

The Tragic Love Story of Marti and Schaeffer Cox, read onto Youtube by Erin Davis

Hello everyone It's Tuesday, July 20, I think, 2016. And I'm going to read the story to you It's a love story Schaeffer Cox has written about his wife and him. Her name is Marti. OK. It's uh 21 pages, here we go.

It was autumn the time when the air becomes still and freshly fallen snow draws the warmth out of the ground. Pale ribbons of wood smoke slipped upward from chimney tops as the windows of each home shown with a hospitable glow against the cold blue.

Off on an early fishing off the coast of Alaska, life at sea had stripped me of my delicate boyishness but my innocent idealism and lust for life were in their full unbridled prime. There was a girl, Marti, who had moved to my home town that summer while I was away. She was tall and slender with an alluring figure and glossy blond hair that spilled down her shoulders like silk. But it was her hands that caught my eye the most. They were smooth and elegant when they moved, as if life and all of her surroundings were a musical instrument to be played with grace and poise by her angelic hands.

She was not the kind of girl you sweep off her feet. No, Marti was the kind of girl you watched go by, as you take a deep breath and think to yourself that you wouldn't have a chance with a girl like that. She was twenty, a sophomore in college, and I was just barely out of high school. There was a seemingly endless line of other older suitors that followed her around. I knew that some dapper young army officer or well to do Alaskan bachelor would likely whisk her away before too long. But nonetheless she was captivating in every way and I wanted to be around her.

And so it was that on this cold dusky day I asked my mother, who was hosting a dinner party, as was her usual custom, if I could invite Marti. My mother looked at me for a moment, as though I had just asked her the dumbest question she had every heard. "No," she said emphatically. "You need to ask her to lunch and take her to a very nice restaurant." I said nothing. I simply turned and made a bee line for that beautiful glowing blond.

I knew this feeling. It was the feeling I got before I jumped off a bridge in the middle of the night with a bungee cord, swam over the waterfall into an ocean, or dove from the mast of a tall ship into the cold dark water. I had to move quickly before I had a chance to think it through. I walked up to Marti and blurted out, "Do you want to go to lunch?" I said it as though I was in a hurry to deliver a cheap telegram then held my breath. "I actually have plans for today," she answered. I let out the breath I was holding and felt a spark of contempt for my mom who had put me up to this suicidal mission. But then she stammered and continued. "I have plans but I'll cancel them. I'd love to go to lunch. Can you pick me up at my Aunt's house in an hour?" I almost said Are you sure about this? But I managed to override the reflex and agreed to pick her up without tipping my hand. We sat at a quiet little table in a restaurant that overlooked the river as we gazed into each others eyes and talked for six hours.

It was an intense first date. We talked about what we wanted out of life and what mattered to us. We talked about marriage and finally business, family business. She told me that she had gotten to know my family over the past summer while I was away fishing and the summer before that when I was off climbing Mt. McKinley and she confessed she'd had a crush on me since before she'd even met me. When she asked me why I hadn't asked her out earlier I thought she was joking. Did she really not know that she was a supremely intimidating totally gorgeous bombshell? I'd watch all my friends, think about it, and then chicken out. I just found a thought free window of opportunity and jumped at it. I didn't try to explain this to her.

Around six o'clock we had to leave because Marti had been previously invited to dinner at the home of a Canadian couple who's children were grown. I tagged along and crashed the party. It was the four of us and an older widow whom I was already friends with. We sat around an ornate table eating freshly baked bread and apple pie as the silently falling snow put our little town to sleep under a blanket of white. Sharon, our Canadian hostess shuffled about her cozy little kitchen producing one masterpiece after another while her husband Bruce sat calmly by with a big knowing smile.

"You two make a pretty cute couple eigh," said Sharon. Marti and I blushed. Did they know this was only the eighth hour of our first date? Before we could say anything Ronnie Pruitt, the older widow chimed in. "You two are going to have some tall kids, and I think you will be great business partners, too." Ronnie knew both of us previously and she was a highly accomplished international business person herself. Marti and I looked at each other both waiting for the other to launch into back peddling disclaimers. Neither did.

Marti's blue green eyes sparkled with delight as they always do. She laughed a happy gentle laugh that seemed to shrug off pretense and admit the inevitable. Sharon handed me a tea cup on a little square saucer. I took a sip of the rich smooth red African tea and silently let their prophetic observations pass into the record uncontested. After a meal when the table clears out and only cloth napkins and half filled glasses of ice tea covered in beads of condensation remain, conversation tends to sprout and grow. I sat there slowly whittling away at a dark chocolate brownie as I watched Marti talk about deep and meaningful things with people twice and three times her age. She was a genuine and beautiful person through and through. I was smitten. I felt peaceful and content as I reached for her hand under the tablecloth. Our hands slid perfectly together as her long delicate fingers gently curled over mine like petals on a day lily.

A week later I kissed her. We were on the couch at my parents house in the glow of the Christmas tree lights. It was slow and trepid. It was her first kiss. How she made it twenty years without being kissed I do not know. But she didn't make it twenty one years.

By Christmas we were madly in love. My parents and siblings loved Marti as much as I did. All seemed well. I still had not met her family but as fate would have it, I soon would. Marti's parents had divorced when she was only six years old. This had been devastating for her. Her

mother who had never remarried was living on a barren windswept island in the Arctic Ocean where she was the sole school teacher for the small Eskimo village.

Marti's younger sister was a student at Michigan State. The two of them were flying into Fairbanks for Christmas break on the same day Marti was flying out to go to a friend's wedding in Portland Oregon. Marti and I picked them up at the airport and after some introductions and a quick lunch we dropped Marti off to catch the same plane on its return flight to Seattle. I carried her luggage to the baggage check then watched as she floated up the escalator to the terminal. She flipped her hair to the side and flashed her big green eyes at me as she looked over her shoulder and waved goodbye. There I was, left alone for three days with the mother and sister.

Everything seemed all right to me. Her sister was beautiful and her mother was nice. I wanted to get to know the family of the girl I was falling for so we all went Christmas shopping that afternoon. It was fun. I took them out to dinner. Then we rented chic flicks and made fondue at the house while we watched them. OK, I thought to myself. This is what girls do. I'd never eaten fondue or watched *Anne of Green Gables* growing up with my two brothers. But it seemed normal enough and I was starting to like my potential in-laws. By the end of the week I couldn't see any reasons we wouldn't be compatible. I was excited for Marti to return home so I could tell her how much I liked her family.

Marti's flight arrived at midnight on Dec 21 the coldest and darkest day of the year in this harsh sub Arctic region. It was around 30 below zero when her family and I picked her up at the airport. Back at the house her mother and sister went right to bed. Marti and I stayed up. In the midst of what was a quite passionate reunion she ran her long slender fingers through my hair and looked up into my face. "I want to marry you," she whispered as her eyes beamed with honesty and vulnerability. I felt a flutter of excitement and delight in my chest. Did I just get beat to the punch by an older girl? I thought to myself I had and I didn't care. I caressed her face and smiled as I replied. "OK, me too, will you marry me?" We held each other close and she whispered ever so softly in my ear. "Yes."

Her voice was like a summer breeze in the tops of the pine trees. Her body was warm and soft. I didn't feel the biting cold as I left that night. The billions of stars seemed to fill the night sky with warmth as the silverish green aurora danced from one horizon to another. We didn't know how, we didn't know when but we were going to get married, and it was wonderful.

The following day when I picked up my gorgeous fiancée, she smiled but was oddly quiet. I held her hand as I shifted up through all five gears on my Jeep Wrangler. "Is everything OK?" I asked, softly and with a tone of caution. She burst into tears and put her face in her hands. "They said you are just like my father," sobbed Marti and I segued slowly not grasping the significance of the comparison "and they hate my dad. They don't like you. They said they think it's fine if we go on a few dates but we shouldn't get serious," said Marti through her tears.

I sat there silently. I felt self conscious I felt like a chump but I still loved this girl. I held out my hand. She took it and I squeezed it tight. "It'll be OK, honey. They'll come around," I said. She smiled at me and let out a sigh. "I guess this means we should probably hold off on telling everyone we got engaged last night" I said with a chuckle. "Yeah that would be a little more than they could handle," said Marti as she wiped her eyes and laughed a sort of half cry half laugh. And so it was that we were secretly engaged while we tried to get her family to warm up to the idea of us dating seriously.

Months went by but her mother and her sister didn't come around. We both got to the point where we were questioning whether this was the right thing or not. Maybe they saw something no one else could. We decided to take some time apart to think things through. In the middle of the Alaska winter, I got on a plane and flew to Africa for six weeks. We had no communication in the country I was in. Now I could see our love quietly from a distance without the electricity of attraction.

Africa is a magical place, wild and primal in every way. I was in the highlands west of Nairobi where red clay footpaths snake through the fields of waist high tea trees that cover the endless expanse of rolling hills. On every hill top sat a magnificent stone mansion, a monument to the long past British Empire. In every valley the streams fed by the daily rains cascaded over the stone waterfalls, where women bathed their children and washed their clothes

Everyday before sunset I would go running with my friend, Mark Nicholson, Mark, a British expat, in his mid fifties, had worked in Africa for decades. He had seen a lot of things and overcome a lot of challenges. He knew why I was there and what was on my mind. He said very little about the girl that filled my thoughts. Instead he just ran silently behind me for miles and miles.

Running has a rhythm and a pace that tends to rinse the mind of superfluous thoughts and distill the questions of life down to their simple and obvious elements. It was after one such run that Mark took a different turn than usual on the way back to his hilltop home. We trudged up winding switchbacks that laced their way from end to end of terraced rows of tea. At the top of the fantastically steep hill we came to a little stone picnic pavilion.

The view was spectacular. The cool misty highlands fell away to low dry savanna below. I was naturally drawn to the panoramic expanse. But that was not what we had come to see. "Look at this little bugger," said Mark, pointing to a gnarled and twisted little fruit tree growing from a crack in the stone bench.

He pawed through its lush green leaves and plucked out two little blue fruits that looked like plums. He handed me one and I ate it. It tasted like strawberry. Mark looked at me and explained. "Every year for ten years, I tore this little tree out. Every year it came back, so eventually I just let it grow. That was six years ago."

He said nothing more and we turned and took off down the smooth clay path to race home. We rounded the bend in the road and started up the long driveway to his estate. The Kenyan gatekeeper in his pressed blue uniform swung open the heavy steel gate as we approached. Mark was greeted by his ruckus pack of guard dogs as he made his way to the side of the house where a beautifully kept garden overflowed with lush fruits that hung over the winding cobblestone paths.

He stopped in the center of his garden and put his hands on his hips, staring straight ahead as if surveying a mess made by an adorable child. "Now see this tree." Mark said as he pointed to a six foot tall pale gray dead trunk that forked midway up. "It's the same kind of tree as the one on the picnic hill. I nursed it for years but it never bore fruit, and in spite of everything I did for it, it died. I just couldn't save it. Love's the same way. If it's not there it's not there. And if it's there it's there, whether it's convenient or not. I can see you love this girl and you are just going to have to work the picnic around the tree."

I knew Mark was right and a few days later I traveled to Tunesia where I bought Marti an exquisite blue tanzanite engagement ring. I could only hope she felt the same way after our time apart.

I had a long layover in London, but I resisted the urge to call her. When the plane touched down in Fairbanks, and I walked down the causeway to see who was waiting for me, I felt the same excitement I felt the day I first asked her out. I stepped onto the escalator, the same one she had floated up back in December. I didn't look up at first as my mind raced through a million possibilities and a million reasons why she would or wouldn't be there.

I fumbled with the ring in my pocket while the man in front of me slowly lowered out of my view as the escalator rolled downward. I looked up finally and saw my mother and father my two brothers and Marti. There she was, tall and beautiful and smiling. She ran to meet me at the bottom of the escalator. She jumped into my arms and gave me an urgent kiss. The traffic coming down the escalator started backing up and stumbling over us. Apologizing we made our way to my family who hugged and kissed us both.

Back at the house my father made chocolate oatmeal cookies for everyone while I told stories of adventures in Africa and passed out gifts. There were ostrich eggs and tribal blankets for my brothers, and soapstone dishes and grass baskets for my mother. But the item that was on my mind the most was the shimmering ring wrapped up in a silk pouch in my pocket.

At the first opportunity I pulled Marti away and closed the door behind us. As I turned I pulled the little silk bundle from my pocket. Before I could say anything, Marti squealed with delight. “Ha, I knew it. I knew it. I knew it. I knew you were going to come back with a ring. I just knew it.” She unwrapped the package and slid the already perfectly sized ring on her ring finger. The fiery blue diamond sucked in all of the light in the room and shot it back out like a blast from some infinitely large cosmic explosion that had been forever contained within the tumbling facets of this tiny gemstone.

Marti threw her arms around me and hugged me. Then stepped back and held her hand out at arms length to look at her ring. It sparkled as she moved it side to side. “Can we tell people?” she asked. “That's up to you.” I answered “If you don't think your mom will have a stroke when she hears about it, then sure, go ahead.”

Marty sighed and dropped her shoulders forward. “Foey, I don't know. I don't think they are ready yet,” she lamented with a furrowed brow. Marty carried her ring with her in its little silk pouch wherever she went. When she was alone she would put it on her finger and admire it. This continued for months as we hoped for a change of heart from her mother.

But then one Sunday afternoon Marti forgot to hide her ring and her Aunt spied it. In a panic her Aunt grabbed Marti's hand and exclaimed, does your mother know about this? The Aunt went marching off to sound the alarm and we knew the cat would be soon out of the bag.

Despite all the drama it was still a joy to tell people about our engagement, though to most it came as no surprise. At the house my younger brother Nathan was the first person we met and subsequently, the first person we told. He burst into a big belly laugh and yelled out in his booming jovial voice for the whole house to hear. “Gather around everyone, Schaeffer and Marti have some big shocking news that no one saw coming.”

My mother giggled in the kitchen as we rounded the corner. “How'd you guys all know?” I demanded. “I've know for months,” said my mother as if to scold me for underestimating her motherly intuition.

“I could see it in the way you look at each other.” “Congratulations,” said my youngest brother Grady who was all about fourteen. “Can I be your best man?” My father was silent for a

moment, then he spoke. "What did your mother say." he asked, looking to Marti. "Hmm, I don't know yet," she answered. "Ouch.," said my father making the face you'd expect someone to make while watching a skateboarder crash down a flight of steps.

That night Marti called her mother and gave her the news. She took it surprisingly well at first. But the next day she became unglued. She put her foot down and told her 21 year old daughter that she couldn't even talk about being engaged for at least another year.

If Marti didn't comply with the demands her mother was going to stop paying for her college, not help her with her student loans, and cut off all other forms of support.

The threat of economic sanctions didn't carry the weight on her that her mother thought it did. .Marti had a stable job that, on top of a good salary, provided a very nice apartment that overlooked the city.

I had started my first business when I was just fourteen and by investing and reinvesting the money, I had built up, I had enough to pay cash for a small house or make a 30% down payment on a pretty big house.

On top of this I was in the middle of a lucrative four year project with a mechanical contractor to rebuild a power plant on the army post. But the money wasn't our main concern. We wanted everyone to be happy for us, to come to a big wedding and celebrate the beginning of our lives together.

And so we jumped through the hoops to appease her mother. Marti tearfully gave me her ring back. This only intensified our love and our mutual commitment to overcome whatever challenges we came up against.

That summer we worked tirelessly to get her mother to change her mind. But try as we might, her mother would not budge. By late August we had come to an irreconcilable loggerhead. We had already merged our finances, we were working together in business. Our lives had become one and we were committed long term. The uncompromising opposition of her mother was beginning to have a negative impact on our marriage to be and our continued growth and progress through life.

So one summer afternoon when I stopped by the office I pitched it to Marti. I said, "Do you want to just get married?" "OK, When?" she asked with a big mischievous grin. "How about Thursday?" She burst into joyous laughter at the thought of it. "I love it. Where?" she asked. I smiled and thought for a moment, "I'm thinking Maui." Marti's eyes lit up like a kid on Christmas. "Can I get a dress and flowers?" she asked. "Of course," I replied. "You can get anything you want." That night we skipped off hand in hand to buy flip flops and sunglasses. It was like a ton of bricks had been lifted off our shoulders.

The next time Marti's mother called, Marti answered the phone with a relaxed bliss. "Hello? Hi mom, I'm absolutely wonderful. How are you? What do you mean I sound different? Um, yes well, I am feeling better than usual. Well, Schaeffer and I went ahead and set a date. No, no, it's sooner than that, no I mean like real soon, as in less than a week. Ah, Maui? Mom, calm down."

When Marti got off the phone, I asked her how it went. It hadn't gone well. Marti explained that her mother and sister both threw a fit and accused her of ruining their family by running off with that boy. But none of it mattered any more. We were on cloud nine and our way to Hawaii. I wrote Marti's mother a check for the full amount of all her daughter's student debt while Marti bought our plane tickets.

I didn't regret eloping at the time or for many years after. But as I get older I see the importance of a big joyful wedding for a young couple. It's a way for friends and family to give them the greatest wedding present there is, a happy sendoff.

I wish we could have had that but under the circumstances it may have been a confrontational disaster that would have done more harm than good. Still we made something beautiful with what we had, and I have only good memories of getting married in Maui.

We touched down at the Kahului airport on the north side of the island just a few hours before sunset. Our plan was to rent a car the following day and drive to the south side of the island to a beach near Lahaina where we had arranged a local minister who would do a simple ceremony.

After we checked into our hotel in Kahului, we changed into our light area clothes and walked into the warm breeze of the tropical night.

We strolled down the path under the unchanging overhanging trees. The smell of jasmine and hibiscus mixed with hints of white and yellow ginger. The sun was gone but its glow remained, radiated back into the night sky by the plants and sand that had soaked it in all day. We held hands and took in the exotic beauty of the surroundings. We stopped by a surf shop where we bought some board shorts. Our next stop was a cute little Chinese restaurant with open air seating.

Marti was so so exquisite in her little sundress, I couldn't take my eyes off of her. By this time tomorrow we would be married. It was the happiest I'd ever been.

We laughed and played as we ate, each trying to one up the other with our chop stick skills. The competition escalated until we went from picking up fortune cookies to bottles of soy sauce and eventually glasses of water, which ended in a big mess.

After we cleaned up the spill, I reached across the table and the heap of soggy napkins and took my bride-to-be's hand in mine. She was innocent, beautiful and full of joy. The laid back rhythms of the Jack Johnson floated over the shadowy trees and rooftops, carried on the breeze, floated over like the scent of night blooming flowers. I kissed Marti's delicate hand and stared deep into her kind eyes. "I love you so much. I've never been more sure of anything in my life." I confessed in a whisper, "I love you, too."

"Can you believe we are finally getting married?" said Marti with delight. The next morning we got up early so we would have plenty of time to drive to the other side of the island, being from Alaska where distances are downright immense and towns are several days travel apart.

We filled the tank with gas, packed a lunch and got some water. After a good breakfast at I-Hop we were ready for our journey. We drove along the road that followed the beach until we saw the sign for the highway we needed to take. "This is it, turn right here left," said Marti, invoking a scene from I Love Lucy. We slammed on the brakes and swung onto the little two lane highway that cut through the fields of sugarcane and pineapple. With the windows down and the radio up, we set the cruise control and held hands as we zipped towards holy matrimony.

“Ho, hold up” I exclaimed after only a few minutes on the road. “Must have gotten turned around. We’re back at the beach. Where’s the map?” I asked. “It’s in my bag in the trunk.” said Marti. We pulled over and dug out the map Sure enough we were on the right route number. We must have just gotten turned around.

So we backtracked to find our mistake, but within a few minutes we were back at the beach again. It clicked for us at the same time. “That road didn’t turned us around, “we exclaimed in unison . We had driven clear across the island and back, looking for the road to the other side of the island. Having explored the island from end to end twice before nine o’clock in the morning we decided to go snorkeling. By mid afternoon we were exhausted and went back to the hotel for a nap.

As evening approached Marti got into her sleek and elegant wedding dress. Her bouquet of flowers was made of tastefully chosen reds, oranges and rich browns, fall colors for a fall wedding. She asked me how did she look.

I stood there awestruck by the beauty of my bride. This woman who had been so gorgeous that I couldn’t even talk to her at first had only gotten more beautiful as I had gotten to know her. “You look perfect in every way, sweetheart. You look like the one I want to spend forever with. I love you,” I said as a tear swelled in my eye. Marti smiled and hugged me. “Don’t make me cry and mess up my makeup,” she said, holding back tears of love and joy.

We drove to the beach where we were met by a happy little preacher in shorts and a Hawaiian shirt. In bare feet we walked down toward the water. The surf churned as the setting sun painted the sea and sky first gold then red then deep purple. The preacher started in, “We are gathered here today in the spirit of aloha.” I looked into Marti’s eyes and didn’t hear a word he said after that, until he handed me the ring. As I slipped it onto Marti’s finger, the memories of our past and the hopes of our future seemed to be fused together in that one moment. It slipped over her knuckle and settled into the place where it belonged., the place where it would stay forever. Marty slipped a thick gold band onto my finger. It felt cold and heavy, foreign and bulky, but right. Marti gave me a deep passionate kiss and we were man and wife.

On the way back to our hotel we stopped at a Star Mart filling station and got two mango smoothies. I sipped my smoothie not knowing that six years later I would have a little boy who's favorite thing in the world would be to sip mango smoothies with his dad.

I carried my bride up the steps to our beach front condo, where we made love as the salty sea breeze whispered through the curtains. Later that night we went out onto our balcony in the moonlight. The silver white light of the moon made our brand new rings sparkle in the night.

I stood behind my new wife and wrapped her in my arms as we held our left hands out and gazed intently at the pair of rings and pair of hands. My hand was strong, tanned and muscular, a hand made for work, adventure and protection. Her hand was elegant and fair, made for delicate tasks, for kindness and a healing touch.

The moon sank toward the sea until its glow cast a narrow silver carpet of shimmery light over the waves, like a pathway from our balcony to the horizon, inviting us to walk along its way into the future.

Back in Fairbanks. we spent our first winter together in a cozy little apartment. It felt like we were playing house. We decorated how we wanted. We tried new foods, and we lived in our pajamas. It felt so extravagant when we bought a 23 piece set of Teflon cookware. But we slowly filled that little place with memories until it felt like a home.

Even though we had plenty of money we lived like broke college kids. This paid off and that spring we bought a big beautiful house on an acre of land that overlooked the golf course. It was way more than the two of us needed, but we knew we would have children someday. In the time being we remodeled the lower level together and rented the rooms to college students while we lived on the main level. We were still kind of kids when we married and as we grew up we had to learn how to relate and communicate. But as we overcame the challenges of a shared life we found a deep and authentic friendship. As Ronnie Pruitt had predicted on our first date, we also made great business partners. Marti and I complemented each other perfectly as we worked hand in hand to build a thriving and successful company.

Within a few short years we had enough time, resources and flexibility to really enjoy our life together. We loved the outdoors and exploring new things and new places. We took groups of church kids backpacking in the summer and skiing in the winter.

One of our favorite rivers to canoe on was the Tanana. It is a wide and braided river fed by mountain glaciers in the mighty Alaska range. This means it is filled with ultra fine glacier silt. These microscopic flecks of mountain, ground as fine as talc over thousands of years, float in the water and turn it the color of chocolate milk. There is zero visibility in this water as it ripples past the river bank like a tan dust cloud

Marti and I floated down this ever changing river in our red canoe until it was time to pull up onto a sand bar and make camp for the night. We pitched our yellow Northface VE25, a tent made for 200 miles per hour winds on McKinley and Everest, excessive for a summer night on a gravel bar. But it was comfortable and we didn't have to carry it on our backs all day. After a meal cooked on a hissing MSR stove, we picked some berries and put them in our tea.

We stood arm and arm on the river bank looking out over its cold rippling surface. "You want to go skinny dipping?" I said. Marti smiled. "OK" she said. with a naughty delight. "I don't know how long we will be able to stay in," she added "I do, about forty seconds," I said with a laugh as I pulled my clothes off and perched them on top of a clean rock.

The two of us totally naked and already covered in goosebumps, held our arms out to our sides as we tiptoed toward the river over the smooth round pebbles like a pair of wet storks. On the river's edge we held hands and crouched down ready to jump in. "On the count of three. Ready. One, two...maybe we should get a fire going before we jump in and get all cold," I said. Marti concurred. We put our clothes back on and gathered up driftwood into a big pile. After several minutes of blowing on a little flame in a bundle of leaves it turned into a crackling inferno of pencil sized sticks and then into a nice warm campfire. We undressed again and tiptoed back to the waters edge. "OK, for real this time." Said Marti. "Yes, no excuses," I said, with resolve We held hands, counted to three and then took a deep breath and jumped in.

Far from the arctic rush we had both prepared ourselves for, it was just an abrupt stop in ankle deep water. We just looked at one another like a couple of condemned bandits, banditos after the hangman's rope broke. "It will be deeper in the middle," I yelled announcing a new plan.

We ran through the shallow waters like two crazy chickens, until our tent and bonfire were two little orange dots on the gravel bar behind us.

Our feet were painfully numb and the water was still only an inch or two over the tops of our feet. "This isn't going to work out," I said as we burst into shivering laughter. "Carry me back," said Marti. "What? Are you nuts? How about you carrying me back?" I said as I kicked a cold splash on her, and we turned for camp. Our voices moved up and down the scale from teeth chattering moans of agony to convulsions of laughter as we frantically pulled our clothes back on.

We propped our poor little feet up on a log and warmed them in the glow of the fire as we cuddled. The midnight sun dipped into the north and swung back into the eastern sky before we wiggled into our down mummy bags and zipped the screen shut on our tent.

We had many more adventures. We climbed 20,320 ft tall Mt. McKinley in an epic forty eight day expedition. We bought and refurbished a sailboat, then explored the water falls, hot springs, secret surf spots and hidden lagoons of Southeast Alaska's misty fjords.

But of all the wondrous experiences of life the most meaningful and precious was yet to come, the birth of a child.

We weren't trying to conceive but we weren't trying not to, either. I was a bit uneasy about a baby but Marti was ready to be a mother. We had been married five years and the time was right for our family to grow beyond a couple. We were vacationing on our sailboat when we realized we were more than two.

It was in the fall when summer had slipped away, and the sea had turned from a deep peaceful green to an angry black, buffeted by the gray and furious wind that drives ships and sailors to distant shores

or protected coves. My bride and co-pilot was not prone to sea sickness but she was suddenly beset by nausea and fatigue.

At first we attributed it to the string of storms that had pounded us with wind and wave for the last month. But as we made it to our port of call in Sitka, we became suspicious that it was morning sickness. Marti, being the perceptive woman that she is, could sense that I didn't think I was quite ready to be a father. In reality I was ready more than ready in fact, but I was slow to acknowledge it for some reason. I think Marti knew she was pregnant for a week or two before she said anything to me.

We walked from the harbor up to the wonderful little Mediterranean restaurant where we sat at a table for two in the corner.

I made nervous conversation but Marti sat mostly silent with the glow of one carrying a new life.

At some point I stopped talking and reached across the table for Marti's hand. Her face was stormy and windblown but soft. "Are we pregnant?" I asked tenderly. She squeezed my hand and nodded yes

In her eyes was fear, excitement, joy, relief and above all love, pure, unending love. "How do you know?" I asked. "I just do," she answered without hesitation.

Back in Fairbanks, we went to the birth center. It was nice. It felt like a home and the midwives felt like family. I have always hated the way hospitals tend to treat people like products in a repair shop. There is more to our health than the mechanics of our body. It is our humanity that often is neglected and thus ails us most much to the befuddlement of the mechanical minded physicians. Pregnancy is not a condition to be treated or a sickness to be cured. Bringing a child into the world is perhaps the most sacred expression of our humanness. And neither one of us wanted it to be encroached upon by the irreverence of industry

So we chose a home-birth.

There are few moments in my life that are burned into memory, moments that were turning points that left me forever changed. One such moment was the first time I saw my son on the ultrasound and heard the wish wish wish of his heartbeat. When I saw the profile of his face and his two little hands moving in front of him, my heart leaped for joy and I never saw the

world the same again. Something clicked in me at that moment. I no longer wanted a better world for me, I wanted a better world for him.

I was in the middle of a campaign for the State House of Representatives when Seth was born. He was born at home on a sunny afternoon in June. It was an easy birth or maybe Marti was just strong

She delivered him in a pool we had set up in our bedroom. I knelt between her knees as the contractions became stronger and closer together. The midwives sat by silently with reverence for the miracle of life that was taking place.

At first Marti clenched my hand until her knuckles turned white, But then as she made peace with the pain, her grip loosened, she took deep slow breaths and let her body do what it was made to do.

Watching her in those moments as she gave birth to our child created a bond and an intimacy that seemed to buttress if not supersede all previous connections we had built. I loved this woman.

As Seth's head started to crown I peered down through the rippling reflections on the surface of the water. The pain and anticipation had both reached their peak. His head came fully into view.

One more contraction and his shoulders would be free. I stared at my son's face on the other side of the shimmering plane of water as though I was looking through a window into a different world, a whole different dimension, and beckoning my child to come into mine.

Time evaporated and a lifespan of ponderous contemplation was completed as my hand cradled this brand new life beneath the surface of my world and on the edge of his.

I tallied all the joys and all the sorrows of the life I had lived. I thought of all the pain and ugliness that this world had in store for this innocent little person and weighed that against the love and beauty that would be his

I thought of my death. I thought of his death. I remembered the time I almost died when I was tangled in commercial fishing gear and dragged beneath the sea. I had looked up into the face of my crew mates as I sank out of this world much the same as I was now looking into the face of my son. When in due course the consideration of the merits of life and pain was finished the conclusion was apparent.

Come my son into this frightful world of wondrous beauty that you may make it a better place.

He slipped into my hands and I gently raised him from the water. He drew in his first breath and let out an exhausted cry. He was cradled between two loving parents. He lay quietly on his mothers chest to rest, like a sailor washed up on the sand over a wreck. This was more than the birth of a baby boy this was the birth of a family.

By the next day Seth had recovered his strength. His deep blue eyes took in the world for the first time as he made one new discovery after another. Somehow everything that was new to him was now new to me as well. I felt like I had been taken back to my infancy to do over all the things I had forgotten.

The first time he laughed at me it made my heart burst with joy like a little green rose bud tight and closed that all at once unfolded into vibrant blossom.

As he grew into a toddler, we spent hours upon hours together. We caught lady bugs and grasshoppers together. We spent all day in the blueberry patches eating one tart little berry after another. He didn't slow our adventurous life down even a little. He would stand on my backpack hanging on to my ear lobes as I glided down the cross country ski trails behind the University. He went along with my brothers and me when we would go rock climbing. He couldn't quite walk but he had his own little red Marmot pack for his juice, granola bars and diapers.

He wasn't even two years old but he was one of the guys. I remember him sitting on a blanket in the sun under a birch tree playing with a pile of cams, runners and other shiny climbing gear as my brother Grady tried to climb this impossibly difficult route up the granite cliff that towered above us. Every time my brother would fall and I would catch him with the thin blue rope that connected him to me,

Seth would yell out the one word he had full command of: Wow

That was the word of his first full summer with Dad. Garbage truck, Wow, fire crackers, Wow, radio controlled airplanes, Wow, taking the top off the jeep, Wow.

I took him to job sites with me. He loved that. He could say excavator, bob cat, compressor, nail gun and forklift. He never quite got concrete trucks, dump trucks and garbage trucks properly differentiated. So they all just stayed garbage truck.

He was positively astonished when one day he found that in the back corner of the toy selection at Fredmeyer's grocery store there were miniature replicas of all the behemoth machines he had seen with his daddy while out on the construction site.

We really bonded in a deep and meaningful way those first few years. His mommy liked to go to bed early but not the two of us. We were night owls. I would read him bedtime stories every night. But sometimes he would crawl out of bed and point at the door to the garage."Blockbuster. Blockbuster?" He would ask with an irresistible smile.

I would put my house shoes on, grab my wallet and the two of us would drive to Blockbuster Video in our pajamas. That little toddler was faster at picking out a movie than any adult I know. He stuck to one genre, hokey b movies I think it must have been the college guys living in our basement that got him hooked because every Thursday night they had their own b movie night and sometimes Seth would join them. One way or another b movies became our thing.

He would march into Blockbuster where he was known as a regular customer wearing his Thomas the Train Engine pajamas. He would walk three isles down, turn right then go ten feet

straight ahead to the b movie section where he would stand waiting for me to lift him up. He would hold his arms out in front of him and lean side to side as I moved him accordingly until he landed on the pick of the night. We must have looked like a pair of crack pots witching a well. But it was what we did and it was fun.

Back at the house we would eat apple slices and watch Giant Squid versus Megaladon, until he got tired and wanted to go to bed. I would sing to him softly as he chanted da da da da di da di da dee da dee in harmony and on beat with my voice. I loved my little boy so much and he had so much love, too. I wanted more children. I wanted him to have brothers and sisters that he loved as much as I loved my brothers and sisters.

And as luck would have it within a few months we were expecting our second child.

I wanted my children to have a good life, a life full of opportunity and freedom. I had opportunity and some freedom but not as much as my parents had. America was changing fast and not for the better.

The people were getting more and more decadent and indifferent and the government was getting more and more powerful and secretive. It was not hard to see that by the time my children were grown, America and the American ideals of self evident truths like the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness would soon be but a memory swept away by the floods of war, inflation and corruption.

I had built a strong base of grass roots support while running for the State House of Representatives.

I lost the election by a thin margin but I think that was actually a good thing because it allowed me to keep educating and organizing people at the local level, which is where all lasting change comes from.

We taught classes on the Bill of Rights, tried to expose police drug trafficking and corruption and just in general looked for ways to resuscitate the Constitution. I found that there were thousands and thousands of people who felt the same way I did, who cared about their families and children and wanted them to grow up in a free and prosperous country.

It was during this time that I was targeted by a coalition of state and federal police. The operation, code named Polar Pen, systematically eliminated libertarian and conservative political figures across Alaska

and used undercover FBI agents to sabotage the campaigns of anyone who ran against candidates who were supported by the police and the US Attorney's office in Anchorage.

I happened to not be running for office at the time but what I was doing, by organizing and energizing voters and donors for the people who were running, was having a far reaching effect. This could not be tolerated by the party elites we were trying to unseat. The Polar Pen task force working in concert with a handful of well connected DC and Alaskan power brokers turned my life into an unthinkable nightmare. They tapped my phone and ran audio and video recording devices into our home, where they recorded hundreds of hours of our private family life for over a year.

All this was done with no warrant or due process of any kind. I hadn't committed a crime. This was the DC insiders simply using the secret police to spy and persecute their political rivals, which apparently they gave themselves permission to do after the 9/11 theatrics.

At first the FBI hired local provocateurs to try to talk me into committing a crime for which I was to be prosecuted. When I refused and showed no disposition toward acts of lawlessness, they switched to more intimidating thugs who tried to bully me into joining them in the commission of a crime.

“Come on they would say. We know who the dirty ones are. Let's go off one or two of them and teach the system a lesson.”

Aside from the fact that I'm just not the sort of chap who goes around offing people, the entire logic of their proposal was flawed. The only ones who need to be taught something is the public at large and what they need to be taught is that the official mythology of honest government is a load of crap and that corruption and deceit are the order of the day in the institutions of power that run the show.

If we did like the undercover agents suggested and went out to do something despicable and full of mean spirited vengeance, not only would it teach the general public the opposite of the message that we wanted to get across, but we would end up in prison or more likely killed. Then what? All we would have done would be make the world an even worse place and then leave our orphaned children and widowed wives to fend for themselves in it.

Despite explaining this on dozens of occasions, the undercover agents who we thought were just violent nut jobs, continued to push. I had even warned local law enforcement that there were some dangerous crazies that they needed to keep an eye on, not knowing that the dangerous crazies were working for the cops.

The feds knew I loved and cared about my family and that they came first. So it was in the spring of 2010 after a year of failed attempts to entrap me that they devised a way to attempt to exploit my love for my family as a weakness. They had some cop file a complaint of child neglect. Then they went and got a writ of assistance based off their own bogus complaint. The beauty of the child neglect complaint for them is that it does not require a probable cause or even reasonable suspicion to come kick in your door with a swat team. When we learned of this writ of assistance through our attorney, Robert John, Marti and I were horrified. We had no problem allowing some social worker to make sure we had a safe happy healthy home but we didn't want men in masks with machine guns kicking their way into our house.

We no longer felt safe in our own home so we moved out and lived at a friend's house across town. I knew the police would be upset that we were trying to expose their involvement in drug trafficking but going after innocent children to get to me was over the line. Little did I know that this was just the conclusion they wanted me to draw.

While all this was unfolding the feds had one of their thugs, Bill Fulton, drive 350 miles from Anchorage to my home town of Fairbanks. I had only met this guy once or twice briefly, but I had heard a lot about him. I knew that he and his friends had killed someone in a bar and non of them went to prison over it. He was violent and liked to drink.

One evening I got a call from a guy who wanted to meet with me. He said it was urgent. Not knowing what this was about, I asked my elderly friend Les Zerb to come with me.

When we arrived we were met by Bill Fulton and Aaron Bennett, both undercover agents we would eventually find out as well as about a dozen other big thugs.

They started in right away. "This is intolerable. These dirty cops are going after your innocent little boy for political reasons. We can't let this go. You need to organize and lead an attack on the ones we know are corrupt. We'll supply the man power, you just make the plan and give the order. This is about protecting your family," they said.

Parts of what they were saying was true, but when I explained that I wasn't willing to lash out violently

Bill Fulton flew into rage. He grabbed my friend and held a large hunting knife to his throat. Then he told me he was going to slit Les' throat if I didn't agree to join him in starting a fight with the government.

Things had gone from zero to insanely horrifying in a matter of seconds. We still didn't agree to their foolishness and we got out of there in a hurry. We told the state police about what happened but they didn't want to talk to us. It makes sense now looking back and knowing it was their own guys we were telling them about. But at the time we were just scared and looking for help. Having gotten none from the local cops we went to the military police on the neighboring army post and asked them for help. They didn't do much either and we left there empty handed.

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But the following day we were contacted by an officer from the MP station who wanted to meet with us. Marti and I met him in a park and he told us why we were there. Minutes after we had left the MP station, the FBI had stormed in and demanded all their video surveillance footage.

There was some back and forth over whether they could hand it over to them or not, but they eventually did. While they were burning the requested footage to DVD this young MP Steve Gibson had asked the federal agent why they were after Schaeffer Cox.

The agent plainly said, "Well, we have been after Schaeffer Cox for a long time but we couldn't get him on anything. But now we are going after his kid and we think he will probably try to use force to try to stop us from taking the baby. At which point he'll be shot and killed and that will take care of the Schaeffer Cox problem." End quote

Lucky for us, criminals brag and most soldiers are good people The federal agent who was a criminal with a badge bragged of his murder plot and this soldier who was a good person came and warned us.

Needless to say Marti and I were stunned and horrified. A few days later we went to court over the writ of assistance the polar pen mafia had arranged for themselves.

I explained everything that was going on to the judge. He was no help. But the social worker from the state heard it all too. I think she saw what was going on and how the feds were abusing the process because she stepped in and defused the whole thing. She set up a time and did an investigation that found that our home was healthy and safe and that the accusation of child neglect was completely unfounded, case closed.

Marti and I were relieved but we still had to worry about Bill Fulton who said he wanted to kill us and these federal agents talking about setting our whole family up to die in a shootout. Promoting government transparency and accountability is all fine and good but our primary concern had shifted to not getting murdered by remorseless drug running predators who worked for the FBI, DEA, State Troopers or USMS.

Just the possibility of being exposed had thrown these knaves into a panicked frenzy of violence and deceit and I was high of their list of people to get rid of.

I was ready to sell everything and move to a different country but Marti was eight months pregnant and in no shape to pack up and leave the home we knew and loved. That changed just two days after our daughter was born.

Bri was born in the same room and in the same way Seth had been born. But instead of being met by a loving and tranquil world, she was born into the boiling turmoil of the federal narco states' violent treachery.

It was a fast birth, so fast in fact that the midwives didn't arrive in time. The contractions were building and the baby was coming whether we were ready or not. Marti knelt in front of me in the pool, her arms draped over my shoulders. She was scared, I could smell it and I could see it in her eyes. Her voice quivered when she spoke. She had not accepted the inevitable.

I kissed her forehead to draw her attention. When she glanced up into my eyes, I spoke with a soft but firm voice, "Sweetheart, stop fighting it. It will be OK. Just let it come in its own time." Marti took a deep breath and nodded her head as she slowly exhaled. A few minutes later our daughter came into the world.

There was something different for me about having a girl.

Seth had made me proud. I wanted to make him tough and strong but Bri melted my heart in a whole new way. She was a soft spoken baby and she moved her hands the same way her mother did. A deeply compassionate and nurturing instinct came to life in me as I held her.

My every thought turned to providing a safe happy environment where these two children could experience a care free childhood surrounded by love. I really only had about an hour of meaningful time with Bri ever. It was at a friend's house on February 6 Super Bowl Sunday. There was a party but I had no interest in sports. Marti moved around the house slowly as she recovered from the labor.

I laid on the couch with my two day old daughter asleep on my chest. I marveled at the spectacular precision of her tiny hand as she grasped my pinky finger. The fingernails, the crease of her palms and knuckles, it was all there in perfect miniature. How I mused to myself can all the little millions of intricate processes required to form this beautiful little hand take place so flawlessly?

I laid my hand over her back and felt her heart thumping rhythmically. She was so small my hand swallowed her whole body. A tear swelled in my eye until it rolled down my face and pulled on my collar bone.

I wanted to cover this perfect little baby girl with my lean strong hand of protection forever. The host of the party approached me and with a bit of a confused look, informed me that there was someone at the door to see me.

I handed Bri to her mother and went to the door.

It was an acquaintance named Jerald JR Olson. He wanted to talk to me outside. It sounded urgent. We stepped into the garage and the stuttering hack started in.

Quote "I just got back from Anchorage where I saw Bill Fulton and and and he he he told me that on this court hearing you have coming up next week, the one, over when when when you got arrested at the anti-corruption protest last year. Well, this Bill Fulton he he he he's serious. He said that if you go to court and get railroaded he's coming to town and going to kill the people who did it. He's got all his buddies geared up and ready to go. He told me to tell you that if if if you try to stop people from rising up he'll he'll he's going to kill you. He said, he specifically said to remind you about what happened last time you tried to shut down the uprising over your son when Bill Fulton almost killed Les. He said to make sure you remember that, yeah He's not playing around on this at all, he'll do it" unquote

I would later learn that this JR Olson worked for the FBI but at the time I had no idea. I just thought he was an idiot delivering a message from another idiot who wanted to kill me for not signing on to their idiotic crusade.

I tried to explain that I wasn't the only one who wanted to prevent an uprising and that nobody would go along with Fulton's plan because he and Bennett were a bunch of hedonistic, scrappy, directionless, brawlers trying to pick a fight.

Everything I said fell of deaf ears. There was no reasoning with these bull headed fools and disagreeing with them was now punishable by death according to Olson.

We'd gone to the police already and gotten no help there. In fact the most help we had gotten was from the MPs who told us federal agents were bragging about how they were going to murder us in a orchestrated shootout.

I felt trapped and cornered. I felt like I had lost my country. I loved America and all things American.

I had memorized the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. I believed in the American dream. I felt entitled to this country. It was my country. I was an owner of it. I was one of We the People. The Bill of Rights was referring to my rights.

Now I felt like a schmuck and a quitter for wanting to just up and leave my country. But all patriotism aside, the ugly truth was that I'd lost my country before I even had it. My parents had lost it when they didn't heed the warnings of Dwight D. Eisenhower and JFK and Andrew Jackson before that.

I'd never had freedom, I'd never had rights. I'd only had the idea of those things and even that was only a shadow of what once was.

Having this reality thrust in my face after a lifetime of being an idealistic boy scout was painful. But

I had to look at the bigger picture. My freedom and dignity were things that transcend governments and even countries and cultures. I'd fought the good fight. I'd stood up for what I

believed in. But now I had to think of my family and my son and of this brand new baby girl. If I couldn't pass something on to them then what would it all be for?

I sat my wife down and told her our lives were in danger and that we needed to flee the country. Her pain was visible as she rocked the baby in her arms and worked through some hard questions. "Do we have time to sell our properties and the business?" she asked, calculating the immense loss we would incur with a sudden departure. "No," I answered, "we have to leave right now. Honey, these people are going to kill me or land me in prison for God knows how long, then what? Who will take care of you and the kids?" Marti looked down at the floor, then let out a long slow breath and nodded her head in agreement..

I had seen the strength in her face before on Mt McKinley, in storms at sea, during times of great loss.

But we had built our life together from scratch and we could do it again.

But not if we got murdered or had our family torn apart. She knew it and so did I. "We only have a day or two to get out of the country. We can take what we can fit in the back of a pickup, but beyond that we are just going to have to start from scratch somewhere new." I said as I tried to look to the future with hope

We left our children with a friend and returned to our house. in the middle of the night for some valuables and sentimental items.

I grabbed my coin collection, my gun collection, my favorite books and my carpentry tools. Between the value and utility of those items I knew I could get a start just about anywhere. That's all I would need, a start. Marti took her wedding dress, her scrap book the children's clothes, her musical instruments and her fine china.

As we pulled away from that big gorgeous house on the hill. that used to be our home, I took one last look at all our work trucks and heavy equipment parked in the back lot for winter.

It didn't bother me at all that I was just abandoning all of it. I almost felt pride in knowing that those things and the wealth they represented didn't own me, that I could let them go and that I could make it all back again.

Then I thought of the fun times I'd had with Seth in the bobcat or in the big white garbage truck. Suddenly I slammed on the breaks and put the truck in park. "I forgot something, I'll be right back," I exclaimed as I hopped out of the truck.

I dashed into the house to the toy chest under the TV in the living room where I dug for the little excavator bobcat and garbage truck my son loved so much. Maybe when he is grown he can hold his machinery with an open hand. But for now he's just a kid, I thought to myself. I didn't want to put him through this, too, on his own little level. And so with his miniature treasures tucked away in a suitcase I drove away from my home never to see it again.

Little did we know that our every move we made was under the all seeing eye of the surveillance state, and that a US attorney like a demonic principality given leave to torment and destroy a family, was directing a swarm of shadowy underworld informants to prevent us from leaving the country.

As we drove towards Canada we were being tailed by the FBI. When we stopped for the night, J.R. Olson sabotaged our vehicle. He then came to the rescue the next day when he just happened to stop by. He informed us that Bill Fulton was on his way to town looking for me. Then assured us that because I had not shown up for a trivial misdemeanor hearing, the one Bill Fulton was going to go on a killing spree over if it didn't go my way, that the border patrol would arrest me when I tried to leave the country. And if that happened he reminded me, Bill Fulton would surely make good on his vow to start World War III.

But he claimed all of this could be fixed by his friend, the truck driver who would be in town shortly. The truck driver could sneak me and my family through the border. We'd be safely out of harms way and defuse the whole situation. Having no other options I agreed to wait for the

trucker. The friends who had accommodated us for the night agreed to let us stay with them until our truck arrived.

I woke early the day the trucker was to arrive. My wife lay next to me still and peaceful as she slept.

She was so pretty there in the dim light that leaked in under the door. Her forehead was warm and soft as I delicately kissed her. The silky locks of golden hair that curved over her pillow smelled like wild flowers and dew on a spring morning.

I admired her beauty and bravery. She had let go of everything and agreed to set out into the unknown so we could live together in safety as a family.

I got dressed quietly in the dark then checked on each of the children sleeping nearby. I kissed Seth's warm little ear. "I love you buddy," I whispered as I straightened his spider man pajamas.

I had bought him dinosaur fruit snacks for the long drive. Those were his favorite and I couldn't wait to surprise him once we were on the road.

Bri lay sleeping in a little basket She had that soft newborn baby smell. I caressed her little forearms that were no bigger around than my thumb. Hope, that was her middle name and that's what she gave me and what I wanted for her. Hope for a better life. Hope that we could live together as a family without fear of the government or their pet thugs. Hope that this country would come to its senses before it was too late. Hope that someday things would get better and we could come back.

I kissed her tiny little hand before I left. That was the last time I saw my daughter.

There was no trucker. It was just an FBI ruse to keep us from leaving the country while they made arrangement for their raids. JR Olsen drove me to an industrial lot where he said the trucker was waiting. But the only thing waiting for me there was a swat team.

At the same time I was being ambushed, a separate swat team stormed the house where my wife and children were waiting for me to show up with the trucker. Masked gunmen burst into the house from all directions at once. They knew the only occupants of the house were two women and six small children. They knew that for over a year I had consistently rejected their violent proposals. They had hours upon hours of secret recordings of me saying I was going to be like Gandhi not Rambo. They knew we were not criminals. But none of that matters to the sociopathic predators who have the moral ambiguity and mindless allegiance necessary to be the federal government's muscle.

They threw the mothers to the ground and held automatic rifles to their heads while the children screamed in terror.

“Stay down unless you want another Ruby Ridge,” yelled one of the Amero-Nazis, referring to an incident in the nineties when federal snipers shot and killed a mother and infant in Montana. The woman they yelled this at was Rachel Barney an eight months pregnant Mormon housewife and mother of four. She had never committed a crime in her life much less done anything to deserve this kind of abuse.

But criminals prey on the innocent and that's what the feds have become, criminals.

I was taken to an interrogation room where I was questioned for eight hours without an attorney. At first I thought that Bill Fulton and Aaron Bennett had gone and done something stupid and the cops were just rounding up anyone who might know something. If that was the case, I wanted to do whatever I could to help. But as the two agents grilled me, I slowly came to realize this was all about me. It was the strangest experience. They were like a couple of little kids playing cops and robbers who were really into it.

Everything started making sense now. The people pushing violence one after another but always asking me to take the lead. The persistence in the face of an uncontroverted logic, the police's unwillingness to investigate people I warned them about, the treats on my children, it all just totally blew my mind. The nightmare that had been my life for the last year was all their fantasy creation. They sat there and tried every psychological trick in the book to get me to validate their charades.

I was dumbfounded. These paranoid pretenders were totally and completely out of control. My mind turned to the well being of my family. Were they OK? What had these mobsters done to them. I had no way of knowing. I was taken to the jail.

There the life I knew was effectively ended. And the nightmare I was so close to escaping became unfathomably worse.

The thick rusty doors screeched and slammed behind me as I entered the tank. From down a long hall I could hear muffled screams of pain. The smell of vomit and pepper spray clung to everything. Through cracks in the door I could see a half a clock but I couldn't see the hands. I knew it was after seven pm.

I sat on the floor there for several hours. Finally the door swung open and two guards called me out. They threw an empty box on the floor in front of me and ordered me to inventory as if I should know what that meant. When I did nothing they told me to put my clothing and property in the box one item at a time. I removed my shoes and socks, the floor was cold and sticky on my feet. Bluejeans, sweater, boxers, wallet, watch, it all got marked down as it went into the box until I stood there naked before my captors.

"Ring," said one of the cops impatiently.

I always wore my wedding ring. It hadn't been off for years. I tried to wiggle it over my knuckle, it wouldn't budge. I pulled at the skin trying to work it under the thick gold band little by little. It was stuck. "It won't come off," I said matter of factly "My knuckle has grown since I put it on."

One cop grabbed my wrist, the other wrenched my ring side to side attempting to do what I had been unable to do. It hurt.

They moved to give themselves a better footage and more leverage, then pulled harder. Their black latex gloves felt ugly and artificial on my skin. One of them reached around the corner, grabbed a bottle of Windex, and squirted a few squirts of it on my finger. It made that sound like a duck with a cold that Windex bottles make.

I remember that sound and smell from when I was a child and my mother would send me to wash the windows. He spun the ring as he pulled on it. They acted like I wasn't even there, like they were the only people in the room. Perhaps in their worldview they were the only people in the room. Who was I? Just some naked, faceless commodity.

One cop pulled the skin taut while the other clawed at the ring. My finger was now a frothy mess of blood and Windex. A flood of differing emotions washed over me in rapid succession.

I thought of my wife and the look in her eyes when she slipped that ring on my finger in Maui. This made me want to cry. I thought of my son of how he liked to hold his little hand up to my big hand. This made me proud that these bullies hadn't gotten him, that a part of me was still out there. Then I turned my thoughts to the crass fumbling efforts presently under way to strip me of the symbol of a covenant with my wife. This made me want to lay waste to these irreverent barbarians with my bare hands in a naked storm of righteous and indignant wrath.

All at once the ring gave way and slipped off. The mindless robot tossed it in the box where it landed with a loud musical thud, like a bell crushed suddenly by an immense stone. The other cop tossed a roll of tattered orange clothes on the floor then slammed the door without a word as he left with the box. I slipped the baggy unhemmed elastic pants on and pulled the coarse drafty smock over my back, then lowered myself on the floor.

The system had stung me with its toxic venom of indifferent brutality like a spider stinging its prey before it is devoured. I had begun a long slow death, a death in which one's humanity is crushed under the enormous and ever growing weight of injustice. `until the father, husband,

son and brother are no more and only the lifeless expendable possession of the state remains. I had begun the journey from Schaeffer Cox to 16179-006

That's the end now. Please pray for the Schaeffer Cox family, This is a travesty. There is no justice here.