

Permanent Scars

I Knocked on the Door and Hell Reignited In

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Preface

"Writing is magic, as much the water of life as any other creative art. The water is free. So drink. Drink and be filled up."

—Stephen King

"I do not carry such information in my mind since it is readily available in books. The value of a college education is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think."

—Albert Einstein

"The more sensitive you are, the more certain you are..."

—Marlon Brando

"Bipolar 1 should be called a brain disorder."

—Marlene Cordero, MD

I dedicate this novel that has been 30 years in the making to my soulmate, who rescued me and shows me every minute of every day what true love is.

No AI was used in the writing of this novel, other than to assist with the copyediting.

Part 1

Oto was 14-months old.

He calmly stood up and walked across the large room without falling.

Ana, his mom, couldn't understand it, unless somehow he was practicing on his own in his crib, and surely that wasn't possible.

When he was four-years-old, Oto had a dream that hairy monsters would grab him.

They would always take him underneath his bed, down to what seemed like hell, to torture him.

One night in real life, Oto was going to sleep, and in a dream he picked up a baseball bat.

When the hairy creatures tried to grab him in his dream, he beat the hell out of them, as they surrounded him in his bedroom.

The monsters never came back for him again.

Oto was five-years-old, and he was already saving pennies and nickels in a plastic Pinocchio from the top shelf in his bedroom.

When he reached up to grab the “bank”, he was standing on the bottom shelf, reaching up to the toy that contained all the coins he had managed to save up.

The top shelf couldn't support his weight.

The bottom shelf fell off its brackets, and he fell onto his bed below, but not before yelling out in pain as the top shelf crashed down onto his bed.

Before landing on his bed, the shelf hit him right above his left eye.

To this day at the age of 40 he can still see the scar.

Oto was five-years-old when he caught his first small trout in a stream with nothing but a short fishing line that was tied to a long stick, and a hook with a bloody worm impaled on it.

He pulled the small fighting fish out of the stream, and it landed on the river bank.

When his stepdad took the fish home he showed Oto how to bash its brains out on a rock, gutting the small limp trout by ripping out its organs.

They then fried up the delicious trout meat and devoured it together.

Chapter 1

Oto was 11 years old on that beautiful Spring day in May in Georgia when his stepdad crashed his Pitt's Special into the ground due to exhaustion (not suicide). He was practicing to be featured in the Georgia State Fair, but flew cargo jets for Hawaiian Airlines. Oto felt guilty because he had a love/hate relationship with his stepdad.

Oto stepped off the bus, driven by an old lady with purple hair, and into the warm sunshine. He opened the front door to the house when the yellow phone on the

wall began to ring. He picked it up, and his good friend Nolon was already quickly talking before Oto even got the receiver to his ear.

"Oto, your dad crashed his Pitt's Special in the field across from my house."

There was a slight pause on the phone.

"I ran over and in the cockpit your dad was slumped down in the seat."

Oto wasn't sure that he was actually hearing the words coming from Nolon.

"There was a piece of metal sticking out from his head and his brains were dripping down into his lap."

Oto dropped the rotary dial receiver and ran to the nearby garage, and opened it.

The Pitt's Special wasn't there, and Oto hadn't seen his stepdad for weeks. He suddenly felt like vomiting, and tried not to panic as he raced back and hung up the phone on Nolon.

Oto walked into the living room and looked out the large windows facing the front of the house.

He saw with horror several cars pulling up into the driveway, and now he was really panicking.

He opened the front door right before a man and a woman he had never seen before were about to knock.

They asked him if his mom was there, and one man whispered to the woman not to tell him that his dad was dead.

It wasn't long before strangers filled the living room, and Oto knew for sure now that what Nolon had described to him was true.

He sat in the living room feeling guilty because he couldn't cry.

He remembered how his stepdad began building the motor for the bi-plane in their garage back in Michigan, when the icicles were so long in the winter that he would

use a snowball to break them off and eat them like an ice cream cone.

He also remembered how months earlier, in the living room, his stepdad had been taping the wings of the bi-plane that he later painted out in the garage.

Other memories started flooding in on Oto.

He walked out the front door and saw his mom, Ana, in the car, pulling into the driveway. She had just come back from a shift of waitressing at a fancy burger restaurant.

In slow motion, he saw his mom park the car and look the stranger that Oto had never seen before right into her eyes. Oto thought he heard the woman whisper something to his mom.

Ana yelled out in what seemed like pain, and it was the most god-awful sound Oto had ever heard in his life.

She burst into tears before screaming once or twice more.

Oto walked back into the garage and saw his model airplane with broken wings lying on the ground in the corner.

His stepdad had walked him through every step to create the masterpiece, and it was a model, much like the Pitt's Special, in a way, with stretched cloth for the wings and a small gas tank that held high-end fuel.

The plane had two wires and a handle attached to it, and on a winter day in Georgia, his stepdad had started up the little engine by putting pressure on the propeller.

His stepdad stood in the field where he usually started his own Pitt's Special from, turning the speeding model plane around in circles, flipping the loud toy upside down by maneuvering the handle in his hand.

The plane moved up and down with a slow rhythm that mesmerized Oto. His stepdad asked him to step in close and join him in the circle, smiling as he handed

off the loud plane to him.

Oto panicked, quickly crashing the small plane into the grass, breaking the wings in half.

The day of the funeral arrived, and Oto was so happy riding in the limousine.

Due to the state of his stepdad's body, he was told by Ana that it would be a closed coffin.

Oto was laughing at the police escort that, for some reason, was blazing a trail for them in the limousine, even though it disturbed his mom.

He had never been in a limousine before, and he couldn't believe how the motorcycles with men in uniform providing the escort would pull up to red lights, rev their engines, and stop cars before speeding their shiny motorcycles through the intersection.

It wasn't long before they arrived at the big funeral hall that was filled with people.

Oto sat off to the side next to his uncle, whom he had once watched The Wizard of Oz with.

The two things he could remember about his uncle were how, at Denny's, he flirted with the waitresses and could use a fork to catapult a spoon into a jar of jelly.

He also recalled how his uncle was running once in the Arizona desert and ran into a sequoia cactus, screaming out in pain as the needles pierced his skin.

Oto listened to the music drifting around him, back near that closed coffin. Finally, he let go, and the tears rushed over him in waves.

Later that night, Oto tried to go to sleep. He remembered all of the different memories of his stepdad.

As he shifted around in his bunkbed, he recalled the times when he felt like he hated him.

Once he had found some matches. He tried to burn a dead bird on the ground to give it a mini funeral, but the nearby field caught on fire.

He jumped up and rode his bike away from the flames.

Luckily, a nearby neighbor had been mowing his field with a big riding lawnmower.

The old neighbor drove over in the lawnmower, and mowed a fire line that prevented the flames from spreading to the nearby houses.

The news traveled fast in the small community where he lived.

As Oto pumped the pedals on his bike, the muscles in his legs started burning, and they felt heavy as he rode home.

Somehow, his stepdad had already heard about the field.

As Oto opened the front door, he saw with horror his stepdad standing there waiting for him.

He had a smile on his face and a dark black belt in his hands.

Oto was ordered to bend over as his stepdad whipped him with it over-and-over again.

By some fortunate amount of luck, Oto had a wallet in his back pocket, so the blows didn't hurt so bad.

His stepdad figured that out and ordered Oto to unzip his pants and drop them with his underwear to the ground.

The lashes then left deep red marks, and the pain was intense. Just like when he had crashed the toy plane that Oto had built with his stepdad, the tears now

flowed down Oto's cheeks.

Back in his bunkbed Oto cried, remembering the intense pain from that day.

Just like when the toy wings had broken in half, he was so upset with himself, but he managed to smile before he went to sleep.

It was at least a year before the funeral that Oto lay out in the dry grass near the runway that was not far beyond the trees on the property of their house in Georgia.

He loved watching his stepdad in the Pitt's Special way up in the clouds, spinning and diving in his bi-plane before stalling out and pitching the plane straight down toward the runway, before buzzing the small field, shaking the ground that he was lying on.

On one of those passes, his stepdad flipped the loud bi-plane upside down, flying close to the ground before soaring back up to the clouds.

That was the day that Oto broke his arm playing football with the neighbors, not far from where he had burned the field to give the poor dead bird his own funeral.

For some reason he thought he could cremate the beautiful, unmoving wings.

Oto was one of the youngest players on the line, where he was playing as a wide receiver.

He only knew what he had been told.

He was supposed to run out and catch a football and make it into the pretend end zone.

He never forgot what happened next.

He managed to catch the ball that was a perfect spiral from his friend.

He then sprinted toward what he thought was the end zone, and his legs were pumping so fast he couldn't feel them.

One of the older kids ran faster than him and slid into Oto's legs, sending him down so hard onto the field that he had the wind knocked out of him.

Not wanting to cry and be called a sissy, Oto jumped back onto his feet, but his right arm was tingling.

Oto shook his tingling arm, thinking the fall had just bruised it. But it wasn't long before the bone in his right wrist snapped and was scraping against the inside of his skin.

There wasn't any blood, but Oto went immediately into shock and was transported by his friend's mom quickly to the hospital.

Since his stepdad was up in his plane and his mom was shopping in a nearby town, he couldn't be treated for the intense pain.

He did remember lying on a gurney in the hallway of the hospital, drifting in and out of consciousness for a couple of hours until his mom finally showed up.

He was given a shot in his exposed butt and didn't remember much after that.

Given the compound break in his wrist, Oto had to be rushed off to the emergency room.

But first he watched as the needle sank into the same right arm to pull out the blood that they needed to use for the surgery.

He recalled being up in a cold room with bright lights as a doctor looked at him and told him to count backwards starting at 10. Oto didn't make it past 7.

He later woke up in the same cold room alone and looked around, but nobody was there.

He noticed the hard white cast that started on his fingers and ran all the way up just underneath his right shoulder.

He was later put into a separate room, and his mom looked down at him with some tears in her eyes, watching a nurse tie his cast down to the bed, where Oto would later fight to go to sleep.

It was eventually morning and the cuff was removed from his cast, but he cried out loud when noticing how his favorite shirt, cut in half, was hanging from his neck.

On the way back home his mom stopped to get donuts.

Oto looked up and just happened to see the Blue Angels ripping through the air with a speed and sound that amazed him.

His friends met him back at the house.

He was shocked to find out that he was now a hero.

They all signed his cast with a Sharpie as they munched on the donuts.

The cast stayed on his right arm for six months, and at school, he had to learn how to write with his left hand, which was not easy to do.

He did manage to figure it out, though, and eventually he went back to the same hospital where he had the surgery so many months before.

The doctor came in, cutting off the cast, and asked him to put his arm up on a "table" where the X-Ray would happen.

Oto was telling his arm to move, but the muscles couldn't respond after so many months of non-use.

The results of the X-Ray showed that Oto's bones had healed.

The doctor gave him a small black ball that he was told to squeeze over-and-over to build the muscles back.

It hurt like hell whenever he used it, which wasn't often.

It was a few weeks after Oto's right arm and wrist were completely healed.

He couldn't believe that one afternoon he opened the garage door, only to see a new minibike that his stepdad gave him as a gift.

There was a red bow stuck onto the handle bars that simply said, "Don't crash."

Like the model airplane, Oto was afraid to ride the minibike at first, but his stepdad explained how to use it.

Unlike with the toy plane that Oto had slammed into the grass on that Spring day, he wasn't scared this time.

It wasn't long before Oto was racing up and down the road outside their home in the street that was almost always empty.

He found the narrow trails in the nearby woods and raced through them, yelling out at the top of his lungs.

When they lived in Michigan, one year before moving to Georgia, his stepdad came home one day with a BB gun.

Oto was lectured about how he had to be so careful and never shoot any animal or anyone.

He set up the targets in the basement, practicing for weeks until he could hit the middle of the target most every time.

He learned how to load the BB's into the small gun, but he felt a little guilty when he broke his promise once they were living in Georgia.

There were lots of squirrels in the woods, and he shot them from a long distance away.

The BB's never penetrated the skin of the jumping squirrels, but he couldn't help but notice how it hurt them.

They would quickly jump from branch-to-branch scrambling to try and dodge the small BB's that would whiz by them.

One time Oto was shooting some squirrels high up in the trees out in the woods behind his house.

His best friend was beside him, and he had a pellet gun that he would pump up and then kill the squirrels, watching as they dropped to the ground before he picked them up and bashed their heads on nearby rocks.

His good friend showed Oto how to skin the dead squirrels.

He would then rip out their guts, dropping them into a plastic bag.

They tied up the bubbly warm bag and swung it around.

Somehow they managed to get the bag to "sit" upon on a nearby power line that ran across the road from his house.

They used the rotting bag full of hot guts as target practice as flies buzzed around it.

Oto and his friend hid behind a nearby tree and couldn't believe it when a car drove under the bag, and it somehow dropped onto the windshield.

The car immediately lurched to a stop as the warm blood was wiped away by moving windshield wipers.

They ran as fast as they could back into the woods and never saw the car or the driver again.

Two weeks after the funeral, Oto decided to go back to school, even though he didn't have to because there were only a few weeks left before summer break.

The old yellow school bus turned around in the cul-de-sac near Oto's home, and the brakes squealed as it stopped outside.

Oto recognized that awful sound as he sat on the couch in the living room.

He grabbed his books and hurried outside, boarding the bus to take the one-hour trek to school.

It was the last day of school, and he had been up late the night before, working and reworking a poem that he wrote about his stepdad's death.

The poem wasn't too long, and he wasn't confident that it was even a poem.

He had written it down on an 8×5 piece of paper and was sure to stay inside the lines with his black pen.

Once he was sitting safely in his seat, he took out the poem on paper, reading it many times over-and-over before arriving at his elementary school.

After pulling up to the curb, Oto stepped off the bus and into the morning sun.

As Oto went through the doors to his class, he ran into Nolon who had called him that day on the phone. Nolon had dropped his math book onto the floor, so Oto picked it up for him.

Their first class was English, and Oto was nervous and made sure again that he had his poem ready.

As soon as it was his turn, he stood up and was shaking as he did his best to keep the paper still.

He launched into his first line and the once noisy class went silent.

It only took him a couple of few minutes to get through it before he sat back down.

His heart was pounding and once safely in his seat he was surprised to see all of his classmates staring at him without making a sound.

It was the last day of school before Oto was told by Ana that they would be moving to California, which he hadn't really accepted yet.

It just so happened to be the last day that he would write a poem until he was 17-years-old.

Oto wasn't sure how many days slid by before he climbed into the back seat of the maroon station wagon.

He didn't even mind not sitting in the passenger seat that was occupied by his mom's good friend Enne.

Enne had flown out to join them and help drive across the country from Georgia to California.

It was hot and muggy in the car, and the air conditioning barely reached Oto in the back seat.

He had been given a Rubik's cube by his stepdad the Christmas before the crash, along with a small "manual" that had some hints on how to solve it.

The trip would take many days, and he was so focused on solving the "puzzle" that he even managed to ignore his sister sitting next to him most of the time.

They would, of course, make many stops along the way, staying in motels and eating in the cheapest restaurants they could find.

Oto was so absorbed in his Rubik's cube that he managed to shut the world out around him.

He even managed to let his sister shove him to the side now and then to keep him from crossing the invisible line that she had drawn in the hot back seat of the car.

Somehow he solved the Rubik's cube before they arrived at his grandparent's house in California.

He really couldn't recall what happened to it.

But it was the last time he picked one up. He couldn't even guess how many of those plastic squares he had turned over-and-over until all of the colors lined up.

Chapter 2

Oto was 17-years-old and it was his senior year in high school when his first downswing, from what would later be called Bipolar 1, hit him like a ton of bricks.

Within a couple of months he had lost 40 pounds and could barely walk to the bathroom to take a piss and brush his teeth.

His brain seemed to be fighting itself, and whatever was happening hit his dilapidated body with full force.

Oto instinctually taught himself how to meditate and do deep breathing exercises.

Although the anxiety ripped through every part of his body, he could somehow read Isaac Asimov books — the Foundation series.

He had what was called a bipolar down swing, but he wouldn't know about that for many months to come.

Oto went from a 3.90 GPA and lettering in two sports, to dropping out of high school from a nervous breakdown, which was the last thing that he wanted to do.

At his high school around the corner, believe it or not, all of his teachers worked together, trying to finish what is the equivalent to a senior project at many universities.

Oto could barely make it to the bathroom down the hall to drink well water out of the sink, and crawl onto the toilet to piss.

He was weaker than he had ever been in his life and he had no idea why.

It was like having the flu that would never go away.

Oto just kept doing the breathing exercises, focusing on his toes and all throughout his body, but the anxiety never seemed to let up for very long.

As he lay there looking up at the ceiling he thought of his stepdad who had crashed his plane.

Back then he recalled how it was in May when he was 11, and how it was May again, but 6 years later.

He never focused too much on dates, other than birthday's of course, but he could feel how it was Spring again.

This time of year for some reason made him a little nervous, but never anything like how he was feeling now.

Oto's biological dad had divorced his mom when he was 4-years-old and had abandoned Oto for the most part.

His Dad was an alcoholic and Oto only saw him a few weeks every few years. But last summer when Oto had visited him for some reason things were different. His dad purchased a three-wheeler, gas-motored vehicle. Oto loved racing it out back in the Arizona "wash," which was a large dry desert that would fill up when there were massive rain storms.

Now in Nevada, there was so much sagebrush everywhere he looked, which reminded Oto of Arizona. In Arizona, however, that is the type of heat that when you spray water on your skin it instantly bubbles up like little blisters all over your arms and legs. He also thought about how both sides of his family knew how to keep secrets. Because of this, Oto couldn't know that his uncle on his dad's side of the family had Bipolar 1, which is what would later prevent Oto and his doctor's from knowing how to treat the illness.

Two days had passed since Oto had been thinking about his biological dad. He had a stabbing pain in his stomach that he had never felt before. He managed to get out into his 1978 Volkswagen Rabbit to drive himself down to the local doctor's office. He was still in his down-swing and his brain was crippled, but he managed to get there.

The doctor instructed him to lay flat on the table that was covered with that tissue-like paper.

On the walls of the office that he was ushered into hung paintings of old cowboys sitting around a campfire eating cooked beans.

Just the thought of cooked beans almost made him throw up.

The doctor instructed Oto to lay down on the table and gently pushed in on his appendix.

Oto nearly jumped off the table, howling in pain.

He felt a burning pain in his side where his appendix was located, and tears and snot started running down his face.

Ana had raised her son Oto as best she could. She had two other daughters and another son after all.

She was working down at the county courthouse in a small agricultural community somewhere in Nevada.

The phone rang at her small office inside the courthouse where she worked.

She answered it only to hear the town doctor, a woman's voice, on the other end.

"Ana, get over here right away. Your son Oto needs an emergency appendectomy and I think it may burst so you need to get him to an emergency room as soon as possible."

Ana grabbed her purse and fumbled for the keys, almost sprinting toward the old blue blazer that ran on diesel fuel.

She raced over to the doctor's office, nearly running an old woman hobbling across the intersection down.

The woman screamed at her and just barely made it across the street.

Ana was panicking and she just kept saying to herself, "Dear God, don't let my son die."

Ana made it to the doctor's office and once inside she saw the doctor helping her son get his shirt back on.

He was blowing his nose and wiping his eyes on a few tissues.

She saw his bony torso in the bright lights from the nearby lamps.

She usually didn't have to worry too much about Oto, but now she was panicking.

Oto managed to get into the car. "Hold on, Oto!" Ana said as gently as she could.

She left the doctor in the dust, so to speak, and said to herself, "I gotta get him to the hospital."

She wasn't sure if she was going 85 or 90 mph, but she did know she got him to the far away hospital in the city in one hour rather than the ninety minutes it usually took.

Somehow, to her surprise, she didn't get pulled over by any cops.

The blue Blazer was belching out diesel fumes that Oto could have sworn he could smell as he lay in the back seat.

The pain in his appendix was unbearable, and at every small bump, the seat would shake and he would moan out loud in pain.

They arrived at the hospital and Ana ran in to the emergency room yelling for help from the first nurse that she saw; a man wearing white scrubs.

She didn't know it but the doctor from the town she lived in had called ahead.

A team of doctors grabbed Oto out of the back of the car and put him in a wheel chair, racing to get Oto to be prepped for surgery.

"Hold on, Oto," she whispered. "God isn't about to send you to the next life if I can help it."

Oto was quickly pushed in a wheel chair at great speed through the hallways of the cold white hospital with all of the typical sites and sounds.

The "team" of doctors were prepped and ready to roll.

The only problem was that when the doctor pressed in on Oto's appendix, he experienced no pain.

The doctor expected Oto to yell out loud, but when he pushed even harder on his stomach there was no reaction from Oto at all.

The doctor was baffled, and so he did a pin prick on Oto's finger.

After getting the results from the drop of blood yanked from Oto's finger, he just looked at Ana and said, "Your son's glucose level is way too high."

He took Ana aside and whispered to her.

"Your son may have diabetes, but we need to run some tests to make sure. You and your son should go and get some air and come back later."

Ana thanked God for granting her prayers and was so relieved she stopped at the McDonald's drive-thru.

She purchased her son a large vanilla shake that he quickly sucked down.

Since they had an hour or so to kill, she drove over to a nearby library.

She asked the librarian where to find an illustrated book about diabetes.

Oto and his mom found a small couch, sitting down together as they looked through the book.

Oto gave his mom a baffled look as he saw the procedure in the book.

You see, he was afraid of needles and almost fainted thinking about pushing one into his own stomach several times a day.

They went back to the hospital, making their way into the doctor's office.

The specialist looked at his mom and said, "Well, I don't know how to tell you this. His glucose level is a little high, but nothing too outside the normal levels."

Ana and Oto were both looking at the doctor in confusion.

Oto was so relieved to hear he didn't have diabetes, but he just wanted something to be wrong with him.

At least then whatever that was killing him could be treated.

The thought of going back to the unknown hit him right in the gut and he began to cry again.

He was relieved of course as they left the cold hospital behind.

Ana parked the car in the real estate parking lot, leaving Oto out in the Blazer in the hot sun.

She walked into her office only to be told that the sale of the house that she had listed had fallen out of escrow due to the seller committing suicide on his front steps.

She was actually in the office for over fifteen minutes and then she remembered that her poor son was out in the hot car.

She walked quickly back to the Blazer, driving Oto back to the small town where they lived.

She helped get him into the house and onto the old couch in the family room.

"Oto, you know where the bathroom is. You must need to use it."

Oto was fumbling around in the bathroom. As he sat on the toilet, he looked in the mirror and saw his sagging body.

He didn't know if he had a tumor or how on earth he could lose 40 pounds in such a short amount of time.

Not long ago Oto was playing on a football team.

He was running several miles back then, but now he barely had enough energy to brush his teeth.

He was pretty sure he was going to die from something, and the doctors had no idea what was wrong with him.

Anna wasn't sure what to do next.

She looked at her son in his bed and tried hard not to break down in tears.

She was a Christian and was praying to God for guidance, but she just did her best to make it through each day, constantly worried about her son.

She decided the best thing to do would be to drive Oto to her pastor. After all, throughout her tough life she had always done that when she had no place else to turn to.

The drive to the church would take an hour or so.

She helped her son back into the car again, and they soon arrived in the church parking lot.

Ana got out of the car, helping her gaunt son out into the bright sunlight.

Oto walked into the dark church, trying to see what was around him.

He had walked in from the bright lights out in the sun.

He was having trouble seeing around the quiet church with nothing but empty pews to greet him.

His mom gently told him to follow her, so they proceeded to a door at the front of the church and she knocked on it.

Her pastor slowly opened the door and asked for them both to enter, but the pastor wanted to talk alone with Oto.

Ana waited out in the empty church, sitting down in an empty pew to give them some privacy.

As Oto took a seat across from him, the pastor that confirmed him a few years before began asking him a bunch of questions.

The anxiety was so acute that later when he made it back to the car, he didn't remember much about the meeting.

He couldn't shake the one memory, though.

"Oto, I have known you for several years. Look me in the eyes, son."

Oto did as he was asked, after all this man sitting across from him was in touch with God.

"Oto, have you ever had sex before? I don't mean just kissing, but actually having sex?"

Oto just looked down at the floor in front of him.

He wished he was back out in the hot car.

Oto couldn't speak, so he just nodded instead.

On the long ride back home, Oto watched the road that was a blur.
He had no idea why he was going to die, but he began to cry.
He now knew he was going straight to hell.

Oto knew for sure that being burned alive is the most painful way to die.
He also knew from confirmation with his pastor that he was going straight to hell for having sex without being married.
And he couldn't imagine being burned alive forever-and-ever.

Oto wasn't sure what time it was, but his mom drove him to his next appointment, which was with a psychiatrist.

Again, his memory was limited, but he did remember all of the books behind the "shrink".

Just like with the pastor a few days before, Oto sat across from the old man with glasses balancing on his nose, with a desk separating them.

The main difference was that in this case there were what looked like hundreds of books on some shelves behind the doctor.

Oto was asked to count backwards by increments of 7 from 100.

That was so easy for Oto that he finished within about 15 seconds.

The doctor also asked Oto a lot of questions to test his memory, and he actually enjoyed the discussion with this doctor.

After probing Oto and hearing his story, the psychiatrist prescribed anti-anxiety pills.

Of course at that time Ana had joined them and she took the prescription on the piece of paper, tucking in neatly inside her purse.

In front of both Ana and Oto the doctor explained that the best diagnosis he could come up with was that Oto had been perfect.

Oto listened to this and tried not to laugh.

"Ana, I don't know exactly what has happened to your son. But clearly he has failed recently at something."

She looked at the doctor and then at her son.

At this point she was willing to believe almost anything.

They left the office and she drove them over to a nearby pharmacy, filling the prescription of what were called anti-anxiety pills.

She didn't read what the brand or dosage was, but trusted the doctor that she had just met for the first time only an hour or two before.

From that day forward, Oto took the shiny pills that Ana would place into his outstretched hand.

She called the psychiatrist several times a week, and she did see a very small change in Oto, but nothing that would console her for very long.

Oto would spend most of his time in his bed.

He still looked up at the ceiling, but now he was able to focus much better on his deep breathing exercises.

Still, for a lot of the time, he would cry and still had no appetite.

Ana, like her son, was losing track of what day it was and she was having trouble eating.

Unlike him, of course, she had only lost a pound or two.

She was pretty sure only a week or two had passed when she finally got ahold of the psychiatrist on the phone.

"Ana," he said. "how is your son doing?"

Ana wanted to throw the phone across the room, but she took a deep breathe before saying, "He doesn't seem to be much better, although yesterday he ate a piece of toast and drank about half a glass of milk."

There was nothing but silence on the other end of the line, and Ana fought to keep control of herself.

"Ana, I can clear about fifteen minutes in my schedule for you and Oto, but it has to be at 2:45 pm."

At this point Ana didn't even hesitate before agreeing to that fifteen minute slot.

Ana arrived with her son and she felt like she had just been there.

She sat down in the chair and waited again as the psychiatrist ushered her son into his office and gently closed the door.

After 13 minutes had passed the psychiatrist came out of the office with Oto next to him. He asked Oto to sit in the chair, and had Ana come into his office.

In the last two minutes before he had to see his next patient he quickly explained to Ana once the door was closed what in his opinion was the best option.

He told her how there was a hospital nearby that could help her son, but she needed to go over there right now without even going home.

He explained to her that a bed had just become available.

It was one of those times that she just reacted.

Ana got back into the car with her son and drove straight over to the hospital after getting the address from the receptionist.

Chapter 3

As Ana drove Oto to the “facility” she tried to be brave, and felt this was the only way her son could get the help that he needed.

Checking into the hospital took a couple of hours and as she filled out paperwork attached to a clipboard she just watched her son now and then.

Oto sat on a couch that was orange and brown and stared at some other “patients” that were also being checked in.

It only felt to Oto like a couple of minutes had passed by, but actually it was two hours.

A large nurse in white came in and Oto followed him into the hospital.

Before leaving he hugged his mom and he watched her leave.

Oto was told to sit down at a table and was given a booklet with what turned out to be 360 questions and a small Scantron with bubbles to fill in with a #2 pencil.

He was told that he had to be monitored as he took the new medication, which had wiped out a lot of his memory.

The few things he did remember, however, was of course the questionnaire, group therapy, an 80-year-old man with a hearing aid, a young girl, and a woman in her forties.

The questionnaire caused him great anxiety.

There were questions he read over and over about torturing animals, and whether or not he wanted to harm himself.

After about an hour he jumped ahead and read a lot of the questions, but he just couldn't answer any of them.

He would very slowly fill in a bubble on the paper with his #2 pencil, and when he counted them, he thought maybe there were 20 that he finished.

At that point one of the "nurses" came up from behind him and grabbed the questionnaire away.

It was like lifting an incredible weight off of Oto's shoulders.

He was then able to eat some strawberry jello and some cold french fries.

Oto was able to watch some TV.

He later remembered watching a special news alert that showed a bus that had crashed into a rushing river.

The reporter on the TV was explaining that 17 passengers had drowned in the cold churning water, but somehow the driver and the rest of them got out in time.

He wasn't positive, but he was pretty sure that it was the same river where he used to catch trout and fry them up in a skillet.

He smiled as he remembered how the bones of the small trout liquified from the sizzling heat.

After cutting off the head and tail of the fish, he could eat them all, like warm fishy fries.

Oto was only hospitalized for a 72-hour hold, but it seemed like a year to him.

Although Ana was unable to see Oto, she did visit the hospital and give a nurse a bag of candy that was delivered to him, along with a book or two.

Oto's "bunk mate" was an 80-year-old man who stole Oto's candy in the middle of the night.

Oto woke up and saw him walking back to his bed with the candy.

Oto hopped out of bed and yelled at him, yanking the bag of candy away from the old man.

The man then shuffled with his gown dragging loosely on the floor behind him.

He walked right up to the sink that they shared and began pissing in it with a strange smile on his face.

Later, Oto felt sorry for the old guy, because the hearing aid that he wore made terrible screeching sounds at night and the old man would yell out in pain.

This prevented Oto from sleeping, but a nurse never showed up to help him.

Oto found it hard to go to sleep with the nurses laughing out in the hall.

He wasn't sure, but he thought they were laughing about the pain his bunkmate was in, and it didn't matter because they never came in to help him.

In group therapy, there was a 17-year-old girl with blonde hair and a fit body with tight jeans, wearing a white t-shirt.

Oto looked at the scars all over her right arm, along with the bandages that she said were from fresh wounds on her left forearm.

The young girl looked down at her feet, before continuing on with her story.

She explained to the small group that she had bulimia.

She explained how she would sneak downstairs in the two-story house and quietly open the refrigerator in the middle of the night, making sure she didn't wake her mom up.

She said she could feel the hunger in the pit of her stomach and how it was something she had to fill up.

She would grab all of the food that she could carry and quickly walk up the steps back to her bedroom.

She would carefully arrange all of the food on her bed before eating it as quickly as she could.

She explained, however, that she was still careful about it all, and didn't leave a single bit of food on her sheets.

"It was about three days ago, I think. I am not sure exactly, but as I ate my food on that particular night on my bed something just felt different inside," she said.

She went on, but this time she looked right into Oto's eyes until he looked away.

He could no longer look at her, so he instead looked down at his his feet that shifted around on the cold floor as he sat in the plastic chair.

In vivid detail she described how she opened a drawer where she always kept a sharp razor blade that she used to shave her legs.

She had put it there weeks before, but she went on.

"I can't really say why I put that blade in my drawer."

What she said next got Oto to look into her eyes again, and they were both crying at that point.

"I carefully picked up that blade in my right hand and slowly pressed it into my left forearm."

She didn't have to explain the pain that shot through her arm as the tip of the blade pierced the tight skin of her arm.

"I got dizzy and the room began to spin around."

She said she fought to stay focused on the blood streaming down her arm and onto the carpet of her room.

She didn't look at the actual place where the blade was moving back and forth as if it wasn't her arm at all.

She pressed harder and harder until everything went black.

At this point she paused and the tears that were streaming down her face were dropping onto her feet that were moving back and forth on the cold floor.

She sighed and explained how her mother, unfortunately, managed to find her before she died.

Of course she had only been told this later as she somehow recovered in an emergency room at a different hospital not far from her home.

Oto had never thought of killing himself, even though he wasn't sure if he had said yes or no on that questionnaire the first morning he had arrived in this hospital. He was intrigued by this girl, and the red ooze that came out from some of her bandages, but he never saw her again.

He couldn't recall if it was at lunch or dinner, or if it even really mattered, when a woman in her forties sat down across from him the next day at the lunch table. She was whispering some words to him that he had trouble hearing. She must have figured this out, so she got up and sat right next to him, and began whispering again.

"Have you been to the rubber room yet," she asked.

Oto had never heard of a rubber room, but the woman who had a small scab above her lip with breath that smelled like chocolate pudding went on.

"Don't worry, you will if you are here long enough," she said.

She smiled, explaining how that very morning she had been drugged and put in a straitjacket and locked up in the white room with padding on the walls.

She had thrown herself with all of her strength against those pads she said with a big smile.

Eventually, though, two nurses had opened the door to the room and pushed a needle into her left arm where the straight jacket didn't cover her skin.

It didn't take long for the drugs that swirled around inside her to work their magic.

She then sat down until the nurses came back in and removed the straitjacket.

The 72 hours actually slid by pretty fast.

Oto was told on his last day that he was being released that his mom would be coming to pick him up.

"You need to back up your belongings and bring them to the front desk," the nurse said.

It was the same nurse that had walked him into the hospital when he first arrived.

Oto walked back into the room that he had tried to sleep in every night.

He wasn't sure, but if he had to give a number he would say possibly that he got around two to three hours of sleep a night.

Oto packed up his belongings and placed them into a clear plastic bag that the nurse had given him.

He dropped the candy into the bag that he hadn't even touched, except to yank it from the hands of the old man that was not in the room at that moment.

He also slipped in the books that he had not even looked at during those three days.

The nurse that had been watching Oto closely took the plastic bag away from him and left the room.

Oto turned around to see the old man that he had shared the room with shuffling in before heading over to his bed.

The wrinkled man slowly sat down on his bed before looking Oto straight into his eyes.

The man kept adjusting his gown to cover up his knees as best he could.

He ran his hands slowly through what little amount of hair he had on the top of his head.

The old man was moving his feet around that dangled off the floor as if he was cold.

He just kept looking into Oto's eyes and gave him a big smile.

The crooked brown teeth are what Oto would always remember after the nurse walked back in and ushered Oto out of the room.

Oto didn't look back at his roommate.

Even years later Oto would never forget that smile.

He would remember though, how numb he had felt at the time.

He hadn't felt any emotion at all.

But he did remember the fear that seemed to knot itself deep inside of him.

Oto stood on the side of the glass door that he had been trapped in for several days.

He watched, without smiling, as his mom suddenly appeared on the other side.

He had been looking down thinking about what he had experienced.

The nurse unlocked the door and gave Oto a gentle push.

He helped Oto walk out into the room where Ana was filling out paperwork again.

Oto watched her hand as she wrote down her signature and then looked up at her son.

She couldn't be sure, but she thought that he looked much calmer and his eyes seemed a bit clearer.

She was relieved as Oto slowly followed her back out into the bright sunlight and helped him get into the Blazer.

Ana slowly drove her car out of the empty parking lot and onto the busy street.

She was focused on the cars that were moving by as she headed back toward their home out in the sagebrush that was at least an hour or two away.

She didn't look over at her son, and he was grateful for that.

The tears were flowing again down his cheeks, but he quickly wiped them away and focused on the blur of the road that went by.

Chapter 4

Once Oto was released, he returned home again, worried about how much of his anxiety was going to return, and when it surely would, what he was going to do in order to survive it.

He was seated at the kitchen table, cranking away on his 10-key adding machine.

The sound of it, spitting out the numbers on the small sheet of paper that churned from the top of the adding machine, somehow soothed his mind a bit.

The goal that he kept to himself was how he was determined to return to the classes at his high school.

Oto wasn't even sure at this point when he stopped driving himself to school in his 1978 VW Rabbit that was still parked out in the driveway.

It sat, unused, for the many days as he stared up at the ceiling in his bedroom.

He somehow knew that he needed to keep swallowing down the same shiny pills that he had been forced to take in the hospital.

He was pretty sure it had only been a few days since he had arrived back home, but already what he had gone through in that hospital seemed so far away.

He focused again back on the "homework" he had out on the table next to his adding machine.

He was so bored at the beginning of his senior year at the local high school because he had already earned enough credits to graduate.

Before his breakdown, he had been juggling several remote correspondence courses, and one of them covered advanced accounting.

The lessons were mailed to his house every week, and after completing them, he would mail them back to the BYU University professor who was in charge of grading and verifying completion of the course.

Oto was still feeling anxiety every minute of every day, but he was now only about 30 pounds underweight.

He was actually able to slowly talk, spending some time each day with his mom, when she came home from work.

He did his best to listen to her telling him about her day.

Back again at his adding machine, he was able to move his fingers quickly over the smooth keys.

After about an hour, he actually finished a couple of pages of homework he was way behind on.

He hadn't received back the last packet that he had finished several weeks before from his professor, and he was afraid that he would be dropped from the course. He paused to look at the columns on the paper that were lined up in such an orderly fashion.

He heard a knock on the front door and walked over and opened it.

The sun was bright and he had to squint to see who was standing there.

It was the math teacher who would also look over Oto's lessons before mailing them back to the professor.

"Hello, Oto," the teacher said.

"I was wondering if you could help me with a couple of problems in the last lesson you finished weeks ago."

Oto knew that the teacher was meeting with students at a nearby town who were doing what they could do, with the help of the man standing on his steps, to get through their lessons.

His teacher quickly explained how there was one student in that group that actually was doing his best, and was completing the exercises in each lesson.

"There are a couple of advanced problems in that last lesson you finished, and I am wondering if you can help me with them?"

Oto followed his teacher out the front door, and was soon sitting in the passenger seat of the old white truck.

The man sat in the driver's seat and pulled out the lesson that he had on the floor of his car.

He opened up one of the papers and set it on Oto's lap.

There was a problem that was circled with a question mark next to it.

As the teacher explained how he had tried to solve the problem, he pulled a cigarette out of his shirt pocket, lighting it up with a match that he struck on the metal steering wheel.

Oto focused on the problem at hand.

He always did his best in life to give it his all, but today like most days, the anxiety was making it hard for him to focus.

He studied the problem and searched his memory.

Oto looked over at the smoke swirling from the lit cigarette.

He hated the smell of smoke because it always gave him a headache, and he was pretty sure that was going to happen.

Oto smiled, though, for the first time all day.

He looked over at his math teacher before saying, "Believe it or not I did complete this advanced problem a few weeks back."

Ignoring the smoke and the pang in his gut, he explained exactly how he had solved the problem.

After about fifteen minutes of Oto gagging on cigarette smoke, he had explained enough of his solution to his math teacher until he could solve it on his own.

The math teacher laughed and put out his cigarette in the "ashtray" in the middle console of his dashboard.

“Oto, I don’t know how you do what you do. Son, I get it now. Okay, you better get back into the house because I need to get going so I can help the kid in my class.” With that, Oto left the car with relief, and stumbled back into the house.

For the rest of the summer Oto worked for Ana’s boyfriend named Renner, who was actually more of a father than his biological dad ever was.

But he still had a week or so to get ready for the new job.

Each day, with the help of the pills, he got a little bit better.

The day before Renner drove up in his Ford F-150, Oto was actually able to sit down and eat a small meal.

He weighed himself on the scale every morning and he was now only about 20 pounds underweight.

Oto had already packed up his adding machine and some old clothes that he thought would be best to wear at the Ready Mix plant.

Ana was very worried about whether or not Oto would be able to do the job he was hired for, but she trusted Renner and gave her son a long hug before he left.

She noticed for the first time that the Ford F-150 that left the driveway was the same beige color of Oto’s VW Rabbit that he left parked on the side of the house.

Oto did his best as he worked for Renner at the local Ready Mix plant, but he still wasn’t back to his “old” self. He was feeling anxiety most of the time.

"Oto," he said, "I will give you three days to improve and do the job I hired you for, but if I don't see any progress I will have to drive you home this weekend and hire someone else to help me out."

There was no way in hell Oto was about to go back home and admit defeat.

He stopped taking his pills at lunch that day, because he believed they were making it hard for him to concentrate.

That day he didn't feel much different, but at breakfast the next day he felt better than he had in a long time.

He sat in the old trailer that smelled like sweat and cement dust, behind his old desk, that he had gotten used to.

He was actually able to eat half of his warm breakfast burrito before tossing the rest of it in the trash.

There was plenty of downtime at the plant when the Ready Mix trucks were out pouring "mud" at job sites.

There were two things that Oto loved to do in his spare time.

The first was to hit a punching bag that hung in one corner of the trailer where he spent most of his time that summer.

It felt so good to slam his fists into the hanging bag.

The other thing was to practice hitting flies with a rubber band.

Oto used the largest rubber bands that he could find on his desk and actually got pretty good at hitting flies when they landed on his desk.

This skill that he acquired actually came in handy.

One afternoon Renner walked into the trailer after finishing a cement slab with a trowel out in the hot sun.

Whenever there was extra "mud" that came back in a mixer they would pour it out in the "yard" and create a smooth slab to cut down on the dust.

"Oto, what are you doing with those rubber bands?"

Oto of course told him.

"Well, if you can hit and kill the fly that is over near me, about ten feet away, then I will treat you out to a nice dinner.

Oto didn't hesitate. He took aim at the fly, nailing it with his first shot using the rubber band.

The poor thing dropped dead from the hit onto the dusty floor.

Oto had never eaten lobster before.

The restaurant they sat out that night was amazingly good.

Oto ordered the biggest steak and lobster that he could find on the menu.

Renner even had some melted butter brought over in a small tin cup.

Oto slowly cut the delicious seafood meat, savoring every incredible taste that burst in his mouth.

The steak was also cooked perfectly, and he took his time eating the meal that he would remember for the rest of his life.

The only other major event that Oto remembered from that summer, besides the fact that the anxiety finally went away, was an accident that he had driving one morning at 5 am.

He was driving Renner's Ford F-150 driving back from a weekend in the small town where he had his complete breakdown.

He had been exhausted after drinking a bit the night before.

Oto was driving on a curvy mountain road, and was doing his best to stay awake.

Renner had drifted off to sleep, since he also had been drinking a bit the night before as well.

Oto felt like he was going to fall asleep at the wheel.

He cracked open a bottle full of water and dumped it all over the back of his neck.

It was like getting hit by some lightning, which jerked him fully awake.

About fifteen minutes later Oto drove around a blind curve in the rough road.

There standing right in front of him was a giant buck. The deer was a five point.

Oto would later remember how Renner had told him about his hunting adventures that he had high up in the mountains.

Renner had plenty of experience killing and skinning deer with his high-powered rifle.

After killing a buck he would carry the freshly-carved meat out on a donkey that he kept down at camp.

The buck had just finished a long drink from a nearby running creek, and he looked Oto straight in the eyes.

In that moment Oto would later recall that he had seen the water dripping from the deer's open mouth.

Oto tried swerving around the unmoving animal standing in the middle of the road. There just wasn't enough time to go around the beautiful animal.

The truck that Oto was driving slammed into the deer with the left tire of the truck. Right before that moment Oto had looked down at the speedometer and noticed that he was racing through that turn at 50 mph.

The deer hit the pavement with a loud thud.

Renner was pulled out of his sleep in seconds, nearly hitting the side window that he had been resting against.

Oto panicked and was shaking, but Renner calmly told him to pull off on the side of the road.

Oto of course immediately did that and shut off the idling truck.

Unfortunately, the left tire had broken the back of the suffering deer that was trying to get up off the pavement, but just couldn't manage it.

Renner didn't hesitate.

He reached into the rack in the back seat of his truck, grabbing his favorite rifle.

He loaded it with a buckshot bullet, sending the bullet into the chamber, and cocked the weapon.

Renner quickly walked over to the deer and without hesitating he shot it straight in the head.

In a second the suffering animal lay still on the pavement and Renner pulled the warm carcass onto the side of the road so nobody would drive over it.

They were thirty minutes late arriving at the Ready Mix at six in the morning instead of at five-thirty.

Renner had made Oto drive the rest of the way there, because like he had calmly said, "When you get bucked off a horse, you don't hesitate, you get right back on."

Once Oto parked the truck in the "yard", Renner quickly jumped out and started up the loader.

They had a 50 yarder scheduled and they were late getting to the job with the first mixer.

Renner immediately loaded into the hopper the right quantity of rocks and sand and began batching 8 yards of "mud" into the spinning drum of the mixer.

The mixer was always so loud under the hopper, because the engine of the big truck had to be revved up while it was in neutral.

The drum could then quickly spin around as the "mud" was being poured inside.

Later that morning, Renner and Oto were eating cold turkey sandwiches.

He looked over at Oto with pride and simply said, "Oto, I still can't believe that the deer you hit didn't damage my truck at all."

"The only way I could even tell that anything happened was the hair and blood that came off the buck and was stuck to the left front bumper."

"I pulled that off right before handing you the sandwich you are devouring."

Chapter 5

Oto could smell the pepperoni pizza cooking away in the brick oven.

Ana had driven Oto in the car for four hours to check out a college in California.

He was living in a small town in Nevada, but couldn't wait to move to California to live in a college town and live life on his own.

As Oto waited for their number to be called so he could eat the pizza, he watched the big screen TV live for the Space Shuttle take-off.

With horror, he saw it explode in seconds after lift-off.

The space shuttle came apart in the sky like something out of a Star Wars movie.

Somehow Oto was still hungry and ate the pizza, but it didn't taste the way he thought it would.

He wiped away a small tear running down his face that dropped into the sizzling cheese on his plate.

They drove over to the college and Oto waited with Ana until they were finally seen by the dean.

Oto had been accepted at a top Arizona school for Accounting, so he thought he had a good chance of getting into that major at the university in California.

The dean saw them in, and laughed when Oto said he wanted to major in Accounting. The dean informed him how they hadn't let anyone into Accounting in at least eight years.

Oto then asked about the English department and was laughed at again.

Oto was told that he should start at a nearby junior college and get his AA degree before transferring to the four year college.

Ana drove him to the junior college, and after going through a lengthy application process he found out right then and there that he had been accepted.

He would just need to wait a year so he could become a California resident, since then the classes were much cheaper.

He got excited about majoring in English and readily signed up for some classes.

Oto turned the volume control up as he listened to Genesis and drove his Volkswagen Rabbit out to the ocean that was 30 miles from the apartment he was now living in.

He was alone, it was about three in the morning, and he had the pedal to the floor.

He had his window down and the cold wet fog enveloped his car with a smell that can only come from the ocean at that time in the morning.

He raced around the turns at 70 mph and he could "feel" the wheels of his beige German car squeal a bit through the turns.

He finally "arrived" and parked his car two blocks from the ocean.

Oto ran the rest of the way down into the cold waves that crashed onto his tight jeans and t-shirt.

Although he usually avoided the waves during the day, that night he danced in them and yelled out at the top of his lungs.

He dropped down on the dry sand and spat out what stuck to his wet cheeks and his dry lips.

Oto hadn't slept in four days, so he looked at the thick fog around him and drifted off into sleep for a couple of hours.

It was the sound of a leaf blower that woke him from his rest.

He sat up and was so cold he felt like an icicle was stabbing into his cold armpits, and his jeans were still soaking wet.

Oto quickly walked back to his car and found some old shorts that had Taco Bell beans smeared on them.

He managed to slowly pull off his soaking wet pants and underwear since nobody was around and pulled up the dry smelly blue shorts.

Oto immediately felt some relief and felt better than he had in all his life.

At least that was how he would describe it to his psychiatrist years later.

Oto was starving so he got back into his Rabbit and drove fast, but not too fast, back to the city he now lived in.

He spotted a Denny's that he hadn't seen before and pulled over.

Oto went to the counter and ordered two "grand slam" platters of food and quickly shoveled them into his mouth until he was finally full.

When the bill was given to him he went to his back pocket to pull out his wallet.

He suddenly remembered with dread that he had left it next to his bed the night before.

He didn't dine and dash, but instead went to a pay phone and called his mom.

Ana had just finished showering in her one-bedroom apartment that she had rented after following Oto to the new city she found herself in.

She had a good amount of money saved from selling some ranches out in the Nevada sagebrush months ago, but had to find a job so she could keep her reserves.

She figured she had enough money for about seven months, but would need to quickly find a job in this new city that Oto had returned to.

Oto refused to listen to her when it came to anything about budgets.

Her house was pale green on the outside and pink on the inside, but was only a few blocks away from the beach.

She had to admit that she enjoyed taking long morning walks in the sunny hot sand.

She was watching a beautiful sunrise, drinking coffee, and smoking cigarettes, when the phone rang.

She picked it up and was surprised to hear her son on the line.

She couldn't believe what he was rambling on about. It was something about dry eggs and how he had no money to pay the waitress.

Oto told her that he had offered to do the dishes, but the waitress had said no, and was threatening to call the cops on him.

Anna always parked her blue Chevy Blazer three blocks from her house because it was too big to fit into the tiny driveway of her rented home.

She had put out her cigarette the minute she had slammed the phone down.

She quickly left the smoldering remnants of her Marlboro Slims in the ceramic ashtray that she had purchased in the shell-shack a block away.

She pulled her Blazer up to the Denny's parking lot and tried not to step into the small pool of what looked like yellow vomit she had unfortunately parked near. She yanked open the grimy door to the greasy spoon restaurant. She saw Oto sitting on a stool, talking to what looked like several waitresses at once.

She walked over to him and gave him all of her cash. It turned out to be a twenty-dollar bill that she had planned to use to buy a pack of cigarettes. The money was just enough to cover the bill with a small tip. Oto smiled as his mom turned around and left, and he didn't see or talk to her again for a couple of days.

Oto managed to stay up for three more days and nights without sleeping. The old apartment room where he currently lived had posters taped to the walls of women drinking Michelob and Coors beers that he had picked up at an empty bar the night before. It was 2 am, the perfect time to talk to those students who were also going to the JC.

Oto loved talking about politics, or any subject at all actually. He discovered that he could verbally joust with anyone who could pull an all-nighter with him.

It never took too long for a person to get worn down and then they would go to sleep.

He didn't mind at all because he would then just move on and hang out with those early birds who woke up to go jogging.

Oto had more strength than he could ever remember having in his life.

He loved jogging with young girls in tight leggings that seemed to be everywhere in the lively college town.

After the jogs they would go out and get some orange juice and toast.

Luckily, he never left his wallet in his room again.

He had plenty of money now that he had cashed in the thousands of dollars he was awarded from the scholarship he had received from high school.

But he didn't worry about how much money he was spending. It just didn't seem that important to him.

Oto would lose track of how many hours he was awake and how many hours he slept. He went to every party that he could, especially those that served alcohol, staying out until at least 2 in the morning.

He and all of his new "friends" would then drive over to the packed Taco Bell, hanging out and discussing all of the parties from that night.

That particular Taco Bell happened to be the busiest on the West Coast.

On this particular night he was flirting heavily with one gal who was giving him lots of eye contact. She was working behind the counter doing several things at once with ease.

He worked up the nerve to ask her out, but she shut him down right away.
He didn't really care, because he was having the time of his life.

The next night he was racing his Rabbit again right up to the speed limit as quickly as possible. He yelled out his window, but never actually went over the speed limit by more than five miles per hour.

He couldn't believe it when he looked back in his mirror and saw the blue and red lights behind him.

He of course immediately pulled over.

The cop slowly walked up to him and asked for his license and registration.

When Oto reached over and opened his glovebox, a full warm and unopened can of Budweiser rolled out and landed on the floor on the passenger side floor of his car.

He looked at the cop after rolling down his passenger side window that barely even rolled up in his car.

He gave the cop his license and registration and was trying to stay calm, at least that was what he thought he was doing.

The cop opened the can of beer and poured it out on the curb, gave Oto a warning, and for some reason he wasn't handed a ticket.

The cop then deposited the dripping can in a nearby trash that was overflowing onto the ground.

Oto had made friends with a 21-year-old student that he met in his psychology class at the junior college.

He was only 18, but she bought him a six-pack of beer that Oto then carried back to his apartment complex.

It was a hot day and he was sweating, wishing he had driven rather than walked with the six-pack in his sweaty hands.

There was a basketball court outside his bedroom where the men's basketball team from the JC would "scrimmage".

Oto was never able to play with them because they were way too good. In high school he had played basketball, but he was really just a bench-warmer.

That all changed, however, when he handed out the six beers when the players took a break.

After slamming down the cold brew they let him join them on the court.

Oto felt like superman.

Although he was only 5 feet 10 inches tall, he somehow managed to "snuff" one of the athletes when the six-foot-three dude went in for a slam dunk.

Later that night Oto's sister, Hanah, pulled up in her Honda, and told Oto to hop in.

He didn't think anything of it at the time.

He was always up for an adventure so he hopped in.

Oto had no idea where they were going, but once they were driving 75 down the highway he opened his window and yelled into the night sky that he would soon be the President of the United States.

When they stopped at a gas station, Oto quickly walked into the bathroom and took a long piss.

After drying his hands on his shirt, he walked out into the store and grabbed some candy. He walked out to the car not thinking about whether or not he had paid for it.

Hanah walked quickly over to the small man working behind the counter, apologized, and quickly paid for the candy.

She then ran back out to the car where Oto was sitting.

"Oto, what the hell were you thinking in there. It is as if you just don't think at all, and just do stupid shit."

Hanah started up her car and quickly got back on the freeway.

She glanced briefly over at her brother.

"Can you please roll up that window and stay in the car?"

Chapter 6

Hannah pulled the Honda up into the driveway of her grandma and grandpa's house.

She was exhausted from the four-hour trip across several freeways to get there.

Her back was hurting and she asked her grandma for some Tylenol as soon as she got into their house.

Her grandparents were waiting for her, since she had called them before picking up Oto.

The three of them just looked at him.

He was so excited, because he had no idea that this car adventure would end up with him at his grandparent's house.

When Oto was 13 he worked for his grandpa out on a peach orchard in the summer when it was 105 degrees and the humidity factor was 80 percent.

His grandpa paid him \$3.35 an hour, which was the going rate at the time.

Oto would hoe a three foot perimeter around 3,000 peach orchard trees in the first month at work, because the weeds couldn't be reached with a mower.

The blisters eventually became callouses, and after three and half weeks he finished the entire orchard.

Oto thought back to that simpler time and recalled that one time his grandpa dropped him off at another orchard that was being irrigated.

Oto had eaten two bean burritos with extra cheese and no sauce and scarfed it down. That usually was okay, but on this particular afternoon it felt like hot lead in his stomach.

He couldn't wait to get home, so he knelt down in the running water in the orchard and relieved himself.

He had nothing to wipe with, so he just pulled up his jeans, finishing up with the irrigating.

It was a few weeks later that Oto was pulling down a 500-pound bin of peaches off a trailer. It had a bunch of metal rollers on the trailer so the bins could slide off

and onto the ground to be picked up with a fork-lift.

There were a few rollers that weren't working, so instead of just sliding off the trailer, he had to go and pull the wood bins down the "ramp" to help them drop off the trailer.

The boy who was driving the tractor accidentally "popped the clutch", and the bin full of peaches fell off the trailer.

Unfortunately for Oto, he was trapped in between two bins, and as one of the bins dropped off the trailer it landed on his foot.

By some stroke of luck Oto somehow managed to pull his left foot out just as the heavy bin dropped down onto it.

Oto's grandpa was busy running the forklift so couldn't hear him scream out in agony.

Oto limped over to the nearby lawn, collapsing on the grass lawn.

His grandpa saw this out of the corner of his eye.

He quickly shut down the loud forklift, running over to see what had happened to his grandson.

His grandpa went inside the nearby house and grabbed ice, wrapping it into a towel that he grabbed from the kitchen.

He then ran out and had Oto elevate his left leg on a nearby rock, gently placing the ice on his ankle.

Oto recalled the pain shooting through his foot, but he was soon in shock and not feeling anything.

His grandpa rushed him to the hospital where they quickly took an X-ray of his foot after waiting for an hour in the emergency room.

The X-ray showed how there was only a small chipped piece of bone in the corner of his foot. The bone was fractured, but luckily it had stayed in place.

He was told he wouldn't even need a cast, just a boot to wear for a few weeks, but he couldn't walk at all on it during the time it took to heal.

His grandma took good care of him, bringing him food while he recovered in bed.

Eventually, after about five days slid by, Oto was able to limp around and use crutches.

He was feeling so much better so he decided to take a trip to the mall with his grandma.

Once they got there and parked Oto felt fine, but he wasn't used to getting around with crutches.

Halfway to the first store his arms were burning, and he was having trouble catching his breath.

He caught up with her and he sat down on a bench as his grandma went into Gottschalks to buy some "old lady" underwear.

The memory of that summer came flooding back to Oto as he climbed out of his sister's blue Honda Accord.

He had so much fun after work that summer long ago, hanging out with his grandpa, drinking A&W Root Beer and eating Cheeto Puffs.

The smooth soda was of course out of a cold can that would sweat in the living room where they would talk about work from that day.

At night he would stay up late with his grandma. She would drink Kahlua and cream at night as they watched old westerns on TV.

Oto was worried about his grandpa.

Every night before limping back to his bedroom he would have to slowly push himself out of his comfy recliner.

He had faithfully driven Greyhound buses for over three million miles in his 30 years of service.

Unfortunately, Oto's grandpa drove the older buses that had a clutch instead of an automatic transmission, which took a toll on his left leg.

His grandpa would smile at him and just say he had to get the old leg "going".

Oto opened the door to the garage with Hannah right behind him like she was flanking him or something.

He was instantly worried because he saw his grandma and grandpa pacing in the kitchen like they had been waiting for him.

His grandma had some type of pill in her hand.

As soon as Oto walked into the kitchen she held it out, looked him in the eyes, and told him to take it.

"Sorry, but no thanks, grandma."

She then handed the pill to grandpa and he did the same thing.

Oto replied back in the same way.

Oto's grandpa then raised his voice and yelled at him, which he had never done, so Oto took the pill, dry-swallowing it.

What Oto didn't know at the time was that the pill was 20 MGs of Zyprexa, which was like shooting an elephant with a tranquilizer dart.

The medication was extremely powerful, and before Oto knew it, he was fast asleep on the same couch where he had fought off pneumonia five years before.

Oto was told later that he slept for 23 straight hours.

When Oto woke up he felt more rested than he had in weeks.

He was delighted to see that Ana, his mom, was also there to greet him.

Ana just whispered to Oto, "We are going on a new adventure. Don't worry we will have lots of fun."

Ana felt bad about lying to her son.

It wasn't long before Oto's sister joined them in the Blazer along with his grandma and grandpa who were "posted" on both sides of Oto in the back seat.

He didn't mind at all being scrunched in the middle, and it wasn't long before he was talking a mile a minute about one of the nights he recalled from the prior week.

Unlike the trip to his grandparent's house, nothing eventful happened along the way as they drove to wherever they were headed.

It was roughly four hours later that they pulled up and parked outside a hospital in Nevada.

They all got out of the car to stretch their legs after such a long drive.

Oto followed his mom into the hospital and was instantly greeted by a clean air-conditioned room.

At the check-in desk Oto watched as a nurse gave Ana a clipboard with a bunch of paperwork attached to it.

Ana filled it out as she stood at a desk.

Her parents and daughter walked over to a nearby restaurant and waited there so Ana was alone with her son as she gave a receptionist her insurance card to go along with the paperwork.

It wasn't long before what looked like a 250-pound male nurse entered the small room.

The nurse in white approached Oto and told him to follow him.

Ana was right behind them both and just told Oto, "Don't worry son, everything will be fine."

This reassured Oto, so he followed the nurse with his mom right behind him.

They approached a white door that had a tiny glass square in the middle of it.

The glass had metal wires running through it.

The "window" reminded Oto of electrical wires that he once saw in a magazine.

The caption underneath the photo said simply that the wires were cooking the chicken's brains so they wouldn't feel as much pain as their feathers were ripped from their skin.

Chapter 7

Oto was surprised that he was ushered through the door of the hospital that was almost all in white.

He jumped a bit when the door slammed shut behind him.

Ana was on the other side of the locked door and he looked back at her through the wired, glass window.

He saw the tears in her eyes and he could hear her screaming, "Otto, I am sorry!!"

Oto felt nothing at all at this point.

The large, smelly nurse grabbed Oto by the arm and turned him around until they were face-to-face.

"Sit down in this desk against the wall. And shut up and don't say a word. I have a headache and don't want to hear even a yawn coming out of your mouth!"

It just so happened that it was exactly 12 noon when the time started for Oto to be confined against his will.

He later learned that he was locked up in an adolescent hospital with 15 to 17-year-old boys and girls for a two week involuntary hold, and there was no possible way of escaping that cold, hard fact.

The small green and yellow pill that he was told to swallow with some ice water was shiny and smooth.

It was 300 Mgs of Lithium Carbonate, but not the generic kind.

He asked the nurse what would happen if he didn't take it and he was laughed at.

"Well, then, that will be fun, because I will force you to take it."

Oto was looking the nurse in the eyes and he could tell he wasn't bluffing, so he took the pill and drank down the entire cup of iced water to chase it down.

The nurse walked back to Oto and made him open his mouth and lift his tongue to make sure he had actually swallowed it.

This was something that Oto eventually got used to doing.

The nurse sat back down behind his desk.

Oto couldn't help himself. He was soon asking the large nurse in white what his name was. The nurse just ignored him.

Oto watched the clock on the white wall slowly tick away until it was 2 pm, but to him it felt like just a couple of seconds had passed.

At exactly 2 pm the nurse walked over, but this time with two shiny pills in his meat-like hand.

"Take these now," he said handing Oto another paper cup with iced water in it.

Oto didn't hesitate this time, he did what he was told.

This time it was two 300 Mg pills of Lithium Carbonate. He quickly swallowed them down with the water. This time, though, he instantly felt queasy.

He was sure that he was going to vomit on the floor in front of him.

He had taken 900 Mgs of the shiny element, the lightest metal on earth, in the span of his first two hours in the hospital.

It wasn't like anything he had taken before. It left a metallic taste in the back of his throat and his body tried to get rid of the element that he was swallowing against his will.

Later on, he would understand that it wasn't just that day when he had to take these poisonous-like pills.

Much later he would have to come to grips that he had to do it for the rest of his life.

He managed to keep the pills down, and then promptly asked the nurse for some paper and a crayon.

The nurse brought it over to him about fifteen minutes later.

Oto politely took the front and back of one blank page of white paper and quickly scribbled out and filled both sides with the smallest print he could muster.

He had no idea what he wrote down, but he felt a little bit better.

The nurse came and grabbed the paper and crayon away from him and he never saw either of them again.

It wasn't long before Oto felt his bladder was going to burst.

"Please, can I go to the bathroom?"

The nurse laughed and told him to piss his pants.

Oto refused to give him that satisfaction of leaving a puddle of his own piss in the chair and onto the floor that he had almost vomited on thirty minutes before.

The nurse waited another thirty minutes before finally ushering Oto over to a bathroom in the hallway.

Oto had a hard time pissing, even though the pain in his bladder took his breathe away.

The nurse just laughed behind him, watching Oto finally get a stream going.

"Good, God, you piss just like a race horse."

Chapter 8

After sitting out in the hallway in that chair all day, Oto was finally escorted to his room.

He was surprised that there was only one bed in a large room and it was just for him.

There was even a private bathroom, so he no longer had to worry about pissing himself.

Before leaving the room the nurse promptly told Oto, "You are still manic."

Oto just looked at him, but nodded without saying a word, even though he had no real idea what the nurse was talking about.

"If you are lucky, you will be released in a couple of weeks. But, since you have good insurance, don't be surprised if we keep you much longer."

The nurse turned to leave the room, but not before Oto quickly asked him, "But, what do you mean by if I have good insurance?"

The nurse didn't even pause or miss a step as he walked back out into the bright hallway.

Oto carefully looked around "his" room.

He quickly catalogued everything in his head, especially the furniture and the bathroom by instinct.

He surveyed and tested out every corner of the room to see if there were any "weak" spots.

It was pretty dark in his room and Oto was supposed to be going to sleep.

Just naturally, he would count how many minutes passed in between the time that the nurse walked in to the room, left, and then later returned.

He looked at the big window that was on the far side of the room.

Oto could see any alleyway out there beyond the window.

He walked over to see if he could open the window, but then the light reflected off something and he noticed how there was a heavy metal screen covering it.

Oto turned his attention to a chair that was next to a desk.

The desk was bolted down to the floor, but for some reason the chair wasn't.

He picked up the heavy wooden chair, throwing it with all of his might straight at the metal mesh that covered the window.

Unfortunately for him, the chair bounced back and hit him right in the nose, which immediately started bleeding.

Oto went into the bathroom and grabbed some toilet paper, shoving it up his nose to stop the bleeding.

He then went to his bed and tried to lay down and go to sleep, but he just couldn't really even close his eyes.

The light from outside his room was flooding in to his room, and he could only sleep when it was absolutely dark.

He went back into his bathroom and noticed the shower curtain with the plastic hooks on the end.

He quickly undid the hooks and pulled them from the shower curtain, tossing the hooks on the bathroom floor.

In his mind he was going to hang the shower curtain up somehow to block the light coming in from out in the hallway.

That of course didn't work, so he tossed the shower curtain back in the bathroom, and tried to go to sleep.

Oto shifted his weight and moved around at every angle, but he just couldn't get comfortable on the bed, especially because it was so bright in his room.

When he finally did shut his eyes, he prayed for help, because he wasn't sure really what else he could do.

He actually thought that he might be drifting off to sleep, when he "saw" a giant red Satan-like demon laughing at him.

He wasn't sure if he was dreaming or not.

It scared him, of course, because he had never pictured anything even remotely like that in his life.

It must have been less than a minute after that when a nurse in white entered the room to check on him again.

The nurse immediately saw the chair upside down, Oto's bloody nose, and the shower curtain on the floor of the bathroom.

"Get up right now before I slam you into the ground!" said the nurse.

Oto was immediately frightened for his life.

He was pulled out of the room by the nurse and forced to sit back down again in the chair out in the hallway.

Oto was staring again at the clock on the wall.

The nurse had left him alone again in the chair.

He managed to yell out, "I swear I wasn't trying to kill myself."

Chapter 9

It was the next day that Oto was told to his surprise that he had to attend "school" in the hospital.

The last school he had attended was the JC that he had been ripped away from after spiraling out with his manic episode.

He had no idea what a manic episode was or why he wasn't back at that college right now.

He thought back to the philosophy class there.

He had no idea who Nietzsche was at the time, but he was bored out of his mind hearing about the guy.

There was a lot of debate in the class about whether or not we as humans exist, and he thought that was a waste of time.

His nose was scabbed up a bit, and he remembered the chair from the night before.

He laughed to himself, thinking that he certainly does exist, because that chair had hit him with a lot of force, and when it hit his nose he felt a lot of pain.

In one of the current "classes" he was given a guitar.

He had never held a guitar before.

The smooth light brown starter was string-less.

He was given the wires, and told that eventually he would learn how to play a few bars on the guitar.

But first he had to string it by himself with some instruction.

He was surprised that he was able to string the guitar.

And next he was taught how to tune the guitar.

He was even taught how to play a few chords before the class was over, and he naturally just started humming along to a little tune that he made up.

The only thing he didn't like was how the wires had bloodied his fingers, and they hurt like hell.

Oto had always been good at learning how to quickly make friends.

He thought that it might have something to do with how he and his family moved around so often.

This would happen, because his stepdad flew cargo planes for Hawaiian Airlines.

It seemed like every two years or so, after he made a best friend, he had to leave and start the process all over again.

In Georgia he made a best friend named Sillis.

Oto remembered laying in the tall grass of his front yard, looking up at the clouds in the sky.

His stepdad had told him that if you looked at the clouds long enough, and thought about a hot fire, the clouds would disappear.

What Oto didn't learn until much later in science class was that it is just normal behavior for clouds to disappear, grow, or even shrink.

He was told how it had to do with factors such as air moisture.

His stepdad had been joking with Oto, but he had no idea of it at the time.

Of course this made him think about the Pitt's Special up in the clouds before it spun out of control, and how his stepdad had crashed hard into the ground.

Oto's attention was quickly brought back to the GI Joe cartoon that he was watching with Ebbe.

He looked over at his new best friend that he had quickly made in the hospital in one of the group therapy sessions.

They loved yelling, "Go Jo," as they pumped their fists in the air.

That of course didn't last long.

One of the nurses soon came over and told them that if they didn't shut the hell up they would be sent back to their rooms.

It was exactly twelve days before Oto was locked up that Ebbe was outside enjoying the warm August Nevada sun at the hospital.

He was loving the basketball game that he was playing with his "buddies".

He had one eye on the basketball, and the other on the fence nearby, that was about twelve feet tall if he had to guess.

Unlike in a prison, there was no barbwire on the top of the fence.

Ebbe didn't see the basketball until it was too late.

It hit him right in the face, and the sting of it on his cheeks quickly brought his attention back to the game.

Like a fighter pilot in combat he didn't think, he just reacted.

Before anyone knew what was going on Ebbe had scaled the fence, grabbing the metal fence on the other side before falling to the ground.

He had seen something like that in a movie once, but now in real life it nearly knocked the wind out of him.

Ebbe landed with the full force of the jump, onto his left ankle.

He thought he heard something snap, but he didn't slow down, he just pushed himself forward, limping over to the nearby freeway.

Cars slammed on their brakes, as he walked out in front of them, almost creating a pile-up.

One of the first stopped cars nearly hit Ebbe, and he just stood there looking in the passenger side window.

Ebbe barely even bothered to look at the man driving the stopped vehicle.

The car was an old maroon Volvo, but he wouldn't recall this minor detail at the time.

He didn't hesitate before walking over to the car.

The passenger side window was down and Ebbe stuck his head in and asked, "Excuse me, but can I get a ride, sir?"

Ebbe remembered reading "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" when he was in 6th grade.

As he looked over at the driver he noticed that his short-sleeved blue t-shirt was soaked in sweat.

"What in the hell were you thinking?" the man said.

Ebbe noticed the man seemed to be shaking a bit.

He was instantly worried that the man was going to hop out of the car and slam him onto the hot asphalt.

Ebbe could now feel the pain in his ankle as he stood on the hot asphalt.

He looked back at the long line of cars that were all stopped.

He even noticed the black skid marks on the road behind the stopped Volvo.

He looked back at the man in the stopped car, not fully realizing that the man was just staring at him, not saying a word.

Ebbe seemed to be frozen onto the road, and he started to feel a bit sick to his stomach.

He suddenly thought he was going to vomit.

What happened next would later terrify Ebbe, but before he could react, there was a hand on his arm and it was being yanked.

The pain in his arm brought him back to the man in the driver's seat, and somehow he was being pulled into the car through the open window of the passenger side door.

Although Ebbe's legs were still hanging out the open window in the hot sunlight, the man sped off at top speed.

Ebbe could now see the face looking at him.

He looked over in horror to see the nurse in jeans that had roughed him up in the hospital the day before.

The forty-year-old unshaven man just laughed at him.

The odds of this happening couldn't be calculated by Ebbe at the time.

But before he was pulled fully into the now moving car, Ebbe's body went limp and the pain consumed him.

Ebbe was pretty sure later, thinking about it, that he had passed out, and the entire memory of that time in the car was all just a blur.

The nurse took advantage of the situation and it wasn't long before he was parking his Volvo in his assigned spot back at the mental hospital.

It had taken the nurse five long years to acquire that reserved parking spot.

The man saw a good friend in white heading into the secure hospital to start his afternoon shift.

He yelled out to his buddy who looked over at the car and quickly ran over to help out.

They both held Ebbe's legs as they worked on getting Ebbe's limp body onto the ground outside of the car.

They both yelled out to a couple of other nurses who were standing outside of their parked cars.

They quickly ran over to see what was going on.

They all helped carry Ebbe back through the front door as a nurse inside held the hot door open for them.

When Ebbe woke up, he found himself in a small room that he had never been in before.

He tried to sit up, but was quickly surrounded by the same four nurses that had carried him in.

While he was passed out, the doctor examined his left ankle, but found out it wasn't broken, so he gave the nurses the green light to take Ebbe away.

When Ebbe was fully awake he looked up and saw a doctor as he sat up on the cold couch.

The doctor was shining a bright light in his eyes, and he wasn't sure if he had finally died or not.

As the room slowly came back into focus, he was horrified to see that he wasn't in the room alone with the doctor.

He looked up to see the nurse who had captured him and returned him back to the hell that Ebbe had managed to escape from, along with two or three other nurses that he of course recognized.

Ebbe had been strapped down in 4-points at least three or four times in the weeks that he had been trapped in the hospital.

At some point he had been told that he had a type of insurance that kept him in the hospital that he despised.

For some reason he just never thought he would be set free, which is why he jumped that fence in the first place.

He heard something from the doctor about his ankle not being broken.

Ebbe just relaxed, letting his body go limp.

He was carried by the four nurses into what he knew was the 4-point room that he had been locked into just two days before.

He knew if he resisted it would only give them an excuse to punch him in the stomach or the face.

He had learned that the hard way.

This time, however, they slammed him onto the 4-point "bed" with such force that his whole body went numb.

They spread his legs out, attaching them with the restraints that were attached to the lower part of the bed.

They tightened them around his ankles, and the pain in Ebbe's left foot shot right up into his brain and he nearly passed out again.

Before he knew it his arms were also secured to the top of the bed in restraints that were already digging into his wrists.

It usually took minutes for his toes to throb, but this time it happened instantly.

The nurses were really pissed off this time.

The nurse who had brought him back in the car punched Ebbe twice in the stomach with such force that Ebbe felt like maybe he was going to spit out blood.

The angry nurse looked Ebbe in the eyes before exclaiming, "Look here you little asshole, nobody has ever successfully escaped from this place in my ten years on the job, and we aren't about to start now."

Ebbe was left alone with his thoughts in the cold white room.

He wasn't sure if he was there for hours, but eventually he couldn't feel his arms or his legs and he looked at the ceiling that started to spin around-and-around.

Right before passing out for good this time he smiled, thinking back to the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy".

He remembered reading that book the previous summer when he thought the worst day of his life was not being able to play video games.

He had finished the book that summer, though, and he thought he could recall that somehow the answer to the universe was the number 43.

Chapter 10

The next day in group therapy Ebbe was squirming in his chair.

The nurses had eventually taken him out of 4-points and put him back in his bed, leaving him alone in his room.

He was hurting more than he ever had in life.

This time, unlike the other times, he was really bruised and could taste blood in the back of his throat.

He felt like hot iron rods were burning in both of his legs and arms.

Ebbe's left ankle, especially, was in such pain the night before, that he finally just blacked out before waking up in the middle of the night.

He cried and cried, begging for someone to just finish off the job.

He no longer wanted to live in this hell, and he knew he couldn't take any more beatings. He had felt so free just six hours earlier out on the freeway.

Why couldn't the Volvo just have slammed into him instead of stopping just in time?

43 or 32 or 23, the numbers just didn't matter any more.

For some reason numbers usually comforted him, but he was beyond that this time.

The room was still pretty light, or at least Ebbe wasn't sure if it was lighter or darker, but he didn't really care this time.

He needed to sleep, but the pain was just too much.

A memory came flooding back to him of his brother's friend beating him up when he was in seventh grade.

Almost every day out in his backyard Ebbe would get punched in the face and in the stomach and even in his kidneys.

He thought then he had learned what real pain was and how even as a young boy you needed to learn how to fight.

His dad had been a marine who was dishonorably discharged when Ebbe was 13, and he had been away for the better part of six years.

During that time his mom had left him on his own for a lot of the time.

His mom was the one, actually, who got him hooked on cigarettes and then later weed.

Ebbe was getting high every day before and after school, and ended up in the principal's office on a regular basis.

The principal called Ebbe's mother once a week, because to be honest, the principal just didn't have time to deal with him any more.

The day he thought he had experienced the most pain paled in comparison to he was feeling in the mental hospital.

He was thinking back to when he had been "jumped" by some 16-year-olds on his way to school.

The thing was, they wanted money, and all he had was one dollar.

They surrounded him, the three of them, and they were in a deserted alleyway at least half a block away from school.

There was nobody who was around to hear his screams.

Even if anybody had heard Ebbe's screams, they wouldn't have done anything.

The alleyway was on the poor side of town.

The three punks always preyed on younger kids to teach them who was in charge.

They weren't part of any gang, but they did love to play Russian Roulette every day after school.

They later told the cops who arrested them that they were the ones that had been attacked by Ebbe.

Of course that was the furthest thing from the truth.

But to be honest, Ebbe wasn't one of those wimps who would roll down on the ground and start crying.

Ebbe thought back, long before the beating from the three punks, to the time back at his house and the 19-year-old man who would come around to screw his mom at least three times a week.

During this time, Ebbe would go climb the tree in the backyard, and listen to music.

He would pretend he didn't hear them both crying out in rapture in the back bedroom of the house.

The three guys that left Ebbe bleeding in the alleyway didn't go to the same school that he went to, thank God.

How on earth could he have gone back to school if that was the case?

Ebbe actually got used to the 19-year-old hanging out with him after school now and then.

The guy was really like a dad to Ebbe.

He was really tough, and he taught Ebbe how to fight dirty.

He showed him how to lean back and kick any guy that messed with him as hard as he could in the nuts.

Ebbe thought back again to that hot summer day when he had squared off against his three assailants.

On that day Ebbe fought dirty, and he managed to kick one so hard in the groin that the supposed leader of the three dropped to the ground, howling out in pain.

Ebbe didn't hesitate, he jumped on top of him, punching him as hard as he could in the face until it was a bloody mess.

But then of course the other two guys pulled Ebbe off their buddy. One held Ebbe down as they pounded Ebbe in his face.

By some miracle a cop had walked by the alleyway that day.

He had called for backup, but by the time they cop cars had showed up the three guys had run away.

The cop found Ebbe laying on the ground in a pool of blood, crying out for help.

The other cops eventually showed up and took his statement.

Ebbe never did hear if the three thugs were caught or not, but he never ran into them again.

But the pain in the alley that day was nothing compared to how Ebbe was feeling now.

He was trapped in a cage called a mental hospital and had just been given the beating of his life for just trying to escape.

He didn't cry very often, and it didn't matter, because at this moment he was beyond crying.

He had been left in his bed, in his room, alone.

Tonight as he rested in bed after the true beating of his life, Ebbe finally relaxed.

The tears finally flowed and he couldn't stop them.

Ebbe fell into sleep, but in the morning, he was in even more pain if that was possible.

That horrible day when they had dragged Ebbe back into the hospital had occurred at least a week before his good friend Oto had showed up, but it still was fresh in his memory.

After that beating, Ebbe had done his very best to be good, and at least try to follow the rules.

He decided right then and there that he was no longer going to pretend to be the tough kid in this fucking hell-hole that he was trapped in.

Oto and Ebbe had just hit it off, so to speak, from the first day they met.

They both were only a couple of rooms away from each other, and were always hanging out in group therapy.

The nurses were always doing their best to split them up, but they just naturally bonded on a level that Ebbe had never experienced before.

Ebbe's injuries had long healed, and the nurses actually gave him an extra chocolate pudding now and then.

Oto and Ebbe had actually been paying attention to the psychologist in that small room filled with 10 adolescents who had some type of bond with each other.

It is true what they say, that when a group of people go through hell together, they form a life-long bond.

"Oto, do you have something to share with the group today," the psychologist asked him.

Oto had decided to share a bit with the group.

He actually ended up sharing his story about how he loved to race around in his VW Rabbit.

His stepdad had loved racing fast in cars or even on motorcycles.

For some reason Oto just knew that he had the reflexes of a race car driver.

Oto wasn't really sure how he knew that, but it didn't matter.

On one side of Oto on that day was Ebbe, who was winking at his buddy, slapping him in the arm when the psychologist wasn't looking their way.

Next to Oto was a 17-year-old girl with brown hair who always kept her head down and never smiled.

She had been called on that day in group, and it took her what seemed like a minute to finally look up and stare over at Oto and Ebbe who were carefully watching the good-looking girl.

Most of the girls in that ward that were separated by empty rooms between the boys and the girls.

If Oto was being honest, he wouldn't waste his time talking to most of the girls there.

He just wasn't that interested in girls.

He usually kept to himself, except when it came to his buddy Ebbe.

It took a long time for the girl to look up, but eventually the therapist convinced her to tell the group why she was locked up like the rest of them.

That was of course the therapist's goal with all of the young kids.

She herself was only 28, and she thought she had a tough childhood.

But the stuff that these kids under 18 had gone through would keep her up at nights.

She would drink Vodka with strawberry soda most every night to get some of the horrific memories to at least go away for a bit.

The young girl in question said it all started when she was 13.

There had been a boy her own age in the same class that she was in.

She explained how she loved school and reading and writing in her journal whenever she got a chance to do so.

She would catch this young boy in class staring at her, and it actually made her feel uncomfortable.

But the teachers in her classes at school didn't seem to even take notice of this, or if they did, they never said anything.

It was only in her Algebra class that the boy was ever in a class with her.

Eventually, he got up the nerve to talk to her now and then after class on the way back out to the hallway filled with students running around after the bell rang between classes.

At the end of the Fall semester she began talking more and more to him after class.

She actually started to feel something for him that she had never felt before with anyone.

She paused, looking up now and then at Oto and Ebbe.

She actually didn't mind watching the two boys enjoy spending time together.

She hadn't made any friends herself.

She looked up at the psychologist who was leading the group, looking the therapist in the eyes for several seconds.

She went back to telling the group her story.

It was at the start of the Spring semester the same year that she had collided with the boy from math class.

But in that semester she never saw him any more because she was in the honor track and he wasn't.

On that day it was sprinkling just a little bit, which she actually enjoyed.

She was flustered a bit, but said hello to him. She asked him what he had been up to and how she actually missed him.

Of course she only thought the part about missing him.

They started walking together more and more after school and soon became quite close.

This time, back in group therapy, she stopped talking and looked over at Oto.

Rather than just shutting down like she usually did, she continued on with her story.

She explained how she actually learned how the boy lived only a few blocks East of her home.

They then started walking together more often before going their separate ways.

Eventually, the boy got up the courage and asked her to go steady with him.

She hadn't heard such a thing before.

She quietly just said, "yes."

Things were great at first, and they enjoyed holding hands and playing video games together at his house when his parents were still at work.

That only lasted for a month or so because he decided to start hanging out more with his guy friends instead of with her.

She spent this time reading any book she could get her hands on, and it wasn't long before her school was out for the summer.

One night in particular, although she didn't know it, he had been drinking warm beer that he had scored at one of his friend's house.

She explained to the group that he had somehow ended up on her doorstep.

The boy later told her how he was terrified himself, but his "boys" had dared him to do it, and he felt he had no other choice.

She came to the front door and was surprised to see him looking at her like he had all of those months before in Math class.

She stared at the floor back in her uncomfortable chair in group as she told the rest of her story, and Oto was now staring straight at her.

She explained in almost a whisper how she started drinking with the same boy and started snorting something that he had given her.

She had never snorted anything before, and the experience left her feeling woozy and disoriented one afternoon at her house when her parents weren't there.

At this point Oto was whispering to Ebbe, but he stopped, and couldn't help but listen to what the girl said next.

"I kept it in the drawer next to my bed at home."

The therapist asked her in a soothing voice, "What do you mean, you kept what in your drawer?"

"It was a blade that I had sharpened," she said.

She looked at Oto and Ebbe, and then smiled before saying, "A&W has the best hamburgers and Diet Coke."

She didn't say too much after that, but she finished talking by saying, "One night I went too far in my bedroom, cutting too deep into my left thigh."

The next day they were all ushered into the gym that Oto had never seen before.

A record player started up with a Country Western song playing.

One of the therapists was at the front of the large room, and briefly showed them with another therapist how to do the Do-Si-Do.

"You know kids, swing your partner round and round..."

The therapist told them they were not allowed to get more than a foot away from each other and that if they actually touched anyone they would be forced to sit down against the wall.

Oto actually refused to dance at first, but he changed his mind as he tapped his foot in time with the song.

He actually laughed to himself a bit listening to the horrible song that vibrated from the spinning record player.

Oto didn't hesitate when the girl who talked about the sharp blade decided to "dance" with Oto.

She spun around next to him, and they both locked arms, even though of course they weren't supposed to.

A nurse immediately separated them.

Although she was allowed to keep dancing, Oto was told to go stand in the corner of the gym all on his own.

He felt bad, actually, but he had been getting used to this type of behavior in the cold hospital.

Just like the first day he had been brought into the place, Oto had to sit in a chair against the wall again after he was ushered out of the gym.

Again, he was not allowed any crayons or paper to write on.

Writing was actually the only time he felt sort of free.

He just stared at the nurses that would walk by.

They ignored him, chatting about whatever they could, to get through their days dealing with the kids around them.

In that chair, on that day, Oto started counting at 1,000 and worked back as long as he could by 7 until he felt better all alone against the wall.

Chapter 11

Oto wasn't sure how or why he knew that he had to be released the next day, but somewhere deep down in his mind he had a feeling it might happen.

Of course the law says that on his 18th birthday he would get to decide whether to stay or go, and it wasn't even a close decision.

At the time, however, Oto knew nothing about the law and wasn't even sure that it was his birthday.

Oto also didn't bother counting the time between the nurse rounds the night before.

He had managed to stay up all night, except for the two hours when he drifted off to sleep.

The morning finally arrived, and he could tell it was morning by the light coming in from the window overlooking that empty alleyway outside of his "room".

He looked around at the desk where his clothes had been sitting in unused drawers.

He thought back to the first night in the room.

He slowly took the clothes out, folded them, and carefully placed them on the foot of his bed.

He then sat there, not even bothering to look up at the nurse who did a check on him and then quickly left the room.

The rest of the morning went quickly by, and before Oto knew it, the time to leave had arrived.

Oto carried his clothes out with him that were in a plastic bag with his name written on it with black marker.

Before walking back out the door that he had been gently pushed into two weeks before, he was able to say one last goodbye to his buddy Ebbe.

They were allowed to fist bump, and Oto, of course never saw his good friend again.

It wasn't long before he was escorted over to the same place where he had been processed-in by his mom.

He spotted her sitting over in a chair waiting for him.

He played it cool, but gave her a big hug that he could tell surprised her.

Before he knew it, he was out in the sunshine, that he really missed.

They had forced him to take Vitamin D pills along with his Lithium when he was locked up, because he was never allowed outside during the day.

Once inside the Blazer, Oto was contemplating whether or not to open the passenger-side door and jump out.

Given how they were still in the parking lot, he decided against it.

"Oto, I don't want to get into an argument, but we are heading straight over to the local Junior College and enrolling you in some classes," his mom said.

Oto just sat there and agreed with her, even though he hadn't really heard what she was saying.

Oto was surprised when his mom drove into a parking lot and parked the car.

He immediately saw a sign that said it was a Junior College.

As they walked up the long sidewalk to the admission department, Oto spotted a crow that landed nearby.

He loved crows and ravens, because they were the smartest birds, at least that is what Ebbe had told him.

He already missed his good friend.

Oto and his mom walked up to the administration building, standing in the cold hallway with young kids walking around and talking to each other in loud voices.

They walked up to the counter, following his mom.

Behind the counter was a woman who asked if she could help them.

The woman explained that the semester started the next week.

Without even talking to Oto, Ana quickly enrolled her son in an English and a Biology class after filling out the enrollment forms and paying the money that was needed to "seal the deal".

It wasn't long before Oto and Ana were back out in the Blazer and the loud sounds from in the Junior College had been left behind, replaced only with silence in the moving car.

Oto couldn't help himself, and what he said next would haunt him for many years.

"Mom, I am not going to this fucking Junior College!"

Ana couldn't even remember her son ever cursing to her in private or in public.

She fought back the tears that were already starting to run down her cheeks, but quickly wiped them away so her son who was looking out the window wouldn't see them.

For the rest of the drive back to the small town Oto just stared out the window, watching the world pass him by in a blur.

He was just so happy to be free again.

When her son wasn't looking, Ana would look over at her beautiful son, before focusing back on the road.

She could tell he had put on a few pounds, which she was glad to see.

At one point, without even looking in his direction she simply said, "Oto, I don't want to hear another word about the hospital ever again."

Chapter 12

Oto decided he would keep taking his Lithium, just like he did in the hospital, but really almost more out of habit.

He really didn't want to lose his mind again, and there was no way he was going to be locked up again if he had anything to say about it.

He said over-and-over to himself that he wouldn't stay "confined" to this house that felt more like a prison than anything else.

One difference, though, that Oto was grateful for, was how he had to take his meds.

In the hospital they had forced him to take the shiny Lithium Carbonate pills, and then they would lift his tongue and probe his mouth to be totally sure he had swallowed them.

Ana, his mom, put his medication out on the kitchen counter, and she watched him take them at the exact times, just like in the hospital, but thankfully she didn't lift his tongue or probe his mouth.

There was also the strange thing about the scale that his mom had brought home with them.

He had never seen the scale before, so he assumed that she had purchased it before she picked him up from the hospital that day.

It didn't really matter to Oto, but his mom made sure he stepped on that scale in the bathroom and wrote down exactly how much he weighed every morning right after breakfast.

The surprising thing to Oto was that in the mental ward they had not ever weighed him, not even once, in the two weeks he was locked up against his will.

Ana drove her son to the Junior College every day that was an hour away from their home in rural Nevada.

She was afraid that she would come home one day and he wouldn't be there.

She was determined to make sure that would never happen.

On the drive each day to the Junior College her son mostly looked out the window and wouldn't talk to her that much.

She would drop him off to go to his English and Biology classes that she had signed him up for.

After dropping him off, she would then sneak in some time at her real estate office, before picking him back up again.

Oto played along, but in both the English and Biology classes he just stared out the window, plotting his next move.

It only took a week before Ana was so happy with her son that she decided to leave him alone at home.

She had a good lead on the possible sale of a large ranch, and she needed the money, so she was doing all she could to land the deal.

Oto waited until the second week of classes before telling his mom one morning how he was too sick to go to the Junior College that day.

Ana was a little suspicious, but she left him alone at the house, and spent the day showing the ranch that was for sale to some possible buyers.

She would call him later that afternoon, just to make sure he didn't need some soup or something for her to bring home for him.

Oto waited until his mom was gone for an hour or two before he sprung into action.

He had his 1978 VW Rabbit packed up in twenty minutes.

He then jumped into the car, pulling out of the driveway, and started driving back to the town he had left a few weeks before.

He knew his sister Hannah had only wanted to help him, but he had trusted her, which was why he had agreed to go with her in her blue Honda Accord without even hesitating on that night he left.

Oto was sweating, because his car had no air-conditioning, and one window wouldn't even roll down.

He didn't care at all, because he just knew he was going back to face his demons.

His mom would never understand his decision, but it was his to make.

He was 18 years-old-now and could vote, so he would plot his own path in life.

The four hour drive back was pretty uneventful at first.

By the time Oto was halfway there, he didn't know it, but his mom was calling him about lunch.

Of course he wasn't there to pick up.

It was at about this same time that his car started "acting" up.

Oto was driving 85 mph behind a big rig on the freeway.

Right before closing in on it, he pulled out into the fast lane to go around it.

For some unknown reason his car slowed down to 40 mph, even though Oto hadn't let up at all on the gas pedal.

Oto was really sweating now, and he quickly swerved back into the slow lane, looking around for a place to pull off the road.

The big rig started closing in on him, but at the last minute his car lurched forward and he found himself speeding back up to 85 again without any pressure at all on the gas pedal.

He took the first exit he could find, pulling off at a gas station and filled up the tank.

Oto was pacing back and forth, trying to figure out what his next option might be.

After deciding he had to just keep driving, Oto paid for the gas, and headed back out onto the freeway.

The car then ran perfectly fine, and two hours later he was speeding down the familiar grade back into the city he had grown so fond of.

He had nowhere else to go, so he parked outside his sister's apartment and knocked on the door.

Hanah opened it, and just stared at her brother grinning on her front porch.

She was shocked, but of course let him in.

As he went to the bathroom, she quickly called her mom, explaining how her brother was in her apartment, and how he had just showed up.

"Mom, what the hell am I supposed to do?"

Four-and-a-half hours later Ana joined her son and daughter in the same apartment.

She of course couldn't stay with him at Hanah's place, so she had Oto follow her in his car to a nearby hotel.

Oto carefully explained to her that he was not going back to Nevada and that if she tried to make him, he would leave in his car and she would never see him again.

Ana was looking into her son's eyes and she could tell he wasn't bluffing.

Ana gave in, because she felt she had no other choice.

Ana and Oto stayed in a cheap hotel for one week.

She needed to find a place for herself to live, and also a place for him as well.

He had never even so much as rented his own place with his own money.

Of course she wasn't thinking that her son had done that very thing a month before in the same town she found herself in.

Ana soon found a small apartment for herself that she rented.

She then found another apartment for her son not far from the Junior College.

She paid for his place, because what else could she really do?

The sun was burning Oto's neck as he walked into the dean's office at the Junior College campus that he had been withdrawn from several weeks before.

He was told that the only way he could be re-admitted was to convince a teacher to let him join an English class that was already five weeks in session.

Oto could be persuasive when he had to be, and he found the English teacher, who did that very thing.

Of course, first he told her what had happened to him over the last several weeks, and she took pity on him and got him into her class.

Oto was off to the races.

He had a week to write three essays, and it wouldn't take him long to quickly get that done.

Chapter 13

Oto couldn't sleep in the large bedroom that must have been three times the size of the one where he stayed at in the hospital he had been locked up in against his will a few weeks before.

His mom, Ana, had been generous enough to pay and get him an apartment with a roommate who was several years older than him. His name was Natan.

Still, he was glad to not be watched like a "hawk" and he looked forward to hanging out with his new roommate.

He still had his goal of finishing the essays that he needed to stay enrolled in at the Junior College.

Every morning at 6 am the 275-pound giant, his roommate, would start up his turntable and put on his favorite Boston record, cranking the volume up on high.

"It's more than a feeling," he would sing out loud.

Oto, at first, would put his pillow over his head.

But, after a week of this same thing over-and-over again, Oto actually looked forward to watching Natan jump around and sing his songs before taking a shower.

Oto squirmed around in the hard chair as he looked at his new psychologist, who was smiling at him.

Her name was Graciela, and half the time she worked with the criminally insane, but she looked forward to her sessions with Oto.

It was the county hospital where they had their "sessions", but this time Oto was able to walk in and leave whenever he wanted to.

He told her all about his stay in the institution and about his new roommate.

Oto only had \$1,500, so he couldn't afford a private psychologist or a psychiatrist.

Because of this, he put up with all of the talk therapy, so he could get his 900 mgs of Lithium Carbonate.

He had learned not to vomit up the pills in the sink by chasing the "poison" that he needed with chocolate or a bubbly soda.

It was 1 o'clock in the morning, and Natan was the bouncer at a local bar.

Oto soon found out that it was always a happening place that every college kid had to find a way to get into.

Of course, Oto always had a way in with Natan, who would pull him to the front of the line.

Oto could still remember vomiting out front on the sidewalk after drinking too many beers with green olives floating inside the mug.

On that particular night, he had stayed out on the dance floor and relaxed with the strobe lights flickering on and off.

He accidentally slammed into a 200-pound guy wearing black jeans and a white shirt with no hair sticking out of his shirt anywhere.

He thought that was so strange.

Oto was mesmerized watching Natan massage the tri-tip on the counter and cut off every scrap of fat.

Natan laughed as he went out and lit a fire with charcoal in the barbecue until he was satisfied with the temperature.

"Bro, you gotta have everything just right."

Oto just laughed as he watched the flames tickle the searing meat on the grill.

Natan told him how he was pretty sure his girlfriend, whom he had been dating for two years, was pregnant.

"We still aren't yet sure whether we will keep it or not," he said, as he balanced a can of Budweiser on his knee as he sat on their couch.

A week before the grill-watching, Oto had been at a party with freshman friends from the local Junior College that he had made.

Unlike his nights with Natan, there was no delicious tri-tip and no beer with green olives.

Instead, he was with his freshman buddies at a party where the cops were on their way to break it all up.

They had scored a large bottle of cheap-ass tequila by paying a homeless person to go in and buy it for them.

They had partied out in someone's backyard.

They would charge anyone from the party five bucks a shot out behind a tree wet from piss.

Oto was happier than he had been in at least a month.

Him and his buddies were passing that bottle back-and-forth, and were two sheets to the wind in less than an hour.

As they staggered out front, they avoided the cops that were asking for ID's.

The party was fizzling out anyway, so Oto and his friends were walking across the street.

They would never drive when drunk.

Oto looked at the street they had just walked across and saw a four-door piece-of-shit car roll up on them.

All of the doors swung open at the same time, and some large dudes jumped out onto the pavement.

Oto stood there, as if his feet were frozen to the ground, and just watched as the guys ran over and started punching his friends in the face.

Oto had never actually been in a fist fight before, but his buddies had those dudes down on the ground and were kicking the shit out of them.

Oto saw in slow-motion a fist coming at his face, and somehow managed to block it.

He would later learn at a bar that all of these guys were high on PCP.

Some random guy at the bar Natan always got him into, was sitting on a stool that was out near the dance floor.

It was dark, but Oto could see the spider web tattoo on the guy's face.

It went down all the way onto his neck, and it moved with a strange rhythm as Oto told him about how him and his friends had been jumped the night before.

Oto had no idea why he was telling this stranger that story.

The stranger just looked at Oto saying how he had heard last night that some friends he knew were high on PCP and jumped some punks at a party.

The tall man explained how he had been in prison for putting a knife inside some stranger during a bar fight, but that he had been released a month ago.

Oto wasn't sure what the odds were of him meeting a stranger with this news, so he decided not to believe him.

Oto left the bar and went home.

Natan was always hungry and he loved hanging out with Oto.

One day Natan walked by a neighbor's apartment and saw a nice filet mignon on an outside grill unattended.

Natan just reacted.

He grabbed the perfectly cooked medium-rare steak off the grill with his fingers and tossed it back-and-forth from one palm to the next, literally running into the apartment.

Oto was laughing his ass off watching this whole thing go down right outside the front door of their apartment.

Natan ran over to the kitchen counter.

He dropped the sizzling meat onto the cheap-ass countertop of their apartment.

He took out a steak knife and fork and cut up the bloody meat, eating it as quickly as possible.

Oto declined a bite, but Natan devoured the whole thing and then wiped off the warm counter with his shirt, before sitting down on their dark brown couch.

This was the same couch that the two of them watched "Days of our Lives" from every day at lunch time.

Oto's favorite character was of course Patch, and yes of course, like any good pirate he wore a black patch over one eye.

It was at this point, when Natan had flipped on the TV, that they heard a scream from the neighbor next door, no doubt having gone out to take the steak off the grill.

They both laughed so hard until they cried.

If you had asked Oto at the time, he had no idea when the "rice episode" went down.

Honestly, it was just another time when he would laugh with Natan until he felt like his side would split.

The night before the two of them had been taking shots from a fifty-dollar bottle of tequila that they had actually stolen off a shelf from a small nearby liquor store.

They had tried walking there, but a train with actual boxcars had stopped on the tracks and was in the way.

Natan jumped into one of the empty boxcars, pulling Oto up with him.

"Dude, we aren't about to let this fucking train stop us, because I am in the mood for some good tequila," Natan said.

Oto had no idea what good tequila was, but as they moved through the open boxcar to the other side, they felt the train lurch forward, and they both fell on their asses.

Natan immediately jumped off and almost rolled his left ankle before hitting the sharp rocks on the ground that can always be found on the railroad tracks.

Oto thought he heard Natan scream at him that if he didn't jump he would end up in the next town.

That was all that Oto needed, so he just reacted and jumped out without thinking. He had no problem landing on his feet like a spider that jumps from a blade of grass.

Natan went into the smelly liquor store without hesitating and stole the tequila right off the shelf.

They both ran as fast as they could back to their apartment, which was easier to do now that the train had passed off the tracks heading North in the night.

Unlike the cheap tequila that Oto was used to swallowing that burned his throat, the tequila in the bottle that they had scored was like drinking water.

It wasn't long before his lips were numb.

The night after the tequila episode, Natan had left a pot full of rice on the stove, and he and Oto were recovering from a hangover.

Oto just sat there and watched his roommate turn over the pot onto the counter.

Natan massaged the white rice into what looked like a discus hurled at a track meet.

Once outside the front door of the apartment, Natan swirled it around in a circle.

The small white missile then flew through the air, splattering on the door of the nearby apartment where the steak incident had occurred.

The rice broke up into hundreds of pieces, and again, about ten minutes later they heard another yell from a neighbor.

Chapter 14

It was a sunny day, and Oto and his roommate took a drive out to the countryside in Natan's old Apache truck that his grandpa had gifted to him.

Oto didn't know what year the truck had been built, but it was so old that there weren't even seat belts in it.

Natan loved "gunning" the old truck over the speed bumps in the parking lot of their apartment complex.

On this particular day Oto wasn't paying attention, and his nose hit the glass of the windshield after Natan slammed on the brakes.

The tires hit the speed bump with full force.

Oto's eyes watered, and he tasted a little blood, but Natan just laughed his ass off.

Oto had the window down in the Apache truck as Natan drove at 50 mph back on an old country road until he got to a tree line out in the middle of nowhere.

He pumped the brakes a couple of times until the truck came to a stop.

"Check this out, Oto, I have a surprise for you."

They both hopped out of the truck.

Oto looked all around, but there was nobody around.

He thought that he heard an old crow cawing nearby.

Natan hopped up into the back of the bed of the truck and pulled away an old tarp that Oto had missed somehow.

"What the hell is that, Natan?" Oto asked.

Natan lifted a semi-automatic rifle that was belt-fed out of the bed of the old truck.

He didn't waste any time, and he wrapped the "belt" around his forearm just like in the Rambo movies.

Natan smiled, aiming at the dirt road ahead, letting the bullets fly.

Oto watched with fascination as the giant bullets slammed into the ground, throwing up dirt and dust.

Natan yelled out at the top of his lungs as the blood pumped in his veins and surged in his big neck.

Even though Oto and Natan shared the same bedroom, Natan had a queen-size bed, whereas Oto only had a twin.

At least three times a week Natan's girlfriend would stay over.

That is when he learned about the sock being on the doorknob.

On those nights when he stumbled in from a late night party Oto would see the sock on the doorknob to the bedroom, and he then knew he had to go and sleep downstairs on the couch.

On these nights, after crashing on the lumpy brown couch, he would wake up the next morning with a hangover and a stiff back.

On afternoons when it was hot in the apartment, and they were tired of watching TV, Oto and Natan would go out to the rec room and play pool.

Natan would bring all of his dirty socks with him and stuff them into the pool table pockets.

That was how Oto learned how to play an afternoon of pool after paying only fifty cents.

Oto did his best playing pool against his roommate, but he never got that good at the game.

"Oto, what the hell is wrong with you? You told me you were good at Math, but if you know Geometry at all, you should be able to beat me playing pool."

It was a Saturday night, and Oto was carefully slicing the fat off a tri-tip the way he had been taught, when the phone rang.

He quickly wiped his greasy fingers off before picking up, and was surprised to hear Natan's girlfriend on the other end.

"Oto, something terrible has happened. Natan ran a red light and crashed his truck after almost running down an old man walking in the crosswalk."

Oto was intently listening to every word she said, and then she paused before saying, "He called me from jail because he has been arrested for drunk driving."

The next couple of days went by in a blur.

Oto went down and visited Natan, who was locked up because he had failed to tell him that he had been arrested three years before for drunk driving.

Like this time, when he had too much to drink, he still drove himself home. He ended up crashing into a power pole, and fled the scene.

Natain explained to Oto how a policeman had knocked on his door before arresting him and taking him away in cuffs, reading him his rights.

Back in county jail with Oto, Natan talked about ten more minutes with Oto before he was told the visit was over by one of the guards.

"Oto, I only had one final class before I could graduate, but I am going to be in here for a few weeks, so I think I will miss my college graduation."

Oto had no idea what he was going to do for the summer, and he was busy with his final essays in his English class.

The last thing he heard from Natan before his roommate was ushered out of the visiting area was, "The lease isn't up on our place until the end of next month, and we are paid up, so you get the place to yourself."

The apartment was pretty lonely without Natan around, but Oto did his best to stay busy.

He stopped drinking alcohol and was no longer able to get into the popular bar downtown.

He would stay out late almost every night, though, since he had been notified that he got a B- in his English class.

He had been hoping for an A, but he was still happy with the outcome.

Chapter 15

Prior to Natan getting put in county jail for his second DUI, he drove Oto to the four year college that he was supposed to graduate from.

They both walked up the steps and into an old dilapidated trailer that had job bulletins pinned to a corkboard.

"Natan, what the hell are we doing here?" Oto asked.

"Look, dude, you asked me to help you get a job, and that is what I am doing," Natan said.

Natan pulled a 3×5 card off the board that read "Shipping and Receiving" and handed it to Oto.

"Call this number when we get back to the apartment."

Oto called the number on the 3×5 card, and a woman answered on the other end.

"Hello, there, I am looking for a job," he said.

Before he knew it, he was on his way to the address he had been given for an interview.

Oto picked out his best shirt and a pair of clean blue jeans, quickly put them on, and then raced over to the address he'd been given.

He would later discover that there was an old Greyhound sign in the parking lot that he hadn't noticed.

He walked into the depot, which he also didn't know was a Greyhound depot.

The woman who Oto talked to on the phone was there to greet him.

She had her blonde hair up in a tight bun.

She looked Oto over up and down, telling him to follow her into her office, which was located in a corner of the empty building.

She had him sit across from her behind a desk.

After exchanging some pleasantries, she got down to business.

"Can you lift 50 pounds, Oto?"

Oto looked at her and just answered honestly. "Sure, who can't lift 50 pounds?"

"Have you ever worked hard and taken initiative?"

Oto paused a bit, but then responded in the affirmative.

"Okay, Oto, you are hired," she said.

He couldn't believe what she was saying, but he was more surprised when she told him he had to start that minute.

He said "sure, why not?"

She took him into the back of the large building, and wrote his name down on a time sheet, "punching" him in to start a shift.

He ended up working a few hours and was trained on how to fill out paperwork to accept packages.

He was then taken out back and shown an empty Greyhound bus that was idling in the parking lot, belching out diesel that reminded him of his grandpa.

Of course at that point he knew he was somehow working for Greyhound.

His grandpa had driven over 3 million miles in his 32 years that he drove buses for Greyhound.

He actually started driving them during World War II to transport soldiers to and from training camps to board planes and head to the front lines.

This was why his grandpa had not been shipped out himself.

After all, someone had to drive the buses.

His grandpa limped around just when getting out of his recliner, due to driving those miles in a bus that had a clutch, rather than an automatic transmission.

Oto had a hangover from drinking too much tequila the night before.

A co-worker who had a "nose" for weed had just scored a box of it from underneath the bin of an idling bus.

She put it in her locker and would later smuggle it home to weigh out the "killer shit" and sell it.

At least that was her goal, but she later told Oto that she ended up smoking half of it.

For some reason she also told him when they were "working" a bus one day that when she got high she would also snort "coke" and drink Absolute Vodka that she kept in the freezer.

She said it would even everything out and she could finally feel good.

One day in the hot sun, Oto walked toward the bus out on the lot that had been sitting there for 24 hours.

He had lost the coin toss with his co-worker, so he had to go into the bus and, using a coat-hanger, unclog the yellow and orange vomit that filled the sink in the bathroom at the back of the bus.

The smell nearly made him vomit as the chunky mess that had been baking in the heat of the bus fell into the blue liquid that he had grown used to smelling.

Oto then exited the horrible mess and switched places with his co-worker, who then went to the bus bathroom, mopping up the vomit before cleaning out the sink.

Oto had to work the graveyard shift, and in order to do his homework he would "busy" out the five incoming lines so that the lights on the old phone would light up so nobody could call in and disturb him.

That worked well until an irate customer walked in and saw the lights all lit up and Oto reading from a Psychology book.

"Look, who the hell do you think you are? I have been calling in for the last hour and can't get through."

"Why do you have all of those calls on hold?"

"I need a bus down to LA, and I want you to sell me a ticket right this instant!"

Oto looked the irate man in the eyes before saying, "I have them busied out so I can do my homework."

The man got calm and stormed out of the depot, but not before saying how he would be back the next day to report him to his supervisor.

It was around half an hour or hour later that same night when Oto was once again interrupted from his studies.

This time, however, he kept hearing a loud smacking sound.

Oto looked over and saw a homeless man sitting cross-legged in one of the old white chairs across the depot.

The man was chanting and hitting himself on the top of his head with all of his might.

Oto was a little surprised, because the plastic chairs were intentionally designed to be uncomfortable so that customers waiting for their bus would not sit for too long.

The next day, Oto's boss had him report to her office, where she had him sit down in the same chair that she had hired him in.

"Oto, is it true that you busied out the incoming lines so you could do your homework last night?"

"What are you talking about?"

"How do you do that?" he asked.

Oto's boss trained him one afternoon, quickly showing him how to sell tickets for passengers wanting to ride the stench-filled buses where homeless and those without much money would manage to ride in.

She spent maybe fifteen minutes training him on how to use paper tickets and look up routes in a giant book the size and shape of his Psychology book.

Oto did his best to follow along, but he honestly wasn't paying complete attention because he knew he would probably be trained for weeks before having to sell the tickets by himself.

The depot was empty one morning, so his boss left for an early lunch break, but instead of the usual half hour she was gone for an hour.

It was during this time that two vans pulled up out back, and about 35 prisoners were led into the depot and lined up in single file like they were in kindergarten.

What Oto didn't know at the time was that they had to take a bus back to the city where they committed their crime.

And they had all clearly been lifting weights for months and glared at Oto, who was standing behind the big glass "wall" that separated him from the pissed-off convicts.

Oto felt like shitting himself, but somehow instinct just kicked in, and he dealt with the first convict and asked him where he was going.

"Oceanside, you dipshit."

Oto knew he had to get the angry man with tattoos on his forehead to Los Angeles where he could then catch a connecting bus to Oceanside.

He wasn't sure how he did it, but he found the information with codes that he needed to enter into the old IBM computer, managing to print the ticket.

He took the 40 dollar bill from the inmate, gave him his ticket, and put the money in the register.

The sweat running down Oto's back started to dry up.

He got through the entire line just as his boss returned from lunch.

She looked at Oto just standing there and told him to get back to work.

Oto was starving late one evening as he worked the counter by himself.

He walked over to the greasy spoon cafeteria that was connected to the depot to load up on some french fries.

One look at the buffet made him feel queasy, so he changed his mind, but not before running right into some crazy old woman yelling about having to take a piss.

She walked past him and grabbed some napkins off a table in the empty cafeteria, pulled up her dress, and promptly squatted down and took a long piss on the floor.

She had no underwear on, and Oto saw her entire lower body.

He would do his best later on to try and get the image out of his head.

The woman calmly walked up to the buffet counter, grabbed some napkins from the dispenser, squatted down again and wiped herself clean.

She then tossed the wet napkins into her warm puddle of piss.

Oto left the cafeteria, ignoring the pool of urine on the floor, and decided to get his favorite peanut butter Grandma cookies out of the dispenser.

One of Oto's favorite bus drivers decided to play a joke one day when the depot was swarming with passengers waiting to board the idling buses out back in the parking lot.

The bus driver opened the glass door that had the number three in an old sign above the inside of the door to the depot.

He was wearing dark sunglasses, and holding a cane used by blind people.

He began tapping the "cane" on the depot floor, calling out to the passengers that the bus would be leaving shortly for San Francisco and that he was the driver.

Oto laughed his ass off until a woman in line nearly fainted, falling to the tiled floor.

Oto quickly ran over and helped her back up, not wanting to fill out the 10-page form so that she wouldn't sue Greyhound.

Oto had been trained by his boss to drive a bus over a metal grate that had a place for a hook in the middle of it.

He actually got to drive the buses off the back lot and was quite good at knowing exactly where to park.

He knew by now that he had to position the shitter on the bus directly under the plate and then use a long metal hook on wheels to lift the plate and pull it back.

He then had to pull the handle located on an open side panel at the back of the bus that released the blue liquid full of shit and piss and God knows what else down into the "pit".

He would then yank on the handle inside the bus panel that he had opened, dumping the sloshy stench that would drop into a wire "filter" to catch the solid waste.

Everything else from used condoms to used tampons would stay in the filter and let all of the blue fluids drain down into the open sewer pit.

He was also trained to jump back at the same time to avoid feces from landing on his face and clothes.

Oto had to later train a new co-worker on how to dump the shitter on a bus.

On that day he was devouring his bean burrito, minus onions, with extra cheese.

He was sitting in one of the blue-cushioned chairs behind the counter, when his boss walked over to him.

"Oto, put down that burrito right this instant and train your co-worker here on how to dump a bus," she said.

Oto did as he was instructed.

He put down his burrito, and had the lazy dipshit follow him out back to train him.

Oto, of course failed to tell him once out at the exposed pit how you have to jump back after pulling the handle.

The poor guy yanked the handle and just stood there as shit and piss sprayed all over him.

Oto walked back behind the counter, picked up the half-eaten burrito without washing his hands, and quickly ate it before the next buses pulled in.

It was about a month later that Oto's brother Kanak called him up one night.

"Bro, I just moved here to Anaheim and I really need a job."

"Do you have any leads or a way to help me out with that?"

The next day while working an early shift, Oto begged his boss to send the Greyhound Anaheim depot manager a letter of recommendation so Kanak could start working there.

Oto's brother worked a few weeks at the Anaheim Greyhound depot, but got sick and tired of dealing with the traffic and homeless people that would "take over" the bus depot at all times of the day and night.

Kanak called Oto up one morning and asked if he could maybe work with him up on the Central Coast instead of in Anaheim.

The next day Oto begged his boss to let Kanak work there with him.

Oto was one of the best working employees that she had hired in years so she gave in and Kanak moved up and stayed with his brother and began working the graveyard shift.

The timing was perfect because this was the same time that Oto's roommate, Natan, was locked up in county jail from his second DUI so there was plenty of room for Kanak to crash on his brother's couch.

One night when Oto was working with his brother, the two of them had to lock up the empty depot and wax the floors with a special buffing machine that was hard to use.

It was a process that took three hours, and the two of them had to go up into the attic inside the mop room to get the cleaning supplies that they needed.

Up in the small janitor's closet there was an attic in the ceiling that only Oto and his boss knew about.

He reached up above the top shelf, opening up the attic door, before pulling down several plastic jugs.

He was being very careful because he knew how the jugs contained a "stripping" liquid that was used to burn off mold from the inside of swimming pools that had been drained and were dry.

Once a week Oto had to pour the liquid acid inside of a small spray bottle.

He would then use it to clean out the urinals in the men's bathroom without having to scrub them with a brush.

The acid was so strong that sometimes it would melt the little plastic coverings where men can do their best to aim their hot stream into them for target practice.

His boss had cheated the system, squirreling away the extra product that she would order from a special distributor.

She would later win an award for the cleanest bus depot on the West Coast.

Oto and Kanak finished polishing the depot floor until they could see their smiling faces on the glowing red tiles.

The two brothers worked at the busy bus depot until the end of that summer, working shifts together and partying with Oto's friends.

It was a good time for them both to quit, though, because they got tired of dealing with co-workers who would just outright steal money out of the cash registers behind the counter.

No matter how much money was missing, the next day for some reason, Oto and Kanak would always get the blame.

It was the end of the summer and both Oto and Kanak quit on the same day.

It wasn't long before the lease was up on Oto and Natan's apartment.

Oto and his brother both had to scramble to get new jobs and figure out where they would live next.

But they had saved up enough money to where they had a couple of months before they had to worry too much about that.

They always cherished those times they had together in life, and would later laugh along with their grandpa telling him about their adventures whenever they would see him.

Part 2

For the next 23 years or so, Oto went through life religiously taking 900 Mgs of Lithium Carbonate, just liked when he was locked up against his will in the second mental hospital in his life.

The first dosage of 300 Mgs was taken at 12 noon and the second 600 Mgs of Lithium Carbonate was taken at 2 pm.

Nobody, unless they have taken Lithium Carbonate for that long, can know what it is like.

Oto couldn't describe it until his senses came back to him after switching off Lithium to save his life, because his kidneys were almost in renal failure.

The way Oto would later describe it to friends and family is that it was like being trapped in a large bubble, unable to feel real emotions.

The trade-off, however, was that he lost a lot of memories in those 23 years.

He would later recall almost all of his medium and long term memories.

This happened, because loved ones and friends that supported him and stuck by him through thick-and-thin, would tell him about their memories of spending time with him.

A neurologist later explained that with all of those years on Lithium, any type of trauma or even accomplishments that he managed to pull off were blocked at a molecular level.

This caused what he would think of as "gray pockets" to form on the inside of his brain.

These "gaps" in his memory would later dissipate, and a CT scan would verify that they were not present in his brain at that time.

Doctors who had devoted their lives to understanding the brain, as best they could, had no explanation of the fact that with a CT scan there was no longer any gray pockets in Oto's brain.

Oto's kidneys, from taking so much Lithium Carbonate for so many years, formed crystals in them.

These crystals prevented, in some fashion, to prevent the normal flow of "wastes" to be filtered from his blood stream.

Anyone that has lost control of his or her brain due to a disease they are born with can tell you, if they survive it, that is the scariest thing in the world.

Oto had his own business during a good portion of the 23 years that he successfully controlled his Bipolar 1 illness that he was born with.

Although he made more than 150k one year, he still felt like a failure, because his goal was to make 1 million a year.

During those 23 years he would attend one 30 minute session, with a private psychiatrist, that he would pay out of pocket for.

The psychiatrist, who treated Oto for those 23 years, couldn't believe how stable he was.

He made the decision to prescribe a year's worth of Lithium Carbonate after only seeing him for 30 minutes once a year.

Somehow Oto was able to pack in the history of all he had accomplished during the previous year into 20 minutes.

The rest of the time in each session was reserved for Oto to pay his psychiatrist, and to set up another appointment for the next year.

Afterwards, he was prescribed a lab check to get all of the numbers from a multitude of tests returned to him. He would later pass these results on to his psychiatrist.

Unfortunately for Oto, even though the private psychiatrist treated a good portion of Bipolar 1 patients for his thriving practice, he was wrong about Oto's prognosis. But Oto had formed a pretty close bond with his psychiatrist over so many years. At least as close a bond you can form with a medical professional who controlled whether or not Oto would continue taking the light metal in the shiny pill casings so he could live a so-called "normal" life.

The fear of dying, since he would soon need a kidney transplant or face certain death, is what led him after several years of worrying, to taper off Lithium Carbonate slowly and then taper onto a drug called Lamictal.

Doctors today have no idea why Lithium works as a treatment for Bipolar 1, but it was first discovered in the 1950's and thus has many decades of studies and actual Bipolar 1 patients that have been successfully medicated who can then do amazing things in life.

Lamictal was created in the 1970's and it was originally used to treat epilepsy, but it was never that effective. By accident, it was used in a controlled study on a group of Bipolar 1 patients and is even more effective than Lithium Carbonate, but it too has side effects.

To start with, once you taper off Lithium Carbonate and on to Lamictal you have to start with a 100 Mg dosage. If you are unlucky enough to develop a large rash on your neck and chest you must immediately be rushed to an emergency room and have a blood transfusion. Without this procedure you will most likely die.

Luckily for Oto, he didn't develop the rash, and he went on and off the Lamictal, had a 6 month manic episode that he hadn't had since he was 17-years-old. His dosage went from 100 Mgs of Lamictal to 125 Mgs, to 150, and all the way up to 200 Mgs.

Oto can happily report today that he is stable with no full blown mania or depression and is back on 200 Mgs of Lamictal.

Just look at many of the most successful doctors, lawyers, actors, writers and so on in this country and throughout the world and if they are truthful and not protecting their "secret" identity they will tell you that they also were born with Bipolar 1.

Science is always advancing.

Doctors and others who study the brain, really don't know a whole lot about it, given its complexities.

They can only truly tell you a relatively small amount of things compared to say, the kidneys, based on how the brain is the most important organ in the body.

Someone who is lucky, or unlucky enough to be born with Bipolar 1, experiences the symptoms from what is described as a "down swing" or mania, depending on the strain, or type of the illness.

Oto would not know any of this until he studied it and figured some of it out for himself.

As a result, during those 23 years of potential up and down swings, for Oto the illness was mostly masked, allowing him to go through life in a fairly normal way.

Sure, he would have some extra energy in the Fall, and not so much energy in the Spring each year.

Most "normal" people without a mental illness feel somewhat similar due to the natural changing of the seasons.

Although Oto would feel this extra energy during the Fall, it wouldn't distract him from doing his job or functioning on a daily basis.

During the Spring time, however, Oto would feel a high level of anxiety.

This would cause him to miss a few days of work for two to three days, or maybe a week.

He would take it easy and not work during this time.

Part 1 of Oto's journey covers from when he was roughly 17-years-old to when he was around 40 years-old.

Part 2 will cover the year when he turned 40, and that is a wild tail that you can read in these subsequent pages.

And yes, as you will see, if Oto can survive it, he might tell you that if you have picked up this book, to read part of it or the entire novel, you may learn a few things about Bipolar 1.

The story of Oto in this novel is hopefully one that you enjoy reading.

Just follow along, as best you can, especially if you are not part of the say one percent of the human population on earth that is born with an illness called Bipolar 1.

This tale, if you take the time out of your busy life to read it, is something hopefully that you will find of amusement or horror, and perhaps it covers what it is truly like to live with Bipolar 1.

This novel is Oto's journey.

It is fiction, and Royce Scratch has done painstaking amounts of time and research to bring this piece of fiction to life.

Although Royce Scratch has no idea what Bipolar 1 can feel like, or even know anything about the illness other than his research, he has done his very best to provide some illumination on what must be a very difficult disease to deal with.

It has taken him more than a decade to bring this tale to life, but there is only so much time in a day, and Royce had his own life to live and deal with.

But, again, Royce Scratch has no doubt fallen short many times during the writing of this novel.

As the large percentage of the world-wide human population without a mental illness can attest to, anyone that is born with Bipolar 1 must indeed have a life full of ups and downs and struggles.

The goal of this novel is to try and shed some light on Bipolar 1 in this country, and perhaps throughout the world, in hopes that it can be useful or maybe even entertaining.

Whether or not this is the case, it took Royce Scratch many years of deep research and doing whatever he could do to bring this fiction to light.

From all of the painstaking research and years that Royce Scratch spent on this short novel, really a novella, can attest to, science is always evolving and being tested against new theories that are constantly being discovered.

So, pick up this book, pay for it, and if you only read part of it or the entire novel, Royce Scratch will be happy with anything you take or don't take away from it,

whether or not you read it in a digital format or in print.