

# The House that Chris Built



by David Holladay  
author of  
The Slave Formerly Known  
as Jane Foreman

## **The House that Chris Built**

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This is a first person book written by Chris Ritter in 2073, based on his recollections and his mother's diary. The story that Chris tells is part of the future history found in the book *The Slave Formerly Known as Jane Foreman*. Towards the end of this book, Chris and his family meet with Jane and her associates. The storylines of the two books eventually come together.

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# Introduction

This is a first-person book written by Chris Ritter in 2073, based on his recollections and his mother's diary.

The story that Chris tells is part of the future history found in the book *The Slave Formerly Known as Jane Foreman*. Towards the end of this book, Chris and his family meet with Jane and her associates. The storylines of the two books eventually come together.

Readers will notice several themes and major book elements. There is the epic loss that Chris experiences at the end of his college education that forces him and his wife to rethink completely what they plan to do with their lives. Chris is separated from his immediate family and must focus entirely on himself and his wife. As they grapple with this, they must confront the impossible challenge of mixing children with work careers, as well as the difficulty of building up savings (to open their own business someday) in a society burdened with heavy taxation. The route they choose is not available in our society (thank goodness)!

Their enterprise and their unique family configuration bring them to the attention of Jane Foreman's company. Readers of the Jane Foreman book know to expect a lot of wry humor, loaded with plot twists. Please read it before you read this one. The humor is meant to poke fun at our present society, and the society to come in the wake of the collapse of our epic financial bubble.

A key theme of both books is that after the collapse, credit card companies sell their customers with large debts to balance their books. I always laugh when I surf the Internet and see clickbait articles entitled, *Credit Card Customers with Large Balances are in for a Big Surprise!* In the event that I am right about the future, I had better make myself scarce. No one wants to hear some nutball saying, "I told you so."

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# Chapter 1: My Youth

## My Beginnings

My name is Chris Ritter. I was born on Monday, July 11, 2011, in Portland, Oregon. America was intact then, and the ill-fated Trump was not yet President. I am the first child; my sister Jennie was born three years later on September 15, 2014. My parents, Gary Ritter and Jane Lin, had only the two of us. My father is your classic white American of German heritage; my mother is ethnically Chinese. I do not think either family approved of the relationship all that much, but having kids brought everyone together. So at very early ages, my sister and I played the role of glue to a divided extended family.

During the years of my early childhood, my mother kept a very good diary. I can report what my first fifty words were, and all sorts of milestones. The temptation to rely on my mother's diary is overwhelming. Instead, I am going to start with my first memory that I retained as an adult. I can date this memory since my sister was about two weeks old at the time. All at once someone was banging on the door. I thought it had to be someone who wanted to hurt my mother. I tried to get her not to open the door. But she eagerly opened the door and brought in a friend from college who was sobbing her heart out. I think her boyfriend or husband must have left her. All I remember is the shocking transition from what I thought was a threat to hearing my mother's concern and affection, all while she was holding an infant. I suppose I also thought I was never going to get my mother's affection again.

My mother's diary described in vivid detail the difficulty she had in getting quality daycare or any daycare at all. My parents ran their own business. It was essential for me to be placed outside the home. The diary made it clear that I never lasted very long at any daycare. I was always exploring everything and every place that I could find. I had difficulty listening to anyone since I never stayed in any one place very long. As I read the diary, it was clear that daycare centers do not like it when kids climb things that they are not supposed to climb, or things they cannot imagine can be climbed.

My parents were at their wit's end when I was about three years old. My parents made a rather bold arrangement. They had a client company that was owned by this sweet couple. Their name was Fisher. Anyway, they had two small kids cared for by a woman named Candy. They let Candy take care of me in exchange for a substantial discount on my parents' billings.

I spent my days with Candy and the two Fisher children. Candy was a master of psychology. If she found me climbing inside, she would say, "Wow, you are a good climber. Let's do this outside where the best climbing is." She would take me to a tree that I could climb a little bit and ask me to climb it. When I could go no further, she would say, "Let's name this tree 'October.' I know by October, you will be big and strong enough to climb 'October' much further. Here is another tree that you can climb today." She managed to keep me from climbing the furniture and the walls inside, while I was dreaming of that day in October when I could climb the big tree. Candy was very clever; she had me coming and going to her tune. I think at one time she had a list of four trees for me to climb when the right day came. She kept me practicing. By the time I

was seven, I could climb a tree up about 25 feet without any branches, just by holding on by my knees and my hands.

She had this theory that when a small child jumps from a platform to the ground, it gives a signal to the bones and muscles to grow bigger and stronger. She had me climbing and jumping at playgrounds for hours. According to my mother's diary, Candy tried to explain to other parents how good it was to have kids jump, roll, and fall down. Apparently, they all shook their heads and took their kids away from "the crazy lady."

Another theory she had was that thinking in humans is just an inner brain dialogue with words. To her, vocabulary was everything. Candy decided that pointing at things interfered with words. She would always say things like, "The napkin on the green plate on your left is for you, Chris." If I pointed at something, she would say, "I know what you want. Now pretend that I do not and that I cannot see. Tell me what you want." One day when I was four, she put on a blindfold and asked me to tell her about everything in the room, so that she could know what it was and where it was. Another day, she took us kids to an art museum and had us tell her what we saw in each object. She did not care about art. Her thing was not having kids "appreciate art."; she just wanted us to extend our vocabulary. She drew simple pictures and maps so that we could find little treasures she hid for us. I still have a tiny teddy bear that I spent an hour searching for in the Fisher's huge backyard.

Going to kindergarten was very sad since I was leaving the very best teacher that I ever had. After I got married, I tracked Candy down. She runs a hair cutting salon. I went there with my wife a few times. The first time I sat in the chair, I said, "I am closing my eyes. Please tell me about yourself and your kids." She just got real quiet and said, "Oh, you remember all that. My goodness, that was so many years ago, and you were so young." Of course, I did not say that I used my mother's diary to facilitate my memories.

## **I Show an Early Interest in Schooling**

A week before I started kindergarten, Candy had me practicing for this big event. She had me sit on a small bath mat in the living room. She had me address her as "Mrs. Taylor." I soon learned that was the name of my real kindergarten teacher. By the time I started at "real school," I was well trained to behave myself. But it was still a shock to share a teacher's attention with so many fellow students. My verbal ability was several grade levels ahead of my peers. My first few years of schooling were a bit frustrating since I did not fit in very well.

My early education did not show great promise. I did not get good grades in my early years. I do remember in second grade watching a student at the blackboard adding \$.69 and \$.44 and getting \$1.013. The teacher asked, "What is wrong here?" I raised my hand and eagerly said, "If this answer is true, it implies that there are a thousand cents to the dollar." The teacher told me, "Be quiet; you are confusing the class." She did not acknowledge that I had grasped the basic idea of the decimal point.

That same year, I remember hearing a discussion about philosophy. I had no idea what philosophy was. I ran to my mother and asked her what it was. Without even the slightest pause,

she explained philosophy to a young child. She said, "Philosophy asks very deep questions that are hard to answer. One question is 'what is beauty?' It is easy to say one particular object or person is beautiful or not. That is an easy question. The hard question is to figure out what beauty is without looking at any object or all. You could say 'Beauty is pleasing to the eye.' Does this mean a blind person cannot appreciate beauty? That sounds unreasonable. Here is a second question: 'what is the universe?' Is it infinite or not? Even after years of work, it is hard to imagine a single thing containing everything that is possible. And if it goes on forever, how can we ever understand what this means, even though it is so easy to say. A third question: 'what is the truth?' Let's say you and your sister were to meet in 25 years. The question of how you got along together comes up. You say, 'I was always good to you, Jennie.' Jennie says, 'You were always mean to me, Chris.' At any moment you are together, you are both experiencing it together. How could your views of 'the truth' be so different? By the way, I hope you hug and agree that you have had a great childhood together. I said that just to illustrate to you that people might differ on basic issues of the circumstances of their life. I think that will do for now."

My mouth was wide open with wonder at how complicated the simplest things in the world were. For years, I thought about all those difficult questions. As a child, I had great respect for philosophers. As an adult, I have a different take on this interesting moment. All I could think of was how smart my mother was to be able to say that all without any preparation at all. I understood every word, and I have thought about this exchange many times in my life.

I also remember asking my father what trigonometry meant when I was in middle school. He patiently explained about the ratios of the sides of a right triangle. I remember being confused about why so many words were needed to describe these relationships: sine, cosine, tangent, etc. The basic definitions were easy to understand. I did not grasp at the time that the actual math keeps students busy for months and years.

By the time I was in high school, my parents had given me some of their best introductory college textbooks in math and physics. I learned that I could understand short parts by reading and re-reading. Since I did not have the proper math background yet, this was pretty exhausting. I am not sure if this was a good idea or a bad idea, but I was determined to unlock all of this material.

I had several friends in high school who were good at math and science. We went around as a group of six. There was one girl in our group. We all agreed that we would date outside of our group to avoid any internal tensions. I don't think we were into dating all that much. We called ourselves the "NS." We never revealed to anyone that this meant *Nerd Salad*. My love for math and science came equally from my family, my Nerd Salad, and my mastery of academic subjects.

## **I am my Parents' Son**

The reality was that my parents' business dominated my childhood. They ran a computer services company. The company took up so much of their time and energy. I did spend a lot of time in a variety of daycare centers. Our family did not go on that many vacations, but the vacations that we did go on were wonderful. I especially liked the long car trips we had together.

As kids, we did not feel rich. But our parents effortlessly had enough food for us, and they were very generous in allowing our friends to eat over quite a bit. They knew how hard it was for many to feed a family, and never turned anyone away. When I was ten years old, the business significantly picked up. They were the first to have software to support LSBO's (Large Scale Buying Organizations), which were entities that allowed people to avoid paying the markup to either physical stores or Amazon.

Yes, there was a point when it was clear that my parents had a great business. But I did not thrill about any perks, such as a household staff that helped our busy family. I was fascinated by the details of the business. I picked up the idea that when I was old enough, I could join the company. I was aware that when my parents retired, they would prefer to turn the company over to a family member, rather than sell it, if only because of the tax consequences. I think one of my aunts on my father's side set me on my life course. She explained what I was going to do, and why I was going to do it. I accepted the mission without any hesitation. I think I drove my parents crazy since I was always asking what sort of education I needed to help join the firm. I always got the same answer, "Chris, do well in Middle School and High School, go to college and major in Computer Science. If there is anything we need you to learn, we will tell you a year or two before you graduate. Right now, just be a good student, and do not worry about your education."

## My Sister Jennie

My father's siblings lived relatively close to us. So we tended to have them come to our house on Thanksgiving. These were German themed events that minimized my mother's role in things. My uncles would point out that *Ritter* means knight. They told heroic tales of Teutonic knights defeating their enemies with their strength and bravery. It was a bit too Nazi for my tastes. But Jennie soaked it all in.

In 2025, my mother's two siblings made the long trip to Portland. It was nice to see my Chinese uncle and aunt. I think they wanted to scout out the area since so much of the nation was continuing to fall apart. Hydropower from the dams in the Northwest kept this area much more functional than other parts of what was now known as FUSA (Former United States of America).

My uncle James asked Jennie and me, "What do you want to do when you are out of school?" Jennie paused for a long time, but then said: "I want to be a teacher." James nodded and said, "That's great. I am sure you will be a very good one." He turned to me, and I said, "I want to study computer programming in college and join my parents' business." James looked surprised. He said, "Some major fortunes come from the second generation of a family business. I do believe you will become a titan of software someday, just like Bill Gates." Jennie had a shocked look on her face. She started acting out and yelling at me that I was, "Stealing everything from her." I am certain that she thought that I was making her goals look so marginal. I was a bit upset that my uncle had exaggerated my potential. I would do anything I could to go back in time to serve him some more mashed potatoes, to avoid having him ever ask that question.

I was surprised many times that my sister did not share my enthusiasm for academics. She seemed to think that her future was already secure. She said, "Mom and dad have worked very



hard, so we do not need to. We are rich. We will always have what we want. Why should I work hard?” My parents were also concerned. It did not bother them that Jennie was not interested in working for the family business. What concerned them was that despite being fairly bright, Jennie did not seem to be interested in any subject, whether a school subject or an area of interest outside of school. She seemed to be interested in new clothes and having an up-to-date phone to impress fellow students. I had to tell her to cool some of her more outrageous demands, or she would end up with a tiny allowance. I was amazed that she did exactly what I requested. She also asked for my advice about how much I thought she could get out of our parents in a month. I was uncomfortable with these questions and just tried to pin her down about what she was asking for, and how she could justify it. I told her, “They are not going to buy clothes just for you to show off what you have. Tell them, ‘My last pair of shorts ripped after only a few months. Now I want to buy a replacement or two that is made better.’ They like that sort of practical thinking. If you don’t buy something that lasts, hide the evidence and see if you can cover your tracks. Just appeal to parent logic, do not dwell on your desires all the time.”

Jennie was better than I was at making friends. By middle school, she was solidly in the center of the “goth” community. Her friends helped fuel her dislike of family and school. In the spring of my junior year of high school, Jennie’s behavior was getting worse. She was doing poorly in school and behaving badly at home. It got to the point that my parents could not control their daughter at all.

She went to live with her aunt and uncle in Lodi, California for the last two months of 8th grade. Uncle Conrad and Aunt Herta were from the German side of the family. They were good to take in Jennie for a few months to help her learn about hard work on a farm. There was a downside to the bargain. My uncle had limited knowledge of the whole human family. I think they were careful not to say racist things about Chinese people around Jennie, but they talked up dad and trashed mom a lot. I suspect they were very racist about black people. This is important because I married a black woman, and she disliked her right from the start.

She went through some intensive counseling and academic help over the summer. Bit by bit, things got better. She pulled herself together; she did much better in high school. It seemed that the crisis had passed. As I went through my high school years, I confess that I did not pay much attention to Jennie’s friends or her thoughts about her family. This was a serious error on my part. I could have been a better big brother if I had given her more guidance on how to make good choices in her life.

## **Dealing with the Collapse**

My earliest political memories are of the 2016 presidential campaign and the brief presidency of Donald Trump. In 2019, a large number of Special Forces soldiers captured Donald Trump and his family. None of them have ever been seen again. I know that the basic outlines of the story are in some high school textbooks, but it was different living through it as a kid. I don’t think many people in Portland liked Mr. Trump, but once he was gone, all hell broke loose in the economy. I wish I had saved some of the newspapers and magazines of my youth. They would be valuable today. The only problem is that holding these publications was illegal during the worst of the troubles.

Yes, there was mass starvation and no end to all of the disasters. But the hydroelectric dams kept the region and Portland with functioning electricity. I think that is why so many military units relocated to our region. It was an island of stability in an ocean of hurt.

In 2019, things went from very bad to much worse. There were widespread failures of computer networks that made many organizations fail. In the same year, those who owed large sums of money were required to turn over half their earnings for debt repayment. As many of you know, many of these schemes failed to generate sufficient income. Some schemes required very expensive supervision. Eventually, in 2023, the creditor organizations (mostly credit card companies) took advantage of the lapse of constitutional law by reinstating chattel slavery. There was an effort to clear the debts of most people in 2019. The criteria for sale was having \$30,000 or more in uncleared debt at the end of 2019, with no significant pay down since. Quite a few people discovered that their college loan balance brought them to the “marketplace of debt clearance,” but their college degree did not guarantee them an interesting “job placement.”

The introduction of slavery was fairly traumatic to me. In 7th grade, about five classmates disappeared as their families were sold and immediately relocated. Two of my best friends disappeared from 7th grade. For years afterward, I was in fierce opposition to slavery.

Behind the scenes, the billionaire class built a network of control and power. In the year 2021, the use of the HTTP protocol was banned from long distance cables. It was clear that the billionaires wanted to bring down the free exchange of information. They figured that businesses would be able to meet their communications goals with new computer protocols. They were right. This gave my parents a chance to increase their business by assisting local businesses better communicate with customers using (or abusing) the e-mail protocols.

So there you have it. I was a privileged prince from a family that was directly profiting from “the troubles.” My sister was unpredictable. My parents worked hard. My extended family was deeply split between the German and Chinese sides. And I was going off to college.

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# **Chapter 2: College: What a Long Strange Trip It's Been**

## **I Was a Lonely Freshman**

By the time I got to college, higher education was in a major decline. I went to Portland State University, one of the few operating colleges in the country. Portland still had electricity and a semi-functioning economy. People from all over the former United States traveled to Portland for their education. For myself, I just traveled from the suburbs to the downtown. The commute was easy; I just went with mom or dad. The edge of the campus was about a mile from their office. It was quick to walk or take a bus to school. During my commutes, I did get my share of Portland's famous 164 rainy days per year, especially since both the rain and my studies took a break for the summer.

My freshman year was harder than I expected. I suppose that it was a mistake to think that college would be an extension of high school. For me, the first month of college was a big wake-up call. The computer science department insisted that first-year students take an impossible load for the first term. I took English Composition I, World History, Calculus I, Physics I, and Introduction to Engineering. The thing that drove me crazy was that none of this was necessary to help my work for my parents. All of this was some grotesque idea of an academic torture chamber designed to see who could take the pressure. I suppose the idea was to winnow out the losers before wasting any precious space in a class with a professor from the computer science department.

It quickly became clear that my plan to be a commuter student was a mistake. I was not able to get enough study time. I needed rides at inconvenient times. My parents had a creative solution. There was a wing of their office building with a break room, some bathrooms, a shower, and two rooms with locking doors where people could sleep for the night if they were on some round-the-clock project. My mom gave me a set of keys and an ID card so that I could use these facilities.

Using my parents' workplace as a substitute dorm room was somewhat awkward, especially when there was a round-the-clock project going on. But compared to other students, my situation was so much better. I learned how to avoid any embarrassing issues. I kept only enough clothing and other items to last a week. As much as possible, I ate in the cafeteria so that I was not using the break room for major food preparation. It was difficult to be cooking a meal when the staff just wanted a snack or some coffee.

There were some advantages to spending the evenings (and sleeping) at a business. I learned what the staff was doing, and they learned what I was doing. The staff seemed to be impressed at how hard I was working. Occasionally they helped me with my subjects. I learned that most of the programmers were also good at calculus and were good teachers. I helped set up virtual machines, rewired test networks, and configured some test databases for them. I did not do that much, but it was enough to show that I was willing and able to pitch in when they got

overwhelmed by simple tasks. I know my parents were concerned that my presence was a distraction. They were thrilled that I was making myself useful now and then.

My social life was virtually nonexistent that fall term. It was a matter of academic survival. I had yet to learn that getting allies was a good way to get across the finish line. The truth was that I met a lot of students, and pursued virtually no friendships. I will say that there were several students who I ignored who turned out to be great friends once I started building a network of friends.

In my second semester, I was talking about one of our assignments with a fellow student. She just said, "Let's work together on the assignment. It will not work out for you to be in my dorm room. Which dorm do you live in?" I said, "I live at home and mid-week I live in a break room at a local business." She did not believe me at all. I knew I could get into trouble, but I did want to show Faith Winters that I was telling the truth. Instead of eating at the cafeteria, I took her to a Thai restaurant. Then I walked down the block with her to a modest two-story building. I used my key and ID card to get in. Fortunately, there was no after-hours project that night; the building was ours. I showed her my wing, the bathrooms, shower, sleeping rooms, and break room that collectively was my dorm area. There were two sleeping rooms, each with two single beds. She quietly said, "This is so unusual, but I can see how it helps cut costs for your family. A dorm can be rather expensive in this economy." I did not want to say that my parents could have afforded to pay for a dorm room; they just thought it was an unnecessary expense.

Even though it was already 6:30 in the evening, we spent over 4 hours on our project. During that time, I did ask Faith about who she was dating. She was extraordinarily beautiful, and I expected her to tell me about her main guy. She laughed and said, "You need to learn a lot about life, young man. Black men do not appreciate females who are accomplished, especially in math, science, or computers. They do not like tall women, and they have a strong preference for light skinned women." I was very surprised. I just said, "Why, you are so beautiful." She just looked me in the eye and said, "You are the first guy not in my family ever to say that." She cried a little bit. As we worked, we shared numerous stories. We each decided that the details of the other were unbelievably hysterical. Our backgrounds were equally confusing to other people. Somehow, we instantly understood each other. Somehow, we managed to get the project done.

We got too tired to walk back to her dorm. She was too scared to sleep in a room by herself in what she called a haunted building. So we each slept in one of the small beds in the same room. Nothing sexual happened; we were both so tired. I knew that I had made many mistakes this year. I had not seen the advantage of study partners. I just assumed that everyone I saw was already paired up, and so why bother? I realized that I was an exotic entity. I was the guy who studied in a company break room. Being half-Chinese and half-German did not hurt matters at all. And I had the most beautiful freshman girl sleeping with me in a tiny room set aside for workers who were at the edge of exhaustion. In the morning, I told her that the first workers come in at 7:30. So we took quick private showers, collected our things, and left around 7:10. I did make a big pot of coffee. I knew it would be drained quickly before another hour was gone. Faith was wide-eyed that I had access to all the computers and facilities. I just said that I liked it when the workers could help me with my math, and I could help them set up virtual computers. Faith just looked at me as if I was a magician. I did not want to burst her bubble. To me, she was

the most exotic thing I had ever encountered. She was very smart, very funny, and full of amazing stories. I will go into more detail later in this story. Let's just say that I was very much in love.

There was one big downside. It was just 12 days before the end of our freshman year. We would be spending the summer apart. We had summer jobs in different states. I decided to keep my new friend a secret from my family through the summer. I did talk to her once or twice a week. I could not wait for my sophomore year.

## **My Sophomore Year: Faith and Slavery**

On the day before classes started, I met up with Faith. We just hugged each other for five minutes and spent a few hours talking. I talked Faith into visiting my family that weekend. I called my family to say that I was coming home for the weekend with a friend I met at the end of my last year.

Faith talked a friend into giving us a ride to my house on Friday. My parents were very gracious but were obviously surprised when their college boy came home with an ebony beauty. Faith was very charming and well spoken. I am sure she noticed the surprise on my parents' faces when she walked into the house. The evening went surprisingly well. I have to admit that I started to learn things about Faith that I had not already known. I did know that her family was from the Los Angeles area, that Faith mentioned that her mother and her mother's uncle were very smart and that Faith's father had created a chain of auto repair shops; but that was about all I knew about her family.

During the dinner, my parents started asking about Faith's family. We all knew that college was expensive, and there was no such thing as a college loan anymore. So who was paying the bills? She said her parents were able to afford it. She started to tell this amazing story. She explained, "My great-uncle spent a lot of time on the internet before the collapses on what was then called conspiracy websites. He told my mother that any money in a bank account or a standard investment would be lost. My mother was very frugal. She lived in a tiny house that was fully paid up in the San Fernando Valley. She lived on the fringes of Hollywood. She had a few bit parts, she gave voice and acting lessons, and she gathered and arranged for the production of masses of costumes. She said that she had no steady job, but she was always busy since she underbid everyone else. Once she was on the job, she found ways of making them sweeter for herself. Anyway, she listened to her uncle and converted all of her savings into gold, silver, and diamonds before the first financial collapse. While everyone else lost everything, she now had a small fortune. She sensed that her holdings would soon be declared contraband and she would be subject to arrest."

She had our full attention. Somehow I had some difficulty picturing this black woman sneaking around Los Angeles with a forbidden cargo of valuables which were all acquired by scrimping and saving. I remember thinking how racist I was since I was kept thinking that her mom sounded white. I tried very hard to say nothing that would betray my assumptions about people. Faith continued, "My mother knew she needed to finance a business. The trouble was that just about everything was failing. She finally realized that with the collapse of the car manufacturing

business, that auto repair business had a bright future. She somehow got hooked up with my dad, who ran a small, but successful repair shop. They got married, and my mother's capital infusion allowed the business to expand. They now have ten locations around Los Angeles. If you talked to them, they would say they were not rich, but they never have any problem paying for my school fees."

My mother told her story, "I met Chris's dad in college. We got an idea of how to better support local businesses. That is how we founded *River Valley Systems*. We were able to expand quite a bit after they pulled the plug on the web portion of the internet. We wrote software so that special client programs could get product details from business in a web-like user interface. Underneath, the whole thing runs on specially encoded e-mail. We give the consumer client software away for free, and charge businesses a fair amount to allow their inventory to be examined by the user. Essentially, we link up a product database with e-mail software. We have to keep changing things since the people who run things keep changing the rules as to what is allowed and what is not allowed. Sometimes I just wish we were poor and the internet was running like it did in the old days. But then we would not be able to send Chris to college. Just like your parents, we do not feel rich. But we can pay for the things we want."

Somehow the subject of diamonds came up. I remember this clearly because Faith explained that her mother was able to sell her diamonds before the large crash in the price of diamonds. She said, "My mother always remarked about the huge difference between the purchase and the selling price for diamonds. Diamonds were a bad investment for the short term and the long term. She said that the only advantages of diamonds were for those situations when you needed to hide all your wealth up your ass. Otherwise, something else is always a better deal!" My father sputtered a bit and just said, "That is not very romantic. I just cannot see that being the catchphrase for jewelry stores when they advertise on the radio or on billboards." I just remembered laughing so long at that. I did notice that my sister Jennie did not seem to like the joke. Perhaps she still wanted to get a big engagement ring someday. I wish I could have explained to her all the ways that the world had changed.

Somehow Faith mentioned that she had visited *River Valley Systems*. My father asked about it, and Faith said that she had slept there since it had gotten too late for her to get to the dorm. My father was quick to react. He said, "You slept with Chris at our company? When did this happen?" He started to look very scared. I said, "We were studying together. If you want, I can give you the exact date when we had the joint study session. It was about two weeks before the end of classes in the spring. We slept in separate beds and did not touch each other. Why are you getting so upset?" My father replied, "We have strict sexual conduct rules for our business. If anyone saw you there together, we could have a big lawsuit. Oh, I do not care if you sleep together. You are adults. You can sleep together in this house if you want, but you cannot be together in one of the bedrooms at work ever, ever."

Faith looked down. I think this was all too much, too soon. I said quietly, "We have not slept together. I would rather not discuss sleeping arrangements, but Faith can sleep in my bedroom, and I can sleep in a spare bedroom or a couch. On the night in question, no one saw us, except some security tapes which I presume have been erased by now. We left about 30 minutes before the first employees come in. The only hint I left that we were there was a fresh pot of coffee,

which I usually make before I leave. If someone measured the coffee in the pot, they could guess that two people drank from the pot previously. I do not think that will be the basis of any lawsuits.”

My mom spoke quietly and softly, “We all regret the limitations that the sleeping pod at work puts on your social life. Perhaps we can find a very inexpensive car for you to allow both of you more choices. Faith is most welcome to visit our business when paid staff or we are also present. And of course, you cannot be behind a closed door, ever.” Faith just said, “Of course, that makes plenty of sense.” I was angry since this was all too much airing of personal behavior before Faith and I had a chance to discuss much between ourselves. I did not disagree with anything they said. I knew my parents were always afraid of some small thing which would cause them to lose their business. I just wish there was a good way for me to tell them to take it down a notch.

If I was afraid that my parents would not like Faith, that was not an issue. They seemed to fall in love with her as much as I did. Only later did I realize their true motivation. It was as if they viewed a devotion to computers as a religion. They were terrified that I would marry outside the faith. Well, here I had a genuine computer nerd as a potential partner, who also had the right first name (at least for this pun). They wanted me to step into their shoes to keep the business going. If I had a partner who had interests elsewhere, I might have to leave or sell the business when they were gone. They were afraid of leaving Jennie without any support. Their love and concern for the welfare of Jennie lead them to go way out of their way to welcome Faith Winters into their family. There was a flipside which would cast a shadow for years. Jennie started to resent Faith almost from the beginning since she was taking up so much of our parents' focus.

That night we both ended up sleeping in my old room. She got the bed, and I got the floor. But we did snuggle up together a bit before falling asleep. I remember thinking that all was well in the world.

I do remember Faith being nervous about me meeting her new sophomore roommate. I knew that her name was Connie Hu, so I figured I would get along well since I was half-Chinese. I was a bit surprised walking into the room to see two students, one at the desk, reading from a book and asking questions, and one lying on the bed answering the questions. Neither one had a shirt or top on. Faith asked, “Hey, you are making my new boyfriend nervous, could you both put on a shirt?” The one on the bed said, “Faith, is this Chris?” I guessed she was Connie since she looked Chinese. While she was asking that she put on a shirt. The other student, just said quietly, “Mistress, hand me a shirt if you want me to wear one.” Connie tossed a shirt, and we all faced each other. I was glad that I was staring at the floor when Faith looked at me to see if I was staring at her roommates. Faith made the introductions. The woman at the desk was named Terry. Somehow no one mentioned her last name. I realized she had on a slave collar. I asked, “Are you a slave?” Connie answered, saying, “Yes, she belongs to my family. She is my tutor and friend.”

It finally dawned on me that Terry had addressed Connie as “Mistress.” I just said, “Can we at least address each other by their first name?” I was outraged that someone was being held as property. I thought the use of the word “belongs” in this context was obscene. I looked at Terry

and said, "Have you ever been raped?" Connie started to yell. Terry raised both of her hands until Connie was quiet.

Terry said, "Let me answer this question if you please since I am being asked about my consent to sexual relations. I will freely admit that other people in my situation do not have the power to give any consent. But for me, lack of consent has been a rare situation. There is no hiding that Connie and I are very good friends. She always asks me about sex, and I do have the right to refuse. Let me make an analogy. Some people take long trips by buying a ticket for the first leg of the trip, and just see how things work out. Others carefully book, pay for, and plan their trips ahead of time. Some journeys are better than others. Chris, you and I will have similar journeys through life. Both of us will pay dearly for housing, transportation, and food. A small amount will be left over for miscellaneous possessions and personal delights. My journey is prepaid and pre-planned. Your journey is 'pay as you go.' You can handle money and make many decisions. I am free of concerns about the cash supply and making decisions, though I do wish to be consulted on these matters. I know you will point out that if I have a cruel or thoughtless owner, I can face deep hardship. Thus I need to be very careful in all aspects of my ownership. For example, if I were to learn that Connie's parents did not approve of our sexual relationship, I would do my best to help Connie find a solution to the situation since I would be at risk of being sold at auction. If I knew that Connie's parents faced financial problems, I would help Connie understand that we needed to raise money as fast as we could."

I sucked in some air. Terry paused so that Connie could respond. Connie said, "You are right. It is in our best interest that we stay together. If someone offered me five million dollars for your heart, lungs, and liver, I would turn them down." Terry just said, "That is the nicest thing you have ever said to me. Come over so you can kiss me." At that point, Faith and I noticed that Terry had a small chain on her ankle so she could not get up from the desk. I just said, "People on prepaid trips do not need to be chained to a desk." Terry just said, "Oh yes. The chain is Connie's way of saying that sexy time is over and now we need to work on Analytic Geometry. I know how much Connie has been looking forward to meeting Chris. I hope I have been pleasant, and not been too much of a distraction."

Faith started to shake her head. She asked, "Why are you saying pre-pay? No slave is being prepaid for anything. They just have to work for no wages." I said, "Think about it. If you are deeply in debt and cannot pay it back, the debt is wiped clean in exchange for the value of all your future wages. In that sense, you are being prepaid for a lifetime of work. Even if you are born into slavery, there is an implied promise to pay your expenses as long as your work justifies the expenses. She is very cynical, saying that a free person has little bargaining power to increase their wages. She is hinting that the slave, with their constant interaction with their owner, achieves similar leverage to increase their living standards."

Then I turned to Terry. I said, "Terry, you are quite pleasant. It appears that you are only looking at things from your point of view. When I was in middle school, I lost about five good friends due to the enslavement of their families. I never saw them again. So I do admit to being heavily biased against slavery. I am glad you are in a good position." Terry said, "My family had a good income. My parents used the income to build up substantial debt. We came to a point where debt was not accepted or acceptable anymore. As you said, every debt had to be settled. The result



was that members of my family are in the prepaid labor pool. I think I am lucky since very few slaves ever go to college. And here I am in college, in love, and you are right, in chains. These are not bitter chains. They bind me to a life of learning, of love, and of teaching. I look forward with eagerness to that which lies ahead.”

After the “slavery debate,” we had a good discussion about who we were as people. Connie was pretty lively. Her grandparents were from China, and her parents were raised in America. They did approve of her relationship since it kept Connie focused on her coursework. The plus was that Connie was not about to get pregnant in college or be the subject of scandal as long as she was discreet outside of the dorm room. I thought Faith would object to having an extra roommate, but she did not seem to mind at all. She was scared of my reaction. I just figured that if no dorm rules were being broken, it was up to them to work out the complicated roommate issues. There were advantages when she wanted me to spend the night being intimate. It was easy to focus on your partner, and not on what was happening in the other bed. It was a very cozy relationship, and we all agreed that we had nothing to hide from each other. I learned to shed my inhibitions about clothing. Both Faith and Connie had to be a bit careful in what they said to their parents. I learned not to mention a word to anyone or to raise an eyebrow since a single hint could compromise our situation.

It turned out that Terry was a very good tutor. She helped Faith and me quite a number of times. Sometimes we walked with Terry to different places around campus as a favor since she had to be supervised at all times. Theoretically, she needed to have a leash attached to her collar, but we just put a small leather loop around her wrist, and no one gave us any problems. We visited my parents' business a few times with Terry. One staff person remarked that it was hard to find good programming talent in the prepaid labor pool. I wondered why that was.

Faith told me that sometimes Connie took Terry to all-girl parties on campus in a way that seemed humiliating. Terry would be wearing a leash, a collar, hot pants, and bare feet. The parties were pretty wild, and Terry was not the only one who was topless. Faith said she always took off her shirt to show solidarity with Terry. I did ask Terry about it, and she opened up, “I love playing this role. I go into the party fairly submissive, and then really loosen up. I get to say and do the most outrageous things. I make Connie bring me drinks and food. Sometimes I make her find people to come to talk to me. Sometimes Connie locks me to something. I play act that I have stolen the key and free myself. Some people act like I am committing the biggest crime ever. Sometimes Connie loses the leash. I yell at her saying things like, ‘I am practically naked without a leash!’ Just talking about this makes me laugh; it is the funniest shit you ever saw. For me, the most important result is that everyone at our female-only parties respects me very much. They are all very grateful when I assist them with their academics. By now, most of our friends know we are just acting, and they love it. So they watch us intently. If we didn't do this, no one would pay any attention to us. By being outrageous, we are the center of attention. I know that Connie loves this play-acting, and my main mission in life is to make Connie happy. So Mr. Grumpy, am I being exploited? Or are we exploiting everyone's sense of humor?”

I was not sure how to handle this. I did notice that Terry was treated with great respect all over the campus. I decided to let Connie, Terry, and Faith play all their silly roles. I also decided that I never get invited to the really fun parties. My main takeaway was not to judge people by how

things appeared. I quietly urged Faith to loosen up and have a little bit more fun with things. I told Faith, "At the next dance, keep her shirt on and go steal Terry away from Connie. Dance with her and ask her if she would prefer to be dressed differently. She might surprise you." Faith later admitted that I was right about how Connie and Terry were the life of the party.

On an errand away from Connie, I asked Terry, "I know you are happy in your life situation. But do you want your children to grow up on a prepaid basis, and your grandchildren? Don't you wish that they will all have the ability to choose their partners, to choose their work, and to choose their sexual encounters?" Terry started to cry. She said softly, "There is no human being that does not know how to answer those questions. You know that." It was hard to see her crying. I did not dare ask if she discussed these issues with Connie. It was too easy to say that the problem with the pre-collapse society is that everyone wanted to be rich. In the end, almost everyone got to be dirt poor. A highly regimented society was sure rough for those on the bottom.

Our course load was lighter for the sophomore year. More of my classes were related to computer programming. College no longer felt like a big waste of time. Faith had a lot of friends; I got to know them and many of their friends. So through Faith and Connie, I ended up the year with a large pool of friends and activities.

Faith and I both worked at my parents' business for the summer. Faith did take a month off near the end of the summer to visit her family in Los Angeles. We worked on a new way to archive information on distributed systems so that we could save on bandwidth. Essentially we were playing around with the structure of how emails were sent to make things cheaper. If anyone audited these e-mails, they would see them disappear and then reappear in mysterious ways. The one thing that kept the company legal was that we had been dealing with plain vanilla emails as a platform for everything. Thus this project was more than a little bit risky.

The project was a success, largely due to Faith's abilities as a programmer. I worked very hard to keep up. By the end of the summer, Faith was fully a part of the family. The lack of a marriage certificate was just a minor paperwork issue.

## **My Junior Year: Everyone Gets Serious**

The playfulness of our sophomore year seemed to melt away. My parents wanted Faith and me to promise to work in the company as soon as we graduated. Faith's parents did not like this plan at all. Faith's father was especially negative. Faith later told me that he was thinking that, "Chris and his parents were trying to enslave Faith." Finally, Faith called her family and learned that her mother's sisters were the strongest force against my family and me. Faith invited her parents and her mother's three sisters to a Thanksgiving meal at my house.

The trip from Los Angeles to Portland was not easy. There was some terrorist activity which delayed the train, making the trip two days longer. Instead of arriving two days before Thanksgiving, it arrived at noon. My parents sent two limousines to pick them up from the train station. Anyway, Faith's family arrived at my parents' house tired, hungry, and thirsty. While everyone was pleasant, it was clear that Faith's aunts were certain that they were in some remote

corner of the world. Jennie said some things that did not sit well. She started talking about how Portland was a center of education. The usual explanation was that the abundant hydroelectric electrical power in the region allowed the universities to be open continuously since before the collapses.

Phyllis, the oldest of Faith's aunts, was the least traveled of the group. She could not grasp that there was any place on earth better than Los Angeles. These remarks did not go over very well. It did not take long to start the big argument about Faith. All three of Faith's aunts wanted her to come back to Los Angeles once her education was done. It was clear that they could see no value in education, much less a technical education. I tried to tell them how skilled a computer programmer Faith was.

I suppose that I should mention that the entire family was employed at the chain of auto repair shops. The aunts were all managers at the three busiest locations. They had a singular focus on building and protecting the business. Faith turned to her mother and asked her opinion of Faith's life choices. Helen Winters said, "Honey, when I walk into church with Ben, everybody knows me and who we are. We are respected. It took a lot to get to where we are. We sent you to college to pursue your dreams. You want to be a computer programmer. I know how you feel about that. But where I come from, people would say, 'Are you a computer programmer? Aren't they the people who brought down our lives?' We trusted the ATMs. One day every single one of them stopped working.' I know you want to help rebuild our society. But in our neighborhoods, people just want their cars rebuilt, not their computer networks." Faith was in tears. She sobbed, "I have worked very hard day and night so you can be proud of me."

Helen said, "I am proud of you. I want you to do what you want to do. I know you intend to marry Chris. I like him, and I like his family. I want you to be free to take whatever job or start any company you want. I know my husband believes the same as I." She glared at Ben, signaling that he had better not say a word, except to nod to his wife's remarks. She added, "My sisters all want to wreck your relationship, and drag you in chains back to Los Angeles."

I should say that there were additional people at the table. One of my mother's sisters, Faith's roommates (they could not travel to Denver for Thanksgiving), and one of Jennie's friends were also there. The remark about chains caused Connie to stare, and Terry to look down at her plate. Very sweetly, Helen reached over to hold Terry's hand; she said, "Child, I am sorry for my very poor choice of words. You are not the one I am speaking of." Helen turned to Faith and said, "Why don't we all agree that we leave the life choices of Faith totally out of this discussion. However, there is a financial side to all of this. We are paying for your fine college education. If you have your heart set on living here in Portland, and not helping our family business, then I do not see why we should keep paying for your education. We will pay through the end of your junior year. If you want to live the life you have described, you are welcome to do so. We will attend your wedding with a big smile. We will adore our grandchildren. We will visit you as often as we can. We just will ask someone else to cover your expenses for your senior year."

That was a very interesting, life-changing moment. Faith's aunts looked like they wanted to have me killed so that they could find another suitor. I do not think they wanted to come to our wedding. My parents had a "don't worry about a thing" expression, holding up their hands to

prevent Faith or me from saying anything. Jennie looked shocked. She sensed what was coming next. It was more evidence that her parents would do anything for Faith, and they were not helping her at all. Jennie got up from the table and ran from the room. For the first time, I started to see the difficulties of balancing my future wife and my sister. At that time, I had no idea how enormous this struggle would turn out to be.

Faith knew she had to respond. She talked quietly and calmly, “Well, this is a bit of a surprise to me. I am going to surprise you by saying that I like your proposal. You are giving me a seven-month time window to decide. Be aware that you also have a seven-month window to rescind your ultimatum. Forgive me if I do not discuss this matter with anyone for the next several months, as we have plenty of time to come to the point of agreement. Right now, this is a time of Thanksgiving. I give thanks that I am on the auction block and that there is a bidding war between two established family businesses. I may be the only person in the FUSA in that position.” She turned towards Terry and added, “Outside of those in the prepaid labor pool, that is. Terry, like you, I am in love and I am in college. These are two rare things in our nation right now. Terry, I hope that you also find yourself facing two or more great opportunities which bid for your attention.”

True to her word, Faith did not discuss the money issues until March. Faith and I did go on a trip to Los Angeles to discuss possible opportunities in the Los Angeles area. It was a fairly bleak situation. There were many poorly trained, poorly paid computer programmers in the Los Angeles area. We could have mounted a major effort to overhaul the company garages, but that would have required a massive investment which did not seem possible. In the degraded infrastructure of Los Angeles, just about any project or expansion took lots of capital. Helen and Ben were very clever about using their capital to keep their business afloat. The more we learned, the more we found that it was a miracle that Faith had three years of college funding. It was clear that they very much wanted to make the investment they put into Faith’s education pay for itself. How that would happen eluded us.

In March, my parents sat down with Faith. They said that they could pay for Faith's senior year without any problems. This amount would be deducted from my portion of the will. At the point that my parents passed on, I would have paid for Faith's final year at college. I did not see the problem with that at all.

## **My Senior Year: I Never Recover**

While Faith's family had formally stated that they supported Faith's choices, it was clear that this was not entirely true. Phone calls and contact from Los Angeles started to drop off. In September we made our engagement official. We planned the wedding to be a week after spring graduation. We made our plans to be as frugal as possible. Faith was just going to pick out her favorite dress and add a crown of flowers for the wedding. We found a church that we could rent that was one block from a bar that was famous for its sandwiches. I do not think we thought about pictures or a honeymoon. We planned on having only one assistant, Terry, who would perform all tasks of a bridesmaid and the best man.

Three months before the wedding, Terry, Connie, Faith, and I got drunk at a bar. Connie said, "You guys need to be faithful to each other until death does you part. Why not experience a sexual fling now before you sign the marriage license?" Faith asked what she meant. Connie answered, "You are on good terms with Terry. Why don't you both have sex with Terry? It will be an amazing experience, and it will help your marriage off to a wonderful start." Faith just said, "Connie, we are all a bit drunk. Have you asked Terry, or are you offering her to us without her permission?" Terry lowered her eyes and said, "I have no problem with this. I look forward to this experience. I hope you do as well." I just said, "Wait. Stop for a moment. Connie, you need to have as much skin in the game as Terry does. Can we swap partners so that we all get a new partner for one night? That way, what Terry experiences is what Connie experiences. If Connie does not want to do this, then this goes no further." Terry said, "You work out the arrangements. I will be present in body and in mind. But could I point out that we have not figured out if it is Connie or I that gets Chris?" Faith suggested, "You should flip a coin for Chris. We will do this in a hotel room tomorrow night. Chris, you cover the hotel bill, since these fine ladies are providing our entertainment."

Connie agreed. Terry got to flip the coin since she was the person who pointed out that it was necessary. Based on the coin flip, I got Terry, and Faith got Connie. The next night, we met early at the same bar. We all ate well and drank well. We walked through the rain to the hotel and booked two adjacent rooms. It all seemed a bit strange since we were all such good friends. I was drunk, and in a hotel room with a very nice and compliant woman. Did I feel guilty of taking advantage of her? Not really. I was glad she was not in any form of restraints. I do not think I could have handled that at all. I turned off the lights. I decided that it would be rude to ask her about her preferences or her choices for a sexual partner. I just focused on her and her needs.

We all had smiles when we met in the morning at the hotel breakfast bar. I passed the hand strap to Connie. I said, "Thank you, ladies, for the permission to have a unique experience. I cannot believe that I needed the consent of three women to engage in one sexual indiscretion." Faith said, "Thank you, Terry, for lending me your Mistress for the night. I do believe that I am now in love with my college roommate." Terry just added, "Congratulations on getting married. Last night I felt very special. You guys are the best." Connie looked exhausted. After some silence, she said, "I think I need a day or so to recover. I am hoping we can find a way to do that again sometime."

No one objected to that idea. So there were a few more occasions when we swapped around in the dorm room. I know that I slept with Connie at least once. I could not imagine what it was like keeping up with her sexual appetite for more than one night. I had a deeper appreciation of Terry. She did so much for Connie. I always wondered if Connie was aware how hard Terry worked day and night to please her Mistress. I was getting curious about a number of things. I did ask Faith if she was regretting getting married to a man. She just said, "Don't get insecure. You are my one and only love. I just think a little bit of extra dessert around the edges makes the main course so much more fun. You need to trust me." I was nervous about what would happen when we all parted ways after we received our college diplomas.

About two months before graduation, I was woken up at my sleeping pod at my parents' company. I got dressed and opened the bedroom door. There were two police officers and two

key staff from the company. One officer said, "There is no easy way to tell you this. Both of your parents died about an hour ago in an automobile accident just north of town. These fine people have volunteered to drive you to your parents' house so you can comfort your sister." I called Faith and told her the news. We picked her up on the way home.

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# Chapter 3: The Legal Tangle in the Aftermath

## A Funeral and a Wedding

I blanked out much of what happened that Wednesday, April 6, 2033, at my parents' home. All night long, more people came as they heard the news. I had a lot on my mind. I knew that I was going to be the key person to plan for the funeral. But I also knew that people needed to come from all across the Former United States of America. The funeral would take place seven or eight days after the passing of my parents. So I knew the funeral was not something I needed to worry about right away.

I knew it was vital to greet the guests as a couple. I made sure to move around the house with Faith as much as I could. It was tricky. The phone kept ringing, and people kept trying to pull me aside. I did my level best to keep Faith next to me at all times, even when I was called to the phone. When people called, I confirmed the facts; then I collected their name and their e-mail address so that I could focus on the visitors. I also was careful to ask everyone who showed up who needed to be notified.

Jennie was a mess. She was constantly crying. I did my best to comfort her. Both Faith and I did our best to figure out if she had concerns about the future without our parents around. We did our best to say that we would make sure her needs were met. I said, "You are 18 years old, so you are a full adult, and able to make your own decisions." She asked, "What are the basic decisions moving forwards?" I said, "Everyone wants to support you. There are two basic approaches. We can sell the house and move into small apartments to raise some cash. We can also sell some of our parents' artwork and other items that other people value. Or we can keep the house. I cannot promise a huge income from the business, but we will work very hard to meet your needs. It is going to be tricky since we may lose some clients once people learn that the two owners are no longer alive. But then we will do not have to pay their salary anymore. There may be some life insurance. I need some time to investigate our parents' papers to know what the situation is."

Another concern that I had was to get some idea what happened to my parents' car. There seemed to be many mysteries here. Why were my parents on the road at that time? Were they traveling to meet someone? Why did my parents' car leave the road? I knew this was not the time and place to ask a question like this. But I was going to pay close attention to anything anyone said that would explain what had happened at the accident scene.

I should be telling the reader how I felt that night. I have a hard time remembering. It is all very cloudy in my mind. I do remember thinking if it was my job to comfort people who came to our house or if it was their job to comfort me. Everyone respected that I stayed next to Faith the whole night. People started leaving around 1:30. Faith and I fell asleep at about 2 am. We were totally exhausted.

The next morning, I wrote an e-mail that gave the details of the deaths and the funeral details to all of the contacts that I could find. I asked people to forward the e-mail to all the people they could think of who would want to know. Soon, everyone who needed to know had heard what had happened.

With so many distant friends and relatives coming to the funeral, Faith and I got married three days after the funeral. Jennie was the assistant. No one cared about how we were dressed, or much about the details of the wedding. It was just one more thing to check off the list of things to do.

Faith's whole extended family traveled up from Los Angeles. This time there were no delays or problems with transportation. Everyone was very sweet to us. We told everyone that our first job was to stabilize the family business and to make sure that Jennie was properly supported. Everyone understood. We promised to come to Los Angeles as soon as it was feasible.

My parents' will stated that a trust would be set up in the event of their death. The business would become the property of the trust. The family trust would make sure that Jennie and I got the support that we needed. I signed some papers waiving my right to some of the proceeds of the trust since I was concerned about Jennie.

## Being Married

I got so involved in telling *my* story that I almost forgot that this is *our* story. By this, I mean the strange transition from thinking mostly about myself to thinking about us as a couple. Our marriage was rushed. We had so much on our minds. We just woke up one morning married to each other. At first, there were no changes at all. I was Chris and Faith was herself. But we burst out laughing when our partner mentioned the words “husband” or “wife.” We would be at a bakery and Faith would say, “Let me ask what my husband wants.” We would get the giggles for a few seconds.

There were other incidents which were quite embarrassing. Faith was tall, imposing, and a sharp dresser. I was the opposite. Sometimes Faith would be asked about “your slave” when I was wearing a coat or sweater that covered my neck. She had to say, “That's not my slave, that's my husband.” Either way, Faith was using possessive language. It was not unknown for a woman to purchase a partner. So in many ways, it was hard to convince anyone once they had made this snap judgment. I just kept quiet and looked down. Faith told me the problem was caused by the fact that I was not “dressing to impress” as if I was going on a date. Faith suggested that I start wearing expensive jewelry, and to the extent possible, show my bare neck.

Our friends, relatives, and contacts all expected vast changes. We wove together moments where we were exactly the same people with moments where we were undergoing subtle changes. Before marriage, we were two people who every so often ended up being together. After marriage, we were living together; I started thinking about the time I was not with Faith.

The biggest change was a reflection of our life situation. Before, our choices seemed simple and obvious. We were going to work for my parents. We had to decide which courses to take. We



had to figure out what to do on a date. It was so easy to agree. Now, we had a universe of choices to make. What were we going to do with ourselves, now that all our plans, choices, and possibilities were so badly disrupted? We quickly found out how easy it was to disagree. I did my best to listen, be positive, but still say what I wanted to say. What helped was that we often talked about just how difficult our choices were.

## **Stabilizing the Business**

I knew we were all in trouble if my parents' business collapsed in the aftermath. Faith and I spent many hours with the staff to reassure our customers that the business was in good hands. We worked out a plan to hire a new business and technology manager to replace the management oversight provided by my parents.

After a few days at the firm, I started getting the message from the senior staff that they had things under control, and that they did not need our help. They suggested that we take a year to get over our personal loss before joining the company. I was told, "If you join now, customers will think that we are in panic mode. Of course, we will consult with you. You and your sister are the owners of this great company. There will always be a place for the two of you at this company. But right now, please take some time off."

The odd thing was that the junior staff all assumed that we were in the process of joining the staff. These miscommunications led to some very awkward conversations. Something was not quite right. It took a few more months before I finally understood what was going on. I can tell you that the first week after my parents' untimely death was truly confusing. I wanted to fix things, but I had no idea what needed fixing.

## **The Letter**

Just before college graduation, I got a demand letter to pay \$800,000 for half the value of the business, or the business would be sold in 30 days. It also stated that Jennie would be the sole owner of the house and that I had 30 days to move my things from my parents' house.

I called Faith immediately. She said that I was exaggerating. I called the law firm mentioned in the letter. He said he would only communicate with my lawyer. I said, "I do not have a lawyer." He said, "That is not my problem. It just makes my job easier."

I called a family friend who was a lawyer. He made a few calls and said, "It appears that Jennie feels you are taking advantage of her. She wants the business sold as soon as possible so that she can live in the family house with a large cash settlement. Based on some of the documents you signed last week, Jennie does have the right to force this sale."

Everything just got worse and worse. I found out that if I could stabilize the business, and negotiate a sale in the six to nine-month timeframe, the business would be worth about four million dollars. If the business had to be sold now, with all the emergency accounting and legal fees, the sale would raise about 1.5 million for Jennie and me. Even worse, this would be a sale

to liquidate the assets as fast as possible. The employment contracts for the staff, the building, all the equipment, and software would be sold to the highest bidder. Even worse, if I started my own business somehow, I would end up competing against the remnants of my parents' company. If I used any code that Faith and I had written, we would be sued for violation of intellectual property.

I did my best to talk to Jennie. She was convinced that I was a thief because I had not mentioned the possibility of selling the business on the night of my parents' death. While I regret not mentioning that as an option; I did not think it would have mattered. Jennie would have been angry at us no matter what. At the heart of the situation, she felt that Faith was stealing her parents' love from her. I wanted some way of saying that the reason our parents were so keen on Faith was that they saw Faith Winters as the means to seal me into the company so that the company could support her. She was so blind with rage she could not recognize how we were all trying to help her.

Jennie was the one person who could have stopped the demand sale. Twenty-five days after our graduation, the business was sold to a bank, which as expected, liquidated everything. All my hopes and dreams for the future died that day. I swore to myself that I would never forgive Jennie or speak to her again. Two weeks after the sale, I got a check for about \$790,000, and Jennie got a check for about \$660,000. The checks were different because of the need to account for the value of Faith's senior year tuition and the value of our parents' house.

I did receive some reports from friends that Jennie had many young men who wanted to marry her. Her youth, lack of supervision, house, and money made her an attractive partner. Some of her suitors were not so young. I was in no mood to rescue her from her own mistakes. Considering what she did, I could not imagine her listening to any advice from me.

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## Chapter 4: Seeking New Directions

This is a tricky chapter to write. I am describing four weeks of discussions between Faith and myself over what to do next. I have condensed the dialogue and edited it to address issues in a logical order. Let me say that the time was much more chaotic and frustrating than I am capable of describing. The result was a most unusual family configuration.

### Catching Our Breath

We arranged for furniture, books, and some household items to be put into storage. Jennie was not interested in a lot of items in the house. I tried to save anything that I thought was useful. It was exhausting to take trip after trip to various storage locations.

My final goodbye to Jennie was not my finest moment. I told her, "I hope you find happiness. I hope at some point you can come to understand the pain that you have caused me. Right now, it feels like you have destroyed everything in my life. I do not have the people, money, or technology to start my own company. It will take decades to get to where I was before I got your demand letter. When you can tell me that you understand this, we will be brother and sister again. Until then, I wish you well on your journey in life. I hope you can understand that I will not be there to rescue you or be by your side. We may never speak again for the rest of our lives."

### Tax Issues

I know that few readers know what the tax situation was in the Portland area in 2033. As a result of the sale of my parents' business, Faith and I had a bank draft for about \$800,000. We talked to Scott Secovich, the lawyer retained by my parents for advice. He said, "Set up a joint account and deposit the check. The account will get taxed at the rate of 15% each and every year so that after eight years, virtually none will be left. There are two ways to avoid taxation. One way is to spend the money within a year. The other way is to purchase twenty-year government bonds. The government bonds lock in your money without interest or taxation. The catch is you can only withdraw the money for approved purposes. Approved uses include starting a business, medical expenses, senior care for a close relative, and tuition fees for your children. You can purchase a house by paying a 40% tax on a withdrawal. You cannot withdraw the money for another purpose, even if you want to pay the tax. If you do not withdraw enough money, it is taxed at the 15% rate. You end up with about 4% of your original money if you wait the full twenty years. I do not recommend this."

The advice was confusing. We asked many questions. We got clarification that any money from whatever sources (the estate, our future salaries, and money we had in our liquid account) was to be taxed at the rate of 15% a year. Tax days were roughly a year apart. The tax days were slightly randomized to avoid manipulation. A day before tax day, we might have \$100,000 in our account. The next day it would be \$85,000. There were no tax forms, no accountants, just an

automatic withdrawal of funds by the government. Since cash, bulk precious metals, or bulk jewelry were contraband; there were few ways to avoid taxation. You could buy real estate, slaves, stocks or bonds, but when you sold, the full amount was subject to a 20% per year tax unless you spent the proceeds on similar assets quickly. So buying some valuables to avoid taxation was not a good idea. You could try to pass money back and forth between individuals. But if you were caught, the entire amount was subject to complete confiscation.

Buying government bonds was a good solution, but only if one could anticipate one's tax-free spending precisely. Since we needed a significant sum for our future business, we were going to buy a lot of government bonds. But we would be screwed if we did not save enough for our immediate needs. How much would we need to set aside for a gap in employment? What were we going to do for childcare?

In case you are wondering, the tax system was designed to collect a lot of money, force people to spend money, and discourage savings, except for a few narrow uses. The obvious consequence is that we needed to work out our housing, child spacing, childcare, education, and business plans as soon as possible. We needed to make a roadmap for the next twenty years while we were both still in shock. I cannot speak for Faith, but I was in no shape to be rational in my decision-making.

## **Unsettling News**

There was one detail that had nothing to do with taxes and planning for the future. I showed Scott Secovich the demand letter I got from Jennie and her lawyer, Glenn Sears. Scott said, "This is just too strange. Three weeks before your parents died, some arrogant people tried to purchase your parents' company for a ridiculously low price, perhaps a third of its true value. Your parents refused the offer. The lawyer for those jerks is the same lawyer who drafted this demand letter for Jennie."

I was stunned. I said, "Are you saying that some criminal group tried to buy my parents' business with an 'offer that should not be refused'? Were my parents murdered because they said 'no'? Are you saying that Jennie is in some danger? What is going on here?"

Scott said, "Hold on, I am not making any claim. I am saying to be skeptical and not to trust anyone. I am saying that I have looked at the police report of your parents' car accident. I was able to notice something obvious that showed to me that the police report is not correct. I think you can spot it in seconds. For a variety of reasons, I am not going to speak clearly about the problem I saw in the police report. It is my opinion that the police will not offer any assistance investigating this affair. Be careful with this lawyer Glenn Sears. He is working with the worst kind of persons. I do not think that you or Jennie is in any other danger since this group got what it wanted. Ignore them, and they will ignore you."

We talked for just a little while longer. I knew there was a limit to what Scott could tell me. In the end, Scott was right. All I could do was to concentrate on our other problems. But I did learn what he was saying about the police report. I could see photos that showed that the rear end of my parents' car was hit by a large truck. It was supposed to be a single vehicle accident. I no

longer wondered why my parents' car went off the road and into a tree. That mystery had been solved.

## **Some Basic Decisions**

We had to decide whether to start a business now or wait fifteen years. This decision was easy to make. We did not have enough money to develop a technology that filled a need and to deploy a company to execute the opportunity fully. Our best chance was to work for other companies and to keep track of any new areas we could exploit.

Faith and I went round and round on housing and kids. It was an endless circular argument. Did we want kids; if so how many? She said, "There are four different answers to the question about the number of children: none, one, 2-4, and greater than 4. Which do you want?" I said, "I was 2-4 kids. Five is too many, one is too few, and why are we discussing the number of children to have if we do not want any? So that leaves 2-4 as the only possibility." Faith said, "See how easy that is once the question is framed properly. I agree with you. With five or six kids, we would not be able to make any headway on any professional goals."

Faith added, "We could save a fortune in childcare costs by buying a slave. We have enough capital to buy a slave and then sell him or her after we do no longer have any need for the additional staffing." I hit the roof on this. I said, "Are you crazy? Slaves make terrible childcare workers! They usually have a very poor education. Do you want to have your babies spending the day with someone with limited vocabulary and lousy child-rearing skills? Seriously, what are you thinking?" Faith answered, "Well, I figure we could use a slave for about eight years. The usual price for a slave is about eight times the equivalent salary, making the direct costs would be equal. But we could probably resell her for about 75% of the purchase price. I figure we would get eight years of work for the cost of only two years. With so much money to be saved, I am sure we could find a flipping novelist, art professor, and dancer who would be able to teach with an excellent vocabulary and still save a load of money."

I could not believe what I was hearing. I thought black people hated slavery. I asked her about the historical association between black people and slavery. Hell, at one time, black people were the definition of enslavement. Yes, there were free black people 200 years ago, but they had to watch their place to avoid being kidnapped into slavery as well. I put this issue to Faith. She said, "Typical of white people to keep the black person down by not letting them buy slaves. Why should I have to pay more for labor just because of the color of my skin? Seriously, I understand your concern. I am not interested in exploiting anyone. Be aware that women have been exploited for years under the wage labor system. While the opportunity for exploitation is obviously greater for those who are enslaved, the critical factor is the decency of the employer, not the nature of the employment."

I argued, "I do not want to help support the slavery system at all. It is easy to say that you will be a good employer. I get that. But a slave is required to wear a steel collar. There are rules and regulations about slaves. They need to be restrained in ugly and cruel ways. Remember, even Terry was chained up in your dorm room. I do not want someone chained up in my house. I also do not like the idea of someone trapped in our house doing childcare with no thought about their

social life, their own destiny as a human being.” Faith responded, “We are not in control of our own destiny either. Our hearts' desires were crushed when your parents died and your sister's brain was poisoned. I just wish we could live in a big house with Connie and Terry.”

I answered, “We are talking about childcare, not your college roommates. What are you talking about?” Faith said, “No, wouldn't it be great if we could find a slave couple for sale who shared our desires and aspirations, our mirror images? They would want to be part of our family unit and share our human aspirations. If we had that, you could not complain about thwarting someone's destiny and ambitions. We would all be in this together struggling for the same goals.”

I just yelled, “What the fuck, Faith, are you crazy? We have many problems right now. How do we solve them by purchasing, with our limited supply of money, a couple, who, if free, would have the same problems we have; only they are dirt poor. So they bring negative money to the table, and they want to have kids, so we double the childcare problems, double the education bills, and double the housing and food bills. I call this the *no solution but double our problems* idea.”

Faith said, “I am going to brush aside the insults. I love your passion. You are missing a key idea. Big houses in good shape are often slightly cheaper than regular sized houses. So we save there. With four adults, we can swap childcare duties so that three adults get to work full-time. Here is the fun part. If we train them to work as computer programmers, we get four jobs instead of two. Remember your point about slaves being imperfect childcare providers? All childcare would be done by an educated parent who lives with the kids, no strangers. We just need two people who we can trust to the ends of the earth, and have them trust us. And we need to train them to be excellent computer programmers.”

I answered, “So you just solved the problem that has plagued women for over one hundred years in one stroke? I am referring to the problem of getting a college education, having a professional career, and having a house and kids. The solution in the 1920s was to have a lot of servants. The solution in the 1970s was to let the kids go to hell and get divorced. The solution in the 2030s is to buy a slave couple and experience childrearing as a foursome? Tell me, do we all sleep together too?”

Faith said, “Look, run the numbers. Set up some budgets side by side comparing living as a single couple and a double couple. I suspect you will find the advantages of a blended family. You are the one who asked me to think about the type of person that I wanted to raise my child. I am going to ask you the same question. Now let's not talk about this for a day while you do some solid thinking.”

I did spend a lot of time working on the numbers. Faith was right. The initial expense for a house for a dozen people was cheaper than a house for a single family. Four adults could manage the maintenance easier than two adults. With a house with more land area, we could grow some food and possibly raise some chickens. Yes, having four incomes is a big plus. The real bonus in Faith's idea was in the quality of childcare. We would be raising our kids. There would be no

temporary workers involved. But no matter how attractive this was in my numbers or my imagination, I still was not sold on this idea.

I asked Faith, “How do you plan to have this perfect commune with two classes of people: masters and slaves?” She answered, “How did we plan to have a balanced marriage that united two kinds of people, male and female? How does any small group of humans live together for a common goal? We ignore these artificial labels and live as a unit. The rest of the world can call us what they want. They can call you a half-breed and me a monkey from Africa, but right now we are a married unit that will not be broken by anything humans toss at us. Together, we are the strongest thing God could have ever imagined. Our job is to find a couple that shares our vision and build a unity of four adults and all our children. I have no idea what to call such a grouping, a blended family, a double marriage, but we need to locate two people with the brains, wits, character, and drive to pull this off.”

I said, “How can you purchase some slaves and then say, pretend you are free? That makes no sense. No one is truly free unless they are fully free. This is all a sham, a figment of your imagination. You want something that is free and unfree all at the same time.” Faith answered, “Yes, we do have to set some basic limits. If we grant freedom, we should be prepared for our potential partners walking out the door. That would be their legal right. But you are correct; we need to offer freedom at some point. How about offering freedom on the 21st birthday of the first child born in our foursome? We should have a business launched by then. We offer full freedom to our partners and their children for staying with us that long. We offer full equity in everything we share together if we all stay together for another seven years. But we arrange it so that we do not get torn away from a business a second time. The business needs to stay intact through any dissolution of our partnership agreement.”

I replied, “You are saying that the purchased slaves would be free, as long as we all stay together until a specified time. Once we have been together for enough time, they have upheld their side of the bargain. This is an interesting idea. So as long as they ignore their status now, they potentially end up free and rich.” Faith chimed in quickly, “And their children are free as well. Think about that. We would be offering a route for a slave couple to have kids, who are raised as if they are free, and they become free.”

I said, “OK, I am warming up to this. I see where we are going. We are looking for three things. We need the right demographic, a young married slave couple interested in having kids in a safe environment, natural math/science geeks, who did well in high school and can be totally committed to our own goals and desires. I know that we can look for a young couple. I see how we could check their school record, but how do we check their aspirations?”

Faith was silent for a minute. Then she said, “Well, we need to be very careful about showing our hand. We sit down with a pair of candidates and ask questions about their education, background, and work experience. We ask about their experiences with computers and computer programming. Then we shift gears. I give a brief outline of our relationship, explaining how we met in college and got married, and all that. Then you tell your story about your parents and their business. Describe the horrible events of this spring. While you do that, I will be watching our candidates closely. I will ask, ‘What would you do if you were us?’ If they do not want to

answer, I will explain that they need to come up with a choice that is meaningful to them. I will tell them that I am not interested at all if they guess what we are planning to do. I want to hear what they would do if they were in our exact position. Then we listen. I cannot imagine what the right or wrong answers are, but we get to hear from their hearts. That is what we want. I would imagine that once we have a winning candidate, we then open up to what we are planning, and still see if they are onboard. If all signs are positive, we take the steps necessary to add them to our family unit.”

I asked, “Do we buy a big house first or buy slaves first?” Faith said, “Well, if we cannot find the right candidates, we do not need a big house. I say we locate suitable candidates first. Our first joint project will be to pick out the best house for us.”

## **Locating Our Mirror Image**

I started with the three national slave dealers: MasterCard, Visa, and Discover. I asked them for candidates in the Portland area who were in our age range, married, with a strong background in math and science. We requested that both of them have a high school diploma, with a school record showing exceptional talent/ability in math and science. We asked to examine the school records before we even got started. After a week, I received documentation on five candidates from the major companies. There was one set of duplicates since one pair of candidates was cross-listed by two companies. A close reading showed that three candidate pairs were average high school students. So we were left with only one legitimate set of candidates.

To salvage this, I contacted two local slave brokers. Each one identified a legitimate pair of candidates with strong educational backgrounds. I now had a much better appreciation of how local businesses can do a better job than a large company with branches all across the FUSA. We decided to pay an extra fee to hold the interviews at a location of our choosing. We rented a small office suite for three days of interviews. We arranged for a security officer to watch the interviews on a screen in an adjacent room. We were able to ask our questions in a room with just the four of us. We were able to avoid any restraints, so we were all very relaxed. We had plates of food and snacks on the table and made it clear that our guests could eat their fill as we carried on our conversation.

Our first set of candidates was challenging. While having a strong high school transcripts, they did not seem to be able to show us examples of work which they did on their own initiative. We felt that a good candidate would show initiative and be able to express this clearly. When I explained our painful situation, both of them seemed not to get the point. They seemed to say, “If I were in this situation, I would use the cash to make a comfortable life and work when we had to work.” They did not feel the pain that we felt or see that the formation of a business was a good idea.

The second set of candidates was entirely different. They came across as genuine math/science nerds. At the current time, they were working as temporary math teachers at a middle school. Their owner needed cash. She was frustrated at the difficulty she was having with selling them. They both had learned the very basics of computer programming in high school. The amazing thing was that they aced our test about aspirations. They grasped the idea of what we were



asking. They knew they needed to respond as if they were experiencing our real-life problems. So they asked many questions about us. By questioning me, they learned that I wanted to work for my parents' company ever since I was in middle school. One of them asked me, "Can you start a new business now?" Faith answered, "That does not seem possible; we lack money, equipment, staffing, and unique technology." The response from the enslaved man astonished me. He said, "We would dedicate our lives to starting a business. We would put all other issues aside, since only people who owned their own business ever get rich."

We were all smiles at this answer. We all got along very well. I was worried that Faith would not like them since they were both ethnically Chinese. I figured she would not want to be surrounded by Chinese people all the time. That night she told me that was not a concern at all. We told our candidates that we still had one more couple to interview. Both of them wondered aloud, "What kind of job do you want us to do?" Faith said, "We will cover that in our next meeting. We are done for today. Thank you very much. I can say that you did very well." We opened the conference door, and the security guard for the slave company put them in chains and marched them out of the office. I had difficulty watching, but I knew it was part of the reality of their lives.

The third set of candidates was a bit frustrating. They had a solid math and science background, but they blew the aspiration question. They just said, "One of us would work full-time, and the other one would work part time while starting a business." They acted like starting a business was something someone could accomplish in a few hours a week. We tried to steer them away from that point of view, but they were set in that belief. Faith and I went back and forth about whether it was a fair interview or not. Faith argued, "It was a fair interview since we did try to set them straight. Their inability to accept a correction is a very bad sign. Since we were counting on this question, we tried our best to set them on a path to answer it. Their inability to even come close to answering our special question is totally disqualifying."

Faith and I decided to go ahead with the second set of candidates. We contacted the company and were able to get all the paperwork settled in a week's time. We were amazed at how cheap they were. It was clear that the owner had been frustrated at trying to sell them for a long time. The fact that they were a married couple meant that they could not be separated. That was a point of law. I came to appreciate why so many slave owners were opposed to slave marriage. A marriage changed the value of the newlyweds. No one but us wanted two math/science teachers as a unit. So it cost us only \$157,000 to purchase them. On August 23, 2033, Faith and I picked up Ruth and Quincy Lo at the slavery office. They had a few bags of clothing and possessions. To me, it looked like what a middle school student would carry if they were told they were staying with their grandparents for the summer. We just had one car, and we drove to our cramped apartment. Faith and I said we would move into a bigger unit tomorrow. We dumped the possessions and the physical restraints and drove to a modest hotel nearby with a nice restaurant. We told Ruth and Quincy that they could order multiple meals until they were full. Faith and I both brought out cameras. We told them that this was the point when we would start a new blended household.

Bit by bit, we revealed the cards in our hand. We told them of our joint plans. We explained our idea of living with another couple who needed to be "our mirror image." We laid out the route by

which they and their children would be free, and they would gain full equity into the joint project. Ruth wept. Quincy was silent. We explained that our basic rule was that among the four of us, we would all be treated equally. We explained that all the children would be treated equally, that we would function as four parents to a large household. Quincy asked, "But you do not have this big house yet?" I replied, "No, we were waiting until you joined our household. Our first job together as a group is to choose a large house for ourselves and our children." Ruth said, "This will not work. No real estate agent will take our opinion seriously." Faith answered, "Then we will get a different real estate agent. We will do this as a group." Ruth asked, "Do we do everything as a group? Do we all sleep together?" Faith answered, "I like to have a personal relationship with one person at a time. I do not ever want to impose my personal habits on anyone else. But I have discovered that a little bit of exploration with other people can make life more interesting."

Ruth said, "Let me see if I understand this. We all live and work together. A few times I sleep with your husband. In exchange we have fun together, go on vacations together, and get rich together. And my children are free and will inherit real wealth. Do I have to sign any paperwork to show that I agree?" Faith said, "No, we do not need your signature. We all need to trust each other in very profound ways. Tomorrow, we will find a bigger apartment, and we will also get each of your own phones so you can stay in contact. I think very soon, all of us will need our own cars so that we can all go to our own jobs. Do you know how to drive?" Ruth shook her head. Quincy said, "I had some lessons many years ago. But I do not think I know enough to drive a car." Faith said, "No matter. We will make sure you both get good lessons and get a car. Your first car will probably be an old Junker. I hope you do not mind." Ruth had never heard of a slave who had their own car and was able to drive anywhere they wanted. It was unreal. Ruth just said, "You do trust us. This is real. This is not a dream." I said, "We trust you since you are our mirror image. Since we trust each other (I pointed to Faith), we naturally trust you." We all drank a toast to our future.

I told Ruth and Quincy that we had booked a large room in the hotel with two double beds. We all laughed when we were all taking off our clothes in the same room at the same time. We were full of food and drink. In the middle of the night, I heard Ruth ask "Faith, do you want to switch so you can sleep with my husband?" Faith answered, "That's OK. I am sure he is the nicest person ever. There will be other times to enjoy each other. This is not the night to do this. I very much appreciate the offer. Sleep well."

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# Chapter 5: Double Domestic Life

## Getting a House

August 24th was a memorable day. We woke up in the hotel. We joked that we were all so drunk yesterday; we needed to figure out who our bed partner was. But we knew it was going to be a busy day. I have decided to refer to Ruth and Quincy Lo as “our partners.” I will use that term for the rest of the book when I want to refer to them as a couple. Our partners enjoyed the hot bath and a big breakfast in the hotel restaurant.

We drove back to our apartment, and our partners started to get the joke. Our apartment was so small and cramped; there was hardly enough room for us, much less room for them as well. Ruth asked, “How can you stand this dump?” I was laughing as usual. We contacted the rental agency, and got a much bigger apartment, with three bedrooms. I figured that we might do some clothes shopping in the next few weeks so the extra space would be put to good use. That turned out to be an understatement.

We all decided that we needed to purchase a house as soon as possible. We needed a permanent address for our paperwork. We needed a place to store all of our goods. We did get phones for our partners so we could manage our schedules and our housing search. We insisted that the phones be registered in the name of the user. That evening, our partners told us over dinner that if they said yes within two days, they could have their old jobs back at the middle school. It seemed like a good idea. Having immediate employment would add cash to our finances; Faith and I were at the time unemployed. It meant that Faith or I would have to drive them until one of our partners got a driver's license. The plan was to teach only for one more school year. All of our partners' free time would be spent learning computer programming. Ruth had suggested adding a programming course at the middle school that she would teach. She would get a small salary bump, and it would force her to stay a week or two ahead of her students.

I knew our partners were asking permission. I said, “Your instructions are to follow your hearts.” Ruth said, “The job starts in one week. We cannot imagine a job that we could get this easily that would pay as well. A teaching job gives us many hours to study for the next year. We earn money now; we earn more the next year. A small step happens before a big step.” Faith answered, “Good, I like that logic. If I were you, I would accept that job. It is good to coordinate, but you do not need our permission.”

In the morning, we started our house hunting. Faith had a recommendation from a friend to use a particular real estate agency. The staff there could not have been nicer. They understood our statement that we needed four people to pass judgment on a house. I think they were pleased that we were interested in a big house. No one was buying them in the current market.

They lined up ten houses for us to examine. It took us two days to walk through them all. We all decided that two houses were way better than the others. We took lots of photos of these two houses. We had an expert check both of them out. One had foundation and roof problems. The

other did not. So we made a low-ball offer on our favorite house. Our offer of \$141,000 was accepted. The house probably sold for two million dollars 25 years earlier at the height of the housing bubble.

No one offered mortgages anymore. You bought your house with your bank account, or you rented. By paying in full, we four were now the proud owners of 267 Stillwater Lane, located about 10 miles from downtown Portland. We had a six bedroom house with some additional rooms. It had a library, a dining room, a family room, and a very practical kitchen downstairs. Upstairs there were a few small rooms for private study or hobbies. There was a large basement which was used for all sorts of things over the years. We built playsets for the kids to use on rainy days. When the kids were older, we set up a shooting range. But I am getting a bit ahead of our story. We had a shady area in the yard for a play area (and for a chicken house) and a sunny area in the side yard for vegetable crops.

## Our Next Steps

It was surprisingly easy to register our house in the names of all four of us. We were told that since slaves could not own assets, it was a moot point. I just said that if our slaves were freed, it would take a difficult lawsuit to remove their names from the deed. It would also be a taxable event to transfer half the house to our freed slaves. I explained that I intended, in time, to free our slaves, and to split the property, and I did not want to be taxed for doing so. The staff at the property and deeds office just said that they understood, but I could tell that they thought I was crazy. The great thing was that there was very little resistance to this. The office did exactly as I asked. Our partners glowed when they saw the paperwork that showed that the house was equally theirs as it was ours. They hugged us and said, “Thank you” a dozen times. We had the deed framed and placed in the entryway to our house. Each time I look at the deed, I feel deep pride in what we had done in those early days.

I soon realized that we needed a pickup truck to bring all the items we had in storage to our new house. We would always need a big vehicle to bring maintenance supplies to our large house. Even hauling a single new window would be difficult in my tiny car. I asked Faith, “How would you like to drive a pickup truck?” Then I explained that our next vehicle needed to be a truck. She laughed and said, “Sure. But I am going to borrow your car when I apply for a job. I do not want to give the wrong impression!” One of my buddies in the “Nerd Salad” days told me about a friend who was desperate to sell his truck. It took only five loads with the pickup truck to bring all the items out of storage to our new house.

We were all required to obtain new ID cards identifying ourselves as owners or slaves. We all held temporary ID cards ever since the purchase. It was a bit humiliating to be subjected to repeated paperwork checks, fingerprinting, and photographs. It was obvious that some people were scamming the system, possibly by trying to transfer slaves from one owner to another in sham deals designed to transfer assets to avoid paying taxes. To get the IDs, we needed to prove that our bank account was used and that the purchaser actually got paid.

Faith and I got plastic ID's showing that we were owners, with small pictures and names of our property. Our partners got ID's showing that they were property, with small pictures and names

of their owners. After getting the cards, we all had lunch together at a small restaurant. At one point I said, "Well, at least if the police ever stop us, we now have ID cards that can establish our identity." Ruth added, "And these cards show that we are bound together as a family."

We were under the gun trying to get as much done as possible before our partners needed to go back to work at the beginning of the school year. I wanted our bank account to be a truly joint account. The bank would not have any of this. They did not have a problem with a slave having a bank account of \$100, but they could not tolerate a slave having access to an account in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The bank said they would be on the hook legally if a slave used the money to escape. Faith and I offered to sign a waiver of liability. They refused us on that as well.

We had to spend an hour on the phone until we found a cooperative bank. We moved the account to our new bank and filled in paperwork so that the four members of our household each had full access to the funds. I later found out that this bank had several key staffers who were legally slaves, and these sorts of arbitrary restrictions made life difficult for the bank as well. We were more than happy to move our account to a bank which was open-minded about supporting their customers' wishes.

Faith did the daily run of driving our partners to their job since she is a morning person. I did the afternoon pickup. After six weeks of this, Quincy got his driver's license. As promised, we got a plausible Junker car. We all knew we could afford a much better car, but that would have made our partners much too conspicuous. We did not want our slaves to be arrested for DIAFC (driving in a fancy car). A week or two after Quincy had independent transportation, Faith and I got jobs. Faith got a plum programming job at a major bank. I got a mid-level IT job at a chain of stores. The combined salary for all four of us was just over \$75,000, which was a fortune in those days. Our partners earned only \$22,000 together, so we knew that we would be earning more when they could locate technical jobs. I did my best to accept that my wife was making \$10,000 more than me. The situation made me very aware that minor resentments simmer in what looked like a great relationship. Keeping everything on an even keel required constant work.

Quincy noticed that once we all had full-time jobs, we got very grumpy and surly when the weekend started. He asked us, "What can we do to force us to transition from a work week to a more relaxed weekend?" Faith told stories about Jewish neighbors celebrating Friday afternoon Shabbat. After some discussion, we decided to adapt this tradition to our household. We made a big meal together. We agreed to complain about our work week while we were preparing the meal. At the point we were done, we walked into the dining room, lit a candle, and refrained from talking about work. On so many Friday nights we did not feel like preparing a meal from scratch. When we did it anyway, we all enjoyed it. Having a weekly ritual helped bind us together as a unit. We also made it a point to include all the adults in our house, including those that were not part of our "meal plan." When we had guests over, they loved how we got our work frustrations out while wielding knives and hot things. Once we sat down to dinner, we put all of that behind us. Our guests thought we were part of some religious cult. We replied, "It is the things we do over and over again that make us human."

## Friends, Neighbors, and Relatives

Once we had enough furniture, cooking equipment, and tableware, we invited the neighbors on either side of our house over for an afternoon barbeque. We also needed to adjust our own attitude. We were flipping the script that Connie and Terry used at their parties. We all dressed alike and treated each other completely equally. We recorded various meals from cooking to clean up and watched carefully for any sign that we were falling into tired social norms of master and slave. Eventually, we got to the point where every interaction was as smooth and normal as would be seen in any marriage.

It was a bit tricky since it was hard to telegraph to our visitors not to treat our partners as if they were slaves. We made it clear that we were all sharing in the food preparation, serving and cleaning up. Both houses had grandparents, parents, and children. It took many incomes to support a large house in our neighborhood. Ruth explained that we were all trying to get work so that our pooled income would support the house. She said it as if she was the house manager, and she also gently chided Faith and me for not having jobs (at least not on the date of the barbeque). Our guests looked shocked that a slave would be acting as the house manager. I decided to have some fun, so I said, "Ruth, I am certain that Faith and I will get jobs soon. By next summer, I am sure that we will have positive cash flow." Ruth did not miss a second. She answered, "Well, I would hope so!" Faith and Quincy almost burst out laughing. I did notice that the guests all brought their used plates to the kitchen, not wanting to ask Ruth to pick up after them. Of course, it was all a big joke, we all had full time jobs for more than a month.

We did wonder how to describe the relationships inside of our household. What we really needed was a simple narrative, a story to tell. One approach was not to mention it at all. In many circumstances, the most straightforward narrative was the external fiction, "Master and slave." A better explanation was, "We are running a household as a partnership of two couples to maximize money and human rewards." A cryptic explanation said, "We are roommates who enjoy doing things together." The full narrative was very difficult to express in a way that was likely to be understood.

One afternoon, Faith and Quincy were off with the pickup truck getting furniture from a garage sale. Ruth turned to me and asked, "Faith has experienced my husband a few times already. Do you want to have a good experience with me?" The question took me off guard. I did not need to be talked into anything. We went into the bedroom that our partners were using, and did what came naturally. I was a bit nervous that our spouses would be back at any moment. Ruth sensed my unease and whispered in my ear, "Do not worry. I told Quincy to take lots of time on this trip. We have plenty of time." For a short time, I was thinking about my wedding vows. But I did remember that by the time we were married, both of us had "experience" with Faith's roommates. Mostly, I did not do much thinking; I was living in the moment, focusing on my current sexual partner. When we finished, Ruth asked me, "Did you like this?" I refused to answer unless she answered the same question to me. When Quincy and Ruth came home, Ruth smiled broadly to Quincy, who then smiled at me.

In mid-September, Quincy mentioned at breakfast that his parents managed a small restaurant in Portland. I was astonished. I asked, "How long has it been since you have seen your parents?"

Quincy said, "It has been about two years." I said, "Can we go there tonight? This is exciting!" Quincy shook his head, "My parents are deeply ashamed of the loan they took out to help my aunt's business. These loans collapsed and resulted in my family's enslavement. The last time I came to my parents, they could not look me in my eyes. I am not certain they would be able to speak to me." Faith said, "Please have some faith that when the four of us walk in as proud and free as we can, your parents will be happy to see you."

Once we were all finished with work and got home, we all dressed up and drove to *The Emperor's Palace*, Quincy's parents' restaurant. We went in and sat down. When Sally Lo, Quincy's mother, came over to offer menus, she looked stunned when she saw her son looking well as one of four well-dressed people. Quincy stood up and said, "I would like to introduce you to my mother, Sally Lo. Mother, these are the people who share a house that we all own together. You know Ruth; this is Chris and his wife, Faith." At that point, we all stood up and shook her hand. Her voice was weak and happy. She said, "Please, let me bring my husband from the kitchen." In a minute, he came out, looking upset and angry. When he saw us as a group of four, his expression changed. He shook our hands and said, "I am so glad that my son is doing so well. No matter what happens, I know you will make us and all of our family, alive and dead, so very proud." It did take a lot of negotiating, but we were able to have Sally and Chan Lo over to our house for Thanksgiving. We were able to give them a better idea of our grand project.

I did ask Ruth about her parents. She had no idea of where they were. She did not think that they lived in Portland anymore. Faith used her bank connections to make some inquiries. She was able to trace them to Salt Lake City. I suggested that we take a road trip to Salt Lake City during the Christmas and New Year holiday. Ruth said, "I do not think that would be a good idea. We need banking, police, and other offices open to locate my parents. These offices will be closed or will be partially shut down. We should wait until my spring break next year. Perhaps I could travel with Chris to avoid too much disruption of our household. I would not want Faith to miss a week of work. She has the highest income of our group. Until then, we will search for my parents using telephones and computers. I very much want to spend Christmas and New Year's Eve at our house. I do not want to be traveling at that time."

Christmas was fun at our house. Not much alcohol was consumed that year. Both Faith and Ruth were pregnant. Faith was a bit further along than Ruth. Faith was due in May 2034. Ruth was due in June or July. We decided that since this was our only child-free Christmas, we needed to set out our preferred Christmas traditions. As soon as we had kids, we would want to keep things the same. As Faith pointed out, "When our children are very small, we will want each year to be similar to the previous year, so the photographs and our memories will blend together." We decided to go around the table to list the things we wanted in a family Christmas tradition. I was first. I said, "Since I am half-German, I have to say a Christmas tree decorated in old-fashioned European style. I remember a real tree with strings of lights and shiny decorations and a star on top of the tree." Faith added, "I have strong memories of my dad dressing up as Santa Claus. I also remember huge Christmas decorations on our front lawn. I think my father liked getting the approval of his neighbors by having an outside display that was enjoyed by all the kids on our street."

Quincy said, "I remember a huge feast of Chinese food in the afternoon. It was special because there were a great many dishes. You would take a tiny bit of each one, but there were so many dishes that you would think you would not eat again for two days." Ruth added, "When I was small, I remember my parents preparing very intricate small gifts for many friends, relatives, and especially business associates. They thought it was rude to give big store-bought presents. They made tiny lacquered boxes, each one holding something of value. I think they saved up all year to give them all." Quincy frowned and said, "That would seem to be very hard to duplicate. Without meaning to insult your parents, I would say that giving out so many expensive presents may have led to their family's enslavement. But I do like the idea of remembering as many people as we can in a wide circle and showing that we care about others. It is very thoughtful."

By the time the dinner was over, we had a complete list of things to do for Christmas. Ruth asked that each year, Quincy and I flip a coin to see who Santa Claus is. Faith said, "I hate to say this, but none of this is going to work unless we do our best to start this year. We need to get the tree decorations, the lawn decorations, the dinner recipes this year. Next year we will be dealing with two kids. We will not be able to pull this off unless we have a dry run. Why don't we organize a Christmas party for your Nerd Salad friends a few days before Christmas? I know they have a few small kids. Let's put on a proper Christmas in our household tradition that we just worked out 20 minutes ago!" Faith was right. All the things we remembered from childhood that seemed to "just happen" took a lot of adult organizing time.

A week before Christmas, We had the entire Nerd Salad gang, their partners, and their kids over for a Christmas party. We had the lawn decorations, the decorated tree, and all the other things around to make a festive house. Our house was host to four kids, ranging from one year to four years old. Since the Nerd Salad was my friends, I did the bulk of the socializing. Ruth and Faith dealt with the kids. Quincy was Santa Claus. Ruth and Faith kept a careful list of everything we needed to remember for next year.

Over the adult dinner, I explained our personal and business plans. My high school friends were astonished. When I explained that a very large house was cheaper than a single family house, my friends asked, "Are you saying that if we all doubled up on housing, we would free up about \$100,000 per double family?" Ruth, as usual, got in first, and said, "Perhaps more than \$100,000." I pointed out, "Doubling up works only if the two family units stay together for decades. We have pledged to stay together for 30 years. If you can do the same, you can peel off some valuable capital. But you need a suitable long-term goal that you are all committed to before you attempt to do what we are doing. You risk being forced back to your present situation having lost thousands of dollars of transaction fees and taxes. But if you are renting housing, you could experiment sharing a single large house for a year to see how things work out." I wondered if the Nerd Salad was going to get a bit spiced up by the formation of blended households.

At the end of the evening, we all helped bundle the kids into the cars and said our goodbyes. We had learned a little bit about handling kids and basic childcare. Our house needed a lot of childproofing. We needed a lot more table space to serve a huge Chinese feast. We glowed, knowing that next year, we would be taking pictures of our own children's first Christmas.



A few weeks later, we had an unfortunate incident in downtown Portland. A police officer yelled for us to stop and pulled his gun on us. He asked us to lie down on the ground face down. I pointed out that we had two pregnant ladies. I asked, "Can they just sit down on the sidewalk?" He said yes. He asked us for our ID cards. One by one, we carefully pulled out our ID cards that showed that our group consisted of two owners and two slaves. We thought that would be the end of it, but he called on the radio for backup. He tried to arrest Faith and me. I asked, "What are we charged with?" He said that we were insufficiently restraining our slaves. He said our slaves should be in handcuffs and other chains. I explained that the law required the slaves to be restrained to the satisfaction of the owners. I asked, "Does that not mean that my opinion is the sole determination of whether a law has been broken?" It took a bit of time, but one of the other officers on the scene did diffuse the situation. Finally, the arresting officer realized that he was liable to be sued. Lawsuits that go bad can lead to enslavement. He finally released us. We did get our names in the newspaper over the episode.

Fortunately, none of us had any problems with our jobs over this episode. I did get a document signed by a police commissioner saying that we did not have to restrain our slaves in Portland, Oregon. We all decided that since laws and customs were different in other jurisdictions, we should use restraints when we traveled elsewhere.

We did get a fair amount of hate mail after our names were in the newspapers. We were called "Slave Lovers" and "Spoiled Cattle." It was all very hurtful. We did ignore these. We did get a few letters that were friendly. It was through those letters that we learned of a "hidden underground" of people who lived with slaves in more egalitarian relationships. Bit by bit, we started making friends with like-minded people.

## **The Trip to Salt Lake City**

One week into February, Ruth had an ultrasound. The big reveal was that she was having twins, a boy and a girl. The medical technician who gave us the result congratulated me since now my slave was worth so much more money. I just said, "All children are valuable beyond all words and understanding." I think the technician thought that I had no grasp of capitalist economics. I thought she had no idea of the worth of each human soul.

A week after the ultrasound, I took Ruth with me on a trip to Salt Lake City. We had a tip that Ruth's parents worked at a major department store in Salt Lake City. We had a list of seven department stores to visit. At the fifth store we visited, the personnel manager told us they had sold Ruth's parents to a hotel in the adjacent town of Holladay, Utah. We drove to the Parkhurst Hotel and checked in. As we were checking in, I made sure Ruth was on a leash. I asked, "Do Grace and Xu Wang work at this hotel?" The man at the hotel desk said, "Yes, but you cannot speak to them. That is forbidden." I negotiated that once we had fully checked in, we could add \$30 to the hotel bill, and we could have a 45-minute session with Ruth's parents in the cafe.

We waited for half an hour in the restaurant. We stood up when a manager came in with Ruth's parents. Ruth was deeply embarrassed to be wearing a leash. I would have paid anything not to be holding a leash, but I did not want to be spending time in jail in what was a foreign country.

The manager sat down at our table. I asked if it was OK to be ordering food for everyone. She said this was fine. We quickly ordered food that we knew was quick to prepare.

Ruth's parents were delighted to see Ruth. They knew that the manager was not pleased, so they were careful not to smile. But their voices were warm and genuine. Ruth said that she was working on a project that would allow her to be free in twenty years. She told them that she expected to give birth to twins in late June. Her parents were delighted to be informed. We asked the manager if it was OK to send a letter when their daughter gave birth. She said yes. It was very awkward, but it was the best we could do.

Of course, we shared a room together. We did not make love that night. We hugged each other tightly. We both cried a lot before we fell asleep. We did stop at a few tourist locations on the way back to Portland. When we were a few hours away from Portland, Ruth said, "Before going on this trip, I did not know if my parents were alive or dead. I got to visit them. I know their address, I can write to them. I gave them my phone number when the manager was not looking. I call this trip a complete success." But I did notice a few tears on her face as she was trying so hard to be upbeat.

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# Chapter 6: Children Change Everything

## Egalitarianism, Emancipation, and Hidden Motives

In 2034, we started entertaining guests who contacted us because they shared our belief in egalitarianism. If I recall correctly, on six evenings we hosted households that described themselves as egalitarian. Overgeneralizing is not a good idea, but these folks seemed to fall into a few categories. Some people found their ideal spouse in the marketplace. While they made charming dinner guests, the obvious question is, “Why not sign the paper so your spouse can be free?” There seemed to be two answers, “I do not believe in divorce” or “I would be disinherited if I did that.”

The second group of couples had a similar motive, which was to avoid being widely recognized as being gay. This was the case for Connie, Faith's college roommate. While Connie was open with her parents, it was clear that Connie's true relationship was hidden from her parents' relatives and friends. Connie did not espouse egalitarianism. But we did entertain others who did. Nonetheless, the prospect of a wealthy person, capable of purchasing another, using slavery to hide their sexual orientation, did not strike us as noble.

There was one brother and sister pair that used some family money to free a group of childhood friends. Strangely, they did not bring any of these old friends with them, saying that, “They did not have the best table manners.” I got the impression that they called on their friends all the time to do errands for them. To me, the emancipation was fairly theoretical.

All of these folks were intensely curious about our complicated relationship. Ruth and Faith did a good job of explaining how our business plans required a mirror-image double coupling. This was bewildering to our various guests. In my opinion, our guests were spending more energy on espousing egalitarianism than they were on achieving it. We were forming a business partnership that needed to last decades. We concluded that the only way to keep the business partnership functional was to build a relationship based on actual equality. In other words, we were behaving as non-conformists to make a buck, not to purify our souls. All of this must have been too much for them to handle. I am fairly certain that our various dinner guests on various nights all left our house shaking their heads, full of discussion points as to why we were not approaching this difficult social problem properly. At each of these dinners, Faith picked a random time to say, “It is time to flip the coins to see who sleeps with whom tonight.” The guests who figured out she was just teasing turned out to be terrific long-term friends.

In our discussions, we knew that we were not trying to score points on some social purity scale. It was our daily job to make sure that we were all functioning properly, without resentment or “issues” that can build up when people live together. We all observed each other carefully and found pleasant ways to keep the group mood as positive as possible.

## The Midwife Arrives

With three children on the way, we decided to line up a midwife. We asked around and located Ann Kopps as someone in our neighborhood. At a preliminary meeting, she told us that she was looking for a place to live. Ruth said, “You can live in our house until the kids are born. Perhaps we can work out another deal once the babies are born. Having you in the house would be amazing.”

We did have a series of short-term renters in our house. This was the first time we had a renter in our house that was there to help us directly. Ann's situation was more serious than we thought. She had virtually no money in her account and needed to have meals with us just to survive. I wondered how she found new clients, but she was very private about her own business affairs. I eventually learned that a very wealthy woman had blamed her last year for a less than optimal pregnancy outcome. She had no idea how to overcome the bad reputation that became associated with her name. I decided to withhold helping Ann with her reputation problem until the kids were born without incident.

On May 15, 2034, Faith gave birth to a son, Samuel Ben Ritter. We all liked Sam; it was a name well used by Americans of all ethnic groupings (there are many Chinese men named Sam). The middle name Ben was, of course, for Faith's father. I got to add the last name, so everyone gave a piece of the name. Faith was in labor for just under six hours, and all went well. My trust in our midwife soared. We were all very happy. By giving birth, Faith had set the date of our partner's freedom to be May 15, 2055 (which is 21 years after the birth of the first child born to our combined household). Faith told me that she was delighted that it was her child and not Ruth's that had set the freedom date.

I would like to mention that on May 20, 2034, Jane Foreman was born in Ohio. I did not know anyone who knew her, but at some point, my story intersects with her story. She was born five days after the birth of my first child.

The next six weeks were amazing. Ruth just barely finished the school year and then retreated to bed rest at home. Quincy and I were doing our best to support Faith, Sam, and Ruth. If I said we had never worked this hard in our lives, all the women in my life would say, “For once you admit that household work is hard and exhausting.” Instead of falling into that trap, I will just say that there is a tipping point when the number of caregivers is outnumbered by the number of people needing assistance.

During this time, the most amazing thing happened. There was a knock on the door. It was my sister Jennie. The short version of her story is that she married, and her husband tried to seize all her assets. She was able to get a divorce. Between the jerk and the divorce, she had very little left. Another man became part of her life and stripped her of her remaining assets. She had no house, no bank account, and very little else. She had two suitcases and some personal items stashed at the houses of friends.

She cried and cried when I mentioned what she had done to our life plans. She said, “I am very sorry. You will never forgive me.” I told her that just saying that she recognized what had happened was 95% of all I wanted to hear. I shared with her what had happened in our lives. Readers can review the last four chapters. Since the book had not been written yet, there was a

lot to tell her. We did a lot of talking while changing diapers, doing laundry, and cooking food with Quincy and me. I cannot tell you how much we appreciated the help.

The most important conversation I had was to explain how I thought that a criminal syndicate had targeted our parents and Jennie. I said, "I am going to guess that this lawyer showed up out of nowhere telling you that I was cheating you, and your only hope of getting anything at all was to sign some papers." She nodded and asked how I knew. I laid out the whole story. She said, "I have been very stupid. I have wrecked everything. I should have slammed down the phone on that so-called lawyer." I said, "We are all in a good place. We all have a home. We have a dream. If you had refused the lawyer, the gang might have killed both of us. We cannot undo the past. Do not do anything dramatic. Stay in our house. Help us the best you can. We will assist you in finding your own place. You were forced into a situation in which you could not turn to anyone else when you got in trouble. Things are different now. As long as you can carry your own weight, we will make sure that you are part of a very large community that wants you to find a fulfilling place in this world. Who knows, that place might be this house. Or it might be thousands of miles from here."

Jennie was still very emotional. She said, "This house is like a dream. It seems to be twice as large as our childhood home. You are living with your business partners. You are well on the way to having three babies here. You must have spent a fortune on the house and the 'pre-paid labor.'" Ruth interrupted, saying, "Honey, just use the correct words. Your brother bought our asses. He just got a terrific bargain." Jennie continued, "It sounds like you still have a lot of money in the bank. Somehow I got wiped out in a year. I must be the biggest fool ever." I answered, "Ruth is right. The labor purchase and the house purchase were bargains. All of us have full-time jobs. We are training Ruth and Quincy to move from being school teachers to being computer programmers. We are all doing our best under our circumstances. I have to deal with the fact that Faith has a much larger salary than I do. That rubs me the wrong way sometimes, but I have learned to joke about it, and not be upset about how my own job can be deeply frustrating. In two years, I probably will be in a better job situation. In two years, you will probably be in a much better situation."

Jennie did have a remarkable transformation. Her Goth associates had endlessly told her that Chris was really evil. The daily tasks of caregiving completely changed her from a glum kid into a bright, optimistic young woman, eager to get a better start into her adult life.

As Jennie and I were bonding, Ruth came closer to her due date. On July 2, she gave birth to Julie Grace Lo and Raymond Xu Lo. The circumstances of the births were fairly complicated. Ann was a champion and used her skill and knowledge to make sure everything was in the right position. Julie was born two and a half hours before her brother. Ruth told her children, "I do not care what your ID cards say. You will never feel the yoke of slavery. You will be free legally before your 21st birthday. You will both make your family proud."

The reality of dealing with three babies was hard to describe. The endless laundry, feeding, sleeping, dressing, bathing, diapering, and fussing took their toll. Jennie was a lifesaver in keeping things functional in those difficult first months with the small babies. Faith had only eight weeks of time off from her work. Thus, the bulk of childcare fell on Ruth, since the twins

were her babies; and on Jennie, since she was around so much. For all of our talk of egalitarianism, it seemed so unfair that so much primary childcare fell on Ruth.

In October 2034, Quincy was able to obtain flexible employment as a computer programmer for one-and-a-third full-time positions for himself and Ruth at an unusual investment company. Together, they would earn \$24,000 per year. Quincy and Ruth were making slightly more money than they did in their last year of teaching. We all pitched in so that Ruth was able to carve out a small number of hours for her new job. This was tricky since a computer programmer needs to learn their basic job as quickly as possible. I remember spending long hours in the afternoon, evening, and morning helping Ruth with the kids and discussing her assignments for her work. Ruth was embarrassed that I would be helping her so much. She would say, "Mr. Ritter, this is my work." I would always say, "Our core mission is to keep our jobs and to take care of our kids, our house, and each other. If you do not know why I am assisting you, perhaps you should reflect on our mission statement." Ruth asked, "Are you reprimanding me?" I just laughed and said, "I do believe that would be quite impossible."

Our Friday night dinners mostly went on as before. If the babies were sick or on a bad sleep schedule, we just gave up. The special meals were for the benefit of the adults. If the adults were not able to function, the meal was off. We all decided that having a special meal on Saturday was not the same thing. If we missed a Friday, we just tried harder the next Friday. Bit by bit we made new traditions that were functional with all of the kids. We decided to take a neighborhood walk with the kids on the full moon. When people asked us what we were doing, we would explain, "It is a full moon night. As much as possible we bring our kids out to see the full moon." We knew the origin of the word "lunacy" and figured that our neighbors must think we were in some sort of moon cult.

As expected, the twins were more difficult than just two kids. Raymond became physically intimidating, and Julie became an expert at psychological warfare. Poor Sam hardly had a chance. Yes, he was six weeks older than the twins, but as the months went by, that advantage slipped away from him.

One morning, Sam was in the kitchen with Jennie. He opened a cabinet and tried to pull out a small ring of aluminum. It was stuck, so he pulled very hard. It was hooked on a bit of cast iron. With one mighty toddler yank, he pulled everything from the cabinet, and a small, heavy frying pan hit his foot. There was blood everywhere. Jennie wrapped Sam's foot in a towel, picked him up, and ran upstairs to find another adult. She burst open the main bedroom door to discover Faith and Ruth making love. They quickly put on robes and tended to Sam. While everyone tried to distract Sam, Ruth sewed three stitches to close the wound.

Jennie wanted to make sure I knew what had been going on in the master (or is it the master/slave) bedroom. I just asked if they were both enjoying themselves. I said, "That is all that matters." I know the open display of hedonism probably bothered Jennie. But she was glad that she was not the bearer of news that ended a relationship. I had other issues. I was amazed that Ruth knew how to sew up a wound. I asked her again and again how she learned how to do this. It turned out that she was a good shot, could fix a car, and could talk a banker into doing what he or she should never do. I decided that there were a lot of skills that I wanted to learn and

I wanted my children to learn. I started to collect books that dealt with emergency situations. Over the years, we had a lot of fun discussing every emergency you could imagine.

## **The Crossover Kids**

At each birth, there was a little game we all played. In our household, we had two dads. One dad was Chinese, and one dad was half-Chinese, half-white. So the presence or absence of a tiny flicker of “whiteness” in a baby might be significant in a DNA kind of way.

In March of 2036, Faith realized she was pregnant. Ruth realized she was pregnant in September. Faith had a girl named Mary Jean on October 27, 2036. Mary looked more Chinese than Sam. Nobody asked for a DNA test. We had the first child of Faith and Quincy. We completed the package deal when Ruth gave birth to Bobbie Jo on May 17, 2037. She had just a dab of Caucasian facial features not found in Ruth or Quincy.

Our second crop of kids was the crossover kids (or crossover girls). We decided to give them the last name of Ritter-Lo. They came to be intensely linked to each other, closer than the twins. They were bright, outgoing, funny girls, who were very sure of themselves. They did everything together. They did not share a drop of DNA. Perhaps at some level, they knew their very existence was the stuff of scandal.

Quincy and I did the bulk of the early childcare for the crossover kids. Our wives laughed a lot and implied that it was our “exploration” that made them possible. This choice made sense considering our careers. Faith, as usual, had her high-paying job. I quit my job, to devote some time to the kids, Quincy was working half-time, and Ruth was up to full-time. With only two and a half jobs, we were up to \$115,000 a year. It was true that Faith was responsible for \$70,000 of it. She was doing so well at managing a squad of programmers; it was scary. The bank she worked for adored her. I was proud of the progress our partners had been making in their careers. It was just me that had a somewhat checkered job history. But our household was as stable as ever with four adults and five bright kids.

In June 2039, Faith had a miscarriage. It was such a sad moment. Faith had a very difficult time. A few weeks later, she said, “I think I am done with reproduction. I do not think we should have a sixth child.” We all started using various forms of birth control after that.

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# Chapter 7: Ninja Children in the Suburbs

## Emergencies Happen All the Time

Family trips by automobile are always complicated affairs. For all the attractions of travel, it was a pain, since most places were long drives away. For example, Faith wanted to go to Los Angeles at least once a year. Taking a long, boring trip with five kids and four adults was always problematic, since boredom came around every corner. One approach is to keep the day full with interesting conversation. I liked the idea of challenging everyone with impossible emergency scenarios and asking what had to be done. One of my favorites was, “A hungry tiger is chasing you. You see your friend leaving in a car. Do you chase after the car and risk exhaustion (and being easy prey) if your friend does not stop, or do you turn around to find a weapon to face the tiger?” The question was and is impossible. How good is your friend? What kind of weapons are within reach? There were far more questions than anything else.

When the kids got older, their answers got more organized. We asked them what had to be done immediately, what could wait twenty minutes, and what could wait a day or so. Over the years, our kids could handle some rather non-traditional situations. They could verbalize how to get away with murder, how to rob a bank, how to tell lies, and how to do better than anyone expected in an election.

I made sure the kids learned how to fix a car, defend themselves, suture a wound, fire a gun, and so much more. Once I cut my leg, and I needed the wound to be closed up. Ruth gave instructions, and Julie did the suturing. Both Mary and Bobbie were fascinated. I think they wanted to be the ultimate tough kids. They kept trying to practice fighting to respond to Raymond's physicality. At a certain point, Bobbie and Mary told Raymond, “We are sisters. Sisters protect each other. If you attack one of us, we will bonk you on the head with a frying pan at some point. For each attack on one of us, there will be one bang on the head. If you attack one of us, you had better know what the other one is doing.” A few weeks after the ultimatum, Raymond finally left Bobbie and Mary alone. The house got a lot quieter after that.

One time I asked Bobbie, “What would you do if Raymond hid all of the frying pans in the house, and then attacked you?” Bobbie answered, “Easy. I would use some of our stash. Mary and I have frying pans hidden all over the house. There is about one for each room of the house. Raymond would soon discover that the cooks would be angry and that his head would still get dented. If Raymond managed to find every frying pan in our house, he still would need to find the frying pans we have buried in the backyard. I also want to point out that the outside world, away from our property, is simply loaded with inexpensive frying pans. It is often easy to borrow frying pans from others, especially if you say you only need it for a few minutes for something unrelated to cooking.”

Somehow, I have gotten this far into the book without mentioning that we were raising the kids bilingual. We spoke English and Mandarin. Some of this was hard on Faith, but she picked up Mandarin along with the kids. As if our family was not strange enough on road trips, we



sometimes switched to Mandarin when we wanted to make rude comments. There is the risk that someone you do not expect can understand you. That rarely happened. There were a lot of stories on the flip side. There is no polite way of saying this. A child of a black person and a Chinese person looks black. The Chinese part is there, but not so obvious. So we had three family members (Faith, Sam, and Mary) who could speak Mandarin but did not look the slightest bit Chinese. I hate to say it, but Faith had numerous episodes when she said, “No, I am not going to steal your things. I am a law-abiding citizen” in Mandarin to persons who looked like they wished they could fall through the floor.

## We Try Home Schooling

Sixth grade started badly for Mary and Bobbie. Their teacher seemed to detest them. It was over-the-top unprofessional. Mary and Bobbie swore that they did not talk in Chinese or do anything to antagonize the teacher. They did say that the teacher would get deeply upset each time they addressed each other in class as *sister*. We parents were quite frustrated because we were paying the tuition. Faith finally had enough and had a meeting with the principal and the teacher. She showed them some videos the girls took of their teacher screaming at them for no reason. He confessed that he had attempted to forbid them from calling each other “sister.” When they persisted, he said this was an affront to school discipline.

Faith looked the principal in the eye and said, “There seem to be some very bad assumptions here. These girls live in the same house that also contains all of their biological parents. They share a room and a last name. Don't be hung up on the slave collar and their skin colors. It appears that it is too late to salvage this situation. You all strike me as the sort of people who are incapable of ever admitting to a mistake. So let us turn to the matter at hand. These *sisters* are leaving this school. I will demand a full refund of the tuition for these two *sisters*. If you object, I will go public about your violation of your mission statement. You promise not to discriminate against families with different backgrounds. These *sisters* have had their rights violated.” She turned to the teacher and said, “I would like you to write a letter of apology to these *sisters*, or I will see that your teaching credentials are revoked in the ugliest way possible. Do you have a written policy against any students from identifying as siblings, or do you reserve this outrage only for my kids?”

Faith got a full refund. Once we had the refund, she considered making the dispute public to weaken the school further. We all decided that this would expose the crossover girls to public scrutiny and possible bullying. We handled the issue as quietly as possible. For one year, the girls were homeschooled.

Faith became responsible for their education. She gave them documents from her work and had them read and understand them. Faith had the girls walk around different areas, inside and out, and had them draw specific maps. The maps had to be as close to mathematical accuracy as possible. Faith assigned her kids rather strange book reports. They had to sneak into a public library, steal a book, have the book out for only a week, write a report, and then sneak the book back without being caught. They were required to demonstrate that they placed the book into the correct place, based on the library's organization scheme. The girls loved it. During their homeschool year, they produced ten “stolen book reports.” I remember one of them started out,

“This book was not worth stealing.” I objected to this in the beginning. Faith just said, “No book is as loved or as carefully read as one of these books. Isn’t that what a public library is all about? To take one book out of a whole building loaded with books and make it magical?” Another assignment was to ask the girls to bike to different places around Portland. They had to document the fastest route, and prove to Faith’s satisfaction that it was the fastest route. Again, I objected that this exposed the girls to risk. Faith told me, “It is not the fastest route if you need to visit the hospital. The girls know this. They stay safe.”

Quincy filled up the pickup truck with bicycle parts from the dump. The girls were asked to assemble as many working bikes as they could and sell them to neighborhood kids. They were required to keep track of their time so that they could work out their earnings per hour. The girls set the prices to maximize their wages. They were required to fix any problem in the first 30 days, and to offer a full refund (if requested) after 30 days. Each time there was a refund, Faith fined them \$5. They found that their hourly wage was quite low, being brought down by all the fussing over repairs. Sam helped grade the assignment. They got a B since Sam thought they could have made two more bicycles from the unused parts.

Faith volunteered for a non-profit that provided legal services for slaves or disputes involving slaves. One problem was access. If the non-profit could get a short video of an accident location or a witness, they could petition a judge for greater access. But without any initial access, there was no evidence to use to petition a judge. Mary and Bobbie’s assignment was to sneak into all kinds of places and get the crucial, initial evidence. Often, Mary put a leash on Bobbie’s collar, and Bobbie carried a tray of chilled sodas into a workplace. While the supervisors were enjoying the drinks, Mary would interview people. One odd metal object on Bobbie’s tray was a hidden camera. Nobody ever caught on. Later the interviews would be typed into affidavits by legal clerks. Bobbie said, “We can do that, too.” Their first attempts were not suitable to present to the court. Eventually, they learned how to use format templates, grammar checkers, and spelling checkers. With improved technology and improved writing skills, they produced documents that could be submitted directly to the courts. One of the law clerks said, “You are going to put us out of business!” Mary said, “No, we are helping you so that your work will get to be more interesting. We are just doing the boring part of the work for you.”

## **The Very Horrible Video**

Some slaves disappeared in Portland. One undercover investigator followed a suspicious car to non-descript industrial location. Subsequent investigation was impossible since the building was heavily guarded. No one could sneak in. The girls got the “assignment” to figure it out the best they could. The building had visible guards. They knew that none of their usual tricks would work. They first snuck into the adjacent building at nighttime. They were able to climb from that building onto the roof of their target building. Bobbie located a skylight that could be opened a few inches. You could stick your hand in, but not your head. Mary had a camera with a massive flash. She stuck it into the gap and took a few photos. At home, they looked at the photos carefully. There was nothing suspicious at all.

Mary and Bobbie worked out a plan together. They did see a row of suspended lighting fixtures. They scrounged around until they located a broken fixture that was identical in an abandoned

industrial building. They took it apart and mounted a camera with a week's worth of battery life and a large capacity memory card. It was rigged so it would fold down to wedge into the skylight, and then snap into place with springs once it was inside. They snuck back up to the skylight, and by using mirrors and optical tricks, managed to lower their fake fixture to roughly the same elevation as the real fixtures. They figured no one would ever notice a non-working light fixture for one week. A week later, they snuck back and retrieved their phony light fixture. They took pains to avoid leaving any clues as to what they had done. Back home, they fast forwarded the video until there was movement. It seemed to show some sort of autopsy. That was enough for them; they turned the memory card over to Faith saying, "Whoever looks carefully at this video needs to have a barf bowl. This is disgusting."

The video showed an organ harvesting operation. Slaves were brought in. They were told they had cancer, and they would be cured at "Special Slave Hospital #4." If you want a further description of the contents of these videos, look at the Portland newspapers from the summer of 2048. The dissecting, the jolly workers with their profane comments, the rapid work, it all caused the whole town to lose their meals. Faith arranged for a 90-minute documentary. I was to be the narrator. It was my job to say that thirty slaves were harvested in a single week. When I went through the tape the first time, I screamed as loud as I have in my life. I saw one of my friends from Middle School being harvested for his liver and his kidneys. He was one of the kids who disappeared when slavery first appeared. They changed the script so that I could mention my personal connection. My voice was filled with rage, guilt, exhaustion, grief, and frustration. No one I saw was able to watch the video without openly crying. I barely spoke to anyone for two weeks. This is, in fact, the first time I am admitting that it was me who was the narrator of the film *Harvest of the Enslaved*. Faith had to accept several awards on my behalf for the "anonymous narrator." It took me a whole day just to write this section, the most difficult portion of this book.

Lots of people went to jail. It was all a very big deal. Headlines were asking who obtained the video. No clue was ever located. No one ever confessed. Faith gave the girls an A-plus for their project. In the records Faith submitted to the school system to justify their admission into the 7th grade, she described it as "an unusual industrial arts project combining old and new technology for a unique practical application which was successfully tested on site."

## **The Incident at School**

The school year 2048 had a rough start for Bobbie and Mary. They were both starting the 7th grade in regular school again. They never had much of a problem with other kids in elementary school. But there was a rough crowd at her school who had never seen or heard of them before. Bobbie and Mary introduced themselves as sisters, which did not go over well with this group. They had the same last name, but they looked so different from each other. You can imagine the conversations, "How come you look so different?" With Bobbie answering, "I have a different mom than she does. She has a different dad than I do." The last straw was that Bobbie had a slave collar, and Mary did not.

There was a lot of name-calling. The parents told them to ignore it. We knew how fierce the sisters were, and we did not want to find out that they beat up a dozen students. Mary learned the

name of the ringleader. We will call him Richard Wilson. He had about ten followers. One particular Monday, Richard was going to throw a big rock at the girls. That was the signal that the rest of the gang was going to beat up Mary and Bobbie. The girls decided to handle this their own way. They did have us adults stock up on a few things at our house.

Monday morning came. Bobbie and Mary walked bravely into the schoolyard. They kept their eyes open for Richard. Mary had no problem raising her hands together with her hidden Wonder Woman metal bracelets and deflected the rock, which was the size of half a brick. Mary yelled, "Stop where you are! Listen to me!" She made sure all the kids stayed put. She continued, "If you mass attack us, we will go total Amazon woman on you. We will break arms and legs. We will kick you with steel-toed boots. We will break your jaws. Each of you will look like you got run over by a truck. We do not want to do this. So stop and sit down. Dick Wilson, I issue the ancient challenge of the schoolyard. You shall fight my younger sister. You are way older, heavier, and stronger than she is. So you have all the advantages. Once the challenge is accepted, you both fight until one person says stop or does something we all agree means stop. No one here tells anyone else about this unless this sacred oath is broken. No weapons. If you want to use your feet, take off your shoes. Do you both accept?" They both answered, "Yes."

The fight was a nothing. Richard charged Bobbie. Bobbie stepped aside. Richard fell to the ground. As soon as Richard got up, Bobbie punched Richard very hard in the stomach. Richard groaned and flopped to the ground again. Mary walked over to Richard and asked, "Do you want to be hit anymore?" Richard shook his head. Mary said, "The fight is over. There is an ice cream party at our house right after school. Everyone here is welcome. I am passing out green tickets. Only ticket holders are allowed to attend. Here is one for Richard." Just then Faith and Ruth showed up near the school. Bobbie called out, "Hey moms! Over here!" The girls swapped backpacks, so that when they walked into school, they had their textbooks and homework rather than weapons.

The ice cream party was a great idea. Even though ice cream was an almost unheard of luxury these days, Richard did not show up. Bobbie thought that the gang was made up of not-so-bad kids that wanted to feel protected. Mary and Bobbie were excellent hosts. They showed lots of family photographs and explained our unique family structure. They gave a martial arts demonstration with bamboo poles in the driveway. In between swinging at each other (jumping, ducking, avoiding each other's swings), they thumped the poles on the cement and called out to each other. I do not remember the whole thing, but the big ending was, "(thump-thump) What do we do? (thump-thump) Homework by day (thump-thump) Fight Evil at Night (thump-thump) Who are we? (thump-thump) Sisters in our family. (thump-thump) Sisters in combat. (thump-thump) Sisters forever. (thump-thump)" I think they scared the daylights out of their guests. They did not show any of their knife throwing or shooting skills. It was better that way. Mary and Bobbie made a lot of friends that day.

The next day, Bobbie was called into the school office. In the office, there was the principal, Bobbie's homeroom teacher, Richard, Richard's parents, and their family lawyer. Bobbie demanded that they call her parents. The principal refused. Bobbie asked what this was all about. The principal said that she was being expelled because a lawsuit was being filed. Bobbie picked up a copy of the lawsuit and looked it over. She demanded that her sister come to the meeting to

dispute the facts alleged in the lawsuit. Mary came in and presented video testimony and affidavits that discussed some facts not mentioned in the lawsuit. These facts were: Richard had thrown a large rock, Richard had organized a gang to attack, Bobbie had responded to a challenge that Richard had accepted, and that Richard had declined an invitation to an ice cream party. Mary asked, "Feel free to present your videos, affidavits, and other evidence." The lawyer shook his head. He had not brought any evidence. Faced with Mary's evidence, Richard agreed with Mary's version of the events. Mary pointed out that the lawyer could be disbarred for such a pack of lies. She pointed out that Richard's family risked a countersuit that might plunge them into slavery, and that the principal risked losing his job for ignoring Bobbie's requests for her parents and due process. Mary showed the bruises on her arms and asked to see Richard's belly. Once the adults could see that Mary had been hurt far more than Richard, there was dismay on all of their faces.

Mary then said, "Everyone here should just ignore the five minutes of foolishness in the schoolyard. There will be no lawsuits. There will be no disciplinary action whether at school or at the bar association. It was all over. Instead, every person at this meeting is invited to come to our house after school for another ice cream party." It was a bit hard for Richard's father and his lawyer to cool down. They uttered about a dozen cuss words each to refer to Bobbie and Mary. Mary just smiled and said, "I will need to ask our parents what all those new words mean. There is another logical fallacy here. Since I made the challenge to Richard, I am just as guilty for this incident as Bobbie is. So logically, you need to expel us both. You would lose lots of tuition money. You would lose your best students. My parents would work ceaselessly to close this school, and all of you would lose your jobs, possibly losing everything you own, even your own freedom. Or, you could walk out of here saying, 'I came into this meeting without knowing the full facts.' In return, we promise to obey school rules. All we ask of you is that you respect due process. We also demand to keep a copy of that lawsuit as a bargaining chip if anyone here ever tries to re-open this case with a revised set of alleged facts. We also demand that we take photos right now of the alleged injuries for the same reason. By the way, cursing is not an argument. Cursing just shows you have lost big time. Next time, leave out the curses and try to use logic and facts."

The ice cream party was a great way for everyone to cool down. It seemed everyone was quite impressed by the charts and diagrams showing the complicated way these two sisters did not share any DNA. The parents used their own words to point out the jeopardy the principal put himself in by not letting any of them attend the meeting. He turned white. The lawyer wanted to know how the kids got so good at legal stuff. Bobbie explained that they did pro bono legal clerking to assist slaves falsely accused of all kinds of things. Bobbie explained, "Once a lawyer realizes that these two tiny girls have affidavits, video depositions, and piles of photos, they kind of melt. They know that if they allow things to go to trial with their word against solid evidence, the humiliation would be total. They would be the laughing stock of the bar association. So they settle on our terms. In this case, our terms are that you show up and get a chocolate sundae. We prefer to reserve our greed for ice cream."

At one point, the girls interviewed the lawyer about his work with a hidden camera. They then invited him to their joint room, while they showed how that turned the video into a transcript that was formatted like an affidavit. They printed it out for him as a souvenir. The speed, accuracy,

and professionalism of the printout amazed the lawyer. He said that he might have some work for them. Bobbie said, "We work for free if we fight for justice for the downtrodden."

## **A Jewish Shabbat**

Faith kept in touch with Richard Wilson's family. We learned that they were Jewish. We told them of our modified ritual to help separate the week from the weekend, based on the Jewish Shabbat. Ruth Wilson invited us to her house. I said, "That is not very practical. We are a family of nine, after all." Faith asked Ruth's family of four over to our house. We learned the basics of kosher (no mixing meat and milk products, no shellfish) so we could prepare the bulk of the food.

At 6 pm, the Wilson family came over for dinner. They brought wine, knotted bread, and a set of candlesticks. We told them that we had a weekly home-cooked meal that gathered everyone. Faith said, "We use the meal as a means to separate the harsh and confusing work week from a hopefully more peaceful weekend. We deliberately complain about our work while we cook, and then stop when we serve the food. We have been doing this for over 15 years." Mr. Wilson laughed and said, "I wish more Jewish families could adhere to Shabbat as faithfully as you have. Do you know much about the religious aspects?" Faith said, "I know a little. When I was a girl, I was invited to Shabbat dinners with my Jewish neighbors. Our weekly dinner is based on my memories. I know there is a lot that I do not know." Over the course of the dinner, the Wilson family told the story of the Jewish Shabbat and explained what they did at their home.

After dinner, the adults crowded into the family room for a general discussion. There were a few words about the schoolyard episode. At one point, Faith stood up and said, "I may regret showing you this, but please look here." She walked over to a large picture hanging on the wall. Faith lifted it off the hook and moved the picture to another location. Mounted on the wall, hidden by the picture, was a poster with lots of pictures and writing. Faith gestured for Ruth Wilson to come over and inspect it. The poster showed how Bobbie and Mary had made a spring-loaded lighting fixture with a hidden camera. It showed how it was installed and removed. The diagrams made it clear that the girls had used a laser rangefinder and a periscope to lower the light fixture to the same level as the other fixtures and to make sure the fixture was level. There was a note that Sam had helped the girls with the trigonometry needed to estimate the correct distance to the fixture straight down. In the corner, Faith had written, "Exceptional work. You get an A-plus."

Ruth Wilson looked shocked. She recovered herself and said, "One hundred years ago the Nazis built death camps that killed millions of Jews. Now we have a mini-death camp located here in Portland. It was your own daughters assisted by the rest of your family who put an end to it. What a mitzvah! And my son rewards them by throwing a rock and inciting a mob! I will never live this down. I am very sorry." Faith put the picture back and quietly said, "No issue. It is not like we advertise their projects. Your son just picked on the wrong girls." Ruth shook her head, "I am very sorry. After this whole affair, I still thought you were bad parents. I thought you let your daughters run wild. I thought the way they said, 'We help the downtrodden' was comic book swagger which was irresponsible. It is not irresponsible to raise children who refuse to be bullied, even when faced with a dozen of their classmates. Your daughters are wonderful, and

you are all the greatest parents ever. I was so, so wrong about you. Thank you for your wonderful hospitality and generous spirit. I have a lot to think about.”

Ruth sat down in her chair, still shaking her head. She said, “Wait, that was Chris' voice narrating the documentary. Oh, I am so sorry for your loss.” Ruth's voice just stopped. I said, “It was very tough to see that. Usually, when your kids start using trigonometry for the first time, you do not end up seeing one of your two best friends from middle school being killed right in front of you. I was in shock for a few weeks. But yes, the girls did an amazing job of executing that project. They had no idea what was going on there. Now that I know what was happening there, I would never have allowed that assignment to have gone forward.” Quincy said, “Please promise not to reveal the secret identities of Portland's newest comic book superheroes. Can we count on your discretion?” We all laughed. It was great that Quincy could break the complicated mood in the room.

A little later, it was time to leave. We discovered that the kids were playing an epic game of classic Monopoly. We asked everyone to take an inventory of their holdings to declare a winner. As usual, Julie came out on top. She knew that the key to the game was continually explaining that another player was winning while she quietly won the game. No one was better at psychological manipulation than Julie.

As the Wilson family stepped outside to walk to their car, I whispered in Faith's ear, “I think you have a new friend.”

## **Sam, Raymond, and Julie**

Bobbie and Mary had three older siblings. They did not get enmeshed in drama. Sam was an excellent student and tended to stay away from getting his hands dirty. I saw lots of similarities with my upbringing. He was interested in math, science, and computer programming. He had a balanced group of friends. Sam was also good at baseball and spent a lot of free time playing games when he could.

Raymond turned out to be a sweet kid. He was ashamed of how he had treated Mary and Bobbie in the past. I think Raymond was the most balanced kid. He was a good student, a passable athlete, and excellent at car repairs. Not only did he have a large network of friends in Portland, but he was a “pen-pal” to a considerable number of people all across the FUSA.

Julie mellowed her psychological warfare to be a social queen. She was always in the center of a big network of friends. She occasionally used Mary and Bobbie as her “special agents” to get intelligence of what various cliques were saying and doing. In return, Julie used very subtle ways to imply that Bobbie and Mary were very, very cool. Julie could have resented the way Bobbie and Mary identified as sisters. Since Julie shared a single parent with both of her younger sisters, she could have insisted that they also pull her into the “club of sisters.” Instead, she was totally charmed with her younger sisters and was constantly encouraging them to reach for even greater goals.

All of us in the family sensed that we needed our own squad of secret agents to move across our finish line. No one ever suspected what these two tiny girls could do when they were threatened.

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# Chapter 8: A Bloody Kidnapping

## Each Second Counts

On a pleasant afternoon in March 2049, Bobbie and Mary were walking towards downtown from school, when a van blocked them by parking in an alley right in front of them. A man jumped out, waved a police badge, and yelled, "Your slave needs to be wearing handcuffs downtown!" He took off Mary's backpack, put handcuffs on both of them, and shoved them into the back of his dirty van. It all happened so fast that it took them a minute or two to realize that they had just been kidnapped.

When the door opened again, they were at an isolated house. The man waved a gun at them as he got them out of the van. He threatened, "If you do not cooperate, my brother will skin you alive." He led them into the house, down the stairs, into the basement, and into a cell. The girls had their hands handcuffed behind their backs. He looped a chain between their backs and the handcuffs, so they could not move more than three feet from the back wall. The man closed and locked a barred door on the other side of the cell.

As soon as their captor went upstairs, Mary asked who else was in the basement. Several voices responded. Mary and Bobbie introduced themselves as sisters, one free, and one a slave. As usual, this was a confusing introduction. They learned there were four other young women in the basement. One was Samantha Barnes, in a cell by herself, and there were three slaves named Jane, Jane (called Jay to avoid confusion), and Sophia together in another cell. Samantha was a free girl who had been kidnapped two months ago. The TV, radio, and newspapers were constantly talking about the search for her. Her parents had offered a \$100,000 reward.

Mary and Bobbie switched to Mandarin as they discussed what to do. Mary said, "If she has been held here for two months, how could we get released without getting this jerk into deep, deep trouble? I do not think we will ever get out alive." Bobbie answered, "Why don't we escape as soon as we can?" Mary quietly said, "How could we ever escape? We are attached to a chain and locked in a cell. If we get out of the basement, do we tell him we need to step out to buy some groceries?" Bobbie replied, "Well, we could get out of our handcuffs, and then kill him. How about that? I do have handcuff keys in my inner pants pocket, and I do have some weapons hidden in the frame of my backpack, which I still have. How about getting out of our handcuffs and killing this bastard?"

Because of their awkward position, it was a bit tricky to get the handcuff key out of Bobbie's pocket and into Mary's hand. Mary was able to open one side of Bobbie's handcuffs. Within a minute, both sisters had entirely taken off their handcuffs. Bobbie started to disassemble the parts of her backpack, and then put some of the pieces together. She had a hunting knife and a thick glove with a telescoping car radio antenna attached to it. The tip had some sharp edges to it, so Bobbie extended the antenna with care.

Mary asked, "Why are you carrying weapons? Don't you know how much trouble you could get into by being a slave and carrying those things?" Bobbie just said, "I suppose I like having these because it is prohibited." Bobbie called out to everyone else and asked how many people lived upstairs in the house. Samantha answered, "Only one guy. I have never seen anyone else here." One of the slaves said, "A second guy drove us here, but we only see one person in this house." Bobbie said, "We will deal with this guy hopefully in the next hour or so. Please be quiet while we do this, so that no one else gets hurt." Several voices called out in terror, "Are you going to set this house on fire, what are you going to do?" Bobbie said, "Quiet. We are only interested in hurting the bastard. You are going to be fine. Just stay quiet."

Mary said, "We need to act as if we are still in handcuffs. Yell like crazy like you just slipped and broke your arm. Yell that you are bleeding and are afraid that you are dying." Bobbie offered words of encouragement. They gripped their weapons tightly and practiced in their minds what they would do. They yelled and yelled. One of the slaves was able to bang on a heating pipe which made a racket that should have been irritating to anyone upstairs. Finally, the basement door opened, and the kidnapper yelled, "What is this horrible noise?" Bobbie yelled back, "I was trying to stand up, and I slipped. I think I broke my arm. There is a lot of blood! I am going to die tonight unless someone fixes my arm! Help me, help me now!"

The guy just said, "No one is dying tonight. I am sure it is nothing. Let me get you upstairs so I can get a look." He came down the stairs and unlocked the cell door. As he walked in, Mary leapt up. As she was coming back down drove the knife deep into his belly just below the ribs. His forward motion helped drive the weapon deeper. Mary used her weight to hang onto the knife handle, which was pointed towards his butt at a 45-degree angle. She twisted the knife back and forth, up and down as fast as she could.

Meanwhile, Bobbie stood up and used the radio antenna to rake across his face and eyes. She was trying to blind him. He was very confused. In his mind, the girls were still attached by handcuffs to a chain. The sisters decided to attack the belly since attacking other key body parts was problematic. The ribs protect the heart, and his hands and his height would protect his neck. They did not want to be vulnerable to being swept away by his hands and feet. Mary was relentless; she kept stabbing and twisting and cutting. At one point, Bobbie decided that she was not doing that much to help the attack. She swung around and grabbed him by the throat and the back of his jacket. She tried to hang there as if she were a backpack, kicking and jerking around. Eventually, Bobbie was able to lock her arms around his throat to cut off some of his air supply. Bobbie's maneuver paid off. He started to lean backward, making it easier for Mary to stab the belly. Finally, he fell backward. The moment he did, Mary hissed, "Get out of my way!" She stabbed him ten times in the throat with the large hunting knife. It was all over (for him, at least).

The two girls rested for a few minutes. Finally, Bobbie remembered the other girls and said, "Do not worry. He is dead. We are tired. We are going to rest a bit. Then we will find all the keys and free everybody. Your moment of freedom is here."

Bobbie said, "OK, time for an emergency list. Tell me what do we do now?" Mary said, "This one is easy. We first assess if any of us has any serious injury. Next, we search his body for keys, wallet, jewelry, or anything else that is critical. Next, we search the cell for anything that would

show we had been here. We look underneath him, in the pools of blood, in his hands, and around the cell. We put everything we find in your backpack and then bring it with us.” Bobbie added, “We unlock the other cells, but we ask them to stay in the basement until we have a chance to search the house. Then we load up the car and drive to our house.”

So they went through the list. Both girls were a bit banged up. They had cuts, heavy bruises, and bloody noses. But they were functional and of sound mind. They picked up the backpack and put in loose pieces from the disassembled frame. They put in the handcuff key, the bloody weapons, and all the little bits and pieces of their clothing that ripped off during the fight. Then they removed much of his clothing. They took his watch, phone, gun, keys, rings, and other items and put them in the backpack.

It was not difficult to figure out which key opened the cells. That key was still in the cell door. It also opened the other cell doors. They used the handcuff key to free everyone. Bobbie said, “Our time here is short. Listen carefully. There are washtubs here, take off your clothes and wash up. There may be enough other clothing down here to replace what you have been wearing. Put your dirty clothes in the washing machine. Please stay in the basement while we search the house. We will come back in a few minutes to get us all out of here.” Mary added, “Does anyone know where this guy kept his money and guns?” One of the slaves said that she thought he put things in the bedroom. No one had any idea where guns were stored. Mary grabbed a pry bar, and off they went upstairs.

They first went to the driveway and looked at the car. Mary's backpack was still in the front passenger seat. They tested the car key and checked how much gas was in the car. Inside, they looked and found his bedroom. Mary found some mail that showed that his name was Barry Budrick. They found two safes, each under a small table. Both were unlocked. Perhaps he had been examining their contents when he responded to the noise from the basement. One safe was empty; the other was packed with cash and other valuables. They put everything in a bag they found. They systematically looked through every closet and under every bed. One closet was locked. Mary used the pry bar and opened the door in a minute. Bingo, it was loaded with guns, many boxes of ammunition, and lots of other valuables. Just about all of it was already in duffle bags. They quickly packed the rest into empty duffle bags that were there. Mary just said, “We are done. Let's get all the valuables into the car. We need to get out of here.” It took five trips to load up the car.

Mary went to the basement and said, “It is time to leave. We are going to our house. You will get plenty of clothing there. Just find some shorts and a warm shirt for now. As much as possible, clean up. Collect all dirty clothes and put them in the washer. We all need to be in the car and moving in five minutes.” As they ran upstairs, the slave named Sophia said, “That is the man who drove me to this house.” She pointed to a photo mounted on the wall. Bobbie took one look and just said, “Oh shit.” the photo showed two men. They both wore shirts that said, “Brothers Forever!” Bobbie recognized the man she helped kill. She recognized the other one as well. She yelled, “Oh fuck, we just killed the brother of the chief of police for Portland. We are so screwed.” Mary said quietly, “No, we are not, we just need to be very, very clever. Let me think about all of this very carefully.”

When they were ready to leave the house of horrors, Mary said, "We have one more duty. We need to make it dirty, difficult, and disgusting to remove the body. We need to go back into the basement." Under Mary's direction, they dragged the body close to the chain on the wall. They used all the handcuffs to lock the corpse to the chain. They drove a wooden stake through his heart. They spray painted, "kidnapper, rapist, murderer" on the cell wall. They dumped all the human waste buckets in the cells all over the body. They rinsed out the waste buckets in the giant basement sink and then poured clean water on the floors of the other two cells. They closed the cell door and locked it. They moved the key between open and closed and hammered the protruding part of the key back and forth until it snapped off. Then they pounded down the stump of the key, so nothing was exposed. They dumped epoxy glue into the lock and the hinges of the cell door. If the chief of police were going to get the corpse of his brother, it would take him days of work if he was alone. If others were to help him, it would be difficult to remove the body without someone asking serious questions about what had happened in the basement. The girls had one more round of washing themselves from their most recent bit of messy work. Now the girls were ready to leave the house, even though the washing machine had about 25 more minutes until it was finished.

Bobbie asked, "Why did you have us dump those vile buckets and mess on the body?" Mary answered, "I want the police chief to be so mad that he cannot even think of this as a crime scene. Remember how mad Julie was when we tricked her into sitting down on the dog stuff? Julie is usually so calm and collected. I want him to imagine that Samantha's father did this. He will go straight to the Barnes house and try to kill everyone. Of course, we will warn them to stay away. His anger will give him away." Bobbie said quietly, "I thought you were crazy. You are thinking three steps ahead. Bravo for your clear head today." And that was it. The girls ran outside, got into the van, and drove to Mary and Bobbie's house.

## **Samantha's Family**

When they got home at about 6:15 in the evening, only Raymond was there. They barely explained their situation. Bobbie said, "These are people who have been locked in a basement for months. They need food, baths, and clothes. Raymond, organize as much food as you can as fast as you can." Bobbie and Mary quickly filled two bathtubs with warm water and made piles of clean, relatively new clothing. They gave instructions so that everyone knew they could get a bath and food soon. While that was going on, Bobbie and Mary carried all the contraband into their room upstairs and locked the door. They got baths and food at the end of the line.

Raymond looked amazed. He just exclaimed, "You all look like you just came from a war zone. Mary, your face and hair are drenched in blood. What the fuck is going on here? Are there any wounded on the battlefield?" Bobbie answered, "Wounded. No. No wounded." All the girls started to giggle. Raymond wanted to know what was so funny. Mary said, "We will explain everything once the parents are home. Let's start making dinner food for everybody." Once dinner was underway, Mary said, "It is time for Samantha to go home. Samantha, tell me if there is some significant family event that happened in a public park in Portland." Samantha said, "We lost our dog Hari Kari in Orton Park and did not find him for three days." Mary said, "Perfect. Was Hari Kari your dog?" Samantha nodded. Mary used the dead man's cell phone and called Samantha's parents. Her dad answered the phone; Mary said, "We would like to bring you

something you are missing. Come to the North side of the area where Hari Kari was lost. Drive there right now. Tell no one except your wife. If there are others there, just say that you are trying to trace a clue. We will be there in 20 minutes. Can you be there in 20 minutes?"

Bobbie said to Raymond, "Please do your best to make sure our guests of honor do not leave. Make sure everyone has a good dinner. We will be back as soon as possible."

Finding Samantha's parents was easy. Everyone got out of their cars. Samantha's dad pointed a gun at Mary and Bobbie. Samantha yelled, "Stop! They rescued me an hour ago. I was locked in a cell until they unlocked me, fed me, bathed me, and gave me clean clothes. They are bringing me to you. Put the gun away before there is a horrible accident."

The three girls explained what had happened. They said why they needed to be so careful. Bobbie offered to drive them to the house where the captor lay dead. Samantha's mom asked, "Is that OK with you dear, can you handle this?" Samantha said, "These brave girls killed the man who held six girls captive. If they can be so brave, I can be brave enough to give you a tour of the place where I was held."

Bobbie explained why they were all in danger. She suggested, "Samantha should stay hiding for a couple of days. Then bring a witness, such as the mayor, and hide in the woods behind the house. While hidden, place a call to the police and say that Samantha escaped and made her way home. I predict that seven police cars and the chief of police will show up at the bad man's house. They all know damn well where Samantha is being held. The search for Samantha is a sham. You can ask the police chief why he responded that way. He will be fighting for words."

Samantha's mother asked, "Where can she hide for four days?" Bobbie answered, "Well, she can stay with us. That way she can say goodbye to her friends who were also captives. We can get two untraceable phones so you can communicate for the next few days. Hiding may save her life. I suspect that the cops will raid your house after they find the rotting corpse of the kidnapper. They will probably intend to kill Samantha accidentally. When they raid your house, make sure you have one or two dozen cameras running. It will be a very dangerous raid. Perhaps all family members should be missing from the house. Once it is public that Samantha is free, petition the court for the kidnapper's house, assets, car, and anything else. If you refrain from making public charges, the police will assist you on your project of stripping the evil one of his assets."

Her dad said, "You have this all plotted out. My mind is spinning. How can you be so aware of these issues?" Bobbie said, "Our parents have us well trained. They always surprise us and propose crazy emergencies and ask what we would do first, second, and third. We would all laugh if someone left out an important step. We are running on adrenaline and our training."

They went back to the house of horrors. Her dad frowned and then smiled at the corpse removal problem that the girls had made. Samantha's Mom just cried the whole time. Her Dad just said, "I just wish that it was me that gutted that cowardly pervert. If I do get his assets, they all go to charity. I will not profit from his criminality, not even for one penny." Bobbie put the wet laundry in a basket and brought it to the car. Samantha hugged her mother. She said, "Go with

these angels. We will all be together soon enough.” She added, “If you use this car to bring Sammy back to us for good, please keep the car.”

As Bobbie drove home, she said, “Telling the parents is going to be tricky. We need to be in charge of the explanation. But they will tear us apart with questions after two sentences are out of our mouths.” Mary said, “I know, let’s pretend we are police officials giving a news conference. We start with the rules. No questions until we have told the story.” Bobbie said, “I like it, we need to start with a formal statement. Mary, please take some notes.”

On the way home, Mary got a call from Sam, “What is going on here? All the parents are here, and they want to know what is going on? Who are these slaves in the house?”

## **A Formal Presentation at Home**

I came home from work and found things chaotic at home. There were three guests with slave collars. Faith was yelling, “What the fuck has been going on?” I got bits and pieces about a basement cell and being chained up. One of the guests said something about Bobbie and Mary killing a bad man. They talked about being with Samantha Barnes. Someone said, “Mary was drenched in blood from head to foot before she took a bath.” I heard talk of pouring buckets of human waste on a corpse. No one knew where Bobbie, Mary, or Samantha was.

In this swirl of chaos, the three girls walked into the house with everyone yelling at once. I was glad that all three were walking with no obvious major injuries. Bobbie and Mary looked like they had experienced combat. They had badly bruised faces with a “hunt or be hunted” gaze. Bobbie raised her hand to show she wanted to be heard. She said, “We are giving a formal presentation in our house. Everybody go into the living room. Get as many cameras as you can. We are not repeating this for anyone. No questions until we say so.”

Bobbie started reading from her notes made in the car:

- Today, we were kidnapped off the streets of Portland by a perpetrator identified by his driver’s license as Barry Budrick.
- Before we knew what had happened, he had taken us by surprise, put us in handcuffs, and locked us up in the back of his van.
- We were driven to a remote house, brought into a basement cell, were chained via handcuffs to the wall, and locked into a cell.
- Being resourceful, we freed ourselves from our restraints, prepared weapons, ambushed our captor, killed him, and stripped his corpse of all keys, wallets, and valuables.
- We freed four other captives, including Samantha Barnes and three presumed slave women.
- Samantha Barnes has just been returned to her family. We have an IOU made out to Chris Ritter for \$100,000 from the grateful Barnes family.
- Since it appears that the dead perpetrator is or was the brother of the chief of police, great caution should be used in making any allegations or public statements of this affair in any shape or form. We need to form a curtain of silence to protect ourselves. I am serious. Even the smallest hint that we are involved could bring about our doom.

- We were able to obtain a lot of valuables and contraband from this house before we drove away in the perpetrator's car.
- Once all six of us got into this house, we washed up and ate a lot of food. We just brought Samantha Barnes to visit with her parents.
- The Barnes family is concerned about the safety of Samantha for the next few days and is asking us to host her at our house for a week.
- As human chattel myself, I am well aware that slaves have names. We are now hosting Jane, Jay (actually also called Jane, but we use Jay to avoid confusion), and Sophia. Welcome, all.
- Finally, a big thank you to our loving family which helped to prepare us for this stressful event. We also want to make it clear that unlike the four women we rescued, we were not raped or sexually assaulted.

It was impossible to get through this statement without questions, shouts, and more questions. These were waved aside.

Mary did her best to explain the details, primarily as it has been laid out in this chapter. Bobbie helped fill in details. Bobbie said, "It is time for questions. Raise your hand, and we will call on you."

I was first, "OK. I get the part about you felt that you needed to kill this guy. But what gave you the sense that you could do it? I remember what it was like to be 13. I was too scared to watch a lot of movies." Mary replied, "I credit Bobbie for this. As we were preparing our ambush, she said that I had to use the knife to the full extent that I could. He was wearing such heavy clothing that I was afraid that I was not doing anything to him. I kept thinking of Bobbie's words as I did everything in my power to bring him down. I also know that he would have slapped me aside if it were not for Bobbie's attacks on his face. He kept trying to grab for her, but the long antenna allowed her to stay mostly out of his hands. We both got bloody noses and got smacked around a lot. I am also grateful for Raymond who beat us up so often that we could ignore being hit pretty hard." Raymond said, "You are most welcome." The parents just glared at Raymond.

Ruth asked, "How can you bring so many people into our house? We are on a tight budget. How are we going to pay for food, clothing, and other items for so many additional people?" Mary said, "Perhaps this will help." She opened Barry's wallet and pulled out seven \$100 bills and put them on the table in front of her. She added, "Do you realize that there is a big sack of these pieces of paper upstairs?" Ruth stated, "I do not think a 12 and a 13-year-old should have that kind of money." Mary answered, "Of course. At the earliest possible moment, we want to turn over all of these items to our parents. Let's go upstairs so you can take every penny and dollar out of our room."

Bobbie and Mary brought the parents into their room. They showed the bag filled with cash, gold, silver, platinum, and jewels. They turned over several compressed blocks of untaxed marijuana. Bobbie said impishly, "If you use this all up by the time we are old enough to try it, you are welcome. If you manage to save some for the day we are deemed old enough, I would appreciate it." The parents quickly moved everything (including the \$700) into a room for which

no child had a key. I said quietly, "We may be financially ready to start our own business now. There is a lot to consider. Let's go downstairs and finish our formal presentation."

Faith asked, "What do you plan to do for the next week? You cannot go to school all beat up like that." Bobbie answered, "If we are absent, that might be bad for us. Someone might be asking schools about who has been absent. I think we will try to get a good night's sleep, use lots of makeup to hide our bruises as much as we can, and then tell people that we are in trouble at home for fighting. When we walk to school, we will come up with a simple story of why we were fighting. Perhaps we were fighting over a boy." Mary said, "No way, we were not fighting over a boy. People would ask who, and we would be busted. I think I caught you stealing my ice cream."

I decided to get to the heart of the matter. I asked, "OK, you claim that the perpetrator is the brother of the chief of police and that they have a criminal partnership. If you are right, then it was morally right to grab what you could from the house of horrors. If you are wrong, then the best thing to do is to return all of the items you took from the house, perhaps even the human chattel, and call the police to say what you have done was in self-defense. It appears that everything rests on your judgment. Can you walk me through this to help me understand your thinking? You are a lawyer making your case. Your parents are the jury."

Bobbie answered, "Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, I want you to look at our three slaves. Each of them was driven to this house of horrors by the Chief of Police. Someone use a computer and pull up his photo. Jane, Jay, and Sophia, is this the man who drove you to this house?" All three answered, "Yes." Bobbie continued, "Is it true that each of you was picked up by the police at a scene of a crime, and the police could not verify your chain of ownership within the required one week, so you should have been turned over to an agency which could have freed you. Instead, each of you was spirited out of the police station just under the one-week deadline?" All three answered, "Yes."

Mary picked up the argument. She added, "I think that like a lot of thieves, these two brothers were cheating on each other. I think that Barry was stealing much of the loot instead of splitting it with his brother. I think the reason Samantha was not returned for the ransom was they needed to hire someone who would pretend to rescue her. I suspect that Barry wanted to pay a low share of the reward, and John wanted to make sure that the hired rescuer would not turn on them since he had so much more to lose. I think the reason there were two safes in Barry's room was to fool John as to how much still needed to be split. I think that John thought that he could control Barry since he was chief of police, and could bring him in for any crime that he wanted. But all of this is speculation. I talked to Samantha's dad. He will report that Samantha escaped and is back home in about three or four days. If I am right, the police will go to Barry's house within minutes. Later that day, they will raid Samantha's house and attempt to kill everyone there. If I was wrong, the police will say what wonderful news and ask when they can get an official statement from Samantha. So in a few days, we will have our answer. In the meantime, hide the contraband, including the car. Everyone keep their mouth shut. No one should say anything in case someone overhears. I rest my case."



I said, "It is bedtime for the kids. As I have said before, there is a lot to consider. I appreciate the arguments of two amazing street fighters and lawyers. The parents will be discussing this for quite a bit longer."

## Decision Time for the Parents

The parents had an all-day conference the next day. As soon as school was over, I went down to the school to pick up Mary and Bobbie so they could be asked again about the episode. The adults decided to accept Mary's analysis. We moved the contraband to a secure, empty house of a friend. We investigated the van and found that it was reported stolen, and the license plates were illegal. We found a way to sell it so they would be no trace of the sale.

I talked to the mayor of Portland and privately told him the story that the chief of police was involved in the kidnapping of Samantha Barnes. He described himself as "an old friend" of Mr. Barnes from college. I suggested a trap, "Just find a hidden place to watch his brother's house. Place a call from an untraceable phone that Samantha Barnes has rejoined her family. The chief will be there within minutes." The mayor said, "You are crazy. There is no way you can get me to hide in the bushes." I said, "If I get Samantha to testify in court to say that, *she saw the chief of police and that she saw the chief in the basement where she was held captive*, you will regret not handling this sooner." I knew this was a lie. The other three had seen the chief, but not Samantha.

A week after the kidnapping of Mary and Bobbie, I placed a simple call to the Portland Police Department. I said, "Samantha Barnes has escaped from her kidnappers today. She is safe with her family." and then he hung up.

Twenty minutes later, the chief of police showed up at his brother's house. Fifteen minutes later, three more police cars came. These were the most trusted lieutenants of the chief, his personal enforcers. Ninety minutes later, a truck for a welding company arrived. After the welding truck had left, the four police cars went directly to the Barnes house.

At the Barnes house, they kicked in the door and started shooting. In the living room, three mannequins dressed as mother, father, and daughter were pumped full of bullet holes and blasted by a shotgun. After the shooting had stopped, the cops had a shocked expression. One said, "Fred, we are going to have problems planting guns on these bodies! What the fuck is going on here?"

A week later, the mannequin blasters were hauled in front of a regional police commission. I do not want to waste ink or pixels listing all of the crimes they were caught on. The welders who freed the body from a steel cage had quite a story to tell. The cops were surprised that the Barnes house has loaded with twenty hidden cameras. The thefts of untraceable valuables and money laundering were what put them behind bars for years to come.

At no point did our unusual family come up in any of the official records.

## Three People Added to our Household

The parents were all very concerned about Bobbie and Mary. They had survived a very traumatic experience. That night, Samantha slept in Bobbie and Mary's room. After that first day and night, the two sisters behaved normally and resumed all of their activities with their friends. A few weeks later, I sat down with Mary and asked her about the whole experience. She told me, "It was like having a test at school that is much more intense than you ever could have imagined. I feel good that it is all over, and that Bobbie and I got passing grades. I do think I might freak out if someone ever wanted to chain me in a cell in a dark basement. I am hopeful I never have to do that again in my life." I could not detect any behavior change or any changes in Bobbie and Mary. I did not want to do anything that would call attention to what Bobbie and Mary did. I told them that all the parents were there to help them if they had any extra concerns or anxiety. Bobbie told me, "We are going to make sure that we are fine."

The other concern was the three new people we had in our house. I quickly realized that just saying "You are free" was not fair to Ruth, Quincy, and their children, who have been asked to make a long-term commitment to our goals. I decided to look into the legal status of Jane, Jay, and Sophia. I spent a fair amount of time interviewing them to figure out all the aliases they had used, and the identities of all of their previous owners. I was able to verify their identities and trace their ownership until a few years ago. I was careful to avoid mentioning that they had been picked up by the Portland Police in the last year. Of course, the police chief had scrubbed that from all the records.

I filed a "finders/keepers" petition for them. I had to swear that they were not stolen merchandise and make a public declaration of their questionable ownership. I had them assessed, and I learned they were each worth \$40,000. I had to pay a tax amounting to 20% of their assessed value. If someone else could make a better claim within a year, they would need to pay a 40% tax on their assessed value to overturn my claim. If I lost ownership, I would get a rebate of half of the tax I paid. The system gave an incentive for someone to make a shaky claim quickly. That was what I was doing. It was clear that spending several years without clear ownership was not good for these three women. The odd thing was that technically, Faith and I now owed eight human beings (Ruth, Quincy, three kids born to Ruth, and the three newcomers). Everyone got new plastic ID cards. Our new trio now had official paperwork indicating that they had a legal status. Having legal status increased their value, and the range of jobs they could handle.

At a family meeting, we decided to turn over the task of orienting our new housemates to a committee of Quincy and Julie. Since both Quincy and Julie were technically slaves, we all thought that would make communications easier. We were unsure if they would stay for a long time or a short time. We could keep them for one year and employ them as neighborhood care workers. Or we could train them to work on computers and bring them with us into our new business. Even though it was a risky venture, we decided to see if we could train them as computer programmers. This effort brought us to some surprising places on our own road in life.

The girls ranged in age from 21 or 27 years old. Jane and Sophia were white; Jay was Hispanic. They all had experience with work in bars, restaurants, and brothels. Two of them had extensive childcare and babysitting experience. Their histories were fairly similar. They were owned by

people who owned bars or brothels. They would be a murder or a fight, and they would end up being owned by someone else. After a few episodes like that, it was unclear who legally owned them. When picked up in a police raid, they should have been sent to a social services agency. Instead, they ended up in a cell in a nasty basement.

Two of them had a fair amount of experience using a computer, mostly to advertise for additional part-time work. A slave had to master many skills to make their notices stand out from countless others. So that was a starting place. Quincy and Julie assessed that the trio barely had the minimum qualifications (intelligence, math background, computer background) to become computer programmers. We decided to offer a deal to give a large incentive. We told them that we would spend two years training them. Our goal was to get them to the point that they could earn \$45,000 per year or \$40,000 more than their current assessed salary (the salary used to value them). If they stayed with us for 12 years, we anticipated \$400,000 of additional income. We offered to split the money half and half. They could not tap the funds to free themselves until the 12 years were done. But they would be freed with a \$150,000 bank account. Some money would be deducted for expenses. Their eyes were as wide as saucers when we mentioned that number. We warned them it would not be easy. They would have to use their brains, not their asses or their hands. We pointed out that if they did not work out in the first two years, we had the right to “give them another placement.” They had to understand that the rewards only go to those who meet our standards. We decided that this was our version of Pygmalion.

We showed them the deed to our house and some of the founding documents of our household. Our kids were a living part of this process. Some details were new to them. We described how fair our arrangements were. We did not want to disrupt the bedrooms of our kids. We moved Ruth's and Quincy's double bed into “the master bedroom.” This freed up one bedroom for a bunk bed and a single bed for the trio. There were a lot of jokes about the four parents sharing a bedroom. We had two answers. We said, “We have slept this way in hotel rooms before without a problem” and “This arrangement will facilitate better communications.” Our answers were bland enough to avoid embarrassing questions. Our new family members were quick learners. They mastered our weekly routine, and fit in well. In the first month or so, they took over most of the cooking and cleaning while we got our training process underway. Sam was their primary teacher, but all of us pitched in.

It was clear from the start that Jay was the weakest student. We knew she would never make it. At a dinner party, we talked to a family that was frustrated at their “pre-paid” child care worker. It seems that she was always reading and studying instead of doing childcare. We swapped Jay for Patricia. Our class now had three winners. Jay was much happier doing childcare.

Bobbie, Mary, and Samantha made sure that the family retained its connections to Jay. They told me again and again that she was part of our family due to her presence in that terrible basement. Mary explained it to me, “You can swap bicycles, but you cannot swap people. We have to keep her within our circle of protection. She is part of our extended family.”

One of Sam's best lessons was asking his students to solve a problem. In parallel, he would solve the problem as well. At different “mileposts” of the project, they would lay out all four solutions. Sam's lessons were collaborative and helped bring the best out of each student. There were a few

times that I would listen in, and decide that I wished that I had professors in college as friendly and as educational as Sam.

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# Chapter 9: Running a Jewelry Store

## Dealing with the Contraband

I think I need to start this chapter describing the “War on Money” that had been waging for several years. After almost all the banks had gone bankrupt a few years back, the people in charge tried to make almost all money illegal except for the NAM (New American Money) electronic payment system. Theoretically, all forms of paper money were withdrawn from circulation. You could bring in under a hundred dollars in cash into a bank every six months, provided you did not draw on it for two years.

All the old assets (bank accounts, life insurance assets, stocks, retirement accounts, and bonds) that still had value could be transferred into NAM, provided that you could prove the assets were legal. The cost of these examinations was usually about half of the deeply discounted current value. And all of the government entities were still bankrupt as well. Transferring assets into the current money system was a painful process. Assets you could measure by checking a web page were by and large worthless. Legal assets, such as functioning businesses or paid-in-full houses and land retained their full value, provided you still had the legal NAM money to keep them operational. It was a rare person whose assets made it from “before” to “after” without losing just about everything.

The problem facing our family was that all of these new assets (illegal drugs, cash, diamonds, other jewelry, gold, silver, platinum, guns, and ammo) were pretty illegal. The challenge was to somehow convert these assets into legal accounts that could be used for starting a business. It looked pretty hopeless to me. I did not know how to launder money. I guessed that any rookie mistake would put me in prison for years. Worse, many jurisdictions could not afford to keep prisons or prisoners, and just executed people when someone needed a liver transplant.

My dear wife said, “Selling bulk diamonds is illegal, selling jewelry retail is quite legal.” I told her, “No one wants diamonds, or diamond rings anymore. When the economy crashed, everyone tried to raise funds by selling diamonds. So the price fell by a factor of ten and never recovered.” She sighed (like she does when she is talking to an idiot) and said, “The price dropped years ago. If you buy wholesale at today's prices and sell retail at today's prices, you can still make money. As long as the price balances the buying and selling demand, you can sell jewelry. All you need to do is to keep adding some from our stock to the legal purchases, and you can run a store and make legal profits.”

Then she added, “I have a cousin who has some interesting friends. I found out that there is a criminal underground that wants cash, drugs, and precious metals. They would love to trade them for diamonds and other items they think is junk. We might have a very profitable business selling diamonds.” I reacted sharply, saying, “US paper money has been withdrawn from circulation. It is worthless. Anyone who says it has a premium value is crazy. I would be lucky to get 8 cents on the dollar for this stuff.” Faith looked me in the eye and said, “You are very wrong. What you do not know is that other nations have collapsed even more than the US did.

For example, a single hundred dollar bill has massive purchasing power in Bolivia. These things have value.” I replied, “Great, but we do not live in Bolivia. We are in Portland fucking Oregon.”

Faith got real quiet. She said, “Let me explain what we can do. My cousin is in touch with business people who buy their popular product from Bolivia. The Bolivians want US currency, preferably one hundred dollar bills. They also want precious metals. They do not want diamonds. Why? Because you get some diamonds and then some jewelry expert says there is a microscopic flaw and they can only pay one-tenth what you first thought it was worth. So we get a good value for our cash and precious metals, and we get loads of diamonds cheap. We sell the diamonds here in Portland, and wholesale them all over the west coast. My cousin will make the exchanges and only wants 2% of the sale price, whether retail or wholesale. He trusts us. We can write things up, so he owns 3% of our store. My cousin has a large extended family at the edge of starvation and slavery. He will be very trustworthy and honest in exchange for a flow of funds he can use to support a lot of good people. Oh, I forgot to say that we keep the guns and ammo to help defend the jewelry store we open. I am still working out what to do with the heroin, cocaine and the bulk marijuana, but maybe we can give it away as wedding presents as our college buddies get married. I'm sorry, I should stay serious. I think we will be able to barter some important items with the drugs. Let's find some good, deep storage so we can access them when we need them. But maybe we should pull out a few ounces for personal use.”

I sat back and wondered how my wife got so smart. I just said, “I would like for your cousin over for dinner soon. We have a lot to talk about.” Faith said, “He is coming to dinner on Friday night. Is that soon enough?”

## **Setting up a Jewelry Store**

We started scouting out locations. We wanted an empty store in a good downtown area that we could extensively remodel. Ruth found an ideal location. We build a hidden sleeping area in the back with disguised gun ports and sights to blast away any midnight intruders. The location for bulk diamonds was a bit of fake plumbing. Every aspect of the store was focused on security. We built a mock-up of the store for our basement. Everyone, including the older kids, practiced shooting and killing intruders. We burned a lot of plywood in our backyard to hide all the bullet holes in our targets.

We opened the store as soon as possible. We had enough savings for the remodeling, the first six month's rent, and an initial stock of diamonds. Of course, we augmented that with some of the diamonds we already had from our stock of contraband. At the time, other stores sold jewelry as a sideline. We focused on jewelry and undercut everyone one else in town. Soon, just about everyone else stopped even trying to compete with us. When anyone asked about our low prices, we just said we purchased in volume and sold a lot to other jewelers in other cities to help keep prices as low as possible.

In the old days, a fine one-karat diamond sold for \$6,000 to \$12,000. With the crash in prices, we would sell a better one-carat ring for \$800. Since diamonds still had quite a bit of cache of wealth, we got a steady stream of business from aspiring people who wanted to look wealthy, even if they were not quite so well off. We turned around the marketing for diamonds. Rather

than tell men that a diamond was the ideal gift for a woman, we emphasized the practical side of owning a diamond ring for both men and women. We showed how a one or two-karat ring would help get a job or a spouse because you would be perceived as being “a better person.” In these days of quiet despair, selling a big diamond ring gave some people hope. Anyway, we sold enough hope to fatten our legal bank account.

This new approach of marketing big diamond rings was reflected in the store's name, *Diamonds for Success*. At home, our private slogan was, *You Can Shove Your Success up Your Ass*. This created the acronym YCSYSUYA, which we pronounced this as yuck-see-sue-ya. Of course, this was based on Faith's simple explanation about the best use of diamonds. This secret name was a big hit with the kids, who loved an acronym that included the word “ass” and seemed to so thoroughly insult the customer, the product, and the marketing message. But even we adults liked having a secret name. We sometimes referred to the merchandise as yuck-see, a potential customer as a sue-ya, a very big diamond and “a very yucky object,” and a dead robber as “someone who lost their lawsuit.” We quickly developed our own private language.

The arrangements with Faith's cousin (who I will not name in this book) went smoothly. We learned that we were to produce bundles of cash and precious metals which would be worth about \$55,000 in Bolivia. In return, we got a bag of diamonds that could be sold retail for about \$400,000. Since diamond prices were depressed by a factor of ten from the old pre-collapse days, this meant that we got a bag of diamonds with over a thousand karats, or about half a pound of diamonds. We were moving a serious amount of yucky merchandise.

Running the store was interesting. We usually had a girl or a woman run the store, with someone else hiding in the back holding a gun, waiting for trouble. Since I did a lot of hiding, and very little selling, I never got tired of seeing a customer coming in and realizing the entire staff at the store was a young slave girl. Bobbie and Mary were our best salespeople since they went through so much to get yuck-see-sue-ya started. Sometimes Samantha Barnes joined the girls in the shop. We disguised her with a fake slave collar. No matter how “enlightened” people were, they would still tend to treat slaves as objects, rather than people. Even though Samantha Barnes' face was on TV, posters, and newspapers for months, no one recognized her in our store.

To get in, the customer would need to go through two locked doors. In between, we had one of the best gun detection machines we could buy. The only way to rob our store was a “smash and grab.” Every time this happened, we made sure the thief held the goods for enough seconds so the video would justify the shooting. Each time this happened, we made sure the thief was dead, and all the merchandise was secure before calling the police. We did not want any police to try to pick up any loose bargains. We posted photos of the blasted corpse on a corner of our window display addressed to potential thieves. Once the body count was six, they stopped trying to rob us. I shot four of them, Bobbie got one, and Ruth got the one. While we hated taking any human life but protecting our family was our highest priority. No person working in the store ever got a scratch. We had to mop the store and replace some display cases a few times. We left the bullet holes on the walls as a reminder to potential thieves. The bodies were always unclaimed, so I used our pickup truck to take them to a local pig farm that accepted such items. It was all part of the great circle of life.

One night Bobbie was running the store by herself. She let someone in who was a thief. He had a big rock and was about to slam it on a display case. Bobbie threw a knife into his upper arm. He collapsed on the floor, bleeding and cursing, as he rolled around the floor. Bobbie pulled a large gun and explained, "I am going to shoot you in the leg to prove this gun is real. Or you can stay still and be silent." She pulled out the knife and threw it into the back of the store. She pulled his backpack away. Bobbie used a paper bag and tape to cover his eyes. She carefully explained, "I have a knife and a gun within easy reach, do not try anything and lie there perfectly still." She ripped apart his shirt. Bobbie reassured the thief, "As long as you do not touch me, I will sew up the wound and save your life. Touch me, and you are dead in two seconds. If you give me your address, I will arrange for a liquor store to deliver two bottles of whiskey to your house." She sewed him up and bandaged the wound. She turned his old shirt into a sling, and gave him an old ratty shirt from the back of the store and sent him on his way. Bobbie calmly picked up the store phone and placed the order for two bottles of cheap booze to be sent "super express" to the thief's address. She then mopped up the blood and closed the store early. Watching the video was amazing. It all took 23 minutes. She later told me, "I have killed one person and helped kill another. I just did not want to kill someone else that night. I hope you are not mad at me for saving a thief's life."

I told her, "Bobbie, you did well. The reason I prefer thieves dead is that keeps family members safe. It also keeps the police investigation to be as short as possible. Your action to send him home kept you safe and resulted in no police investigation at all. I just hope his wound does not get infected. That would be very bad for all of us. Can you arrange for a nurse to visit him in two days just to make sure that he is healing appropriately?" Bobbie nodded yes, but I could tell that she started to realize that these issues of life and death were trickier than she first thought. If the police investigated why someone died from a knife wound, and a family member or friend could relate what had happened, it would get our family into deep trouble. Bobbie bit her lip and went to bed. As it turned out, the gentleman did not die, but we needed to swap some of our illegal drugs for medical care and antibiotics.

We did find another use for the illegal drugs. We used them to bribe some of the drug users in the downtown area to alert us to possible thieves. I would try to track people down and tell them not to try it. Sometimes I would visit with the thief with the shoulder wound. I would leave some photos of the bloody corpses in our store and some photos of happy pigs. I asked if they wanted their family to learn that their beloved was recycled as pork. I know I saved about a dozen lives that way.

As soon as it was practical, we purchased and freed Ruth's parents. Soon after that, we purchased and freed Quincy's parents. All four of them were getting close to "retirement" age. For a slave, this is an uncertain time when survival depended on luck and skills they never needed before. With no savings and no continuing economic value, a "retiring" slave was left on the streets to depend on charity if they were lucky. If they were unlucky, their owners would sell them to illegal medical scavengers. We were all happy to pull them away from that fate. We did set them into adjacent apartments close to *Emperor's Palace* restaurant. All four worked there after we freed them. Every two weeks (when the restaurant was closed), we picked them up and took them to our house for a dinner meal. As would be expected, all of the conversations were in Mandarin. They affectionately called Faith, "Our curly haired daughter." They blessed Faith and



me for saving their lives. They refused to stop working at the restaurant, no matter how old they got. While the four of them were a handful sometimes (they were naive about the responsibilities of being free), they gave us a taste of the rewards of freeing slaves. When the opportunity came, we freed many additional slaves.

September 2049 brought the third marriage of my sister Jennie. She was thirty-five years old. Her first two marriages had gone badly. These occurred when she was quite young. At a social function a few years ago, she met Fred Plotkin, a local high school teacher. Faith and Ruth were convinced that Jennie had finally broken the cycle of falling for people who wanted to exploit her. Fred was a kind soul who wanted a stable partner, and little else. Jennie had been doing a very good job overseeing the suppliers we used to prepare and mount the diamonds that we sold retail. Her skill in supervising so many complicated relationships gave her the tools to enter into a personal relationship with confidence. As of the first printing of this book (2073), Fred and Jennie are a year away from celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary.

After being in the business for a year, I realized one of the reasons we were not being investigated. Very powerful people were doing what we were doing: mixing illegal assets with legal assets in a legitimate business. If the police investigated these sorts of crimes, they would always end up confronting powerful forces. There were a lot of crooked bankruptcies with bribed judges. Good people lost their businesses, and the “insiders” ended up with the good assets. We tried our best to steer clear of any entanglement with the wrong people.

After 18 months of operation, we got messages that some “important people” wanted to invest in our business. We knew our days were numbered. So we quietly accelerated our operation to clear out the last of our contraband. We sat down with these “important people” and showed them our financial books. It was not a surprise that the “important people” turned out to be Mr. Sears and his thugs. We valued our business at three million dollars, based on our profits. We were offered 1.3 million and told that it would be unwise to turn down the offer.

Faith and I took leave of the meeting to discuss the “offer.” I said, “This is an insult. Mr. Sears does not even remember that he killed my parents. He does not know who I am. I am not going to have him walk all over me again. We have to nail this murdering asshole.” Faith replied, “Dear, the business is not worth what they are offering. We are cheating him. You can kill him later. For now, just take their money. You do not want anyone else to be stuck with our store without our stockpile of contraband. Just take the money quietly.” We accepted the offer, knowing that the new management would be unable to make any profit unless they pulled the same stunt we did. And maybe they were. We never heard from them again. I did pay close attention to all the details. I kept track of every name, phone number, car license plate that came up during that transaction.

## **Money Laundering and International Finance**

I had a few thoughts about high finance through all of this. I knew that the main reason why we were never investigated for financial crimes is that we did not fall for the obvious temptation. Many people with similar businesses tried to avoid taxes by accepting valuables for full or partial payment for their goods. By selling or trading these valuables, they tried to avoid paying taxes on

their income. We were constantly offered all kinds of items instead of regular NAM payments for our diamonds. It was expected. We always refused. I think that is one of the reasons why we were so popular. Customers needed their valuables for special situations. Using NAM was always preferred since the government was always taking out taxes and fees. You got charged for getting money, spending money, or letting your money pile up in your NAM account. We wanted it since we needed a legal source of funds.

The government was always watching for the sale or trade of valuables. By not being involved in this, no one suspected a thing. We never accepted any “luxury shower curtain,” like so many other businesses. The cops never asked if the guns used to kill thieves were legal. They just took the video and photos of the robberies and declared that the case was closed. If any thief had lived, there would be a more careful investigation. So we were careful on that front as well. We all trained on how to keep shooting until it was clear that there was nothing left alive. Occasionally the cops would say, “Boy, you guys have a lot of ammo!” We would smile and nod and say, “Yes officer, you are right on that score.”

I also started wondering about the state of international finance. The newspapers and electronic media always pointed out that the only money accepted for international trade was a gold backed currency. NAM was not gold backed, so they set up the ITD system. ITD stood for International Trade Dollars, the currency system that allowed America to purchase goods from abroad. Backing the ITD system required confiscating all domestic gold, silver, and other precious metals. I never found any mention of international trade financed by bundles of hundred dollar bills. I guessed that the government lost the technology to print money anymore with all the anti-counterfeiting technology developed when I was an infant. The lack of additional print runs might explain why the hundred dollar bill was used so heavily in international trade.

I was able to read Bolivian newspapers from a few sources. They were quite open about mentioning that Bolivia bought vast amounts of oil with hundred dollar bills. Bolivia used the oil to barter for goods from all over the world. They were careful to purchase industrial goods so that Bolivia was one of the industrial powerhouses of the world. So what did the oil-producing nations do with all those hundred dollar bills? It appears they used them to purchase goods from Europe and Japan. I finally realized that the oil-producing states were buying weapon systems from the Former United States of America with crates of hundred dollar bills. So there were entities in FUSA using hundred dollar bills as a form of currency for international transaction. I started to realize how little the average citizen knows about how the businesses of war, drugs, and commerce were locked in a deadly embrace.

Before I started a jewelry store, I thought hundred dollar bills were almost worthless. They had been withdrawn from circulation. I was just a tiny part of the business of bartering contraband goods, but it opened my eyes to the reality of modern finance. I suspected that in many, many places, they just weighed boxes of hundred dollar bills. It would take too many hours to count them all. As successful as we were, we never operated at that level. We always counted out each and every hundred dollar bill that we ever sent off on its journey to Bolivia and beyond.

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# Chapter 10: A Key Linkup

## Informal Training in Computer Programming

Our goals for our in-residence programming training program were slightly optimistic. We thought we could make our three students employment-ready in two years. It took a little over two and a half years. Our students joined the workforce in March 2052. We thought we could lift their annual income from \$5,000 to about \$45,000. Their average starting salary was \$30,000. Again and again, the parental units in our household said this was not about money. We wanted these three women to get a better start in the world. But there was money to be earned. All of us, the trainers and the trainees, were being well compensated by the additional income.

We helped them line up jobs. They were all in downtown Portland, so we set up an apartment for them to stay for the first few months. We gave them some basic financial advice. We set up their salary pay-flow, so it was split half and half between our household account and their account. We paid for minimal housing, food, and expenses subsidy from our half. We pointed out that if they lived a Spartan life, they could save almost their entire salary. We recommended that they put at about 75% of their savings into government bonds, to avoid taxation. We set up their account so they could pay for most items directly out of their account without any issue. We would need to approve bigger purchases, such as furniture, luxury goods, trips, or a used car. Each young woman told us that they had never been this free from supervision. They each expressed the idea, “We will not disappoint you.” We told them that they would all be free in about ten years, and we wanted them all of them to have as much freedom that they could enjoy.

We had to set some limits. They could have boyfriends and get married, but their married life could not interfere with their work life. We told them that we would allow up to two children in the ten year period, but any kids after that would cost them two additional years of enslavement. We made it clear that we would not tolerate any use of drugs, alcohol, or lifestyle choices that would interfere with their jobs or their striving for independence.

Faith and I had a meeting with the Human Resources people at each company. Faith said, “My husband and I need to be informed about any episode that involves the HR department. However, ‘our family member’ has as much independence as persons with free status. For example, ‘our family member’ can quit and take another job at her own initiative. She gets a financial incentive package directly related to her salary. She will quit if she does not get the incentives, bonuses, and opportunities that other staff people have. It would be unwise to try to exploit their labor status.” The Human Resources folks looked startled, but they nodded that they understood. I am sure they were wondering, “If we could not exploit the slave status, then what was the point of hiring a slave?”

We had many fears. Would any of our Pygmalion Programmers lapse into any of their old lifestyle of bars, sleazy restaurants, and brothels? Would they tell the full story of how they came into our household? Would they relate an experience from one of their previous jobs that would be so lurid that it would backfire unintentionally? None of that ever happened. Instead, we had a

big headache that never occurred to us. At work and various social gatherings, they gave the outlines of their financial incentive package. Our household started to get a wave of phone calls and letters from slaves and free people in difficult circumstances wanting to have access to the same attractive terms.

Sam was a champ. He collected all the letters. Sam called everyone who phoned and asked them to write a letter. He showed the letters to the parents, wondering if he could extend the informal school into a full-time job. Sam estimated that he could handle 10-12 students. The only problem was he needed millions of backing to purchase the slaves to make his dream work.

Faith and Ruth sat down with Sam. Ruth did the arithmetic. She said, “The average slave of some intelligence would cost about \$100,000. A class of twelve would cost \$1.2 million every year. The third year, the payback would be \$200,000. The fourth-year payback would be \$400,000. Eventually, it would be immensely profitable, but it would take a whole lot of years to be cash positive. The only reason your class of three is working out so well is the unique circumstances that led them to join our household. However, there is another approach. What if we were able to borrow slaves at no cost? We could split the increase in salary: 70% to the owner, 15% to us, and 15% to the slave. We could widely advertise, and only accept the best of the best. Perhaps we could graduate a class in one and a half years. After three years, there would be 24 graduates. Assuming a \$40,000 bump in wages per student, this would total close to a million dollars of additional income to split. Our share would be \$150,000. At year 6, the revenue would be \$300,000. If Quincy, Chris, and I were to join the effort, we could further multiply those numbers.”

Sam looked shocked. He said, “What are you talking about? You are going to set up a programming business. I am very confused.” Faith said, “Sam, we have all been running the numbers. We think we can run a training business that would be way more lucrative than any software business. We might make more if we let our students go out and form new companies. Yes, thank you for identifying this business opportunity. This may be the opportunity that we have been waiting for all this time.” Sam said, “Are you taking away my business?” Faith said, “The whole family would jointly own the business. We will make you the head teacher. All teaching will be under your supervision. But yes, we are jointly taking over this business opportunity. We will purchase a major property in Portland and outfit it as a major school.”

## **Setting up the Academy**

Once the family was all in, things moved quickly. We bought a small school next to a modest apartment building. We did a rapid remodel to meet our minimum standards. We hired Julie and Jennie to work as administrators for the educational department. Bobbie and Mary were our security department. Raymond was the administrator in charge of facilities, contracts, and financial oversight. The teaching staff was Sam, Ruth, Quincy, and I. Faith kept her job as a vice-president at a local bank.

Faith and I worked on publicity. We sent e-mails to lists of slave owners, explaining how they could unlock the earning potential of their slaves. The minimum qualifications to be admitted were a high school diploma with a B average, with some exceptional work in math and science.

At orientation sessions, we carefully checked ID cards and ownership paperwork. We verified all the high school records. We passed out mathematics aptitude tests to all the candidates. We explained our principles that it was our goal to allow each student to buy their freedom about ten years after graduation. We explained to the owners that they should view this process as selling their slave over a ten year period for an obscene amount of money.

We refined our offerings to a slave owner; they could choose between two levels of participation in the increase of salary: 60% and 70%. To get the 70% rate, the slave owner needed to accept low supervision. To be tightly supervised, the owner needed to accept the 60% rate. We explained that all slaves are highly motivated to stay the course and cooperate with all basic rules and regulations. We had Jay, Sophia, and Patricia give this lecture. They explained how lightly supervised they were, and how they co-operate with us to reap the rewards of the whole arrangement.

We started our first class in August 2052. Once we had our first class underway, we could recruit the next class in a more relaxed fashion. We had a lien on each of our students. If the owner did not share the money with the slave or us, we would petition the court to take ownership. We pointed out that the owner had signed a contract, and we would hold them to the contract. If the slave did not get their share, they would not be motivated to keep increasing their salary. That was the magic kicker that made the deal very lucrative to us. By incentivizing the person earning wages to earn more, we unlocked the profit motive.

After we had been in business, I knew that our rapid growth and obvious profitability would attract the wrong attention. We had some family meetings. Quietly, we asked around Portland to identify as many victims of Mr. Sears and his thugs as we could. We ended up with a list of about 100 family owned business that had been victimized.

We turned the list over to Bobbie and Mary who went full Erin Brockovich on this. They went out and interviewed everyone. They wrote up countless affidavits. Bobbie and Mary were very careful to ask very detailed questions about how Mr. Sears and his thugs showed up. Did they come to their home or the business? How many thugs? Did they all show guns? Did they leave a gun on a desk as a means of threatening everyone? Did they guard any children? They had victims draw diagrams of where everyone was sitting.

Bobbie and Mary learned that there were usually five thugs, never six. One thug would sit next to Mr. Sears. The bodyguard for Mr. Sears would place a gun on the table while the negotiating took place. The rest would guard other family members out of view of the principles doing the negotiating. The idea was to scare the business owners to give in since they could not tell what was happening to their family members.

The whole family planned out every detail. We decided on the layout of chairs and tables to give Bobbie and Mary the best advantage. Bobbie and Mary endlessly practiced with their weapon of choice. We bought over a dozen tarps and additional supplies needed to repaint the downstairs. We collected other items for a darker purpose.

## **Success Brings Unwanted Attention**

Eventually, we got the dreaded phone call from Mr. Sears. "I would like to discuss the ownership of your company." Ruth answered the phone, and she said, "I am sorry, we are not interested in whatever you are selling." He called back again and again. He threatened to hurt the children. Faith took the call. She said, "You can come to our house at 10 AM this Saturday. Try not to be too disruptive to our household. The kids usually do their homework on Saturday morning, so they can have the whole weekend free."

At the appointed time on June 21, 2054, two cars arrived. One car held four thugs, and the other brought Mr. Sears and his personal bodyguard. Faith pointed to the sign in the entryway that said, "This is a gun-free household." Faith said, "Please respect our house rule. The kids go ballistic if they see a gun. If you have a gun, please put it back in the car." The men came in as if Faith had not said anything at all. The men looked around when they saw all the furniture covered with sheets and the floor covered with tarps. Ruth said, "We are repainting the ceiling and walls here."

A man in a red shirt said, "We want the children in one room and the adults in another room." Four thugs and five kids settled into the dining/study room. The parents went into the library with Mr. Sears and his bodyguard. The bodyguard put his gun on the table, as expected. Faith said, "I warned you not to bring guns into this house. Please put this back in your car now." The thug ignored Faith. Faith said, "If anyone points a gun at any of my children, there will be hell to pay. This is your last and final warning." The bodyguard grunted, "Shut the fuck up." I stood up and was about to eject everyone. The bodyguard said, "Hey asshole, sit down." Everyone was silent for about 30 seconds. Mr. Sears presented a document to sell our business to him for a meager sum of money. I decided to slow things down by insisting on reading the contract and asking a lot of questions. At one point we heard a scuffle and some muffled yelling in the hallway outside. I was dying inside. I could not believe that I had arranged for my children to confront experienced gun-thugs.

All of a sudden, the library door crashed open. Bobbie and Mary burst into the room and raced towards the desk. All the parents hit the floor. Mr. Sears and the thug turned towards the door. The thug's hand reached for the gun he had placed on the desk. By the time his fingers touched the gun, there were three knives in the thug's throat. Raymond and Sam rushed into the room behind the girls with a plastic tarp. Julie also entered with a pile of towels that she laid next to the dead body to prevent the blood from getting on the rug. Julie placed one small towel on the floor and pulled out all three knives to put on the towel. She moved aside so that Raymond and Sam could roll the body onto the tarp. All five kids pulled the tarp back to the entryway, which was already covered with plastic tarps.

Mr. Sears yelled, "What the fuck? What is going on?" Ruth said, "When the kids were younger, they liked to play this game called 'self-defense' where guests would pretend to point guns at our kids, and the kids would throw pretend knives at their throats. It looks like they are playing a more adult version of the game right now. My kids do not tolerate anyone pointing a gun at them. Do you let strangers aim guns at your kids? Seriously, did I not tell you never to bring guns into this house? I suspect that five people have died because of your ignorant refusal to listen to me."

Quincy yelled out, "Is everyone fine? Is anybody hurt?" Sam yelled back, "Sorry, I forgot to say. We are all fine. No one has a scratch. All five of the assholes are as dead as doorknobs." Julie ran back with a big plastic box containing guns and knives. She put the gun and the towel with the bloody knives in the box and closed the lid. She said, "After we deal with the five unit disposal problem and clean up the blood, I will be cataloging the new weapons and their ammo. These jerks did not bring much ammo. I think they must have thought we would melt at the sight of a bunch of guns. Bobbie and Mary got them all in seconds." She ran from the room with the box of weapons.

Faith turned to Mr. Sears. She said, "Mr. Sears, you were explaining to us that we had no choice but to sell our business to you at what seems to be a very, very low price. I know you are a very good lawyer, but I am having difficulty understanding the legal basis of your argument. It is almost as if you were using gangsters to scare us into doing what you want. Are you attempting to intimidate us?"

Mr. Sears said, "I cannot believe that you think you can get away with this outrage! I will make sure you all hang for this!" Faith said, "I would like to wait until my youngest daughters have a bath and put on fresh clothes. I know they would like to discuss this exact issue with you." After ten minutes, Faith called Bobbie and Mary into the library. Faith asked, "How is the cleanup coming? You know I am having a dinner party tonight, and I would like to make the house presentable." Mary said, "We are a bit behind schedule, but there is some wiggle room. I think we all set on this. Sam and Raymond are preparing the packages the way we discussed. Julie has collected and has hidden all the artifacts. She is starting to repaint the places on the walls and ceiling that got splattered. Once she is done, we need to pull up all the tarps, padding, and tape."

Faith cut in. She said, "Dear, it would be nice for you to address some concerns that Mr. Sears has. If I remember his question, he wants to know how we think he can get away with this." Bobbie said, "Is it OK if I sit down in a chair? I have been running around, and I am a bit exhausted." Bobbie rested for two minutes, then said, "So, Mr. Sears, here are some issues. First, we did not invite these five gentlemen. You insisted that they show up here to be your muscle. Next, they made the mistake of pointing those awful guns at my siblings and me. We have a rule in this house that guests cannot bring guns. If they do have guns, it is very bad to point them at anyone. The one with the red shirt pointed a gun at Mary. Mary had started to use her phone. Mr. red-shirt said, 'Put that down.' Mary said, 'No.' Mr. red-shirt pulled out a gun. I threw a knife at his throat to protect my sister. He was not watching me."

"Even though the principle of self-defense was obvious, the other three guys started to make the exact same mistake of brandishing a gun. They all started to look at me. Meanwhile, Mary was getting them. When the survivors started to look at Mary, I tossed a few more knives. At various points, Sam, Raymond, and Julie moved around a bit to add to the distraction. I always say you should not bring a gun to a knife fight. It takes a long time to pull out a gun, hold it the right way, point it, aim it, and shoot it. We were tossing knives much faster. We made it difficult for them to figure out who is throwing the knife. My siblings hid lots of knives in hollow books, so we didn't have to worry about missing now and then."

“When we had killed four people in self-defense, we came into the study intending to tell our parents what had happened. We do not like secrets in this house. It just happened that both my sister and I had some knives in our hands as we came into the study. Naturally, our parents fell to the floor, since they guessed what was about to happen. The guy next to you just compounded the problem by trying to pick up his gun. So Mary and I zapped him. Do you have any questions about the sequence of events?” Mr. Sears said, “No. But I dispute your right to ambush my friends like that.”

Bobbie responded, “As I understand the law, we face no legal jeopardy at all. We acted in self-defense. But I ask you why you brought these very bad men into our house. As I understand it, you did not give my parents any choice. They just came in with their bullying behavior and sense of entitlement. And you brought guns into this house, even though that was expressly forbidden. Do I understand that you brought them into our house to intimidate our parents into making a deal that puts them at a disadvantage? Can I see the paperwork of the deal you brought here?” She flipped through the papers quickly; she turned to me and asked, “Are you interested in selling this business at this price?” I said, “Hell no.” Bobbie turned to Mr. Sears, “What kind of sweetener were you planning on to get my parents to accept this lousy deal?” Mr. Sears shook his head and said, “This deal was theirs to reject. I was not forcing it on anyone.”

Bobbie said, “We seem to be going round and round, not getting to the heart of this matter, which is a pattern of criminality. Chris, have you showed him the affidavits yet?” I said, “We have not gotten to that yet. Be my guest.” Bobbie pulled a huge stack of papers from a shelf. Bobbie said, “Mr. Sears, this is a stack of affidavits which detail 83 incidents of extortion and intimidation. I spent two months typing these up. You may not know it, but I do a fair amount of pro bono legal clerking work. Producing these affidavits has been my biggest project yet. Each of the file folders in this big stack details a separate act of intimidation and extortion. The file I am holding now is most meaningful to this family. You and your thugs came to *Wind River Systems* and asked to purchase that company at rock bottom prices. The owners refused. So you killed them. Did you know that Chris here is their son? You probably didn’t. I do not think you care about your victims even to keep track of them. You came here to buy our training academy at rock bottom prices. If my parents had refused, you would kill them, just like you murdered my grandparents. Here is the thing. I want this business to remain in the family, and I do not want my parents to be killed. Let me be as clear as I can. Your days of stealing businesses are over. Your only job from now on is to help restore your ill-gotten gains back to your victims. Get used to it. Man up. You said we would hang for our acts of self-defense. Let me throw some numbers at you. If you are found guilty of just four of these episodes outlined in these folders, you would be sentenced to 20 years. That is the limit for prison. You would face the hangman in a week after you were found guilty. Let me say that once more. We walk away. Right now, the disgusting corpses of your gun thugs are in the process of being fed to some pigs. You face the hangman. Good day.”

Before Mr. Sears could answer, Faith spat out a few angry sentences, “my husband and I could have turned *Wind River Systems* into a 50 million dollar business in our lifetime. Instead, you killed the owners and shattered the company into a thousand parts to gain a few hundred thousand dollars. I would kill you in seconds, but I want you alive to take this whole fucking corrupt system down. Be grateful for the information in your head. It is saving your life!”



Mr. Sears said, "There is no way I could ever be found guilty. I work with almost all of the judges in this county. I would be free within minutes." Faith said, "So we agree. You are giving us a great incentive to kill you tonight and dispose of your body the same way we are getting rid of the others. Once your corpse has been taken to the pig farm, we will make sure to tell your family they can find you recycled as some pork in the supermarket. Do you want that? I did not think so. I would like to work out a deal. We would like you to spend a week or two in our basement giving video testimony against all the crooked judges. We intend to show up with you and the videos in another county. We will let the criminal justice system handle you. It does not matter if you are rich or poor; you need to follow the law. Is that not part of your professional oath?"

Mr. Sears said, "I would not last a month in jail. They would kill me for betraying them." Bobbie cut in, "The person who put you in your position is none other than yourself. My mother is offering you a way out. Of course, you can refuse to cooperate with my parents. For myself, I draw the line at justified homicide. I will let my parents deal with you. But I would recommend that you cooperate. Again, it is just my hope, but I would love to see that many judges be found guilty all at once." Ruth said, "I know we have asked a lot of you. Can you prepare a secure area in the basement to hold Mr. Sears? It will take him some time to respond to each of these affidavits in this stack. By the way, Mr. Sears, we are returning your car to your house. We do not steal the property of others."

Faith said, "Mr. Sears, we are having a dinner party here tonight. My sister-in-law Jennie, who is one of your former clients, will be here to celebrate her upcoming wedding. You are welcome to join us upstairs for the party. We will supervise you carefully. Do not worry; we are not vindictive. We do believe in redemption. During the process of exposing this sordid affair, there will be many voices wanting to strip you and your crooked comrades of all of your assets. We will help you retain some basis to sustain a modest life. To the best of your ability, remember who got the assets. We would like to return assets to their rightful owners, if at all possible. After you have spent two full days giving testimony, you can draft a statement that you are alive and well that you can give to your family. Once we turn you over to law enforcement authorities, you will have access to others based on your legal status. Let me answer one of your questions. You asked how we thought we could get away with the events of this day. I would like to ask you how you and your buddies thought you could get away of twenty years of extortion, murder, and robbery?"

As Bobbie and Mary marched Mr. Sears to his cell in the basement, they walked through the entryway. The older boys, aided by Quincy and me, were stripping the corpses of all clothing. Julie was carefully collecting all wallets, watches, and personal items in yet another plastic box. The clothing went into a series of garbage bags. The naked bodies were being wrapped in fresh tarps, which were being sealed with some duct tape. Quincy and I used a cart to move the packages to the pickup truck. According to our schedule, we wanted to dispose of the corpses, finish painting, pull up the tarps and sheets, donate the tarps and clothing to a homeless camp, and make everything look normal in four hours. It was going to be a busy day.

## **We Get another Offer We Cannot Refuse**

In early 2056, we got a strange phone call from someone who was quite vague. They wanted to set up a meeting. I was afraid it was one more group of gangsters that wanted our business. Someone named Danny was coming into town. We assigned Ruth and Quincy to take the meeting. Danny took them into one of the most exclusive restaurants in Portland.

The big joke was three people with slave collars go into a fancy restaurant. They scanned Danny's card to make sure he was loaded. His pitch was amazing. He was a leader in a hidden project that needed thousands of computer programmers. They wanted people trained as soon as possible. Danny said that he was not supervising the programming projects, but he was in charge of hiring staff. Danny said, "We do not want to attract too much attention. We would prefer to avoid causing a shortage of computer programmers that would alert authorities of the size of the project. We would like you to ramp up your training as fast as possible. We would like to have your train 2,000 people that we will select for a flat fee of \$5,000 each for ten million dollars. We will give you four million so you can jump start the training process."

Our partners asked quite a few questions about the nature of this big project. Danny Hughes was very vague. Ruth said, "Without knowing if your project is legal or not, we cannot agree to this. Why don't you come to our house tonight? Perhaps you can show us some document that will help explain your project in more detail. Tell us, where are you from, and how did you hear about us?" Danny said, "Many of us come from a small town in Ohio. We learned about you from a software billionaire who is our friend. He knows about your efforts on behalf of enslaved persons." Danny walked with Ruth and Quincy back to the Training Academy. During the walk, Danny learned more about the blended household and their shared projects.

At our house, Danny stopped at the framed deed. He asked, "Within a week of being purchased, you bought this house in the names of all four adults? This is an amazing story." Faith and I got to meet Danny. Over dinner, we learned about this mysterious Jane Foreman who had a project to overturn the rule of the billionaires. We learned more about conditions in the rest of the country. Slaves in Portland had even more rights and privileges than the Ohio slaves had with gold collars. We all thought that having to run around holding a leash all the time to bring a slave anywhere was a pain. We kept asking, "Who would pass such stupid laws?" We learned that these laws had been passed after major slave rebellions.

Faith started to run some numbers. She said, "There is no way we can do what you ask for given the budget you have suggested. If we tap into our two million in savings, and you give us eight million up front, we can expand enough so that we can triple our current 'regular customers.' By tapping into the final two million of your offer, and the cash flow from our expanded existing business, we would avoid going bankrupt. Are you sure you cannot offer us more?" Danny said, "our entire budget, including several years of salaries, is somewhere near 200 million. We are pretty much up against a wall. I have been traveling around the country, and you folks are the only ones that offer us any chance to get the staffing we want. I know we will put an enormous strain on your ability to stay solvent. But we plan on so transforming society that any company that is associated with this change may be worth hundreds of millions of dollars." Sam and Raymond almost spit out their food. Faith said, "This does have all the hallmarks of a very large scale con game. Would you mind if our security team visited Jane Foreman and other key staff, so we know this is all for real?"

Danny said, "I can draw up a contract, and deposit eight million in your account. That is how much I trust you. I know you are people of your word. Of course, all of this has been confidential. Bobbie and Mary are welcome to come to Ohio. Bobbie, you need to wear a leash most of the time and suffer other indignities. Are you willing to travel under these circumstances?" Bobbie said, "Sure, it sounds like an amazing adventure. But I want a full list of all these slave rules. I hate learning about a rule while a cop has a gun on me." Danny replied, "No problem. We could arrange for you to get a gold collar, which allows travel without a leash. It requires written permission from your owners and the signature of a billionaire. Please bring lots of ID cards, and permission slips. I will make sure you travel safely with a minimum of discomfort."

Bobbie and Mary came back to Portland three weeks later. Bobbie did indeed have a gleaming gold collar, which was the source of great curiosity in Portland. We asked her about her trip. She said, "It was amazing. I was required to be chained to a fixed location every night. They are paranoid as hell out there. Mary was very sweet about the leash thing. Jane Foreman is the real deal. She got rich in the stock market and has now raised about \$250 million to overhaul the new America. It will not end slavery, but it is a real first start. I saw all her papers including her diary, her educational record, and her poetry. Every paper we asked for, they had, and it all cross-checked. We did not see their confidential business plans, so I do not know what they are programming, but I am sure it is all for real. The person who signed my application for the gold collar is Roger Carter, the software guy. I think he is the one who told Danny about us. I did not know we are famous. Mary and I enthusiastically endorse this project. I do not care if we have to eat potatoes and porridge for five years. Accept the eight million, and change the course of history."

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# Chapter 11: Jane's Rollout

## The Big Expansion and Management Chaos

The deal went through. One day, there were eight million dollars added to our business bank account. Faith gave us a lecture, "Beware. This is a massive project, but it is underfunded. We need to be careful with every penny. This project will bankrupt us unless we use every fiber in our bodies and minds to overcome hundreds of obstacles. We are going to war. In five years we can see if this is all worth it. I suspect that we will be asked for all kinds of extras, which we would need to support on our tab. Our expenses are going to be 15-25 million dollars. I am going to come up with all sort of side deals to raise additional cash. The 8-10 million we are getting from Jane Foreman's organization is less than half of what we need to avoid bankruptcy."

Our household had made a list of things to do in the event the deal went through. We were ready. Within two days, we purchased an unused urban campus in Portland. Immediately, the buildings started to be refurbished, food service equipment installed, and staff was hired. Everything was on a fast track.

There was so much to decide and set up. The purpose of this book is to tell the story of my family. Going into in-depth details about the Academy is a bit of an inside story. Some of it needs to be told because there were serious problems when family members clashed on key issues. In the beginning, it was all smiles as we worked out the initial details together. We decided to build the curriculum in units of two weeks. We made a list of the seven tracks that we were supporting and worked out schedules to allow multiple tracks to share classes.

There was a second major project, Blue Flame, which trained staff for the technical network upgrades. This required the training of masses of people for a shorter time frame. Blue Flame was moved to Denver and turned over to Connie and Terry (Faith's college roommates). Since the graduating technicians immediately generated income for the Jane Foreman Enterprise, there was cash flow to fund the training. Faith arranged a profit-sharing deal to help support the Portland Programming Academy. Faith used every deal she could to shift money to our project.

Our job was to receive students coming by train from across the country, and then send them to new jobs in different places, ready to go. We knew that because of the recent history of Portland, there had been little political and technology repression in Portland. Portland was one of the safest places to operate from, but we still had to be careful. One of our goals was to maintain operational security. We had to confront the fact that we were teaching forbidden topics. Everything about web technology: ISP's, networks, browsers, social media, and so much more had been banned for allowing the exchange of forbidden information and ideas. Bobbie had a wicked idea. She suggested icons for each of our seven tracks which were nonsensical or opposite. We would brief incoming students by saying that the entire group would not get a diploma if anyone of them revealed the secret meaning of their group insignia. This was ingenious because it told the students that there were secrets to be kept, but the initial focus was

on a silly image. The logo for the network students was a cactus, a snail for e-mail and an angry bear for social media, and so on down the line.

Bobbie and Faith gave presentations to each group of incoming students. Faith said, “We are on a war footing. We are all involved in a massive project which will win many social victories for ordinary people. You will all do well in a new society. In the meantime, we are struggling to educate you, amuse you, feed you, keep you warm, and make your lives comfortable. I do know that you can sleep together and solve three of these problems all by yourself. I am serious about that. A great person once said that a social movement does not thrive unless its foot soldiers are having intimate relationships.”

Bobbie took the stage and added “I need to turn to another issue. One way we are holding down costs here is a complex web of relationships with the poorest people in Portland. They have agreed to work long hours at the school in exchange for food, clothing, some education, and other benefits. The school services will provide the food and clothing, but we ask the students to volunteer their time to educate, enlighten, and assist our volunteers. We are on a limited budget. By organizing this way, plentiful food is distributed to our students and the poor. But we need your help to keep the bargain alive. Who here feels they have the skills to teach basic subjects?” Eventually, all hands were raised.

Next Bobbie addressed operational security. She said, “When anyone asks, here is your script ‘I am learning to be a computer programmer for the financial industry. A bank is paying my way. The bank has requested that I not reveal the details of my employment and my education. You can ask for more information at the Academy of Programming.’ Do I make myself clear? Any phone calls, letters, or e-mails that reveal anything will result in the loss of graduation for yourself and your fellow students. We do have a special office set up so you can discuss specific situations where you wish to break secrecy. Let's say you have a sweetheart who does not believe that you are on a good life path, and might forsake you. Well, we can work out a way to bring him or her into our secret family without you breaking any rules. For the next week, try and learn the hometown of your fellow students. If you do so, you get a gold star, and your victim will get a letter of reprimand. Let the games begin.”

Sam had an unusual role. He spent a quarter of his time traveling around the FUSA to visit facilities that used the graduates of the Programming Academy. He had a way of asking a whole series of questions at each site, such as “Which students are your top performers? Which students are your bottom performers? What do you need to teach everyone that you wished we did?” On and on he went. As Sam got his answers, in his head, he rearranged schedules, problem sets, and skill sets. Within a month, changes were made in Portland exactly matching the needs of our clients. I had no idea that Sam was capable of such complex mental feats.

Unfortunately, Sam could not fix our school single-handed. After operating about ten months, we faced a real crisis. We had major problems recruiting quality teachers/professors. People we thought would be great ended up being disasters. Our standard response was to fire the teacher and then assign a family member to be a temporary professor. We had so many temporary professors in our family that there was no one left to mind the store. We had quick meetings where we just got into arguments on who to hire and who to fire. I was as bad as everyone else. I

defended two members of my Nerd Salad friends who were not working out. I could not recognize how dysfunctional everything was getting. We had jumped from one issue to another so quickly that I lost all perspective. I do remember one week which was full of family fights in front of too many Academy senior staff.

Faith called an all family meeting on Saturday night. She laid down the law. She said, "I am going to say two things that are not up for debate. I am leaving the bank, and I am taking total control of the Programming Academy. Why? I need to save the Academy from disaster. When we argue or do not do our jobs, our staff wonders why they took the job. Even if they do not quit, everyone does less than they are supposed to. Eventually, our enterprise lands in the crapper. I want to avoid unproductive arguments, shirking of responsibilities, and fights over the future of our enterprise." When anyone objected to the loss of income we would have by losing her salary; Faith said, "Let's discuss this later." When anyone objected to Faith running the business, she said, "Wait until we are done here. You will see that I am in the process of empowering you to run this enterprise effectively. I want to move onto to the heart of my proposal. I want to issue stock in our business. Each adult in this household gets 6%, each child gets 4%. If you are good at math, that adds up to 44%. The other 56% will be vested in a family owned corporation that cannot be further sub-divided without an 80% vote. This way, each of you can look forward to a big payday if we are successful, but the interests of the family are protected if most of you sell your shares. If our wildest dreams come true, and our firm eventually is worth \$10 million, each kid walks away with \$400,000. I hope I have your attention."

Faith continued, "Next, I want to set up a decision making process for our company. I want each adult to have six votes and each kid to have four votes. All decisions need to get 59% of the votes. Why 59%? By a mathematical curiosity, this means that if all the adults want something, they need a single kid to reach the threshold. It flips around, if all the kids want something, you need a single adult to get to 59% of the votes. Here comes the fun part. If there is anything you are arguing about, you can pass a new procedure by voting it in. For example, we can set up a hiring/firing committee of three to consist of Chris, Julie, and Bobbie. Notice that my passing a new procedure, you take power out of my hands. If you all agree on enough procedures, I am not a dictator, but a powerless figurehead." Raymond asked, "Why Chris, Julie, and Bobbie on that committee?" Faith replied, "Almost all of hiring is being an excellent judge of character. Julie and Bobbie are the best we have to judge character. Chris can check credentials, which also plays a role."

Raymond called for a vote. Unanimously, we agreed to form a family corporation precisely as Faith proposed. The proposal to form a hiring committee using Faith's language passed 34 shares to 10. Everyone's mood improved as we realized we had the power to make rapid improvements in the school and our situation. By offering such a tangible reward for success galvanized us all to work together rather than to have unproductive arguments. We made a list of issues that could use a new procedure that we could discuss next week. Sam asked how we could afford to cover Faith's salary. Faith explained, "If I can cut the expenses of the Academy by \$100,000 a year, then I more than make up the cost of my \$70,000 salary. I think I can do better than that. Right now we need to solve a dozen problems all at once. Let's get to work."

## Getting More Computers

One of our constant headaches was obtaining large numbers of standardized computers. We needed hundreds of largely identical computers for our educational program. It was frustrating when we had to keep having to work around differences. We were getting feedback from the Jane Foreman complex that they also needed standardized computers.

Once again, I turned to the Barnes family. Mr. Barnes saw an opportunity. He turned over \$100,000 to Samantha to work up (with a series of industry experts) a proposal for a computer hardware business. Once they had the basic specifications, the Barnes family set up a computer company called *Carp Computers* to start production. The name was based on the fact that they were “bottom feeders,” since they cannibalized old computers to make new computers. Samantha ran the new company with a firm hand. She had a vision that she was building a major company and set out step-by-step to get there. There were some leaks between Bobbie, Mary, and Samantha. Samantha learned that the forbidden HTTP protocol was the future of computers. So quality Wi-Fi was a secret ingredient in each computer. Once Jane's product rollout came, everyone wanted a Carp Computer. The bottom feeder ended up being the apex predator. While I am proud of her success, I am still nostalgic for the early days of Carp Computers. I loved their ads with the tagline, “It's not a Crap Computer, it is a Carp Computer.”

## A Very Classy Wedding

In November 2057, Mary brought Samantha Barnes over for dinner. She asked that all her parents and as many of her siblings as possible be present. Mary looked so excited that I thought she would start glowing. Finally, Mary announced that Samantha had proposed marriage, and she had accepted. Mary showed her engagement ring. She had pretended that she had a bandage on her finger. She took it off to display a very tasteful ring made up of dozens of small diamonds. For me, this was a huge surprise. I had not been tracking my kid's social circles as much as I should have. I just thought of Samantha as a good friend from middle school and high school. My main focus was on the financial relationship between our family and the Barnes family. So you could have knocked me over with a feather. Bobbie just said, “Well, it's about time. I was wondering how long you guys were willing to live in sin.”

We all got up to walk over to Mary and Samantha and offered our personal congratulations. Ruth asked, “So, do you have a date set?” Samantha answered, “My parents prefer May 18th next year. I wish it were next week.” Faith asked, “Do you have any idea of what kind of wedding you would like to have?” Samantha replied, “My mother is Jewish. She would prefer a Jewish wedding. Mary needs to study pretty hard if she is going to satisfy the rabbi with her conversion.” That stopped the conversation for a moment. Once everyone reflected that Mary was entitled to her own personal decisions, we carried on without skipping a beat.

Ruth said, “Traditionally the bride's family pays for the wedding. Here I am a bit confused. You are both each other's bride are you not? So do we split the cost?” Samantha replied, “No. My parents insist on paying for everything. I am an only child. They seem to want to make a big deal about this. They want our wedding to be the big social event of the season. This would be way too expensive. Frankly, my parents have oceans of money, and they are so grateful to your whole family for the rescue from both the kidnapper and from the police chief. This is on their dime.”

I said, "I am not so sure that I like these fancy affairs where a fortune is spent to impress lots of rich people. Why not skip the big party and just feed poor people?" Mary laughed, "I knew you would say that. I think the plan is to feed as many poor people as possible while also having a nice party that is a bit scaled back. I think you may appreciate all that we have planned."

I will skip over all the planning details. The wedding itself was unforgettable. I think I would have enjoyed the actual ceremony a bit better if I were Jewish. Other people were laughing and crying at different things that I did not understand. Oh well, that's what I get for not being very religious. Samantha wore a beautiful white dress. Mary had a highly modified lavender outfit that was pantsuit at the bottom, and wedding dress at the top. The wedding party consisted of the brides, three bridesmaids in pink outfits, and Bobbie was in a purple tux.

As is traditional for a wedding, almost all the guests were seated at their dinner tables before the wedding party made its way to the grand ballroom. Once the wedding party was in the center of the open area, someone ran out to give a microphone to the brides. An emcee started the following dialogue:

**Emcee:** Do I understand that you six women were together nine years ago in a very unusual house?

**Mary:** Years ago, we were captured and held in a homemade dungeon by a homicidal maniac. My "Best sister" Bobbie and I were handcuffed to a chain inside a locked cell. Samantha was in her own cell, and our dear bridesmaids were sharing the third cell.

**Emcee:** So how were you captured?

**Bobbie:** We were walking together on the streets of Portland. A man identified himself as a policeman. He said we were under arrest. He had us in handcuffs and pushed into his van before we knew what was happening.

**Samantha:** Something very similar happened to me.

**Jane (Bridesmaid):** We were each picked up in a police raid. When no one could trace our ownership, the chief of police turned us over to his brother who was supposed to sell us. The two brothers were trying to steal city property for their private gain. (At this point, the three bridesmaids sat down at a table that already had Patricia, dressed like a bridesmaid, who did not take part in the formal wedding party since she was not part of the original rescue.)

**Emcee:** So how did you escape?

**Mary:** Bobbie had a handcuff key in her pocket. She had some weapons hidden in the frame of her backpack. When the time was right, we killed him. Then we opened up the other cells and freed everyone.



**Samantha:** That night, I slept in Mary and Bobbie's bedroom. Mary could tell how frightened I was since I was shaking and shivering. She brought me into her bed and made me feel safe for the first time in months. That feeling has never gone away.

**Emcee:** Let's have a round of applause as we remember the terror and the bravery which brought all six of these fine women to freedom.

**Bridesmaids:** (all four pointed to their slave collars)

**Emcee:** Well at least your life situations all got a whole lot better! (The bridesmaids all nodded, smiled, and waved.) Is there anything else you wanted to say?

**Sophia (Bridesmaid):** We had been granted our freedom last week. We have been too busy with the wedding to get these collars sawed off yet. I want everyone to know that because of the careful planning of Mary's family, the four of us have substantial savings and a bright future. We are eager to begin our lives as free women.

**Emcee:** (turning back to Mary) It was not enough for you to affect this rescue. You also realized that everyone was in great danger afterward, didn't you?

**Mary:** I guessed that the chief of police and his evil brother were fighting over their stealings. I knew that the chief of police would lash out violently once he realized that his brother was dead. I made sure that everyone was in hiding and safe. A week after the rescue, someone called the police to tell them that Samantha was safely at her home.

**Emcee:** (dramatically pointed to a large projection screen) Let's watch what happened in the Barnes house two hours after that phone call. (The audience gasped as the 57 seconds of video showing the four top police officers of Portland bursting into the house and shooting up the mannequins dressed as the Barnes family.) Please understand that the house was empty except for three mannequins and twenty cameras. Bobbie and Mary, Mr. and Mrs. Barnes would like to salute you for saving their lives and the life of Samantha a second time in a week. How old were you at the time?

**Bobbie:** Ed, that happened when we were in the seventh grade. We were twelve and thirteen.

**Emcee:** How did you know you could escape?

**Mary:** We were fighting for our lives. Bobbie told me some things to me which brought out my last ounce of fighting energy.

**Emcee:** What did you say to Mary?

**Bobbie:** I said, "If there is a split second when you am not stabbing, twisting, or slashing, then he wins. I told her to attack like an Olympic sprinter, and then keep fighting like you are in a marathon."

**Samantha:** Oh my God. I had not known this detail. Thank you, Bobbie, for giving your strength to my beloved.

**Emcee:** So which one of you proposed to the other?

**Samantha:** I proposed to Mary. I figured that she was not exotic enough being a half-black and half-Chinese combination streetfighter and law clerk. I wanted her to be a half-black half-Chinese lesbian Jewish streetfighter and law clerk. I am not sure if that is a statement of personal identity or a job description.

**Mary:** If it is a job description, I do not think I have to worry about someone taking my position.

**Emcee:** When I look at you two, I would think that Mary is more of the proposing type.

**Samantha:** I am not sure what you are trying to say, Mr. Thompson, but I was afraid that Mary might forget how much I love her.

**Mary:** Oh no, I would never forget anything about you.

**Emcee:** You can call me Ed. Is it OK if we show the engagement ring on the big screen? Can you describe it?

**Samantha:** I knew that Mary's family used to run a jewelry store that specialized in big diamond rings. So I wanted a ring that was very special. It is made up of a field of tiny diamond chips; some are bigger than others. In the center, there is a handcuff key made up of ruby chips. It represents the many ways Mary has liberated me from bondage. You know there were a few years when I could only do horseback riding. I avoided dealing with people. I started to hang around with Mary's family, and I started to see the positive parts of being human. Seeing nine people work together with humor, love, and deliberate positive energy has lifted my emotional horizons. So that is the third way in which Mary and her family have saved my life.

**Emcee:** It was Bobbie that had the handcuff key. Why not a ring for her too?

**Samantha:** Good question, Ed. Bobbie, this ring is for you. (Samantha picked up a jewelry box from the table.) It is not as fancy as an engagement ring. I do not want to upset your boyfriend. It uses garnets instead of rubies for the tiny key, but it is on a field of diamonds. Come over her, my dear sister, and put on this ring. Can we show this ring on the big screen?

**Bobbie:** Oh my God! (At this point Bobbie almost fell over as she tried to stand up. Tears rolled down her cheeks.) I don't know what to say. No one has ever given me anything so lovely. I had no idea. Oh my, it fits perfectly. I think I had better sit down again before I start to fall over again. (She also said, "You have the very best wife." in Mandarin, to which Mary answered, "Yes, I know that.")

**Emcee:** Samantha, we need to lighten the mood here. Can you stand up and introduce your parents? (Samantha got up slowly and gestured for her parents to stand up too.)

**Samantha:** This is my mother, Rachel Swartz Barnes, and this is my father, David Hughes Barnes. They are very clever about forming, re-arranging, and selling large businesses. Recently, they set up a new business to build the kinds of computers industry needs right now. They have installed me as CEO. And I know what you are about to say. You are going to accuse me of being a spoiled brat with a mountain of money at my feet due to my being born to wealthy parents. Yes, guilty as charged, I am. If I do my job right, thousands of people in this area will have jobs, and tens of thousands of people around this great landmass that used to be a united country will have businesses because of the empowering effects of uniform computers. Further, it is hope is that my efforts lead to better communications and understanding to allow us to re-form as a united country. My wish is to eventually fund a Second Constitutional Convention to help form the new United States of America. (At that point, the assembled people in the ballroom got up from their chairs and gave Samantha a thunderous standing ovation.)

**Emcee:** Mary, I would like you to introduce your family. Before I do, let me ask you, how do you introduce your family?

**Mary:** Ed, I don't. It is much too complicated.

**Emcee:** I will do my best. Mary, your family was started by Chris Ritter and Faith Winters. After Chris' parents were murdered, they "bought the lifetime labor rights" of two enslaved persons, Ruth and Quincy Lo. The four parents purchased a large house where you all live. The four of you have five children: Sam Ritter, son of Faith and Chris; Raymond and Julie, twins of Ruth and Quincy, Mary child of Faith and Quincy, and Bobbie, child of Ruth and Chris. None of this sounds very kosher. Were the adults all sleeping together in one big bed?

**Mary:** I don't think so. My parents aren't freaks. They sleep two to a room like normal people. I do have some sweet memories. When I was small, I would wander into bedrooms when I woke up, as kids do. No one ever told me that I might see something that I was not supposed to see. The result is that I have no memories of who slept with whom. We just all lived together, cooked together, went to school together, and took trips together. I think the original concept was that they could all work practically full-time. By sharing childcare, they would be able to get ahead of families that had to make do with only two parents. My sense is they aimed for more money and ended up with more happiness, the money they got from other things. (Turning to Faith and Ruth) Do you have any advice for me?

**Faith:** Under no circumstances should you both be pregnant at the same time.

**Emcee:** In your family, how do they refer to you and Bobbie?

**Bobbie:** We are known as the crossover girls since we both cross between the two married couples. But we like to call each other twins.

**Emcee:** Twins? Even though there is another set of actual biological twins in your family?

**Bobbie:** Correct.

**Emcee:** Even though you do not share any DNA?

**Bobbie:** DNA is highly over-rated.

**Emcee:** Even though you were born months apart?

**Bobbie:** I do not know what you are trying to say.

**Emcee:** Even though you do not look like each other? You are three-quarters Chinese and a quarter Caucasian. Mary is half-black and half-Chinese. How can you be twins?

**Mary:** Let me tell you a story. In sixth grade, our teacher refused to allow us to identify as sisters. Even worse, he screamed at us for no reason and marked most of our homework with a zero. When one of my mothers found out, she was pissed. We ended up leaving the school with a full refund and being homeschooled for the year. So Ed, how do you like your job of being an emcee?

**Emcee:** I love doing weddings when the bride has a twin sister. Let's give them both a hand. (Long pause for applause) And I would like to add that Bobbie saved my life many years ago. Let's watch this video. I should point out that I was a drug addict at the time, and not in a good mental place. I am certain that I would have died in the next two months of an overdose if you had not intervened. (The video was highly edited. It showed Ed Thompson trying to break the display case of the jewelry store. He was interrupted by Bobbie, who threw a knife into his shoulder. Bobbie stitched up the wound and sent Ed on his way.)

**Bobbie:** How did you get this video?

**Emcee:** Your father or one of your fathers was kind enough to share this. You guys sent nurses to my house, and then gave me jobs when I was recovered. Right now I am the manager of buildings and grounds at your family's Programming Academy. The wound healed very well. I have full use of my arm. Do you know why that is?

**Bobbie:** I aimed the knife to avoid nerves and blood vessels. I did not want to deprive you of the use of your arm.

**Emcee:** Well Bobbie, your aim is excellent. Right now, I would like to recognize that about a hundred guests here are victims of Gerald Sears and his corrupt gang. Let's have all of the people who lost their business or loved ones to these gangsters stand up. (A large percentage of the people at the tables stood up, including all members of Chris and Faith's family). Mary, why are you standing up?

**Mary:** This gangster organization murdered my grandparents. They also tried to steal the Programming Academy. We took them down by monumental planning and execution. All the details will have to wait for a more appropriate forum. Their attempt to invade our house was their last stand. We planned hard; we turned the tables on them and saw each gang member find an appropriate fate. We worked hard to locate assets to return to the victims. I appreciate the

efforts of my mother Faith to locate evidence and take down all of the corrupt judges who were involved in this massive scandal. Due to her efforts, new judges have replaced the criminal judges. I do believe that we also have all of the seven new judges here and their families. I do believe we should give them credit for restoring the rule of law in Portland Oregon.

**Emcee:** You and Bobbie interviewed over 200 people who have lost business to those gangsters?

**Mary:** Yes. Bobbie and I did a lot of pro-bono legal clerking in those days. We did these extensive interviews. Only 83 were willing to go on the record. We prepared affidavits for the court. These led to the execution of Gerald Sears for theft, extortion, money laundering, and many other crimes. It took us months to type up all the legal documents. It was our most extensive legal project.

**Emcee:** So now people can form small businesses in Portland without fearing that parasite gangsters will steal their business?

**Mary:** Correct.

**Emcee:** Let's wind this all up. Bobbie and Mary, you have a deep secret you want to reveal?

**Mary and Bobbie:** Yes, please show the video.

**Emcee:** As I understand it, your mother Faith heard there was a report that slaves were being taken to a particular address. You were asked to investigate but found the building well-guarded. You figured out that you could go up the stairs in the adjacent building, and then get to the roof of the suspicious address. You found a skylight and were able to open it up a few inches. So you built a foldable lighting fixture and lowered in down there, correct? (The video started. As the building came into view, there were gasps as many people recognized the building. The video showed the hidden camera and the folding lighting fixture. There was a diagram showing the use of a periscope, a laser rangefinder, and trigonometry to figure out how to lower the fixture. Then the video showed the title page of the documentary, *Harvest of the Enslaved*. So you two were the mystery camera people!

**Mary:** It was a homeschool project. We got an "A." As you know, Faith edited the video, and Chris was the mystery narrator.

**Emcee:** Why did you keep it a secret?

**Mary:** We were little kids. It was just too big a story. This affair involved wholesale murder. Thirty people went to prison. The news people kept searching for the mystery camera person or persons. No one could imagine that it was twin sisters doing a school assignment. Our parents helped us understand that it was best to keep our mouths zipped up on this story.

**Emcee:** Until now, that is. Can we have a hand for these twins who single-handedly shut down an execution chamber for enslaved persons? (There was a lengthy standing ovation)

**Emcee:** Samantha, how does it feel to be so overshadowed by your lovely bride?

**Samantha:** Oh it is just fine. Sometimes I feel self-conscious or feel that people are judging me. I love the attention that Mary gets for her colorful life. Today is very overwhelming. I am sorry for crying right now. Yesterday, I had no spouse. Today I have one who loves me beyond all telling. Yesterday, I had two parents and no siblings. Now I have six parents and four siblings. I love them all, and I know how much they love me. I am just sorry that I have so thoroughly blown Mary and Bobbie's cover as being Portland's twin action heroes. I know that Portland respects my parents and all of their accomplishments. I feel that Portland needs to take a moment to respect Mary's family and all that they have accomplished. I know our marriage will help our families work together and accomplish amazing things.

**Emcee:** Let's strike up the music and start the dancing just before our dinner. Can our wedding couple come to the center of the dancing floor? (Samantha and Mary were lovely on the dance floor. They giggled, laughed and kissed their way through a romantic number). Now we have a challenge for Mary's parents. We will all judge which pair of dancers is the sexiest. When you hear this whistle, they have to switch partners. Are we ready? (I danced with Faith, Ruth, and Quincy. When the dance was over, the emcee called out each of the six pairs of dancers. Faith and Ruth won. They must have been tipped off. They both pulled down their tops each revealing a thin, almost transparent bandage covering their breasts. I was busy dancing with Quincy, so I do not know all the tricks they played. When our wives' names were announced, the applause shook the room. I still think they cheated. I did notice how hysterical it was when Faith and Ruth each asked their husband to pull their clothes together and look all normal again. I also remember enjoying kissing and holding each of my three partners and realizing that for once, I had nothing to hide. It was quite liberating.)

**Emcee:** Now for the final challenge before the meal. Samantha will show us all how she disarms her bride just before going to bed tonight. We need a drumroll. (Samantha patted down Mary very thoroughly, especially in private places. Samantha shook her head. Bobbie got up, and reached under Mary's ribcage and pulled out two knives. Samantha looked totally shocked and wide-eyed.)

**Bobbie:** You need to remember the fake ribcage and rubber skin trick. We tried years ago to hide a pair of knives while wearing a bathing suit. It never worked because it made your tummy look like a dead chicken. But it works great under a wedding gown. (While Bobbie was speaking, Samantha took one of the knives and examined it closely. She winced as she realized how sharp it was.)

**Emcee:** Speaking of dead chickens, you will all be served momentarily.

I do remember that the food and drink were of exceptional quality, but was served in modest proportion. A glutton would have been disappointed by the whole affair. I was delighted since I always thought excessive displays of food were an insult to the many people who were genuinely needy in our troubled times. There were hours of dancing. I remember dancing with quite a few wealthy people. They were beaming with pride at being able to dance with me. My favorite moment was dancing with Samantha's father.

The event that got the most significant reaction from the guests happened during the dinner. A video started up called *Mary has a New Partner*. The video showed Bobbie and Mary doing things in the seventh through ninth grade such as singing in the back seat of a car, throwing knives, target shooting, dancing with menacing bamboo poles, fighting with rubber knives, and general roughhousing. In each case, the old video of the activity was shown, and then the video was recreated by Mary and Bobbie (a few weeks ago) wearing similar clothes and surroundings from the older video. In each case, Samantha came over and tapped Bobbie on the shoulder; Bobbie smiled, shook hands, and moved away so that Samantha would engage in the same activity with Mary. Some of these were very clever. Bobbie left, and Samantha joined the singing in the car episode from a hidden hole in the bottom of the car. Even when the actors came to take their bows, it started with Bobbie and Mary and ended up with Samantha and Mary. The laughing, hooting, and cheering was intense, especially at the brief nude scene in the bathtub.

I kept thinking of the amazing alliance represented by the wedding couple. These were not idle words. Our families could do great things together. I think I could summarize all the dialogue in four sentences. Bobbie and Mary are willing to do so much for the city of Portland. All they ask in return is to be treated as sisters. Samantha is coming out of the shadows to reveal that she is a formidable entity on her own. Samantha and Mary love each other very much and paradoxically, look to my family as a model.

Within six months of the big wedding, both of the twins (Julie and Sam) got married. Julie married Ann Ng, and Julie married Doug Fisher. Both of these weddings were small, intimate, family affairs. Raymond and Bobbie had long-term relationships but chose not to get married. All five of my kids had children that they raised with their partner. I will discuss our enlarged family in a later chapter. Years later, when we spoke of *the big wedding*, everyone understood that meant the Mary and Samantha nuptial. The tight relationship with the Barnes family was essential to keeping our Programming Academy alive, which in turn allowed the Former United States of America to become America once again. I know everyone credits Jane Foreman for everything that has happened in the last few years. But in my book, Mary and Samantha are founding mothers for our new nation.

## Crossing the Finish Line

After the wedding, there were still three more years before Jane rolled out her set of products. Our family was running on fumes. Faith used all our savings, all of our revenue from our businesses, all the kickbacks, all of the lease buybacks she could to keep the school afloat.

Twice a year, I made the trip to St. Louis to meet with Jane Foreman and her inner circle. At one meeting, I used a quiet moment to show the video of the pre-dinner dialogue of Mary's wedding. She called over Cathy and Debbie (the black and white lesbian couple who later shared a US Senate seat) over and the three watched it closely from beginning to end. When it was over, they asked lots of questions about the events that were described. Jane said, "I met Bobbie and Mary when they traveled out and wanted to know if this project was real or not. I was very impressed with them. Bobbie kept complaining about the hassles of being a slave outside of Oregon. I told

her ‘Welcome to my world.’ I just had no idea of what they had endured as they were growing up.”

Jane told me a few of her high school and stock market adventures. Her tale of facing death at the hands of the Supreme Council in Sunnyvale was surprising since I had no idea of how our political structure worked. Years later, when Deb wrote that book about Jane Foreman, I devoured every word to learn more about every aspect of her life. I treasure my memories of meeting her in person and being able to share our family stories. No one who was not there has any idea of how hard it was to get to the finish line. Jane's group originally asked us to train 2,000 students for ten million dollars. We ended up training over 6,000 students without asking for more money. I have to thank Faith for her ability to juggle funds for that miracle.

A few months before the launch date, we quietly had an IPO for our family business. We set a modest valuation for our company and offered about 10% of it for sale. We let all the slaves (and ex-slaves) who were trained by our family's business learn what a lucrative investment the IPO was. Only when our community of slaves had their fill of this investment did we let people working for our academy, Samantha, her parents, and their associates purchase the rest of the available stock. We wanted to make sure that those who owned the stock knew the story. We wanted the stock in strong hands, who would not sell until the price got to be very high.

On launch day, we had a huge fireworks show at the Programming Academy. We openly celebrated the event and our role in the story. No one doubted that our academy was a key institution that made the new computer networks possible. Suddenly, we were famous across the country.

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## Chapter 12: The Formation of the House

The day after Jane's rollout, investors wanted in. Since you could not buy into Jane's enterprise yet, people across the FUSA purchased the stock of our academy as a proxy for the new banking and communications colossus which was transforming America. The wildly underpriced stock went up by a factor of nine from the original IPO value. We all made a lot of money.

I should give some more details. Sam set up a corporation. Every stockholder (except the family trust), turned over their stock in the Programming Academy in exchange for shares of the corporation. Sam used sophisticated algorithms to sell stock during upthrusts of the stock price. He always stopped selling before the price reached a local maximum. He sold some stock at a multiplier of twenty; some were sold with a multiplier of six. The average was nine. He dissolved the corporation, returning the proceeds to each participant. By having all sales go through a single entity, he kept the price bubble going. All corporation participants were treated equally. Some of the stock purchasers think that we took advantage of them. They choose to buy stock in a tightly-held family enterprise that was known to do tricky things with computers. Every person with money was trying to gain advantages during that tumultuous time. We were no exception.

But we all got richer. We all agreed to use cash from the stock sales to purchase shares of Jane's IPO at the earliest possible moment. Our partners were able to purchase Jane's IPO at the slave discount. After a few weeks, they were worth over 100 million each. Lacking slave status, Faith and I were worth over 50 million each. As a family, we held onto the majority of the shares of the Academy which was locked into the family trust. As nine individuals, we were worth 750 million dollars together, that we were able to spend as we wished. No one now needed the status of slavery anymore. Jane had tipped us off years ago to maintain that status so some of us could gain additional shares. We had agreed that when the time came, each slave in the family would purchase their freedom with a bottle of fine wine. So we had five bottles of wine that evening. We didn't quite finish them all.

As I circulated a rough draft of this book, the preceding paragraph got the most negative reaction. People did not like that we extended the state of slavery inside our own family for purely financial reasons. I knew that I could not respond. I needed Bobbie, who is both my biological daughter and an ex-slave to respond. "I can see why people want to complain. Slavery is a complex subject. Until the night that Chris described, I was legally a slave. But I always knew that I really was not. Sometimes when I was walking around Portland with Mary, someone would yell 'leash your slave.' I would always give them the finger, and Mary would laugh her head off. I was Schrodinger's cat. I was free and slave at the same time. At Mary's wedding, a dozen people asked me why I was still a slave. I just said that Chris had some big financial deal coming where I would earn millions due to some lease-buyback or tax deal. I said the deal was so lucrative, that if they had any sense, they should sell themselves into slavery. My punchline was always, 'choose your master well.' You will only understand the true character of a person when you are totally in their hands. The thing is I did not sell myself for \$32 million. I extended the time period that I wore a slave collar for a few years for \$32 million. With that \$32 million, I

freed hundreds of slaves. I am proud of my decisions, and people who think I offended them can go fuck themselves.”

And thus we transformed ourselves into a free family. All of us were very rich. Bobbie, Raymond, Julie, Ruth, and Quincy all decided to cut off their slave collars. We arranged for a team of specialists to come to our house and perform the technical work as fast as possible. Samantha joined the party and gave the workers a very large tip. We all got new ID cards which reflected our new status. For the first time in decades, I did not own any humans. It was a huge relief. I was always afraid that some freak accident would throw members of our household into difficult circumstances. All of that was in the past.

We were both celebrating and a bit concerned about what the next steps were. We all have many years of happiness together as a family together. It was all so strange. We were suddenly free of financial problems, free of the institution of slavery, and free of concerns about meeting the impossible requirements and deadlines of Jane's project. Now we asked the questions, “Who are we? Are we the same people who raise chickens and vegetables on our land to save money even though we were quite wealthy? Were we all about to all split up into our own small nuclear family units? Would the parents split up?” Somehow, we all turned to Ruth for the answers. We all had private conversations with her. Her advice was, “The status of slavery did not bind us together. We are a family. The arrival of money does not change us. We were always a family without want for food and basic things. We remain a family without want. We have been released from one set of challenges. If we all split up, we will miss the experience and wisdom of facing new challenges together. Of course, you can go where you want to go. My name is on the deed to this house. I wish to stay here, and I ask that you stay here as well.” We did hold a very large block party to celebrate the change of status of half of our family. Our simple explanation was, “It was the right time to do this.”

## **The Ex-Slaves Organize**

We could contact all the slaves who were ever a part of our family's original training project. All told, we trained over 800 slaves to be computer programmers. Most of them ended up working on one of Jane's projects. We sent messages to them all, explaining how to use their slave custody accounts to purchase shares of our IPO, and then switch to Jane's IPO. So here was a group of people who were each worth between \$300,000 to one million each. They all wanted to free themselves and their families.

Doing so proved difficult. A few never got the messages about investing. Some decided to ignore them. Some had large; expensive families; some had small, inexpensive families. It appeared that the best way forward was to create a formal organization that would collect all the money and then purchase all slaves and their families. I do not know all the details, but the e-mail chains converged on the idea of holding a meeting of all the (mostly wealthy) ex-slaves in Portland in three weeks' time. I rented the meeting room big enough for 800-1000 people. They decided to create an organization that would be funded with 90% of the liquid assets of all members. They made a list of qualifying relatives (slave and current spouse or lover, slave's parents and grandparents, children, siblings). If a slave had five or fewer qualifying relatives, they could name two additional persons. A slave could subtract three qualifying relatives to name any other

person of their choice. It was expected that each slave would use their remaining assets to pay rent and other costs to help establish all of these new households.

The list of qualifying slaves and the number of new households was staggering. The costs of this project were escalating. After more work was done, it was clear that there was not enough money to purchase all of the listed slaves, and certainly not enough money to keep them from abject poverty. No one wanted to scale back on the lists. Finally, our family showed up at one of the meetings, and we pledged \$250 million to bring the project forward. I was proud that I pledged the highest portion of my holding of anyone in the family. I pledged \$35 million of my \$50 million. I figured that I would still be able to eat and get drunk when I wanted, so why not? Amazingly, Jane Foreman added a further \$100 million to this project a week later.

Based on the appreciation of our role in allowing the original dream to be realized, the new organization was titled *The House of Chris*. I said it should be *House of Faith* since it was Faith Winters who single-handedly worked out each step in our family's path. Most people said *House of Faith* sounds like a Baptist Church. This is how an organization that eventually became so famous across the country was organized and named. I had hardly anything to do with it at all.

The House of Chris started out with a specific set of missions:

- To negotiate the group purchase and freeing of slaves
- To help newly freed slaves set up households with basic money and supplies
- To help newly freed slaves find work or set up small businesses
- To network among its members to promote businesses and projects within the network
- To raise money for all of these objectives

Members of *The House of Chris* were encouraged to spend money only on network businesses. Someone made a very attractive logo of three raised fists each one holding an oversized key. A business could display the logo in red if they were a member of the organization. A business could display the logo in black if they pledged 1% of their net revenues to the organization. Every member was expected to send in 10% of their net income.

Members moved across the FUSA and brought the organization with them. Anyone who wanted to free a large group of slaves worked with them since they had such good experience in performing this task. A large part of the American population wanted to assist the freeing of slaves. While ordinary people were living hand-to-mouth, large numbers of tiny donations do add up. The rich and powerful found that they sold more products once they publicized their donations.

As America got closer and closer to accepting universal emancipation, *The House of Chris* was called in to integrate newly freed slaves in locations all across the FUSA. As this innovative organization, constantly growing and changing to meet new challenges, held my name, I had mixed feelings about it. I am not sure what I thought my legacy would be, but seeing my first name everywhere for something I had little to with felt very odd. It was even stranger that when I walked into a business that was loaded with signs and logos, no one knew that I was the guy all of this was named after. Even when I pulled out my ID cards, no one knew. *The House of Chris*

was a thousand times more famous than *Chris Ritter* would ever be. It took some time to get used to that.

## **Jane Foreman Comes to Portland**

The history of our Programming Academy after Jane's product rollout was complicated. We all realized that the project was over. We could unwind the institution since we had achieved our objective. On the other hand, we had sold stock in our business. The Academy had a massive valuation based on the expectations that it would profit from the close ties with Jane's Enterprise. If we had quietly unwound the institution, we would face lawsuits and a stockholder revolt. Remembering that the family had sold its individual shares to raise money to invest in Jane's enterprise showed how we felt where the future was. The family trust held over 50% of all outstanding shares of the Academy, so no group could possibly actually vote us out of power. It was a complicated situation which made for lots of headline stories in the local newspapers.

We did set up a permanent committee made up of large shareholders to examine and explore ideas for generating revenue. This group focused on profiting from the Academy's central role of training the shock troops of our social coup against the billionaires. The committee was mostly window-dressing to appease the large stockholders. Meanwhile, Faith, and I held secret negotiations with Jane Foreman. She suggested morphing the Academy into a great university would be the very best approach to building a new society. We agreed that this was not possible with the current ownership; Jane suggested that we slowly buy out the other shareholders. We could only do this by lowering the price of the stock.

What we did was complicated. We allowed the minority shareholders to work out the most optimistic plan and gave them the resources to write it up in detail. We leaked the report in the newspapers. This caused the stock to go up even more. Faith, Quincy, Ruth, Sam and I had a long interview in which we shredded the widely optimistic report. The stock plunged in value. We bought lots of stock during the falls, being very careful never to be responsible for an actual rise in prices. We did the best to keep flip-flopping public opinion on our Academy between optimism and pessimism. When we had enough stock, we announced that we were donating the Programming Academy to create a great public institution called *Liberation University* to be backed by Jane Foreman. The remaining minority stockholders sued, and we gave them a fair settlement. The long-standing debate about the fate of the Academy was settled.

We were very careful to release as much information as possible. Anyone who was clear-headed about their investments did not lose any money. Those we wanted in on a financial bubble and did not care what the actual future prospects were lost some of their money. Fortunately, very few of the people who were speculating on our company lived in Portland. Local opinion was positive. Portland was proud that America's premier University would be located in the Portland area.

Since it was our family (and Jane Foreman's group) that was donating our ownership of the Programming Academy, we got naming rights for some of the parts of the University. Here are some of the institutions that we named:

- Faith Winters School of Business
- Chris Ritter School of Mathematics and Sciences
- Sam Ritter School of Computer Science
- Samantha Barnes School of Electrical Engineering
- Ruth Lo School of Social Sciences
- Quincy Lo School of Education
- Bobbie Ritter-Lo Athletic Complex
- Jane Foreman School of History
- Debra Coulter-Jackson School of Re-Engineering

Each of these schools opened at different times when they had enough professors, staff, facilities, and students. In September 2068, Jane Foreman came to Portland to dedicate her *School of History*. She participated in a symposium on the founding of the Programming Academy and the University. I enjoyed hearing the recollections of our first group of slave students who lived and studied in our house. Jane commented, “The institution's foundation story is deeply important to its integrity and its ability to tell its own story. The FBI of a century or so ago never had a legal charter, and it behaved lawlessly ever since. Many people have criticized Universities for prostituting themselves to the wealthy. By contrast, our University was founded with a student body entirely made up of sexual slaves. We have an attitude, an antagonism to the social order, which will never go away.” Jane's formal speech was boring for those who did not know their history. For those that did know their history, it was a wild scene. Here is an abridged version of her speech at the dedication of the Jane Foreman School of History:

I do have two questions about our recent past that have defied my efforts to fathom. I wish that I had the answers to these two questions. In 2000, you could buy an ounce of silver for the price of lunch. Today you can buy a thousand lunches for a single ounce of silver. Why did so few people recognize the extraordinary investment potential of silver and why were they so unsuccessful at convincing others of this life-altering financial proposition? It is too easy to say that silver was underpriced. Anything that is that underpriced would cause everyone to buy every lump of silver that could be found. In those days, they had the computing power and networks of educated persons analyzing every tidbit of financial information. No matter how much I read from this era, I draw a blank on this lack of interest in physical silver. My other personal mystery is why Des Moines Iowa was destroyed during the militia wars of the 2020's? However, I did not endow this department of this University to explore my personal questions. I have a much more significant project for you.

Let me start by telling you a story. When I was a high-school slave, I discovered a dozen books in my owner's library about technology in the 1980s and 1990s. These books had such profound insights that I was able to turn the tables on our decaying social order which was keeping our entire society in chains. The question I am raising to you is “How can a few books have such power?”

I would like to discuss the book *Tragedy and Hope* by Carroll Quigley, a professor of history at Georgetown University, published in 1966, one hundred years ago. *Tragedy and Hope* covered the time period 1900-1950 and laid bare the role of the inner circles of an Anglo-American alliance. The political analysis was that in America, the two political parties were two parts of a

unified central establishment. So this was a most unusual history book covering unfamiliar territory. It was researched and footnoted extensively. Political extremists who have denounced the phony battles between Democrat and Republican loved to cite *Tragedy and Hope*.

Carroll Quigley had one more note to play on the political *Mighty Wurlitzer*. One of his students, William Jefferson Clinton, used the knowledge from his classes with Quigley and his study of his books to go from being an obscure student to being the president of the United States. Somehow, William Clinton and Hillary Rodham *knew* that Bill would be president one day. These were no dry history books with yellowed pages and sleep-inducing pages. Just like I had, the Clintons had stumbled onto a total roadmap to power.

Where am I heading? I would like to defang history. I want enough information to be common knowledge to prevent one person or faction from gaining power merely by reading a few old books. I want the rungs of the ladder that I used to disappear. My fondest wish is that you historians will pull apart each significant event and tell the truth about it. Once the true story is laid out, then conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions are likely to be that secret organizations, secret societies, secret assassinations, and secret plots should have no part of modern America. I would like to directly quote from a speech given by President John Kennedy in 1961, after the *Bay of Pigs* episode:

The very word “secrecy” is repugnant in a free and open society; and we are as a people inherently and historically opposed to secret societies, to secret oaths and to secret proceedings. We decided long ago that the dangers of excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts far outweighed the dangers which are cited to justify it. Even today, there is little value in opposing the threat of a closed society by imitating its arbitrary restrictions. Even today, there is little value in insuring the survival of our nation if our traditions do not survive with it. And there is very grave danger that an announced need for increased security will be seized upon by those anxious to expand its meaning to the very limits of official censorship and concealment. I do not intend to permit that to the extent that it's in my control. And no official of my Administration, whether his rank is high or low, civilian or military, should interpret my words here tonight as an excuse to censor the news, to stifle dissent, to cover up our mistakes or to withhold from the press and the public the facts they deserve to know.

The Central Intelligence Agency and its masters, the New York banking elite did not like such talk. The CIA launched *Operation Zipper*, masterminded by Allen Dulles and George Herbert Walker Bush. Operation Zipper was the code name for the assassination of President Kennedy. We know this now since we have opened the vaults of the CIA. We need to sweep aside all the talk about what a senseless tragedy this all was. That is bullshit. This was premeditated murder. If our history books do not say it was premeditated, then our history books are bullshit, too. George Herbert Bush was quite a historical figure: he not only killed Kennedy and then ran the CIA, but he also got to be a whisker away from killing President Reagan. Let's use him as one more example of why we should not idealize the past.

The CIA also eliminated Trump and his family. We are not certain exactly what happened, but my thinking is they took him to the basement of a mansion and brought in some intelligence officers to fire pistols until they were all quite dead. Why do I favor this fate? That would be a replica of how the Romanov family was executed almost exactly a century previous. I like to imagine that these assholes love to copy each other's work.

So who was Trump? He was an egotistical, ignorant, media personality who thrust himself into the presidential election race. He had something in common with John Kennedy. Kennedy got his money from his father, who made his money in stock market speculation and smuggling liquor. Trump got his money in real estate speculation and money laundering funds from Russia. Neither one of them were connected to the matrix of Rockefeller connected corporations. As far as the Anglo-American establishment was concerned, they were both outsiders.

How did a jerk like Trump get elected? The establishment was raping the middle class. The middle class asked the various institutions of the establishment why they were suffering, and the answer they got was, "We have no idea." If you rape someone and then tell them that they have no reason to be angry, expect a volcano of anger in return. You reap as you sow.

We need a history that is based on truth and deals honestly with social anger. This is more important now than ever. Right now, we are dealing with immense social anger from ex-slaves. I came up with a whole series of social programs. The response from ex-slaves has been "Fuck your social programs." I am running out of solutions. If I were dictator for a day, I would require every American to get a DNA test; to show how related we all are to each other. When the truth of our biological beginnings becomes plain, and the truth of our historical beginnings becomes plain, then we become a united nation filled with brothers and sisters instead of one filled with political enemies. I entrust to you the sacred duty to heal our broken nation.

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# Chapter 13: 2073

## It is Time to Wind up My Story

I started this book when Deb Coulter-Jackson wrote her book about Jane Foreman. At first, I was angry that there was nothing in the book at all about the Programming Academy or Portland Oregon. I took this as a personal insult. But little by little (with some wise words from Ruth), I realized that the book *The Slave Formerly Known as Jane Foreman* was the story about a cast of characters that met in a high school in Ohio. It was their story. So I decided to write my story. Here we have it.

It is time to get my readers caught up with my family to where we are in 2073. My kids are all in their mid to late 30's. That is the same age range of their partners. Sam has had a long-term relationship with Amy Xia. They have chosen not to get married. Sam married Ann Ng a few months after Mary's wedding. Julie married Douglas Fisher at about the same time. Like Raymond, Bobbie has a long-time partner, Mathew Green, but has chosen not to get married. All of them have children of their own. I wanted to list all 18 of my grandchildren. They are aged four months through age 14. I got overruled. The family voted to keep the names of the grandchildren out of this book. It was the price I had to pay to get their cooperation on all other aspects of this book. I am allowed to refer to grandchildren as a group, like a flock of birds, but I am forbidden to give them names and unique identities. So somehow I must end this book without naming the 18 people who are most precious to me right now. I can say that they are all the colors of the rainbow. I can also say that they can all speak Mandarin. It is an event when we invade a Chinese restaurant. By now, just about everyone in the Chinese community knows who we are.

Fifteen years ago, Mary and Samantha got married. Just after the wedding, I asked Mary about their plans for children. She replied, "It is very important that our children look like they are a proper mixture of their parents. I would have to search the whole country to find a willing sperm donor who is the same blend of Chinese and black as I am. Portland is loaded with white folks that look like Samantha. So I will carry all our babies since it is so important to have kids that look just right." I was outraged. I argued, "You spent your lifetime arguing that you and Bobbie are twin sisters. Now you want to match your kids like you were buying the right shade of paint at a store? What has gotten into you?" Mary answered, "Sisters are one thing, and babies are another." It took me a few months to discover that she was yanking my chain. Mary and Samantha gave birth to three beautiful children. I do not know the criteria for choosing sperm donors, but getting the skin tone to match was not on the list.

Ruth and Quincy's parents have all passed. When they could not work any longer, we took them into our big house. We hired staff to take care of them round the clock. Their lives were both bitter and sweet. They all lived long enough to see slavery abolished. They lived long enough to discover their children were deeply respected all across the nation. Even more important, they learned how much their children loved them. As each one of these fabulous people left us, we held a banquet in their honor and memory.



Quincy had a nasty accident three months ago. A truck swerved in traffic and knocked him off his bicycle. He broke his leg and collarbone and had a bad cut on his face. The healing has been slow, due to his age. He is still walking with a cane and a big limp. We have all insisted that he only travel by car now. We hired a driver for him. Ruth likes to travel with him a lot. Faith and I joke that Ruth does not trust Quincy not to have an affair with his driver. Both of us knew how unlikely this was, but we did enjoy the joke.

Four years ago, we totally refurbished our house. It was virtually gutted and rebuilt in the same location. We rented a large house for almost a year while the work went on. We now have a secure sub-basement for our memorabilia and our treasures. Our new house has much more security, and we have better communications than the old house. Now we don't have to run around the big house looking for people. After a few decades of chasing around the house, it gets a bit old. We have an elevator, which was very useful for getting Ruth and Quincy's parents from their bedrooms to the dining room. There is a motion detector system in the shooting range in the basement to prevent any accidents from happening. The zip line in the backyard is padded and safer than before. We have a fancier breed of chickens in the yard, but we still raise our own chickens. I think we are the same people, but we do live in a bit more comfort. I have to say that I am tired of the jokes that end with the punchline, "The House that Chris Rebuilt."

Our tradition of having a special Friday night meal did not translate well into having everyone over to our house. Each family unit has a special Friday night meal at their own house. We all still take late night walks on the full moon. Perhaps twice a year, we do it all together with all the children, partners, and grandchildren. As we gather together, we refer to "kids" and "parents." The four people who bought a house together in 2032 (forty years ago!) are referred to as "the GP's" or "the partners."

## **Grandchildren are Different than Children**

Once or twice a month, we have dinner, usually at a Chinese restaurant, with the extended family. We call these dinners *The Council of the Elders*. We limit these dinners to grandchildren who are eleven years or older. When you take the four partners, ten parents (when you count their partners), four grandkids who are old enough, plus Jennie and her husband and child, that gives you 21 people. It is at *The Council of the Elders* that the parents and the partners begin to offer the newest generation some sense of who they are and how they got there.

When my own kids were small, we were not famous. Our personal lives were our own. It was true that some of our neighbors were bothered by the fact that we treated our slaves as normal people (and even worse, our slaves treated Faith and me like normal people), but no one gossiped about us.

Things are very different now. The grandkids come with so many questions, such as, "Are you gay?" This never came up when the kids were small. We all just lived with each other. So I answered, "Wendy, why don't you ask your father. He grew up in our house." If the reader has been paying attention, the reader knows that I am not allowed to name any of my grandchildren. So now you know that none of the grandkids are actually named *Wendy*. Wendy answered, "My father says he never checked who slept with whom. But Bobbie and Mary are living proof that

you all have slept with different partners. Great-aunt Jennie says that she once walked into a bedroom and saw Faith and Ruth having sex. Isn't that gay?" I replied, "You seem to have answered your own question. Or are you trying to ask if I ever sleep with Quincy? Let me answer your question this way. Gay and Straight are names people use for couples. I have been part of a true partnership made up of four people. I love all of my partners. But here is an important point. Most people are so used to couples that speaking openly about our relationships can be damaging. You do not want headlines on the newspaper quoting you, do you?" Wendy emphatically stated, "No!" I continued, "Ever since your parents' wedding, people have lost their curiosity about our family's private affairs. Please do not say or do anything that would revive this curiosity unless it is something very, very important to you." Wendy looked disappointed. I added, "Do you want to know how we came to be a partnership?"

At this point, all the parents were wide-eyed. They had rarely heard us old folks be so open to discussing our personal sex life. Faith took over from me. She said, "Chris knew that before we were married that I sometimes slept with women. When our partners joined our family, we told them that they had a choice to accept or reject our offer to them. Our offer included allowing all of us to form additional deep and personal relationships. We would not have an extended family of thirty people if they rejected the offer. So we are the people we are today because two married couples came together to become one partnership."

Ruth spoke up, "One way to think about this is that we are all married to each other. Married people love each other, have kids, raise kids, and God willing, live long enough to see their grandkids thrive. So we are no different than other people. The question 'Are we gay?' seems to be a way for your friends to ask, 'Are your GPs different from my GPs?' But the question is loaded because the question implies that being gay is wrong. My own opinion is that you should feel free to answer this question any way you want. You can say 'No,' 'Yes,' or 'Maybe' as you wish. And you are free to choose the life partner or partners you desire as well. Follow your heart, and do not worry about the questions that other people have."

Samantha added, "Look, Mary and I are gay. We are both women who live together and are parents together. When we walk outside together, we hold hands. How often do you see Ruth and Faith hold hands or Chris and Quincy hold hands? Not very often, and when they do, it all seems to be part of a joke. My own thinking is that each GP has a primary partner, the one that they married. As a double couple, they all have additional sexual partners who they use to strengthen the bonds of the partners, with the goal of strengthening the bonds with their primary partner. The whole thing would become unglued if anyone of them switched who was their primary partner was."

Quincy added, "Well thank you, Dr. Barnes. You just shaved three years off my therapy. No, I am serious, that makes a lot of sense to me. I just never thought of it that way." Even the smartest grandkid was getting lost at this point. They all wanted a translation that they could understand. Ruth said, "Samantha says that Quincy and I love each other the most and that Ruth and Chris love each other the most. Anything else we do in our partnership to show love and affection bounces around until it makes our primary partner happy. The next time that I sleep with Faith or Chris, I want a laser or ultrasound device so that I can watch the love bounce around until it hits Quincy. I'm sorry, I should be careful about my words tonight. I like

Samantha's approach. I certainly like the positive spin it gives everything. I hate it when people are all judgmental and say things about me having kids with two different men. I happen to have two husbands: my main husband and my second husband."

The grandkids wanted to know how old Bobbie and Mary were when they learned that they were "crossover kids." Bobbie said, "I think I was nine or ten years old. When kids learn that it takes one mother and one father to make a baby, my parents were very clear as to who the biological mommy was and who the biological daddy was. There was never a secret about anything. But it took a few years for me to realize the significance of the love story that led to the birth of Mary and me." Wendy asked, "What do you mean?" Bobbie answered, "Well, Mary and I knew that our lives depended on keeping the family together with all four adults. We also acted out a little bit, since that was a lot of pressure on two little kids. I think we gave the partners a lot of grief. It was hard for us to be quiet kids and good students like Sam."

We got many more questions. The younger grandkids wanted to know the details of our bedrooms. In our new house, we had adjoining bedrooms with a semi-hidden door connecting them. The grandkids loved operating the hidden latch and exploring the common room the partners used as a closet.

## My Current Projects

As is my pattern, I get roped into projects by other people. Jane Foreman visited me and praised our family's leadership of *Liberation University*. She was concerned about the pace of development of quality higher education in the rest of the country. We covered many topics until we identified the areas where I could have a leading role. Once again, I leaned on my family (especially Faith, Sam, and Samantha) to help execute these plans.

Right now, I am working on three related projects. One is to assemble as many books as PDF's which allow the underlying text to be captured. We are not so interested in trashy novels but in books with lasting social, economic, or historical import. We also want to scan as many textbooks as possible. We need millions of skilled workers in our new America. Our effort to revive the printing industry has been lagging. There are enough books still in circulation to depress the industry, but not enough of the right books in the right places to foster education. We are trying to spread electronic books to encourage the publishing industry, not to suppress it. But when a print book costs five dollars, and an electronic book costs five cents to add to a computer network, it is hard to jump-start the publishing industry. If we could print textbooks for fifty cents each, then we can start another industry.

We have located the servers of Google, and have obtained millions of books which were still under copyright during the years that *Google Books* was operating. The archive is so massive that it is overwhelming. I am working to de-centralize this archive so that people across America will be able to read from this enormous archive. My role is to help funnel talented people into this project and to fundraise from major business people.

My second project is to do what I can to encourage the formations of new Universities across America. We are spoiled here in Portland. In almost all of America, cities lost electricity for

years at a time. Wiring and plumbing were destroyed and stripped. It is very tough to take an old college campus and turn it back to education. It is even more difficult to build a University from scratch. We are working on new tools and techniques to rehab old University buildings. We are designing simple building designs that can be shared around the country. We are working on innovative funding and staffing issues.

The pitch that Samantha and I give to the wealthy of America was based on a detailed explanation of the current critical historical moment. We covered our decline and the stabilization under the thumb of the Supreme Councils. Samantha discusses interest rate policy and how we need to avoid boom and bust cycles. I explain how a single functioning university can empower them to be at the forefront of the struggle to rebuild America. As a bonus, the new institution would bear their name. Meanwhile, Samantha would describe our vulnerability until we can regain control of our technology:

Right now, much of our technological, economic, and business life depends on what has been left from decades before. We have abolished slavery, but we are slaves to the past. Sometimes it seems that the more we learn about the technology of decades past, the more we discover that we need to learn and reconstruct. We are fortunate that we have been able to reconstruct as much as we have. With an educated workforce, we can start to focus on areas that *we want* to develop. It is about time we build the future that makes sense to us right now.

My third project is an attempt to deal with an intractable social problem: integrating ex-slaves into society. No one worries about the  $x$  plus or the double  $x$ . These ex-slaves are integrating well into society. It is the  $x$  minus that is on everyone's mind. The  $x$  minus are the frustrated  $x$ -slaves who expect the world to come to their aid. The problem is that their previous owners, Jane's group, my family, and others have spent a fortune to free these people. There is not enough economic activity in the economy to offer them enough money except for a few dollars beyond minimal food and dismal housing. All around them they see others advancing with greater wealth during the transition to better technology. No matter what is done to improve the situation of the  $x$  minus, the excitement of other sectors of the nation only highlights the stagnation of the  $x$  minus.

Where there are real problems, the  $x$  minus want their lives to be provided for them. No more working, just sitting back, collecting and spending money. Just like the advertisements for winning the lottery you see in museums these days. It is not going to happen. The macroeconomic policies that are recommended to assist the  $x$  minus are highly destabilizing. These will bring us back to the insane bubbles of the last two hundred years or so. When I argue this point, I am told how heartless I am.

The solution is centuries old: by dedicating ourselves with lifetimes of hard work, we make life better for the next generation. I know everyone wants a shortcut. If we have learned anything from history, it is that shortcuts can be very destructive. I still think we can find plenty of abandoned properties (farmland and factories) that we can turn over to the creativity of ex-slaves to help build a better life. I just need the right vehicle to make this argument.

# I Face My Failings

Recently, I had the experience of watching the movie *Schindler's List* which was made by the celebrated filmmaker Steven Spielberg. Here is a description of this film:

*Schindler's List* is a 1993 American epic historical period drama film directed and co-produced by Steven Spielberg and scripted by Steven Zaillian. It is based on the novel *Schindler's Ark* by Australian novelist Thomas Keneally. The film relates a period in the life of Oskar Schindler, an ethnic German businessman, during which he saved the lives of more than a thousand mostly Polish-Jewish refugees from the Holocaust by employing them in his factories during World War II.

Watching the movie, I saw how morally compromised Oskar Schindler was. He starts by trading with (and cheating) high-ranking Nazi officers. Bit by bit he acts more morally, but the fact that he has been enmeshed with moral corruption puts him in a position to run a factory to supply the Nazi army using Jewish slave labor. Near the end of the war, Schindler devotes all his cash, gold and diamonds to the cause of keeping his enclave of Jewish workers alive. After the war, he eventually becomes a great hero for his singular actions. Schindler remains a complex character. He was brilliant at black market activities. Not shown in the movie is that Oskar is a failure at businesses. After the war, “the Schindler Jews” three times pooled their money to set up a business for Oskar Schindler. All three businesses failed.

I could not help but notice the many similarities between my life and the life of Oskar Schindler. We both traded in diamonds, gold, and cash as contraband to further a goal that ends with the liberation of many people. Just like Schindler, my initial efforts were to exploit captive people, not to save them. But rather than offer a detailed comparison between myself and Oskar, I will instead imagine that I have just died, and I am facing the Almighty. There is a prosecutor and a defense attorney to deal with my case. However, due to a mix-up, my defense attorney can only show up tomorrow. So I have to stand there as all of my faults are listed, without anything being said in my defense. My only hope is that even the Almighty does not get overwhelmed by the mountain of my faults. Here is the speech by the prosecutor:

This case is made more complicated by the fact that Chris is considered a great hero in the struggle against slavery. The problem is that Chris fails as an ordinary human, so he fails a thousand times over as a hero. All of the crucial decisions of his life were passive ones. His wife makes a proposal. He says, “That sounds fine to me.” Where are the positive steps that show that he has an active moral compass? What are his great innovations? What he did was based on a lust for money, a lust for sexual fulfillment, a lust for revenge, and a great desire to be a key part of important institutions.

If I look at the beginning of his life, he desired to be a computer programmer the way some kids want to be a firefighter. Did he understand what it took to be a programmer? Not really, but he focused his middle school and high school years on doing so. When he was in college, he found out how much better a

programmer Faith was. Faith was very excited at working with Chris' parents because of her direct experience that she could make a real difference there. It was her first taste of being an adult and making adult decisions.

As a child, he was so focused on his own issues and aspirations that he ignored his own sister. If he had been one-quarter of the sibling to his sister than his own children have been to each other, he would have been much more able to pull her out of her downward spiral. Subsequent events showed that Jennie had no underlying mental issues. She just found life outside of her nuclear family much more fulfilling than life inside of it. He could have helped her to trust the rest of the family. If Chris and Jennie had been able to work together, they could have worked as a united front to resist the poisonous effects of that awful group of evil lawyers and gun-thugs.

He did not find a good solution to his hopeless situation after his parents died. All of that, bringing in a second couple was the work of Faith Winters. He stood by and said, "That sounds like a good idea." When his wife was not bailing him out, it was his kids that were doing it. His daughters brought home a treasure chest of contraband. His wife told him how to use it. He enjoyed the bloodlust of waiting to kill thieves in the jewelry store. At every stage of his life, others showed him a roadmap. That Chris walked on that road does not make him a great moral leader.

When did he go after the business-stealing gun-thugs? When he wanted to close down the jewelry store, did he challenge the gun-thugs? No. He just shrugged and said, "Your offer is acceptable to me." Only when the gang demanded his second business did he challenge them. And how did he do this? He allowed his young daughters to battle them virtually without any aid. He just sat in his chair, waiting until his kids killed all the gunmen. Does this sound like a great hero? Ordinarily, at this point, I would hear the objection of the defense attorney. Since she is not here, I will continue.

In the last fifteen years, Chris had three great moments of public triumph. These were Mary's wedding, Jane's rollout, and the formation of the so-called *House of Chris*. While publically, these were all triumphs laid onto Chris' feet. Each of them celebrated the accomplishments of others. The young ones and the Barnes family organized the wedding. The Programming Academy was based on an idea of his son Sam. When the Academy needed the best of leadership, Chris failed. Faith stepped in and saved the day. The financial doings which led to the formation of *House of Chris* were given to him by Jane Foreman, who masterfully anticipated exactly all the financial ups and downs.

Now let us get to the heart of this matter, which is his relationship with slavery. In middle school, he detested slavery. His wife suggested they use willing slaves to raise funds. He agreed. His own child was a slave. At one point, he and his wife owned eight slaves. It does not matter that they were well treated. He tolerated the legal fiction that one human can own another; in the same way that one human

can own a bicycle. The real test for Chris came when he came home to discover his crossover girls brought home three slave women. His greed for revenue allowed him to trade a slave for another to keep his revenue and profits high. He showed no regard for the slave ejected from his household unless urged to by his family members.

His initial business to train slaves for programming positions was based on financial greed, and appealing to the greed of slave owners. They all clamored to be part of his program to get wealthy by having their slaves participate in his program. This was no grand project to free slaves. Slaves were no freer after years of his project than before. Only the scale of Jane's project and her insight into financial affairs allow him to make any real headway into freeing slaves. So the real question is how much of a moral leader was he? He freed slaves very late in his life when he had an overwhelming amount of money from exploiting slavery. He gets to play hero while still holding onto a lot of that money. Chris Ritter reminds me of Alfred Nobel, who accidentally saw his own obituary. Alfred endowed the funds for the Nobel Prize to improve his legacy. In the same way, he donated most of his money at the end of his business project towards a good end. Everything before this point is hopelessly compromised. I rest my case.

I would like to report to the reader that my defense attorney was able to give a brief speech the next day. She pointed out that I had done some extraordinary things, that I had put much at risk, and had used good judgment throughout my life. My advocate did say, "The argument made yesterday was that Chris did nothing to support Jay once she was swapped with Patricia for the initial three-person training project. Chris monitored her status to make sure she would not be sold outside a loving community. He directly contributed over \$15,000 to her slave custodial account as a way of making up for her leaving that opportunity. Chris worked with Samantha to arrange for very favorable employment within Samantha's Carp Computer Company." My advocate spent most of her time pointing out that that I should not be held responsible for the acclaim that I have obtained. She said, "Just because people are misguided and treat Chris as a hero, does not mean Chris should be cast down. The simple fact is that he has done more to end slavery than just about anyone else in the world. I think we can all agree that mindless hero worshiping distorts everyone's legacy. All members of Chris' family and their associates all deserve their proper credit."

As I wind up my book, I have to admit that I never had a representative argue my case before any deity (good, bad, or indifferent). Of course, I used this as a device to say as directly as I can that I am quite aware that others around me are largely responsible for the projects or decisions for which I am being lionized. I hope I get some credit for knowing that all fame and fortune is fleeting and knowing that my own role in our society's transformation may be much smaller and more conflicted than most people think. Anyone who thinks that I wrote this book to promote my brand had better reread this last section of this chapter. I claim no grand plan or mission. I was swept along with events. Somehow, I ended up with a great life and an amazing family. After a lifetime of being fairly secretive about myself, I am now letting my story be an open book. Each of my readers, day by day, writes their own life story in the metaphysical *Book of Life*. My hope is that each one will take an even more active role than I have in making our world a better place.

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# Chris's Afterword

While my name is on this book as the author, I need to say that many hands created this book. Besides Samantha's father, and the parents of Ruth, Quincy, and me, virtually all of my relatives and persons mentioned in this book are still alive. This is a complicated story. Many people insisted that changes be made to protect people's privacy.

Samantha Barnes has been invaluable in negotiating requests from a large number of family members for changes. Her work made an impossible task into a movement for consensus. It was her insistence that the description of the kidnapping was as real as possible while still sparing the reader from unneeded gross details. She insists that everyone fully understands what her wife (and Bobbie) went through.

Since I collaborated heavily with Samantha Barnes on the writing of this book, I must reveal a secret about our relationship. A few months before she proposed to Mary, she wanted to know more about my character. It was Samantha that seized on the status of Jay as the acid test of my character. She asked me if I felt like contributing to Jay's slave custodial account. I ended up putting in much more than she expected. By doing so, she felt she could trust my instincts. I now understand that Samantha's trust in me allowed so many subsequent events to take place. In retrospect, I am grateful that I aced her test. I feel that if she had pushed me on some other issues, I might not have done as well.

I have received large numbers of e-mails suggesting who would be best to play various persons in the movie of this book. While interesting (and flattering), I have to say that my focus is on the book. My goal has been to write a short book that could be released in the same calendar year as Deb's book on Jane. I think I am meeting that goal by just a few weeks. It is my opinion that this book has portions too graphic and distasteful to ever make into a movie. I know that predictions about show business often misfire. So I will just say, "Don't break a leg and don't make this movie!"

Many readers of early drafts of this book begged for information of the fate of key players. I found it tedious to interrupt the narrative flow to go through a list of names. Faith's beloved college roommates are still together. Connie never wanted to free Terry. They are married, happy, worth many millions due to *Project Blue Flame*. They too got advice from Jane Foreman on how to launch their company as an IPO. In this instance, the stockholders in Blue Flame have been well rewarded for staying in for the long haul. I sometimes regret at the way we manipulated our own stock price. I hope history (and some of the investors) can forgive me. The last time I visited them was years after universal emancipation. They were very friendly. I noticed that Terry still wore a jeweled slave collar, and there was a variety of leashes on hooks by their front door. Old habits die hard.

The Wilson family (a pseudonym) has stayed close friends of our family. Faith and Ruth Wilson have been especially close. Ruth Wilson tapped into many memories that Faith has of her interacting with her Jewish neighbors when Faith was a child. I sometimes call Faith my secret

Jew. She often attends Jewish services with Samantha and Mary. Ruth Wilson helped arrange for the Portland Jewish Federation to give our family a major human rights award for our work to provide legal rights to slaves. We were and still are grateful for the recognition. It was the only award that my family got before we became famous, so it holds a special place in my heart. I am humbled at all the ripples in time and space that started with a brief playground fight.

The ex-slaves Jane, Jay, Sophia, and Patricia, who were official and unofficial bridesmaids for the big wedding, are all doing well. Since I referred to their lurid past, I want to be very careful not to give any clues to their family names, family members, locations or occupations. Besides being contributing members of society, they have all contributed their talents and money to the *House of Chris*.

Recently, I found a database listing the richest and most accomplished one thousand ex-slaves. Of course, Jane Foreman was at the top of the list. I am proud that fully 40% of the people on the list are graduates of my family's programming academy. The social forces in our country are extreme. The social friction caused by angry ex-slaves cannot be minimized. While installing accomplished ex-slaves as their leadership is wrong (there is massive resentment between the x-minus and the x-plus; all of the graduates of the academy are x-plus), they can at least offer some path to positive steps.

Of course, the high volume of training of slaves was only possible because of the existence and needs of Jane Foreman's organizations. Most people want to strike out on their own to transform society. For myself, I am quite content to follow the coattails of Jane Foreman and her accomplished group of friends.

– Chris Ritter