

Eric Seiley

Burning Bridges As We Go

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The Last Journal of the Blue Blooded Hound

He was nervous about telling his children he would be dead soon – Jake, Maya, Shawn, and the twins Abigail and Lily. Not directly by his own hand, mind you, but they still might consider what he was about to do a form of suicide. Especially if things went south. Regardless, broaching death with your adult children – all of whom lost their mother years ago – was not something he felt keen on doing. Better to act first and confess later.

So he bought a journal -- the inexpensive kind you get on sale at any Barnes & Noble -- and began writing out his plan.

Yes, he block printed on page two, answering what he imagined their first question would be, the damn doctor's report had been sure in its finality. And yes, he had gotten a second opinion. And a third. All conclusive and in agreement. Cancer, rare, malignant mesothelioma, stage 4 metastasis across all three zones of his body – local, regional and distal. Chances of survival, less than twelve percent. Hospice care to begin immediately at three thousand dollars a day with insurance willing to cover up to forty percent. Prognosis, at best guess, four months to live. Maybe.

“We’ll fight, Daddy! We’ll pull together and fight! Miracles happen every day in ways even doctors still don’t understand. I’ve seen it,” he imagined his faithful daughter, Maya, would react. “We just have to pray for intercession.”

"Aren't you a doctor?" her older brother, Jake, would tease.

"You know very well I'm a psychologist, so don't start with me! We've talked about your penchant for using humor at the wrong time to avoid your fears. Well, here we are right in the middle of our worst fears, so deal with it!" she'd fire back, though not entirely unsympathetically.

"Ouch," Jake would growl, his feelings hurt, "I call penalty for a low blow."

"No, Maya, there is no fight," he'd reply, "All I can do is accept my fate, even though I don't believe in fate, and use the remaining time to right a few wrongs that've been on my mind of late." *And maybe, just maybe, he thought, leave each of you a legacy to remember me by. The Legacy of the Blue Blooded Hound, as his buddies used to call him.*

He knew he'd have to sit down and have that conversation with his children, but not yet. He wanted to put his plans in action first before they could stop him. So he picked up his journal and, on page seven under entry number three, wrote, *Transgressions are to be understood and corrected, not dwelt upon or agonized over.* Then he put his plan into effect.

Sam McKenna died violently several days later. He was 39 years of age. Divorced from a wife he hadn't treated very well, with two kids he never bothered to see, and unemployed while living back at home with his parents. He could daily be found on a bar stool at The Watering Hole, late into the night, slurring, "That fucking bitch ex-wife of mine still thinks she can serve me legal paperwork. Thinks she can steal my hard earned money. Well, you can't get blood from a turnip and she sure as fuck ain't getting nothin' from me."

He died three hours past midnight on a Wednesday staggering past an alley on McPherson Ave. A black, 1984 Dodge Charger waiting at the end of the alley, gunned its engines and charged. Sam, drunk as usual and blinded by the car headlights, turned

and flipped the vehicle off yelling, "Go fuck yourself!" as the vehicle hit. He was dragged under and spit out a hundred yards away looking like bloody bacon.

No one witnessed the hit and run. No one except the driver of the Dodge that is, who only smiled as he sped away. Nor did the driver stop for another forty-five minutes till reaching an unmarked dirt road circling behind Elkhorn Slough at Moss Landing. Once there, the driver exited and shoved a two by four against the accelerator, cut to length for just this purpose, wedging it to the floorboards, making the car leap forward and splash into the deep, muddy water. The car sank in totality fifteen minutes later. After which, the lone driver climbed into his reliable, beloved 1978 Chevy pickup, lifted his new journal off the passenger seat, which he'd recently purchased from Barnes & Noble, turned to page seven to line out entry number three -- *Kill the bastard who raped Maya after her prom when she was sixteen. Check.*

In the morning, after sleeping deeply and peaceful, the man rose to continue his work. He took out his journal, turned to page ten and wrote, *The glutton is barely more than an animal and much less than a man.*

Benedict J. Walsh, 52 years, manager of West Port Community Bank in downtown West Port, silently raged during a staff potluck luncheon, knocking over the buffet table as he turned red then blue in the face. Till an astute employee, the bank's assistant manager, realized what was happening, grabbed him and administered the Heimlich maneuver causing a chunk of sourdough bread the size of Walsh's fist to shoot out from his mouth and land messily on the plush carpet in front of everyone.

"Holy cow, you just saved his life!" Walsh's secretary, Bev, exclaimed. "I've never seen anything like that."

Walsh, gasping, was more mortified than grateful realizing he'd embarrassed himself in front of all his employees because of his gluttony. Walsh prided himself on the control

and fear he held over his staff and believed such a vulnerable position as having to be saved made him look weak.

“Thank you, young man,” Walsh croaked to the assistant manager who saved his life before excusing himself. And later in the week, in a small ceremony held in his office, acted magnanimously enough to reward him with a “lifesaver award” along with a small raise. But two months later, in order to prove a point, but more honestly because seeing the employee every day had become a torturous reminder, Walsh fired his assistant manager under the pretense he had *“continuously failed to meet departmental expectations and uphold the standards of this institution.”*

“It was so horrible!” Bev gossiped, “And sad! I’ve never seen anything like it. Mr. Walsh fired him right on the spot and had security escort him out the back like they were taking out the trash. Wouldn’t even shake the poor man’s hand when he offered.”

The assistant managing employee, Jake Hillsborough, had just turned thirty, recently married, and was expecting his first child in the spring. He’d been a hardworking, decent man all his life.

“I don’t understand, Dad,” Jake said to his father that night knowing his father would at least sympathize. “I don’t understand why he did it. I’ve worked there eight years and only ever given him my best. And now he does this. Says I haven’t lived up to his expectations and let him down for the risk he took on me. But he’s never indicated anything but that I was one of his better employees.”

“Don’t trouble yourself, son. The pride of men in this life condemns them in the next. I’m proud of the way you’re handling this. And you and I know the truth. It may be hard now but facing unfair circumstances in life with grace make us better men. You’ll find a way to turn this to the better. For you and your family. In the meantime, I’m here for you. And I’ll cover any expenses till you get back on your feet, so don’t worry.

Worry profits a man nothing, neither adding to his days nor benefitting him in any way. Go home to your family – you’re a good husband and father and they need you. We’ll face tomorrow together and get through this.”

“Thanks, Dad. That means a lot.”

Benedict J. Walsh was still the proudly dictatorial manager at West Port Community Bank fifteen years later. Still gluttonous, but more careful in public with his eating habits. Still controlling and feared by his employees. Until the pictures of him having sex with an underage prostitute -- himself a disturbing image of fat and lecherously vulgar hovering over such a tiny girl – were discovered on just about every car, tree, window, and downtown shop window within a half a mile of the bank early one Friday morning.

Walsh hid in his office all day afraid to leave till the flyers could be collected and disposed of. But he couldn’t hide that afternoon when two men in suits arrived and removed him from his office in handcuffs.

“I can’t say officially,” Bev gossiped, “but those men said they were detectives from the West Port Police Department who were investigating a report of child pornography, child endangerment, and engaging in acts of child prostitution. Can you believe it! I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Walsh didn’t return that evening. Nor the next day. Or the next. Eventually his employees learned he was fired in disgrace after being sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence in upstate Folsom, which he wouldn’t likely outlive considering his age and his crimes.

The *Blue Blooded Hound* didn’t consider the matter closed till he received a late call from a fellow retired cop confirming Walsh’s arrest and booking. Then he picked up his

journal, turned to page ten and crossed out the number five entry -- *Get even with the bastard who fired Jake from his job at the bank.*

The Blue Blooded Hound decided to add a note in his journal about how surprised he was revenge could be so easily arranged. Just a quick visit to an old informant -- one he'd developed during the old days working as a vice detective for the West Port Police Department -- had done the trick

"If I can help," Sally, the old informant told him, "I will. I still owe you."

"You don't owe me anything. Not anymore."

"Yes, I do."

Sally was, well, not really a friend, but someone he'd kept in contact with over the years, even into retirement, because he felt responsible for her. Unlike most informants who crashed and burned as their addictions raged out of control, causing the same detectives who recruited them to cut them off, he'd done right by Sally and made sure she ended up sober, with a job, and a place to live a few towns over in Pescadero. It'd cost him, but after all she'd done for him as an informant, risking a great deal to secretly expose hidden criminals and suspects, he was grateful. Thanks to her information, he'd solved quite a few cases, located many missing teens before the streets swallowed them up, and brought closure to several families whose loved ones had been victims of violent crimes over the years.

"I just did it to make money and get high. And avoid going to jail," Sally always tried to demur. "It was decent of you treating me so fairly though."

But he knew it was more than that. Sally had heart. And she did get out. Mostly. She wasn't necessarily committed to sobriety all those years, but she did appreciate his efforts on her behalf enough to reform most of her ways. Which, in turn, allowed her to

provide a fairly decent life of stability and happiness for her son. The same son who went on to college and much better things. Who still came back around to look in on his mother and make sure she was comfortable and didn't need for anything. He was a good son.

"You still have your old contacts?" he asked Sally when he visited.

"You know I do, sugar." She did because she still liked to dabble every now and then. But she didn't tell him that.

One week after he asked, Sally returned a thumb drive filled with incriminating digital video and pictures against Walsh, along with an index card of the juvenile's name, date of birth, and the pimp's contact information. With assurances the girl would be willing to testify. The money the man paid Sally to pass on to the pimp for his troubles, and a little extra to possibly get the juvenile clean once she entered the system, had been a lot, but worth the price. The rest was even simpler – drop the thumb drive, index card, and contact information off with an old retired cop buddy – whose oldest son was the current, on duty Lieutenant in charge of West Port Police Investigations Unit -- and wait till midnight to paper the half mile radius around the West Port Community Bank with the photos of Walsh he'd spent two hundred and fifty bucks buying a new photo printer at Target for the occasion.

The choices we make are ultimately our responsibility, he wrote.

The number two entry in his journal on page four was a real challenge. Trickier. Much more personal. He wasn't sure he could actually pull it off or even whether he should.

Find a way to help Abigail and Lily forgive their mother for killing herself. Help them find closure. My fault for letting it happen, not theirs. My responsibility to fix.

And then he got to work.

Number two affected Abigail and Lily the most, having cost them valuable developmental and social milestones, taking them the better part of a decade to recover from. They were better now, after years of therapy and the blessings of *storge*, but the tendrils of number two still haunted.

It wasn't their fault their mother devolved into a miserably unsatisfied woman after giving birth to them. Or that they'd never known her as the lively and ethereal woman of beauty like their brothers and sister did for a short while.

And none of you had the chance to know her at her best, when she was young, wrote the Blue Blooded Hound, though I wish each of you had. She was something truly amazing.

He'd met their mother, Annabeth Temple, at a party in Oakland back in 1975, when she was 22 years old, recently graduated from Julliard, and performing as a soloist ballerina with the Smuin Ballet out of San Francisco. Soon to be promoted to Prima Ballerina just after her winter performances of the Christmas Ballet, and at the height of her youthful powers, she was lithe and beautiful with an athletic talent that embodied both the best of classic and contemporary dance. Her belief, her desire, was selection to the historic New York City Ballet where all the best went to dance.

So when their courtship began, highly romantic and passionate, Annabeth loving his young, virile Tarzan qualities, and he mesmerized by her ephemeral, esoteric nature, he promised her he would never stand in the way of her dreams – even if he had to follow her to New York despite having goals of his own and a good job in law enforcement with West Port City Police where he'd been working for several years.

They'd married, and, as promised, he didn't stand in her way. Annabeth continued with the company in San Francisco while he lived and worked seventy-six miles to the south in the city of West Port. Driving up weekends for her and her returning to his home for holidays and summer break – their time together romantic and passionate,

communicating through lots of photos, poetry, and love letters – made their marriage special for a while. And true to herself to the end, Annabeth made only one honest concession for him.

“When my time dancing is done, my dear Hercules,” she promised in one of her letters, “when I’ve exhausted my window of opportunity and my youth has faded, when I have danced in the immortal steps of Fonteyn and Kirkland, from the stage of the greatest company America has ever known, then I will return to you, my love, in peace and fulfillment. Then I will give you the family you so very much desire. And I will be happily overjoyed to live out the rest of my days as your wife and their mother. Content because you supported me while I lived out my dreams.”

She promised. As did he. But neither knew what to do when, just a few short years later, her dreams crashed and burned with a knee injury that ended her career on the spot. She returned to him broken and unfulfilled. Which changed her and broke her.

A freak accident to some. Not to her. She blamed him. She blamed others.

“I didn’t need to perform that move. Nor did I feel ready for that performance. But I was so determined to move ahead, to accomplish my dreams right there in my grasp. I should never have listened to them and done it my way.”

Blame turned to bitterness as the years continued, as the pills and alcohol took root, contesting the truth she had refused to accept because her pride and regret disillusioned her.

“I wouldn’t have been so reckless had you not grown so impatient with me. Had we not argued. I would’ve respected my inner voice and not tried to dance before I was ready,” Annabeth bitterly cried during one of their failed marriage counseling sessions. “It was right there, but when I reached too far, I fell. And screwed all my dreams up. Because you wouldn’t stop pushing me to return home to you.”

“When did I do this? When did I not support you?” he would ask to no reply.

She'd made it to New York Ballet two years after they married, but only as an understudy. A backup dancer who performed when other girls were either sick or injured. Which frustrated her because she felt her window of opportunity was closing. She was already twenty-six at the time -- a veritable senior citizen in ballerina years -- and fast approaching the twenty-eight year old cut off mark when you were no longer viable, professionally speaking. She became consumed with fighting off all the incoming eighteen year old ingénue's from around the world who were younger, prettier, and more talented. And more prosperous. But then an unexpected miracle. The first week in December just before the premier of New York City's annual Nutcracker performance, when the lead principal, THE prima ballerina of the New York City Ballet, Ella Vaishnava, revealed she was six months pregnant and taking an immediate leave of absence. Annabeth was quickly selected and thrust into the lead role, rushed to the stage to begin rehearsals, introduced to her co-star, Demitri Nureyev, and thrown in the deep end. After, she was quickly whisked into a nearby office after to sign contracts, followed by being wined and dined as the next “big thing” by the director to bolster her ego and guard against the anxiety that was threatening to overtake her.

As long as she doesn't fall flat on her face, the director told the board. And even if she does, she'll carry all the blame and be the one audiences and critics vilify. Then we can easily dispose of her and bring in Martilova. But if she succeeds! Oh, if she pulls this off, we can hype up the PR and receive credit for discovering her talent. At a tenth of the cost we'd have spent bringing Martilova in. That's a win-win for all of us.

Annabeth didn't know any of this. Doubtful she would've cared if she had. She believed in her talent and knew this was her big chance! Her opening! Overjoyed and willing, she dove in headfirst without any protection. Scared, but willing.

“Am I crazy?” she wondered calling him late that first night to tell the Blue Blooded Hound the big news. “It’s so fast, and I haven’t a clue what I’m doing, choreography wise. But everyone is so helpful. I’d be crazy to pass up this opportunity, right? It’s everything I’ve worked for all my life.”

“Can you do it?” he asked in return. “Should you?” He knew it would be near impossible for any girl, let alone Annabeth, to give up such an opportunity, but he was worried for her. He knew she was only asking for a little reassurance, but still. “Is there enough time to get ready for the performance? Maybe they can delay the show, just a little even? I’m worried for you.”

“You’re so sweet. But don’t be a fool. Of course I’ll be ready. And even if I’m not, I’m going to do it anyway. It’s everything I’ve worked for my whole life. Imagine. This will be the story of legends.”

“Of course. You’ll be wonderful. You’ll break a leg. Isn’t that what I’m supposed to say?”

“No. We say ‘*merde*’ before going on stage. Only those ridiculous stage actors say break a leg to each other.”

“Should I fly out? I should. Of course I should! I’ll be there for your debut performance watching from the audience. You’ll be wonderful! I’m so proud of you.”

“Would you? That would be lovely. I’ll be busy much of the time, but we can still have a late dinner after the performance and enjoy a beautiful Christmas in Manhattan toasting our future. It’s snowing like a winter wonderland out here right now. Very romantic.”

“I’ll talk to my boss tomorrow and fly out by the end of the week. I’ll stay through New Year’s so I can see all of your performances and you can show me Manhattan!”

Annabeth never made it to opening night. Two evenings before her debut performance as Clara Marie in Tchaikovsky's classic holiday ballet, *Nutcracker*, during live dress rehearsals, she miscommunicated a timed leap at the end of Act One during the Snow Scene. While she was supposed to leap into the waiting arms of the Mouse King and be lifted high overhead among a flurry of snowflakes, she mistimed her leap early, and he, in the flurry of snowflakes, didn't see in time. Annabeth landed hard, tripped and fell landing fifteen feet below the stage in the orchestral pit -- the impact completely destroying her left foot in totum at the ankle, ripping her knee apart, breaking her femur, and rupturing discs S1 and S2 up to L4 and L5 along her vertebrae. She also shattered her left elbow and gave herself a concussion. Not to mention, the most searing crescendo of agony and pain she'd ever known.

Needless to say, her dancing career ended. As did her health. Neither of which Annabeth ever really fully recovered from. She returned home in the spring to him physically limited, emotionally devastated, and with a heavy addiction to opioids for the pain.

He made room for her and did his best to care for her. Adjusted his schedule and tried to be more available. But it was hard. He'd recently been promoted to detective, with a great many cases to work, along with bills to pay, and goals of his own to attend to. The world didn't stop turning just because Annabeth's had, much to her disappointment.

After the accident, after surgery and rehab, after moving back to the west coast with him, Annabeth realized she needed something to fill the hole dancing left. So she chose to substitute her dreams for his. She asked him to start their family and make her a mother.

"It would be better if we had a family," she begged. "I'll be better if I have a baby to love and care for. Motherhood to occupy my time. You're always gone now and I have so little to do here."

"Will you be strong enough?"

"Of course I will."

Even though he knew she wasn't the same woman he'd married once upon a time -- she just wasn't -- he still wanted to have a family with her. And give her what he thought she wanted now.

So I agreed, he wrote. Men are always willing to do what they want without much convincing. At least according to Julius Ceaser. I suppose I'm no different. I loved her and convinced myself the power of love could wrought miracles. In a strange way, it did. She gave me five miracles -- each of you, my beautiful children, to complete my life.

He and Annabeth started their family. Bought a bigger house, made friends around the neighborhood, went to church on Sundays, and began living the "American Dream." Jake came, as did Maya, and Shawn in quick succession. And while he threw himself into his work to provide for her and them, Annabeth spent long hours at home raising their children. It seemed to work for a while. The kids were happy, he was happy, but she wasn't. She only pretended to be. With a liberal dose of alcohol and prescription medications to help her along the way.

And when she could no longer pretend, he wrote, when depression threatened to overtake her, she asked for another child hoping desperately that would solve her overwhelming feelings of anhedonia. I guess I knew, at heart, what she was doing. But I couldn't admit it to myself at the time -- that she was damaged and I not able to "fix" her. So I convinced myself more children was the answer and ignored what I knew to be the problem. This is where I failed you my dears.

Despite an alarming reliance on alcohol and pills Annabeth used to get through the day and go to sleep at night, she still gave birth to the twins Abigail and Lily. Who were healthy, thank God. And happy. So everyone was busy again. No time to think, worry, or feel sorry for oneself. Annabeth pretended again, but her bitterness would not relent, acting as an anchor dragging her down again.

“Surely if I knew the fate bitterness held in store, I would’ve shrunk back in fear and let the cup pass us by untasted.” This from a passage he discovered highlighted in Annabeth’s copy of Jacqueline Carey’s Kushiel’s Dart, sitting on her bedside table that fateful afternoon. With the twins in middle school, and the older children already matriculated to college, she could no longer pretend she wasn’t losing her battle with addiction and depression. The thin veil finally fell and the suicide attempts began.

She felt empty, he wrote, but I was too busy to notice. Or made myself too busy, I suppose. The signs were there. And I could’ve done something about it. But I didn’t. I’m sorry Abigail. I’m so sorry, Lily. I should’ve done something before that final time to protect you better. She did love you! I know she did. She just couldn’t face her disappointment in life. It was very selfish of her.

Annabeth chose her time well – late one evening when he was out on a case and Abigail and Lily sleeping over at a friend’s house. Then she made her move. She meant for HIM to find her when he returned late and hadn’t accounted for Abigail and Lily wanting to come home early. He was still out on his case. They came home early. And called 911. Which the police dispatcher relayed to him telling he needed to get home ASAP.

I’m sorry, girls. What a mess we made of it all, he wrote in his journal. Pretended things were great for many years trying to give you the best home we could when I should’ve just been honest and gotten the help for her she really needed. I should’ve seen it coming and taken her

away. Put her in a hospital. I should've been more honest and not ignored all the red flags. I should've cared for you two better.

He had no idea how to help Abigail and Lily find closure now that they were adults. How to truly repair the deep impact their mother's suicide created in them, even into adulthood. How to heal the memory of their disappointed mother.

You've both been so brave and wonderful, he continued writing, for such a long time. And your willingness to let the pain go, accept the reality of your mother's suicide, and forgive me speaks volumes to how truly amazing and resilient you both've become. But I can see those bad days with your mother still haunt you and I wish I to give you some peace. I just have no idea how to. I am at a loss. I'm sorry for my weakness.

He continued writing, *Very few times in life do we get a chance at redemption. I plan to take advantage, since the discovery of my cancer, and redeem a few overdue receipts in the hope that I can. This is my chance. Maybe...obviously...my last chance.*

In order to cross out number two in his journal, he did the only thing that might possibly mean something to them. He went down into the basement, into the locked storage room he'd built years ago, where he kept all his personal mementos and all the things passed down from his own father, all his old case files, and his guns, ammo, and gear, and every stitch of every item he received from Annabeth. He collected every photo, letter, and poem, every dance program, ribbon, and newspaper clipping, everything he'd saved, including Annabeth's diaries written from a time when she was a young girl dreaming of being a ballerina -- up to each and every diary she kept during her pregnancies when she liked to write poetry to her unborn children. He gathered everything together showing the ephemeral beauty and joy Annabeth had lived once upon a time, boxed them all up, and loaded them into his beloved '78 Chevy. Then he drove across town to Abigail's house knowing she and her sister would still be busy at

their clothing shop downtown. Abigail's husband, Seth, would let him into their garage. And help him unload everything as he explained to Seth it was a gift he hoped the girls would one day come to appreciate. And while a confused Seth might beg him to stay till dinner when Abigail would return home, the man thanked him and hugged Seth before getting back into his own truck. Then drive over to Shawn's place.

The time was near, he could feel it the rot building up inside, but he refused to stop. He had more work to complete.

Eventually, he wrote in his journal, we all have to accept full and total responsibility for our actions, everything we have done, and have not done.

At Shawn's house, sitting in the cab of his truck, he read number five, written on page fourteen. The last entry on his list. *This one is for Shawn, he wrote, For all of you really, but Shawn will understand most.*

At Shawn's house -- vacant because Shawn and his wife, Diedre, had taken their four children to visit her parents down in Monterey for the weekend -- he let himself in with his spare key and walked to Shawn's den at the back of the family room. He sat and wrote the final entry in his journal.

Number five had been hardest to contemplate, but easiest to set in motion. *Check into hospice and let yourself die, under the assistance of professionals, so your life insurance policy will pay out the full amount upon your death.*

My dear children, he wrote, You may not understand how hard it is to die in this way. To wait and let nature ravage, rather than end things by my own hand, in my own way, as my own choice. But I am no longer my own and haven't been since the day each of you were born. I belong to each of you and must consider you in all I do. That is the only living legacy I know -- the great love I have for each of you. The five people I care for most. And because I do, I want to ensure there are funds to secure that legacy for generations to come.

Shawn, of all his children, would most understand his choice. How a lifetime of “protecting and serving” had cost a portion of his humanity and turned him into a harsher, more closed off person than he cared to be. With their mother. With them. But it never stopped him from loving them.

Nietzsche wrote, When you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back at you. I didn't really understand that when I was younger. Your grandfather even tried to warn me in his own way. But I fully understand what Nietzsche meant now. When you live too long facing the harsh realities and tough circumstances that humanity curses itself with, you lose a portion of your own soul. I'm ashamed to say I wasn't brave enough to prevent it from happening; to do all I should've to get myself clear of those emotionally damaging consequences. I became that which I had fought to protect you all from my entire life. But no matter how I justify my actions, I accept full responsibility and will, in the end do the right thing. I will check myself into hospice and live till the end.

You, my dear son, he continued writing, are so much better at it all than I ever was. I'm so proud of the man you've become and the upstanding police officer and detective you've become. You're a real gift. And I am most proud, in the face of that same abyss, you've become a much better husband and father than I ever was. You can deny or demur all you want, but I can see how sincerely happy Diedre is. And how happy and joyful your children, Zachary, Owen, Olivia, and Grace, are. And how much you're respected by friend and foe alike. There is your proof. There is your legacy!

And here is my proof. My legacy in you. These documents ensure financial security for generations to come. My will, power of attorney, retirement, investments and living trust. All I have left to offer.

When he was a rookie police officer just starting out, his father made the Blue Blooded Hound take out a life insurance policy along with his retirement accounts. At the time,

he didn't think life insurance was necessary -- he was twenty-two and going to live forever. But his father insisted.

The insurance agent he met gave his best sales pitch. "My young friend," he coerced, "do not deprive your future wife and children from the best life insurance policy this company can offer. Even though the chances of you, heaven forbid, dying 'on the job' are statistically low, it happens. And you should realize, for those who do, one hundred percent of families struggle financially trying to live off every cop's 'meager' pension! If you really are the protector I see you to be, then purchasing an Allstate High Risk High Reward Life Insurance policy for emergency services personnel is not just smart, but an act of faith. Now I know the premiums are a bit higher than your average policy, but they also cover all violent deaths and serious diseases barring suicide. And the payout, God forbid, should this ever happen, is worth millions of dollars. Compared to the premiums, how can you refuse the reward of security for your family for generations to come?"

I don't know why I said yes at the time, he wrote, I knew that insurance agent was just a carpet bagger looking to make an extra buck. But I did. And I paid those premiums nearly forty years – even when money was tight. But guess what happened in the end? I acquired a serious disease and, as a result, am sitting on a goldmine thanks to my rare form of cancer. One directly and distinctly covered in the fine print.

He checked his watch noting he had sixty more minutes. In sixty minutes, he was going to take a cab over to the hospice facility, check himself in, sign all the appropriate forms, and agree to all their terms. Then he would move in and get on with the business of dying. But not before leaving his will, and all appropriate documents, in a manilla envelope on Shawn's desk. Inside, he had also placed the keys to his locked basement room, the keys to his beloved '78 Chevy, his life insurance policy, living will, power of attorney, house deed, pension documents, and every other important piece of paper he

thought would be needed. The last thing he put in the envelope was his journal, which he had purchased on sale from Barnes & Nobel weeks earlier. He sealed the envelope, dropped it on the desk, and then called for a cab to pick him up.

Number one, the first entry written last, explained it all -- *leave your entire journal to Shawn unedited.*

In the final entry, Shawn would learn his father regretted most not being a better father. And considered fatherhood his greatest honor and achievement.

I'm sorry, he wrote to Shawn. Tell Jake, Maya, Abigail, and Lily so. I'm truly sorry for not being a better father to you than I was. You deserved my father and I gave you me. Well, I can't change the past or make up for all I failed to do for you. But I can leave this world letting you know two truths – I loved each and every one of you to the very core of my being! And I hope your own paths bring you true comfort and sincere joy. I know each of you gave me so much more many times over in return. Goodbye then. Love and care for each other as you always have. I love you! Your father.

Thus, he concluded, ends The Journal of the Blue Blooded Hound.

Two short weeks later, David Michael Hillsborough, 72 years old, died. The cause of death noted as malignant mesothelioma, stage 4 cancer, without chance of remission. An expected and painless death was arranged at the hands of certified medical professionals in accordance with policy and law to which he was surrounded by his family and friends. And a slightly overweight woman standing with her adult son just outside the doorway. Everyone had their chance to say goodbye. He had his chance to tell each and every one how much he loved them. And then he died.

After, when their father's body went off to be cremated, the five children, Jake, Maya, Shawn, and the twins Abigail and Lily, along with their spouses, and his twelve grandchildren, gathered together at their childhood home and held a small, private

family ceremony together. His middle child, Shawn, read passages from their father's journal. The same journal that, for many years after, they would refer to as *The Last Journal of the Blue Blooded Hound.*

The End.