since it was just him, his wife, and his teenage daughter still living with him. All the houses were about 2,000 square feet give or take a few, and a large 2 car garage. The lots were broken up into 2 acre parcels to allow them a small garden. After the houses were moved on, any house that wanted dogs got their property fenced with a 6 foot chain link fence to keep the dogs safe. There was no mail delivery, so everyone collected their mail at the mine office on their way home from work. Everyone had PO Box Numbers, which corresponded to a small box in an addition to the mine office with 1 Postal employee who worked 40 hours a week even though the office was open 24/7. They controlled access to the back area with a roll-up window and drop slots for outgoing mail and a dispensing machine that weighed packages and dispensed postage with cash or a credit/debit card. The mine had its own credit union, but didn't do many loans. It was more like a place to store their earnings and write checks to pay outside debts. Most of the workers were debt-free when they moved into the community since they sold their houses and paid off their bills. The few that couldn't had access to credit counselors who developed a plan to get them debt-free as soon as possible. All transactions inside the mine community were via cash or the credit union issued debit card.

Soon thereafter, the company started producing about a house a day, and seeing a house moving down the road became a common sight. The mine had started production, and issued a commemorative coin to every mine employee when they were hired, or given to them at a big meeting when they were first minted commemorating the start of production. Each contained an ounce of pure silver, worth about \$6.00 at current prices. It was the gesture that was most important to the mine employees. They had succeeded where many had said they would fail. Ken got the first coin, and had it embedded in Lucite and turned into a paperweight.

Chapter 16

Now that the mine was producing silver, the priority changed to improving the Village. The huge steel building was cleared out and converted to a Grocery Store, Hardware Store and Drug Store all in one. Ken hired people to manage and run the store. He paid them a good living wage, and they received the same benefits as the mine workers. As a result, Customer Service became a reality instead of something they gave lip service to. If they didn't have it – they ordered it. Clerks roamed the aisles looking for people to help. Senior Citizens (parents of employees who were allowed to live in the employee's homes on a case-by-case basis) were helped with reaching high items, and everyone was helpful. The prices were unbelievably low – they didn't realize how much markup there was in some products. Ken told the manager that if he showed a profit of more than 10% he would be looking for another job, so he kept the prices low, the profit down, and just covered his expenses. With no health insurance or union dues to pay, they could keep their payroll costs down as well. Since Ken set the salary of the managers, they either had to give the workers more money, or reduce prices to keep profits down. They were seriously confused, since their last couple of jobs, they were told to shaft the employees and charge as much as they could for products to maximize profits, but after a few months, they got the hang of it.

Jim's friend the gunsmith was doing a fire sale business at the Sporting Goods store. They were selling ammo and guns at prices below the Internet Companies, and they didn't charge shipping. Most everyone bought an AR-15, 20 30-rd mags and 1,000 rounds of ammo out of their first paychecks. Gun safes became a hot seller as people realized they got to keep most of their money instead of spending it on bills.

When they were finished with the dirt work for the Village, the earthmovers that weren't working in the mines used their equipment to build a solar heated indoor/outdoor Olympic size pool, and a kiddie pool for the infants and toddlers. People volunteered to teach swimming classes and Lifesaving. The schools were a big hit. Basically the curriculum was whatever the parents decided to teach their kids, since it was a private school. The State Superintendent of Schools was PO'd, but couldn't touch them since Ken had so many friends in high places. The teachers found pre-1960's textbooks that didn't teach Revisionist History, New Math, and "Guess-Spelling". They taught the 3 R's in elementary school, with a healthy dose of Conservative Christian Philosophy. Very few parents disagreed with the curriculum, and had a chance to opt out of the "Religious and Ethics Studies" classes if they wanted to. It was a credit to Ken's vision that few parents opted out for religious reasons.

In Junior High and High School, the Students spent time not only learning their basic studies, but apprenticing under a master craftsman who started teaching trade-related subjects in the schools in Junior High, and field experience classes in High School. By the time a student graduated High School, they were either prepared for Advance Placement in College, or were well on their way to completing their apprenticeship program and earning the title of

Journeyman. No one was “Socially Promoted”. Kids that didn’t apply themselves were counseled and punished if necessary. There was a zero tolerance policy toward juvenile crime in the Village. In the rare instance of a kid getting caught tagging, or vandalizing anything, they had to work at Community Service to pay the damages when they weren’t in school. Kids were not suspended or expelled, they were sent to the equivalent of Boot Camp for an Attitude Adjustment. Most of the graduates of that program never committed a second act worthy of Boot Camp. Jim had hired a retired Marine Drill Instructor to supervise Boot Camp. He told his charges on their first day “The reason they call it Boot Camp is because if you don’t do anything I tell you to, right when I tell you to - You’re going to get my Boot in your Ass!” The parents had all approved and signed off of various forms to allow them to use physical discipline on their kids. The Sheriff of Humboldt County checked out the facility and approved. Several Humboldt County judges wanted to send juvenile violators to the “Boot Camp” but the hanky-wavers in CPS threw a monkey wrench in that idea. Since it was on private property, the Snit-throwers and Hanky wavers had to go throw a snit elsewhere. If they attempted to enter the property, they were refused. No Humboldt County Sheriff would go with them, so they were SOL. Ken had enough juice to keep the State people out of their hair. As a result, they had a well- run orderly community with a minimum of hassles, and virtually no crime.

The only snake in their garden was several investors who thought they should have made more money by now, and started trouble for Ken in the Board. The head of the Board of Directors got wind of this, and before it could cause problems, got together with a couple of other investors and bought the malcontents out. 6 months later, their stock price doubled as they announced they had turned a profit in their first year. The malcontents were out millions in potential earnings, and were still sore at Ken because they blamed him for forcing them out. They approached his Cousin Teresa Heinz who still had an axe to grind over the \$10 Million he cost her. It wasn’t the money that bothered her, it was her pride at having the Judge publicly humiliate her. At least that’s how she saw it – anyway – now the snake had fangs, and was laying in wait to strike.

Once they completed the pool, the workers looked around for other stuff to build. First they built a big community hall that was used for social gatherings and movies on Friday night. They didn’t need a theater, since everyone got first-run movies via cable for free. When Ken figured all the costs of a theatre, he found that giving everyone cable was cheaper, and he could write it off as a benefit if he included Educational Programming. As a result, their cable service was 2/3 educational 1/3 entertainment. They counted the Religious Programming as Educational, since it tied into the school’s Religion and Ethics Curriculum. When they finished the Community Center, they built a big multi-use park with a football field, baseball, softball, and soccer fields and installed lights. Since water was paid for by the mines, they had lush green grass for the kids to play on 9 months out of the year. 2 blocks away, they created a huge Dog Run area with 8-foot fences to keep the dogs in. People came to play Frisbee with their dogs, and to let them run. Everyone brought a Pooper scooper, and there was a receptacle right outside for doggie deposits. The mine even hired Sanitary Engineers and had its own landfill.

Almost everything that could be recycled was, and very little was thrown out. The recycling operation paid for the trash removal service.

By now, Ken had permanently relocated all the Mine's offices to the site in Winnemucca. Sam wasn't too happy, but wasn't offered a choice. Over time, he got used to living in the "sticks" as he called it. Ken moved into a regular house just like everyone else. They completed the indoor shooting range, and had their first match before winter. They completed the gas station shortly after opening the mine, and the people were amazed at the prices they charged. Between shipping by rail, and buying 100K gallons at a time, Ken was getting fuel cheaper than the jobbers were getting it, and right at distributor prices. JR's estimate was dead on, and they were using about a million gallons of diesel a month in the mine, and when they had the tanks filled, they had about a 10 month supply. The railroad delivered about a million gallons per month, so the tanks never got below 2/3 full. Even the gasoline tanks were kept full, even though they weren't using near as much. Ken got a deal on some used diesel busses, and used them to transport workers from the Village to the mine itself, further reducing the demand for gasoline.

With their extra spendable income, people were buying boats and RVs to recreate on their time off. The outdoor range had to be expanded it was so popular on weekends. A new skeet/trap range was put in, and George's daughter won the first match in the girl's 18 and under category. With the new life and good doctors, she bounced back fast from the accident. Brian's girls were doing well in their new school and one of them even had a new "boyfriend" even though they were only 11 and 12. Brian and Jim's wives were inseparable, and started several clubs together for the wives. Most of the wives grew huge vegetable gardens, since the mine rented tillers and other garden equipment for a dollar per day. The soil was so poor that Ken decided to buy some "fertilizer" from several nearby ranches, and had the dump trucks take several loads of manure and dump it in an out of the way location and mixed it with various other refuse to form a great compost pile. One of the "Community Service" assignments soon became turning the compost pile with a pitchfork. After a week of that, they rarely had any second offenders. When the compost had fully ripened and was ready to be used, they filled smaller trucks, and made a list of the gardens, and gave each garden a full-size truck bed full of rich compost to till into their gardens. They had enough compost to give anyone who wanted it 2 truck loads.

Next year they took a collection and went to get some more. Soon the entire village was sporting large well managed gardens. Orders for Canning jars and equipment were soon placed, and the Grocery manager decided unilaterally to order enough to get a great price on them. Good thing he got the count right, because at the end of the summer, there were only 5 canners left, and no canning jars or lids. Some of the workers were Mormons, and had already stored a year's worth of food. When the gardens came in, the Mormons advised their neighbors that it might be a good idea to stockpile food, and how to do it. Soon the entire village had a year's worth of food stored, and only went to the grocery to re-stock what soon became their "pantry". Most of the employees had decided they wanted basements instead of crawl spaces, and those

that had basements stored their food and other emergency supplies in their basements. Others had a spare bedroom, and used that space.

Soon it was hunting season, so the hunters came back with venison, and people put up venison in jars and sausage further adding to their stored supplies. The Sporting Goods store got a deal on Ammo when a huge retailer went out of business, and had a case lot sale. Most of the miners bought an additional case of .223, .45acp and .22lr. It seemed the most popular guns at the Sporting goods stores were Glock and ParaOrd .45 and 9mm pistols, Ruger 10-22's and Bushmaster .223/5.56 rifles. He carried just about every gun available, but the bulk of the sales were those guns. There was a growing minority of Cowboy action shooters, but they tended to be the older shooters. He sold several semi-auto shotguns after the skeet and trap range opened, then they sort of died off. There wasn't much call for fishing gear, since the nearest fishable lake was several hours away. He hoped Ken would take care of that and build a fishing pond when they started de-watering the mine.

Meanwhile, Jim had an idea, and found someone to build it for him. Turns out one of the miners was a rabid model airplane builder and flew RC airplane models, and several others were electronics geeks. He got them together on a project to build several "Poor man's R.V.'s". The RC guy figured a powered glider would work best, and the electronic geeks figured out how to install color and infrared cameras under the fuselage with pan tilt and zoom capabilities so the plane didn't have to bank so much and loose altitude. They figured out the electronics to control the plane and the camera, and still see the pictures. What they ended up with was pure genius. They sat an operator at a computer console with 2 joysticks that were connected to the plane and the camera, as well as throttle controls for the two electric motors. What pulled the rabbit out of the hat was when someone thought of the PV panels on the roofs, and made some calls to locate the manufacturer. He said he already had some panels laminated to light plastic and that a 6 foot by 12 inch piece of this PV panel would produce enough power to keep the sailplane up all day.

They also mounted another camera in the nose that could only look down or forward and was fixed focus for pilot control. The geeks got together with the RC nerd as they called him, and designed a lightweight, strong plane that could stay up all day between the NiMh batteries, the solar power, and gliding. It was a "Push-me-pull-you" setup with a front and rear prop. Both props were self-furling when the power was cut to increase its gliding capabilities. After a rocky start, they had a working prototype, and after extensive testing, made 6 daylight and 6 night versions. The night versions were smaller and lighter since they couldn't use the PV panels and had to stay up using batteries, so they eliminated the pusher motor on the night variant, and fixed the front camera to look forward and down so the pilot could land. They traded the P/T/Z daylight camera for a fixed IR camera. The night variant had to be launched and recovered every 4 hours, to swap the batteries for fresh ones. One operator could operate up to 4 R.V.'s since they were semi-autonomous and could be programmed to circle an area.

When they tested the daylight version, they found they only needed the pusher motor to take off and climb. Once they reached altitude (2,000-5,000 ft.) the rear pusher was shut off and self-furled to minimize drag. If thermals were present, they could become a pure glider, and charge the batteries. If not, they used the front motor as a sustainer, using very little power since it was much smaller than the pusher motor. The big 6 foot wingspan, combined with the 12-inch chord of the wing, provided the soaring characteristics of an eagle. It maneuvered like a pig, but could stay up and circle forever. Since it was so small, it was invisible at 2,000 ft or greater and had enough zoom capability to resolve a single person on the ground at 2,000 ft. Matter of fact, when they were testing it, someone's wife was sunbathing and decided she didn't need any tan lines. She got a note of appreciation from the entire test team, and they got a memo to keep the R.V.'s out of the Village from Jim.

After the successful test, they installed 2 consoles in the Communications room for the R.V.'s and a dozen battery chargers to keep the NiMh batteries recharged. Their transmitters used a little more power than authorized, but what the FCC didn't know wouldn't hurt them. One of the Communications crew was always responsible for flying and monitoring the R.V.'s and just to be sure, the feed was videotaped for storage. The operator had no direct access to the video recorder, but could order a quick rewind of the last 30 seconds of video to check something if needed. During the night, they had an extra controller on since they had to launch and recover much more frequently. With this system, they could end the roving patrols, since they could monitor the entire mine and the surrounding area from the air.

Chapter 17

The mine was humming along steadily, producing large quantities of silver, and the pit was getting progressively deeper which meant more work removing dirt, except at this depth most of what they were hauling was Silver Ore that was deposited at the processing plant. They were producing so much silver that Jim had to step up the escorted trips. Using Ken's and Jim's connections, they received permission to escort an armored 18-wheeler with 2 Ma Deuce mounted Humvees, and several lightly armored Suburbans with 5 team members and a driver. When they were on escort duty, they wore their Blackhawk Level IV Tactical vests, and carried their AR-15's. Armed as they were, no one messed with them, and they safely deposited their silver in the Federal Depository in Carson City, which ironically was a leftover from what was now the Second Richest Silver Mine – The Comstock Mine in Virginia City, NV.

While Ken enjoyed the publicity, he knew that his enemies would take any advantage they could to bring him down and destroy his dream. He was especially worried about his distant cousin Teresa Heinz, who was now married to a powerful Senator who might be the next President of the United States. Ken wouldn't put it past her to use power as First Lady to get back at him. He saw the look she gave him as they left court. Maybe giving Sam a High-Five as they walked out of the Courtroom wasn't such a good idea after all. Sam was hearing more and more rumors that certain people who were being made very foolish because the Mine was so successful were now out for blood. The Teacher's Union for one – The NEA. The IRS was seriously peeved because the mine hadn't paid a penny in tax since they opened, and they were making money hand over fist. All the Hanky-waving Snit-throwers were still up in arms over "Boot Camp", they were claiming it was "Child Abuse". Ken said that Child Abuse was letting a child do whatsoever it wanted until it was an Adult, then throwing them in jail for doing exactly what you had been letting them get away with for 18 years. That didn't win any friends either. Sam was very busy defending the Mine against every Liberal, know-it-all Do-gooder that could get anywhere near a microphone. He was doing a good job so far, but the pressure was building.

The Village was nearing completion, and they hadn't had any incidents of vandalism or Juvenile Delinquency in over a year. They had one Domestic Violence incident, which got blown way out of proportion by the local media, but scarcely created a ripple in the community, since everyone who lived there knew the truth, the couple simply had a loud argument. Most of the Security Force was released to other duties except when they were escorting a convoy. That freed up another 30 mine workers to expand various mine functions. Jim was spending more time in the machine shop than the Security Office, spelling Brian who split his time between scheduling and supervising Heavy Equipment Operators and running the Machine Shop. George was the happiest of all, since he was moved over to "The Big Dig" – a huge power shovel that could fill their largest Haul Pack with one scoop from its bucket. They blasted once a week, and spent the rest of the week digging up and moving what they blasted. The mine used

ANFO since it worked best for what then needed, breaking up and moving dirt and rock without throwing it everywhere.

The Village was growing, so they decided they wanted to add a small strip mall. They used some mine equipment that wasn't being urgently needed elsewhere, and bulldozed, graded, compacted, and poured concrete pads for 10 small stores that carried stuff the Villagers wanted. Most were arts and crafts stores, and bookstores. Ken was very picky about what businesses the mine company got into. If it wasn't wholesome and uplifting, they didn't do it on mine property. It's not like the entire mine company was full of dour Quakers, it's just that they weren't running around drinking, carousing and sleeping around. Ken did not permit any businesses that encouraged those behaviors. If people wanted to drink in their homes, that was OK by him, but they bought their booze off Mine property. Since they had to go so far to buy booze, most of the steady drinkers gave it up. AA meetings were well attended due to the high number of Recovering Alcoholics the Mine employed. Ken felt that if you had been clean and sober for a year, paid your bills, and didn't cheat on your spouse or beat your wife and kids, that you deserved a chance to prove yourself. Time and time again, Men he had given a second chance to rose to the occasion.

As the electrical load increased, they added more arrays to the heliostat, more wind turbines to the wind farm, and finally they added another steam turbine and generator to the power plant. That was a day to remember since they had to stop most work in the mine to move the huge pieces and install them. When they brought on line the 6th turbogenerator, they became an energy exporter again, and the balance sheet turned into the black again.

Their communication system was State of the Art, and the Wide Area Network Computer System allowed most working wives to stay home with their younger children 3 or 4 days a week and only come into the office one or two days a week. Not only did this greatly reduce child care costs to the mine, the extra money meant a lot to the families that were trying to get out of debt, and more goodies and supplies stored up for the ones who were debt free. Since salaries kept increasing, several of the miners were now fairly wealthy on paper, owning mine stock worth several hundred thousand dollars. Steve, Brian, Jim and George now had a net wealth in excess of several million dollars when they included all their stock value. This didn't go to their heads, and they kept working just like everybody else. Ken didn't go for the Chiefs and Indians stuff. Someone was in charge, but they lived no better or worse than their neighbors and co-workers. The stock of Nevada Silver Mine Inc. was steadily gaining value despite the low profit margins. Any profit Ken managed to make was returned in dividends, which kept the stockholders happy, and prevented Teresa from pulling something like a Hostile Takeover Bid to take over the company. No one in their right mind wanted to sell their stock since it was steadily increasing in value and returning decent dividends. Most of the Big Boards had badly underrated their stock, but Ken knew what he was doing, and the Board trusted him. So far, they had all made back their initial investment and then some.

What really amazed Ken was how well attended churches were – he'd never been particularly religious until attending AA meetings, but he really didn't feel comfortable in church. He guessed it was because the last one he stepped foot in was so judgmental that they never gave him a chance to receive the same grace they had received, maybe now he should try some different churches.

Security was still an issue at the mine, and the R.V. crews had earned their stripes when they detected an intrusion by ELF Terrorists trying to blow up the mining equipment. They despised mines and mining, especially Pit mines that the claimed were "Raping the Land". The security force gathered them up, and the Humboldt County Sheriff was more than happy to throw them in the cooler. Since they were found with explosives on them, they were all charged with major felonies, and were sentenced in Federal Court to long terms in prison, where they could write their Manifestos in peace, blissfully unaware that they were surrounded by the products of mining.

Life in the Village was busy but very safe, hardly anyone locked doors or had car alarms since theft and burglary had ceased to exist as problems. Everyone was armed to the teeth, and most of the managers, and some of the workers had CCW permits. Few carried at work, since they got in the way, and there were weapons lockers situated all over the mine site, and every member of the security patrol had a key that opened all lockers in an emergency. People were volunteering for activities after work, and First Aid classes were heavily attended. Almost everyone over 12 knew CPR and basic first aid. The Militia was organized into squads and platoons, with each squad having a medic, and every platoon an EMT/Paramedic with a complete medical kit. Some thought all this was overkill, but Ken and some others could see the writing on the wall – The Powers that Be couldn't let this succeed, since it would prove how corrupt and inefficient the existing systems were.

The Sheriff of Humboldt County was one of Ken's staunchest supporters. In the 2 years the mine had been in Humboldt County, the only times he had to come to the mine was to transport trespassers to jail. The Village took care of all discipline problems internally, without involving the courts, which was perfectly OK with the Sheriff. He silenced the critics at Child Protective Services by pointing out that the Mine was Private Property, and they had their own security force that he had deputized. In short – he told them to Bug Off! One nice thing about Rural Nevada – the Sheriff was the ultimate Law Enforcement Official, and the judges didn't get involved. Since the District Attorney was the brother-in-law of the Sheriff, they had an understanding and didn't step on each other's toes. The Snit-throwers tried to get a Grand Jury investigation, but the District Attorney refused to appoint one. Even the local paper was conservative, as far as newspapers go.

As November got closer, it looked like Sen. Kerry was going to be the Democratic Nominee, and when he picked Sen. Hillary Rodham-Clinton as his running mate, conservative pundits were saying they hoped Sen. Kerry's Life Insurance was paid off, after the mysterious death of Sen. Hillary's husband in a crash of a military VIP aircraft. What was swept under the rug was

the body count didn't match the flight manifest, and the fact that the extra passenger happened to be a retired Hollywood starlet was buried back on Page 12 of most big-city papers. Ken was really worried, because if things continued the way they were, with George Bush bungling the Economic Recovery and sending troops to Iraq instead of letting the UN get bled to death, and his approval rating at an all-time low – an unelectable 20% approval rating. Even the majority of the Republican Party deserted him when he signed the AWB renewal into law. That basically spelled the death knell for GW's second term as President.

October 14, 2004 CNN News Broadcast (CNN)

“CNN is forecasting that Kerry/Clinton will win the Election in November, with George Bush's Approval Rating at an unelectable 20%.”

Joe Greer, the Commandant of the Marines, at least until that Liberal Witch Hillary Clinton became Vice President, swore so vile an oath that it surprised his wife Helga, who being a Marine wife, had heard some profanity before in her life.

“Joe, what's wrong?”

“CNN just announced that Kerry and Clinton were a shoe-in for the next President and VP!”

“Joe, you're retiring after January, you promised – so why are you so upset?”

“I spent 25 of the best years of my life defending the United States against All Enemies, Foreign and Domestic, now it looks like the Idiots are going to elect that gold-digging SOB and Broom Hillary. You thought things were bad for the Country when Bill Clinton was President, wait until they meet his Witch of a Wife! I was forced to give them their Top Secret Briefing on Military Readiness, and Hillary said we didn't need to worry about that, because they were going to do away with 2/3 of the military and spend the money on Social Programs! This means that you average Raghead Terrorist or Third World Dictator would have more capability than the US Armed Forces! Damn that Witch to Hell! I need to call the rest of the Joint Chiefs and talk to them.” He called the rest of the Joint Chiefs, and told them he'd meet them at the meeting next week in Norfolk, VA.

Several groups were seriously upset, and willing to “do something” to prevent Sen. Kerry and Sen. Clinton from destroying the country, but the best organized of these groups, and the most secretive, was the soon-to-be ex-Joint Chiefs of Staff, and their senior staff members. They knew DC had more bugs than a fleabag motel, so they met in a secluded area near Norfolk VA that nobody new about, and they had an excellent cover of attending meetings at the nearby Naval Base to plan the force reductions that the Liberal Left was going to demand. During the meeting, they discussed their options. Some wanted to hire a sniper, some wanted to blow up their Limo on the way in, but the loudest of them all, the Commandant of the Marines, suggested the most outrageous plan of them all – Blow up DC the morning of the Inauguration,

taking all the Liberal Politicians with them! The Air Force General told him there was No Way he could get an Air Force plane to drop a Nuclear Bomb on DC, and the Commandant told him they should get the Russians to do it for them. With that, the head of the Navy turned to him and said, “Joe, I’ve known you almost 25 years, are you sure you didn’t forget to take your medicine?” The Commandant laughed and said “Bob, I’m Crazy – Like a Fox!” It’s the perfect setup, we get deniability, we get rid of those Liberal Bastards that have been ruining the country, and we get a country that all of a sudden WANTS its military – we could write our own checks for all the weapons systems we want! It’s perfect – I know this guy who used to be a head honcho in the KGB before the wall fell, who had to go find a real job. Since there aren’t too many places that need ex-spies, he got into the Russian Mafia. He’s now second in command to the Godfather of the Russian Mafia, and they have enough clout to “borrow” a Russian Boomer with its crew, and if we could get the SONUS guys to ignore it while it steams to the US, and if they launch from just outside Norfolk, the Secret Service won’t have enough time to get them into shelters before the bombs hit. After the Russian Sub nukes DC, we’ll have a Los Angeles standing by with orders to kill it. By now the Admiral of the Navy was sold on the idea, and told the rest of the chiefs that he could handle his end, and he even had a Los Angeles submarine in mind – he knew the Skipper personally, and he was a Patriot like them, and he’d understand the need to do what they had to do to save the country. Of course, he wouldn’t be told the whole story, just what he needed to know, then they agreed to meet a week later after the Marine Commandant got word to the Russians. On that note, the meeting broke up, but before they left, all notes were burned, and everyone was searched carefully. It’s not that they didn’t trust each other, but since they were planning something that certain people wouldn’t like, their OPSEC had to be airtight. Someone could have planted a bug on one of them without their knowing, so they were searched going in and out of the meeting, and they couldn’t bring anything into the meeting room, including pens, lighters, etc. They knew all the NSA’s dirty tricks, and were very thorough.

Later that day, the Commandant of the Marines called Russia on a Secure Cellular phone. The phone itself was not secure, but the devices he attached to them made it so. He bought a pre-paid phone with cash and a false ID from a Wal-Mart in NYC that sold hundreds of them a day, and didn’t use the phone until now. When he’d finished with this call, he’d dispose of the phone with a piece of C-4 out of the stash he kept from his duty in Vietnam. The phone couldn’t be traced to him, and the number he called couldn’t be traced to the Russian, so they in essence set up the perfect secure link, and both their phones used one-time pad security systems. Since they had the only copies of the pad, it was secure even from the NSA. The computer that made the discs had been crushed to bits as the Commandant watched. When he finally got in touch with the Russian Mobster, what his American friend told him floored him. He agreed to look into it, and keep it to just himself and his boss on their end. Boris logged onto their computer system, and found who was in charge of the Russian Submarine force, and the fact that he owed millions of rubles to a mob casino gave him an in with the admiral. He called his boss, told him he’d be over in 10 minutes, and went to their headquarters to discuss this in person.

15 minutes later he was in Sergei Mikhailov's office. "Sergei, I'm not so sure we should take this Yankee's offer. It's obviously a trap!"

"Of Course, it's a trap, but it's a trap we know about, and we can use that to our advantage. Find out what they are willing to give us in return, and I will arrange things on our end. Have you ever heard of Project Pobeda?"

The way Anatoli's eyes bugged out at the code word indicated he did, but he got himself under control fast. Showing weakness was deadly to an up and coming Mafija man, especially the heir apparent to the largest criminal organization in Moscow.

"We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity here – We can make a pile of American Dollars, and cripple the US at the same time!"

"How is nuking DC going to cripple the USA?"

"Who said anything about just nuking DC?"

"Sergei, are you mad? If we nuke America, they will retaliate!"

"Not if we do this right! The worst they can do without revealing their Joint Chiefs conspired to kill millions of Americans is to blow up an out-of-date submarine and kill maybe 100 sailors. If the captain is as good as I think he is, he might get off 3 or 4 missiles before they sink him. If they target every major city within 500 miles of Norfolk, they can cripple the USA, and we can either take over, or negotiate from a position of strength! We will be a World Power again!"

The few remaining conservative talk-show hosts were having a field day skirting the edges of FCC regulations about foul language describing Hillary and Kerry. Rush Limbaugh had survived his revelation that he was addicted to pain pills, and safely defended himself against a politically motivated prosecution by a Big City District Attorney who had it in for Rush. In a bit of poetic justice, the District Attorney lost his job 6 months later when he was recalled, then he was later indicted for possession of Crack Cocaine. Rush was having a field day being his bombastic self, and bashing Hillary and Kerry whenever possible!

Later that day, Joe Greer got a call back from Anatoli. He still had his cell phone, and violated opsec by answering the phone. He knew the only person who had this number was his friend Anatoli, so he decided to take the call, since he was in a vehicle that had just been swept for bugs that morning. "Anatoli, how are things in Moscow?"

"My boss has tentatively agreed to do what you asked. He wanted to know what you could offer in return."

"Ok, How about 10 Million US wire transferred directly to your bank in Switzerland?"

“Not good enough – we risk a vessel worth 10 times that for you!”

“OK, how about the money, and a free hand to do what you want inside the Russian borders without interference.”

“Jim, you mean that?”

“Frankly, we couldn’t give a Rat’s Ass what happens in Russia as long as you guys don’t try to invade or nuke us!”

“Fat chance of that happening Jim! I’ll relay your message and get back to you tomorrow.”

“OK, but make sure to call me on the other number, and destroy your phone.”

“OK, Do Svidaniya, Jim!”

“Goodbye Anatoli.”

Jim drove his car to the base at Norfolk, to a footlocker a friend of his kept for him, stuck a small piece of C-4 to the back of the cell phone, inserted a pencil timer, and dropped the whole thing over the pier into the bay. A minute later, a small fountain of water told him the phone was blown to smithereens. He drove home, opened his garage, parked his car, and opened a hidden box and took out another phone just like the last one, and a calling card. He closed the box, wiped his prints off the box, and went into the house. Helga had his dinner ready. She was surprised that Joe was in a better mood. Maybe he realized that once he was out, he really couldn’t do anything about it. Maybe they’d buy a cabin cruiser, since Jim loved fishing and the ocean. She made Fillet of sole for dinner, with mashed potatoes and green beans. They said grace, and ate a quiet dinner. After dinner, they sat down to watch TV, then went to bed.

Chapter 18

Pobeda was a Russian First-Strike weapon that was born during the Cold War by Gorbachev in case the GRU was right, and Star Wars was a first-strike weapon, instead of a defensive weapons system. He ordered a Typhoon to be “mothballed” for a rather embarrassing defect, when in fact the 20 2-meter missile tubes were replaced by 10 3-meter tubes, and the screws were updated to an ultra-quiet design stolen from the west, and machined by Japan. The outdated sonar suite and obsolete computers were replaced by a contract from a corrupt European dealer in computer technology. They had the equivalent of a Sun Microsystems mini-computer running the entire sub, with 80’s technology sonar systems, including a long-wire towed sonar array. Their fire control system was updated to take advantage of GPS technology. Meanwhile a new first-strike missile was developed that could reach most major targets from anywhere along the Eastern Seaboard.

SSN-30 POBEDA (Victory) Russian Stealth Cruise Missile carried by Russian Typhoon SSBN Submarine – Mach 8 SRB/Ramjet with 10MT Thermonuclear warhead. Size: 3 Meters x 15 Meters. Rocket boosted to Mach 1, GPS guided to within 50 feet of target (lat/long/altitude) air burst weapon. RAM skin – low observable. KISS simple propulsion – rocket boosted pure ramjet using Magnesium powered burner and Nitromethanol fuel, Submarine- Launched Stealth Cruise Missile designed as a first-strike weapon by former USSR, tested but never deployed, approximately 20 in storage Range approximately 500 miles @ Mach 8

The combination of the Pobeda missile and the highly modified Typhoon made a very dangerous first-strike weapon, and shortly after the wall fell, the Russian Government got scared the US would find out and scrapped the Pobeda, but the Admiral in charge of the Submarine Fleet never told the other members of the military that he had in fact diverted funds from other obsolete subs to maintain the Pobeda in absolute secrecy, because he knew in his Russian Heart that the Pobeda was the best defense of the Motherland in their arsenal. As the Army suffered under the new government, he knew he was right, and maintained the system in absolute secrecy.

The head of the Russian Mafia knew that he could convince the head of the Russian Navy to carry out what amounted to a first-strike attack on the USA. After all, he owed the Mafia a gambling debt in excess of 2 million US dollars, and was in no shape to pay it back. He was “paid a visit” by a local don, and agreed in principle as long as the Mafia took care of his family and erased his gambling debt. The Russian half of the plan was in place. The next day, with the time difference, Joe Greer got a coded call from Anatoli confirming they were good to go on their end. With the Inauguration scheduled for January 20th, 2005 they needed to hurry and get things organized on their end.

With Kerry and Clinton coming to power in January, pressure on The Mine and Ken continued to grow, since the Liberal Democrats knew that as soon as “their” president was in office, there

would be an accounting. Ken despaired, but told no one except Sam and Steve, who kept it to themselves, and tried to keep Ken's spirits up. Sam had to hire even more legal help, since vultures were circling, and the Mine's legal troubles seemed to increase. Production was at an all-time high and things were almost boringly stable in the Village.

The Joint Chiefs met in secret later that week to discuss their options. They agreed to the Marine Commandant's plan, especially when they got the New President-to-be's memo ordering them to stop all ongoing weapons plans, demobilize $\frac{3}{4}$ of the men in active duty, and turn over command of all "peacekeeping forces" to the UN. They were glad the tape recorders weren't running when the Commandant heard about that memo. His oath surpassed his last one by a factor of ten! He used some words that the head of the Air Force hadn't heard before! They agreed to everything, and set the date of the attack for Inauguration Day – the one day they could guarantee that every Liberal in the United States would try to make it to DC. "Might as well get them all at once!" was what the Marine Commandant had said. The Admiral in charge of the Navy had made contact with a Captain of a Los Angeles Class 688-I and instructed him to prepare for a joint exercise with the Soviet Navy, while the orders were highly irregular, what he told the Captain in private was even more so. He understood the need to protect the US from as the Admiral said "All Enemies Foreign and Domestic" with the emphasis on the word "Domestic". He clearly understood that Kerry and Clinton intended to destroy the US Military once and for all in a misguided attempt at "peace at any cost". The US half of the plan was in place. The head of the US Army suggested they had better come up with a very good reason to be as far away from the East Coast as possible when the balloon went up. The Air Force General suggested a Conference on Disarmament in Hawaii on that day. The other Joint Chiefs thought that was an excellent idea, and decided to bring their families, and their entire staff's to this "meeting" in Hawaii.

Things were going downhill at the mine – production was still sky-high, but it was impossible to keep the news away from the people especially when the Major Media was trumpeting the impending investigation into "child abuse" at the Mine. The employees and citizens of the Village were up in arms, and several wanted to drive to DC and take care of the problem personally.

When Jim heard about the "investigations" Jim's wife Marge suddenly remembered the phrase "Swears like a Chief". She had never heard Jim swear before, and was sure she'd have to repaint the walls of their house, because what she heard could have peeled the paint right off! When Jim finally calmed down, he called the Sheriff, and he told Jim not to worry – there was nothing pending on the local or State level – he had made sure of that. Jim was glad for what good news he could get.

Ken was up in arms – he knew his Evil Cousin Teresa was behind all this! He wished Sam could sue the Witch for Libel and Slander, but she had almost as much money as Nevada Sliver Mine, Inc. and that would be a tough battle. He was thinking evil thoughts, like hiring a hit-man, when Sam walked in. "Ken, we've received Congressional Subpoenas for the 22nd of

January. Evidently, they want The Mine as the main attraction at a Congressional Show Trial. I can't stop this, since Kerry and Clinton now have a Democratic Majority, or will on the 21st of January. It seems we've been stepping on the wrong toes, and the owners of those toes intend to make an example of us!" Ken wasn't that religious, but at that minute, was praying that God would destroy DC and all the Liberals. Little did he know that his wish would soon be granted.

Dateline December 1, 2004 Somewhere in the Russian Republic

"Anatoli, please tell the Commandant that the Pobeda has sailed, and will reach the target on the 19th and launch at on the 20th of January at 0650Z or 11:50 am Local which will guarantee that they will never be sworn in."

"Very Well Sergei, Also the money has been transferred to our account in Zurich. They paid us \$20 Million as agreed, and the rest of the agreement was that they would give us a free hand to run Russia as we saw fit!"

"Very diplomatic of them – like they'll have a choice!"

Anatoli waited until he was in his armored Mercedes before he took out his cellular phone and dialed the Commandant's number. "They're on the way." was all he said. The Commandant activated his end of the plan, and slowly moved his entire family out of the Eastern Seaboard on the pretense of a skiing holiday in Colorado. The joint chiefs circulated a memo about an upcoming disarmament conference in Hawaii. When the members had received it, they made arrangements for their immediate families to join them, as well as their staff and their families.

With the new ultra-quiet screws, the Pobeda cruised slowly past the GUIK SOUSUS line without revealing enough data for a positive hit. Since the system had replaced the operators with an automated reporting system, some programmer had decided to turn down the sensitivity of the system to minimize false reports, and set it just below the radiated noise threshold of the quietest Russian nuclear submarine. Problem was the Pobeda was almost twice as quiet with their new screws, and the ship made the dangerous transit in "rig for ultra-quiet" mode. Once they were out of the effective range of the system, life returned to normal aboard the sub, until they had to cross the US side of the system. The captain didn't know how he would manage that – only that his orders were sealed, and came from the highest authority in the Russian Navy, or what was left of it.

Life had returned to "normal" at the Mine, if you could call the sense of impending doom "Normal", but life has a way of going on, even in impending disaster. They were still producing silver in huge quantities, and transporting it to the Federal Depository weekly. There had been no other incidents since the ELF terrorists tried. Evidently the Environmentalists didn't care enough about "Gia" to spend the next 20 years in a Federal Penitentiary for her. Since the members of ELF were on the effeminate side, they adapted well to prison life, and

their sex lives improved greatly! Some of the ex-lumberjacks who were in the same prison got a revenge of sorts.

Teresa Heinz was looking forward to the day when she'd be "First Lady" and have the legal authority to investigate and shut down her cousin's silver mine – she really didn't care what they did – she just wanted revenge. She was deeply involved in the Inauguration Galas, and made sure that her entire family had front row seats at the swearing-in ceremony. Every Liberal in the country was weaseling their way into prime seats, and the seating arrangements had been expanded several times to accommodate the huge crowds. Every TV and Radio news station was sending their top reporters, including NPR. It would be the usual media circus. Several Gay Pride organizations were planning large pro-Kerry/Clinton demonstrations in the days preceding the actual Inauguration, and they had already reserved Hotel rooms in NYC for millions of Gays, Lesbians, and even the MBLA people would be there. It was hinted that when they were inaugurated, their first act would be to repeal the Marriage act of 2003, making marriage legal only between a man and a woman. They hinted they would also do away with the "age of consent" laws. When Michael Jackson heard this, he finally came out of the closet in support of the new legislation. Upon hearing this, Rush and other Conservative pundits started opening their shows with REM's song "It's the End of The World as We Know It." and several conservative preachers like Billy Graham and Pat Robertson started talking seriously about the Great Tribulation.

The USS Virginia steamed out of port and headed for a rendezvous with the Pobeda for "military exercises" – they were supposed to be doing a tracking exercise on the Russian Boomer. They picked her up much closer than they expected, and the Chief Sonarman noted that the signature was different than any previous Russian boomer, and called the captain to the sonar room. "Captain – this should be a real exercise for us, this Russian boomer is almost as quiet as ours!"

The Captain's ears perked up at this, but hadn't opened his sealed orders yet – he was under instructions not to until January 20th. The Russians crossed the Grand Banks without incident, and cruised at a steady 10 knots to their launch point. The captain of the Russian sub had determined almost a month ago their fastest quiet speed, which happened to be 15 knots. Since they were in no hurry, they cruised at 10 knots to avoid having to run their coolant pumps at high speed, which made the most noise of anything in the sub. Once they cleared the Grand Banks, they streamed the long wire Sonar Array, and detected the Virginia exactly where she was supposed to be. There were no other hostile contacts in the area, so they proceeded with their mission.

As the Inauguration approached, Liberals of all stripes congregated on the East Coast in anticipation of a Party to end all parties – they were finally in control of the Government! Hotels in NYC and Boston were booked solid for months. People living in the outlying areas made money renting rooms to people who wanted to be in DC for the inauguration since all the hotels were full.

When the 19th approached, the Captain of the Pobeda finally opened his sealed orders, and almost fell on the floor from shock. It was a “First Strike” mission exactly like the Pobeda had been built for. This was no exercise, it was an opening gambit designed to cripple and destroy the government of the United States. Along with his orders was a targeting list for his SSN-30 missiles. Evidently they were going to target the entire eastern seaboard of the USA, starting with DC, 10 minutes before the swearing in ceremony. The Russian captain approved of the timing, but didn’t realize there was an entirely different reason for targeting the missiles to explode before 12:00 noon local. He confided in his second in command, and ordered the missiles made ready for launch off the coast of Virginia at 1150 local, and handed him the target list, and ordered the targets be entered into the Fire Control System. They continued to cruise at 10 knots, but they were more careful about monitoring the sonar, expecting a double-cross, or an attack. They cruised unmolested to their launch point, and loitered in their launch box for a day.

On the Virginia, the captain opened his sealed orders, and couldn’t believe them. They had come directly from the Joint Chiefs. He was ordered to allow the Pobeda to fire 1 missile, but if they attempted to fire additional missiles, they were to sink the Pobeda without warning. He was under orders not to reveal these orders to the crew, and destroy his orders after reading. He fed his orders into the Top Secret shredder, which shredded the paper into confetti.

Around 1100 on the 20th of January, the Pobeda determined its launch position with a precision navigation fix. This was critical for missile accuracy. Once the fix was made, the Captain ordered “Battle Stations Missile, but kept the boat submerged until the last minute. At 11:45 the captain ordered all ballast tanks blown, and as soon as the missile tubes cleared the surface, ordered the launch of tubes 1-10, and turned his missile key to “enable” at the same moment his second in command did.

On the Virginia, they heard the Pobeda blowing ballast, and assuming the worst, ordered Battle Stations and charged their position at Flank. They were still out of range of their ADCAPS, and their conventional Harpoons wouldn’t have much effect against the enormous Typhoon. Still he ordered “Load Harpoon in tubes 1 and 2 and ADCAP in 3 and 4. Make all tubes ready in all aspects. DO NOT open the outer doors. Sonar – you have a firing solution on the Typhoon?”

“Still out of range of the ADCAP sir, but we are in range of the Harpoons”

“Very well sonar, Range to the Typhoon?”

“Typhoon is at 28,000 yards, bearing 125”

Conn, Sonar continue track and advise when we are in ADCAP range, Conn out.”

At 11:50 local exactly, Sonar on the Virginia heard the noises of a Russian Missile launch. The head sonar man yelled “Conn, Sonar – Missile launch noises from Master #1.”

“Conn, Man Battle Stations Harpoon. Fire Control, Firing point procedures, Master #1 tubes 1 and 2, then tubes 3 and 4 as we get in range. Then reload tubes 1-4 with ADCAP. Sonar, Conn. Stand By”

“Sonar Standing By”

“Firing Point Procedures Tubes 1 and 2.”

“Tubes 1 and 2 fired electrically, Captain.”

As soon as the Harpoons were ejected from the Virginia, they floated to the surface, where their canisters jettisoned their nosecones, and with a 45 degree nose-up attitude, the boosters ignited, sending the missiles out of the water. The missiles closed rapidly with the Typhoon, but the Typhoon had gotten 3 missiles off before the Harpoons exploded directly above its sail, detonating the 4th missile, and wrecking the missile deck. The Virginia, charging at the Typhoon at Flank speed, fired tubes 3 and 4 as soon as they were in range at maximum speed, then reloaded all 4 tubes and launched them at the Typhoon’s screws in hopes of flooding the engine room and sending the Russian sub to the bottom before it could do any more damage.

The Virginia reached optimum ADCAP range as soon as the tubes were reloaded, and the Captain ordered all 4 tubes fired at the Typhoon’s screws. The Russian sub commander was still at Battle Stations Missile, and didn’t detect the incoming torpedoes due to the launch noises reverberating throughout the ship. The loud explosion of the harpoons detonating Missile #4 above the missile deck was confused with the noises of the missile launch, until the bow of the Typhoon was forced under water by the concussion of the explosion, flooding the empty missile tubes that were designed for above water operation, and the additional tons of water made the sub very nose heavy and started their plunge toward the bottom of the Atlantic. The 6 Mk-48 ADCAPS arrived almost simultaneously, and blew the screws off the Typhoon, ruptured the rear seals, and flooded the engine room, accelerating its plunge to the bottom. When the Typhoon exceeded its crush depth, the Virginia’s sonar heard the sound of the dual pressure vessels collapsing like a beer can. the next sound they heard was the hull striking the ocean floor over 1,000 feet below.

Meanwhile, the 3 missiles rose above the Atlantic and their rocket boosters fired accelerating the missiles quickly to Mach 1. When the rockets burned out 30 seconds later, the explosive charge blew the rocket off the exhaust pipe of the ramjet, which ignited, burning an explosive mixture of Nitromethanol that would destroy the engine in 10 minutes if the missile carried enough fuel to fly that long. Since there was only 5 minutes of fuel on board, the Russian Engineers were certain the missile would survive its brief acceleration to Mach 8. Stubby winglets popped out of the missile body, giving the autopilot directional control of the missile.

Since the missile knew where it was when it launched, and the GPS coordinates of it's target, a simple ballistic computer was all that was needed to plot the trajectory.

2 minutes later, a 10 Megaton blast destroyed all of Washington DC just as President Kerry was about to be sworn in. No one had any warning due to the speed and trajectory of the missile.

3 minutes after that, New York City and Boston Massachusetts ceased to exist as well.

Chapter 19

Ken was watching the Inauguration on CNN, morosely contemplating the end of Nevada Silver Mines Inc. and his dream. He was watching President-Elect Kerry about to be sworn in as President when there was a white streak across the sky and all of a sudden, the screen went white, then the signal was cut, followed by a STATION IDENTIFICATION logo, and a few minutes later, the feed resumed from their Los Angeles Bureau.

“This is Jose Lopez-Martinez with a late breaking story. We regret to inform you that there has been a large nuclear explosion in Downtown Washington DC. NORAD was taken completely off guard by this development, since our Cobra Dane radar and Space Based detectors didn’t detect a launch. Preliminary reports from Space Command indicate the blast was a 10 Megaton, That’s MEGATON blast which rules out Terrorism. Reports are sketchy at this time, but we cannot raise New York or Boston either. Since this was the Inauguration, everyone from previous Presidents to the entire Congress was in attendance. We do not believe there are any survivors within a 25 mile radius around ground zero, which appears to be the Rotunda of the Capitol Building, where the swearing in was to occur. Noticeably absent were any members of the Joint Chiefs, and this reporter doubts they were invited. We are getting unconfirmed reports of mass casualties up and down the Eastern Seaboard. As you can imagine, power, phones and everything else dependent on electricity is out from Virginia to Maine due to the massive EMP pulse generated by this bomb. This just in... OH MY GOD!!....Ladies and Gentlemen, I have just been handed word that additional detonations estimated at 10 Megatons have gone off in the city centers of New York City and Boston, MA. This has now been confirmed by Space Command. As you can imagine fatalities are measured in the thousands to millions, and casualties are in the millions. We have no confirmation of the numbers. I have just been handed this. It seems there is no one authorized by the government to resume the authority of the Federal Government, since everyone was at the Inauguration Ceremony. It seems the one person designated as the holdout was visiting his granddaughter in NYC when the bomb leveled the entire city, and threw fallout all over New Jersey and the surrounding area. The Joint Chiefs had their conference in Hawaii interrupted by this event, and are flying back to the Continental US in a VIP 747, with a full military escort. They have released a statement deploring the event, calling for calm, and activating and federalizing the National Guard for disaster services. More information will follow as we receive it. This is Jose Lopez-Martinez reporting Live from our CNN studios in Los Angeles.”

Ken turned down the volume for a minute. His emotions were overwhelming him; On one hand was relief that the Mine and his dream would remain untouched. followed by grief for all the fatalities and casualties. He was sure CNN was off by a factor of 10 on the fatalities. There had to be at least 10 million people crowded into Washington DC for the Inaugural Gala. With a blast radius of 25 miles, no one in Downtown DC survived the blast, and millions of people outside that area received either life threatening burns or radiation poisoning. Even now the intensely radioactive fallout was scattering downwind of the 3 cities, and all the water was now

poisoned by fallout. This was going to be a Civil Defense nightmare, and FEMA was effectively decapitated along with every other federal agency with the exception of the military. He realized that tanks and guns weren't going to solve this problem. Looting, panicking and rioting would spread as rumors of the attack spread and outdistanced the media's ability to publish the facts as the government wanted the sheeple to know. Since the West coast wasn't affected, there was no direct threat to his mine, except that he needed a new board of directors, since most had offices in NYC. With the mine up and running, he didn't need any additional investors, so he could just operate it himself for a while and see what happened.

At 2:00pm PST that afternoon, one of the luckiest Conservative Commentators in America took to the air. He usually did his show from NYC, but Roger Hedgecock had to have throat surgery, and asked Rush Limbaugh to fill in for him doing his show live from San Diego. Instead of playing REM's "It's The End of The World As We Know It" again, he had a surprise for his listening audience. His engineer had come up with the soundtrack to the Wizard of Oz, and was playing "Ding-Dong the Witch is Dead!" While some liberals might have complained that it was in poor taste, Rush pointed out that you had to be alive to complain, and that whoever dropped those bombs should get a medal for eliminating 99% of the worst Liberal Idiots in the country. Rush quipped, "It's too bad they didn't nuke San Fag too, and get all of them!" This caused a panic in the Mission District where scores of drag queens misheard and spread a rumor that Rush said that San Francisco was about to get nuked. The scene of a bunch of drag queens running up Russian Hill in high heels and long dresses would have been hysterical any other time but this. As soon as the Mayor of San Fag realized what had happened, he went on TV and Radio to dispel that rumor. It didn't do much good, and San Franciscans were in a panic. It took the California National Guard to get order restored.

When their flight made it back to the CONUS, the joint chiefs asked to be deposited at the closest airport to Cheyenne Mountain that could safely handle the plane, and then be choppered out to Cheyenne Mountain, which was going into lockdown as soon as the Joint Chiefs were inside and accounted for. They insisted on bringing their families and Staff, so the Air Force detailed a squadron of Blackhawks to transport them. When they got inside, they talked to the remainder of the military, and declared Martial Law since there was no one left of the old Federal Government that was competent to run things and take care of the emergency. They declared a dusk to dawn curfew on the Eastern Seaboard, and limited travel in those states. With 3 10-Megaton bombs worth of EMP, there wasn't much moving anyway—at least anything motorized. The local National Guards were decimated, and the Reserves were depleted from overseas deployments. One of their first orders was to bring all troops in non-essential "peacekeeping" assignments home. Since NYC was gone, the UN was in disarray, and in no condition to object. Within days, every ship of the Navy, and the Civilian Reserve fleet was steaming toward our troops to bring them home. CNN's initial report of casualties was wrong, like Ken expected. Estimates were that between 10 and 50 million people died in DC alone, not including NYC and Boston. Estimates were that we could have lost 1/3 of the US population between fatalities and casualties. Some of the Casualties would soon become Fatalities as they succumbed to Radiation Sickness or died from infections caused by their extensive burns.

People all over the US were in shock, but several Old Codgers commented that it was the best thing that could have happened to the US. They got rid of 1) A bunch of Liberal Idiots who were screwing up the country and 2) a whole boatload of Welfare cases that were draining the budget and 3) a bunch of greedy money grubbing Lawyers and Bankers. The only down side according to one Old Codger was that Both Bushes were dead as well, to which another Old Codger commented “Good Riddance – they didn’t do US any favors – just slowed the bleeding a little. Now once the country recovers, hopefully they will have learned their lessons, and the states will take back their Sovereignty.”

As a matter of fact, the Legislatures in Several Western and Southern states were contemplating just that – not seceding from the Union, but reorganizing it into a Federation of Sovereign States, to their eternal Credit, Texas was the first to retake their Republic of Texas Roots. Several Southern States followed suit, and eventually, every state except California that was west of the Mississippi had declared themselves an Independent Republic. Since there was no Federal Government to rebel or secede against, the anti-secessionist Northerners didn’t have a leg to stand on, and didn’t protest. The Joint Chiefs did nothing to stop it, and secretly encouraged it. The Nevada Legislature passed a law returning the State to a Silver/Gold standard giving the citizens of the state 30 days to redeem their FRN’s for Silver or Gold. Eventually, they would return to paper money, but for the duration, thanks to the Nevada Silver Mine, the state was now a net Silver exporter, and the wealth of the State improved.

Governor Guinn called Ken in Winnemucca, and first of all apologized for all the stuff that had been going on, then asked him if he’d be interested in selling the State Mint in Carson City enough Silver bullion to start minting silver coins of different denominations. Ken told the Governor that they already had a million ounces on deposit at the Federal Depository in Carson City. The Governor said he would get hold of them, but he would need even more. Ken said that he would arrange weekly shipments to the Mint if the Governor would either let them provide their own security, or else provide Nevada Law Enforcement Security forces. The Governor had heard of Jim’s security arrangements, and assured Ken that they would be adequate. Ken asked what price the State would pay for Silver, and the Governor hemmed and hawed and finally agreed to \$10.00 per ounce, which was double the going price before the attack. Ken agreed, with a condition that \$10.00 per ounce was a floor price, subject to upward revision if inflation devalued silver. The Governor agreed, and Ken told him to e-mail the contract to Sam’s attention. The Governor thanked Ken again and hung up.

Sam was much relieved when he heard of the demise of Teresa Heinz and the rest of her cronies. He knew a Congressional Investigation would be impossible, since no sitting members of Congress survived the blast. For all intents and purposes, the Mine was off the hook. Sam also realized something he hadn’t told Ken. With the nuclear attacks, most of his relatives had been wiped out – he might be the sole surviving heir to over 10 Billion dollars in Heinz assets! Sam was aware that some of those assets were destroyed in the blast, but at least half of their business was west of the Mississippi.

About a week later, the Joint Chiefs realized the ruse had gone on long enough, and unlocked Cheyenne Mountain, and returned to their bases. By now, most of the Military had returned to the USA, and was busy with the cleanup.

Several States had reluctantly called for retaliation. These calls were quickly silenced when the Head of the Russian Navy admitted he had a Rogue Captain, and then committed suicide. The resulting scandal – heavily aided and abetted by Russian Mafia owned newspapers, forced the resignation of the Russian Government. Without any opposition, the Russian Mafia took over running the country. Since the daily lives of the peasants didn't change much, no one inside Russia really cared who was running things as long as there was Bread and Vodka. The Mafia was much better organized than the government, and motivated by profit, and soon had all the factories working again. This time they made good products since they were paid in real money, not rubles. The Russian economy slowly improved, since the Mafia didn't allow any competition or unauthorized corruption. As a result, levels of corruption quickly fell to a manageable level, and the standard of living improved as a result. The mafia dons were still making money hand over fist, but this time it trickled down in bucketfuls to the peasants. The system was working, and since they were no threat to the USA, they were left alone as they had promised.

Later that day in San Francisco, California

Roger was broken-hearted as he thought of his aunt and other relatives who were attending the inauguration of the new president in Washington, D.C.. He was supposed to be there but there was an important paper due as he worked on the Master's program at SF State in San Francisco.

The pea beneath sixteen mattresses of family money was his Uncle Ken out in Nevada. That jerk seemed to be against everything that their family stood for, or at least what they had, stood for. Roger wished Ken would just dig a hole and bury himself in it. And his aunt was working hard to accomplish that task before destruction.

Roger wasn't very straight on the facts, but in his heart knew that somehow Ken and those other freaks were responsible for everything that had happened. He made a commitment to himself to do something about it that would be a tribute to his aunt and parents' honor.

Quietly he went in to the graduate office and declared his intention to withdraw from the graduate program. The student aide filled out a form with accompanying sighs. She spilled coffee across the forms which lay on her desk. But she didn't seem to notice. Her hair hung down in strings and her clothes looked as if they had not been changed since day before yesterday. Roger knew she was just going through the motions. Many of the students were just going through the motions in the shock of the deaths of all their idols in Washington, D.C..

Roger returned to his apartment in the Volkswagen convertible he had been given for transportation at school. He parked it across the sloping street from his apartment. He was only

a few blocks from the place where Eldrige Cleaver had stayed during the sixties. He gained strength from that fact as he trudged up two flights of stairs and stepped into his room. He must make a plan for revenge.

The three room apartment was a mess and the television was still going from when he left it on this morning as he left the apartment.

Roger glanced across the room to a shelf where he had copies of books by revolutionaries like Che Guevara and others. He needed to immerse himself in the comfort of their heroic lives again before he made a plan for revenge against those responsible for destroying this country. He glanced over toward his laptop. Roger wondered if the internet was still up. He hadn't checked when the news came a couple of days ago. He just had gone out on the streets and looked at the sky, waiting for the heavens to crash down on him like most other folks in that Haight-Ashbury neighborhood.

Roger didn't even have the heart to go out and entertain the hookers and homeless with his mime act like he usually did, as his "giving back" to his community. This was ingrained in him as needful by his family. His aunt, especially, tutored Roger in paying back the community which had given their family so much wealth.

But now his mind was turning to a different, darker kind of payback to his uncle and his uncle's freak show friends.

Roger may have suffered some disconnect when it came to politics but as a student he was an excellent candidate for any graduate program. His was a mind which organized well and developed logical plans to accomplish his objectives.

His primary objective was the destruction of his Uncle Ken and those who supported him in Nevada. Roger began to break his plan into smaller segments. First he would begin to eliminate Ken's supporters and friends outside of the State of Nevada. Roger thought, that has a nice sound, "eliminate."

He had heard his Uncle mention one of those crazy survivalist boards. Roger would try to remember the name of that group. Luckily the internet was back up and running. He could do his research there.

His Uncle had tried to influence him as a freshman in college to look the world differently than the rest of the family. Ken did look at it differently. Ken attended some emotional church that met in a warehouse. Roger's family only attended the "high church" Episcopal services on special occasions like funerals, christenings and when someone special spoke at Christmas.

Ken was on the far right of the Republican Party. He had been there a long time but spent a lot

of time with Independent Americans and Libertarians. He would say he was eclectic. Roger's family was hard-core Liberals.

The effort Ken had put in with his nephew wasn't wasted though, Roger thought, because now Roger began to remember all those things Uncle Ken had said. Roger's plan began to take shape in his mind. First, he would work on those friends and supporters that Ken knew and then begin both geographically and relationally begin to narrow the circle. Eventually he would get to the town and mine in Nevada. By the time he reached there he would have made the transformation. Like the toy transformers from Japan, he would morph into one of them, at least from the outside.

Roger knew he would have to depend on himself for resources because his family was gone. But he felt he knew how to do that. His Master's Thesis had opened a new world. He was getting the graduate degree in cross-cultural studies. The title of the Research Paper he was working on was "The interaction between the Hispanic Migrant Workers' Organizers and Black Union Members from 1965 to 1970 in developing Coalitions in the California Central Valley." Roger had interview dozens of leaders of these two groups over the past year. He knew the right people to get help.

He had another resource from within himself. His years of experience as a Mime had allowed the ability make people believe in the imaginary or suspend belief develop. Roger had become a consummate street actor.

Roger listed the categories of development of his character for this task. First, there were the physical looks. The long ponytail had to go, and the beard. Next, he needed some clothing that was appropriate to fit in with the crowd his Uncle spent time with. Then he needed to observe and practice the affectations of speech, language and content of his target group. It kind of irked him but he needed to get clothes at Sears or J.C. Penny and sit around the mall to watch middle America.

He needed to start spending some time at gun shows or something like that. California is not a great place for guns. Maybe he could go to stock car races or even a rodeo.

The medium height young man with the pasty look to his face walked into the beauty salon for men and women with a sour look and a pony tail. To the surprise of the hairdresser he left the blonde tail behind and was sporting an almost military-short cut. Next he visited the Mall. He was glad the power was back on for he bought jeans and a few plaid shirts at the Penny's, He also picked up a pair of work boots in a light leather color.

His image for the "mime" was of a young adult recently out of the Army. He wasn't sure how well he fit that look but older adults began to be more friendly. He had left the sandals and shredded levis in the dressing room.

Roger started saying, “Yes, Ma’am” and “Yes, Sir” to anyone more than five years older than him.

And Roger began to research redneck and survivalist sites on the web. He kept looking until something registered. He had remembered his Uncle Ken talking about rodents or rats or something as a good place to look right before the Y2K bust. When Roger found “Rough and Ready Raccoon Site,” it clicked. Uncle Ken had mentioned something another Raccoon had said. The idiots on the website called themselves Raccoons.

Roger began to immerse himself in the genre of preparedness, bug out/in and love of guns. He began to memorize particular expressions and specifications for a dozen rifles and handguns. Roger began an outward transformation in earnest.

He began to listen to the talk radio programs of Michael Reagan, Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage and a half dozen other shows in the Bay area. One thing about research projects that Roger did was his thoroughness.

And he began to use his contacts at the University. For a few bucks he was able to get one of the geeks to trace some of the raccoons around California who posted on the “Rough and Ready Raccoon Site.” That list was being saved for later. The dark thoughts of what he might do with these names and addresses swirled around and around like a man pacing in a dungeon, in his head.

Roger also began to do his reading on the roof of the apartment building. He wanted to get rid of the pasty city dweller look. He had noticed that middle American men wore ballcaps. He found an Smith and Wesson cap at the Thrift Store with a little wear on it and he began to always wear this cap.

He added the gestures of middle American men. He walked with his head up and eyes straight ahead....may a little military bearing instead of the inner city shuffle that had been characteristic over the past few years. People and some girls began to notice Roger’s blue eyes...that was a plus, he thought.

The young man who had waited for the sky to fall less than a month ago was really transformed, at least on the outside.

Roger got out the list Brian, his geek friend and master hacker, had made for him through use of the computer system at the University. One of the names on the list was a Raccoon who went by the name of Sierra Medic on the survivalist board. Sierra Medic lived north of San Francisco in Petaluma. His name was Richard Conway.

Roger wondered why the Feds weren’t going after these radicals. They probably would have when the inauguration ceremony was over. A lot of things would have changed when the right

thinking people got into office after inauguration day.

Roger stepped into the hall. Gina the woman next door almost collided with him. She took a double take. Roger was wearing a new Raiders warm up jacket.

“I almost didn’t recognize you.” Gina looked up and down at Roger. “I didn’t know you were a Raiders fan. You’re pretty brave wearing that jacket in Niners territory.”

“I just got it. But there’s a lot that you don’t know about me, Gina.”

Roger smiled and then swaggered down the hall and tromped a little louder than necessary down the two flights of stairs preceding Gina out to the street.

Roger boarded the bus to head for the BART Station which would take him under the Bay to Oakland. Earlier, he had called a resident whose number he had seen in the paper selling an old Oldsmobile, 4 door sedan in fair shape for \$350. as is. He was told it runs good but smokes a lot. Roger didn’t care. All he wanted was wheels to get him around for a week. For an extra \$50. the old lady agree not to turn in the registration papers for a few days until the buyer, Roger, who represented himself as Samuel Dodge could get the money for insurance, so he could legally register the vehicle. This was a crummy part of Oakland with a lot of welfare types so this request was not unusual here.

Roger then stopped by a Circle K which was advertising plastic gas cans on the outside of the store. He bought two. Then Roger stopped to fill up the car...he was almost afraid to turn the engine off but it had started to run more quietly after driving a few blocks and the smoking had also stopped except when he accelerated quickly. He also filled up the gas containers about 3/4 full and put them in the trunk.

Next Roger stopped in Emeryville to pick up a lighter and a couple of bottles of liquid detergent. The key wouldn’t work in the trunk lock but Roger found that by bumping the lid with the heel of his hand, the lid would spring loose. He put the detergent in the trunk.

He took it easy driving across the San Rafael-Richmond bridge and on toward Marin County. Roger did have a shudder as he passed in view of San Quentin Prison but he was steady, right at the speed limit. When he came closer to town he stopped again in the far corner of a 7-11 market. He wanted to check his lights before dark. He didn’t want to be pulled over for a defective tail light or something. Roger’s luck was good. Everything seemed O.K.. His timing was good. He would arrive in Petaluma before dark to drive by the Sierra Medic (or Conway’s) house.

Sierra Medic lived on the outskirts of town. There were lots of places on half to acre and half lots scattered about the hillsides of the city which used to be known for chickens and dairy

farms. Roger drove slowly by the address and there it was hanging in the breeze, a wooden sign indicating that this was the Conway home. He went past the house, down the road and then doubled back on a parallel road across the irrigation ditch from the house. He could see that the lights were on and there was a lot of activity.

Roger found a place about 50 yards away where he could hide the Oldsmobile and then quietly pulled himself across a pipe to the other side of the ditch where he was only about 40 yards from the house. He was concerned about dogs barking but the only real alarm he had was when a couple on bikes riding down the country road almost caught him when he stood up to stretch.

He spent two evenings observing and started to have a feeling for the patterns of the family. Then Roger left to drive down to Petaluma for a night at a cheap motel and two days worth of nursing long neck Coors at the Cowboy Bar on the edge of the older section of town. How he wished for a glass of cold Zinfandel but Roger was quietly concentrating on picking up language and the interests of this crowd.

Finally, it was time. He drove over to the Conway house, hid his car and walked quietly toward the house. Slowly he circled and crept toward the back of the house. His heart was pounding loud enough to be heard, or so he thought. His arms were aching from hauling the two five gallon containers of gas. He had poured the detergent into one of the gas cans with the gas. He couldn't remember exactly how to make napalm; that was a mistake but he would look it up and memorize the formula when he got home.

Roger stopped every few minutes to listen and look around. He had almost dropped the containers of gas when a car roared down the road. He jumped and scrambled behind a rose bush. Then he sat quietly waiting for a light or some noise from the house.

Then he quietly moved forward to begin splashing the liquid around the perimeter of the old wooden frame building. He gashed his knee on a spigot he didn't see as a cloud covered the half moon. Roger almost bit his tongue to keep from yelling out with pain.

So far so good. when he came to the front of the house, he threw more gas on the separate standing garage and some on the rusty Ford P/U with two flat tires.

Roger looked both ways, took his plastic containers out to the road edge, walked a few feet away and threw a lit torch at the foundation of the house. There was a boom as vaporized gas ignited in a trail across the front of the house but the sides didn't ignite right away. But by this time Roger was running towards the ditch, throwing the containers across and crawling as fast as he could.

He got in the car started it and kept reminding himself to drive slowly or at least the speed limit. By the time he reached the older section of town he could hear sirens and he could see a faint glow to the south.

Roger headed back toward Oakland where he planned to dump the car after cleaning it up. He was thrilled so that he wanted to blast the radio and sing to the top of his lungs. He kept telling himself. Be cool. Be cool. But there was something more. The edge of a black cloud seemed to be restricting his lungs and it had a hold of his heart.

Roger dialogued with himself, asserting that he was doing what had to be done and that the payback had begun.

Roger stopped in an alley, dumped all the garbage from several days of convenience store and fast food meals. He also dumped the gas containers in a dumpster. Then Roger began to wipe down everything inside he could with a rag and Armor All. He used Windex on the windows and then took the vehicle to a drive through car wash.

“Hey, Peachy.” One of the young black men huddled near the corner, under a street light in downtown Oakland, turned and looked into the Oldsmobile.

The rough looking man leaned over and squinted into the interior of the car at Roger. “What’a yuh want?” Peachy was thinking this was some kid who wanted some kind of drugs. “Peachy, it’s Roger.”

“That doan look like yuh.”

“It’s me all right. I want to make a deal, a trade.” Peachy indicated he remembered Roger from the interview last year. Wondering what the white college boy wanted perked up an interest in Peachy.

“What’a yuh wanna trade?”

Roger spoke in lowered voice, “I want to trade this car for a gun. I got a bill of sale and it’s legal.” Peachy could get anything, anyone wanted. “Can we do a deal?”

Peachy went back to the group on the corner. One of the men handed him a package. “I got two I’ll trade. Take your choice.” Roger got out of the car to examine the package. There were two. It was hard to read the etched names in the dark. Roger stayed near the door of the car but opened the package to the be exposed in the street light. The first gun was small and could be hidden easily. The name started with a J... Roger couldn’t read the writing in street light. The second looked like a German Luger but it had a really small hole in barrel end.

“Are you trying to give me a BB gun--the caliber is so small.” Roger looked up hard-eyed at Peachy.

“Nah. It’s a good one. A Ruger.” Peachy took the pistol and held it out with his hand held it horizontally in a “gangsta” grip. “It’s a twenty-two caliber.”

Roger decided to bargain. “The car has a full tank. It’s worth more than both those mouse guns.” He had seen small calibers called that on the Raccoon forum two weeks ago. “I’ll give you the car and twenty bucks for both.” Peachy hesitated and then agreed. Roger told him that he needed a ride to BART and then he would turn over the car.

Peachy didn’t say anything on the way to the station but just as Roger started to get out of the car Peachy said, “Who yuh gonna kill?” Roger stared at him with a blank look and then got out, removing his gloves after stepping through the door.

“Does it make any difference?” Roger said as he turned toward the light of the station and walked quickly toward the group of people waiting for the train. Each gun weighed heavily in the side pockets of his Raiders jacket. Roger felt a chill. He thought it must be the fog that was wrapping around everything in the night.

The trip across the Bay and the ride on the number nine bus was uneventful, at least on the surface. Roger had a pair of wild emotions racing through his mind. First, his curiosity about the fire in Petaluma was roaring. He had to get to a newspaper or at least on the net to get information. Second, the weight of the two guns felt like bags of concrete strapped to his waist.

He tried to keep the mantra of “stay cool” running through his mind as the other riders on the Bart and Bus glanced at him as if they had x-ray vision. Each time he saw a cop or the Security for the Mass Transit he forced himself to relax and look bored. That was hard. His nerves were on edge and the slightest movement or gesture from other passengers seemed a potential threat.

Yet the guns felt a comfort until he began to wonder if they were even loaded. He had never even shot or thought of shooting a gun before. He needed some information. What if they were loaded and he bumped one of them wrongly? Would the gun go off in his pocket? Did they have safety switches? The anxiety about this began to displace other concerns. He couldn’t wait to get home.

Even though Roger laid his jacket gently down on the kitchen table there was a soft clunk from the guns inside the pockets against the table surface. He stepped back and eyed the jacket as if it were a predator he had brought into his house. Then he went into the bathroom to wash his hands and face with cool tap water. The face looking at him from the mirror was haggard and drawn. He needed a shave. And there was a fuzz on one of his eyebrows. Roger rubbed his eyebrow and tiny bits of hair broke off the ends of his right eyebrow. That flash from the ignited fire must have singed his face. He was ... lucky, very lucky.

He went back to the kitchen and automatically opened the refrigerator. He was looking for something. What...he was looking for a cold beer. That wasn’t like him. He wondered if he was getting too deep into his character. That didn’t happen with the Mime routines.

There was something in him that wanted to share with someone else what he had accomplished this night. But who could he trust? There was a nagging sense of isolation and an edge of intensified caution as he reviewed the events of the last few days like a merry-go-round in his head.

Roger shut the door and went to the cabinet. He was out of wine. But in with the spices was a bottle of cheap Peter Vella Burgundy he used for cooking Italian sauces. It wasn't drinking wine but Roger wanted something right now and he wasn't going to the matchbox Vietnamese corner grocery store down the block for something better. They didn't have anything better anyway. He poured the red wine into a water glass, filled to the top. He took a sip and grimaced at the slightly sour taste of the warm liquid and walked back to the living room. His eyes automatically focused on the Raiders jacket lying on the table as he passed.

When he thought of the experience out on the gun range with the instructor he was still embarrassed

He had pulled the two guns out of the paper sack and placed them on a table adjacent to the aisle he and the instructor would be shooting down. The target was ten yards away. After some preliminary safety instructions he was asked to load the guns.

Roger had purchased ammo at a local sporting goods store. He was so relieved to find that both guns were the same size. He thought he would get 15 or 20 bullets for each gun to take a lesson and then get another 10 or 20 bullets for extra use. The clerk said he might as well get a whole brick of 500, they were cheaper that way. Roger hesitated, then mumbled something about how that's the way he usually purchased "ammo".

Roger began to be worried about the cost as the clerk pulled out the box. The family safety deposit box at the Bank of America in downtown San Francisco only had yielded eight thousand dollars cash and about five pounds of silver dollars. Stores were becoming hesitant about taking credit cards or debit cards. The price of gas was now almost six dollars a gallon. But even with prices going up the Big five still sold the "brick" for only thirteen dollars. Roger was relieved he didn't have to hand over more of his cash. He was also surmised that now he knew why there was so much crime. If you could buy 500 bullets for thirteen dollars, you could equip an army for a couple of thousand dollars.

His ears had burned when Dave the firearms instructor laughed when he looked at the little Jennings he placed on the table.

"What's so funny?" Roger didn't like anyone to laugh at him.

"That, that is a piece of" The instructor cut himself off when he saw the immediate reaction of Roger. "It is a very small pistol, which is useful only at very close range."

“Well, I like it fine.” Roger immediately defended the little gun.

Then to cover an awkward situation, Dave said, as he observed the second gun that Roger pulled out of the paper bag, “Now that Ruger Mk II is a fine little pistol. Let me show you the safe procedure to load both these weapons.

Now matter how hard he tried, during the course of the lesson, Roger couldn’t hit the target more that one out of four or five times with the Jennings. He didn’t do much better on the Ruger but at least he was hitting the paper target and one or two bullets made holes close to the center. Roger figured he must have shot at least one hundred bullets during his lesson.

He was so glad for the lesson to be over. That instructor kept trying to get him to use a certain posture. Roger thought if he could just get out on his own somewhere he would figure this out.

And the worst thing was that the little gun he had liked so much wasn’t worth diddlysquat. Even Dave, the instructor couldn’t do more than hit the big paper target with it.

As Roger thought about that experience he cruised south on I-5 towards Southern California. One thing the instructor had mentioned was the laws about carrying the guns loaded in a car from place to place in California. But then Dave mentioned, “That’s up to you. With all that’s going on, you might need some personal protection.” Roger heard the comments and half listened and half-responded. He felt a slight excitement because he was breaking the law by having the guns loaded, but he protected himself by keeping them both under the spare tire in the trunk of the VW convertible as he drove south. He was making his next move.

There had been a real disappointment in the first payback he had planned. He waited for some news to reach San Francisco about the Petaluma fire. There was nothing in the local papers and nothing on the television news. Roger finally went to a library and scrounged a newspaper from Napa, which reported the event.

After all his effort, Sierra Medic and his family had moved out the day before he torched their house. Roger had mixed feelings: great disappointment and this vague sense of relief. He wasn’t a murderer yet, just an arsonist. The paper said the family had moved to Colorado. They must have been moving on the two days he had been waiting in Petaluma.

This time, when he got to L.A. he would make sure. He had the Ruger .22. Roger had read in one of the books on revolutionaries that assassins on the international scene used these kinds of guns with silencers to eliminate opponents. Roger didn’t have a silencer but on the Raccoon Discussion Board someone had discussed using a small balloon on the end of a .22 to make it quieter. Roger intended to buy some balloons and try this out in the desert before he struck next.

The list his friend had given him, listed a LA Fox as one of the Raccoons. This time the list

didn't give a name, just an address. This was his next target. He wouldn't make a mistake this time. He would make a real payback here in Southern California.

Roger turned up the radio, took off his Smith and Wesson cap and let the sunshine glow and wind blow as he drove off the freeway into the town of Ventura where he intended to stay. The radio had been reporting riots in some parts of the City. Ventura was a nice place nestled along the beach and only an hour or so, depending on traffic, to downtown LA..

When Roger awoke he felt a strangeness in the air and chilly quiet assailed his ears. He had left the slider on the tiny balcony open the previous night.

He stretched, pulled on his pants and ran his fingers through his hair. The blonde hair was determined to do its' own thing since he had cut it short. What he needed was a cup of coffee. Roger shambled over to the balcony. It was apparent that the riots he had heard about on the radio were isolated to the worst section of LA.. There was a drifting smoke, barely visible through the yellowed Southern California air as Roger peered around the edge of his balcony.

He also noticed a lack of the usual sounds of traffic. It was as if most folks were staying home. Well now for the coffee. He went into the bathroom and fumbled around for the light switch. He found it and began to flip it back and forth. Maybe it was the exhaust fan switch he was moving, he thought. Roger went back into the main room of his unit and noticed that the clock radio was also dead. He picked up the receiver of the telephone and heard a busy signal. He imagined it was some local outage, perhaps one of the minor earthquakes. The motel along the beach on the northern end of Ventura wasn't too far from Northridge.

He went down stairs with his overnight bag to check out.

"We're really sorry. The police came too late. We're really sorry."

The mumbling, overwrought desk clerk cowered behind the desk as if Roger would blow up over something. "I understand there has been a power outage. That's O.K.." Roger replied quickly.

"Your room is complementary. On the house. No charge." The plump clerk avoided looking him in the eye. Roger thought that this was a good deal for a little power outage.

Roger said, "Thanks, no problem." and hurried from the reception area before someone in management changed their minds about the free room.

Quickly, he walked down one flight of stairs to half-basement garage. As he glanced through the semi-dark interior he could see that several cars had been vandalized. His beautiful little, light blue, Volkswagen Beetle convertible looked to be in the worst shape. All the tires were flat. The roof canvas was in shreds. The side windows were smashed and long gashes were exposing the springs in the front and rear seats. The hood lid in the back was open and it looked like someone had taken a tire iron to the carburetor. The bags gone were as well as his new

Raiders coat he had left overnight in the car. The front trunk lid was smashed in, too, but not open.

Roger assumed that the LA cops had pulled another Rodney King caper and that was the cause of riots. It looked like some gang had taken advantage of the power outage to take a run through this beach town. He was detached from the scene as he analyzed the wreck that had been his precious VW. Another part of him wanted to take a tire iron to the perpetrators of this destruction. He walked to the front and remembered the two guns and the ammunition box he had stashed under the spare tire. With a groan and a heave the lid came open. The tire was still there covering his hideout. He reached in and withdrew the box and the rag wrapped parcel. He shoved them into to overnight bag after glancing around the parking basement to see if anyone was watching and left the car as he walked out.

Probably the hotel employees had been afraid to intervene. This motel wasn't big enough for security...besides why did they need security in quiet Ventura? Roger was thinking that he must have really been dead to the world last night...a few too many wine coolers. The thickness of his tongue and an edge of a head ache made the need for the coffee obvious to him.

He needed coffee and wheels or his plan would be dashed to the ground. That VW was a total wreck. He would call the Insurance company later that day. He could have them send a check to his address in San Francisco. He walked the few blocks toward the freeway from the beach. The electricity was on here. He went into a doughnut shop, got his coffee and planned his next move.

The clerk was slow to serve Roger. There was a radio with news chattering on it in the back room. The clerk stood in the doorway to the back room. He kept his eyes on the front door but listened through the doorway at the news broadcast.

Roger was alone in the shop. He had glanced up the street and saw a used car lot so he covered the coffee with a plastic lid and left going south toward the garish sign, "Quality Pre-Used Cars", a block away.

Roger wanted to save his cash. He knew he had about \$40,000. credit card limit so he would pay with MC on his replacement wheels. It was a small lot with about twenty or thirty cars; late model BMWs, Mercedes and Lexus were in the majority with a smattering of late model Toyotas. He walked up to the typical small office connected to an even smaller garage and met a salesman with a rumpled Aloha shirt coming out the door. "Local check or cash. No credit cards or financing. At least 'til this blows over." Roger hadn't opened his mouth. He was down to about \$7,000. cash now and he didn't want to blow it all on a set of wheels.

"I have excellent credit and you can check my bank."

The salesman frowned and said, "Didn't you hear me? No credit. Local checks only or travelers' checks."

Roger knew he wasn't going to get anywhere with this guy. This was odd, Roger always had enough money. He never had any problems with getting more from his family and his family's credit was always good.

An odd look came into the salesman's eyes. He had looked Roger over. The levis, work boots and cap said to him that this dude might have some cash. "Do you have any cash?" The expression that Roger gave must have indicated yes, because the salesman said, "I can offer you some basic transportation, if you're interested." He had an old junker that he was going to wholesale out for five or six hundred dollars tomorrow. He was wondering if he couldn't get a thousand or so out of the kid for it. "I can give you a real discount. We haven't gone over it or even cleaned it up. It was left over from an estate sale. The owner, used it for his prospecting hobby out in the desert. His daughter brought it in as a trade-in. Take a look at those tires."

There were some big, aggressive tires on the '89 Toyota with a camper shell. It looked like it had originally been a green color but there were patches of primer gray and tan where someone had attempted some rough body work. In the front there was an off road bumper with about twenty or thirty feet of chain wrapped from side to side and in the back two army green gas cans were mounted. A small roof rack had a couple of shovels attached with bungee cords and an odd looking hand jack about three feet long. Roger peered into the dirty interior. The seats were worn. They had saddle blanket covers on them.

"This is a four wheel monster and it will go up the side of a mountain! And its got all the stuff to take you four-wheeling anywhere." The salesman noted Roger's interest. "I might throw in all the gear if the price was right."

Roger walked around the vehicle. The salesman got in and started the vehicle. "You'll love this rig." It had started easily and the only thing Roger heard was that it was a little loud. Probably needs a muffler, he thought.

Roger glanced towards the front parking lot where the shiny newer vehicles were sitting. The salesman thought he might lose a customer. "Make me an offer I can't refuse."

Roger thought that he was going to head for Nevada so this vehicle might suit his new image. "\$750." The salesman looked astonished and replied, "This rig is worth a whole lot more, especially now. You must be joking."

"Give me \$2000. and I'll throw in all the gear." There was a lot of what looked like junk, in the camper shell. Roger figured to stop at the first dumpster with that stuff.

"I'll give you \$1500 and you fill the tank and the extra gas cans. That's all I can do." The salesman believed that this was really Roger's limit and agreed.

“Let’s do the paperwork and then you take this note to the Chevron Station across the street for the gas. We have an account with them.”

When Roger pulled in, a grumpy attendant barked “cash only”. Roger didn’t know why the guy was so grumpy with his gas at \$5.99 per gallon for unleaded. The attendant looked at the note, turned and scowled across the street at the car lot, then said, “Pump Nine.”

The first thing on Roger’s mind as he drove out onto the freeway was to find the address where LA Fox lived. He felt it was important to get his surveillance operation under way. The sooner he got on this Raccoon, the sooner he could move on toward the mine and the payback on his uncle.

He drove up to the address, then parked back under a shade tree where he could see the doors to the one story apartment complex. Each unit had its own door.

This was a lousy neighborhood. There were cars along the curb which had been burned and the wheels on others were stripped with some windows broken out.

A new red Mustang drove up to the apartment complex Roger was watching. A low rider filled with young adults, was right on the Mustang's bumper. A young woman jumped out of the passenger side and started running up the street. She had on heels, at least for the first few steps. Then she leaned down in a quick gesture to discard the shoes and continue running barefoot up the street. An overweight Mexican with a scarf around his head fell out the driver’s side of the Mustang and stumbled to his feet to start the chase. The low rider car backed quickly and followed paralleling the efforts of fat man. The passengers were egging on the man to more effort. The young woman was getting away and the passengers yelled curses at the fat man to hurry up.

Roger had watched for a few moments and then started the truck engine and began to follow. He had to see the end of the chase. He wanted to see if she would get away. Her legs continued to churn and it looked like she might be successful until she looked back and stumbled on the edge of driveway and fell rolling across into the gutter. She immediately jumped up but the fat man was almost on her.

He caught the tail of her red leather jacket. She still had spirit though and moved her arms to the rear, pushing forward and wiggling out of the jacket to run forward. Her pursuer stood there staring at the red jacket. He was huffing and puffing from the exertion of running. His friends pulled up and started jeering at him again. They stopped their car.

Roger wasn’t a hero but something in him made him push down the accelerator pedal. He roared past the stopped men and was alongside the limping and running woman.

“Get in. Get in. It’s O.K.. I’ll help you.”

Roger glanced in the rear view mirror to see the fat man trying to stuff himself in the back door of the low rider as it began to move. The woman looked back too and began to move over to the passenger side. The door wouldn’t open. Roger leaned across the front seat pulling on the broken lock and then desperately trying to release the door with the inside handle.

“Open it you stupid,” she yelled at him.

“I’m trying.” Roger leaned further over and practically broke the window crank winding it down. “Jump in.” In spite of the height of the window and her injury the woman jumped halfway through the window of the truck. Out of the corner of his eye Roger saw the low rider accelerating toward them. He released the clutch, stamped the pedal down and grabbed the arm of the woman pulling her roughly toward him as she struggled to get through the window. By the time she was mostly in the small cab of the Toyota, she was laying across his arms as he struggled to keep the truck on the road. She twisted around and put her feet down as Roger made a quick left turn in his efforts to evade the low rider and its’ occupants. The woman slammed against the door and it suddenly decided to open of its own volition.

Roger grabbed the woman again, “Not leaving me yet?” They both laughed. It is odd how in the middle of an intense situation, someone can crack a joke or make a gesture which breaks the tension for a fraction of a minute before everyone is involved in the situation with its intensity once again. They both laughed and then she pulled in and pulled the door shut again.

The low rider had a lot more acceleration than the truck and was gaining again. Roger looked forward and saw a red light with cars passing through the intersection. He took a gamble and drove through the intersection. The low rider tried to follow but didn’t make it and was struck broadside by a large diesel milk delivery truck.

Glad they were safe and needing to take a leak. He drove another block, stopped the truck in an alley and got out. He threw up, then gagged for a moment. He had seen the crunch of the car against the side of the low rider and had vividly imagined the result of smashed bodies inside.

Roger felt weak. He sat down on the curb by the right front of the truck, put his elbows on his knees and his hands on each side of his face as he leaned forward. “God, God.” He wasn’t praying but somehow he knew he had been more than fortunate. The adrenaline rush that had propelled him over the past few moments with such energy had drained him, also. He didn’t know if he could stand up and walk over to the truck without his knees wobbling. The heroes, or bad guys, in the movies never had this problem. Roger felt frozen. All he could do was utter deep sighs. And he felt seriously dehydrated.

As he heard sirens in the background, Roger knew there was a necessity to move. He stood, with the sense of heavy weights on his body and within a scope of slow motion moved back to

get in the driver's seat. The truck was still running. And the young woman looked glassy eyed straight ahead without noticing him at all. He started the truck forward. Then he looked down to see the laceration across her knee and blood running down her leg. She wasn't going to die but the wound needed attention.

"I may have been safer with them!" The woman spoke and then continued her glassy eyed stare.

Roger saw a Long's drug store as he drove a few blocks down the boulevard away from the scene of the accident. He pulled in and then told the woman that he would get something for her leg. She gave a barely perceptible nod to him in response to his repeating the statement. She kept staring straight ahead. Roger thought that she must be in some sort of state of shock.

The store was in operation but it was also messy. It looked like they didn't have enough staff to keep the aisles clean and to restock the shelves. He kept thinking maybe it was this neighborhood in LA. Roger found the first aid supplies, got a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and a large tube of Neosporin. Next, he got some gauze wrapping and the good quality tape. As he started to walk away he had second thoughts and picked up a couple of boxes of different size pads and some elastic bandaging.

Then he headed for the cold drink refrigerator. He started to get some bottled water in sixteen oz. containers and noticed the gallons of bottled water sitting on the floor. His money wasn't going to last forever. Roger placed the small bottles back into their places and grabbed a couple of gallon jugs of distilled water. They were cheaper. On his way to the front he picked up a box of 12 energy bars in the candy section, a small jar of peanut butter, a loaf of multi-grain bread and a big bag of Fritos. His arms were full with all he had collected.

As he waited for the customers in front of him he saw a display of student book bags on sale. They were \$2.99 each. He selected a large dark blue bag with shoulder straps. Roger needed something more than his travel kit to carry stuff. His soft luggage had been stolen back at the motel. He decided to just get a cart and do some more shopping. Long's had a small clothing and a camping section as part of its merchandise. Roger didn't want to take too long because the woman was still out in his truck.

He breezed through the medical section picking up a large plastic bottle of aspirin; He still had a headache from the night before. Then over to the camping section where he bought one of those little aluminum penlights and a card of extra batteries. Roger had been in the Boy Scouts for five months before his family moved from the Piedmont section of Oakland and he had never got back involved nor had he ever camped out after that but he always had a fascination with camping gear, so that section of the store slowed him down even though the stuff extended only about 12 feet down the aisle. It was like his childhood was coming back to him. He picked up a stainless steel sierra cup, and one of the good quality stainless steel 8" frying pans. Next, he

bought some strike anywhere matches. He got three boxes with 50 matches to a box. He was like a kid in a candy store.

Next he spotted a fishing outfit which had a telescoping pole and all the accessories, including hooks and weights. Roger had never fished in his life but the past few hours had made him lose touch with reality in a unique way. Then as he turned to go to the front he spotted a counter which made him twelve years old again. His mom wouldn't let him buy a knife because it was too aggressive even though it was just for their Boy Scout troop activities. She was much more interested in the Tribes Curriculum and her financial contribution to the troop had considerable weight.

But here was a counter with gleaming steel knives of all kinds...and his mother wasn't looking over his shoulder. There it was, and he remembered, the Bowie knife that he had wanted as that twelve year old. The older clerk had come from the front to keep an eye on him. He asked, "Going camping?"

Roger ignored the question and asked to see "That one." The clerk pulled it out and mentioned it came with a leather sheath. He said that it had been a special order by one of the managers who changed his mind, so it was put out for sale. It had a 13" blade and a wooden handle with a brass guard. The clerk said the manager told him it was a replica of an early Bowie. Roger felt it in his hand. "It's like a short sword." If the clerk had not been standing there Roger might have swung it through the air in a manner to slay dragons or to defend against a huge grizzly bear. "I'll take it."

"You didn't ask the price." The clerk commented.

"I'll take it. Where's the sheath?" The clerk handed him the sheath and a small wooden box which went with the knife. There was an Arkansas stone for sharpening it in the presentation box. They went together to the front of the store.

A hand printed sign said, "Cash Only." The clerk was apologetic as she saw his eyes pause at the sign. "Our computers are not working. They won't connect to the system." Roger acknowledged this and pulled out his wallet with a few hundred dollar bills in it. The rest of his money was in the front pocket of his levis. The sticker shock at the price of the knife brought him back to reality. It was \$89.99. The clerk who had helped him noticed his shock and mentioned that the knife was 40% off the original price. He almost decided to put it back but impulsively kept it with the rest of the stuff.

When he walked toward the truck he remembered the woman he had left behind. As he approached the rear of the truck he wondered if she was still there. He peered in through the passenger window. Her head was leaning against the glass and she was fitfully sleeping. She must be wrestling with her own demons. He hadn't really had time to look at her since toad's wild ride had started this morning.

She had shoulder length dark brown hair with just a hint of auburn where the sun through the window struck it. He glanced down to her injured leg. The bleeding had stopped. She had placed some old paper napkins over it and the wound had clotted around the temporary bandage. Her complexion was a light brown. Roger believed that she must be part Mexican or something else. She was huddled there in the cool temperature of the fall morning with the goose bumps standing out on her well toned arms. She appeared to be in her late twenties.

He looked at her unblemished face and was immediately drawn to her finely cut features and long dark eyelashes which were, for real. Even with the ordeal of the morning he could see she was beautiful and with this awareness he blushed and was embarrassed at his close visual inspection of this young woman through the window of the truck. He felt guilty and looked around to see if anyone saw him there. He knocked on the window.

She woke suddenly, as if out of an extreme nightmare. Her large eyes showed the whites in a big circle and she looked around the cab and then out the window to find an escape. Roger, spoke through the glass, "It's O.K. I'm not here to hurt you." He didn't even know her name. At least using her name might have been reassuring to her. "Remember, I helped you when that gang was chasing you." She looked around the cab of the truck, out the windows and then down at her wounded knee. And she seemed to come out of the panic of the nightmare world she had been going through.

"I have a dressing and bandages for your knee. Let's see if we can get this door open." They worked together and found that by manipulating the outside handle and slightly lifting the door the catch would spring and the door would open. Roger told himself, remember this is just basic transportation.

He knelt down beside the truck after she turned and swung her legs outside the door. He took one of the water bottles to pour on her knee and tried to clean it with a gauze pad. Then he looked down to where the water was running across her feet. She had hurt her feet running. Roger looked up as he continued cleaning the soles of her feet and brushing the dirt off her toes. Surprisingly, the cleaning of her feet seemed to hurt her more than her knee unless it was numb. "Just a minute. I'll be right back."

Roger ran back into the Long's and picked up three pair of ladies socks, paused and took a couple of pair of men's athletic socks for himself and then down to the paper goods where he got a roll of paper towels.

The clerk didn't seem surprised to see him back so soon. For today no one seemed surprised at anything.

He took a hurried pace back through the largely empty parking lot to the truck. He almost expected that she would disappear but logically knew she wasn't going anywhere with those

feet and that knee. He finished cleaning her knee with distilled water, poured hydrogen peroxide on it, allowed it to air dry, smeared the neosporin into the laceration and then covered it with a gauze bandage. Roger used a similar procedure on her feet except that he then placed two pair of clean socks over the scraped and bruised feet.

“I’m thirsty.”

Roger replied that he was, too. He got out his Sierra Cup, rinsed it and poured it full of water and let her drink two cupfuls before he took his turn.

“We’ve got to get out of this area, it’s too dangerous. Those gangs are leaving LA to the surrounding towns and I don’t see any cops to stop them.”

He waited a moment for her to reply. She said nothing but carefully swung her feet into the cab. Roger shrugged his shoulders and thought, I guess that’s a yes to my proposal.

Chapter 20

Several weeks later, Ken was thankful that the Mine had survived and was prospering when a violent earthquake shook the entire state of Nevada. There was minor to moderate damage throughout the mine, but nothing that couldn't be fixed. Later Ken had learned the Earthquake had done what no one else had managed to do – Split California in two. It seemed the San Andreas Fault finally let go, and from Monterey Bay south, Southern California west of Bakersfield was now an island and the San Joaquin Valley was fast becoming an inland salt lake. Ken thought for a minute, then called the Governor's office, offering help and support for relief efforts. 10 minutes later, an aide called back, telling them the best thing they can do is to continue making and shipping silver. Ken said they had a lot of heavy equipment, and a huge amount of desert around them, and the capabilities with the Army's help to house and feed thousands of refugees. The aide thanked Ken and said that they'd get back to him when they new something more and hung up. Ken didn't get upset since he knew no one in the State of Nevada government really knew anything that he couldn't get off the news.

Jim called Ken and asked Ken if they needed to bump up the security level a couple of notches. Ken thought that was an idea, and left it to Jim to make it happen. They would be expecting refugees in a couple of days, and there could be security threats from bandits mixed in with the refugees. Ken rightly guessed the bulk of the California refugees wouldn't go any further east than Reno – that big desert gets very intimidating. Besides, Reno was a big city with a big city mentality – they'd take care of everyone, even if it bankrupted the city! Steve, Brian and George were busy repairing the damage caused by the earthquake. Except for some broken dishes in some houses, and minor injuries, the most serious damage occurred to the power plant when the oscillations caused by the earthquake shut down the generators and vented tons of steam. It ruptured pipes that were designed to blow in an emergency to prevent over-pressure in sensitive areas. It took 2 days to get the generators back up and running, so they had to rely on the grid power. When they went back on line after the repairs were made, the manager sent the Mine a note of thanks because he had to take 3 boilers off line for repairs due to earthquake damage, and couldn't take them down until the Mine was back on line. He got his boilers fixed and back on line in a week.

The Governor's Office finally called Ken back and told him to expect some refugees, and if they could grade a rough runway, some C-130s would bring in supplies to house up to 1,000 refugees. Ken told the Emergency Manager they had excess power and water enough for 1,000 refugees easy – the only thing they were short of was food. The Governor's EM told him not to worry – the military had already thought of that and were shipping 10,000 cases of MRE and field kitchen food packs, as well as tents and everything else they would need.

Ken picked some abandoned vacant land on the other side of the tracks, and got the earthmoving equipment running grading a rough landing strip and clearing enough land for 5,000 refugees just in case. He also ordered a trainload of diesel fuel to top off their diesel fuel tanks just in case. He called the grocery manager, and told him to place a huge order for non-perishable foods, enough to last the Mine and Village at least a year, and get it now! He added a request for a huge order of non-hybrid seeds just in case something else happened and they needed to live off their gardens. Ken checked with Jim and asked him if they could order something more heavy duty than M2 armed Hummers, like Bradleys or M-19's. Jim said he doubted it, but would check and see what strings he could pull with the emergency. Ken hoped the Governor's Office would help out because the Silver would stop flowing into the State's coffers if someone managed to take The Mine over. Jim made a couple of calls and got assurances that extra firepower was on the way.

Not one to take chances, Jim ordered that they keep 4 daytime ROV's up until further notice. He told the security office to pull operators off mine duties if necessary, but to make it happen. At night, they would run the full compliment of night ROV's as well. Jim also ordered the Security people double-check their gear, especially the batteries in their NVG's. Jim had a bad feeling some crooks would use the multiple disasters as cover to score several million dollars worth of silver bullion. Jim called the front gate and told them they were in lockdown until further notice. He got a list from Security with who was off the mine property, and where they were. Jim contacted those he could on radio or Cellular phones, and advised them to return to The Mine ASAP. Jim called the Humboldt County Sheriff's office, and asked the Dispatcher if they could advise the deputies that The Mine was going into lockdown, and if they knew were any of these people were (he read her the list) if they could send a deputy to tell them to get back to the Mine ASAP. She said she'd get the message out over the air right away. She told Jim that the Sheriff told the dispatchers to treat any radio calls from Jim at The Mine like the Sheriff himself was calling. Jim made a mental note to thank the Sheriff later.

6 hours later, everyone was back at The Mine, and Security completed the Lockdown procedures. No one could get in or out without written authorization from either Jim, Steve, Brian, Sam or Ken.

***That morning near Palmdale, CA ***

Roger had originally intended to cut East from LA to Palmdale where he had the name and address of another Raccoon he could get to but circumstances and the fact he didn't know the LA area very well caused him to turn back toward Ventura and on North into Simi Valley. Things seemed more normal as he drove north. He stopped at a tiny strip mall with general store, and farm and ranch supply retailer in Simi Valley. Once again it was the Cash Only signs on the door and at the registers. It was October and Southern California was warm during the

day but each mile north it would get cooler. He had lost his jacket and the woman only had a thin silk blouse for warmth.

Hold it. Had he adopted her? He didn't even know her name. Why was he responsible for someone else? This would be a new situation for him. But Roger told himself these were strange times and he would take it one step at a time.

The Farm and Ranch Supply didn't have a Raider's warm up jacket. But it did have some lined Carhart chore coats in a dull tan color. They were on sale for \$49. each. He had never heard of that brand. They looked sturdy. He picked a man's large for himself and a medium for the woman. He also got a couple of men's plaid flannel shirts in similar sizes; they were on sale, too, made in China. Roger had never worried about shopping at sales.

He was thinking about her feet. He bought two pair of extra heavy duty socks in a small size and then noticed some fur lined, high topped leather moccasins that looked easy to slip into and he got those in small too. Next to the checkout counter was an array of winter gloves. He picked up a small and large of some that were rough leather on the outside and fleece lined on the inside.

He felt anxious and peered across the parking lot to the truck where the woman sat quietly watching for his return. He took his purchases to truck and took out the shirt for her. She slipped it over the blouse. Then he handed her the chore coat through her window. She laid it across her bare legs. For a moment he felt foolish but went ahead and gave her the gloves and then the pair of high-topped moccasins. A little light flickered in her eyes at the moccasins but she didn't say a word. He took out his own flannel shirt and used it for an overshirt in the cool afternoon. Then he told the woman he was going to get something for them to eat at the market. He stuffed his coat behind the driver's seat.

As he went in to the market he could tell there was some concern in this town. Sections of canned goods displays were empty and other areas like bottle water were also empty. But there was still a good variety of food available throughout the market. Roger went straight to the produce section for some fruit. The only fruit available was the citrus which was produced locally.

He took a bag of oranges and caught up himself in the anxiety surrounding the store picked up the last 10lb bag of potatoes. He also loaded up 10lb of onions and 5lb of dry beans. He thought later, that his was stupid. He didn't know what kind of beans they were and besides he had never cooked beans before. Yet there was in him this basic instinct that something wasn't right. And, the instinct was telling him to be prepared.

He roamed through the store picking up two jars of instant coffee, a box of artificial sweetener packets, two containers of salt, a pepper container and a tin of virgin olive oil. There wasn't any flour left but Roger snagged a 25lb bag of rice, four boxes of Bisquick and two small packages of corn meal. A jar of honey seem to call out to him as he went by and he stuck it in the cart.

Most of the canned meat and tuna was gone but he picked up a 5lb Danish ham and 3 cans of oysters packed in oil. The lights in the store flickered several times as he cruised through the aisles. Near the storeroom door was a 4 pack of toilet tissue. That went into his cart also.

The last aisle had a variety of hardware and automotive materials. Roger picked a roll of nylon cord, six quarts of motor oil, a brown plastic five gallon water container. Also he loaded two rolls of duck tape and a 10 x 12 plastic sheet. At the leader display he took a large box of laundry detergent and bottle of bleach.

“You have to hurry. We’re closing early today.” Roger could hear the elderly manager hollering from the front counter.

When the total was made on his purchases Roger couldn’t believe it. “\$249.73!” The manager said that there hadn’t been deliveries for two days and he could take it or leave it. Roger took it. Roger asked him if he had gas. The manager pointed to the pump outside. “\$6.99 per gallon for unleaded. Take it or leave it.” Roger went out and topped off the tank after loading the truck with his purchases and pulling around to the pump. That set him back another \$34..

Roger drove on North for another hour and pulled into a Nat’l Forest campground which had restrooms and a picnic area. There was a family with a camp trailer there already. They had looks which were both anxious and hostile. The husband kept his hand inside his jacket after Roger walked around the truck even though he was over a hundred feet away.

Roger hadn’t eaten since the night before and it was already four o’clock. He shifted the passenger door to open it and the woman turned to swing her feet outside the door frame. Then she handed him the moccasins. He tried hard to be gentle but she grimaced as he put them on her feet. She looked toward the restrooms and he helped her from the vehicle and she leaned on him as they made their way the few feet to the door marked for women.

He went in, did his business fast and got back out to check the security of the truck. Then he stood by the door of the women’s restroom until the woman came out. He had intended to stop to eat here but the hostility of the other family put him off. He helped the woman back to the truck, shut the door and took out the five gallon container and filled it at the faucet that appeared to be gravity fed. Then Roger drove back down the paved highway to a brushy two-track road that he had seen earlier when they came by. He forced through some bushes that edged the road and came to a clearing up about sixty or seventy yards. Then he went back and muscled a fallen oak branch across the road opening to further restrict traffic and disguise the access.

Roger found a depression in the clearing, lugged some rocks in to form a fire ring and found enough dry wood to start a small fire. There was a log adjacent from a fallen tree that looked good to sit on. He went to the truck and helped the woman down and over to the log. She kept the jacket on her legs and the temperature started to go down. Roger took his jacket and laid it across her shoulders.

He got out the skillet, poured the olive oil in and sliced half an onion and half of a potato with his Bowie knife. These he put in the skillet when the oil looked hot. He used his cup to heat some water, put a little instant coffee in and a package of sweetener and handed it over to the woman.

He watched the skillet, stirring the potato and onion from time to time with his knife, and focused on an old memory of sitting at a campfire with the Boy Scout troop. It was a pleasant memory in comparison to the rapidly shifting, confusing circumstances into which he had been thrust just recently.

Roger got up. He had to arrange for sleeping before it got so dark he couldn't see. He remembered seeing a piece of black plastic in the back of the truck. That could be used for a ground cloth. He took his penlight to peer into the back of the truck as he held up the door flap with one hand.

He took the black plastic sheet out and tried to wipe it down some. He had seen something else in the back. He reached in to a tightly compacted lump and pulled into better light. "Hooray." He just hoped it was what he thought it was. A sleeping bag. It was. It had two longer than necessary straps holding it tight. He had wanted to wear the knife sheath but he didn't have a belt. One of these straps might work.

Roger spread the plastic and opened the bag, shook it out, and spread it across the plastic sheet. Then he went to check on the dinner.

The woman just went along with anything he asked or did. She was either strange or still in a state of shock. They ate the small meal and it wasn't easy. It was either stab the pieces with his knife or grab them with their fingers. He should have picked up a couple of forks and spoons. He told her she could have an energy bar if she wanted. Then he helped her over to the place he had spread the bag and she laid down. He made himself some hot water for coffee and then wrapped himself in his "chore jacket on the edge of the plastic and fell into a deep sleep after putting out the fire.

"Pop, pop,pop, pop, pop." Roger felt drugged as he raised up on his elbow in the dark. He looked over at the woman and she was sitting up too.

"I wonder who would be setting off firecrackers at this time of the night?" He could vaguely hear the sound of yells across the quiet hills. and then all was quiet. He put his head down looking intently into the night and then shut his eyes to fall into another heavy slumber

He awoke early to find that the sun was already busy. His watch showed 9 AM. The woman was still curled up with the dirty sleeping bag tucked tight around her. Roger rose to look for some sticks to gather into a small fire. He was looking for dry wood. He didn't want to advertise their

location to anyone--especially Forest Service or Park Rangers. He didn't have a permit for a campfire.

It was a good day to take stock of life in general and to make some plans. He wondered about the woman. He had heard of shock patients who went on for years without responding. Yet she seemed to understand him well enough and she could talk when she wanted to talk. It would be nice to have some name to call her. Betsey or Louise or Joanne or something other than, that woman. He thought he sounded like Clinton at least in his mind, "That Woman," "who I haven't had sex with."

Roger had a few minutes before the fire had warmed up his cup of water for coffee. He went into the bushes to do his business. When he pulled up his pants he saw a branch that might work as a crutch for "that woman". It had a T at one end and a couple of bends to grab on to. He could cut it down to size. He worked it into a rough shape. And he guessed at the height. He set the toilet paper on the end of the log.

The water was simmering at the edge of the fire. He poured a little coffee from the jar into his cup, broke open a package of sweetener. A beautiful morning, a beautiful woman and fresh cup of coffee.

"Bam!" He spilled half the coffee on his shirt and he stood shocked in the midst of his morning reverie. The sound reverberated from hill to hill. Was it an early morning hunter? It sounded so close. Probably from the direction of the campground up the road. The woman had bounced to her hands and knees listening to the sound.

Roger felt a need to reassure her. "It's not close. We're O.K.. You're O.K.." To show her everything was fine and she was safe, Roger sat down on the log and continued drinking his coffee, or what there was left of it. "Look what I made for you." He demonstrated with the crutch under his armpit and then handed it to her. She placed it alongside her bed.

"I'm going to take a little hike and then we can make up some breakfast." She didn't respond, as usual, so he started for the edge of the woods. He wanted to circle around and take a look at the campground up the road.

He went uphill until he was out of ear range and eyesight and then turned toward the road. He was almost ready to step onto the pavement when he heard a roar of an engine around the bend. He jumped into the bushes on instinct and a caravan of two cars, one truck and two motorcycles came down the road. He dug his face into the soil of the ditch behind the bushes as soon as he saw this group. As they sped down the road he got to his knees to look after them.

It was a struggle, but he decided that walking down the middle of the road wasn't such a good idea with groups like this out running around. He moved toward the campground through the trees parallel to the highway. He wondered about the family that he had seen there yesterday afternoon. Had they left after eating their meal? That instinct that had started kicking in after the

chase seemed to have some validity. Maybe that's what is called a survival instinct.

He paused and stood very still, just listening. He was close to the campground now, not more than 50 yards through the trees ahead. He stayed there for a few minutes trying hear anything. There were birds singing and squirrels scurrying around, but no sound of human activity. He may only find trash from that gang that passed on the road. But it still bothered him--the remembered sound of fireworks last night.

Roger got down on his hands and knees. He began to crawl forward while trying to be very quiet. Every ten to fifteen yards he would stop and listen for any unusual sounds. As he snuggled up to a tree and stretched around it he could see the camp trailer sitting in the same spot. There were beer cans and personal belonging scattered around the area. But no sign of life.

He edged around the campground toward the entrance and looked for anyone left behind. He stayed quiet and listened. He noticed that the jays and squirrels felt free to run around at will. Roger got up and walked into the campground very cautiously. When he got to the camp trailer he noticed dark stains on the floor. The covers were strewn about without any order. There were the marks of boot prints in the stains on the floor.

There was a trail of blood from the trailer to a ditch nearby. Roger acknowledged to himself that these were indeed, bloodstains and wondered if someone or anyone had survived. Someone could have pulled himself through the dirt and decomposed pine needles leaving the trail. Roger almost didn't have to guess what he would find in the ditch. He walked slowly hoping some unseen hand would hold him back before he arrived to look over the edge.

There were two tiny twisted bodies in the bottom of the ditch and the body of the man, who had looked fiercely at Roger and the woman, was staring blankly up at the beautiful morning sky. His arms were spread out covering much of the little ones with their stained pajamas underneath him.

The woman he had seen yesterday was nowhere around. They deserved to be buried but there was no pick or shovel. Roger looked at an overhanging bank on the far side of the ditch. He went down and climbed up the far side. Then hanging on a low branch he kicked the bank down to cover the bodies of a father and his two little ones.

Then Roger cried.

In the middle of the towering pines, and flitting jays Roger walked back to the camp trailer. He took a couple of heavy blankets and an of pair of jeans that must have belonged to the man's wife and a sturdy pair of boots that looked like they fit a small woman. Then as he left he picked up a small pot, its' lid, a paring knife and a couple of forks and spoons that were scattered about. He couldn't be a scavenger at the scene of this tragedy but he thought he might be

forgiven for a few necessary items. He rolled everything together in the blankets and put this roll over his shoulder. He walked quickly but still took time to stop and listen every few minutes as he went through the woods back to his truck and the woman.

She looked at the bedroll as he put it in the back of the truck with the ground sheet and sleeping bag. "What do you say we eat on the road this morning?" Roger just wanted to get away. "We have those energy bars."

He rummaged in the glove compartment and came up with a map of California. Roger talked out loud even though the woman wasn't responding. "I think it would be better to take side roads away from the freeways. I-5 can get blocked up for miles sometimes. We can take 33 North to Coalinga and then cut across Northwest of Fresno, then over Yosemite to Bishop." He looked at her very seriously. "You can let me know if you want out somewhere or even want to go somewhere else." The woman didn't respond.

He got up, took the Ruger out of his bag, loaded the pistol and slid it under his driver's side seat. Then he got a couple of energy bars out of the back. The woman hobbled around the passenger side. Roger moved behind her and manipulated the door to get it to open. She allowed him to hold her arm and help her up into the cab. Roger checked the fire again and looked around to see if they left anything. Then he drove to where the tree blocked the road. He moved it. They went to the highway, turned right and drove North past the campground as they traveled. The woman didn't turn her head to look down into it but Roger noticed she was watching it fade away through the passenger side mirror. She had to have seen the trailer standing there but she didn't say a word.

Roger turned on the Radio but the mountains kept blocking the reception on some of the few stations still broadcasting. It only came in brief interrupted segments but Nevada had closed all the Southern entrances to the State except for permitting legal Nevada residents to enter. They weren't going to be able to go through Las Vegas. Heading for Bishop sounded like a pretty good idea to get into Nevada.

The map Roger found in the glove compartment showed that they had stayed the night near Beaver in the Los Padres National Forest about 10 miles north of Ojai. He knew he needed to be more accurate with distances and places. They must have made those purchases in Ojai, not near Simi Valley. The next biggest town was Taft, along Highway 33. It was about 80 miles to Taft. Then from Taft to Coalinga was another 90 miles north. This route would keep him in a parallel route to I-5 but away from the heavy population areas of Bakersfield and further on Fresno. Roger was following his intuition that some of the problems of LA might be moving up the California coast.

If he could get 180 miles out of the tank of gas, he could get to Coalinga on one tank. And, he had two 5 gallon cans attached to the back bumper which were full. That was a conservative

estimate. A full tank at LA prices would cost him about \$108..

For some reason there wasn't much traffic coming north from Ojai this morning. Either things were calming down in LA or things were getting worse and Roger didn't like not having the facts. When he got out of the hills here or a little higher he'd turn on the radio and see if he could get some news.

As he drove north and arrived at Taft he came upon several heavily loaded pick ups and minivans moving slower than him. Also there were some other vehicles being driven awfully fast who had drivers who were willing to pass him on blind curves going North.

He stopped in Taft and found a station where they were selling gas. It was only \$3.99 per gallon. He thought that this station was still getting gas. He mentioned this to the cashier. Roger was told that there was only so much gas available and their deliveries had been postponed. The boss told him to sell it at that price until there was only 2,000 gallons left and then save that for the City Emergency Services.

Roger's senses had seemed grow with the anxiety he was experiencing since yesterday. He saw a couple of five gallon containers for gas sitting next to the counter. He also noticed a rack of Zippo lighters next to the cash register and remembered that it had taken several matches each time he tried to start a fire. Those matches wouldn't last long at this rate. He grabbed a handful of lighters. The cashier raised an eyebrow but counted out 9 lighters. Roger also asked about the two gas containers and filling them up. The cashier said yes and added the price to his bill as he shrugged and raised his shoulders. Once again a crudely scrawled sign attached to the register read "No Credit Cards or Checks."

"Have you had any problem with electricity?" Roger asked.

The cashier told him no. But volunteered the information that there were some problems in LA and SF. And he said that he had heard there were a few riots in LA, but that some help from the National Guard had solved the problems.

"Do you have any newspapers?" Roger asked.

"We haven't had any papers from LA or SF for two days now and our local paper only comes out once a week."

Roger was thinking that he had forgotten to turn on the radio when they came across the pass and out of the hills. The lack of information had him bothered. He had never paid much attention to news or even current events in the past but these times were making him wonder if information might not be a critical factor in his safety.

"Is there a drug store near here?" Everything seemed just fine except for the lack of deliveries to

the stores and gas stations out here in the central valley of California from what the clerk was telling him. Roger kept hearing these bugs whispering in his ear. They kept trying to creep into his consciousness with weird, “what if” questions. And, Roger didn’t like their insinuations. The knee jerk reaction to buy the extra gas or cleaning out the display of lighters was not his normal way of doing things.

He followed the directions the clerk had given him to the store. “Would you like to get some things here?” he asked the woman sitting beside him. She responded by a slight shake of her head negatively. “Do you want to get out with me?” Once again she shook her head, no.

He parked the truck close to the front door and went in. Everything looked normal in the store except for some slightly empty shelves here and there. Roger had remembered that the woman didn’t have anything with her when she had got into the truck. He thought he would pick up some stuff for the meantime. “For the meantime“, that was an interesting thought. The last two days felt like weeks and the future was so vague, that he was just taking it one moment at a time...not even one day at a time. He had slipped into something so totally different that he didn’t know how to describe it.

What would a woman need or want? No purse. No bag. He picked a small kit of manicure items. Then a large comb. What if she wanted a brush? He grabbed a brush, too. Then down to the toothpaste and toothbrushes. He took a pack of four toothbrushes and a large tube of Crest. He stopped, looked back and picked up two more tubes. On the aisle there were some wash clothes and towels, not very good quality, but durable. He placed a couple of each in his basket. They couldn’t afford to stay in motels with the price of gas skyrocketing, at least for now. There it was again, “at least for now”. Was it worry, intuition, a conservative spirit or what?

He would just look at this as a camping trip with a partner. That was a positive attitude. A partner who didn’t talk. If he could look at it as an adventure, then those fears and worry that crowded the edge of his consciousness would not dominate and he could keep a positive attitude. Roger tried not to think about the campground at Beaver. That just didn’t fit with the camping scenario. Soon he would be back to SF and he could use the ATM’s and his credit card, and his monthly allowance would be coming.

A short fat woman wearing a straw hat was looking oddly at him. Roger realized he had spaced out adjacent to toothpaste display and she wanted to go by him. A camping trip, yes. If he could keep on track with that thread, then within a few days, this all would pass into memories. “Roger, focus on a camping trip. Get absorbed in those details so you don’t have to think about tomorrow.” He was talking silently to himself as he continued walking through the store. His path moved him by and end display where there were two bags of Fritos left. He put one in his basket.

As he continued browsing he picked up four packs of batteries for his penlight. He looked at the larger flashlights but they looked too heavy and bulky. Another turn and he was back at the camping section. He had traded for a rolling basket. There was one child-size sleeping bag on a

shelf. Maybe the woman could use that. He looked for a pad to put under it but didn't find one. There were some small bottles of water purifier tablets next to all sorts of gimmicks for the camper. Roger picked up one which had 50 tablets. "Don't get carried away", he told himself, this is just for a few days. What did attract his attention were some blue enameled metal plates. He placed two in his basket. He looked hard at the coffee pot which matched but decided against it because he said again to himself, "this is just for a few days".

Roger mused that after everything settled down, he would have no use for all this stuff. He'd probably stuff it in the closet of his apartment for a while and then give it to a thrift store. There was a small knife display. And again it attracted his attention. He didn't need another knife but indulging a whim he chose a large folding Buck knife with a scabbard to give to the woman. Another item which caught his attention was a cast iron Dutch oven. "Like you really need that, Roger!" Taking this shopping trip was like a Christmas he had wanted but hadn't received for that brief time as a Boy Scout. Impulsively he lifted the box containing the heavy, 14" across by 6" deep pot to put it in the cart. There were some small, motel size bars of soap in a 6 pack hanging on the rack. But Roger refused to buy them. He intended to walk over the cleaning supplies section on his way out.

Before he had purchased the laundry detergent and bleach but he wanted some soap to use for personal hygiene. The package of six bath size bars of Ivory was the same price as the little bars in the camping section of the store. He also picked up a box each of scrubbing pads and sponges in this section. As he moved to the front of the store he saw a display of miscellaneous items including a box of votive candles on sale. Those would work well at night and they were cheap.

As the cashier rang up his purchases the lights flickered slightly in the store. He pulled out his wallet to pay in cash. He almost expected that now. He asked that the stuff for the woman be placed in a separate plastic bag.

Roger went out to the truck. The woman had rolled down the window. He handed her the plastic bag through the window. She took it but didn't look inside. Then he went around to place the other bags in the back of the truck.

One thing more he wanted for the camping trip (as he was trying to think of this experience). He wanted a hatchet. When he was a boy he had asked his Mom for one of those combination hunting knife and hatchet sets for Christmas but she had ignored his request saying it was too dangerous for a boy his age. Roger wanted to get one now just out of spite, or for the fun of it. Plus, he might have to use it for the campfire.

Down the street was a bright red and white Ace hardware sign. He pulled in and once again asked if the woman wanted to go in with him. She declined with a gesture. He went in to the store. He asked about a hatchet. He was almost embarrassed to do so. It was as if his mother somehow could see his disobedient act of defiance. He hadn't thought of her recently. How odd.

“If we have one it will be down aisle seven with the tools.” Roger followed her directions and was soon at a rack with all kinds of hand tools. He couldn’t find a hatchet but there were several axes. That would spite his mother, to get one of those long handled, “What did the label say?”, double bitted axes. Adjacent to the tools there were a selection of other tools including files. Roger selected one which indicated it was for metal use. Now he was ready to cut his foot off, he thought with a smile that hadn’t graced his lips since the wild chase from the low rider in LA.

He stopped at the counter where ammunition was stored on the way out. The thoughts of the low riders and the bodies he found at the campground had sobered his spirit. Another clerk came around to help him. He asked for .22 LR ammo. The clerk laid out a brick on the counter. Roger asked for three more. He wanted some more practice. The campground images had clouded his thoughts. One more stop at a grocery store and he felt a real need to get out of town and away from crowds.

Roger felt an anxiety about this whole situation. He hurried out to the truck after he paid in cash. Then he drove down to the market on the corner. He didn’t ask the woman to get out with him this time. He noticed she had chosen the brush from her plastic bag and was brushing her hair as he got in the truck after piling the sacks in the back.

He quickly stopped at the market and grabbed a rolling basket. He went to the flour and sugar section. He remembered that you needed some other ingredients to bake. He paused looking at both baking soda and baking powder. He felt an urgency so he grabbed two boxes of both. He saw a two lb container of yeast and took this too. One of them would work. This store still had flour and sugar so Roger took two ten lb packages of sugar and a twenty-five lb bag of flour. He moved past the pasta displays, dumping a half dozen bags of spaghetti in his basket. Through the canned fruit and vegetable sections he pulled cardboard trays of cans out and placed them in and under the cart. When he passed the canned meats, Roger grabbed several handfuls of tuna, Spam, and miscellaneous can meats indiscriminately and dumped them in the basket. The hair was starting to stand up on the back of his neck. He almost ran with the cart to the fresh vegetable section and grabbed a twenty-five lb sack of pinto beans from under the table and he took a 50 lb bag of potatoes which was in a burlap sack. There were bags of apples and he grabbed two of these on the way out to the check out line. He beat an elderly couple into a open line and started pulling his groceries onto the moving conveyer belt. It was going slow because the checker had to package everything by herself. Roger moved around to help as soon as everything was on the moving line. The bill was presented he paid with twenties and didn’t ask for change but pushed the cart out the door.

Roger stepped out the door and had taken a couple of steps toward the truck when a rumbling sound started with just a little quivering of the asphalt and as he glanced back toward the store he saw that the lights flickered a couple of times and then went out.

He had quite a pile in the back of the truck now. He practically threw the groceries inside as he held the lid up, but paused to set the Fritos to the side, he didn’t want them crunched under the

other groceries. Then he drove a little too quickly from the parking lot and headed toward Coalinga. He didn't intend to stop 'til he got there. He had been through a minor earthquake when the Bridge collapsed near Oakland. He didn't want to be anywhere near an earthquake zone. When he was a few miles out of town, he slowed down, took a deep breath and pulled out a couple of energy bars. He took one and gave one to the woman.

There were more cars on the road on even this back road. They were going both ways, North and South. And, they were loaded with bags and there was stuff tied to their roofs. Almost invariably, the drivers and passengers had a grim look on their faces. Roger tried the radio. There was only one station playing on both the AM and FM bands. It was a NPR station from Santa Cruz. Every few moments, between selections of Mozart, Chopin and Bach, a canned announcement would come on stating that the listeners needed to stay tuned for further important announcements. "Damn!" Roger blurted out, "What was the primary announcement?"

He turned off the radio and he drove in silence toward Coalinga.

Roger felt more stress as he got within sight of Coalinga. The road had some peculiar buckling of the asphalt, to a degree that he slowed down to about 35 mph to avoid bad bouncing. It looked like there were several fires in the downtown area. That tremor must have been more serious here. He felt some more of that anxiety he had felt back in Taft.

Roger stopped on top of a slight rise just South of the town of Coalinga. He figured to be about half a mile from the small community. He got out and lifted the lid of the camper to reach for the gallon of distilled water across the mound of groceries and "stuff" in the back of the truck. He had to crawl up on the bumper and hold the lid open with his back to reach the container. He was half in and half out when he heard.

"Ru--m--m--ble WHAM!" He thought something had struck the truck. Then the "ru---m--ble started again. He fell forward onto the pile as the truck started to bounce and he was caught in the jaws of the tail gate and the camper lid. It felt like a giant was bouncing the truck like a rubber ball. And, he felt like he had been beaten about the waist with a stick. Roger quickly pushed himself backward out of the truck. He fell flat on his back. All was quiet except for a single lonely siren that wailed out in the town below.

Roger went around to driver's door and looked in at the woman. She seemed O.K. except her eyes were round and staring straight out the window. He followed her line of sight and saw the buildings of the town falling, "ker-chunk, slide, boom ker-chunk into gaping sink holes that started appearing in the main street. And there was a definite tilt to the land east of town.

The crust of the earth had split through downtown Coalinga and it was eating the town one or two buildings at a time. He forgot the bruises he had suffered and scanned the horizon as he remembered about the fault line somewhere near this area. As he looked back toward the east he

could see that the land was damaged and even power poles looked knocked askew. To the west of town the hills looked more stable.

Well, that kicked in the head, the wild rumors about California sliding into the Pacific Ocean. The way it looked from here there were a stable row of hills, or mountains depending on where you came from, between the Ocean and the Central Valley. Roger wished he had a satellite view. One thing he knew for sure as he looked around, it was safer toward the hills than anywhere else. He looked back down the road they had traveled up from the South. He could see a new huge ravine or canyon running East to West. It extended from the hills in the West across the flat Valley. He couldn't go back that way.

Roger recalled that there would be aftershocks for a period of time. That meant if he could find a road that was open to the hills west of there he might be safer away from the earthquake activity.

He looked down to the town for a moment. Maybe he should try to help those people. It was a critical moment. He turned on the truck and sat there looking through the front windshield. There was bound to be people who needed help down there. Then he turned and looked at the woman sitting tensely next to him. He finally admitted to himself that he had accepted the real responsibility for someone besides himself. They were strangers, he didn't even know her name. He hadn't even told her his name. But in the midst of this emergency Roger had committed himself to care for her as long as she needed it. If he could help save himself and her he felt like that would be about as much as he could do.

"I'm Roger Heinz." He stretched out his hand. She just sat there and turned and looked into his eyes without any expression. Then she turned to watch another building fall into the growing crevasse that used to be main street, Coalinga, California.

"We have to get out of here; and fast." That said Roger scanned the hillside for any kind of a road or street. It looked dangerous to go toward town but there was a small country road angling out in a northwest direction, just outside of town and it was accessible from where they were without going into the downtown section.

Roger put it into gear and moved forward. There were people outside of town whose houses had not been damaged so badly, walking out to the road to look toward the fires and downtown section. The road started getting bumpy and Roger swerved to avoid a pothole. Then he looked up to see the tops of the telephone poles swaying. They were experiencing a minor aftershock as they drove down the country road. He hoped that the shocks wouldn't be any worse until they got away from Coalinga and into the hills.

He looked in the rear view mirror and got a personal shock, totally separate from the seismic jolts. That narrow ravine, now looked like the Grand Canyon. He drove on as fast as he thought he could without getting into an accident. There was a plume of dust where they had traveled. He wanted to get them as far away as possible before the next aftershock or a different

earthquake occurred.

The road started waving in front of them. He pushed on the brakes to slow down. The vibrations started as he got them stopped. Slowly and then faster like a ping pong ball dropped to the floor cycles faster and faster. There was a roar in the air. Roger could feel the air pressure changing around him in little spurt of minute differences.

“Brace yourself. Here it comes!” They must have been more than six or seven miles out of town by now but the shock was more a whomp, whomp, whomp and on before it quit bouncing the truck around the road. They were now diagonal across it. When it stopped, Roger put the vehicle in gear to move forward and get further away from the epicenter of the earthquake. What was he thinking? There was probably more than one quake along the fault line. And that fault line extended up through San Francisco. The soil that was a foundation for the City was seismic mush. What if this were the “Big One” they had been expecting and yet not expecting.

He started moving them forward again. They had driven about ten miles when they connected with Highway 198. This was a narrow but well built paved road that connected with Highway 101, South of King City. They reached the intersection of 198 and 101. There was a CALTRANS worker sitting on the fender of maintenance truck smoking a cigarette. Roger spoke out the window as he stopped near the vehicle.

“How’s 101 North of here?”

The California Transportation Dept. Worker responded after pausing from puffing on his cigarette. “Fell in the sea, South of Salinas. You can’t go North unless you have a boat.”

“How’s 101 South of here?” Roger asked hesitantly in a quiet voice.

“Can’t get anyone up on the radio. A fellah, came by a few minutes ago and said the road was impassable right before you get to Camp Roberts. Good Luck!” After speaking these words the worker turned his back and concentrated on smoking and looking to the South. He just ignored them. Roger was in a quandary.

“Concentrate on the details. One foot in front of the other. One day at a time.” He spoke these words over and over to himself. Because beyond the utterance of these catalyzing phrases there was a deep abyss of fear and apathy. What he needed was a safe place to camp and let the woman recover from her injuries and he could figure out the next step.

His intensity about the payback to his uncle was moving further and further out of focus.

He pulled out the faded map and decided to drive West toward the Ocean and find a place to camp. He drove across 101 and went West on G14. He imagined what he was looking for. Someplace a couple of miles off the road which didn’t look like anyone had been there for a

while, and a clean water source. The map showed G14 going West then turning Southwest where it connected with a gravel road going West toward the Ocean. They followed this route and turned on the gravel road for a few miles before it crossed an almost dry river bed. Roger saw what looked like a two track road for a ranch leading off parallel to the river. Maybe they could find a good camping spot up that way. Roger was getting concerned about using up gas but they were still on the same tank they had filled in Taft, though it was running near empty. He pushed the truck further up the road, shifting into four wheel drive to climb over some minor landslides. If they didn't find a place soon he was going to try to turn around.

The area now was greener and not the dry grassy hillsides and flats of the central valley. There were pine trees mixed in liberally with the oaks and brush. And, Roger could smell what must be a touch of salt air. He was guessing they were about 15 miles as the crow flies from the Pacific Ocean.

The road turned into a canyon bottom that was about forty or fifty acres. Roger guessed that. There was a small board and batten cabin with a shed roof add-on to one side. It had a small front porch. Behind it was an open sided barn and two corrals. In the front corral were two horses with their heads hanging down and a similar horse, or was it a mule in the second corral. It looked like someone had left them for several days and hadn't come back. They had water from a seep that ran through the corner of the corral area but the bales of hay were in the small barn where the animals couldn't reach it. The logical assumption was that someone had left them, intending to come back, but couldn't or didn't make it.

"Let's check this out." It was already mid-afternoon. Roger called out, "Hello the house, anyone home?" There was no answer. Roger walked up to the door and knocked. "Anyone home?" He didn't really expect an answer but asked anyway. He pushed against the door. There was no give. Below the wooden handle a cord extended through a hole. Roger shrugged his shoulders and pulled the cord. There was a light clunk and the door edged open an inch or two. Roger pushed it the rest of the way open.

The small cabin was perfectly fitted for its' purpose. It was a built to be a line cabin for a large ranch. But from the layer of dust over everything it didn't look like anyone had been here for several months. Correct that, no one had been inside the cabin for several months. There were only one set of tracks on the floor and Roger knew they were his.

Roger was ready to collapse, anywhere, but knew those animals were starving. He walked out the door and called toward the truck. "We're staying here." Then he went over to the barn and started pulling some hay out from one of the bales. The hay didn't want to release. Then he saw the thick orange twine which held them together. Roger pulled out his knife to cut the string after struggling with getting it off. He didn't know how much to give each animal. So he pulled off a handful. The hay came apart easily with a section just about as wide as the distance between his thumb and index finger. That made it easy. Roger took a section in each hand and walked toward the horse corral. The horses had picked up their heads and were intently

directing their eyes toward him. He threw one section to the left and one to the right. The horses made for the closest hay. From the second corral the low pitched rasp and the longer ears identified this as a mule. It voiced displeasure as Roger went back into the barn to get another section of hay.

Roger looked to see the woman but she wasn't in the truck. He went over to the cabin door to find her sitting in one of the chairs at the table. She was slowly rubbing her sleeve across the tiny table. "It's dirty, isn't it? But we can get it fixed up quickly. I'll take this chair out to the porch where you can enjoy the view and I'll clean up some." He carried the chair out on the narrow porch and set it so that the greenery of the small pasture and the shrubs by the stream were visible. The woman got up, followed him out, and sat down. She laid the makeshift crutch by her feet.

Roger got the bucket he had found beside the cabin and went for some water. He rinsed out a couple rags he found in the cabin and began to wipe furniture down. The dust was bad so he opened the windows and washed the insides of them, too. Then it was so dusty on the rough board floor that he began to scrub that down with the rags like they were mops. It took several trips for water before he was finished. The 12 x 12 main room was looking good. Then he drew back the curtain from the lean-to add on. There was a box for a nightstand and wire mattress covered with a four inch pad. He took the pad outside away from the porch and began to pound it against a rock until no more dust came out of it. Then he took it back inside. Oh, what he would give for a vacuum sweeper.

"One foot in front of the other. Focus on the task at hand." He kept working. In the main room there were two straight back chairs, a small countertop with a removable dishpan and a curtained space underneath for storage. over the counter top there were about four shelves 8' long and 12 " wide for holding food, canned goods and etc.. There was a small box stove which would handle "at max", 16" chunks of wood. It looked like it had been used for cooking on its' top. Behind the door there was a short bench. Over it six inch pegs stood out which probably were use to hang clothes. In short, a minimal bachelor's cabin.

Roger thought, this is just what we need. We have enough food, if we stretch it for three weeks and by that time they have the roads fixed and the woman will have her leg and feet healed. "Dang," that reminds me. I was going to clean the wounds and put a new dressing on them.

He walked quickly out to the truck and came back with the medical supplies. He tried to gently remove the socks and then wiped down her feet and rubbed neosporin into them. Then he broke open a new pair of socks to place own her feet. "I'm going to have to wash these socks out." He took them to the stream and rinsed them until they looked clean, then he hung them over the rail in the fading afternoon sun. He quickly cleaned her knee and put fresh bandages there, too.

Then Roger went to the truck. He took out the Ruger and placed it behind his belt. That was probably something he needed to do everyday. Then he first went for the bedding. He brought

in both sleeping bags, laying out the new one on the bed in the alcove. He placed a couple of folded blankets he had retrieved from the campground on the floor near the door and put the old sleeping bag on it. The woman had gone inside while he went to the truck. She was sitting at the table again. He brought the other chair inside.

Roger motioned to the alcove, "That's for you."

It was almost dark. Roger wished he had picked up some wood for the fire before it got dark. There were rattlesnakes around here. But he thought, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. He had seen a small pile of wood scraps along the side of the cabin. Roger picked up a stick and scratched through the pile watching for some movement with his penlight before picking up an armload to take back in the cabin. The woman was still at the table but she was alert and watching him. The inside of the cabin was dark. He placed some smaller pieces in the stove and tried to get them started with one of the lighters he had put in his pocket. It didn't work. He took his penlight,

went out to the truck and got a couple of paper napkins. By using smaller pieces he was able to get a fire started. He left the door open. The smoke started pushing out the door. He looked at the stove. He was thinking, what's wrong with it. Then he glanced at the stove pipe and saw the damper handle there. He turned it and the smoke started going up the pipe.

He went to the truck, got a couple of energy bars for each of them, brought them inside and said, "I'm sorry, we'll eat right tomorrow." The day had drained Roger. He wolfed down the bars, took a couple of long drinks out of the distilled water jug and went over to the old sleeping bag next to the door and crashed, clothes, boots and all. The woman was still sitting at the table when he fell asleep.

Chapter 21

Jim woke up the next morning and the hairs on the back of his neck were standing up. He had forgotten something! He called Ken, because he was just paranoid enough to be a good sounding board.

“Ken, It’s Jim. Yeah I know it’s early, but something’s bugging me – I can’t get it off my mind that I’m missing something! Yeah, the ROV’s are up and haven’t spotted anything, but that doesn’t mean anything. What if we are underestimating the opposition? What if they have ghille suits and are only moving during the day. A man-sized object that was not moving at night might get missed by our ROV operators. OK, do whatever I think I need to – right...any ideas? Great, thanks for the suggestion!”

Jim called Brian next “Brian – I need you to run the trencher for a day to cut some trenches out along the fence line to our west. I also need a backhoe operator. Make it a single guy because he might be under observation by snipers. Don’t tell him, I don’t want to panic anyone, but I don’t want to lose a family man. Great – you know just the person. OK, get everything together and I’ll meet you at the Southwestern corner in about an hour – OK, make it two.”

Two hours later Jim met the operators, and told Brian where he wanted the trench, about 50 yards east of the fence line and parallel to it. He walked over to the backhoe operator – He was just a kid, maybe 18. His name was Josh. “Josh, I need a single person spider hole every 100 yards about 100 yards back from the trench line. Let’s say 7 feet deep, about 4 feet by 4 feet wide. Dig them ¼ mile apart today so we have the trench line covered, and come back tomorrow, and dig them 200 yards apart, then if we still have time, come back and dig the 100 yard intervals. When he was finished, Jim drove over to the machine shop, and started cutting empty 30 gallon barrels in half, and drilling a hole in the bottoms. He called the explosives office and asked how many electric detonators they had in stock. They had enough to blast for the next 10 years, so he ordered 2 dozen along with 10 rolls of electrical detonating wire and twist detonators. When they showed up, he epoxied them in place in the bottom of the barrels, then loaded the barrels onto a large trailer and towed them out to the trench line. He put one in the trench every mile, so he could cover then entire fence line. When Brian finished digging the trench, he called the explosives office again, and asked that a pumper truck to deliver a load of ANFO to the trench line. An hour later a thoroughly bewildered driver drove up to the trench line. Jim explained that he needed about 10-15 pounds of ANFO in each barrel, enough to simulate a secondary explosion, but not enough to give it away. The driver laughed out loud. He worked as a Special Effects man in Hollywood before coming to The Mine, and new exactly what Jim wanted. Jim was relieved to find out that the driver knew exactly what he wanted – and he suggested an improvement to make it look more “real” – he suggested putting a quart

mason jar full of gasoline in the center of the ANFO for a small fireball. Now it was Jim's turn to laugh. He told the driver to go ahead, he loved it.

By the end of the week, they had the trench and all the spider holes dug, and Jim asked for volunteers to man the spider holes. Knowing what they were up against, he had more volunteers than spider holes. They unrolled the wire and attached the twist detonators at night since they HOPED the enemy didn't have any Gen III or better Night Vision equipment. When they were set, the men took a week's worth of food and water and dug a primitive latrine in the spider hole, then covered it with a well-made wooden cover with enough junk on it to look like another sagebrush. There was just enough room out the front of the cover to look out with NV and daylight binoculars that were equipped with-anti-flash covers so as not to give away their position. They each had a FRS/GMRS radio and several sets of batteries. They didn't have long to wait.

Several days later, they spotted movement along the entire front. Jim told the guys in the spider holes to let them come, and hopefully they would expend their weapons attacking the empty trenches. Jim told them only to fire the decoys after a few grenades had landed in the trenches. Soon enough, they started a Human wave attack of the trenches, and then tossed grenades into the trenches. When the decoys started going off, the attackers all rose and attacked the trenches. The guys in the spider holes withheld fire until they were almost on top of the trenches, then popped up and hosed them. It was what one ex-soldier described as a "target rich environment" or another described as "The Winnemucca Turkey Shoot". In a minute of very rapid firing, the attackers had suffered 80% casualties, and broke off the attack. That was when Jim dropped the other shoe, and had the armed and armored Hummers charge up on the flank of the retreating forces. The gunners of the Ma Deuces started scoring hits at a half mile, and kept hitting all the way in. The surviving attackers died where they stood. They had no cover for a mile in any direction. They had their backs to the trenches and the men in the spider holes, and they were stuck in the middle of "No-man's land" that Jim had deliberately cleared of all vegetation and potential cover. When they stopped shooting, there were several calls of "Medic" and several unanswered radio calls. The Hummers stopped shooting and drove up to the spider holes. The wounded all popped red smoke markers so they could be easily located. Some were treated at the scene for minor bullet wounds, but some had to be transported to the Mine's Hospital, which was alerted for casualties. The Hummers drove as fast as they could, yet some men were too badly wounded and bled out before they got to the hospital. Out of 50 men manning the spider holes, they had taken 5 fatalities and 10 wounded.

When Jim told Ken, he hit the ceiling. "Why didn't we have Medevac Choppers?" Jim had to admit they hadn't planned on getting in a major firefight.

Ken's next call was to the Governor's office. Jim heard some words he hadn't heard since he left the SEALs. The gist of the conversation was if the Governor didn't assign enough help to them, including choppers and heavy weapons, they'd shut down the mine! Ken didn't want to take another casualty. The Governor got the message, got on the phone to Fallon, and detached an entire company of US Marines, and a squadron of Cobra and Huey Medevac choppers, and enough ammo to fight WWII and sent them to The Mine. The next morning, and whole convoy of US Marine vehicles showed up at their front gate. Jim was expecting them, and escorted them to a spare building they had built for storage, that would now house the Marines. Jim was impressed when he saw what they had sent. It was an entire company of Marines including their LAV-25's. The convoy was almost 5 miles long by the time it all got through the gate. They assembled in front of the building Jim had designated, and then the Helicopters did a fly-by. Everyone at The Mine looked up when they heard the huge "Whop-Wop" sound of the helicopters. There were 6 Super Cobras with a full weapons loadout, and 6 Hueys configured as Medevac choppers. When they landed, Ken had driven up, and the Colonel who was assigned as the CO of the Marine detachment strode to the front of the assembled Marines, who saluted him, then he turned to face Jim, who out of habit saluted the Colonel. The CO ignored the breach of protocol since Jim was in Civvies, but figured once a SEAL, always a SEAL, so he returned the salute, then walked forward to greet Jim. Ken walked up after that, and Jim introduced him to the CO of the Marine Detachment.

"Colonel Chester Williams at your service Sir."

"Wow, when I asked the Governor for some help, I didn't expect this!"

"Sir, not too many people have the cajones to yell at the Governor like you did – I heard some of the tape, and I could have sworn you were a Chief in a previous life!"

Jim tried real hard to maintain his composure in front of the Colonel, and was barely succeeding, he had heard Ken's tirade as well, but the unedited version from the next door office.

"Anyway, the Governor said to make this place secure, and when you tell a Marine to make a place secure, he sends the very best." The Colonel turned to Jim and said "With your permission sir, we will assume perimeter security of the compound!"

"Permission Granted!"

With that, the Marines assumed all external security of the mine compound. Jim breathed a sigh of relief. When a Marine secures a perimeter, that perimeter is SECURE. The Colonel barked orders, and the Marines started moving at a rapid pace to get set up as fast as possible. Jim took the Colonel aside, and asked him if he'd like to tour the security office, he had a few things he wanted to show him. When they got to the security office, Colonel Williams, or Chet to his friends, admired the ROV setup, then suggested replacing them with armed Predators. Jim's smile could have lit the room. Jim nodded, then Col. Williams grabbed a radio and made a few calls. Later that day, another truck drove up towing 6 disassembled Predator drones, armed with Hellfire missiles and 2 control panels – one in reserve just in case. As soon as the Predators were up and running, Jim had the operators recall the ROV's – The Marines were on the job!

Somewhere in Central California

Roger awoke after the first night in the cabin, momentarily wondering where in the world he was. Light was coming through the small window by the door over his head and from the window on the south side of the room. The curtain was drawn across the alcove opening. The stove front was closed and the damper was turned down. Roger thought that the woman must have done this after he crashed on the sleeping bag.

Roger knew that there was a lot of work to do. He was thinking that this might be that safe place they were looking to find. He got up and the effort made him groan. He pulled up his shirt to see a ring of bruises around his waist and lower ribs. He probed the injuries and concluded that they were just bruises. It was going to take a few days to get over the beating the shocks of the quake had given him. Roger gritted his teeth. 'This, too shall pass,' he reminded himself.

"O.K. I'll make an executive decision," he thought. "We are going to stay right here for a week or two until the Government, and FEMA, and everyone else gets some of these issues resolved." Roger was thinking that until the power was restored, some of the major highways fixed, and, law and order restored there was no reason to be roaming around. The memory of the campground near Ojai had made an indelible impression on his mind.

He glanced down at the rumpled sleeping bag. The Ruger was laying there exposed. It must have slipped out of his belt last night and he had slept on it all night long. Good thing the safety switch was on. He picked it up and stuck it behind his belt.

He went outside to get some wood for the fire. The area around the cabin was foggy and the temperature was around 45-50 degrees. Roger just guessed at that. He believed that the cabin must have been somewhere in the range of 2000 to 3000 feet elevation. As he picked up some shorter pieces of wood from the side of the cabin he heard the horses whinny at him. He commented, "You must be hungry, too. But you'll have to wait a few minutes."

He took the wood into the cabin, loaded the stove, and used a couple of paper napkins for kindling. This time he had opened the flue, and the smoke went up the chimney. When the fire looked like it would stay lit Roger went out to feed the stock. He was thinking that he was starting to assume responsibility for quite a menagerie. He counted on his fingers as he went back toward the cabin. A woman who didn't talk, two horses and a mule. He was tempted to just hop in the truck and leave but didn't. He saw the woman's white socks on the hitching post in front of the cabin and paused. Each of these members of Roger's menagerie needed his help and he had committed himself to them.

There was no food or water in the cabin. He started toward the truck to begin an unloading process. It was parked only about twenty feet from the door of the cabin. He took everything out of the cab first and then began to unload the camper shell of everything he had purchased. The process took about 30 minutes because he was trying to put things away as he brought them in. The food he placed up on the shelves over the sink. It was almost like a transformation of the place was happening as the brightly colored labeled cans and bags were stacked on the shelves. His coat was hung from the pegs behind the door.

The woman still hadn't come out from the alcove. Roger put his sierra cup full of water from the distilled water jug on the edge of the stove top and started looking for something to prepare for breakfast. He took out a can of peaches and started looking for a tool or something to open the can. "What an idiot," he thought. All this food and no can opener. He must have walked past can openers a half a dozen times in the last couple of days. He took out his Bowie Knife and carefully punctured the lid of the can and worked his way around the edge. That knife wasn't going to stay sharp long using it like this. He slopped half the peaches on one of the blue plates and the other half on the other blue plate, then sat them on the table. Next he opened a can of corned beef hash and dumped it into the skillet with some oil and began to warm it up.

His water was hot for coffee so he took the cup off the stove and poured a spoonful of instant coffee in the cup with a packet of sweetener and stirred it around. "Ready to eat breakfast?" he called across the room. There was no answer but there was a sound of springs creaking. He pulled the skillet off the stove and divided the hash in half as before. Then he tackled the breakfast and drank down the instant coffee with visions of that blue coffee pot he could have purchased and cans of Yuban that would have fit in his cart.

Roger used his shaving cream and cold water to shave and then he brushed his teeth outside on the porch. He thought it might be two or three miles down to the main road from the cabin. He wanted to go down and disguise the road like he had done before near Ojai. He was thinking that dragging brush across the road would make it look impassable, at least for a quick look. He had set his new double bitted axe by the door on the porch. It was a fine day for logging. Roger smiled. "I'll be gone for a couple of hours." He yelled this through the open door of the cabin. "Back before lunch." He felt like a pioneer going off for a day in the woods. Roger even recalled the dwarfs trudging off leaving Snow White for the day. Maybe the woman would

some day awake just like Snow White. She was pretty enough to be a Snow White.

He had his knife in its' scabbard, the Ruger in his belt and a fine double bitted axe on his shoulder. What more could a man want on a fine morning?

According to his watch, Roger had left at about 8 AM, it was now close to 10 and the main road was not visible yet. He started thinking that the road was further than he had imagined. But he continued walking. At least it was downhill. It was close to eleven when the winding gravel road came into sight. He could see a dust trail moving across the hills coming toward the intersection. He almost jumped out to wave the group down because it looked like some kind of an army vehicle but in the back there sat a bunch of men and women with hard looking faces and an odd color fatigue uniform. There was also a large gun mounted on a swivel above the back of the bed of the truck near the cab. There was a swarthy looking guy moving it back and forth as they came down the road. This didn't look like a group which would want to help refugees. There was something going on that Roger felt a real awkward caution about. He ducked behind a large oak as the vehicle went past. It seemed if they were on a patrol.

As long as he and the woman weren't in any dire distress, Roger concluded that he wouldn't try to make contact with this particular group. Roger walked back up the road to a clearing where it looked like where people on a picnic had stopped and turned around. There was a dead tree he could take down to impede normal progress up their road. He cut all the way around the six inch trunk. The tree just stood there. Roger wondered how he could make it fall in a particular direction without it falling on him. That was a puzzle. He leaned against it and it only slightly moved. If he could make it fall where he wanted it to he wouldn't have to struggle to get it across the road by hand. If he had a rope, he could scale the dead tree, tie the rope on and then pull against it toward the direction he wanted it to fall. He cut some more around the trunk. It looked like it might fall any direction now. He pushed and it did fall mostly in the right direction with the explosive pops of dried, dead branches breaking on the way down as the tree struck other trees and then the stubs driving into the dirt. There had to be a better way!

Roger decided he would search out some trees a logger had taken down to see how the logger cut them and which direction they landed before Roger tried this again. He then proceeded to cut brush and stick it in between the branches of the fallen tree in an upright position. "On a fast horse, on a dark night." It would disguise the road to the cabin.

It was almost 3 PM before Roger got back to the cabin. He was walking fast but it was uphill most of the way. What a treat to come into the canyon and see the narrow trail of smoke drifting skyward from the stovepipe. The woman was sitting on the porch. She watched him walk up. "Took longer than I thought." She didn't respond. He went in and pulled the bucket from under the sink. Then he noticed the Dutch oven on the stove. Something was cooking.

He took the bucket down to the stream and brought it back to the cabin. He washed his face, arms and hands. Then dried them on the towel. Then he went in to get the medical supplies. He

cleaned her wounds and applied new bandages. Everything was doing nicely. Even the wound across her knee looked healthy. If she stayed off her feet, she'd be doing real good by the end of the week. He put a clean pair of socks on her feet, then took the others to wash them out at the stream.

Roger knew the pile of scrap wood was dwindling away and he had to get some more. He took the axe and went looking for small stuff down by the creek. He wasn't ready to tackle anything big after realizing how dangerous his lack of information could have been for him. He tried to be careful because there was no doctor near if he had an accident, and no way to go for help. Mostly he was gathering the dry stuff. He had heard, somewhere, that wet wood was hard to burn. He remembered, it was at the family chalet in Tahoe where they had been delivered a cord of green wood from a local woodcutter. They had to use barbeque fluid and rolled up newspapers to get it to start. However the next year it was dry and there was no problem.

Roger had noticed the day before that it got darker sooner in the canyon. The sun may have been up but the canyon walls blocked its light and it started to get cooler earlier than he was used to in San Francisco. He wondered what was happening there. He started to go into the cabin when the horses started whinnying at him. The mule started its braying, too. They were saying, "Don't forget us." Roger noticed that every piece of hay was gone. Maybe they need more because of having no feed for several days, he surmised. "O.K guys," he spoke, double rations tonight.

When he got to the cabin, the woman had gone in and closed the door. There was a slight light in the window. Inside she had lit one of the votive candles and placed it in the middle of the table. She also had set two plates and had made coffee for Roger. The lid was off the pot and the aroma of a stew or soup was filling the room. She pointed for him to help himself.

"Wow, this is great!" She didn't respond to him. It looked like chicken, potatoes and onions had been cooked together. After several days of not much more than energy bars this looked good. As he sat down across from her he noticed a shiny can she was using for drinking water. She had cleaned the can, including removing the label so they both had something to drink from. It was silent except for the sounds of a low fire crackling. But that wasn't bad at all. Roger ate a second helping, then got up to clean the dishes and the makeshift water glass. He glanced at his watch. It was only 7 PM but he was ready for bed. This night he took off his boots and his overshirt and crawled into the sleeping bag. The woman sat at the table as he drifted off to sleep.

Roger was getting curious about what was happening outside their little world of the cabin, in the canyon. After he got up and started the fire, he went out to the truck and turned on the radio. All he could get was static. He wondered if the canyon was the problem. If he took the truck out on some open area, maybe he could get better reception. He moved the truck down the road a quarter mile to a small knoll. He tried both the AM and FM bands. When he turned the volume up all the way he just got louder static.

When he was driving at night sometimes, AM stations would come in from all over the country. He decided to try the radio that evening. He continued to feel frustrated about the lack of information, and certainly he wasn't a news junkie. For Roger, there seemed to be some important information missing. Information that would affect his decision making. He didn't want to go there. Because all the scenarios which tended to crowd his imagination were of the bleakest kind. "One day at a time", he chanted softly to himself as he walked back to the cabin. The animals called for their feed. Roger went to the barn.

Roger decided to drive the truck on up the road out of the North end of the canyon on the afternoon of the third day. He emptied one of the 5 gal. containers of gas into the tank to make sure he would not run empty.

Back in the cabin the woman seemed alert but still did not talk as he explained what he was doing. At the far end of the pasture he had noticed the tracks of a road looked to lead up and over the edge of the canyon where the cabin was located. Roger put enough wood to start a fire, by the stove, and left a lighter on the table.

He left the cabin about 3 PM. He wanted to be up on top of the hills before dark. He was hoping that with the night he could get better reception for the radio. He stuck a couple of energy bars in his book bag and half-filled jug of water. The bars and the distilled water was almost gone.

It was a rough ride out of the canyon so Roger put it in 4x4 drive as he climbed onto the ridge of hills and drove on North. By 4:30 PM he had found a place where he could see the Pacific Ocean to the West. He found a spot and stopped. He quietly enjoy the colors of a sunset. He let the seat slide back and then tilted it slightly to the rear. It was hard to imagine such a dramatic change in his world when he sat quietly enjoying a beautiful sky.

Roger had tried the radio earlier and he got was static. He had slowly turned across both the AM and FM dials with the volume turned up high. He was going to wait until dark to try again. He almost wanted to put that task off because he was somewhat fearful of the result. He took advantage of the quiet to close his eyes and relax until the cool night intruded into the cab and woke him up. He got out of the truck, stretched, and reached behind the seat for his chore coat and pulled it on. It was a clear night for this coastal area.

This time he was able to pull in an AM station in Nevada. It was coming from Las Vegas. The announcer was talking about the tragic refugee problem and how the hotels were being used to house those coming from California. However Las Vegas was already facing a serious food shortage because there were no trucks coming from California. The California central valley where many crops were produced was cut off due to the massive earthquakes.

And there was news that a new inland sea was being formed from Monterey Bay in the North to San Luis Obispo in the South. People were evacuating Eastward to the Sierras to avoid the seeping salt water that was inundating San Jose to Bakersfield. The San Joaquin Valley was

becoming a second Great Salt Lake. Croplands and orchards were being destroyed by the surging salt water.

Another significant problem was that though Southern California had, by comparison, less damage from the earthquakes--the salt water problem further North was ruining the water supply. The wonderful canal and aqueduct systems were now running salt water into most of the homes in the Los Angeles Basin.

The worst news for Roger was that he was now on an island that stretched from South of what used to be Monterey, to just North of San Luis Obispo where a major East-West inlet had been formed. The radio station drifted loud and soft as he listened further. He heard partial segments of news about some sort of social breakdown occurring up and down the West Coast.

Roger began to digest what he had heard. Well, this island, roughly 30 miles wide by 140 miles long appeared to be safe from the earthquakes. But it was isolated from the rest of California by those same quakes. The disaster was also so crippling and huge that any help would probably be focused on the refugees fleeing East toward Nevada and the Southwest. The last bit of news indicated that seismic shocks had precipitated some tsunamis. Officials throughout the Pacific Basin were in full alert to evacuate their populations to avoid record impacts along their coasts.

It had sounded like the East and West Coasts of the United States had been effectively destroyed in a few short days. The East from political coups and terrorists, and the West from a major natural disaster. Roger drove carefully and slowly back down the road into the canyon. He was trying to understand the enormity of this tragedy and fumbling to piece together some sort of plan about what to do now.

His casual one or two week plan for survival and safety had been kicked in the teeth by this news. If they were going to survive, he would have to be a whole lot more resourceful and careful over the next few days, or weeks, or months? He had to develop a new plan. His "one day at a time", attitude wouldn't work for the long term. That attitude would bring them to starvation in a couple of short weeks.

It was like each choice needed to be carefully thought out in a similar way to how he approached not cutting off his leg with that double-bitted axe yesterday.

There was a comfort in seeing the soft light in the window as he parked the truck next to the hitching post in front of the cabin. He took his penlight out to see, to feed the stock before going into the cabin. Roger went into the cabin to see that the fire had been started and the remainder of the stew from yesterday was warming in the pot on the stove.

He got a plate off the counter and stepped to the stove and lifted the lid of the pot. Inside the pot were some biscuits or dumplings setting on top of the thick stew. Roger looked over to the woman who was seated at the table and asked with a raised eyebrow if it was alright to serve

himself. He guessed from the lack of response that it was O.K.. He served some of the stew with a couple of biscuits and poured water in his cup to heat for coffee. He appreciated the stew. The energy bars probably satisfied the nutritional requirements of his body but it left his stomach feeling empty and growling at him.

The memory of the radio broadcast caused him to pause slightly as he poured the instant coffee directly into his cup from the jar. Roger curiously turned the jar toward the light of the candle on the table. How many spoonfuls of coffee were left in this and the other jar? The directions indicated to use a rounded teaspoon for each cup. Maybe if he used a level teaspoon and just drank a single cup each morning, the coffee would last until he could get some more. "Hold it." He told himself. That's not very accurate. Roger cleaned his plate dried it and began to take out the coffee one level spoonful at a time a poured it on the plate. He took out 1/3 of the jar and estimated that each jar of Toaster's Choice would yield 150 cups of coffee at that rate minus what they had used already.

As a grad student he was oriented toward an analytical process. As he sat there sipping that single cup of coffee he began to think about critical need deadlines in his mind. Heat, shelter, food and water were those critical areas. He paused and wondered if he should include security. That big truck had seen earlier looked like it was loaded with a private army.

Roger started his mental lists with coffee. They had consumed 7 or 8 cups. So, with restraint--and level teaspoons, they had about 290 cups left. Using two cups a day, that would be approximately 145 days of coffee. Today was October 2 so the coffee would be gone on January 22.

I'll write this down Roger thought, but he didn't have paper or pen. He hoped there might be some in the truck. Later when he looked and found the yellowed paper of an old writing pad and a stubby pencil he wrote Coffee: Jan. 22. He almost choked when he thought Jan. 22. It was like passing a sentence on his and the woman's lives. Coffee wasn't that critical but it might be representative of what was coming.

Roger reviewed what he had learned from the news with the woman. She sat quietly and looked into the open door of the stove at the fire and shrugged her sleeping bag tighter around her shoulders--but didn't say a word.

Chapter 22

After several weeks, the Marines were established and had improved Jim's security ideas. Instead of the trench being a decoy, it was now a "flaming wall of death" with ANFO bombs, waste oil and gasoline containers, and for that extra special touch, white phosphorous and Thermate charges set in mortar tubes with just enough lifting charge to jump 6 feet straight up and detonate above the trenches throwing WP and Thermate all over the place. The charges were controlled by a single nail board. The Spider Holes were moved back 100 yards, and the old holes were now oversized Punji pits, just in case someone got the word out about the spider holes and attacked them. 20 yards in front of the new spider holes was a long row of daisy-chained Claymore mines backstopped by sandbags to protect the spider holes from back blast. The entire setup was covered by cammo netting and looked like a natural berm. Anyone who attacked The Mine would be decimated long before they got to the spider holes. They had dug fighting positions for the LAV-25s so they could sit hull down behind a berm, and only expose their turrets to incoming fire, while having a full field of fire in front of them. They added some ITV Bradleys their CO had requested when he saw how long of a fence line he had to defend, and these were interspersed with the LAV's. Since they had the Predator Drones, the LAV's and Bradleys were stored in the building when not needed, but could be advanced to their fighting positions in a matter of minutes.

With the Marines on the guard, production almost doubled, since they didn't need much of a security force anymore, and the security force was put to work at the mine. Even Jim went back to his old job of running the machine shop. Frankly he was happier in the machine shop knowing the Marines were on the job than when he ran the security operation. This freed Brian up to operate equipment again, and supervise the operators.

Things were just going swimmingly until one day an earthquake shook Winnemucca so hard that it knocked everyone off their feet, and stuff came flying off the store shelves. When everything stopped shaking, Ken got on the radio, and had all the supervisors check their people. There were a lot of minor injuries, a few severe ones, and about 10 fatalities when a Haul pack loaded with silver ore went over the side of a switchback, killing the driver, a 40 year old mother of 2 kids, and killing several workers below who were unaware of the runaway haul pack. The medical teams were dispatched to critical locations at the mine, and the wounded were brought to them. When Ken was informed of the fatalities, he put his head in his hands and cried. Then he prayed that God would take care of them, and the wounded.

What had happened was a branch of the San Andreas Fault running under Los Angeles finally gave way, resulting in a chain reaction of earthquakes. It turned out that a seismologist that said that the LA basin was the linchpin of the entire Southern California fault system was right. The first earthquake was tentatively assigned a Richter number of 7.0, which probably would later

go up. That resulted in the San Andreas Fault line moving not 30 feet, but 300 feet up and down its entire length. The city of Palmdale ceased to exist, and other towns up and down the fault line were leveled. The shocks and aftershocks destroyed what was left of San Francisco, San Jose, Monterey, and other coastal Cities. Southern California didn't fare too well either. A 200-ft tsunami was generated when the entire La Jolla trench collapsed as the Rose Canyon fault moved. The Tsunami wiped out everything within 10 miles of the coast from San Diego to San Clemente. There was no warning, so the loss of life was staggering. Between the two earthquakes, California as a state ceased to exist. There were pockets of survivors inland, but they had no water, electricity, sewer, or gas service, and were effectively cut off from the rest of the nation when the Gulf of California rushed in to fill the lower desert from Mexico through Death Valley, and into the rest of the lower desert of Nevada when seismic activity broke the cork in the bottle holding the Gulf of California.

Las Vegas soon became an island with the Colorado River on one side, and the Pacific on the other. While the water wasn't very deep around Las Vegas, it was over 30 feet deep around Death Valley, which was 500 feet below sea level, and the water was rising. Somehow the Governor of Nevada had survived the earthquake in Carson City, which was a miracle in itself, since most of the government buildings weren't up to current earthquake standards. He got in touch with the military commanders of the bases still working in Nevada, and asked them to prepare to deal with survivors and refugees. To that end, he called the governor's office in California, somehow the governor had survived there as well – Sacramento was a low-risk area for earthquakes, but even still the river bottom had liquefied when the earthquake struck, and most tall buildings in Sacramento were down as well. Governor Guinn offered the assistance of the State of Nevada with refugees and survivors, since most of Nevada's military bases had survived with minor damage, and had tons of C-130s that could drop supplies, or remove refugees to safer ground in Northern Nevada.

When he got off the phone, he remembered that Ken at the Nevada Silver Mines had volunteered to assist with refugees from the previous quake, and owed the Governor big time for sending the Marines there. He called Ken, who didn't believe it really was Governor Guinn until he answered the phone.

"Mr. Heinz, this is Governor Guinn of Nevada. I need your help. Remember when you offered to assist with refugees from the previous earthquake. The damages from this one are 100 times worse, and I'm going to take you up on your offer if it still stands."

"Governor, I'd love to assist. Can you find out if Fallon has surplus supplies like tents and stuff so we can house refugees. If they can supply what we need to house them, we have over 100 square miles of open desert on the other side of the tracks from our compound that we could

easily convert into a tent city. We could drill wells, and set up basic facilities with all the heavy equipment we have. Just tell us what you need and we'll take care of it!"

Ken, you don't know how much this means to me – I'll talk to Fallon, and get back to you – if necessary, I'll order the stuff from out of state, and have it shipped. How many refugees can you assist?"

"Governor, that depends on how much supplies you can send us. We need food, blankets, cots, tents, basically everything to set up a tent city and feed all those people. We could easily handle 10,000 refugees given enough supplies and equipment."

"Again Thanks Ken and I'll get back to you."

Within days, Ken got the Mine cleaned up, buried the dead, and started to prepare to receive refugees. He had almost a year's worth of Diesel and gasoline on hand. If he could get the supplies to increase power production and run a power line across the tracks, they would have electricity. Ken made a list of what they needed, then got on the phone. The Governor told him to use his name to authorize any expenditures for Refugee assistance, but Ken had enough money in the company not to worry about that – there were lives that needed saving. Ken put the Batch plant on notice to prepare concrete 24/7 until further notice, and got Brian to call the gravel pit and request that they assist in transforming the desert south of them into a refugee camp. Within days, supplies started rolling in up the road, and down the rail line. Ken suspended all unnecessary work on the Mine to free up some heavy equipment to build a road, and engineer pads for all the tents and buildings that would go up across the railroad. Their well diggers drilled wells, and ran pipe to a central location, and assembled a spare 100,000 gallon water tank to store the water in. When the tents showed up, workers volunteered on their off days to pitch tents and get things organized. They even built a runway to land C-130s, since the Governor had decided it was quicker and easier to move supplies and refugees by air, since most of the major roads in California and Nevada were down, with the exception of I-80 and Route 50 in Nevada. Flights originated from the airport in Los Angeles, and deposited hundreds of refugees into the desert southwest of Winnemucca every day.

Ken offered the healthy ones jobs erecting tents, digging ditches for septic systems, and all the other stuff that needed doing to quickly erect a tent city. The power company in Salt Lake City donated the wire, towers and transformers to erect a 10KV line from the Mine's power plant to the tent city across the tracks. By the time that they really needed the power, it was there. Several companies donated steel buildings and huge evaporative coolers so they could house the sick and elderly in an air conditioned building. They erected showers and toilet facilities right along with the tents. The Army sent medics and medical supplies. Patients who needed surgery were airlifted to other bases. The tent city was fast taking shape, and what amazed the

Governor was that Silver production never dropped after they recovered from the damage. Ken was making money hand over fist, and was pouring the money into relief efforts. They had a kitchen, and a dining room/ entertainment room, showers with hot and cold running water. In the desert, the hot water wasn't a problem, but the cold water usually came out lukewarm. As the tent city continued to grow, Ken kept adding generating capacity to his solar powered heliostat generating facility.

At last count there were between 15 and 20 thousand people in the tent city, and they were all wards of the State without jobs or futures. Ken realized they would probably never be able to go home, and started working on a permanent solution. The first thing he did was call the owner of the manufactured housing company and tell him they were going to need a bunch of houses again, and they would need to re-start their factory. Ken was glad they had decided to leave the equipment in place, since it cost more to move it than it was worth after building all those houses. When Ken told him that he needed enough houses to house 20 thousand people, the owner nearly stroked out on him.

Ken then called the Governor with an idea. "Governor Guinn, it looks like these people are going to become permanent residents of Nevada. It would be cheaper in the long run to put them to work instead of them living on State disaster funds. If you'll let me, I'd like to open several manufacturing businesses near the tent city, and put them to work."

"Ken, that sounds like an excellent idea. What do you need?"

"First of all, I need the state to sell me the land, then guarantee financing for buildings, materials, and a railroad spur line to move goods in and out. Also, if the state could help me with some ideas for light manufacturing and other businesses that employ large amounts of people, I'll put them to work for you, and pay them out of my profits, just like I do at Nevada Silver Mine. I contacted the manufactured housing builder, and he has agreed to build enough housing for 20 thousand people at cost. He might even be able to hire some of the refugees with the right skills."

Ken, you take care of things at your end, I'll give you the land you need, and guarantee financing for everything you need to get this going. I'll get back to you in few days with ideas for light manufacturing companies."

The Governor called his department heads into an urgent meeting, and told them to put their heads together, and come up with several options for light manufacturing companies that had a ready market, and could start up right now. Several department heads started to raise a stink when they heard it was Ken Heinz at Nevada Silver Mines running things. Governor Guinn

solved their problems by firing them on the spot, and promoting their #2 person in the department. He laid down the law – “I don’t want any bureaucratic problems with this – I’ve already declared a state of emergency, and if I hear of anything less than 100% cooperation from any State department, I will fire the head of that department that very day. If any state employees give this project any problems, it’s your responsibility to bring them into line or terminate them. Understood? Great, get back to me within 48 hours with a plan to make this work ASAP!”

*** The Next Morning, California ***

He awoke with a start the wind was blowing and something was banging with the harder gusts outside. He shut his eyes for a moment and drifted back into a deep state of relaxation. This was the first time he had thought about a “day off” throughout the terrible grind of the last few days. It was October 3. He could hear the water boiling on the stove. The woman had made the fire. He rolled over toward the stove. She was standing with her back to him working at the counter. She had the sleeping bag again wrapped around her shoulders like a shawl. He could hear something frying in the skillet on the stove. The good smell of cooking onions and potatoes filled the room and urged him to get up but he stayed snuggled down in the sleeping bag’s warmth and felt the quiet, peace of this situation for a moment longer.

Roger decided to get up, and quickly pulled on his pants. There were cool drafts each time the gusts forced their way into the room. The board and batten construction was fine when new but years, drying and cupping boards had opened cracks which needed to be sealed shut again. Roger thought that even though there was little snow in this coastal range, it would take less wood to heat and be more comfortable sealed up. That was a chore for another day.

He began to think about Jan. 22. By that time, he hoped the worst of the winter should be over. Could they survive here for that long? Roger was thinking about his original plan of two or three weeks at the longest. They didn’t have enough food, even if they did have shelter, warmth and water to stay all winter. He wondered if there were edible animals in the woods and brush in the area. He didn’t think too much of eating the horses or the mule. After breakfast he went out to feed the stock. He didn’t intend to eat them but he ran his eyes over them in a new way.

Another thing he was thinking about was the Toyota truck. There was less than 20 gal. of gas left. He probably needed to save that for emergencies. Anyway if they were on an island--where was he going to drive?

The wind and the whipping rain stopped later in the morning. Roger decided to hike out to the road and see if there had been any activity out there and then maybe hike a ways toward the coast. Before he left he told the woman what he was going to do and brought in wood for the

fire that night. Then he went to the truck and pulled out the Jennings. It was terrible on accuracy but it probably was better than nothing. He sat down at the table and explained how the safety worked and how to load it. He also emphasized that you had to be close to hit something. He left it with a box of .22 LR's on the table. For a moment he wondered about her shooting him some night but she had already had her chances so he was going to trust her.

Roger took the book bag with an energy bar, and a half gallon of water along with him as he set off with a good pace down the two track road. He exercised some caution as before, stopping every once in while to listen.

Arriving at the junction of the roads, Roger noticed recent tire tracks. They were the dual wheels on the back of a vehicle probably like the truck he had seen earlier. The ruts were deep in the gravel bed where it had pulled off the road. Roger wondered if it had a heavy load.

Roger decided to walk a few miles west to see if he could determine whether they were friendly or not--if he found them. The first look he had earlier made him skeptical on that point. He set out down the road. He moved slowly and stopped often to listen for any sounds. He didn't want to be surprised by someone coming up the road. About 4 miles, he guessed, down the road he noticed smoke drifting skyward. He began to approach very cautiously, taking advantage of the brush in the ditch line beside the road.

What he saw was a partially burned summer cottage about fifty feet off the road. There had been a lot of care and work put into this place with a wooden picket fence and a grassy front yard. There were no cars around. Just a shack behind the cottage with an attached chicken coop and some rabbit hutches with their doors hanging open.

Either the owner had left quickly or ...? The images of the family at the campground came back with a lurch to his stomach. Roger sat down behind a few trees on the wet grass for a half an hour before approaching the burned cottage. He waited patiently to see if there was anyone around. It was also a way of procrastinating. He didn't want to find anyone's body here. He thought that the truck had passed by a couple of times in the last few days.

He walked carefully and almost reverently into the open area surrounding the cottage. He knew he was shifting gears mentally. The one-time heir to a fortune was figuratively going "dumpster dipping". He was going to look for food or anything that would make his and the woman's survival possible 'til that arbitrary Jan. 22 date he had set for himself.

There were a few items thrown into the yard near the remnant of a concrete front porch. Roger had the feeling that someone had ransacked the cottage before burning it. They had probably taken everything they wanted, then set it on fire out of pure malice. In the scattered stuff in the yard there was little of value but Rogers eyes lit up as he found a large stainless steel bowl and two tarnished forks with the silver plate worn off from long use. He placed these items in his book bag. He wondered about what treasures of common items might have been destroyed

when the cottage burned. He stopped briefly to look at a soggy footstool with a rip diagonally across the top, exposing the stuffing. There might have even been a manual can-opener somewhere in the cottage.

Roger only found one body. A dead cocker spaniel. He had never seen an animal shot but he imagined the dog had been shot with something larger than a .22 LR.

He walked on back toward the shed behind the cottage. There was a lean-to next to the shed where someone had cut and stored wood for many years. Roger stepped inside to look around. There leaning against the wall was a splitting maul and an old, but usable bow saw. There were some empty containers marked for an oil-gas mixture but no chainsaw around. The looters must have taken it. There were a couple of files on the ledge of the wall. Roger put these in his bag. He tied the saw to the bag and intended to carry the maul in his hands.

Roger moved around to the shed door. Inside there were two new bags of cracked corn sitting on the floor. He looked carefully to see if there were any ingredients that were not good for human consumption. The label said 100% pure, natural and organically grown. He decided this was part of his food solution if he could get them back to the cabin and he was willing to risk that this food source was appropriate for humans. The problem was that each bag weighed 60 lbs. How was he to get it back?

Roger wished that the Toyota was with him now. He walked outside looking around for anything to use for a pack to carry these precious bags of grain. The he remembered the old wheelbarrow in the front yard. He almost ran around the wreck of the cottage and dumped the old wheelbarrow over on its side to eject the leftover summer flowers. It was a dark brown rust color and had a metal wheel with spokes. As he wheeled it to the back of the cottage it complained noisily that not a bit of oil had been applied to its axle for years and years.

Roger loaded everything and started moving the wheelbarrow away from the cottage to the edge of the woods. Then he started looking in earnest for any other items in the shed. He found three wood chisels with some rust in a broken wooden box and a hammer head with a stub of a handle. He knew his time was running out when he saw something glistening in the grass near the back of the cottage. He walked over to pick it up. It was a hand mirror with a beautiful silver filigree around its' rim. This looked like real silver to Roger. The looters must have dropped this in their haste.

He heard the sound of a diesel truck up the road. Roger ran to the edge of the woods and shoved the his squeaky wheel barrow behind some low growing bushes and jumped behind a large tree himself, laying down to hide.

The truck pulled into the yard. Roger tried to quiet his breathing. It backed up to the woodshed. The man on the passenger side got out, went around to the back of the truck bed and ordered an elderly couple to get busy. The old man almost fell as he lowered himself from the tailgate. The

man gestured with what Roger thought of as an assault rifle for the old man to hurry up. The weapon had a curved magazine sticking out of the bottom and a pistol grip. The old man began to pick up the cut and split pieces of firewood and put them on the tailgate of the truck. The old lady carried them to the front and stacked them neatly.

The driver got out. He was wearing a gun in a holster. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and began to smoke. In a few minutes with his free hand, he turned, and zipped down his pants to begin urinating. Roger had been cautiously watching all this. It seemed that the driver was looking directly at him. Roger stayed perfectly still--shutting his eyes--absolutely sure the driver would see him about 40 yards away. But he didn't

Finally, the loading was done. The old man was roughly shoved up into the bed of the truck and the truck was driven away. Roger immediately began pushing the old wheelbarrow back toward the cabin in the canyon. It should have been faster going up the gravel road but the metal wheel made so much noise that Roger stopped even more frequently to listen for vehicles or people on the road. Fortunately there was none. When he reached the turnoff for the two track road he began to push harder. The trip up the canyon took twice as long to go up as it did to come down.

Roger's legs were practically rubber when he finally made it to the cabin and saw the pleasant glow in the small window. He was dying from the effort but hollered out, "Hello the house, it's Roger." He was thinking about the Jennings he had given the woman.

The horses snorted, whinnied and pawed at the ground to let him know their displeasure in him feeding them late. He almost passed on that but turned his weary body towards the corrals.

When he returned, he brought the two sacks of cracked corn into the cabin and set them under the counter. The woman was sitting in a chair by the fire. She hadn't lit a candle even though it dark outside. Roger took a washcloth and the bucket out to the creek, got a bucket of water and washed up. When Roger came back in there was a plate of biscuits and flour gravy sitting on the side of the table where he usually sat. He pulled out the two forks, washed them and set one on each side of the table. Then he pulled out the hand mirror and placed it on the woman's side. Her eyes seemed to brighten and she stared intently at it. Roger said, "It's for you." Then he began to devour the biscuits and gravy. He didn't notice that the Jennings and the box of .22 LR's were no longer in sight.

As Roger crashed onto his bed the moonlight glistened and the single track of a heavy wheelbarrow rut stood in relief in the moonlight leading away from the cabin.

He awoke first this morning. There was no fire. Roger glanced over in the dim light of dawn to see the curtain on the alcove was drawn still. It must be my turn he mused, not wanting to get out of the sleeping bag. But he did and was able to get a fire started with the dried material he

had begun bringing in from outside. The matches and lighters would last longer this way. One match---one fire. Or strike of the lighter if necessary.

It was October 4. The date pressed him with its' urgency since looking at the use of the coffee. But he still crawled quickly back into the bag until the small stove took an edge off the cold in the cabin. This morning it would be nice to have something like oatmeal. Roger recognized he wasn't going back to sleep, so got up, got dressed and went out to take care of the animals.

Roger began to line out his work for the next few days. He must build an enclosed outhouse, with a door and a roof. There were no materials: plywood, lumber or other things to use. He thought about putting trunks of small trees together and lacing them with that nylon line he picked up. That might work for the sides. But for the roof. Maybe he could put together a frame in to same way and then lay out bark like shingles on top. The hole underneath came first and then the seat. O.K. that was the first task.

Then he needed to start to cut and split wood for the winter. Finding that long handled splitting maul was wonderful. And the bow saw was good, too. If he could figure out how to properly sharpen the blade he would be in business. Roger decided to cut some wood every morning--maybe two days worth and then work on the other projects later in the day. In a week he would have a week's worth of firewood ahead that way and his muscles could get used to the hard work.

The third big project was to secure the water source. There were only 50 tablets for purifying water. That meant 50 gallons of water before they had to start drinking surface water. The best shot at clean water was the seepage running through the corral area. Roger believed if he could build some kind of a spring box above the corrals, on the hillside to keep out insects, birds and animals, he would have a safe source. He knew he didn't know how to do this, but he didn't have a choice. He had heard too many stories about giardia and cryptosporidium around Northern California. He should have picked up a filter in one of those stores. Probably do him more good than those two bags of Fritos he had taken.

Actually there was another project he had in mind. He wanted to take another look around the cottage to see what else he could find. There might even be a can opener lying around. Roger thought about how his sense of the value of things had changed. He went to work getting the days worth of kindling and firewood before going in for something to eat.

This morning the woman divided an apple and an orange for each of them for breakfast. Roger told her that he was going back down to the cottage to see what else he could find. He took his coat, hat and started out the door.

"Bye, Roger." He almost ran into the door frame on the way out. She had spoken to him. Well, maybe he could find out her name when he returned.

He was so preoccupied with the words she had spoken that he walked quickly down the road.

But soon he stopped to listen because he knew it was important. As he quietly waited he glanced down at his feet. In the damp soil of the two track road was the mark of the wheelbarrow. He turned and looked back up the road. Clear as day a trail of that wheelbarrow led right to the cabin. Anyone could follow that as easily as a colored marker on a map. Roger hurried down to the junction where the gravel road was. He wanted to get busy and erase those marks before someone found them. When he got to the clearing on the side of the road he found a branch to scratch out the marks and then he threw bark and dead leaves over the wheel track back up his road about a quarter of a mile. That was lucky. He intended to clear up the rest when he returned.

The trip down to the cottage was uneventful except for the stress Roger felt listening for a vehicle on the road. He looked carefully around the cottage from the shelter of the bushes and trees before proceeding to begin his search.

This time Roger was looking for nails in particular. He wanted to use them to nail down the loose boards on the cabin and help build the outhouse. What he did find was a bunch of wadded up bailing wire bundles. They were just the circles of wire off a hay bale that had been bent double several times to decrease their size. He knew they would come in handy so he put them in the book bag. He thought he must have at least 12 or 13 of these little handfals.

He could find no nails but he did find a jar of rusty bolts. He put this in his book bag too. He started rummaging around in the junk pile in the corner of the shed. Roger found an old hand brace with one auger bit of about 5/8 inches wide still locked in it. He put that in his book bag. The looters had really cleaned up or the owners of the cottage kept everything inside. He kept looking for nails. Then he spotted the chicken coop. The builder had used nails to attach the chicken wire to the fence posts. The wood was old and the nails were standing out. Roger found a piece of old hinge and worked the nails loose one by one until he had about 50 of them. These he put in his bag too.

One thing he did want to do was to look for a spring. He wanted to see how the spring was dug or developed. This cottage had only a well. Roger decided to explore down the road a ways to see if there were any other cabins or cottages around. It would be great to find one that hadn't been burned. His time was running short. He wanted to get back by sunset if he could. Especially since the woman had spoken to him.

Roger saw a path leading away from the clearing. It seemed to parallel the road going West. He only had a little time so he moved quickly. About a quarter mile away he found the remains of another cottage. This one had the remains of an auto burned along side remnants of a house that had also burned. It appeared that the looters were systematically robbing and burning all the cottages in this area. Roger believed that they would do the same to his cabin if they found it. There were no outbuildings with this cottage to rummage through.

Roger heard some voices coming through the woods. He crept closer to see who was talking.

One of the people he saw was the driver from yesterday. Only today he had a suburban. On the side of this new vehicle was the name, "Ecologic Peace Institute". Roger had heard of some group like this around Big Sur. It made purchases like the Nature Conservancy did of large parcels of land and then resold them for National Parks or Wilderness areas.

The man who Roger recognized had a uniform shirt on today. The man turned and Roger saw the green and white logo of EPS on the sleeve of his shirt.

This was a puzzle to Roger. The actions of yesterday and the uniform and car today just didn't match. That organization was supposed to be one of the good guys. Roger slowly eased himself backwards from the loudly talking men. He was glad he had left his bag back at the other cottage. That bag would have been noisy. It seemed to take forever to crawl away and get enough cover so that he felt he could stand up and walk. When he got to his bag he started walking quickly to cover the miles to the cabin before dark.

As he walked he tried to sort out the puzzle. The whole world for Roger seemed to have been turned upside down. He was tired, but not as tired as yesterday when he helloed the house, dropped his bag on the little porch and went to feed the animals.

When he finally had washed up and came in he found that the woman had made flour tortillas and there were some of the pinto beans in the pot on the stove. His plate was filled with the beans. He was tired but not totally exhausted like the night before. He told what he had seen to the woman and then went over to his pallet and laid on his sleeping bag and watched the flames flicker in the stove for a few minutes before he closed his eyes. The woman was still up when he went to sleep.

Chapter 23

The next day, the Governor's aide called Ken and gave him a list of manufacturing ideas. The one that intrigued him the most was manufacturing Alternative Energy components, including large and small wind turbines, solar panels, and inverters. Several California companies volunteered to send engineers to Nevada to start the project up. They wouldn't be designing new technology, just building existing equipment. Ken decided that they could use most of the components right there, to make the new community that some were calling New California energy self-sufficient. Ken was making money hand over fist, and if the 5,000 homes were generating their own power, Ken would become an electricity exporter again. Bill from the railroad called, and said he could run a spur line out to New California next week, and mentioned that they had a known geothermal site on the property that could produce electricity and hot water. Ken found out exactly where the site was, and called Steve, who got his AE buddies working on a geothermal site ASAP. Brian, Jim, and everyone they could spare were grading lots and roads, and later that day, a workforce showed up at the Mine to re-open the UBC building manufacturing plant. They ended up hiring over 100 refugees who had carpentry or manufacturing experience to help build houses.

Ken ordered several huge steel buildings to house the manufacturing plants, and Steve located several refugees who used to be foreman in large high-tech manufacturing plants, and put them in charge of the project. As soon as the spur line was in, they started delivering building materials, and George wound up helping them erect 3 buildings the size of the UBC building. In fact, they were direct copies to make things easier, since the UBC company loaned the mine their plans, and could save massive amounts of time building 3 direct copies of the building, since the embedded bolt locations were already worked out, and George was familiar with the construction procedures. They were up and ready to be occupied a week after the concrete dried. Suppliers from all over the US were shipping equipment and raw materials to the Mine to be delivered to New California. Several crucial pieces of equipment were fully robotic CNC 3-axis mills to manufacture the blades for the wind turbines, and machines to form sheet metal for the housings. The engineers gave Ken a list of materials and equipment to build thin-film PV panels. Ken secured a license from the patent owner for a very reasonable cost, since they were having problems keeping up with demand, and wanted to buy panels from Ken's company at a reduced cost. Ken agreed to sell them panels at a reduced cost in lieu of a licensing fee.

The railroad was raking in the money, and all the crews were busy now that both sides of the mine property were taking daily deliveries of supplies. The UBC company took several carloads of lumber and supplies each day, and the NC companies were getting daily shipments of raw materials, and would soon be shipping out finished products. Ken contacted Outback Products, and got a manufacturing license from them as well, and was soon manufacturing PV panels, inverters and other AE components, as well as small and large wind turbines. As things got going, more and more people in New California were working instead of getting General Relief, and the State of Nevada was amazed at how fast Ken got them working productively.

As they started producing panels and turbines, they were installing them in the UBC houses that were coming off line, and connecting them to the grid with licensed Outback Grid intertie inverters. The only thing they had to buy was a small battery bank for voltage stabilization and back up. The mine's power system slowly crept back into the black – they were again a net energy exporter. The geothermal plant was completed a few months later, and not only made over 10 megawatts of power, but it provided all the hot water for the community, so they eliminated the electric water heaters from all the rest of the houses. During the winter, they were heated by baseboard hot water systems, and they had enough excess hot water that they built an Olympic sized indoor pool and several Jacuzzis that operated year-round.

New California soon became a mirror image of The Mine. Ken was amazed that they had succeeded with a bunch of refugees, instead of people who had been specially selected. There were more problems in New California, but the crime rate and other negative statistics were far below the rest of Winnemucca. Maybe the fact that the USMC was right next door kept people from getting too squirrely. That and the fact that New California was dry, probably contributed to the low crime rate.

There was one fly in the ointment, one of the mineworkers was hired despite a checkered past, including involvement and arrests for racist activities. He claimed he was an ex-member of WAR, but it turned out that he was trying to recruit people at the Mine. He had been warned numerous times, and counseled repeatedly, but he kept up the racist rhetoric and recruiting attempts, so finally Ken fired him after he called him a dirty Jew. Ken wasn't even Jewish, and if he remembered correctly, his family was Lutheran. Unknown to Ken, this guy ran right back to Tom Metzger and told him some tall tales about how much silver they had on hand. He told him there was \$10 million worth of silver on hand right before they made the delivery run on Friday. Since he worked in the mill, he had no idea about the security, or else they might have reconsidered. Mr. Metzger's greed took over, and he plotted to attack and rob the mine.

Chapter 24

Author's Note: WARNING AND DISCLAIMER: Due to the nature of the characters in the following chapter, the Author has included some of the racist rhetoric spouted by Tom Metzger and the members of WAR for reasons of authenticity. The author does not condone or agree with the rhetoric and beliefs of Tom Metzger and WAR.

Several days later Tom Metzger met with his Storm Troopers. He outlined his plan to rob The Mine of all the silver there. He estimated there was at least \$10 Million dollars in silver at the Mine. This would buy a lot of weapons for the struggle to depose the Zionist Occupying Government (ZOG). He told them that Kenneth Heinz, who was a German Jew and a Race Traitor, was funneling funds secretly to the ZOG to fund their plan for World Domination. He knew of Ken's approval of mixing of the races. Jerry, the loyal WAR member who had brought him this information had told him there were Niggers, Spics, and Kikes there and there were even several mixed race families. Tom told them that they were going to take everything that they wanted, Kill all the men, and take the women prisoner. His Storm Troopers approved of all this since they had very few women in the compound, and they needed women to breed more Aryan Warriors. The Storm troopers met with their cadres of Skinheads, and connected with the different cells all over the Pacific Northwest and Idaho. They were going to meet in Idaho, assemble their troops, and drive south to Winnemucca on back roads and ranch roads to avoid being spotted by the Agents of the ZOG (police). His Storm Troopers met later that week with Tom and told him it would take a week to collect all their weapons, mount all their firepower onto the trucks, and be ready to move south. Tom told them to proceed, and went back to his office to write some more speeches.

Almost 2 weeks later, every Skinhead who could carry a gun was converging in Idaho. Everyone had an M -16 or an AK-47. They had hundreds of deuce and a half trucks to transport everyone to Winnemucca. They had taken 50 pickup trucks and converted them to gun trucks with the addition of M -60 and M -2 Machine guns that were either stolen or sold via the black market to various White Supremacist groups. They had an assortment of RPGs and LAW rockets too. Almost 30% of the WAR had military experience, but luckily for the Mine, most of it was in Supply instead of front line armor or infantry units. Tom made a rather long speech, and finally they were headed south. Since the roads were in such bad shape, it took them several days to make it south to Winnemucca.

Colonel Williams had the Predator Drones ranging as far as they could to give The Mine as much warning from attack as possible. The western Predator, on the extreme northern end of its 20-mile circuit picked up a huge dust cloud to the Northwest. The operator zoomed the camera in, it was a huge convoy of trucks, and they spotted Machine guns mounted on several of the trucks, so they weren't the Girl Scouts out to sell cookies. The operator hit the alarm button, and the entire Mine went into controlled panic. All over the compound, Militia members pagers were going off, and the display said "Code Red 060" meaning that an incoming land based

attack had been spotted, and the Marines would deal with it, but the Militia should assemble and gear up just in case.

The Marine armorers had a surprise for Colonel Williams; they had taken the BMG-50's off several Hummers and replaced them with GE 7.62mm Mini-guns. The entire back of the Hummer was a huge ammo bin, and the gun had a telescopic TV sight mounted on top that was boresighted to the gun. The gunner sat in the passenger seat, and controlled the gun with a monitor and a joystick. Each Minigun equipped Hummer had over 50K rounds of 7.62 ammo including AP, tracer and ball. They were loaded and ready for bear. Colonel Williams dispatched all the Mine's ROV's to ensure that there was full coverage around the mine, in case this was a diversion, and there was another attack coming from another direction. Women and Children were quickly brought to shelters, and New California sent their militia to their borders to ensure that no one was trying to attack them. Finally one of the Predator drones got close enough to one of the trucks, and what Colonel Williams saw made his blood boil. Skinheads! Since he was half-black, and had spent his entire life fighting against racism, he was especially PO'd at White Supremacists. He could see the WAR logos on the trucks, and the Swastikas decorating the trucks, vans, and motorcycles attacking them. He sent the LAVs, Bradleys, and Hummers out to engage the oncoming trucks. Their orders were simple – take no prisoners, engage the heavy weapons first, and use the mini-guns to take care of the foot soldiers. When they arrived at the fence line defensive belt, they pulled into pre-built revetments that protected the hulls and occupants, while allowing the turrets to transverse unimpeded. They had even placed cammo nets with quick releases in front of the emplacements to further obscure the hiding spots until they were ready to fire. When the trucks got within range of the TOW missiles, Col. Williams ordered them to fire at the trucks with the Ma Deuces. With their long-range firepower taken out, the rest of the Marine contingent lit up the Skinheads like the 4th of July! Every 25mm round from a LAV destroyed a vehicle with one hit, and their coaxial guns were shredding the deuce and a half trucks, killing the occupants. As they bailed out of the burning vehicles, and got within their range, the GE Mini-guns on the Hummers opened up, sweeping the battlefield. At over 4,000 rounds per minute, they were devastatingly effective. When they finished firing, very few of the enemy survived. Several skinheads tried to pop up and shoot their RPG-7s, but they were outranged by the Bradleys and LAVs, and never got within their maximum range of 500 meters. All of the RPG rounds fired fell way short. Col. Williams called Cease Fire, then the Bradleys and LAVs drove forward, and disembarked their troopers to check for survivors, and make sure there weren't any. One black Sergeant came upon an overturned truck, and spotted a familiar face. It seemed Tom Metzger was pinned under the vehicle he had hidden under, and had soiled his pants. The Sergeant saw that Metzger wasn't going anywhere, and addressed him. "You remember all those crosses you guys burned in Mississippi, and all those Black people you killed, tortured and harassed for being black? Well, this is payback!" He pulled an AN-M14 TH3 Thermate grenade from his vest, stepped back, pulled the pin, and tossed the grenade into the cab of the truck. As he walked away, he smelled gas. 10 seconds later, the vehicle went up in a huge fireball, and he was close enough to hear Metzger's dying screams.

After they had cleaned up the mess left by Metzger's WAR, the Mine and New California got back to business. The AE factories were running smoothly, except for 1 problem. About 10 % of the people in New California didn't want to work at the jobs assigned them. There wasn't any physical reason they couldn't do the jobs, they just felt they were beneath them. Jim tried to keep it from Ken, but a couple of days later, Ken made a surprise visit to one of the plants, and noticed that the factory, that was once full of workers, was now missing 1/3 of it's workforce. Ken walked into the supervisor's office, and asked why the machines were idle. He finally admitted that he had a wildcat strike on his hands. Ken wanted to know why they were striking – weren't they getting paid enough, were any other needs not met?

The Supervisor finally admitted that they had just decided they didn't want to work in a factory, said the work was beneath them, and they'd rather sit on their butts and collect their refugee checks. Ken told the supervisor they had 24 hours to return to work, or he'd do something about it. He called back the next day, and only a few workers had returned. Ken was furious, and demanded a list of all the workers that refused to work. It was on his desk in 10 minutes. Ken called the CO of the Marine detachment that was providing security, and asked a favor. Later that afternoon, a C-130 landed on the runway at New California, and the Marines surrounded New California, and went door to door with armed and armored Hummers and Bradleys backing them up. They went to each house, told the occupants they had 10 minutes to pack a single suitcase each, and board the bus, or they'd die where they stood. No one was crazy enough to resist, and soon all the Strikers were on board busses and headed to the runway where the C-130 waited with its engines turning. They were removed from the busses and herded onto the C-130, when the last Striker was aboard the plane, the ramp came up, and it took off. Several hours later, it landed at what was left of LAX. They were ordered off the plane by armed guards with M-16's, and as soon as the last person was off the plane, the ramp came up and it took off.

Later that day Jim went into Ken's office. "What happened to those strikers?"

"I took care of the problem."

"You didn't kill them, did you?"

"Nope, the last we saw of them, they were alive and well standing on the runway at LAX."

"You dumped them back in California?"

"Seemed they liked things better there than here, so I granted their wish!"

"So what are we going to do about the plant?"

"Call the Governor's office, and ask him to send some more refugees, this time, make sure they are willing to work at whatever jobs we have for them."

“Ken, Remind me never to P#ss you off!”

Chapter 25

Somewhere in Central California

Seeing the same armed men who were brutalizing the old people later working for the Ecologic Peace Institute scared Roger more than he cared to admit. He realized that their cabin wasn't safe, and they had to leave, but where to go? Later that afternoon, he decided to risk driving the vehicle up to the hill to listen to the radio since he needed news. When he turned the radio on after dark, he found a California radio station, which broadcast the EAS tones followed by this announcement.

"All surviving residents of California who need medical care or food are urged to report to the nearest military facility. You will be fed and treated for your injuries. Please leave all weapons outside the facility."

Rummaging through the vehicle, he found an old road map in the glove box, and realized they were just over 20 miles from the Hunter Liggett Reservation where he had protested years before because there was an old-growth redwood forest on base that someone claimed the military was going to cut down to make room for more training area. As usual, they got it wrong, and after being stopped cold by base security, held a sit-in at the gate until they got tired and went home after declaring a "victory". He saw that a couple of small county dirt roads led from his hideout to the front gate of Hunter Liggett. He coasted back down the hill to save fuel. After dinner, he tried talking to the woman he had saved. "I need your help, after I saw those guys from EPI brutalize those old people and force them to scavenge wood; I knew it wasn't safe here. This evening I heard a broadcast on the radio that said that anyone who needs food or medical care should report to the nearest military base. Hunter Liggett is less than 20 miles from here if we take dirt roads. I wanted to leave at first light and make a run for it, since it's only a matter of time before they find us and judging by what they did to the other cabins, either enslave or kill us."

"So what do you want from me?"

"First of all, I'd like to know your name, and secondly, I need your advice."

"Ok, my Name is Maria Consuela Lopes, but if you want to call me Maria, that will do. Second of all, my dad was in the Marines, so I think the best thing we could do would be to head for the base, since that little cap gun of yours would be worse than useless against those guys, since they're probably armed with AR-15's."

"How do you know so much about guns?"

“Roger, my dad was a Marine, and he always had a .45 around the house since we lived in the Barrio, and I’m pretty sure he had an AR-15 around too. He really loved his time in the Corps, and retired as a Gunnery Sergeant so he knew guns cold. I hope he survived the earthquake, but I doubt it since he was at work when it hit, and the building he worked security in was built in the 1930’s. I made it out of the house alive with the clothes on my back, only to get captured by that gang you saw me running from. I was used as a party toy for several weeks, and I’m pretty sure I’m pregnant since I missed my period. We should get the heck out of here as soon as it’s light enough to see without the lights, because they could see the lights from way off. You need to drive slowly enough so you don’t raise a dust cloud, or they’ll spot you and we’ll be dead. Now let’s get some sleep, since we’ve got to be up early. By the way, I never thanked you for saving my life.” Maria kissed him on the cheek and said goodnight.

They got up at first light, and quickly packed. Roger put all the gasoline they had into the tank. They had maybe 5 gallons left, and he hoped it would be enough. Since the truck was a stick shift, Maria suggested coasting downhill to save gas. Roger thought that was an idea, since they had to go slow anyway. He started the truck, and they piled in. Roger had memorized the route earlier, and drove slowly to the intersection of the dirt road that would take them to Hunter Liggett. It was a narrow dirt road that followed the spine of the hill. Once they crested the hill, Roger shut off the engine and put the transmission in Neutral. They coasted down the hill, and were within 5 miles of Hunter Liggett when Maria yelled at Roger to start the motor and floor it, since there was a huge dust cloud gaining on them. Roger engaged the clutch, shifted to 2nd gear, and popped the clutch. The motor started with a roar, and he floored it, and quickly accelerated away from the vehicle. He drove as fast as he could. The next 5 minutes were the scariest of his life. Finally they were within sight of the base, when all of a sudden Maria screamed as the rear window shattered. Maria yelled at Roger to keep driving, because he had braked instinctively. 60 seconds later he skidded to a stop at the base’s gate because a squad of MPs were pointing their M-16’s at them. Maria jumped out of the vehicle and ran up to the guy with the most stripes on his sleeve and explained they were chased by a white Suburban, and they had just shot at them. One of the privates checked out the vehicle, and the cab was full of glass pieces and the rear window was demolished. The Sergeant in charge of the MP’s got on his radio, but by the time the reaction force showed up with a Hummer, the Suburban had disappeared. The reaction force didn’t chase them too far, and when they called back, the MP Sergeant told Roger “I think they might have thought you were trespassers since its private property up there. Most of it’s owned by EPI except for a few cabins. It’s your word vs. theirs about what happened, so since no one was injured, you might be best to drop it.”

Realizing how well connected EPI was in California, Roger thought it was good advice.

“Ok, now just who are you two?”

Thinking fast, Roger said “I’m Roger Heinz, and this is my fiancé Maria Lopes. We barely made it out of LA by dumb luck and were hiding in an abandoned cabin when we heard your broadcast.”

Maria looked at Roger with wide eyes, and realized she could do worse, so she played along since she realized married couples might get better housing. She wrapped an arm around Roger while the MP's searched their vehicle, and confiscated the .22 Ruger Mark II and the Jennings. The sergeant shook his head ruefully. These two were a couple of babes in the woods, and the wolves out there had real teeth. "OK, you two follow the jeep ahead of you to processing, then they'll take care of housing, and medical needs, and assign you a work detail."

"Work detail?" asked Roger.

"Mr. Heinz, even if you're related to the ex-first lady, no one goofs off around here, either you pull your own weight or you can stay on the other side of the gate." Roger thought about what had just happened, and realized that if he wanted to live, he needed to stay on this side of the gate. "Ok Sergeant, whatever you say!"

"Good choice sir, now if you'll follow that jeep to processing."

They climbed back in the truck and followed the jeep to the processing center. There was a line of refugees waiting to get in, most in worse shape than Roger and Maria. Roger started chatting with several of them, and found most had been brutalized by roving gangs of thugs. Some were furious that the cops had fled, but some were even madder that after the LA riots, the city council had tried every trick in the book to disarm the population. They all thought it was for the best, they just never planned on the street gangs keeping all their weapons. Finally they got to the front of the line. When Roger told them his name, the Lieutenant said "Yeah Right, and I'm the Queen of England!" Roger opened his wallet, extracted his Driver's license and student ID from San Francisco State. The unsympathetic Lieutenant said "Too bad about your aunt and uncle!" and said "Next". Maria presented what little ID she had on her person, and said she was Roger's fiancé. The lieutenant looked up and wordlessly handed them 2 ID bracelets with their names and tent assignments. Roger notice they were assigned to the same tent. Next they went to Medical, and Maria told the nurse what had happened to her, so they drew blood for a pregnancy test and took a pap smear to check for STDs. She said they'd know 24 hours later, and handed her a slip with a number on it. Then they checked the bandages on her feet, and luckily her feet were healing nicely, so the nurse recommended sedentary duty for Maria since she might be pregnant, and her feet were still injured, but the risk of infection was over. Roger checked out OK but 20 pounds underweight, so he was given a blue ration card instead of the green card everyone else got. Maria was given a red ration card on the way out which the nurse told her would include prenatal vitamins and more calories. Next they were guided by stanchions to Supply where they were issued a basic kit including toiletries and 2 sets of BDUs and 3 sets of underwear and socks. The last stop in the line was where they were assigned their duty stations. An old grizzled Master Sergeant looked at Roger's records and said "College Boy how would you like to set up tents for the next month or so?"

Realizing that he could get stuck with KP if he turned them down, he nodded. Maria got a sedentary job in the base laundry working the folding tables. They were issued duffle bags for

their personal stuff, and laundry bags with their names on them for their dirty clothes. They collected laundry once a week, and returned the bags the next day. Finally, they were led to the mess hall, where they got into color-coded lines based on their ration cards. Roger and Maria found each other after they got through, and sat together.

“Roger, why did you say I was your fiancé?”

“I feel responsible for you. I’m not in love with you, but if you want to stay with me, I guess I could learn to love you.”

“Could you raise another man’s child?”

“What happened to you wasn’t your fault, and it’s not the kid’s fault either. Stuff just happens sometimes. I could do worse for a wife, you’re a survivor, and a pretty tough cookie, anyway, let’s cross that bridge when we get there.”

“You realize we’ve been assigned to a married tent, and probably won’t have a lot of privacy.”

“If you promise not to laugh, I won’t either.”

“Ok, one last thing, this fiancé stuff comes with some fringe benefits, but if I were you, I’d wait until my STD test comes back before we sleep together.”

“Maria, I didn’t even think of that yet, I’m still trying to survive.”

Once they finished dinner, the MP’s told them to go to their tents and get situated. Breakfast was at 0700, and they stopped serving at 0800. Roger picked up her duffle, and they trudged off to their tent. The tent was a regulation Army tent with 2 cots and a wood floor. Roger put their bags down, and Maria started packing her footlocker. Roger stared at her, and finally started copying her. “How’d you know how to load a footlocker?”

“I watched my Dad, and he told me about his time in the Marines.”

Once she was done, she started getting undressed right in front of him. Roger wasn’t a virgin, but wasn’t used to women getting naked right in front of him with the lights on. Maria didn’t seem to have any problems with it, and was soon standing naked in front of him. Roger realized that while she was petite, she was beautiful, and when she held out her arms, he opened his and held her. Maria held him for several minutes, sobbing hysterically. He knew he had to be strong for Maria, but finally he started crying too, when he remembered all the friends and family that didn’t make it. Finally when they came up for air, Roger said “Maria, you’re beautiful, and I don’t mean just on the outside. Thanks for holding me and letting me be vulnerable.”

“I could tell you were holding a lot in, so I felt if I approached you like this, you’d have to open up. Holding stuff in like that just eats you up inside. I know because my Dad would never talk about what happened to his platoon in Desert Storm. He loved us dearly, but he closed himself off to us, and drank himself unconscious on the weekends. I hope we can always be this close.” With that, they disentangled, and Roger stripped to his boxers and slid into bed. Maria slid under the covers of her cot as well, and said “Goodnight Roger!”

They awoke the next morning to a recording of Reveille “What’s that racket?”

“It’s called Reveille, or the Marine Alarm Clock – now get your lazy butt out of bed and get dressed, you’ve got exactly ½ hour to Chit, Chow and Chave!”

Roger was laughing himself silly at Maria’s bad Latino accent. He got out of bed, grabbed his kit, and followed the men to the head. He took care of business, even though he hated the lack of privacy. Maria came back wrapped in a light cotton robe feeling much cleaner than when she left. She opened her robe, gave Roger another hug and a passionate kiss. Roger’s reaction confirmed he wasn’t gay, but he stopped before they missed breakfast, besides she had warned him that they shouldn’t have sex until her STD test came back. She got dressed quickly, and they walked hand in hand to the mess tent. After breakfast, she walked to the Medical tent and handed the orderly a slip. He pulled a file and told her “Good news, bad news, No STD, but you’re pregnant.”

She thanked the orderly, and went out to find Roger. She told him the results, and he held her tightly. She assumed by his reaction that he was OK with her pregnancy, and she could sleep with him that night. Then they had to go to their work details. Roger reported to the grizzled Sergeant, and spent the rest of the day pounding spikes and erecting tents. While it was hard work, they were allowed frequent rest breaks, and all the water they could drink. After work, Roger met Maria in their tent before dinner. He complained how hard he was working and she quipped “That’s why they call it Manuel labor! You white boys have forgotten what it’s like to really work.” She then gave Roger a back rub to make up for it. He kissed her, then looked at his watch – chow would start in 15 minutes so they had to get going. They got up and walked hand in hand to the mess hall, ate dinner, then came back and finished what they started. Maria decided that Roger wasn’t the best lover she ever had, but what he lacked in technique and experience, he made up for with enthusiasm. She thought she could improve on the other 2.

2 weeks later, they received a message to see the Top Sergeant in Security. “Mr. Heinz, sorry it took so long, but we had to make sure you were who you said you were before we got in touch with Ken Heinz. He said that you both were welcome at Nevada Silver Mines. It’s much nicer there, they have houses with running water and air conditioning. There’s a C-130 leaving from SF International this afternoon if you want to relocate there. I’ve got a Blackhawk that can fly you and your fiancé to SFI in time to catch the flight.”

Maria hugged Roger, working in the laundry gave new meaning to the term “sweatshop”. Roger thought that anything was better than where they were, so he agreed. The MP jeep drove them back to their tent to collect their personal belongings, and drove them to the flight line and into a waiting Blackhawk for the flight to SF International.

Chapter 26

Later that day, they arrived in Las Vegas, and caught the next C-130 to Winnemucca. When they landed at New California, Ken was there to greet them. Their meeting was strained but polite. Ken said “Roger, you and I are the only living Heinz family left, and I’m too old to have kids, so you’re it. We need to put whatever happened in the past behind us. I just wanted you to know that I had nothing to do with the demise of your aunt Theresa; the Russians nuked DC, New York and Boston before a Los Angeles sub could get close enough to blow it out of the water. Your aunt and I had our differences, but that doesn’t mean we can’t get along.”

“Ken, we’ll probably never see eye to eye, but I’m grateful you got us out of California. Now that we’re here, what do you propose to do?”

I talked to the Governor, and with the San Joaquin valley inundated by salt water, Nevada and the other states have to take up the slack to produce fruits and vegetables. The governor has given us carte blanche to start a huge farming community as an offshoot of New California. I want you to run it. I know you don’t know anything about farming, but you can hire anyone you need to. Hopefully you speak Spanish, because our best source of laborers and farmers will be displaced Mexican farm laborers and managers.”

At this point Maria made her appearance “Ken, I’d like to introduce you to my fiancé Maria Consuela Lopes.”

“Bienvenidos Sra. López.”

“Muchas Gracias Sr. Heinz.”

“I’m sorry Maria, but that just about exhausts my Spanish”

“That’s OK Mr. Heinz; I speak English better than Spanish anyway!”

They both got a good laugh out of that.

“Roger, I can set you two up with a home right now. The Governor is looking for qualified farmers and ranchers to expand the state’s food production capability. In the mean time, anything you can do like looking up equipment on the internet will be appreciated. I can pay you \$100 thousand per year, plus free use of the house if you want the job.”

“Holy Cow, that’s way more than I could have earned teaching with my degree! Are you sure?”

“All my managers are making \$100 large. Plus we have profit sharing, and the only things you pay for out of your own pocket are your food, clothing, and personal fuel, and we sell all of that at 20% above wholesale cost.”

“How do you do that?”

“For years employers have paid their employees cash, and made them buy basic necessities on the open market, with several middlemen. We eliminate the middleman, and sell at just high enough of a markup to cover salaries and expenses. The silver mine is making between \$50 and \$100 million per year, and since my board of directors is toast, we’re basically running things ourselves, and plowing the profits back into the business, including the New California development. We’ve taken over 30 thousand refugees and started 5 companies manufacturing Alternative Energy equipment that is totally environmentally friendly. They’ve got the same setup over there as we do for the mine. The only problem we had was when we got a bunch of lazy louts that didn’t want to work, so we shipped their sorry butts back to California. We have virtually no crime, no domestic violence to speak of, and everyone is pretty happy with the arrangement.”

Roger’s eyes got as big as saucers. “You know, you’ve managed to build a Utopia here that most of my compatriots only dreamed about, and you did it all with private money, and no coercion.”

“Exactly – Not only that, but any other business owner could do the same. So you want to work for me or look elsewhere?”

“You kidding, I’d be nuts to turn this gig down! Where do I sign up?”

Ken drove them to their new house, and they found a new diesel pickup waiting in their drive. Ken handed Roger an ATM/Debit card with a \$10 thousand balance, and told him it was an advance against his salary and he could buy anything he needed, food, clothing, etc. in the Village shops and charge it against the card. Roger hugged Ken in spite of himself, then Maria hugged him too. Ken smiled, since he was glad that his nephew seemed to like him. Roger noticed the solar panels on the roof when they got there, and Ken explained the entire company ran on a huge AE system with PV panels, wind turbines, and a huge heliostat that made almost 50MW. Roger was impressed. He was always told by his relatives that Ken was raping the land and stealing from his employees. He realized the truth was the exact opposite, and Ken was as environmentally conscious as he was. Ken told him that they were in the process of building a geothermal power plant to supplement the power made with the heliostat, since New California was using as much power as Nevada Silver Mine. Roger was feeling really bad, because for the longest time, he wanted to kill Ken, now he realized that would have been a major mistake.

As they walked through the house, Roger saw the new computer hookup, and the cable modem. Ken told him all the houses were set up that way, and they even had their own ISP so they could legally block all pornographic sites. Roger didn't care one way or the other, but was impressed that they would go to that expense. Ken told him that NSM owned the phone company, and the cable company as well, and that all local calls were free, and long distance was only 3 cents per minute 24/7. There was no cable bill, but 2/3 of the programming was educational in nature, and they had free internet access. Over half of his administrative staff worked from home 3 or 4 days a week, further saving costs, and the mines had huge diesel busses that transported workers from the village to the mine itself. When Ken got to the subject of guns, he was sure Roger would freak, but he didn't know Roger had a change of heart, and realized that guns could protect as well as kill, so he didn't get upset when Ken told him that the company owned a gun store, and most of the families were members of the militia, and they had already repulsed 2 attacks. As a result the USMC was now providing perimeter security. After having spent the last couple of weeks at an Army base, Roger knew that the only thing that kept them safe was better weapons and training than the guys who would try to get in and rob, rape and pillage.

Once Ken was finished with the Grand Tour, he told Roger he had to get back to work, and shook his hand, and said he'd be in touch. Once he left, Roger and Maria took a look around and made a list of stuff they needed, then went shopping. Roger was amazed at how low the prices were, and bought plenty of everything, remembering he had a basement to store stuff. He bought staples and supplies to store, and food that they wanted to eat soon. Next they bought clothing, toiletries, and household supplies. Maria couldn't believe her good fortune. Never in her wildest dreams could she imagine such abundance. Once the pickup couldn't hold any more, they drove home and unloaded it. Roger assembled the shelving he bought to store stuff in their basement, and Maria put stuff in their kitchen and bathrooms for immediate use. When they finished, Maria said she was going to make dinner, and Roger said he was going to check out the internet. Once he fired up the brand-new Pentium 4 computer, and logged on to the internet, he was amazed at the speed of the connection, which was as fast as or faster than his connection at SF State. Remembering that Ken needed prices on Farming equipment, Roger did a Google search, and located several sources of new and used tractors, combines, and other essential farming equipment. He sent Ken an e-mail with the relevant info. Ken replied 2 minutes later "Order it, and give them PO # 153455 from NSM Inc." Roger was stunned, Ken was telling him to spend money sight unseen. He realized Ken really did trust him, and it wasn't just an act. Roger contacted the dealers, got the particulars, and e-mailed Ken, who advised Roger to have them shipped via Rail, and to go ahead and order it. Taking yes for an answer, Roger placed orders for several million dollars worth of farming equipment, and told them to ship via rail. He e-mailed Ken back with the confirming and the ETA. When he finished Maria announced dinner was ready. He walked into the kitchen, the table was set with nice plates and silverware, and she even lit several candles. Dinner was excellent, and Roger knew that Maria was a really good cook, so he'd have to make sure he got some exercise. After dinner, he decided that her bedroom aerobics program would probably be sufficient.

Chapter 27

The next morning, Roger checked his e-mail, and there was a note for him to meet Ken and the rest of the management team at the main office, and it included driving directions. Ken made sure Roger knew the dress was casual, so jeans and a sport shirt would be fine. Half an hour later, he met Ken, Steve, Sam, Brian, and Jim. When all the introductions were made, they sat down around the conference table.

“Guys, it’s worse than I thought. California was the sole source in the US for large crops of several fruits and vegetables. We can buy overseas, but the price goes up. With the devastation of California, the prices on produce are already skyrocketing even with foreign suppliers, because California supplied so much of the demand. That means our farming project will have to take a priority until it is up and running. Roger has already located farming equipment, and it’s being shipped. What I need are ideas to accelerate production.”

“Ken, I’m not a farmer, but I remember acres and acres of greenhouses near San Francisco State. If we can get some greenhouses started right now, we could have a crop in quicker and maybe have 2 or 3 crops this season before the snow flies.”

Steve said “I remember something about using a warm and cool fluorescent bulb in the same fixture to simulate normal daylight. If it works for the plants, and we can keep them warm, we might be able to grow year round.”

“Also, I read something about combining Tilapia aquiculture with hydroponics. The output of the geothermal power plant would be perfect for keeping a greenhouse and a large tank of fish warm year round.”

“Great ideas everyone, let’s jump on this and find out all we can. Roger, money is no object - we’re sitting on \$20 Million in the bank, and the State is paying us quarterly for new silver deposits. This silver standard is becoming a boondoggle for the company.”

“Roger, you can use my computer, no sense driving all the way home.”

“Thanks Steve, I’ll need it for a while.”

Roger spent the rest of the day surfing the Internet and presented his results to Ken that afternoon.

“Great Job Roger, you’re definitely earning your salary today. I’ll get Sam’s approval, and you can order everything first thing tomorrow. Go ahead and go home and get some sleep. I’d appreciate if you could be here at 0900 tomorrow so we can go over this and order everything we need.”

Once Roger left, Ken called the Governor. “Governor Guinn, Ken Heinz at Nevada Silver Mines, Inc.”

“Ken, what can I do for you?”

“Governor, I’ve got a plan to produce a huge quantity of fresh produce and fish, but I’m going to need more land, and a permit to build a geothermal power plant. I’ve already started the permitting process, but it’s taking too long, and you told me that food production is critical, and will soon become a National Emergency.”

“Ken, do whatever you have to, I’ll sign anything I have to so you can start producing food. Why do you need the geothermal power to make food?”

“The food is a byproduct of the geothermal heat. We use the geothermal heat to power an electrical plant, and the excess hot water goes into a greenhouse to keep a huge Tilapia pond at 80 degrees year round, and keep a greenhouse warm during the winter. Our projections indicated that the waste heat generated from 1 10MW geothermal power plant could heat a greenhouse that would encompass a square mile, and heat a pond big enough to generate 10,000 pounds of Tilapia fillets each year. We’ve got sufficient geothermal capacity to produce 30MW of power, 3 square miles of greenhouse and 30,000 pounds of Tilapia fillet each year. All we need is regulatory permission, and title to another 100 square miles of state land.”

“Ken, e-mail me what you need, and I’ll sign it and get it back to you ASAP.”

“Thanks Governor, I’ll get right on it!”

Ken already had the e-mail ready to send, as soon as he hung up he hit the send key, and the e-mail showed up on the Governor’s desk. Half an hour later, a signed authorization was back on Ken’s computer. He called Sam and told him to take care of it.

The next morning, they ordered everything they would need for the geothermal power plant, the greenhouses, Tilapia tanks, and fry. Ken was glad everything was coming by rail, because the quantities they ordered weighed tons each. Their order for fluorescent bulbs and fixtures cleaned out the Salt Lake City Home Depot warehouse. Roger showed up at 0900 on the dot, and they got to work ordering supplies for the greenhouses. Ken called the governor and said he needed 100 laborers and 10 farmers that had experience in large-scale farming like the farms in California. Governor Guinn checked around and somehow 500 people had survived from the San Joaquin Valley who were on the northern end of the valley and fled eastward as fast as they could go into the mountains. Governor Guinn e-mailed Ken and asked if he could take all 500 of them. He talked to Roger, who said that they would be welcome, especially if they all lived on farms. Ken e-mailed Governor Guinn back and said “Send the lot of them – we’ll make room!”

The housing manufacturer was working 24/7 to keep up with demand, and the railroad ran virtually non-stop delivering supplies to the mine property and New California. Brian led a huge convoy of heavy equipment to New California to grade and clear the pad for the geothermal plant, the greenhouses, and all the new housing they were going to need. Ken had the well digger double the number of wells in New California, since they'd need a huge amount of water to irrigate all the fields they would be planting. Ordinarily pumping that much water out of the aquifer would be dangerous, but with Lost Wages out of business possibly forever, there was plenty of water in the aquifer, since the casinos weren't pumping millions of gallons out each year. By now all the casinos were shut down, and the only people left in Las Vegas were homeless vagrants with no place to go, or refugees from California that were still streaming into the state. The military was doing a pretty good job of separating the sheep from the goats, and already built a huge prison camp in the desert. With the demise of DC and NYC, there was no ACLU to whine about the treatment of prisoners. Suddenly the crooks got the message that it was open season or dirtbags, and there was no bag limit. The ones that were caught by the police or military were thrown into prisons that the ACLU would have called dungeons, and the ones that were caught by militias wound up buried in the desert.

The next morning, a C-130 landed at the airstrip at New California, and the first planeload of refugees de-planed to face their new lives. Ken, Roger, and Maria met the plane. The first man off the plane introduced himself as Julio Vega, and the rest of the people on the planes were related to him in some way or another. He said they had all bugged out right ahead of the rising salt water. Since the sea water was infiltrating from the northwest from San Francisco, they headed south to Bakersfield and on to Barstow where they met up with a detachment of National Guard troops who gave them enough food and water and diesel to make it to the Refugee Center just west of Las Vegas. They stayed at the camp about a week when someone came looking for people with farming experience, and they located them and asked if they wanted to relocate to Winnemucca and live in a much nicer house. Of course they said yes! Ken and Roger told Julio what they had in mind, and he made several suggestions. Ken got on the cell phone, and had everything taken care of.

"Julio, they're building your homes as we speak, but I've arranged tents, food, showers, and a recreation room / mess hall for you until they're built in a couple of months."

"Sr. Heinz, we're lucky to escape with our lives, now you offer us all good paying jobs, food, clothing, medicine, and soon new houses with air conditioning, I think I've died and gone to heaven. As soon as the equipment arrives, we'll get started preparing your fields for planting, and we'd be more than happy to take care of the green houses and Tilapia ponds."

The next day, Governor Guinn received an update from FEMA. They expected fatalities from the earthquake and flooding in California to exceed 10 Million. The number stunned him since he knew the population of California before the quake was around 35 Million. The people on the island section of CA were almost totally cut off from the rest of the state, with San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland, and parts of Monterey totally under water or destroyed by the

quake. Sea water flooded in from San Francisco Bay southeast through the San Joaquin basin, which dropped anywhere from 50-200 feet after the quake. From the South, the Gulf of California traveled North through the low-lying areas around Death Valley, into the low Desert South of Las Vegas until Las Vegas was surrounded on 3 sides by water. For all intents and purposes, California ceased to exist as a state, and all the farmland was under at least a foot of seawater. Governor Guinn hoped Ken Heinz could pull a rabbit out of his hat again.

After the introductions were made; Ken, Julio, Roger, and Maria walked over to Ken's truck. "I know you had to leave a lot of stuff behind, but we'll take care of you. I'd like to pay you personally \$30 Thousand a year to be my Farm Foreman. You'd report directly to Roger. I haven't a clue what to pay your relatives, but I want to pay them more than they've made before, since we can afford it. The only things you have to pay for yourselves is your food, clothing, personal fuel, and any personal stuff you buy at our stores. We only charge 20% above our cost, which is at or below wholesale, including gasoline and diesel."

"Sr. Heinz, none of my relatives have made more than \$10 thousand in a year. If you paid them \$10 Thousand, and provided them with a casa, medical care, and all the other stuff you mentioned, they would be very happy."

"Ok Julio, I can do that. Anyone that wants to open a credit union account can do so for free, and as soon as their houses are completed, they'll have free local telephone, cable, and internet access. I've even provided a basic computer terminal. If you want to start classes, we can arrange classes for the kids, and also if anyone wants to learn English, or anything else, we've got a great Adult Education program here."

"Thank you Mr. Heinz. Some of my relatives unfortunately are illiterate, and a class in English would be much appreciated. Also, if we could teach our children in English, we want them to learn English."

"Let me know what you need for school buildings, and I'll get those set up immediately. Feel free to use the recreation room for Adult Classes when you're not using it as a mess hall. I apologize for the primitive conditions, but this happened really fast."

"Don't worry, we're just thanking God we're still alive, and now you want to pay us to work for you, and you're going to feed and house us? I still can't believe it!"

Roger spoke up. "Julio, it's all true. A week earlier, Maria and I were trapped on the island side of California, and barely escaped getting killed, then Ken had us flown here. I really don't know a lot about farming, but I know a lot about people. I'm going to rely on your expertise. If you need anything for the farm, make sure you come to me."

With that the meeting broke up, and Julio turned to get his relatives organized, fed and help them find a place to sleep that night. Maria had organized several Mexican ladies to help cook

for the new arrivals. Julio liked their cooking so well that he asked Ken if they could cook all the time. He asked the women, and offered to pay them an extra \$100 per month to cook a couple of meals per week each for the new arrivals. They would have done it for free, but realized the extra money would make Christmas nicer for their kids, and decided to take the money. It took 3 months to build all the houses, and as the houses were built, the crowds at the mess hall and around the tents grew smaller each week. They still had a packed house for festivals and Sunday dinner when the people who had their own houses decided to eat together as a community and catch up with everyone. Ken had several portable buildings brought in and he started a K-8 bilingual school for any of the kids who weren't already fluent in English. The ones that were either went to a small regular school for kids that had both parents working, or they were home schooled. Roger turned out to be an excellent administrator.

Slowly as the equipment showed up, the Mexicans started preparing the soil for farming, and set up the greenhouses and Tilapia tanks when the construction crews got the geothermal plant started. Steve found 3 10MW steam turbines for sale cheap, and bought all of them. The drilling rig drilled 1 huge hole into the hydrothermal pocket, and the pipefitters installed a huge feed pipe for the very hot water. The water coming out of the ground was hotter than boiling due to the pressure underground. The return pipe was routed through a manifold, and into 1 of 3 hothouses and into a heat exchanger that kept the water in the Tilapia tanks between 80 and 85 degrees year round, and the air temperature at a comfortable 70 degrees year round. During the winter when the sky was cloudy, the florescents came on to provide artificial daylight year-round. Between the heat, humidity, and year-round sunlight, they were able to grow 3-4 crops per year. They decided not to go with the hydroponic system since it was more complicated, required specialized equipment and media, and they had plenty of dirt. They blended liquid fertilizer into the irrigation water, which made up for the poor soil. Some people worked in the greenhouses, and the rest worked the fields. With the proximity of the railroad, they hauled tons of chemical fertilizers to the fields. Roger wanted to farm organically, but when he was explained the facts of life, namely that the soil was so poor that they would only get 1/5 of the yield using organic techniques, and the people of the US were depending on them to replace as much of the lost production as possible, he relented and authorized the use of fertilizer and pesticides, but they did one thing differently, they used the least toxic pesticides, supplemented by a natural predator program. At the end of the year, they had 90 % of the production they would have by using more toxic pesticides, but they had no workers sick from applying the toxic substances. Ken was happy, Roger was happy and the workers were happy. When the Governor was told of the bumper crops, and the fact that they could grow some produce year-round, he was really happy!

Chapter 28

Roger had bought a commercial canning plant, and installed it in New California, since he realized that produce they grew had to be shipped all over the US, and shelf-life was critical. They designed a basic label that said “New California” with a logo, a graphic of the produce, and the name and net weight of the produce. With the demise of the Federal Government and all the agencies, there were no labeling requirements, so Roger knew the simplified label would be sufficient. Once they set aside a sufficient quantity for use in New California and Nevada Silver Mine, he put the word out that cans of fresh produce were available, and the bidding wars started. Ken called Governor Guinn’s office, and told him how much surplus produce they had, and the Governor said they could use all of that in the State of Nevada. Ken told him that there was a bidding war on the internet for canned goods as a result of Roger putting out the word on the Internet. Governor Guinn asked Ken if the State could buy all their production this year to avoid mass starvation in parts of Nevada, and authorized them to put as much land as they could into producing food. The state would give them the land, and pay them for the food. It couldn’t afford to pay the highly inflated prices that the suppliers would pay. Ken made Governor Guinn promise that the state wouldn’t take more than a 20% markup from the prices he sold them to the state for, and they wouldn’t sell to the same distributors Ken could have. Governor Guinn reluctantly agreed, because he had planned to sell half of whatever Ken sold them to private suppliers and make enough money to cover all the money the state had paid in Refugee relief. Ken told the Governor he’d need a written contract on his desk before he’d authorize the sales of excess produce to the state, and he’d better hurry up, because in 48 hours, Ken was going to tell Roger to take the best offer over the internet. That got the governor’s attention, and he said he’d get right on it.

Ken called Roger, and found out how much food they had for sale. The amount of canned produce staggered Ken. It would take over 100 18-wheelers to haul all of it to market. Still, it was barely enough to feed the citizens of Nevada and the refugees that were still wards of the state. Ken asked Roger to meet with him tomorrow and to have some ideas for radically expanding production.

The next morning, Roger was there at 0900, and they were poring over a map of the local area around the mine. Roger called a State Geologist, who told him there weren’t any more geothermal pockets nearby, and the closest one was almost 100 miles away. Ken said that they could put in another Heliostat network, expand the existing heliostat, and add PV panels to the roofs of any buildings. Just the other side of a small range of mountains was another 1000 square miles worth of arable land. They spent the rest of the day running scenarios for power, water, and transportation. The range was only 5,000 ft high, and the existing land was maybe 3,500-4,000 feet high, so building a road over the range to haul produce wouldn’t take much. Ken knew that the land had been used to grow hay and alfalfa for as long as the ranchers could remember, and there was plenty of water available. Roger pointed out a low saddle in the range, and suggested building a 2-lane chip-seal road over the range to transport stuff. Ken suggested

building a railroad line instead, since the grade was pretty gradual. Roger agreed that a Railroad could haul more stuff way more cheaply, and suggested Ken call Bill at Southern Pacific, and get a quote for building a railroad over the pass.

Ken called Bill at SPRR, and asked him how much it would take to build a single-line railroad from New California over the pass. It was only 50 miles of track, but it was 3% grade most of the way.

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it would be cost-prohibitive to build a rail line over those mountains. 3% grade is about the max we like to build, and switchbacks would quadruple your cost – You might be better off with a roadway and tractor-trailers.”

“Ok Roger, back to Plan B – we need to get hold of Granite Construction and check on the price for building a 2-lane chip-seal road over the mountains.” While Roger got hold of Granite Construction, Ken decided to have another conversation with Governor Guinn.

“Governor, it’s Ken again. I talked to the railroad, and it’s way cheaper to build a 2-lane road from New California south over the small range to the south of them to connect it to over 1,000 square miles of arable land we could put into production by next season if we can get moving on the road right now.”

“I can take care of that right now, the Navy base at Fallon has recently been returned to State control, as well as all the active duty personnel on the base. They have a Seabee battalion co-located with them that re-located from California when the earthquakes started. They have enough heavy equipment, and heavy lift choppers to get the job done fast.”

“Ok, if you could put me in touch with the CO of the Seabees, we’ll take it from there. If this goes according to plan, we should have another 100-1000 square miles of farmland ready for planting next season.”

“If you need anything, just let me know, and I’ll take care of it. Thanks Ken!”

“You’re welcome Governor – talk to you later.”

5 minutes later, an e-mail from Governor Guinn appeared on his computer. It authorized the Seabee battalion to do anything necessary to assist NV Silver Mines to build a road connecting New California to some land on the other side of the range. Ken saw the message had been CC’d to the CO of the Seabees, so he knew that he’d get a call or an e-mail later that day. Roger walked in with some interesting news “I talked to Granite Construction. They’re tied up for the next several years with repairing damage to the freeways, but they said they’d sell us all the roadbed and gravel we needed at cost, since the Governor wants this project done ASAP.”

While they were talking, Ken's computer beeped, and an e-mail from Captain Nichols from the Seabee battalion at Fallon came in. He said that they would make the entire battalion available if needed, and they had 10 CH-47 Chinooks available for heavy lift if needed. So far, Interstate 80 was passable, so they could haul everything out on lowboy haulers. Ken replied to send anything they thought they could use, and they could buy materials from the local Granite Construction yard, so they wouldn't have to haul materials. 2 days later, the lowboys started rolling in, and Ken diverted any extra mine equipment to the southern boundary of New California to start road building. Captain Nichols showed up in a Blackhawk and asked Ken and Roger to join him, they needed to do an aerial survey of the route. When they showed Capt. Nichols the route, he suggested several spots where they should blast. Ken said they had tons of ANFO and all the drilling rigs necessary. Captain Nichols told them to call him Steve, and said his Civil Engineer would be out the next day to map the blasts so they could cut a path through the mountains, and drop the debris in such a way that they could use it for roadbed. Ken thought that was a good idea. He told Steve that they were starting on the rough grading just south of the existing boundary of New California. He didn't see any problem with that, especially when Ken said the graders and dozers were GPS equipped.

In 2 days, they had the 20 miles to the mountains rough graded, and the Granite Construction trucks, and the Haulpacks Ken could spare, were dumping roadbed, and huge rollers were compacting it into the dirt. Once the second layer of roadbed was compacted in, they took Granite's chip sealer and started chip sealing the road. The helicopters flew drilling rigs into the mountains, and they started drilling holes to blast a section of the mountain. Once they finished, they loaded the holes with ANFO, and used a 1/4 stick of dynamite as a booster. Ken had a bunch of primacord lying around, and since they couldn't use it at the mine, they used the older non-electric detonation method. The master blaster stuck a 209 primer into the clapper, and after making sure everything was cleared out, blew a horn 3 times, waited a minute, repeated the process, and slapped the clapper against the heel of his boot, which ignited a short fuse, then the primacord which detonated the dynamite in the holes, which set off the ANFO, and blew the rocks to pieces. Just as his engineer figured, the debris settled right where they wanted it to, forming a nice ramp up to the much lower saddle. As soon as the blasters said the coast was clear, the heavy equipment got up there and pushed some dirt and boulders around, and quickly graded the ramp up to the pass. The roller compacted it, and after a single pass of roadbed, they were ready to chip-seal. While they chip-sealed, the heavy equipment moved to the other side of the mountain, and kept working ahead of the people chip-sealing. A month later, they had all 50 miles of roadway ready for heavy traffic. Captain Nichols met with Ken and Roger, who were amazed they got the road finished so fast.

"I found out we have about 50 surplus Quonset huts on the base taking up room. They'd make great storage for farm equipment and temporary housing for the workers. If you want, we can deliver and help set them up for you."

Ken agreed in a heartbeat. Steve said they would be delivered tomorrow, and if they had any spare workers with construction experience, they'd appreciate it since it would make the work

go faster. Ken called Brian and Roger, and suggested that anyone not working on essential projects that had any construction experience could be useful building Quonset huts in the next valley. The next day, 50 men and women showed up ready for work, and by the time they were bussed over to the site, the Quonset huts were being delivered. The Seabees sorted the workers by trade, and they joined the Seabee crews. It took a little over a week of 10-hour days to assemble all the Quonset huts. Ken called the Governor, and said they had enough room for another 500 refugees if they could find anyone else with farming experience. Julio motioned to Ken, who asked the Governor to hold for a minute.

“I know personally of at least another 500 refugees in Las Vegas who have done farm labor before, and would love to work here. If you could get me to Las Vegas, I could locate them for the Governor, and get them here much quicker.”

“Governor, my farm foreman Julio says he knows of another 500 refugees there that would love to work here. Is there any way we can get him there. OK, I’ll tell him to be ready in an hour. Thanks!”

“The Governor said there would be another C-130 landing here in an hour, they’re going back to Las Vegas, and hopefully they’re still there. They’ll have to grab their stuff and go, because the C-130 needs to lift off within an hour. It will take several trips to transport everyone, so maybe the ones with families should go last, since it will take them longer to pack.”

“Si el Jefe, it’s an excellent idea.”

“Ok Amigo, get going – you need to be on that flight, and it leaves in an hour.”

Later that evening, the C-130 started making round trips full of Mexican Refugees. Since the tents were still available, and they didn’t have running water in the Quonset huts yet, they put them up in the tent city, and re-opened the “cantina” as they called it. The latest refugees were several families from the southern half of the San Joaquin valley, and knew some of the members of the other group. The older group of refugees helped the new ones get settled, and then they started getting the new area ready for planting the next season. Instead of trucking the houses over the pass, Ken decided to expand New California, and the housing factory kept right on building houses. They left the equipment at the new farm, and rode in busses back and forth each day. Roger was so busy that he wished he had a clone, and delegated as much to Julio as he could. The railroad was delivering diesel as fast as they could, and Ken crunched the numbers, and ran a High-tension line from New California over the hill instead of building another generator 50 miles away. Since they were living in New California, they didn’t need as much power at the farm site, just enough for the support activities at the farm.

The Well Driller drilled a couple of extra wells, and converted stock tanks that were feeding off windmills to holding tanks for irrigation. By the end of the year, they had almost another 80 square miles under cultivation. When Ken gave the Governor the new production estimates, he was practically dancing for joy. Somehow, between what Ken’s group was producing, and

other farms in the state, they had almost replaced 80% of the output of the state of California, minus some exotic produce. It took decades to raise an Avocado grove to maturity, so any guacamole would have to be made with imported avocados. Rice took a hit as well, since it didn't grow too well in the brackish water that now infiltrated California's prime rice growing areas. Governor Guinn was glad that the Midwest wheat fields were still producing bumper crops, and the Idaho potato farms were running at max production. If Ken's numbers were correct, they could export 1/3-1/2 of Ken's crop to out-of-state buyers for the first time since the destruction of DC.

Chapter 29

Things were going smoothly at New California, until one day a Union Organizer from the AFL/CIO showed up at New California. Ken had forgotten to block access to New California like he had at The Mine. He started causing dissension until Roger got wind of it, and called a mass meeting in the common room.

“Everyone sit down and get as comfortable as you can – this Gentleman from the AFL-CIO wants to start a Union Shop here at New California. Why? What are they going to offer you – more FREE medical care? More pay, better working conditions? Look around you. We’re lucky to be here, we could still be in the middle of the Las Vegas Desert living on MRE’s and sleeping in tents. For decades, socially aware people have dreamed about a system like we have; now this Union Bozo wants to mess it up! Why don’t we just show him the gate, and tell them not to come back!

From the back of the room, Roger heard a bunch of clapping, and the chant started “No Union, No Union, No Union!” until it grew so loud that the Union Rep couldn’t be heard, and left in frustration. On his way out, he buttonholed Roger “This isn’t over by a long shot!”

“If I were you, I’d be careful who you threaten, there’s a lot of desert out there, and we’ve heard reports of travelers just disappearing, and reports of bandits.”

The union rep got Roger’s clear meaning, turned white as a ghost, and ran out the gate as fast as he could. What he wasn’t counting on was getting arrested by a Nevada Silver Mine security officer for Trespassing, Disturbing the Peace, and Littering. He was transported to the Humboldt County Sheriff’s Jail, and held without bail.

Ken found out about the incident, and added a blockade to prevent access to any part of NSM Inc. property without passing through a guarded gate. A large group of workers from New California volunteered to help build a barbed wire fence around the property, and post the entire property with No Trespassing signs. Ken wanted to add “Violators will be shot” but Sam vetoed that idea. Ken contacted Governor Guinn’s office, who decided that since Lost Wages was destroyed for good, he’d sign an Executive order banning Labor Unions for the duration of the Emergency in the State of Nevada, and had the national officers of the Labor Unions served notice that they would be arrested and imprisoned if they attempted any union activities within the State of Nevada. The president of the AFL/CIO was negotiating for the release of his rep, when the Sheriff heard about the new EO and transferred the rep to state custody. Governor Guinn made an example of the hapless union rep, and threw him in prison.

Later that day, Governor Guinn called, and asked Ken if he could take some more refugees. “Governor, before I agree to take them, we need to figure out what they can do. I’ve got over

1,000 square miles of land under cultivation, I've got 10 separate factories producing solar panels, inverters, and wind turbines. Unless they want to work on a farm, I'm out of ideas."

"Ken, I'm e-mailing you a list of their qualifications. They all want to work, and won't give you any trouble because we told them you shipped the last bunch of whiners back to LAX. By the way, nice touch – I wish I could do something like that with about 10% of the population of Nevada that refuses to work."

"Governor, simple solution. The Federal Government has ceased to exist for all intents and purposes, so the State is paying Welfare benefits, instead of the feds. Just change the qualification requirements for State aid to match the requirements for the federal SSDI program. If they've got kids, put them in day care. If they just don't want to work, deport them to California!"

"Ken, remind me to never get you mad at me! I like it, and since this is a declared National Emergency, I don't have to get the Legislature's permission to implement it! Thanks!"

Ken got the Governor's e-mail, and forwarded it to Steve, Jim, Roger, Brian, and Sam. With the mine in full production, they decided that they could hire more miners and expand to meet the demand for silver, expand the power plants to generate more power, and open some more factories. The only component of a PV system they weren't manufacturing was the batteries. Ken called the Governor's office, and they checked, and there were no West Coast battery suppliers in business anymore, except for 1 or 2 in Washington State. Ken told his managers to locate the suppliers for the parts needed to manufacture deep cycle batteries for their systems. 2 days later, they had a list of manufacturers including plastics, plates, sulfuric acid for the electrolyte. Jim highly suggested putting the plant down-wind of any future development since most of the components produced obnoxious smells, and the sulfuric acid was hazardous. Ken told them he wanted to automate the dangerous parts of the process including pouring the lead plates, molding the cases, and mixing the electrolyte solution. Interstate Batteries contacted them, and Ken negotiated a contract with them to manufacture Interstate Batteries, including their Optima AGM line, which Ken was really interested in using as a deep-cycle storage battery due to their great safety record, and very low maintenance. With the destruction of the federal government, he didn't have any regulatory hassles with the EPA like they usually did opening a battery manufacturing plant. Roger talked to Ken about it, and realized that if they couldn't get batteries, all their Environmentally Friendly technology would come to a screeching halt. They didn't have big battery banks, but they installed a small bank in every house since the inverters and solar panels couldn't run properly without one. With that out of the way, Interstate helped them set up a battery manufacturing plant, and soon they were cranking out Optima AGM-type batteries, both starting and deep cycle for use in NSM Inc. and throughout Nevada, Idaho, and what was left of California and Arizona.

Ken wound up taking 2/3 of the remaining refugees, and they were glad to get out of the Lost Wages Tent City, as they were calling it. There were no malcontents in the group, since they

were given the word that Ken had the authority to give them a 1-way ticket back to California so they quickly and willingly accepted whatever work they were assigned to. Some of the new refugees were from Silicon Valley, and their presence gave Ken some ideas for future expansion into other areas.

Ken called the Governor and told him that they had some first-rate technicians and programmers, and asked him if the State needed to update their equipment or programs. Several programmers had already gone through the mine's software, and optimized the code that controlled the processing plants, the power generators, the manufacturing plants, and were looking for something else to do. With the price of silver and gold steadily rising, Nevada was now one of the wealthiest states in the Federation of United States, as they were calling themselves. The States had finally discovered the 10th Amendment, and decided to implement it. They had turned the previous government upside down, and the States controlled everything in their borders, and the military defended them. A small Congress made up of 1 representative from each of the remaining states (The Eastern Seaboard was written off as uninhabitable for the near future) met in Philadelphia to coordinate trade, and settle disputes. People talked about being Nevadans or Texans instead of Americans any more. The Governor's office had the authority to do almost anything necessary to keep things running. The Nevada Legislature was a part-time legislature anyway, and Governor Guinn was doing a good job running things, so no one objected.

The most Liberal members of the Legislature died in the nuclear attack of DC, since they wanted to be in DC for the Inauguration. Governor Guinn's private thoughts ranged from "Good riddance" to "Why didn't they take the rest of the Liberals with them?" With the casinos shut down, Las Vegas quickly became a ghost town, then dried up and blew away. The only structures remaining 20 years later were maintained by the military. McCarran International was now a Military airfield and the state reverted to its conservative roots. Reno was facing bankruptcy and finally saw the light when Governor Guinn cut off the tap of Social Welfare money, and told the lazy bums to find work, or they'd put them to work. Suddenly millions of refugees from the bay area and Sacramento came to the rude awakening that Reno wasn't the Socialist Worker's paradise they hoped it would be. Some tried to move back to California, and the rest got with the program when they found out that Governor Swartzenegger had copied Nevada's austerity programs. With half the state destroyed or under water, they didn't have the money anyway. All over California, refugees were being conscripted to help rebuild infrastructure. Since most of the state was destroyed, the State of California decided on a simpler transportation system utilizing light rail to transport commercial goods to distribution centers, and diesel tractor-trailers to distribute the goods to local markets. Interstate 80 was rebuilt to support interstate commerce, but I-5 was destroyed, and the cost of rebuilding was astronomical. Instead the state decided to build a twin-track light rail system, and a parallel 4-lane divided highway utilizing the old I-5 right-a-way. Cities and counties were responsible for building their own roads and repairing their own infrastructure. Governor Swartzenegger asked Governor Guinn if he had any experienced construction crews that would be interested in working for the State of California. Governor Guinn replied that he might have several

companies, but they demanded payment in Gold and Silver at current market prices. Governor Swartzenegger said that they had plenty of precious metals in storage. He found out that Governor Reagan had stored an emergency supply of precious metals during his term in office since he was afraid that the Soviets might attack and destroy the Federal Government, making FRN's worthless. He set aside a bank vault full of gold and silver totaling \$10 Million in 1960's dollars. It was now worth over 100 times that amount. Arnold wasn't spreading the word too far, but wanted the Governor to know that the State of California was still solvent. Governor Guinn asked Arnold to e-mail him a list of projects they needed help on, and he'd ask several NV-based companies to submit bids. Arnold said he'd send it in a couple of minutes, then said "goodbye" and hung up.

With the massive rebuilding projects in California, companies like Concrete Construction could offer salaries double or triple what they were paying before, and several employees of the mine decided to jump ship. Ken didn't stop them, but advised them to consider that if they were working for Concrete Construction, they'd have to pay their own housing expenses, and the costs of everything had doubled or tripled, so they wouldn't be ahead of the game. Still over 30 workers left, so Ken moved people around to cover them. Several of the new arrivals decided to try their hands at mining, and Ken started them in an apprenticeship program, and soon had as many qualified Heavy Equipment Operators as before. They were amazed at how much Ken was paying them when they completed their apprenticeships. Often it was double or triple what they made working construction labor jobs in California. Ken didn't bother bidding on any California projects; he was busy enough in Nevada.

Governor Guinn called Ken, and asked if the Silicon Valley guys would be interested in a 1-year contract to help rebuild California's computer system. Ken said he'd have to ask them. They were interested, but needed more information. Ken and Governor Guinn talked, and the State of California was accepting bids for contracts to fix and re-connect their computer network, and to streamline their computer system. This was a labor-only contract, so Ken asked the programmers, who suggested Ken bid on the contract and keep their dependents in Nevada while they worked on the contract. Ken was leery about the whole thing until Governor Swartzenegger called and asked him to bid on the contract. There were very few surviving top-notch programmers on the west coast, and Ken's group had the required skills. He told Ken he'd set them up in a nice hotel that all the State workers who didn't have a house were living in, and be responsible for their safety and security. The hotel was across the street from the State's computer center, and the project would take 6 months to a year to finish, and he'd pay Ken \$1 million in gold per month for the services of his 10 programmers. Ken said he'd have to get back to him, and called the programmers into his office.

"Gentlemen, Governor Swartzenegger has asked for our help. He's willing to pay me \$1 Million in Gold per month for the services of you 10 programmers. I suggest an 80/20 split of the contract fee, with you keeping 80%, and maintaining your existing salary while your families remain here where it's safe. Governor Swartzenegger had guaranteed your safety and security, but once you're off the compound, I can't guarantee anything, so you have to agree

among yourselves whether or not you want to accept. He needs all 10 of you, so it has to be unanimous. I'll give you the rest of the day to decide among yourselves, then I'll need to get back to the Governor."

"Ken, no need to wait. We've already talked it over, and talked to our wives. Your 80/20 split is more than generous, especially since you're still paying our regular salaries and taking care of our families. We've already decided to do it. We're programmers, and would rather work on computer systems than pick lettuce. Go ahead and tell the Governorator we'll do it!"

"Governator, I like that one! OK, I'll call Governor Swartzenegger and give him the good news. Thanks guys."

The next day they flew to Sacramento in a C-130 that had dropped off supplies earlier. Governor Swartzenegger met them personally, and told them their project had top priority. The entire state-wide computer systems were down, and they needed to get them back up as fast as possible. If they needed to travel to remote destinations, he'd detail a helicopter and a protective detail to them. If they brought their personal sidearms, they could carry them 24/7. That got their attention – evidently things were going as smoothly in California as they had hoped. They dove into the challenge, and either fixed or bypassed damaged equipment, connected the state network again, and wrote some new code to optimize the data transfers. They had several close calls when they were sent to Los Angeles County and inside the City of Los Angeles to fix things since the LAPD didn't have 100% control of the city. They were glad they were flying in a Blackhawk with a pair of armed Kiowa Warriors bird-dogging them when they saw the devastation on the ground. They decided to get the job done as quickly as possible and get back to Nevada where it was safe, and worked 12 hour days for 6 months. Governor Swartzenegger talked with the head programmer when it was done, and gave them a \$5 million dollar bonus for finishing early, since his Controller said it would take a year to fix the computer system. He shook the Governor's hand, and decided to take the money and run. The Governor's personal Gulfstream jet flew them back to Winnemucca, and they were driven home from the Winnemucca civil airfield by the Sheriff and a couple of deputies since they were carrying \$11 million in gold bullion with them. When they made it back to Ken's office, Ken refused to take his share until the head programmer insisted, saying Ken had costs of taking care of their families for 6 months to consider. Ken thought \$2.2 Million in gold was an awful lot of gold, and he was right. Gold was selling at \$5,000.00 per ounce, so that amounted to 440 ounces of gold. He called Jim and had him put it in the company safe. The programmers each received \$880,000.00 worth of gold for 6 months worth of work, or 176 ounces of gold. Jack had the Credit Union install Safe Deposit boxes when he had it built, so each of the programmers opened a Safe Deposit box, and deposited the gold. When Ken heard the horror stories of conditions in California, he decided not to bid on any other contracts, it wasn't worth losing someone, even for \$11 Million in gold. He'd find something they could do in Nevada.

Chapter 30

Several months later, Maria and Roger's son Jose Heinz was born, and Roger and Ken were celebrating with Sparkling Cider and cigars.

"Ken, I'm really glad I didn't shoot you!"

Ken gave Roger a look that basically said "WTF" so Roger explained.

"Back when all this started, and I was still in California, my only reason for living was to kill you. I blamed you for everything that had happened, and I started plotting how to get to Winnemucca and shoot you. When DC was nuked, my entire world collapsed, and I think my logical reasoning mind went with it. I now realize that all the stuff my Professors were telling me were total lies. I just wanted to say I'm sorry!"

"What for Roger, you didn't hurt anyone."

"Actually I did, but luckily I didn't kill anyone, just burnt their house down, only to discover they'd moved the day before."

"I'm sure their insurance paid for it. Anyway, I hope you understand that the lies you were told were even worse than just lying. I think that Teresa and her fellow travelers actually did more harm than good with their social programs."

Now it was Roger's turn to give Ken a "WTF" look.

"Roger, think about it, welfare teaches people dependency. The Liberal Left wanted people dependant on a Big Federal Government, so they could keep their jobs and power. Some of them really wanted to help the poor, but the people in power wanted to keep a large majority of the people dependent on their monthly Welfare check, and voting for the people who kept the checks coming. If you noticed, there are maybe 1 tenth the people per capita now receiving some form of aid as before, yet no one's starving. That's because the ones who physically could work were forced to get off their lazy butts and work for a living. It's not that there weren't enough jobs to go around, it's just that welfare was more comfortable than moving to California and picking vegetables. Maria and other Mexican Migrants worked their way up from picking vegetables to running businesses, and even public office. The only difference between them and the welfare moms was they had a work ethic and wanted their children to have a better life than they did. Drug addiction and Welfare takes all initiative out of people, and turn them into wards of the State. Its funny how high drug addiction, including Alcoholism go hand in hand with high numbers of welfare recipients. The Liberal Left blamed Welfare on drug addiction, when in fact the drug addiction was a result of the hopelessness of being dependent on the State for your daily survival. The way to break the chain of poverty isn't to

throw more money into Welfare, it's to take money out, and find the recipients real jobs, like I did. Over 1/3 of my workforce is recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. People like that in a big city would be prime candidates for one of your aunt's misguided Social Programs. They didn't need a hand-out, they needed a hand up, and if that didn't work, they needed a swift kick in the ass!"

"Talk about Tough Love, but you're right, it works!"

"Well now that we've had a chance to fix things, what do you want to do with the rest of your life?"

"I'm not sure Ken. Maria and I would like to raise a family, and I guess we'll see how things turn out from there."

"Roger, you know that we're the only surviving Heinz's. When I die, all this is yours. I'm placing a tremendous responsibility on you, to take care of all these people, and keep the mine running. If we ever stop mining silver here, hopefully by then you'd be so diversified that you would have a permanent town here, and the people will stay and do other things besides mine."

"Ken, we're already diversified enough to stop mining and stay in the black, so why are we still mining?"

"First of all the State needs the Silver, it's the only legitimate coin of the Realm, except for Gold, and it's too valuable to use for coins or money. Second of all, the huge income from the silver mine allows me to invest money in new enterprises like that huge farm on the other side of the mountains. It cost almost \$10 Million to start it up, and I did it without a penny of State money. All the manufacturing plants you see were set up the same way."

"Wow, you must have invested almost \$100 million dollars building all that?"

"Easily, but it was never about the money. I'm just like you, I wanted to help as many people as possible, and make something out of my life. I've been a drunken bum for years, and God gave me a chance to change things. I thank him on a daily basis, and I make sure I constantly review my 12-step program and attend AA meetings religiously."

"Are you a Christian?"

"I'm not sure, I definitely believe in God, and I read the Bible, but I've never been to a church per se. I've seen miracles, and I'm living proof of the redeeming power of God."

"Maybe I should start reading the Bible more?"

“Wouldn’t hurt, especially now that you have a son to raise. Maria gave me the Reader’s Digest version of her story. I just wanted to say that I’m really proud of you for raising Jose instead of having Maria get an Abortion.”

“She’s Catholic, and wouldn’t consider it. Besides, what happened to her wasn’t Jose’s fault, and he’s a cute little baby. You want to go in and see your God-son?”

“What?”

“I was going to ask you to be his Grandpa, but I think it would be better for you to be a Godfather.”

“Ok, but don’t expect me to talk like Marlon Brando!”

Roger groaned at the bad pun, and they went inside. Maria sat there feeding Jose, and her exposed breast didn’t bother either man, since the scene of a mother feeding her baby was the most natural sight in the world, and the proper use of the breast. It wasn’t like she was sitting their topless either. Roger bent down and kissed Maria, and as soon as Jose was done nursing, Maria buttoned her top and handed Jose to Roger. He held his son carefully and looked into his eyes right as his son smiled in his face. Roger beamed, realizing this was what life was all about, then he handed Jose to Ken, who gently rocked the infant while he held him in his arms, then he returned him to Maria. Jose was ready to nurse again, so she unbuttoned her blouse and gave him the other breast. They sat there and talked the rest of the afternoon. As soon as Jose was done feeding, Maria buttoned up again casually and held Jose so he could burp up any gas he got, then put him to bed when he fell asleep.

“Maria, I told Roger that I want him to take over when I die, and run this whole place. I’m not going to have any kids, so it’s up to you two to keep the Heinz line alive.”

“Ken, don’t worry, we’re going to have at least 4 kids, the future is in good hands.”

“With you and Roger as their parents, I’m sure the future is in good hands.”

The End